Texted Love:
A social-semiotic examination of greeting cards

Jane Claire Hobson, B.A. (Communication Studies) Hons.

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
School of Communication, Design and Media, University of Western Sydney, February 2002
In an emergent language, that of internet ‘emoticons’, there is no signifier for the personal pain and joy involved in completing a doctoral thesis. Nor is there a symbol for the collective sigh from those around the writer or for the complex of relations within which the project is performed. In lieu of such visual signifiers, I would like to make some more conventional thanks and acknowledgments.

I am grateful for the amount of enthusiasm shown towards the research by the many people who have told me their stories and passed on their greeting cards (and still they come!). I would particularly like to thank those individuals who made their greeting card collections available and who in conversation inevitably disclosed much about their families and their lives. As always, a researcher’s debt to informants far exceeds the product of that interaction. A different kind of debt is owed to the greeting card publishers, in particular, The House of Bodleigh, John Sands, Hallmark Australia and The Ink Group for their frank discussions, for access to documents and for making substantial numbers of greeting cards available for this study. Further support was provided by the Women’s Research Centre, University of Western Sydney in the form of direct funding for the purchase of greeting cards at a later stage of the research and, more indirectly, by employing me as a research assistant for a period.

My supervisor, Cate Poynton is owed a particular debt for her intellectual generosity, friendship and enthusiasm for my project. Any errors and problems with the text are of course my own. For sustaining me in other ways, I owe a great deal to a great many: to all those who have generously sought me out to work with them and have encouraged me in this, as well as other research interests, especially Greg Noble, Maria Angel, Anna Gibbs, Marsha Durham and Janice Withnall. Many other members of the University community at Western Sydney have offered me their thoughts, the occasional cup of coffee and their professional support. I am grateful to them all, particularly: Linnell Secomb, whose tenure as a postdoctoral fellow at the Women’s
Research Centre also brought a new friend; Nikki Lengkeek, Janice Baker, Debbie Bailey, Natalie Gallen and Gar Jones of the University’s Research Office; Diane Milne, Jodie Lancaster and Helen Johnson in the School of Communication and Media and Loelene Harrison and Trish Marshall in the School of Cultural Histories and Futures; the team in the Ward Library, particularly those in document delivery and those on the circulation desk who would occasionally override the computerised system’s refusal of my loan requests because of ‘overdues’; and for their IT prowess, I owe debts to Sue Powell and Paul Savage. These are the people who have made the wheels go round.

In the latter stages of writing, I have been fortunate to be part of a research ‘survival’ group whose members have inspired me, chastised me, supported me and made me laugh. Many thanks to my friends Penny Rossiter, Katrina Schlunke, Sarah Redshaw and Carolyn Williams (3 down, 2 to go). To my sister Julia Hobson goes my sincere thanks for taking on the task of ‘reader’ and, less collegially, for producing my darling nieces, Nicola and Rosa. Thanks must go to all my friends, particularly Kathy Sport and Margie Kaye, who’ve visited at the right times and made me ‘surface’ occasionally.

There are two debts that cannot ever be repaid. The first is owed to my family for being all that they are and my foundation. In determining to provide me and my sisters, Ann and Julia, with the social, cultural, educational and emotional capital that their own family circumstances had not allowed, my parents went about it with love, commitment and care that they have also shown towards their own relationship. A more recent debt is owed to Ruth Filewood without whose emotional and intellectual succour this thesis would never have been completed by an intact human being. For feeding me, for loving me and for making me laugh every single day, thank you.
The material in this thesis has not been accepted for the award of any other degree in any tertiary institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed ..............................................

Date..................................................
Contents

List of Tables, Figures & Illustrations i

Abstract ii

Introduction 1

Texted love: what’s love got to do with text? 4

The material research process (method) and methodology (some issues) 20

Overview 27

Part One 30

Chapter 1 Industrial production of personal communication 30

Chapter 2 Consuming User?: commodification and social relations 31

Chapter 3 Performing social relations: gendered bodies 32

Chapter 4 Language: speech, writing and print 33

Chapter 5 Love’s language: a discourse on the real thing 33

Part Two 34

Chapter 6 Texted Love, Texted How? 34

Chapter 7 Fun (sex) and love: doing intimacy; rewriting love stories 35

1 Industrial production of ‘personal communication’ 37

Introduction 37

An empirical account of the greeting card industry 38

The greeting card in Australia: ownership and control 39

The retail context 43

Producing greeting cards 46

Materiality 47

Boundaries 49

Sending situation 52

Retail advertising and marketing 56

Who is communicating with greeting cards? 59

Mass produced greetings in this cultural moment 63

Greeting cards and the social 63

Alternative greetings 66

Non-occasion greeting cards 68

The mass producers reflect on their practices 72

Towards interpreting mass produced personal communication commodities 74
Mass production: self-expression? 75
Mass produced ‘authorship’ 78
Mass produced greeting cards - mass consumption 81
Conclusion 86

2 Consuming Us/er?: Commodification and social relations 88
Introduction 88
Consumer/User? 89
Re-reading consumption 90
Consuming women 92
Newsflash! ‘Corporate invaders annihilate the everyday?’ 95
The-commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away 99
Commodity, Gift and Value 100
Some consuming work (possessing and inscribing) 106
Possess it? 107
Inscribing is not possessing? 111
Giving away what is being held on to 114
Possessing the inalienable 116
Conclusion 118

3 Performing social relations: gendered bodies 120
Introduction 120
Mediating social relations: love, labour, power 121
Love or labour or power relations 122
Love and labour and power relations 125
Different histories, different performances 131
Doing interactional work: speaking and writing bodies 132
Doing interactional work: inside and outside bodies 135
Commodification and an aesthetics of existence 140
Conclusion 143

4 ‘Languaging’ love 145
Introduction 145
Texted love: tainted love? 145
Resources for the analysis of printed love 152
Contexted-text 153
Languageing love in print 156
Languageing intimacy 156
Languageing distance 157
Languageing whose meanings? 160
Conclusion 163

5 A discourse on love’s language 164
Introduction 164
A mass produced vernacular for doing fun-and-love
‘Let me count the ways’
More than words can express
Ways of doing love’s language

Love(r)s language: discoursing the ‘real’ thing
A taste for the poetic
This is not a love song
I am the real thing?
Blank greeting cards: just for the taste of it?
Inscribing self with blank greeting cards
A rescue

Conclusion

Part II Introduction

6 Texted love – texted how?

Introduction

Representing fun & love: experiential meaning making
Fun and love: an interior world
But is it love?
‘Who’ occupies the world of fun and love? From process to participant
I am, you are, love is

Love, soft as an easy chair: visual semiosis (i)

Intimate realities

Interpersonal meaning making with a corpus of fun-and-love texts
What personal pronouns ‘do’ and ‘mean’ in fun-and-love greeting cards
‘We’ entails?
The interactional language of fun-and-love greeting cards

Writing on the page: visual semiosis (ii)

Textual meaning making and material reading practices

Beginnings: Theme in fun-and-love greeting cards
News in fun-and-love greeting cards: information structure
Theme, information and reading practices with fun-and-love greeting cards
Meaning and the page

Conclusion

7 Fun (sex) and love: Doing intimacy; rewriting love stories

Introduction

Between you and me there’s a great love story being written
Generic fragments and the idealised love-story
Fun-and-love greeting cards: fragments of a love-story
Fragments: discursive histories, discursive futures
Becoming couple
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beyond the coda</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The classed couple</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The homo-romantic couple</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toward re-writing intimacy as difference in the love-story</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disassembling the narrative: dispersing the coda</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other desires, other intimacies</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texted love: little texts and emotional moments</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Tables, Figures & Illustrations

## Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.1</td>
<td>Ownership and percentage of wholesale market share</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.3</td>
<td>Proportions of pronoun selection in the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.4</td>
<td>Theme in the fun-and-love greeting card corpus</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.1</td>
<td>Functional roles in English transitivity and labels</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2</td>
<td>Love ‘at stake’ in fun-and-love greeting cards</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.3</td>
<td>Semantics of inclusion and incorporation in a fun-and-love greeting card</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.4</td>
<td>The four basic speech functions (based on Halliday 1994:69)</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.6</td>
<td>Theme- New pattern ‘I’/‘you’ in fun-and-love greeting cards</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.7</td>
<td>Provisional Information Structure added to Theme and Rheme analysis mapped onto Transitivity and Mood analysis</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.8</td>
<td>Candidates for New</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.9</td>
<td>Hypotactic clause complexes: selecting dependent or independent clause as first clause</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.10</td>
<td>Thematic analysis of hypotactic (dependent^independent) clause complex</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.1</td>
<td>Narrative structure of the love-story, as exemplified by fun-and-love greeting cards</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.2</td>
<td>Intimacy beyond the coda exemplified by fun-and-love greeting cards</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.3</td>
<td>Meaning potential in the romantic relationship is maximally expanded at the point of mutuality via a reduction of discursive difference between ‘I’ and ‘you’</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.4</td>
<td>Vectors realising action in commercial fun-and-love greeting card for gay audience</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.5</td>
<td>Muted action realised by women’s bodies</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example 1</td>
<td>‘A Love Letter’</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 1.1</td>
<td>Mother’s Day greeting cards: mid-twentieth century compared with late twentieth century, showing change in typical proportions</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 1.2</td>
<td>Sister to Sister Birthday Greeting Card</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 5.1</td>
<td>Greeting card by Judy Horacek</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example 6.1 ‘Forever Friends’, exemplifying ‘cutesy’ greeting cards 216
Example 6.3b The visual image of the Sorry text 237
Example 6.2b Retrieving graphological semiosis 241
Example 6.4 Interpersonal meaning making realised by graphology 242
Example 6.5 Graphology realising affect 242
Example 6.7 Reproduction of inside recto page, *Your love is the most important gift I ever got* 249
Example 7.1 Commercial fun-and-love greeting card produced for lesbian audience, exemplifying de-sexualised lesbian representation 282
Example 7.2 Commercial fun-and-love greeting card produced for lesbian audience exemplifying sexualised lesbian representation 283
Example 7.3 Commercial greeting card produced for gay audience 284
Example 7.4 Greeting card representation of passive male body 286
Example 7.5 Commercial greeting card representation of homosexual practice 287
Abstract

Texted Love: a social-semiotic examination of greeting cards

The late twentieth century has seen an increasing commodification of the realm of the private and a reconstitution of the public sphere as a site of emotion. These twin processes give the current cultural moment a particular resonance with consumption and production, with the construction of gendered identities and with relations of intimacy between persons, including relations of love and desire. Communication technologies are an important example of how relations of intimacy between individuals are negotiated through the public sphere: for instance, over the telephone; between eroticised presenter and audience, via radio. The greeting card, typically combining visual semiosis and written rather than spoken language, occupies a particular place in this negotiation and in the commodification of the private sphere.

The thesis surveys patterns of production and use of greeting cards in Australia and analyses a corpus of greeting cards, examining the organisation of semiosis by greeting cards. As a commodity consumed for the express purpose of being given away, individuals using greeting cards enact themselves through a commodified technology of the self simultaneous with a performance that enacts relations with others. The particular focus is an emergent phenomenon, the ‘fun-and-love’ card, within the industry category of non-occasion greetings cards (i.e. greeting cards that are not for culturally mandated occasions such as a birthday, Christmas, Hanukkah, etc). The fun-and-love greeting card circulates, mostly, within intimate couplings. While both heterosexual and homosexual couples may practice intimacy using fun-and-love greeting cards, the progress of such intimate relations in the culture is constituted largely by heteronormative discourses.

The fun-and-love greeting card is situated within a complex of performances which are constitutive of a contemporary nexus of commodification, public-private spheres, gender, interpersonal relations and discourses of intimacy. While the commodification
of a feminised interpersonal realm is traditionally viewed as a debasement in modernity, it is treated here as both tracing fluidities between a binarised structuring of public and private spheres and as unsettling women’s traditional discursive positioning in the private realm. The thesis is that the emergence of fun-and-love greeting cards, a recent diversification of the greeting card’s longer history, simultaneously constitutes a solidification and disruption to the privileged position of romantic love relations in the culture as an inevitable outcome of heteronormative discourses.

As this is an inquiry into a commodity that is a texted cultural artefact, it is informed by both cultural and textual theories. The thesis fashions a strategy for doing close textual work within cultural analysis, drawing on complementary strategies: empirical and ethnographic methods, textual analysis and interpretive work – especially cultural and feminist theories. This conjunction of strategies is brought to bear on the greeting cards and other kinds of ‘languaged’ material, both spoken and written, that was amassed for the study.

The organisation of the thesis into two parts reflects its twin concerns: the first is akin to a study of the greeting card as a commodity that is given away, paying attention to practices of production, consumption and use within personal relationships. In symmetry with that exploration, Part Two is contiguous with the ‘linguistic turn’ that has taken many disciplines in productive directions over the duration of the twentieth century. The textual analysis, using the social semiotic approach to language of Michael Halliday (1978, 1994) and its associated technical resources, enables analysis of the inscription of positioning discourses in greeting cards to be grounded in the resource through which those discourses are realised, that is, language as text. In doing both these kinds of ‘discourse analysis’ articulated to an empirico-ethnographic study of a cultural artefact that embodies emotion, the thesis seeks to contribute to dialogues that are concerned with moving forward with respect to theorising relations among sociocultural practices and language and discourse.
Example 1 ‘A Love Letter’: greeting card published by Art Unlimited

Greeting cards are strung up at Christmas time and sit on mantelpieces proclaiming congratulations. They record the aging process as a series of birthday greetings and are stored as mementos of significant experiences or individuals in a person’s life. While they have proliferated in type and kind to be available for many occasions, greeting cards have traditionally projected two distinct orientations to experience: a birth to death life-cycle (e.g. birth, marriage, sympathy cards) and as events on religious or secular calendars (e.g. Easter, Mother’s Day). Seasonal greetings are recorded as occurring in ancient times in both Egypt and the Roman Empire as part of New Year celebrations but the greeting card in something like its current form is traced from a lithographed Christmas card produced by J.C. Horsely for Sir Henry Cole of London in 1843 (Chase 1971). A substantial edition of this first greeting card was produced, some 1000 prints, but commercial production is generally agreed to have begun in earnest in Britain and the United States of America in the 1860s.
The greeting card’s emergence in modernity does not appear to be directly related to technological impulses related to printing, lithography being a process developed in the 1700s.\(^1\) The appearance of the first modern greeting card coincides with a set of conditions associated with transport, including the introduction of the penny black stamp in 1840, an increased use of envelopes and the expansion of postal services concomitant with railway infrastructure development. The greeting card’s ongoing development corresponds with the expansion of literacy, especially in writing, and a broad growth in publishing during the same period.\(^2\) The use of conventionalised greetings, such as in greeting cards, affords someone with limited writing skills a measure of access to written communication. These conditions for card use, increasing levels of literacy and technologies that enabled at a distance communication to be more generally available, are important in the broader social conditions of the period. A dislocation and dispersal of people, as part of the historical conditions associated with the land enclosures in the period of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, continued with industrialisation and the massification of farming. Early postcards reproduced in Liell (1998) show evidence of being used by displaced people to communicate with their family and friends. Conditions for communication between dislocated families have continued into the twentieth century, with global capitalism and the division of work across national boundaries, providing further impetus for transnational migrations. At a distance communication does not form all the conditions for greeting card use, as the thesis will show. The story of greeting cards involves a fluid configuration of public and private spheres, gender relations and the development of capitalism.

Currently, commercially made greeting cards worth 1.4 billion retail dollars per year are sold in Australia (Prices Surveillance Authority 1990:5). This is a consumption rate

---

\(^1\) As an era, modernity is usually dated from the late eighteenth century. It is usually characterised as the Enlightenment, a term signalling its key philosophical problem, ‘truth’, which is proceeded to through reason and rationality.

\(^2\) During the mid-nineteenth century, the social movement concerned with mass primary education in Britain became increasingly influential, although primary education had been available to rural and the working poor in urban areas from the sixteenth century. The pedagogical practice of teaching reading before writing meant that unless children were at school for a substantial period, they did not acquire writing skills (Shevelow 1989:27-28).
Introduction

of some 21 cards per head of population. Greeting cards are overwhelmingly bought by women. Figures cited by greeting card publishers vary but put consumption of greeting cards by women at between 80%-98% of overall card consumption. The full complement of greeting cards produced by a commercial manufacturer is organised by the greeting card industry according to a set of ideas they deploy about social relations in public and private spheres: about women and men; and about personal interaction and marketing. These ideas are to some extent discernible in the classificatory and labelling practices of greeting card publishers and in the industry self referencing as both the ‘social expression’ and ‘self expression’ industry. Social and self expression practices with greeting cards are structured through a distinction greeting card publishers make between occasion and non-occasion greeting cards (and other sub-categories). Occasion greeting cards are produced for use in conventionalised social exchanges, for example, cultural practices associated with birthdays or the engagement of a couple etc. The non-occasion card is labelled as such because it does not acknowledge a particular secular occasion, such as an individual birth or death, or a collectively experienced event such as Hanukkah or Christmas.

Non-occasion greeting cards have themselves proliferated into a range of ‘friendship’, ‘fun-and-love’, ‘lifestyle’ and ‘blank’ greeting cards (cards with only an image and no linguistic text) alongside an earlier kind of non-occasion card, the inspirational friendship card that draws on religious belief or is highly sentimental. One of these, the ‘fun-and-love’ non-occasion greeting card, is a recently emerged type, the terrain of which is captured by the image above – Example 1 – in an overdetermined and amusing way. This card, in the style of a letter written in a ‘language of love’ with red ‘love hearts’ for an alphabet, visually inscribes the thesis’ nomination of greeting cards, as ‘texted love’.

---

3 Comparable figures for America indicate greeting cards are a $6.3 billion dollar industry in the US, translating to 30 cards per head per year (Mogelonsky 1996).

4 These figures are provisional because the industry consists largely of private companies who do not make their financial details public. The figures are derived from interviews with representatives of greeting card publishing companies (see Appendix A).

5 Finkelstein (1994b) nominates all non-occasion greeting cards as ‘non-purpose’ cards (p.66).
On the back of the greeting card reproduced above as Example 1, the image is identified as an ‘artwork by Katri-Dahl 1981’, exemplifying a slipperiness between aesthetic objects traditionally constituted as art and commodity objects. It is not only ‘art’ and ‘commodities’ that are reconstrued by the greeting card. The classificatory categories of greeting card publishing constitute social fields. ‘Fun-and-love’ is a sociosemantic label. While love is a complex of ideas, an emotion and a marker of certain kinds of relationships, the category ‘fun and love’ collapses those and reconstrues them as specific texts. Read as a single lexical item, ‘fun and love’ is a semantic category formed from the conjunction of love and fun but ‘fun’ may in certain instances be read as a euphemism for ‘sex’, putting these greeting cards firmly into the terrain of particular relationships, the ‘intimate’ or ‘romantic love’ relationship. So, while greeting cards constitute and are constituted by cultural distinctions among interpersonal relations, the thesis focuses on how a commodity, the greeting card, social relations and emotion connect up with one another, that is, on meaning making realised by texted love.

Texted love: what’s love got to do with text?

The fun-and-love greeting card cannot immediately be linked to a specific occasion, raising the obvious but interesting issue of ‘when and how and why are they used? These questions about greeting card use are considered through analysis of textual meanings and through the exegesis of greeting card producers and users. The pleasures card users have in such little texts suggest they are related to important cultural narratives and experiences. As an artefact used particularly by women, greeting cards are also implicated in various fictions about gender, language, and social relations. The cards are a mass produced commodity that is constituted by and constitutes discourses of love and desire. ‘Discourse’ is here used as it emerges in Michel

---

6 While acknowledging that the relation between love and desire and particular kinds of relationships (marriage and friendship, for example) has long been the concern of certain philosophers, the thesis takes as a given that love, as it constitutes an intimate relation, is culturally constituted as a combination of romantic love and carnal desire, although this is a shorthand way of referring to a complex set of ideas and practices and social processes, including homosexual and heterosexual relations.
Foucault’s (1972; 1990) work. In Foucault’s work, discourse takes language in the form of statements and social practices; as systematically forming the objects that they ‘speak’ about, as bringing sociocultural objects into being by naming, defining and delimiting their field of operation. Discursive regimes shape what can (or cannot) be said, or read (or not) about any aspect of a lived life. These objects of knowledge then become linked to specific practices that realise and set the conditions for discourse, which itself ‘returns’ to those ‘statements’ that facilitate particular practices. Discourse, in Foucault’s (1981) power/knowledge relation, is a claim to ‘truth’: the very thing that is at stake (p.53). If power works through discourse, then speaking a particular discourse is both a claim to ‘truth’ and a positioning of the speaker and the hearer within a power relation. Such positioning practices, collectively organised within institutions such as law and education, are legitimated and become common-sense knowledges. Individuals and communities use this common-sense to make meanings, designating, for instance, what is ‘normal’ desire, what is familial or romantic love and what might be ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ experiences of love.

The greeting card commodifies emotion and personal relationships and fun-and-love greeting cards commodify the realm of romantic love and carnal desire. Greeting cards, therefore, come under competing claims about public and private realms and the cultural value of emotion, particularly as these are organised along gender lines. These discourses are, furthermore, inflected with the cultural value of the greeting card, which is not a prestigious cultural artefact or way of ‘speaking’. The thesis is that the recent diversification of ‘texted love’ both constitutes a solidification of the privileged position of romantic love relations in the culture and a disruption of those relations as an inevitable outcome of heteronormative discourses.

---

7 In certain disciplinary contexts (e.g. linguistics) ‘discourse’ is a term that may be used more narrowly to refer to language-in-use. For an extended discussion of uses of the term within linguistics, by Foucault, and in critical discourse analysis, see Pennycook 1994.

8 Putting affect on display in the public domain is antithetical to Barthes’ (1992) location of the lover’s discourse in ‘extreme solitude’ (p.1). Like many writings on love, however, Barthes treats love as an ineffable emotion of poetic dimensions, never quotidian.

9 Heteronormativity being heterosexual desire constituted as a regime of truth.
Given the scope of the thesis’ aims, this Introduction’s tasks are to: outline a set of concerns and positions, providing a foundation for the analysis; delineate a complex of theoretical resources drawn on for analysing and interpreting the greeting card both as a cultural artefact and as a text involved in sociocultural practices. A number of debates are identified, including those that have informed the material research process: the ‘method’. That discussion is followed by a chapter by chapter synopsis. In the vernacular of the ‘new humanities’, the thesis is thus broadly ‘inter’ or ‘trans’ disciplinary. Capturing much of the sense of recent intellectual and social movements, Benhabib (1999) writes:

If *fragmentation* was the code word of the eighties, *hybridity* is the code word of the nineties; if *incommensurability* was a master term for the eighties, *interstitiality* is one for the nineties; if *the clash of cultures* was the horizon of the eighties, *multiculturalism* and *polyglotism* are the framework of the nineties.  

(p.336, italics in original)

While terms such as ‘trans’ and ‘cross’ disciplinary and ideas of ‘fragmentation’ and ‘incommensurability’ are disrupted by Foucault’s (1970) observations about the impossibilities of disciplinary purity and practices that police disciplinary boundaries, they usefully signal the distinctiveness of ‘Cultural Studies’ in approaching both the practice of analysis and the ‘object’ as ‘cultural’.

From cultural studies the thesis inherits a conception of culture that is inclusive and concerned with meaning making (Williams 1989). Taking a similarly semiotic approach to culture, more recently Frow and Morris (1996) designate it as ‘a network of representations – texts, images, talk, codes of behaviour, and the narrative structures organising these – which shapes every aspect of social life’ (p.345). As a cultural practice, there are two conspicuous features of greeting card use: its meaning making involves a commodity being given away, as an ‘expression’ of thoughts or feelings the

---

10 In *The Long Revolution*, Williams (1965) sets out what will come under the rubric of cultural analysis. Williams (1989) insists on (at least) two senses of the word ‘culture’, drawing on both the broad scope of the anthropological – as ‘a whole way of life’ and a narrow view of culture as ‘the arts and learning’ as in high modernism (p.4). ‘Culture’ in the anthropological view is not something that is territorially bounded by cartographic convention, nationhood or even ‘community’, it is the dispositions that form a whole way of life produced through the assumptions (metaphysics, cosmology) and internal logic of a group as Sahlins (1976) defines it. Culture is also keenly concerned with ‘society’, that is people in social structures (hence, a certain anthropological emphasis on kinship structures).
giver makes in relation to the recipient and greeting card use is sexually differentiated. The use of greeting cards thus involves a configuration of practices and ideas that puts the sociocultural production of cards in a relation with discourses constituting the cultural categories of gender.

Gender or, rather, sexual difference is elaborated by feminist theory, providing a collection of approaches to theorising sexual difference and demonstrating that it is not possible to reduce the complex social constructions of male and female, masculine and feminine to each other and to the categories man and woman. Sexual difference is read as produced within a binarised logic of Western thought, for example, tracing relations between ‘male’ and ‘public’ via reason, freedom and culture, although it is also possible to ‘detour’ as it were from this trajectory via feminised terrains of the private, the body, nature and emotion. Part of the logic of dualism is that it makes invisible the way the cultural categories are interdependent and, thus, part of the feminist project is ‘unpacking’ such relations. Pairings, or binaries such as reason and emotion, are treated as relational terms, so the category ‘reason’ is dependently constituted through its opposite ‘emotion’, without which ‘reason’ cannot be constituted (Lloyd 1993).

Evolving out of a tradition of engagement with modernist constructions of the rational and with power, what is at issue in feminist theory is not any social fact about men and women’s roles in a binarised social realm of public and private domains. While to say, generally, that men command a public domain in which rationality is central and that women inhabit a private realm constructed as the opposite of the public is not too controversial, it is nevertheless somewhat controversial. The point for feminism is that these distinctions are constructed as opposites and that the cultural value attached to each sphere constitute the categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’. It is a process that matters for the concrete and lived lives of particular women and men. While this study provides a view of certain aspects of some women’s experience, its

---

11 What feminists have to say about women, femininity and femaleness and, increasingly, about masculinity, is not always a matter of shared theoretical and political perspectives. For example, some feminists have been particularly interested in extending Marxist theory, analysing the sexual division of labour in the domestic realm and the workplace (Game and Pringle 1983; Beechey and Perkins 1987). Locating women’s position outside class relations, radical feminism developed a theory of patriarchy, producing analyses of sexual politics (Millet 1970; Rich 1980;
purpose is not to make claims about ‘women’s experience’ or ‘woman’. It is interested in the possibilities that discourses of love and desire constitute with respect to gendered subjects, and those subjects’ cultural practices or experiences of love.

Historically, interpersonal and emotional realms are occupied by the cultural category ‘woman’ in a relation that is tied to women’s alignment with nurturing and expressive functions. Emotions are attached to women’s bodies and feminised, mobilising ‘nature’ as a discourse in the form of biology. Such essentialising discourses have a devastating effect on what a ‘woman’ possibly is and may exclude many women, although the dualism constitutes that idea of woman against an equally monolithic ‘man’. Masculinity, constructed within an idealisation of culture, reason and the public sphere, presupposes that the self is somehow abstracted from social relations and is formed from an essence or human spirit, enabling the self to be imagined as an autonomous rational self (Poole 1990). This, in part, constructs for the category ‘man’, a dislocated view of the world in which social relationships can be constructed through a means-ends relation, delegitimising emotional life for masculine subjects.

Feelings and intimacy have not, in general, held any significant interest for many disciplines. A drive towards explaining the world in terms of causes and effects or ‘action’ means that ‘feeling’ has been ignored or relegated to ‘soft’ disciplines. In the social sciences, emotion has fared little better, often being consigned to an ‘epiphenomenal’ position (Tompkins 1962:5-7). An emergent critical discourse of

MacKinnon 1989) and language (Spender 1980; Daly 1978).

12 In cross-cultural studies, writers engaged in a debate about the universal subordination of women, with Ortner’s (1974) paper, ‘Is female to male as nature is to culture’ being a pivot for many discussions (see also, MacCormack and Strathern (eds) 1980). The universalism question is undercut by critiques of both patriarchy and feminism with respect to racism (Lorde 1984; hooks 1981).

13 The emergence of such functions coincides with the delineation and definition of women in terms of sensitivity, sensibilities and their ‘open’ bodies – a softness which enables penetrating glimpses of the functions and passive state of woman attributed by the (masculine) scientific gaze as Jordanova (1989) traces in visual representations of woman that constitute women’s association with both psychical and physical ‘interiors’.

14 Feminist critiques of sexual difference have brought masculinity out of the invisibility of its cultural position as a given category and into the light of scrutiny as an identity category (see for example, Connell 1995; Mac an Ghaill 1996).
emotion is being built, in part, upon foundations provided by feminist engagement with discourses constituting the ‘nature of woman’. Qualities such as femaleness, sexuality or emotional-ness that are taken to be part of an individual’s identity are not an inevitable outcome of inhabiting a particular kind of body (as in essentialising discourses), according to feminist and ‘post’ critiques of the humanistic, rational, autonomous self. Feminist and ‘post’ theorists rewrite the self as profoundly social and as constituted by and constitutive of particular social relations (Henriques et al 1984). A social self means identity categories such as ‘woman’ and ‘man’ are comprehended as particular to historical, social and cultural moments, unravelling the unitariness and singularity of modernity’s subject. Given that the subject is always an ‘embodied subject’, there are qualitatively different values attributed and experiences of the same behaviours performed by male and female bodies, including women and men in love, having sex or giving greeting cards (Gatens 1983; Butler 1990). Having a ‘female’, ‘male’, ‘emotional’, ‘emotionless’, ‘heterosexual’ ‘lesbian’ identity, for example, is only possible or ‘speakable’ within the context of particular social relations. Furthermore, because the subject always inhabits multiple social relations, identities come to be inflected through each other (being female and heterosexual and emotional, for example).16

15 While the shorthand ‘post’ refers to a set of theories and analytical procedures – the most famous of which is Derrida’s (1976) ‘deconstruction’ – it also tends to be problematically inclusive. There are significant differences among theorists that may otherwise be grouped together under the rubric of the terms poststructuralist or postmodernist, for example, Lyotard 1986; Rorty 1989. While poststructuralism is sometimes referred to as ‘continental’ philosophy and by Anglo-American and Australian writers as ‘French theory’ (sometimes as a pejorative), in the term ‘poststructuralism’ some of the strategy – and the theoretical roots – of its critique is usefully traced in its reference to structuralism (de Saussure 1983; Levi-Strauss 1978) and is used in the thesis. The term ‘postmodern’ has a specific history with respect to the field of arts and visual culture (Hutcheon 1988), especially in the variation ‘postmodernism’, and a different history as antifoundational theory (Lyotard 1986). ‘Postmodern’ also functions as a diagnosis (Baudrillard 1983a; Jameson 1991), as a periodising structure (Frow 1997a) and for Butler (1997) as ‘a futural form’, a politics of both hope and anxiety (p.161). The practice adopted is to use the term ‘postmodernism’ where visual theory is concerned and ‘postmodern’ to refer to a set of intellectual threads concerned with problematising certain conceptions of human existence, especially those usually associated with, but in no way superseding, ‘modernity’ (Huyssen 1986).

16 Such choices may be political. During the 1970s, many black feminists in Britain chose to foreground their ‘black’ identity over their affinity with other feminists as ‘female’, a process that was widely debated in feminist journals, for example, Spare Rib. Echoing that debate, some
Emotion is traditionally located in the interior of the ‘self’, although the privatised realm of the domestic has also been attributed as a site of ‘feeling’, and a site where individuals temporarily secure for themselves a degree of safety from the public sphere (Lasch 1979). Love is thus positioned awkwardly in relation to culture, reason and the public realm of rational corporate production of greeting cards, particularly in being associated with ‘woman’, nature, the body and the private realm. For example, the attachments and bonds that individuals have in the private sphere are understood to be qualitatively different to those formed in the public sphere. A key difference is that the bonds and attachments of the private sphere are taken to involve positive emotions, such as love, sympathy, etc., between individuals and to arise naturally in the course of social relations, in contrast to the instrumental attachments of the public sphere.

While one or any of various identities may come to be an individual’s point of departure for their sense of ‘self’, Foucault (1983a) suggests that subject’s sense of self as an ethical subject is, in this cultural moment, derived through feelings: ‘in our society the main field of morality, the part of ourselves which is most relevant for morality, is our feelings’ (p.238). It is how a subject ‘feels’ that organises performances of self. Foucault’s comments anticipate current scholarly interest in the arena of emotion and what has been termed, the ‘emotionalisation’ of public discourse. Emotionalisation is the process whereby affect is not just brought into the public domain but the public domain is itself ‘affect-ed’.

As evidence of the ‘emotional turn’, Squire (2001) points to ‘the increasing personalisation of fields such as politics that seem far from emotions’ (p.17). In the fun-and-love-greeting card, emotions come

---

Australian indigenous women’s writing seeks to position ‘Aboriginality’ outside of both feminism and post-colonialism (see Lucashenko 1994).

17 The individual’s occupation of the problematic idea of the private realm and the domestic site is structured in relation to whether they are gendered as feminine or masculine. Femininity, for example, is constituted in the private sphere through the notion of ‘homemaker’, whereas masculinity is constituted through the idea of the family ‘breadwinner’ (Poole 1990:55). Vogler (1998) observes that the ‘public/private contrast is not strictly applicable to wives who stay at home with children … whose “public arena,” home, is their husbands “private arena”’ (p.333).

18 While this process is referred to by a variety of terms, the preferred term here is ‘emotionalisation’, which is drawn from the seminar series ‘Affect, Ethics, Citizenship: The Emotionalisation of Public Life’, February 1999–May 2000, in the Department of Cultural Studies, University of East London, coordinated by Radstone, Richards, Squire and Treacher [accessed November 28, 2000].
into the public realm as material objects put on public display and as commodities for consumption. Considering whether or not emotionalisation is a good or bad thing, Squire suggests that while most evaluations come down on the negative side, ‘the public life of emotions can operate as a pragmatic strategy to achieve otherwise unlikely effects’ (p.23). Not, Squire cautions, that the public life of emotions offers ‘a guarantee of psychological health, social progress or democratisation’ (p.25). The thesis explores how fun-and-love greeting cards are involved in the twin processes of the emotionalisation of the public domain and the commodification of the intimate and constitute a rupture of the naturalised relation between women and the emotional realm, emphasising the contingency of the discursive location of affect in the private realm and its attachment to ‘woman’.

The acquisition and experience of emotion for individual subjects is contingent. While emotion involves physiological states, the relation between those states and named ‘emotions’ does not involve a one to one correspondence. Hochschild (1983) points out, fear and anger have much in common as bodily states, providing good reason not to name feelings after these states of arousal (p.223). Defining emotion, Crawford et al (1992) describe it as the relationship between the physiological state of ‘arousal’ and its sociosemantic realisation.19 A common experience, the argument goes, does not lead to a singular common-sense experience of emotion because it is dependent on a complex of social and cultural, that is, interpretive processes, including sexual difference (p.118).20 An elaborated social construction view of the relation between emotion and gender brings Gilligan (1982) to develop a view of how women and men differently carry out everyday inter-relating. Gilligan develops a ‘care ethics’ based on research into ethical decision making by women and men, finding that women draw on knowledges about interrelations between people, situational detail and consideration of the other, whereas men tend to rely on principles of justice. While Gilligan appraises these pragmatically, finding that

---

19 Crawford et al (1992) emphasise the construction of texts and memory with respect to solidifying ‘emotion’ in a syndrome of physiology which constitutes how ‘arousal’ becomes differentiated according to sociocultural conditions.
20 For example, giving birth does not necessarily lead to maternal attachment or, as Foucault (1987a; 1988) traces, the meaning of sexual relations between men and boys shifts historically (see especially, The History of Sexuality, volumes 2 and 3).
they are each and all useful, Gatens (1995) warns that this is an oppositional relation and is imbricated in a separation of spheres of activity for the sexes and a series of dichotomous relations, including associating femininity with passivity (p.53).

Promoting ‘care ethics’ does not work to dislodge stereotypical views of femininity and masculinity. Emotion is experienced by positioned subjects and the possibilities for a positioned subject’s experience and practice of love are constituted by discourses through which different kinds of love relationships are known: Western Judæo Christian religious traditions; European philosophies; the literary Romanticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and the socioeconomic conditions that have structured the family as the site of consumption. These discourses constitute carnal desire as normatively heterosexual and structured through romantic love and marriage, providing a basis for reproduction and familial or nurturing love practices by women in the domestic sphere. A different perspective on ‘care’ is seen in observations Foucault (1997) makes about men (made as part of developing an argument on the conditions for the emergence of the homosexual subject). Institutions of governmentality – a form of productive power organising knowledges institutionally and ‘professionally’ that is internalised – including the rise of marriage as a public institution constitute the conditions for men’s association with instrumentality and an absence of care of the other (p.171).21 Under these conditions, friendship and caring for other men disappears except in certain conditions of danger or triumph (such as war and sporting success).

Performances of love with greeting cards, whether romantic or familial, by femininised or masculinised subjects, emerge historically within a capitalist cultural context. This is an economic structure which conceives social relations as based on ‘exchange’ transactions and the production of commodities for the (instrumental) purpose of profit (Marx 1990). Love is usually understood as falling outside such exchanges, at least, ideally. Western discourses on love, take love’s meanings from non-capitalist – i.e., pre-capitalist – culture, imbuing it with naturalness, freedom, purity, ahistoricism, altruism and reciprocity. To read love through a

21 Foucault (1997) focuses on male to male relations of power, sex and politics in order to destabilise the givenness of those relations, writing that it is the idea of love and fidelity tenderness and companionship that stirs feelings against male homosexuality not sex between men (p.136).
dualism of pre and post capitalism, would be to ignore the way in which
romantic love precedes capitalism and how love has been important in promoting
some of the ideals of capitalism, especially, individualism and egalitarianism (Illouz
1997). It would also idealise pre-capitalist cultures. Taking up this latter issue, Frow
(1997b) is concerned to reconsider the analysis of pre-capitalist and capitalist cultures
through the respective logics of their economies, showing how distinctions between
these structurings are problematic with respect to cultural practices and social
relations. Differently ordered cultures analysed through the logics of contrasting
‘exchange’ (Marx 1990) and ‘gift’ economies (Mauss 1966) structure agonistic
competition in contrast to reciprocal sociality (where individuals could successfully
live together without needing either the state or the market). Critiquing this ‘exchange
vs gift’ logic, Frow argues each social structure already contains within itself these
different kinds of social relations (p.102). The effect of this critique is that it opens up
the question of ‘giving’ as a cultural performance. It becomes possible to argue that
giving has a number of dimensions not accommodated within the dualism. One such
dimension identified in the practice of greeting card giving is explored by drawing on
Foucault’s (1988) work on the care of the self. ‘Care of the self’ is Foucault’s conception
of the ethical principle leading subjects to shape their inner self in particular ways.
Fun-and-love greeting card giving, the thesis will argue, is caught up in fashioning an
ethical self, both as part of the cultural practice of intimacy and consuming.

The greeting card arose in one cultural moment and has flourished in a rather different
one. Its history is tied to developing industrialisation, so it is not a ‘folk-
popular’ artefact, although it is a popular artefact. A broad and semiotic perspective of
‘popular’ culture is derived from cultural studies. As a consequence of a broad and
inclusive sense of culture, the cultural studies undertaking is, in part, an investigation into
the mutual interdependence of a set of terms describing culture: ‘high’, ‘low’ and the
related terms ‘popular’ and ‘mass’ culture. With the (now sloganistic) insight that ‘culture
is ordinary’, Williams (1989) aligns the ordinary practices of individuals with a view of
culture as arts and learning – against the narrow view of high modernism (p.4). In

22 Romantic love appears in late medieval times. See de Rougement 1956, for a historical account
of love in Western society.
Keywords, where Williams’ (1983) maps these terms, he gives them their positive and pejorative semantics: mass, for example, has both a sense of being base or common and of connoting solidarity among people (pp.158-163). In the latter decades of the twentieth century, these classifications have become imbricated in a tendency to define all ‘popular’ culture through ‘mass-ness’ and, in particular, through mass media. Generating any inventory of what is or is not popular culture is hazardous, as Hall (1981) cautions (p.235). While Baudrillard (1983b) suggests that it is the desire to specify ‘mass’ that should be problematised (p.5). The mass produced greeting card is popular culture in the sense that a social and semiotic definition would take it to be a commodity that is involved in people actively generating meanings with it (Fiske 1989:23). The social relations constituted by particular artefacts and their use are always ‘historically provisional’, a matter of a particular artefact or practice and specific conditions of production and use (Hall 1981:235). Some of these particulars are the concern of the thesis.

As a popular cultural artefact that is texted, the greeting card places a demand on cultural theory to attend specifically to linguistic significatory practices. The linguistic components of greeting cards are, as Halliday (1994) puts it, ‘little texts’ (p.397). They are frequently, but not always, stereotyped with overly sentimental forms of greeting, congratulation, etc. Most existing analyses of greeting cards are situated within a particular qualitative research tradition, consisting principally of ‘content analysis’ studies that identify and assess social attitudes to various topics by quantifying and describing ‘messages’, ‘themes’ and specific words: through representations of death (Woods and Delisle 1978); historical events (Kaur-Kasior 1987); love (Mooney and Brabandt 1988); deviance (Mooney and Brabandt 1987); and ‘sex-specific’ images (Brabandt and Mooney 1989). Content analysis, however, is not able to analyse meaning making contextually.23 There are two, related, theoretical problems. Using a transmission communication model of sender-message-receiver, content analysis assumes an unproblematic sharing of ‘code’ and processes of ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’. This is a model of communication that is difficult to sustain

23 Content analysis involves researchers establishing categories external to the text that are then counted. McQuail (1987) points out this assumes the investigator is able to construct a category
given the contingency of social subjectivity, interactional and ‘reading’ processes. Content analysis is also unable to distinguish between what it identifies as the message (usually treated as ‘meaning’) and its form, relying on ‘expressive’ and ‘commonsense’ theories of signification. Expressive and ‘folk’ theories of language have the effect of reducing language to being a simple carrier that transparently transmits meaning, ideas, emotion and experience. Such theories mobilise what Reddy (1979) analyses and identifies as a ‘conduit metaphor’. Such a metaphor constitutes language as a neutral conductor for meaning, inferring that communication processes are normally unproblematic (hence, attention comes to be on ‘mis-communication’). This message-conduit formulation is a mechanistic communication concept that is antithetical to cultural interpretation interested in historically specific signifying practices. Moreover, the conduit metaphor presumes a one to one correspondence between referents and spoken or written words; an extension of which leads, Derrida (1976) argues, to the privileging of speech over writing. ‘Phonocentrism’, as Derrida terms this relation, forms an important strand of criticism directed at greeting cards that is addressed in the thesis.

A critical and social theory of communication and of language is required for the analysis of texted cultural production. Communication is treated in the thesis as an intersubjective meaning making process, not a process of transmission. Thus, ‘senders and receivers’ are rehabilitated into a social relation. As cultural linguist Ong (1991) puts it, in a denunciation of the conduit metaphor, ‘[i]n real human communication, the sender has to be not only in the sender position, but also in the receiver position before he or she can send anything’ (p.176). While specific instances of language ‘exchange’ are not necessarily of interest to the broad field of cultural studies, the conditions that may produce particular exchanges are of interest, for example, where system without ‘imposing his or her meaning-system’ on the analysis and ‘that “coders” can be trained to make reliable judgements about categories and meanings’ (p.277).

24 Different problems are generated for the sender-receiver model by Vygotsky’s (1986) argument that thought and language are different semiotic systems.

25 Ong’s view of the intersubjective nature of communication owes a considerable debt to Bakhtin’s (1986) notion of addressivity, the quality an utterance inherently has of turning to and speaking to ‘someone’, a social subject in a social relation with the speaker, ‘for whose sake, in essence, it is actually created’ (p.94). ‘Speaker’ in the thesis is used to refer to the position of text producer and, therefore, includes writers (among other kinds of text producers).
individuals are differently ‘sexed’ or ‘raced’. Social, institutional, political conditions and cultural values, together with how they are constitutive of the sociocultural realm, mean that text is a complex of conditions, a social field of meanings and a site where subjects are positioned and position themselves. ‘Who’, with respect to the greeting card, is involved in these positioning practices? There are competing authorships in the production of meaning being made by the greeting card: the greeting card designer; the commercial publisher; the card giver who may further inscribe the card; and the recipient, who ‘authors’ their own reading. Text, as Bakhtin (1981) argues, is constituted by and produces multiple and contesting meanings, having the quality of multivoicedness or ‘heteroglossia’, rather than a single and undivided ‘truth’ (p.668).

Barthes (1984a) – drawing on Bakhtin – writes:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (p.146)

Heteroglossia is not simply ‘reference’ to another text or voice but creates a text’s meanings with ‘attachment’, constituting speech utterances as positioned and positioning discourse. A sense of text as making multiple meanings and as constituted by meanings from ‘innumerable centres’ contributes further to disrupting distinctions between high and popular culture because some of the force of that distinction depends upon text being separated out from its social and historical and textual threads: its intertextuality. As analyses of a range of cultural production demonstrate, textual ‘tissue’ may draw on vernacular language, popular and clichéd or sentimental language as well as, for example, poetic or scientific registers (e.g. Barthes 1984b). Text always involves the use of utterances of other speakers and, moreover, meaning making involves play between the text and intertexts, the producer and the reader.

With a sense of text as heteroglossic, text can never be uninterrogated; it is always susceptible to the discursive positions that textualised voices constitute being deconstructed. This is what frames Weedon, Tolson and Mort’s (1980) discussion of what might be an ‘adequate sociolinguistics’ for cultural studies (p.216). The task, as they set it out, is for a model of language that can account for interaction between social and cultural subjects, producing a map of communication that is dynamic and responsive to context and subjectivity. What Weedon, Tolson and Mort argue for is a way of being able to keep hold of cultural studies’ concerns with social, cultural and historical
analyses while looking at specific instances of text. Thus, an ‘adequate sociolinguistics’ is outlined as follows:

we feel the need for a form of sociolinguistics which would pay attention to both language *structure* and *usage* in historically specific locations, thereby opening up the area of the language of continually repositioned, speaking subjects within the symbolic order, thought historically to be a particular formation of social practices and discourses. Thus while decentering the subject as the source and guarantee of meaning, we would want to look at the range of socially and institutionally constructed possible subjectivities available to individuals; and here, we would argue, close attention to forms of language within discursive practices is central. (p.216, italics in original)

As susceptible as any text is to interrogation, the analytical approach needs to be able to handle the situatedness of the text (whether spoken utterance in an particular position in an sequence of utterances or as a specifically located written text) and to be able to relate specific textual instances to discourse as a practice in the Foucauldian sense. The thesis, therefore, draws, as an appropriate model and analytical technique, on work under the broad rubric of discourse analysis, including social semiotics (Halliday 1978; 1994) and what has come to be termed ‘critical discourse analysis’ (Fairclough 1995).26 Social semiotics and critical discourse analysis theorise communication as always mediated, paying attention to the mediation of meaning through both text and context (context is understood as social, political and cultural etc.,) and attending to a range of discoursal features (grammar, semantics, topics and genres etc). Discourse analysis takes the relationship between signifier and signified as more than an abstract relationship: language is constitutive (language and the social constitute and are constituted by each other). Language ‘speaks’, as Heidegger (1959) puts it, calling into being a ‘world’; it is evocative (p.190). Language is, therefore, both representational and ontological.27

The relationship between social and discourse ‘realities’ is in both social semiotics and critical discourse analysis rendered as dialectical.28 Fairclough (1992) elaborates on the importance of such a relation:

---

26 Referred to variously as ‘systemic functional linguistics’, ‘Hallidayan’ linguistics and more recently ‘critical discourse analysis’.

27 Although Heidegger emphasises the ontological and Halliday (1978) adds ‘textual’.

28 Despite a relation between discourse structures and social situations and interactions being assumed in discourse analysis, and despite the richness and usefulness of the material that social
It is important that the relationship between discourse and social structure should be seen dialectically if we are to avoid the pitfalls of overemphasizing on the one hand the social determination of discourse, and on the other hand the construction of the social in discourse. The former turns discourse into a mere reflection of a deeper social reality, the latter idealistically represents discourse as the source of the social. (p.65)

The central technical resource drawn on in the thesis is Halliday’s theory of language as social semiotic (1978) and its associated functional grammar (1994). The dialectical demand is fulfilled by social semiotics not only by taking language and social context to be relational but in a bidirectional relationship: it is a constitutive theory of language. Social semiotics enables an analysis of the inscription of positioning discourses in greeting cards to be grounded in the resource through which those discourses are realised, that is, language as text. Social semiotics, therefore, fulfils Weedon, Tolson and Mort’s (1980) call for a sociolinguistics that makes the link between discourse as text and discourse as a body of knowledge and is grounded in actual material – text.29 Text is a semiotic record of the deployment of resources positioning individuals within discourses, constitutively forming subjects of those discourses (Lemke 1995). Moreover, the specific technical resources for the analysis of text are inherently ‘multiple’. Halliday (1994) conceives language-in-use as not simply instrumental or concerned solely with representation but as simultaneously making interpersonal and textual meaning and, furthermore, conceives grammar, not just

semiotics and critical discourse analysis makes available, they are vulnerable from two directions that are important with respect to sociocultural analysis: from ‘direct’ readings being made of the social from the text as a ‘structure’; and Poynton (2000) points out, from tendencies towards technicality and the rigidities that provokes (p.30). The most important effect of ‘direct’ readings is the way in which they may be identified as the operation of ‘ideology’, a highly problematised term sometimes loosely invoked to refer to ‘beliefs’ or the operation of capitalist social relations or in neo-Marxist discourse as a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence and a number of ideological structures that secure the reproduction of relations of production, e.g. the family (Althusser 1977). Linking the problematicness of the term, ideology, to textual analysis, Johnson (1996) warns that ‘no cultural form can be dubbed “ideological” ... until we have examined not only its origin in the primary production process, but also carefully analysed its textual forms and the modes of its reception’ (p.92 italics in original).

29 Weedon, Tolson and Mort (1980) champion ‘sociolinguistics’, terminology that is related to the moment in which they are writing. While there are differences between sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis with respect to their project, these are less important than the similarities: concerns with detailed descriptions of talk and the interpretation of that talk within a ‘social’ perspective. Language – all social semiotics – are ‘always-already’ social and in this way Halliday’s theory is not ‘social linguistics’, it is a sociosemiotic theory.
words, as a meaning making resource. This provides a compelling reason for doing close textual, that is, grammatical analysis of texted cultural artefacts.

The germinal work of Halliday has been taken up and put to work in various forms of ‘post’ cultural analysis. As a discourse analysis technique, social semiotics offers a rich ground for doing cultural interpretive work and analysis of written and spoken (both ‘scripted’ and ‘spontaneous’) texts and a considerable corpus exists. There is a developing body of work on semiotically complex texts or what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) have called ‘multimodal’ texts. The importance of text analysis being able to handle such multimodality is most clearly seen in ‘new media’, especially the internet, where web technology produces text that may simultaneously deploy still and moving imagery, sound – both recorded or live ‘streaming’ – and dialogue in ‘real’ time among multiple interactants. Whether or not there are sufficient reasons to agree with a claim made by van Leeuwen and Kress (1992) that social semiotics and its associated multifunctional grammar should be ‘the theoretical, analytical and descriptive branch of cultural studies’ remains to be seen (p.28).

Meaning making, as it coalesces around texts, is both multiple and semiotically heterogeneous. Greeting cards, for example, make meaning with much more than

---

30 Textual interpretive work drawing on social semiotic theory is a particular strand in the ‘hybridised’ field of Australian cultural studies (Turner 1993:5-6). See Frow and Morris 1996 for a discussion of the distinctiveness of Australian Cultural Studies. Threadgold (1987) also gives social semiotics a very particular place in an account of Australian semiotics. For a recent collection of such analyses, see Lee and Poynton (eds) 2000.

31 That corpus is broad ranging but includes analysis of print and broadcast media (Kress and Fowler 1979; Kress 1986; van Leeuwen 1987; Poynton 1991a; Hodge and Kress 1993; Bell and van Leeuwen 1994; Iedema 1995), film (Cranny-Francis 1988) and advertising (Coupland 1996); scientific writing (Halliday and Martin 1993), literature (Hasan 1985; Thibault 1991; Huisman 1999), casual conversation (Eggins and Slade 1997), mother-child interaction (Halliday 1975; Painter 1991) and educational concerns, including pedagogical practice and curriculum development (Lee 1994; Wright 1996; Christie and Martin 1997).

32 These semiotically complex texts are sometimes referred to as ‘composite’ texts but the term preferred here is multimodal. The former tends to cohere semantically with part-whole relations, suggesting ‘compound’, which is also a combinatory ‘whole’, implying the possibility of the text being broken down into composite parts. ‘Multimodal’ signals that more than one semiotic system is involved in constituting the text without tending toward rendering the semiosis into ‘elements’. Multimodality, in other words, produces an entirely new ‘substance’, taking account of Vygotsky’s (1986) insight, in a discussion of verbal thought, that in making the task a study of elements, ‘thought’ and ‘word’, specific properties that pertain to ‘verbal thought’ are elided, rendering the activity as a search for reasoning ‘a set of mechanical interactions and, [i]n essence, this type of analysis, which leads us to products in which the properties of the whole are lost … is generalisation rather than analysis’ (p.4).
language. They deploy a number of semiotics, including the visual, but also ‘scratch and sniff’ technology (where scratching a coated surface releases an odour), ‘voice’ cards (where a 1900 telephone number accesses voice mail via a personal identification number), musical cards (using music box technology to play, for example, the ‘happy birthday’ tune), edible cards and internet (web site) cards that include moving images and sound. The thesis will not develop a description of these cards, for reasons of limiting scope, but attention will be given to visual semiosis, particularly in the context of presenting the close textual analysis of the corpus.

The material research process ('method') and methodology (some issues)

The greeting card as a texted cultural artefact produced in commercial contexts forms the focus of the study, with analysis across a range of features: visual and linguistic meaning making realised by the texts; intimate relationships and other social practices that the cards are involved in; gender relations; and industrial and capital production and the consumption of greeting cards. The praxis of research forming the study engaged in both pragmatic and theoretical difficulties. The ‘concrete’ process of research – the collection of the material for the thesis, over the period 1992-1998, not only involved constructing the corpus of greeting cards but was concerned to observe the things people did and said with greeting cards, as well as what people said about what they did with greeting cards.

One of the ways in which this ‘data’ was collected was to conduct semi-structured and open ended interviews as developed in qualitative research (Rubin and Rubin 1995). The ‘interview’ is a productive method of inquiry but it is not unproblematic. A series of one on one interviews with key figures in the greeting card industry was carried out. Interviewees included: manufacturing chief executive officers (CEOs), marketing directors, card designers, importers, and retailers in specialist greeting card shops and newsagencies. Of the manufacturers, the major companies in Australia were selected (John Sands Greetings Pty Ltd, Hallmark Australia, The House of Bodleigh, The Ink Group). Interviews were carried out with follow-up telephone interviews being done in three instances (with Hallmark, John Sands and Hallmark Australia).

33 Hereafter, ‘John Sands’ and ‘Hallmark’.
Sands and The Ink Group) to clarify and elaborate on particular issues or, in the case of John Sands, after a change in ownership and management. Other industry sources were identified by going though the Yellow Pages listings under ‘greeting cards’. A range of distributors, importers and retailers in both suburban and central business district shops in the two largest Australian cities, Sydney and Melbourne were visited. These visits also produced further contacts (a process of ‘snowballing’). The visits occasionally involved making an appointment but more usually involved spending time in the shop or place of business and/or introducing myself and the purpose of the study and conversing about the industry and greeting cards. This strategy produced a set of observations and widely ranging conversations often of some hours duration over more than one visit. These aspects of the study informed the development of the problematics addressed in the thesis, including those addressed through the social semiotic analysis of linguistic and visual meaning making. This forms one strand of the thesis ‘data’ and the greeting card texts forms a second.

The research focuses on contemporary greeting cards circulating in Australia. It has not attempted to be exhaustive but a substantial corpus (455) is examined in detail and the complete corpus, including non-fun-and-love greeting cards, is almost double that (860). All the greeting cards were obtained within Australia. There has been no attempt to source texts outside the Australian geographical context but this does not mean the cards that form the corpus were produced or even sold in Australia. They became available through a range of collection processes: a public call for cards on radio; letters to national newspapers for publication in letter pages; a local newspaper story on the research and requests for cards from publishing and distributing companies. Other cards were purchased specifically for the research.

Some difficulties were involved in the industry arm of the study and relate to the commercial realm in which the study was carried out. The position of interviewee is already a particular performance of ‘respondent’ but the industry interviewees are the representatives of manufacturing companies with allegiances to those companies flavouring their responses, although criticisms were made on occasions. The second issue, also related to data gathering, was of a different kind. Despite presenting myself
as a researcher attached to a particular university with appropriate authorisation, on some occasions retailers and importers voiced suspicions regarding the possibility of ‘commercial espionage’. This suggests a highly competitive industry. Commercial advantage obtained, for example, by attending annual trade fairs held in both Europe and North America and sourcing greeting cards from around the world was considered to be lost, if others were able to source the same cards. Such advantages were of particular concern to specialist retailers and in some instances led to reluctance on their part to pass on other contacts for this study. The information obtained is constrained by that reticence, although return visits to some retailers helped establish rapport and allay those concerns.

A third strand of material drawn on for the study consists of discussions with individual informants about greeting card use and informal conversations that produced a set of anecdotes about greeting cards and their use. These informants include those who made their collections of greeting cards available for the study, groups of undergraduate students and other individuals, who, during the research and preparation of the thesis, were sources of greeting cards and accounts of their use. This material raises another kind of issue with respect to the research process. Collecting and examining donations and loans of collections of family greeting cards involved engaging with the lives of the people among whom the cards had circulated through the card collector’s stories about them. The person who made the collection was in all cases a woman, the mother or grandmother in a family. Their exegesis on their card collecting habits provides considerable impetus to the discussion of women’s card use. The informants often provided detailed descriptions of individuals in their families and various relationships. The value of this anecdotal material cannot be overestimated, providing both exemplars of individual creativity in the use of greeting cards and evidence of patterns of card usage. All of these different kinds of ‘interviews’, together with documents provided by industry members (advertising contracts, marketing materials, corporate plans and mission statements), are the basis

34 A letter from the University identified the purpose of the visit as related to research.
35 Informants referred to in the thesis have been assigned names and records of their consent are kept in the researcher’s secure filing cabinet. This caveat of privacy does not apply to those who spoke as official representatives of greeting card publishing companies.
for what is reported and discussed in the thesis.

Arising from the ‘method’ is a methodological issue. The research into the production and use of greeting cards was carried out, in the vocabulary of cultural studies, ‘ethnographically’ — a not unproblematic term and concept. What was done for this study involved attending to the practices involved in the production and use of a cultural artefact and focusing on the discursive and social territory of that artefact. From the perspective of being someone already familiar with much of the cultural terrain of using greeting cards, what is being invoked by the use of the term ‘ethnography’ is that the study involved being with individuals using greeting cards, observing and recording the complex conditions of greeting card production and use and reflective talk about greeting cards. The study, therefore, involved something like the kind of ‘immersion’ that the term ‘ethnography’ evokes in anthropology, as well as the kind of ‘defamiliarising’ of cultural practices that cultural studies provokes. In working in this manner, what is presented is akin to Geertz’s (1973) development of ‘thick description’: moving between both specific and general description and being, like all cultural analysis, ‘intrinsically incomplete’ but exceedingly rich (p.29).

One difficulty with the term ‘ethnography’ is that it is most precisely a practice of participant observation that evokes moving into a milieu that is not the analyst’s own, for example, ‘participating’ in a drug using ‘subculture’. Whether or not that is actually the case, this raises a set of important difficulties for cultural analysis beyond those that have been the traditional concerns of anthropology (establishing ‘rapport’ for instance). Most important is the social relation constituted between the ethnographer and their subject, between analyst and informant, particularly, the power dimension of that relation. The relation between informant and analyst is one that is complex and vexed and cannot be overcome through the institutional practice of obtaining formal consent. Studies – such as this – produce material that is used and interpreted, representing informants in a manner in which they cannot have any say.  

36 Although such consent was obtained in this study.  
37 See Clifford 1983; and Clifford and Marcus (eds) 1986.
This is not just an issue of sympathetic or ‘fair’ representation but the praxis of cultural research and its power dimensions. In the production of this text about their texts – the card producers and consumers and users – a rewriting inevitably occurs, the informant’s enunciation is ‘displaced’ as Freadman (1983) puts it:

any text is a rewriting of the field or fields of its own emergence, that to write, to read, or to speak is first of all to turn other texts into discursive material, displacing the enunciative position from which those materials have been propounded. (p.162)

What that rewriting produces is in part a consequence of the relation between analyst and informant, which as Morris (1996) writes, constitutes an “‘ethnic’ gap between the cultural student and the culture studied’ (p.157). As Morris points out, an interpreting subject, despite sharing aspects of that culture, ‘in the process of interrogation and analysis is momentarily located outside it’ (p.157, italics in original). To illustrate this shifting and problematic ground for cultural analysis of popular mass produced texts some conclusions from Radway (1995) are drawn on. Radway’s analysis of women romance novel readers seeks to demonstrate how certain kinds of approaches to analysis of everyday reading practices privilege the analyst’s response to the text at the expense of the text user, championing instead the idea that the process of romance reading creates a potential space for interventions in both the political and the personal (p.442). Radway suggests that this process would involve

persuading[ing] such [romance reading] women to see that this imaginary activity is so valuable to them precisely because it reverses at least some portion of the experience of their daily lives. (p.455)

This persuasion, a successful ‘consciousness raising’ in the language of early ‘second wave’ feminism, would have the effect of producing romance readers who could recognise their own utterances about their self worth and value in the culture as

indignant defenses [which] originate in persistent and nagging feelings of inadequacy and lack of self-worth which are themselves the product of consistent subordination and domination. (pp.455-456)

Thus, if romance readers (and writers) could be brought to see these psychological clues, in collaboration with ‘politically active feminists’, it might be possible to

---

38 For a discussion particular concerned with critical discourse analysis, see Lee 2000.
39 Based, in part, on a larger ethnographic study of romance reading, see Radway 1991.
transform romance reader’s utopian longing for the world of the novel into actual agitation for social change (pp.455; 456). Unfortunately, this agenda signals the limits of the usefulness of Radway’s formulation because her position comes close to something like the kind of elitism she finds elsewhere, realising the gap between ‘culture’ and ‘student’. The point is not to chastise the analyst caught up in the pleasure of diagnosing such effects nor to perform the kind of ‘dis-crediting’ that Morris (1996) identifies in academic discourse (p.160). The point is to problematise the transformation of an ‘ordinary’ consumer into a political subject.

If an individual romance reader or greeting card user happily, unconsciously or otherwise occupies the subject position constituted in the text, then what? Radway implies that the romance reader would, after consciousness raising, ‘really want to change’. Inadvertently, such a formulation (re)positions the untransformed romance reader as an abject subject. Moreover, the desire for such a liberatory transformation of the romance reader – or greeting card user – is an effect of a familiar ‘knowing’ position toward the ‘object’ (in this thesis, a ‘subject’). It is a position analogous to that of the hero in a romance narrative. In the setting of cultural analysis, the appearance of the hero is the moment of analytical praxis where the analyst inscribes themselves as either the-one-who-is-not-duped or the-one-who-sees-the-potential/complexity/ etc. This constitutes a cultural elite – a stance that Williams (1989) explicitly warns against. By virtue of an ‘objective’, theoretical stance toward the object, observing and pronouncing on the practice, the ordinary users of the object are othered, in the desire to position self as not subject to the effects of misrecognition (Bourdieu 1990). How the analyst performs that stance is, therefore, critical, although any analysis will necessarily always be a particular performance of those tensions.

Despite the importance of reinserting the reader, as Radway does, the romance reader in a transformed state problematically implies a potentially unified and unambiguously self-knowing subject. The reader, however, is a contingent and unstable subject and the space of reading is a ‘rented’ one, in de Certeau’s (1988) terms, always being inscribed and reinscribed (p.xxi). Reading, whether of a romance novel

\[\text{40} \] Frow (1995), however, takes Bourdieu to task about his own critical exteriority (p.46).
or of cultural practices such as negotiating intimacy with greeting cards, goes on in a context where interpretive authority is precarious (Lyotard 1986). From the perspective of ‘post’ theories, each account is a ‘fiction’, although some fictions are heard and told more often and with more authority than others. There are particular implications for cultural analysis and the ‘post’ theory that informs it. If there is no fundamental ‘reality’ of human existence to be ‘discovered’ and re-presented, either in language or via an all encompassing theory, and the subject is ‘inside’, or unable to transcend – in the sense of being outside and ‘above’ – then knowledge is what Haraway (1988) usefully nominates as ‘situated’. The cultural value associated with sexual difference, for instance, is the work of particular individuals and groups, producing particular knowledges within specific social, cultural and political contexts, which have material effects on individuals. While a ‘post position’ insists on a contingent account of knowledge that forms the ‘objects’ with which it is concerned, that theory is itself ‘situated knowledge’, for example, feminist theory’s reading of sexual difference as the production of certain kinds of knowledges about ‘women’ and ‘men’. Any re-construction of sexual difference – or other knowledge – comes to have a certain poignant epistemological fragility.41

The crux of the relationship between analyst and the object – here importantly a ‘subject’ – is that it is a consuming relation. As ‘researcher’, I have consumed, in some way, individuals’ experience and stories of card users whose talk produced intimate accounts about greeting card use, themselves and their families. They are then recreated as another story. While that praxis involves abstracting certain personal experiences from the context of experience, cultural analysis always involves the consumption of someone’s experience (whether it is the writing self – the analyst’s

41 The impossibilities of interpretation from a position ‘outside’ the sociocultural realm and feminist insistence on the importance of everyday and personal experience has produced a certain autobiographical mode of cultural analysis. Using autobiographical modes of writing critically has meant, for some analysts, exploring the personal and intimate as a site of experience. Irigaray (1996), for example, gives a description of an encounter with Renzo Imbeni that forms the Prologue to an analysis of love. It is a mode selected in part to foreground the subjectivity of the analysing subject and to insist on the importance of experience, of the lived life (Probyn 1993:21). This process involves the personal experiences of an individual writer being subject to a particular theoretical discourse through which that experience is then organised and is also commodified in the social practices of teaching, writing papers and giving
experience – or someone else’s – the traditional ‘subject’). Consuming, whether it is food, stories or greeting cards is some of what humans do. In the face of the compulsion to consume (in general, in order to live, and in the institutional context of performing this study) and the impossibility of refusing to consume, the issue, as Derrida (1991) configures it, is an ethical one. In carrying out this research, therefore, while institutional procedures were followed, as already mentioned, the acknowledgement is made that, ‘at every meal’ as Derrida writes, there must be, ‘respect for the other at the very moment when, in experience, one must begin to identify with the other, who is to be assimilated, interiorised’ (p.115).

The practice and presentation of cultural analysis is troubling and troublesome in other ways. The thesis must necessarily negotiate the tendency towards the production of totalising discourses on a field warned of by Foucault (1970, 1972) and Derrida (1976). One of the ways totalising tendencies realise themselves is in the production of coherent and cohesive texts (e.g. the ‘commentary’ in Foucault’s terms (1983b:123)). Cohesion and coherence have other resonances. As part of constituting a text in institutional terms, they are required for ‘readability’ and for a text to be accepted as the thing it purports to be: its genre (for instance, with respect to this text, for it to be read as ‘Thesis’). Such totalising tendencies are taken seriously here as part of the praxis of the thesis. The gaps and slippages that occur in all analyses and interpretations are taken as signifying the impossibility of singular readings: this ‘rewriting’ is contingent. With Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg (1992), it is taken that [although] [c]ultural studies ... believes that its practice does matter, that its own intellectual work is supposed to – can – make a difference [...] its interventions are not guaranteed; they are not meant to stand forever. (p.6)

Overview

The thesis is an inquiry into relations between sociocultural phenomena involved in three key sites with respect to greeting cards: their industrial and capital production,
their consumption and use together with their meaning making resources, particularly linguistic and visual semiosis. The analysis is structured into two Parts, providing an account of greeting cards as sociocultural artefacts and as texted cultural artefacts respectively, although the analysis is always interested in their articulation. Meaning making coalescing around greeting cards is both ‘textualised’ and contextualised, as the articulated two part structure of this thesis attempts to take account of. While the two part structuring keeps something of a ‘context-text divide’, the position of the thesis is, with Bennett (1993), that approaches to text and context are not incommensurable and both are necessary in the cultural studies enterprise.

Greeting cards and the practices and performances enacted with them fall into a zone of turbulence that is created by fluidities between public and private spheres, femininity and masculinity and affect and cognition, particularly as these have become delineated in modernity and by capitalism. Two questions thus signal the kind of debate that the thesis engages with but moves on from in Part One: are manufactured greeting cards symptomatic of an invasion of personal and intimate social relations by the corporate realm, as some critics argue (Papson 1986; Finkelstein 1994a)? Obversely, do greeting cards constitute ‘gifts’ of personal communication? This may be inferred from the claims of some greeting card publishers. The questions framed above, while produced within a particular logic, delineate a point of departure for analysing intersecting social relations in fun-and-love greeting cards and for putting into a critical context meaning making practices associated with greeting cards. In order to tell a story about texted love, these two versions of greeting cards and their various proponents, in particular, the greeting card publishers together with Papson 1986 and Finkelstein 1994a; 1994b, serve as ‘straw’ figures, their positions providing commonplaces from which the argument proceeds at a number of places in the thesis.

Chapter 1 reports on the ‘personal communication’ or ‘social expression’ industry, analysing the commercial mass production aspects of greeting cards. It will be seen that ideas about women, personal communication and social expression articulated by manufacturers demonstrate a similar diversity to arguments put in certain writings explored in Chapter 2 with respect to gender. Feminine identities constructed in relation to private and domestic spaces, personal relationships, emotions and consumption constitute woman as modernism’s ‘other’ (Huyssen 1986), although
men’s identities in Western capitalist cultures are increasingly tied to consumption practices (Mort 1996). It is possible, therefore, to ask, ‘how will such an incorporation of masculinity effect a revaluation of popular culture, domestic spaces and personal relations?’ It is also possible to ask, more specifically, whether these feminised terrains will ‘contaminate’ masculine subjectivities or if a greater occupation of the personal and domestic by men should be treated as the colonisation of ‘women’s space?’ Rather than proceed to argue for either of these trajectories, the thesis assays gains and losses involved in a reconfiguration of mass production and consumption of greeting cards as artefacts used in the performance of intimacy. An important gain, from a feminist perspective, is that the commodification of intimacy and affect unsettles the discursive location of ‘woman’ in the private realm and the constitution of femininity through discourses of positive emotion and performances of nurturing or selfless love.

While consumption and commodification are usually discussed concomitant with mass production and issues of homogeneity and standardisation, they are analysed separately in this study, although their articulation is kept in mind. Chapters 2 and 3 are concerned with overlapping but somewhat different aspects of consumption and commodification and Chapters 4 and 5 with issues of standardisation and homogeneity. Chapter 2 focuses on consumption practices involving greeting cards and processes of commodification, while Chapter 3 focuses on what greeting cards are being used for and by which social subjects. Chapters 4 and 5 also articulate overlapping concerns. Chapter 4 tackles the issue of greeting card’s ‘languaging’ love in writing or, rather, print and Chapter 5 is concerned with greeting card text as an artefact of mass production and thus discourses around standardisation. Treating mass production and the issue of printed language separately enables aspects of social relations and language to be elaborated, which is particularly important given that phonocentrism is a central relation forming critiques of greeting cards. Chapter 5 configures the issue of the greeting card’s mass production in relation to discourses of authenticity and individuality. A ‘case study’ is presented of a particular kind of greeting card, providing an opportunity to consider how greeting cards are implicated in ‘class’ and in the constitution of ethical consumption practices. In Chapters 4 and 5 (the last two chapters of Part One) the orientation to production and consumption processes and practices thus begins to change. The view of those processes moves
towards their specific ‘forms’ and, therefore, these two chapters also introduce the broad analytical resources that underpin the close textual work of Part Two.

Part Two constitutes a shift from a consideration of the cultural and social practices that structure greeting card production, consumption and use, moving to visual and linguistic significatory practices. Part Two’s close textual analysis of a corpus of greeting cards grounds the discursive formations constituted in and by the cultural practices of greeting card production and use in visual and linguistic meaning making. The analytical tools of a critical discourse analysis, in particular, functional lexicogrammar are used to identify discourses mobilised in the texts, specifying which resources of language are deployed to position subjects in and through the texts. The thesis addresses itself in this respect to a set of questions: What kind of discursive formations or knowledges, ‘truths’ and ‘realities’ are constituted in fun and love greeting cards? How are those discourses related to various fictions regarding gender and, relatedly, ‘what kinds of subjects are discursively constituted by the card texts?’ How does greeting card use constitute a normatively gendered performance, or not? How is a particular mode of production of the self enacted in selecting and using a greeting card (cf the post card, the personal letter and other printed or written texts)? What cultural value is attached to written and printed expressions of affect in contrast to verbal ones? Commentary in Part Two, the ‘textual’ chapters, is, therefore, still concerned with sociocultural phenomena, not linguistic phenomena.

It will be seen that the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards produces a lover’s discourse that is both traditionally romantic and self reflective in a way that traditional ‘true’ romance is not. The corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards constitutes the intimate relationship as a site of contested desires for romance, for egalitarian relationships and for difference.

**Part One**

*Chapter 1 Industrial production of personal communication*

The chapter sets out and analyses the first of the thesis findings, contributing to a history of greeting cards by examining the contemporary greeting card industry in Australia. The orientation of the description in the chapter is toward the production,
marketing and retail of greeting cards and the account is elaborated initially by industry exegesis concerning the product and the practices that produce it and which form the conditions for its consumption. The complement of greeting cards produced by manufacturers is specified and the particular history of the fun-and-love non-occasion greeting card is fleshed out. That description is a first sketch of love, desire, intimacy and the card consuming subject, who is gendered as feminine by the greeting card industry.

Mobilised in the exegesis of greeting card producers is a set of discourses that shapes Chapter 1’s analysis of the cultural practices of greeting card production. Of most interest is the way in which the industry negotiates contesting discourses constructing greeting cards. As a mass produced commodity, the greeting card is subject to rational management practices that are associated with developed capitalism, while the publishers discursively constitute greeting cards as facilitating individual ‘self-expression’. The approach is not immediately to treat these as symptoms of contradictions inherent in capitalism but to reappraise the cultural embeddedness of these practices. The synoptic view taken in Chapter 1 contextualises the following chapters, where greeting cards are rewritten first, as a sociocultural artefact, then as texted cultural artefacts.

Chapter 2 Consuming User?: commodification and social relations

Chapter 2 sets out a view of greeting cards as a sociocultural artefact constituting social relations. In order to do so, the chapter draws on a small literature specifically interested in greeting cards and a much larger literature concerned with consumption, commodities and gifts. The approach to the consumer and commodity relation is that it is a dynamic one, without championing ‘consumerism’. The chapter considers specific arguments that the greeting card is destructive of the relationships it commodifies, particularly, familial relations (Papson 1986, Finkelstein 1994a), offering a rebuttal of that position. Underlying a variety of claims about greeting cards is an assessment of objects that relies on making problematic distinctions of value among sites of production – commercial vs cultural – and, therefore, among objects with which subjects perform social relations. Rewriting the greeting card as a-commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away, the chapter – and the thesis – seeks to avoid delineating the social relations constituted as either commodity or gift relations.
because to do so has the effect of drawing a line between the current cultural moment as ‘virtual’ and preceding cultural moments as ‘real’. The social relations constituted by the greeting card cannot be left there, however. Drawing on cues provided by Frow (1997b), the greeting card’s commodification of emotion is focused on, analysing it as a productive process that commodifies an inalienable category in Western thought. This enables the social relations constitutive of the greeting card to be analysed as a struggle over the inalienability of emotion. It is a struggle that takes on gendered proportions, as is pursued in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 Performing social relations: gendered bodies

Chapter 3 follows a set of threads formed by the greeting card as a performance of social relations, particularly but not exclusively, by women. A ‘vision’ of personal communication as formulated by the greeting card industry makes assumptions about the relation between gender and interpersonal interaction, in short, that ‘women do it and men do not’. Chapter 3, therefore, takes up the question of what kind of cultural practice the consumption and giving away of a greeting card is and ‘who’, that is, what kind of social subject is involved. The question of ‘who’ is focused on through the sexually differentiated use of greeting cards, which tends to support normative accounts of gender and intersubjective communication. It is terrain that is important in the discursive construction of ‘woman’ but individual women’s practices are diffuse performances with respect to family and intimate relations. Those performances are rendered as intimate interactional work, a concept derived from di Leonardo’s (1987) reading of women’s interpersonal practices as embodying labour and struggle over meaning, resources and rights which refuses a ‘self-interest’ and ‘altruism’ binary.

Chapter 3 takes the commodification of the ‘inalienable’ category ‘love’ to be useful from a feminist perspective because it identifies what is at stake in the use of greeting cards and unsettles the relation between love, the private domain, and ‘woman’s’ discursive location in that domain. Given that women are discursively constituted through their relation to personal and intimate relations, the greeting card’s commodification of interpersonal and intimate relationships destabilises woman’s naturalised occupation of ‘expressive’ social roles.
While occasion greeting cards are identified by greeting card publishers as ‘women’s work’, there is less certainty about the gender of users of non-occasion fun-and-love greeting cards. In the second section of Chapter 3, men’s use of greeting cards is considered. How masculine subjects are positioned with respect to certain interactional practices and the emotional realm – as outsiders – means that men’s intimacy work necessarily impinges on women’s position in that domain. Men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards also emerges out of a different discursive history with respect to interpersonal interaction than women’s, constituting a differently embodied practice. Foucault’s (1987a, 1988, 1990) account of sexuality is drawn on to suggest some of what is at play in men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards. Men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards is read within a particular history where certain techniques of the self (related to pleasure of and with the self) come to be formed in relation to certain social responsibilities towards and in relation to conjugal relations.

Chapter 4 Languaging love: speech, writing and print

In being written or, rather, printed not spoken text, the greeting card motivates a set of phonocentric critiques – the privileging of speech over writing (Derrida 1976). What is implied by some critics is that performances of intimate interactional work can be unproblematically assigned different cultural values with respect to whether they are spoken or printed (Finkelstein 1994b). One tendency is to treat speech as an individual, spontaneous, heartfelt and ‘authentic’ performance, while the greeting card is a synthetic substitute. Such distinctions are analysed in the thesis by treating differences between speech and writing or print as differences that must be analysed in relation to the context of a text (Bakhtin 1986). In order to describe and interpret the language of greeting cards as contextualised text, Halliday’s (1978, 1979) social semiotic theory and its associated grammatical theory (Halliday 1994; Martin 1992; Matthiessen 1995) are introduced. The account of those resources is structured in order to reflect on the issue of languaging love in print.

Chapter 5 Love’s language: a discourse on the real thing

Chapter 5 problematises the idea that a standardised mass produced text is antithetical to ‘proper’ social relations, pursuing a number of criticisms which arise with respect to the greeting card’s characteristics as a communication technology – distinguished in this study from their characteristics as commodities (although they are related).
Western individualism is constituted, in part, through a discourse that presumes that mass production swamps the potential for novelty in individual performances of social relations. Such a discourse is problematic, in part, because of its modernist conception of the individual as a creative and unencumbered self but there are other difficulties, including the assumption that repetition produces mundanity. Drawing on both linguistic evidence and critical cultural and discourse theory, the chapter argues that while mass production is a process that simultaneously differentiates and ‘standardises’ members of a culture, greeting cards do not necessarily standardise intimate interaction. The language of the mass produced greeting card is read as a problematic but mobile cultural resource, which nevertheless enables ‘speakers’ to position themselves and others in performances of intimacy.

Where Western conceptions of a self articulate with modernist aesthetic discourses of verbal and visual ‘originality’, greeting cards are susceptible to claims that they are in an antagonistic relation with ‘individuality’. These discourses coalesce in a taste for blank – or image only – greeting cards. Blank greeting cards are a technology for the cultivation of difference among greeting card users but the most important relation they constitute is not between self and other but one with the self. In performing social acts of intimate interaction with a mass produced artefact, the blank card user cultivates a self that is particularly valorised in contemporary Western discourses, the ‘authentic’ subject.

**Part Two**

As Part Two, in some senses, constitutes a different orientation to the concerns of the thesis, there is a brief *Introduction* that sets out aspects of technicality drawn on in the following chapters.

*Chapter 6 Texted Love, Texted How?*

Chapter 6 analyses the performance of intimacy as enacted by fun-and-love greeting card texts. While principally concerned with language, the chapter considers the contribution of visual semiosis as a textual practice that traces and enacts aspects of social relations: interpersonal meaning making. The analysis demonstrates that there are complex positioning practices realised by the card texts: they realise multiple and contesting speaking positions; demonstrate dialogic features; and build shared
experience towards intimacy. Fun-and-love greeting cards are constitutive of love as both romantic and as something less idealised and more ‘everyday’ than ‘romance’. Competing tendencies are discerned in the possibilities for intimate relationships, with fun-and-love texts both tracing and diverging from normative constructions of intimate love relations. This analysis and discussion leads to theorising the interactional context in which the performance of intimacy occurs (i.e. intimate relationships) and Western discourses on intimacy, gender and affect that follows in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 Fun (sex) and love: doing intimacy; rewriting love stories

Chapter 7 is still concerned with greeting cards as text but analytically is reoriented toward the social processes through which the discursive realm of intimate relationships is enacted. Cultural and textual narratives of the ‘love story’ shape particular intimate relationships and the chapter analyses the corpus of greeting cards in relation to that the love-story, finding a heteronormative trajectory towards a coda of ‘happy ever after’ and, informed by the close textual analysis of Chapter 6, certain gaps and tensions.

Central to the formation of the subject of the romance narrative, the ‘couple’ of the intimate relationship, is a discourse of merging. Its technique is the procedure of confession (Foucault 1990). The chapter argues first that there is a constitutive relationship between text and intimacy, tracing how discursive history between subjects is a requirement of intimacy but suggests that too much discursive history, knowing everything about each other and everything about themselves, erases desire and love between the couple, producing only sameness. The corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards, in one sense, constructs this normalising account of intimacy, although there are other tendencies identified in the previous chapter’s grammatical analysis. The thesis, therefore, adds its voice to a call for rewriting of intimacy as difference. Such a rewriting is understood by the thesis as an ethical and erotic posture of the subject, as Diprose (1998) elaborates it: as an opening towards the other without destroying the other’s alterity. In order to develop such an intimacy, the love story itself must be ‘re-written’. This does not present a serious difficulty as the narrative space necessary for other intimacies or ‘endings’ is generated by dispersing
the coda – a possibility already found in fun-and-love greeting cards and other popular texts.
1 Industrial production of ‘personal communication’

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the contemporary greeting card industry and its product on the basis of the empirical and ethnographic research described in the thesis Introduction. The account provides a picture of the scope and the activities of most aspects of the industry: publishing or manufacturing, import and retail and elaborates on an emergent and flourishing trend within the industry, fun-and-love greeting cards. Drawing on interview and textual material from a range of industry participants, including key decision makers, the current chapter also constitutes a report on how the greeting card industry pictures itself.

The first section of the chapter moves between the empirical and ethnographic and only includes analysis to situate that material where appropriate, enabling the richly textured material to be presented with a minimum of interpretive intervention. That style of account precedes a sustained discussion of some of what is raised by the industry’s exegesis. In the later part of the chapter, the key discourses mobilised in greeting card industry accounts are teased out: a discourse of rational management associated with developed capitalism and its marketing practices; a contrary discourse of ‘creativity’ associated with card producers (artists and writers) and card users (individual self-expression); and a ‘communication discourse’ which treats social relations as complex and inflected according to gender but, in a relation with rationalising practices, produces a contesting discourses around communication.

Greeting card production is a process that is always carried out in relation to consumption and the difficulty of treating the two as separate, other than as a strategy for focus and elaboration, is seen in the interpretive work of this chapter, where consumption is always ‘there’, drawing the discussion towards itself. Discussion of
An empirical account of the greeting card industry

The following description of the greeting card industry in Australia draws on an empirical study of industry participants: greeting card publishers, importers, distributors and retailers. Important aims of the study were met through the interviews and conversations forming that aspect of the study: obtaining quantitative information on the industry (production and retail information); obtaining information of how greeting card industry members perceive the greeting card; understanding the broad goals of the industry, particularly through information from those in a position to determine production decisions; and obtaining information on how the greeting card is conceived as part of the sociocultural contexts it is produced and consumed in. These kinds of information enable a third aim, an analysis of some industry perceptions of the roles or sociocultural position of the current ‘social expression’ or ‘personal communication’ industry.

The account of the industry presented here, in part, draws on formal interviews with individuals from the four largest greeting card publishers. These interviews were arranged by written request and a face to face interview was carried out with either the company CEO and/or the Marketing Director or Manager. The interviewees were asked questions that sought to elicit information about their company and about the greeting card industry more generally in Australia, including its global context. At the outset of the interview information about terminology and the companies ‘mission’ or philosophy regarding their products was sought, during which time the broad parameters of the research were described. More specific questions about production practices (and marketing), concepts around greeting card use and market position were then introduced. While an interview ‘schedule’ was developed and covered in the interview proper, in most instances the meeting also involved informal conversation, especially, during visits to the production ‘plant’ and sales display areas. These provided an opportunity to steer the conversation back to topics not elaborated

43 Cited in what follows by name and year of the interview. See Appendix A for details.
in the interview or pursue issues not raised during the earlier interview. From one perspective, it is problematic that those interviewed are speaking as employees (or owners in two instances) of greeting card companies, although from another perspective, this is its greatest value; it provides a window onto the views and practices of greeting card publishers in Australia.

The interviews produced elaborated accounts of each company’s production processes, philosophies and marketing strategies and, inevitably, an induction into the technical and marketing vocabulary of the industry. This vocabulary is, unless otherwise stated, the same across the industry and while terms are glossed, they are not attributed to any particular source. Typically the interview context included a tour of the design and display areas as well as the manufacturing complexes and introductions and brief conversations with various workers in the complexes. Material sourced in this manner is cited in two ways. Direct quotations are attributed to specific speakers identified in Appendix A, where they are listed by title, company and date of interview, while marketing data and documents provided by several of the publishers are cited in the usual manner. Other information was obtained informally from distributors, importers and specialist retailers, including ‘on the spot’ interviews, and is collectively cited as ‘Fieldnotes’.

**The greeting card in Australia: ownership and control**

Four large greeting card publishers dominate the industry in Australia: John Sands, Hallmark, The Ink Group and The House of Bodleigh. John Sands is one of the oldest companies in Australia – a fact proudly attested to by the marketing manager who showed the company’s 00001 bank account number with the colonial company the Bank of New South Wales (now the Westpac Bank and one of Australia’s top 10 companies). John Sands is no longer a private or Australian company and has acquired several other greeting card companies operating in Australia. Hallmark Cards Australia Ltd is a privately owned subsidiary of its American parent company, Hallmark Greetings. The Ink Group is privately owned by two individuals – Linda Langton and Jonathon Lee. The House of Bodleigh is privately owned by one person – Philip Bodley.

---

44 These acquisitions included Valentines and Murfett Regency (the latter being a result of a previous merger between the Murfett and Regency card companies).
These four companies, along with other aspects of the industry more generally, were subject to the scrutiny of a government inquiry reported by the Prices Surveillance Authority (PSA) in 1990. As a result of consumer complaints about the price of greeting cards, that report considered the nature and extent of competition in the industry and investigated a variety of price related issues. The inquiry found that, despite the domination of the large publishers that ‘the market is generally competitive’ but raised the issue of the ‘great market power’ of retailers. A lack of price competition provides benefits to the retailers but not the consumer (PSA 1990:34).

The research reported here began at the time of an expected review of the industry and was carried out over the following four year period. It was a period of considerable transition. The greeting card industry in Australia emerged in the late 1990s from an era characterised by corporate takeovers and intense maneuvering for market control and position among the major publishers for the 1.4 billion retail dollars (PSA 1990:5). After this period of acquisition and mergers, the present configuration of the Australian greeting card industry is a reduced number of publishers at the top end of the market. John Sands acquired a number of other companies during the 1980s and then was itself acquired and added to the stable of the multinational Amcor Ltd. The association between John Sands and Amcor was based on mutual commercial interests – in particular, Amcor’s involvement in the forestry industry, making paper products and in printing (Jobsons 1994). It was not an entirely successful association and in January 1996 John Sands became a wholly owned subsidiary of American Greetings Company (AGC). This acquisition of John Sands by AGC was developed

---

45 Complaints made to the then Minister for Consumer Affairs, Senator Nick Bolkus.
46 The inquiry sought information on: ‘The basis for determining card prices and the elements that contribute to these prices; whether prices should be displayed on cards; and the relationship between recommended and actual prices and comparative local and overseas prices’ (PSA 1990:1).
47 The PSA report recommended a review of the industry after two years. This was not carried out and still has not been.
48 A note regarding the interviews on which some of this description is based is in order here. The interviews were commenced at the time of some of the most intense movement in the industry and the initial research contact and telephone interview with John Sands was with a particular executive, no longer in place after the Amcor takeover. An interview was then conducted with the newly installed office holder.
from a long standing licensing relationship between AGC and John Sands, positioning American Greetings strongly in Australia with respect to their traditional (and worldwide) competitor Hallmark. Of the other major publishers in Australia, The Ink Group is the newest of the large publishers, going into production in 1980. The House of Bodleigh has the next most significant market share (see Table 1.1).

The figures in Table 1.1 are an assessment of the estimated wholesale share of the branded market in greeting cards drawing on two sources, the PSA report and the CEO/marketing manager interviewed. It must be stressed that these figures cannot be confirmed because most of the companies are private and information about their value is not publicly available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>John Sands</th>
<th>Hallmark Australia</th>
<th>The Ink Group</th>
<th>House of Bodleigh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSA 1990</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self assessment 1993-94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Confidential information*

There is some difference in the estimates that came from two unidentified sources cited in the PSA report but there are clearly three dominant companies that comprise more than 80 per cent of the market in 1990, leaving less than 20 per cent available for other publishers (p.4). These percentages are compared with self-assessments that three of the interviewed publishers gave of their market share. The self-assessments were largely confirmed by ‘guesstimates’ of each other’s earnings. The Ink Group’s

49 The company most concerned about the resultant reduction in major players was the House of Bodleigh, although they also produce cards and other paper products that do not necessarily directly compete with traditional greeting card production. The Ink Group assess their own position as strong having ‘survived the tough times’ (Langton, Interview 1995). Comparable ‘card wars’ occurred in USA in the late 1980s with similarly good results for retailers, little improvement in price competition, no benefits for consumers and increased costs for the companies (Oliver 1990).

50 This information was provided for the study for use in this thesis on condition that it is not publicly published.

51 Two industry sources provided figures to the PSA; neither is identified. The market share allocated The Ink Group by these two sources is quite different (one puts them at 8.3% in 1989, the other at 4.6% in 1990 – which seems an unlikely fall).
apparent overestimate of its share may be related to movement during the three years to which these figures refer. All companies predicted that market share levels would even out again after the round of mergers that were occurring during the time of the study. There is no vagueness within the companies about levels of sales, as all stock movement is managed through computer stock control and figures for sales are obtained on a daily basis as necessary.

Despite the reduction in the number of larger companies in the industry through mergers and takeovers, the smaller end of the market appears to be proliferating, as a count of greeting card publishers and publishers listed in The Yellow Pages database attests: in 1989 there were 70 listings, in 1994 there were 99 and in 1996 only slightly fewer with 90 (Telstra, National Directory Services 1989-1996). This proliferation of greeting card publishers confirms the PSA assessment of the industry as accessible to new producers and there being no necessity to declare the industry, that is legislate for regulation. A proliferation of smaller publishers, distributors and retailers parallels a ‘type’ diversification of greeting cards in the market. The expansion is in part due to the availability of desktop publishing technology, enabling high quality cheap production of printed paper goods so many more publishers can enter the market at a similar level.

There are other kinds of technological influences diversifying the market. The Ink Group introduced the ‘voice’ card for St Valentine’s Day cards and its ‘1900’ telephone number recorded 44,000 uses on that first occasion, motivating the company to extend the technology across their ranges (Langton, Interview 1995). Greeting cards are freely available via the internet as both free ‘e-cards’ sent from computer desktop to desktop

---

52 This particularly relates to capacity to respond to market demand. Turnaround time for card production is typically 12 weeks from concept to sale, although one publisher claims to be able to produce cards in a 21 and 12 day fast track management cycle - which is particularly relevant for cards produced as ‘spin offs’ or franchised to other commodities such as films.

53 Hallmark Australia has approximately 3000 designs, John Sands 4,500 and House of Bodleigh 1000 (Interviews 1992-1996).

54 The greeting card is also the subject of a great many ‘how to do it yourself’ books and articles, suggesting that the homemade greeting card production is flourishing. Other texts are written with the express purpose of instructing the reader as to how to be a successful greeting card writer - designer. Greeting card publishers receive thousands of unsolicited card ideas a year (Fieldnotes).
and as hard copies that can be bought. Hallmark provides the possibility of ‘customisation’ through CD ROM technology and has introduced interactive computers to its full-service shops in America that enable consumers to develop their own greeting cards (Advertising Age 1991). Such individualising processes are always in tension with the mass production of the greeting card, a point developed in following chapters with description and discussion of processes by which consumers ‘interact’ with greeting cards to make them personal objects.

**The retail context**

Overall, the Australian greeting card retail scene is driven by the larger publishers in combination with the restraints and demands of traditional retailers: newsagencies and department stores. A diversification of production, inferred in the PSA report, suggests that the Australian context is moving towards something like the diverse market of the British context, which has been more consumer driven (Langton, Interview 1995). In Britain, a retail shop carries greeting cards from some 60-100 producers compared to an American retail outlet, which may have cards from only three publishers available. In Australia, the market at the time of this research is somewhere between these two points, with the consumer being able to choose amongst 10-15 producers, although in a newsagency this will vary depending on retail stocking arrangements with the major producers.

Traditional retail of greeting cards is through newsagencies and department stores. According to both the Prices Surveillance Authority (1990) and greeting card publishers, the relationship between publisher and retailer is dominated by the retailer (p.34). This is an effect of the structure of the contractual arrangements between them and is played out through particular divisions of labour. Publishers establish contracts with individual newsagents, chain and department stores to place greeting cards. Attempts to gain ‘position’ in the industry involve market share grabbing strategies by publishers, such as providing free advertising, free cards, free display installation and maintenance, free tracking of stock and physical stocking of displays: ‘We do

---

55 The effect of free internet cards has yet to be ascertained on the material greeting card market.
56 Called ‘Personalise it!’.
57 While newsagencies are individually owned, the newsagent retailer’s association acts on the behalf of all newsagents, providing a single unified bargaining position.
everything except take the money at the till for them’ (Cook, Interview 1993). It is argued by some publishers that this is a stranglehold on the companies by major retailers and produces the high retail cost of greeting cards in Australia.

Despite this relationship being perceived as a constraint on greeting card production, the number of publishers and retailers is increasing. Retailers now include alternate outlets, including specialist greeting card retailers but also service stations, video shops, bookshops, etc., which may put some pressure on the traditionally powerful newsagents. One Australian publisher (The Ink Group) developed its own retail outlets, initially with some success – comprising three shops – although only one shop remains at the present time.\textsuperscript{58} What may mitigate the competitive effect of alternate retail outlets is that consumer goods have been found not to sell well when they are isolated from similar goods (McCracken 1988:119).

The total number of cards available to a consumer from any particular selling point display is dependent on the kind of card, the kind of retail outlet and the demographics of its location. The diversity of greeting cards, at the most mundane level, is related to space: department stores have more space and, therefore, more cards than a suburban newsagent or small card speciality shop. Availability of greeting cards is also constrained by rational marketing practices, using demographic information (as these are narrowly understood and deployed in marketing discourses) correlated to geography. In an area with largely older residents and no primary school, for instance, retailers would stock more ‘sympathy’ and ‘get well’ cards than juvenile age birthday cards (Unsgaard, Interview 1992).\textsuperscript{59}

The servicing style relation between publishers and retailers means that the publishers control the display and stocking process, contributing strongly to structuring the social process of greeting card consumption. The physical organisation of the retail space

\textsuperscript{58} Hallmark has its own retail outlets in America.

\textsuperscript{59} The relationship between retailer and publisher or importer is the site of marketing and advertising practices in the Australian context, practices more usually associated with the relationship between producers and retail consumers. Marketing practices are analysed later in this chapter as part of a discussion of the relation between advertising and greeting card use in Australia.
consists of stands that are identified with the publisher’s brand name and the card caption\textsuperscript{60} e.g., \textit{John Sands, Birthday}. These stands are visible from a number of metres away, directing consumers to cards but are limited in height (1.2 metres), enabling adult consumers to see across the intervening space to other stands of greeting cards. Greeting card publishers construct the display so that the social process of card purchase is an easily repeatable one and can be produced and reproduced across any retail setting. Using similar layouts of stands and configurations of card types, consumers are ‘apprenticed’ into a greeting card purchase process that can be repeated in different physical sites. Broadly, the greeting card consumer is directed by layout and visual signage using industry categories in a ‘funnelling’ process, producing finer degrees of selection. Having been directed to the general area of appropriate cards, the process of selection is guided by more detailed labeling (birthday, age birthday cards, juvenile age birthday cards).

The socio-spatial arrangements of greeting card display and purchase warrant some discussion here. Greeting cards are sold in spaces that have been subject to rationalisation. Spaces subject to practices associated with an earlier transition from counter service to self-service (Usherwood 2000:116). This physical organisation of greeting card displays in department stores and in larger newsagencies produces ‘panoramic perception’, as Chaney (1983) has reused the term coined by Schivelbusch (1980). Schivelbusch applies the metaphor to describe how perception is transformed by speed: that the view (literally) from a fast train gives prominence to the impressionistic over the detailed because of the way a landscape foreground disappears when travelling through it at speed. As Schivelbusch uses it, panoramic perception connects spatial (aesthetic) relationships and economic relationships (so landscape becomes a tourist ‘vista’ from the perspective of a train seat, for example). The metaphor is applied to the department store by Chaney as a way of conceptualising the relationship formed between customers and goods at the historical emergence of the department store.\textsuperscript{61} Panoramic perception changes objects and

\textsuperscript{60} Bolded terms introduce industry terminology, after which use will not be bolded. A caption is the occasion for which a greeting card is produced, e.g. birthday, christening, graduation.

\textsuperscript{61} See Reekie 1993, and Lancaster 1995 for studies of the department store.
experiences from phenomena in their own context and integrity, providing ways in which they can be valued and used:

Panoramic perception organises a jumble of impressions through a synoptic perspective, the sensations may be blurred and discontinuous but they are held together by our admiration for the spectacle and by our gratification with the service rendered. (Chaney 1983:27)

In the context greeting card display, card presentation through these large stands brings each small object – individual greeting cards – together, impressionistically constituting dabs of colour that are aesthetically satisfying to the purveyor. In its ‘mass’ quality, it also suggests a plethora of choices. The greeting card industry also manufactures desire.

While potential for browsing is produced by panoramic perception and browsing ever more consumption, the actual consumption of a particular greeting card relies on selection. Selection is also organised, in part, through the display of greeting cards in a grid with a number of pockets where, at least, the top third of each card is visible. There is a strong imperative toward displaying as much of the card as possible. It is an imperative sounded in one publisher’s marketing adage that a card buyer will, ‘Pick a card up for what it looks like and buy it for what it says’ (McAuliffe, Interview 1996).

**Producing greeting cards**

The characterisation of the greeting card consumer’s selection process as moving from the visual to language is the obverse of the production process, where the words are chosen first and the graphic design is then ‘married’ to it (Cook, Interview 1993). While aspects of greeting card production were described in the interviews with publishers in various ways, production is analysed as being organised with respect to the product’s materiality, its graphic design, and its consumption. Greeting card production always goes on in relation to consumption, so publishers and retailers negotiate issues in the production process that are usually considered as part of

---

62 In Australia, there is little consumer tolerance of the crammed and condensed displays of British and American sale points (Cook, Interview 1993).

63 These production processes may in fact be separated in the case of some publishers, although the ‘writers of humorous cards often have more say in the design because they have an idea of how the gag should work’ (Cook, Interview 1993).
consumption practices. For example, production practices engage with how national and individual identities are involved in consumption practices, as well as how social relations and interpersonal interaction is involved in consumption of greeting cards. Production, as it relates to this complex of concerns, is described here in three strands. First, as it relates to the materiality of the greeting card. Second, as production is related to sociocultural differences by greeting card publishers. Differences that are thought here as ‘boundaries’ that greeting card producers negotiate. Certain of these differences are enlarged upon because they are constitutive of certain assumptions about gender, national identity, and cultural and moral values. These will inform later analysis. Third, issues around interpersonal interaction and greeting card publisher’s development of a key concept, the **sending situation**.

**Materiality**

Greeting cards are objects constructed from card strength paper that is segmented by folding, to produce a number of pages. This multiple page construction of greeting cards differentiates them from an historically agnate text, the postcard. Early greeting cards were not distinct in this respect from postcards and consisted of a single piece of card around the size of contemporaneous postcards. While size and shape have been diverse largely because of arbitrary historical conventions in particular countries, the form of the greeting card stabilised in the twentieth century into a card folded with an image and linguistic text on the front of the card and the possibility of more linguistic text on the inside verso page of the card. There have been two major changes to size and shape in the last 30 years in Australia. The first occurred in the late 1960s when the form for greeting cards became stabilised in the current proportions (a card 17cm x 13cm). An older proportion (a card 22 cm x 9 cm) largely disappeared in the 1970s, other than for the category commonly known as

---

64 In publishing terms, the greeting card is a folio construction.
65 The choice of image and the greeting distinguished between them: specifying ‘Happy Birthday’, for instance, rather than ‘Here we are at Blackpool’. Antique shops and markets usually have examples of early greeting and post cards because they are ‘collected’. Postcards and greeting cards were sometimes highly decorated, using collage and other techniques.
66 Recent publishing technologies have produced other options. The corpus of greeting cards collected for this study has examples with images on the inside page of the card as well as the front and some with images on the back and front of the greeting card.
'vulgar' cards, and is now rare. Postal regulations put a monetary penalty on cards of non-standard shapes for many years and publishers who imported cards or designs reformatted them for the Australian market. Greeting card dimensions have recently diversified again as postal penalties for excess size have been revised. Example 1.2, consisting of examples of earlier and more recent greeting cards, illustrates the main changes in greeting card dimensions.

Example 1.2 Mother’s Day greeting cards: mid-twentieth century (left) compared with late twentieth century (right), showing change in typical proportions

While greeting cards are now available in many dimensions, there are a number of factors likely to militate against some kinds of further changes to their size, for example, what people do with the cards and how they physically handle them. Displaying a very large card on a mantelpiece or bedside table may be quite difficult and storage also becomes difficult and the memento aspect of greeting cards is substantial, as the collections sourced for this study demonstrate. Larger cards tend to be for particular situations, for example, 18th or 21st ‘coming of age’ birthdays, where

67 Vulgar greeting cards usually involve humour of the ‘toilet’ and ‘tit and bum’ variety but also make targets of various persons, drawing, for example, on ‘fat’ jokes (see Orwell 1968 on British postcards in the vulgar tradition).
68 This penalty did not only in relation to excess size (which is still regulated) but if the postal object was, for example, square or circular rather than rectangular.
69 While both these cards represent women’s domestic labour, they exemplify some changes in the representations of women in Western liberal democracies under the influence of feminism in the second half of the twentieth century.
many people may be expected to sign the same card as a memento of an occasion; they may be novelty cards, for example, a St Valentine’s Day card playing on the idea that ‘size matters’. While the greeting card may open either ‘like a book’, (left to right) or ‘like a calendar’ (top to bottom), most examples of the latter in the corpus of greeting cards are Christmas cards. This orientation may be related to traditional practices of displaying Christmas cards, e.g. strung above the mantlepiece.

Some aspects of the material production of greeting cards are related to a set of ideas about aesthetics, style and consumption. For example, the recycled card stock used for many non-occasion greeting cards is white card with a ‘sheen’ that is deemed inappropriate for other cards, particularly, Mother’s Day, Anniversary cards and Sympathy cards. These latter captions are produced from more expensive (non-recycled) stock that has been treated to create texture and is often creamier or a yellow-white. These kinds of production practices are constituted by greeting card publishers through a discourse of ‘style’. This aesthetic discourse extends across all aspects of the production process of greeting cards: colours, images, font etc. At its most elaborated, these various aesthetic practices are used to constitute some greeting cards as a

**collection**: a set of greeting cards with certain visual, stylistic and typographic characteristics. Such collections may also form a particular style of editorial content or ‘take’ on the world, such as the well known Gary Larsen ‘Far Side’ cartoons which poke fun at human frailties.

**Boundaries**

Greeting card publishers understand the production of cards as involving the negotiation of sociocultural differences. Such differences are framed here as a collection of boundaries that publishers perceive that may or may not have to be crossed in the manufacturing process. For greeting cards imported from the USA, certain differences between America and Australia were cited by publishers as important. Card production is also organised in accordance with how consumption is understood as organised by differences: those between women and men, by social groupings such as family and by social ‘taste’ – a concept akin to a culture’s morals or community standards, in the publishers’ discourse. In rendering these differences as boundaries, the account here seeks to retain some of the sense of constraint that many publishers drew on during the interviews, and the sense in which some publishers sought to
position themselves as pushing at sociocultural boundaries, for example, through producing greeting cards that were ‘cheeky’, or drew on risqué visual material as well as boundaries associated with the sexual differentiation of greeting card use. The Ink Group’s CEO, Linda Langton explicitly identified the company’s greeting cards as being accessible to men. Sexually differentiated greeting card use was not seen as a social ‘boundary’ by all interviewees, rather as a ‘natural’ boundary, and it is pursued under another heading below.

Greeting cards that are imported and republished in Australia involve basic production decisions (the image source, construction of its editorial content – the linguistic text, typography and so on) being made elsewhere. Revisions typically involve only a few features of the greeting card, usually related to language variation, for example, terms of address in American imports, e.g. Mom/Mum. Local interventions negotiate other sociocultural differences. Organised through narrow conceptions of complex signifiers, such as ‘Australian’ identity, American editorial content is generally perceived as ‘overly mushy and sentimental [for the more] reserved British flavour of Australian emotional life’ (Cook, Interview 1993).

While designs for greeting cards published in Australia may have their inception elsewhere, there are varying levels of cultivation of local artists by all publishers as ‘outworkers’ who operate under contract or with licensing agreements. The House of Bodleigh, whose product is oriented to ‘art cards’ (literally reproducing artworks or fragments of artwork on cards), promote the company’s role as developing local fine-art work (Bodley, Interview 1993). A figure of 5 per cent given on the level of imports does not include licenced design arrangements such as those between Hallmark Australia and Hallmark Greetings (USA). A small number of Hallmark cards are

---

70 Great Britain and other Western European nations and the United States of America are the most common sources. In 1990, imports comprised around 5% of the market with New Zealand expected to be a new source of cards given a reduction in import tariffs. These cards come under a licence agreement to allow revision of cards for the local market. Such practices are addressed in Chapter 4. Editorial content is also referred to as sentiment.


72 Designers with a licence agreement share the financial risk with the publisher; others are paid between $150-$400 for developed drawings. Re-use of a design at a later time would involve a payment of approximately two thirds of the original fee (Fieldwork).
wholly designed in Australia. These are largely wildlife fauna or flora, well known landmarks or land and seascapes that have come to signify ‘Australia’ (e.g. Uluru or the Great Barrier Reef). The work of local greeting card designers submitted to a publisher may be further developed by a small number of in-house designers and marketing experts to fit the overall product line style. The artist, or card originator, is rarely the copyright holder, with legal ownership of designs being vested with the company, although the card originator is present textually: their name inscribed, in many instances, on the back page of the card.

A complication to the practice of acknowledging card originators is that one interviewee in this study stated the artists and authors that are named on the back of greeting cards are fabricated. Unsgaard of John Sands said he ‘personally makes one up every week’, in effect fictionalising the stated source of the card (Interview 1992). When this claim was put to other publishers, it was denied that this is the industry’s general practice. That position is supported by the considerable number of documents sourced by this study promoting small companies. These documents attest to the work of graphic artists whose central business is greeting card design. The authenticity of the greeting card’s author/artist and, therefore, the veracity of various claims about greeting card production practices, does not alter the analysis, although a number of issues are pursued later in the current chapter.

Publishers are involved in negotiating perceived differences about national identities as well as other identity categories, particularly gender together with a notion of cultural and moral values through humour. Each of these identity categories are collapsed in various combinations in the discourse of greeting card publishers, for example, distinctions constituted between women and men may also be configured with respect to differences perceived between urban women and rural and regional women. The publishers collapse of national and cultural identity enables a signifying slide between those categories and the identification of ‘moral’ values with those identities. Humour is also perceived by greeting card publishers as enabling ‘things’ to be said which might otherwise not be and, therefore, may often be central to the design of a greeting card (Cook, Interview 1993). According to greeting card publishers, this is particularly important with respect to men’s use of greeting cards. Men select humorous cards before any other kind (Fieldnotes; Hallmark 1993). In negotiating
moral standards, humour is a resource exploited to make meaning that would otherwise be considered too risqué (Cook, Interview 1993; Unsgaard, Interview 1992). An Australian sense of humour is identified by Hallmark as more like British ‘toilet’ humour, in contrast to an American preference for ‘tit and bum’ humour (Cook, Interview 1993). Some support for which of these might constitute an ‘Australian’ sense of humour comes from John Sands greeting card sales figures, which have shown greatest growth in the ‘Giggles’ range – roughly 10% growth whereas overall sales growth was put at 1% – of ‘toilet’ humour cards (Unsgaard, Interview 1992).

A broad view of humour is taken by The Ink Group, which has a stated commitment to non-sexist, non-racist products, although the company takes humour as a resource through which boundaries of ‘taste’ may be ‘pushed at’ or transgressed (Langton, Interview 1995). While humour may negotiate certain marginalised thoughts, publishers practice self-censorship with a particular eye to whatever is their biggest market distribution channel. Hallmark cards are distributed in Australia through the variety and department stores Coles/Myer and content is permitted with respect to what is seen as appropriate for these ‘family’ shops (Cook, Interview 1993). There are other company moralities in play with Hallmark. The company, it was suggested by the marketing manager, would let a particular market go entirely, rather than produce something that contradicts their core ‘North American Midwest, bible-belt conservative values’ (Cook, Interview 1993). In contrast, some degree of the risqué was considered desirable for The Ink Group’s greeting cards, where distribution is through boutique card shops (Langton, Interview 1995).

Sending situation

Greeting cards are developed for particular occasions and for particular relationships – both kin and non-kin – of varying degrees of social distance. Two dimensions, ‘occasion’ and ‘interpersonal relationship’, are core features of greeting card publishing, driving production of the visual and linguistic text of a greeting card.

---

73 Although interviewees were reluctant to conclusively specify what may constitute too risqué.
74 This particular American/British distinction is problematised by Orwell (1968) who identifies both ‘toilet’ and ‘tit and bum’ humour in British postcards in the vulgar tradition.
75 Humour always involves boundaries in any case, as Douglas (1991) demonstrates, ‘humour chastises insincerity, pomposity, stupidity’, it is an attack on control (p.93). Elsewhere, Douglas (1978) interprets the meaning of both forms of vulgar humour already mentioned through their relation to bodily margins (pp.155-157).
These dimensions are refined in the development of a specific greeting card by publishers combining two industry categories – caption (the occasion) and sub-caption (kinship, social role and social distance) – to produce appropriate greeting cards. These two categories provide the beginning point of greeting card development, forming the skeleton of the key concept used to organise greeting card production and marketing activities: the sending situation – a concept that attempts to capture everything relevant to the greeting card as a sociocultural artefact, other than certain issues of taste.

The ‘sending situation’ is how greeting card producers attempt to construct a degree of congruence between the editorial content of the card and the relationship between the greeting card’s audiences: the card giver and the card recipient. Sending a ‘get well’ card, for example, involves the card giver in choosing a card that negotiates their kin or non-kin relation and degree of social relationship closeness and the severity of illness the recipient is suffering. A card sent to someone suffering a temporary physical misfortune, where perhaps both sympathy and humour may be considered appropriate, is not necessarily suitable for sending to someone whose condition is grave. The industry maps caption and sub-captions, attempting to produce cards for a range of combinations, as Figure 1.1 (below) describes. A greeting card for a particular sending situation is constituted by publishers as a combination of ‘occasions’ and the social relationship between the sender and recipient along continua of social distance, choices of kin or other social relation and the sex of the card recipient.

**Figure 1.1** Get-well sending situations, according to Hallmark (1993a)

The ‘sending situation’ is the imagined starting point for the production of any particular greeting card and organises the image and editorial context in relation to possible social relations within which a greeting card may be consumed. The
combinations exemplified in Figure 1.1 necessitate different degrees of affect and social
closeness being realised in the greeting card’s final appearance. It is through this
concept that greeting card manufacturing most explicitly constitutes and negotiates the
realm of interpersonal interaction. Greeting card producers understand these
contextual features as determining a card’s editorial content and its overall
construction. This process is quite explicit in the production process and is articulated
to card retailers in marketing documents that describe a range (e.g. the Everyday
range). So, for instance a **general** birthday sentiment is identified as, *Sister.../ Wishing
you all the special things that make a birthday lovely. Happy Birthday*. A more ‘intimate’
message is exemplified as, *For a Special Sister*, or again, *With Love for my Sister*. In these
cards, *Sister* shifts from being a vocative in the general card to being characterised as
*Special* and then possessive, *My Sister*. In the latter example, the degree of closeness is
understood to be ‘upped’ through the explicit presence of the word *Love* – the sender
and recipient here are close and loving sisters.

Publishers talk and write about the card buyer and recipient as if they are characters in
a specific narrative. For example, the sisters imagined for one ‘Sister to Sister’ birthday
greeting card (the three pages of linguistic text are given in Example 1.2 below) were
given a ‘backstory’, a narrativised context, in a description by an interviewee in the
following manner:

The sisters are not young, they have a close relationship, and, possibly, they do
not live close to each other anymore, or they are not in touch constantly; however, this has not altered their relationship. (Cook, personal communication 1994)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With love</th>
<th>Sisters have a talent for caring, for sharing, for creating warm, wonderful memories, for giving life a special and meaningful touch. R.A. TANKERSLEY</th>
<th>The happiest of memories, the nicest to recall, Are all the special days we shared when we were very small-- And even though we’re grown up now, and time has changed some things, It can never change the warmth and love this special greeting brings! Happy Birthday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For My Sister...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example 1.2** Sister to Sister Birthday Greeting Card (Hallmark Card 967) pages 1–3

---

76 All examples of greeting card linguistic text will be italicised. A slash / mark is used to separate text on the front of the card from that inside.
This talk of sisters is not coincidental. The most important social relations for all card sending situations, from the point of view of publishers, are those between women. The relationship between mother and daughter is, publishers suggest, the most sentimentalised relationship in the culture but the core of greeting card giving, at least for occasion greeting cards, is the sister to sister relationship (Cook, Interview 1993; McAuliffe, Interview 1996).

Sending situations are also characterised by publishers in terms of degrees of obligation. Certain cards fall into a category that is referred to as a ‘must send’ situation, for example, the wedding Anniversary card and the Christmas card (Fieldnotes). These two greeting card captions also exemplify something of the way in which greeting cards are conceptualised as sexually differentiated products. According to greeting card publishers, men do not typically purchase greeting cards for these ‘must send’ situations with one major exception: the wedding Anniversary card. The degree of obligation, the ‘must-sendness’, of the Anniversary greeting card is expressed in the pricing of ‘husband to wife’ cards, which are the most expensive of all greeting cards. They are usually around the $7.95 mark, double the price of other cards, compared to the typical cost of greeting cards between $3.50 - $3.95 (Fieldnotes). In a twist on the adage ‘it’s the thought that counts’, this pricing constitutes a direct relationship between a husband’s expression of affection and respect for his wife and her corresponding understanding of that expression.77

Publishers’ discourse on men’s ‘must send’ use of Anniversary cards can be constrained to how they contextualise another ‘must send’ situation, Christmas. Christmas cards are both the biggest seller in the ‘seasonal range’, and the biggest sending situation overall for the card industry. The Christmas festival generates the production of greeting cards by many small companies, which only produce for this occasion, selling bulk cards through supermarkets, petrol stations and so forth. The flooding of the Christmas card market produces a cheaper price array, with ten cent cards being available in some discount shops. As with all cards, there are sub-captions

77 The more expensive the card, the greater the degree of affection that can be judged to be expressed, foregrounding the economic, which is more characteristic of sexual relations with the ‘whore’ than that of the loved and respected wife.
available: cards for giving to family members, relatives and friends. The explicit presence of one sub-caption, ‘family’, makes salient a popular practice in the culture, the exchange of Christmas cards between families, although this exchange is normally facilitated by a woman.

Women’s greeting card consumption patterns suggests to publishers that they respond to obligatory social contexts, such as Christmas, as ‘must send’ situations. Evidence of women’s response to the obligations of social relations is one of the crucial ways in which women come to be discursively constituted as naturally social beings. Thus the greeting card industry constructs women as social beings who take care of and maintain family ties, while men are constructed as purchasers of affection – at least the purchasers of the affection of one other person, their wife. Greeting card publishers conceive the production of cards as responsive to a context that is in their understanding configured as ‘feminine’, although ‘femininity’, it will be seen, is not uniformly represented.

*Retail advertising and marketing*

Greeting card purchase is driven, according to publishers, by the sending situation but the selection of a particular greeting card invokes a different set of discourses, more traditionally associated with marketing. Marketing practices in the Australian context of greeting card production are directed not at the point of sale consumer (in the language of marketing discourses) but at the retailer. During the interviews for this study, most publishers’ exegesis about ‘markets’ was focused on greeting card retail purchases (later in this chapter documents targeting retailers, cf advertising targeting point of sale consumers, will be considered).

The historical context and present reality is that the Australian greeting card industry has been structured generically. That is to say, there are low levels of brand awareness. ‘Branding’ is a marketing strategy in which a signifier, e.g. a company name, establishes a context for itself (Valentine and Evans 1993). Greeting card publishers spoke card selection using a mixture of concepts from marketing discourses. Marketing discourses understand products as having to establish some context for the goods within the framework of the culture in which the product will be sold. For example, brand name analgesics seek to elaborate a context of ‘scientific safety’ by dressing actors in their
advertising in white 'lab' coats. The constitution of a context for a brand also usually involves the construction of a narrative – as seen in the sister to sister greeting card above.

While expressing commitment to the principle of ‘branding’, greeting card publishers perceived a low possibility of ‘market segmentation’ via branding in Australia, unlike many other goods consumed at a similar volume (Bodley, Interview 1993; Cook, Interview 1993; Langton, Interview 1995; Unsgaard, Interview 1992). Some publishers predicted the generic structuring will continue (Unsgaard, Interview 1992), while others held the view that segmentation of the market is possible (Cook, Interview 1993). Different strategies for marketing and development of the business followed. The Ink Group CEO stated a commitment to the potential for brand differentiation and had set up retail outlets to achieve that precise aim (Langton, Interview 1995). American Greetings always retains the local brand name, whereas Hallmark takes its (well known) brand name with it. These marketing strategies are then applied in the particular Australian context. Advertising practices in Australia are focused at retailers and distributors via trade magazines, not at the card sender, an important distinction between the Australian and the American marketplace. There have been intermittent efforts directed at point of sale consumers by Hallmark, using television advertising. Hallmark Australia’s marketing manager suggested that, despite the experience of television advertising in Australia having had absolutely no positive impact on sales, Hallmark does as a general position believe that there is a potential for brand differentiation (Cook, Interview 1993).78

The range of publisher’s viewpoints on branding in the Australian context is reflected in marketing research practices. Few greeting card companies in Australia are involved in regular or large scale market research. The approach to market research is haphazard: ‘we occasionally send some people out to buy a few hundred cards and then discuss with them why they chose the ones they picked’ (Cook, Interview 1993). The kind of information obtained by rational marketing research methods is seen as

78 For a period of time between late 1999 and June 2000 Hallmark implemented television advertising, drawing on targeted strategies. Two kinds of cards were advertised and both are non-occasion cards: fun-and-love greeting cards initially, then humorous cards were promoted via a competition. Both promotions were for a short duration of some weeks only. Other companies have not followed suit.
‘unnecessary’ or only ‘additional’ to what card designers bring to the process themselves (Cook, Interview 1993; Langton, Interview 1995; Bodley, Interview 1993). Qualitative information is obtained by Hallmark Australia by using focus groups formed by ‘occasionally send[ing] people out to buy a quantity of cards [around 300] and interview[ing] them on why they bought them’ (Cook, Interview 1993). Hallmark Australia has, however, the vast research resources of Hallmark US to call upon. Other publishers neither use traditional demographics for retail stocking or to inform production direction. House of Bodleigh does no qualitative research at all, although all publishers get empirical information from detailed ‘point of sale’ reporting. Occasionally publishers collect data that enables them to measure their sales against competitors by recording sales and assessing the pattern of activity during purchase, distinguishing particularly between unfocused ‘browsing’ of greeting cards or focused ‘beelining’, seeking a specific item, in marketing discourses (Fieldnotes).

The future of greeting card retail advertising and marketing in Australia is not entirely unclear. While Hallmark’s market research suggests it does have a small brand following in Australia, this kind of brand ‘loyalty’ is not how the company conceives it should direct its marketing effort. Instead, Hallmark envisages extending its market share through ‘target’ advertising. This approach conceives the market place as made up of local contexts, rather than an older marketing discourse which deploys a narrow conception of demographics, for example, where age determines the choice of ‘floral’ greeting cards or even the kind of description that terms such as baby-boomer – individuals born in the 20 year period post the Second World War – attempt to capture. Target or ‘niche’ advertising draws instead on concepts of identity. It is the outcome of market discourses that understand consumers as differentiated demographically but also as ‘segmented’ through lifestyle and patterns of consumer behaviour (Craik 1994:199). As deployed by marketing discourses, these concepts conceive greeting card selection as related to an assemblage of consumption practices that are already related to an individual’s ideas about themselves and the world as

79 A term used to refer to people born in the post World War 2 period, involving a socioeconomic and birthrate boom in Europe. The term groups them – problematically – by social values and consumption behaviour.
they understand themselves occupying it.\textsuperscript{80} For example, these ‘self concepts’ are elaborated in greeting card marketing discourses, describing non-occasion card buyers as ‘friendlier, more affectionate, funny, smart, refined, creative, domineering and stubborn’ than other card buyers (Waldrop 1989:7). Branding in this way determines the advertising site, for example, non-occasion greeting cards would be advertised in a magazine that is known to have an audience with similar ‘self-concepts’ to those of the non-occasion card buyer.

**Who is communicating with greeting cards?**

In the light of broadly non-traditional commodity advertising practices, what specifically do publishers understand as motivating greeting card purchase and how do they understand who is using the greeting card? The issue of which ‘niche’ groups may be purchasing greeting cards is best considered initially in relation to the overall extent of greeting card use. While the proportion of the population purchasing greeting cards cannot be estimated from available figures, annual sales, distributed across the Australian population, as mentioned in the Introduction put the figure at 21 cards per head per annum (Unsgaard, Interview 1992; Bodley, Interview 1993; Cook, Interview 1993; Langton, Interview 1995). The consensus of those spoken to during this study is that greeting card givers and recipients are women. As women are only a proportion of the population, per capita greeting cards use is, therefore, somewhat higher than 21 cards per head per annum. While women’s use of greeting cards is pursued in Chapter 2, publishers were asked to reason about the sexual differentiation of card consumption. The responses cluster around versions of biologically essentialist and functional explanations. More than one interviewee explained that, ‘men don’t do that kind of thing’ (Unsgaard, Interview 1992) or alternatively that, ‘women are just like that’ (Cook, Interview 1993). More pragmatic explanations also varied. One interviewee suggested that, ‘men don’t have time to shop’ (Bodley, Interview 1993) compared to Langton’s (Interview 1995) suggestion that even if they work full time, ‘women do the shopping still [and] can pick up a card while they’re out’. These latter quotes gesture towards labour and gender as coming into relation with power but take

\textsuperscript{80} Marketing in this way takes consumers to be author of a scenario in which the brand might feature, drawing on its dramatic or comedic meanings, and so develops advertising around these scenarios (Valentine and Evans 1993:135).
women and men’s positions and roles in society as unproblematically determined by unspecified social factors.

The broad relation between gender and social structure was not something that most greeting card publishers had anything to say about, other than to remark on the sexually differentiated consumption of greeting cards as a ‘market’ issue. The one interviewee who did specifically address the question of sexual differentiation and social structure, did so through a certain kind of feminist discourse. Langton (Interview, 1995) proposed that greeting cards provide women with a resource for doing nurturing and ‘social’ activities and, as a bonus, The Ink Group provided greeting cards that used positive representations of women and ‘sexist’ and ‘racist’ representations were actively avoided. Reading the two positions put above in relation to each other, it is possible to revisit an interpretation that Veblen (1934) might make of the master-servant relation pervading the industrialised-capital system: a reading of women’s consumption of greeting cards as ‘vicarious leisure’, activity directed towards the care and comfort of men whose genuine productivity entitles them to experience proper leisure. Langton’s reasons for providing women with a resource for doing this ‘social’ and personal communication are that this commercial activity arises, in part, out of the personal values of The Ink Group’s owners. Such a position had a different, but parallel position, which was put by Cook of Hallmark Australia who suggested Hallmark’s commercial practices were, in part, driven by the company’s moral affiliations to midwest American community standards (Interview 1993).

Articulating social justice values, as Langton did, in commercial production is a practice that can be tentatively linked to The Ink Group’s conception of its market as, in a large part, made up of baby-boomers, who as a group, are associated with post

Langton’s personal values, some of which were specified during the interview, have some symmetries with the company’s target audience. Langton and her business partner Jonathon Lee are themselves ‘baby boomers’. During the interview, Langton identified herself as such, among other ‘identity’ terms, including as having emigrated to Australia from the north of England, being a feminist and Jewish. That Langton identified herself in these terms is interesting to the extent that these outline a subject position constituted through a series of differences, suggesting a ‘decentred’ subject.
World War Two progressive social movements. It is, therefore, not unsurprising that, according to Langton, The Ink Group consciously produces a range of greeting cards which set out to appeal to men without using traditional strategies of masculinising greeting cards by using images of sport (Interview 1995). The question of the commercial value of this ‘appeal’ is interesting because the choice of a greeting card is a choice made on the basis of the perceived gender of the recipient not the sender. Therefore, the gendering of greeting cards in traditional ways could continue alongside the production of cards that do not draw on stereotypical representations of masculinity or femininity.

Greeting card publishers say they have done no market research into men’s use of greeting cards in Australia, although one – Carl Unsgaard of John Sands – was prepared to make some claims about men who buy fun-and-love cards. Unsgaard constructed a version of a social deficit theory tied to an unproblematised notion of class to distinguish greeting card buying men. Men who would use non-occasion fun-and-love greeting cards would be ‘men who are unable to say certain emotion things’, citing men who are ‘truckies and bikies’, as that kind of man (Unsgaard, Interview 1992). To support this claim, market research in New Zealand was cited suggesting that the people who buy non-occasion cards, ‘[are] Maoris [indigenous New Zealanders] … they tend to have a job where they have to wear a uniform’ (Unsgaard, Interview 1992). The argument Unsgaard constructed in this statement – if treated charitably – is that only men who have certain educational or social ‘inadequacies’ would be expected to use non-occasion fun-and-love greeting cards. These comments, while ‘othering’ men with respect to ‘class’, education and ‘race’, usefully articulate a constitutive discourse of masculinity: an absence of emotion. It is a discourse that impinges on other differences, such as those perceived by publishers between Australian and American card consumers that have already been mentioned. So, while greeting cards are produced in Australia for a consumer who is, largely, understood through discourses of femininity, greeting cards, including fun-and-love cards, in the American context are produced with the expectation that they will be consumed by

---

82 The articulation of social justice in business is exemplified by The Body Shop in UK and Australia. Such companies are increasingly linked into ‘ethical investment’ brokers.
certain categories of men. One group of men buying fun-and-love non-occasion cards is frequent business travellers. Hence, these cards are stocked at various travel centres (airports, train stations). Publishers attribute this use to advertising along the lines that the ‘in-transit’ partner can say with a greeting card what cannot be said face-to-face, targeting the consumer’s distance from their ‘loved ones’ (Cook, Interview 1993). In Australia, publishers do not currently regard travelling business men as a relevant category of card purchasers. According to Unsgaard’s account of men consuming fun-and-love greeting cards, these would be emasculated subjects, although frequent business travellers are men who cannot ordinarily be understood as ‘unsuccessful’ in a manner in keeping with Unsgaard’s deficit theory. This emasculating discourse mobilised in the Australian context is in part constituted through a relation between national identity and emotion. ‘Australia’ and ‘emotion’ are embedded in a discourse which positions Australians somewhere between a stereotyped British sensibility – a tradition of closed emotion – and an equally stereotyped American sensibility that is rendered, in contrast, as loud and confessional.\(^{83}\) Such narrow conceptions of emotion linked to national identities are not useful and emotions are always shaded.

The race and nationality discourses mobilised in the comments reported above are the main ways in which cultural identity as a feature of the social has a presence in the discourse of greeting card producers. While the larger greeting card publishers explicitly acknowledge certain aspects of sociocultural diversity in the Australian context, producing greeting cards for ‘multicultural’ Australia: Jewish Bar Mitzvah, Greek Name Day and so on, the question of cultural identity in relation to doing interpersonal interaction with greeting cards is muted.\(^{84}\) These limited responses to sociocultural diversity in the Australian context are in keeping with findings from the American context that greeting card use is correlated by ethnicity to Anglo-Americans (Sparks 1994).\(^{85}\) Many of the practices of greeting card publishers thus, suggest that

\(^{83}\) As seen on television talk shows such as Jerry Springer and Rickie Lake. In the British context (or Australia of the 1950s), the contrast might instead be to the passion of the stereotype of the ‘continental’ European.

\(^{84}\) Discourses of cultural identity in Australia are currently constituted through the term ‘ethnicity’ – a difference relation to a normative white Anglo-Celtic identity, except where that identity involves indigenous Australians where relations of difference are understood through ‘race’ (Stratton and Ang 1994; Muecke 1992).

\(^{85}\) In the American context, ‘ethnic’ cards are placed in specific neighbourhoods with ranges developed targeting the African-American, Spanish-speaking and Jewish areas (Liebeck 1996).
while they conceive their commercial activities as responding to social change (e.g. a diverse composition of communities), that responsiveness is produced not only within the constraints of market research practices and marketing discourses but within a broader ethnocentric constitution of ‘Australian’ identity. A similar set of issues arises with respect to publishers’ discourse on ‘the family’ as an aspect of social life taken up now.

**Mass produced greetings in this cultural moment**

Greeting card publishers in this study constructed for themselves a ‘reflecting’ or ‘mirroring’ role in society, conceiving their production of greeting cards as keeping in touch with the shape of society and expectations of experience. The greeting card of today has clearly diversified from its historical antecedents. Four aspects of social arrangement in the late twentieth century, which coalesce around gender and the family, were linked to the contemporary production of greeting cards in comments by members of the industry: the structure of the family, women moving extensively into full time paid employment, an aging population, and a less well defined aspect of the social, changes to moral or community standards. Each of these, among other contemporary features of social life, has produced changes to the ‘traditional’ occasion greeting card and more broadly to the diversification of greeting card types, during the period of sociopolitical and techno-economic-labour transformations following the Second World War.86

**Greeting cards and the social**

The family is an important social arrangement particularly transformed in the post Second World War period in Western industrialised nations and draws a specific and elaborated response from greeting card publishers in production practices. As women have moved out of the domestic sphere and into the work force in large numbers, transformations in the structure of households and changes broadly associated with the women’s movement are acknowledged by publishers to have impacted on the family. How greeting card publishers articulate the contemporary domestic sphere and the family is most clearly seen in documents such as Hallmark’s What is a family

86 And thus, in what is arguably the postmodern period. Huyssen’s (1986) contention is that the postmodern is signalled in the emergence of the supermarket and all it entails at this time.
today? For Hallmark, A Challenge (no date, obtained 1994). In this document, its audience of greeting card retailers is given advice that, ‘the 35 year old female cannot be safely predicted anymore to be married with two children, a house and a part time job’ and consequently who will buy a greeting card to send to whom and for which occasions cannot be predicted on the basis of sex, age, role, geographic location etc (Hallmark n.d., p.1). Representing the company philosophy and ‘take’ on the family to retailers, Hallmark cite, in the same document, a current percentage of traditional nuclear, two parent family households and evaluate contemporary social relationships as ‘complicated’ (n.d., p.2). On the basis of these kinds of assessments, greeting cards are now produced which acknowledge My Daughter not Our Daughter, reflecting the number of people parenting in a ‘blended’ or single parent families and recognising step-parents in a variety of ways (n.d., p.2). By taking account of the changing constitution of the family, publishers seek to articulate both relevance for their product and a discourse of social responsibility, constructing their products as a function of contemporary social relations.

The constitution of the family is also affected by demographic trends played out over entire communities, for example, the aging population in Western industrialised nations. Particular greeting cards are produced in response to certain strong trends such as this. For example, the aging trend means at the simplest level that there will be more centenarians, so there are more Happy Birthday 100 years old greeting cards produced. There are also younger as well as older grandparents and many adult grandchildren with grandparents living longer so greeting cards suitable for exchange between these adults are produced (Hallmark n.d., p.3). The factual basis of these trends is used by greeting card publishers to formulate what they understand as diversity in their product. In advertising material, these facts become articulated as a ‘real’ picture of personal experience to which greeting card publishers and retailers are responsive.

87 The document cites ‘traditional nuclear, two-parent households declining from 41% of all households in 1970 to 27% [in 1994]’ (no date p.2).
Some publishers specifically articulate changes in the family as relating to women’s experience, acknowledging that women’s domain of operation has expanded into the public sphere, while a level of responsibility in their traditional domain of influence, the private/domestic realm, has not diminished: ‘busy women need all the help they can get’ (Langton, Interview 1995). In ways that are reminiscent of 1940s and 1950s advertising for electrical appliances, greeting cards are thus spoken of as providing an easier way of meeting familial emotional obligations, as a product that will ease these increasing burdens on women. Greeting cards producers, in this way, utilise women’s continued occupation of social and emotional manager roles.

The fourth aspect of social arrangements that drew comment from the major manufacturers and other members of the greeting card industry was a general broadening of moral or community values, particularly with respect to sexual mores. The historical place of ‘vulgar’ greeting cards notwithstanding, sexuality occupies much more public discourse than it did in the first half of the twentieth century. One of the ways in which such changes are materialised in greeting cards is through the commercial publication of greeting cards targeted at lesbians and gays.88 The success of ‘gay and lesbian’ as a niche market category is related to gay and lesbian legal and political enfranchisement and can be measured to the extent that, in a large city such as Sydney, a number of specialist gay and lesbian specialist greeting card retailers operate.89 The effect of various social movements on the production of greeting cards, seen as a systematic diversification of captions and sub-captions, is specifically

88 The terms ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ refer to particular configurations of male and female homosexuality as practices and identities and are in this way relevant to the construction of identities (and are, therefore, tied to the rise of identity politics). The terms male and female are unstable, as queer theory and ‘transgendering’ attests. Such audiences are often presumed to include transgender and queer identified individuals. Queer theory (Butler 1990) attempts to avoid the terms ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ to speak of sexual practices which are instead specified for example, as ‘male homosexual practices’ to be inclusive of ‘men who have sex with men’ but who are not ‘gay’ identified. These ideas owe most to discourses developed to target individuals at risk for HIV/AIDS by gay and queer activists/theorists. ‘Gay’ and ‘lesbian’ are used as shorthand in the thesis.

89 At the time of this study, there were three explicitly gay and lesbian specialist gift and greeting card shops and two other card shops with extensive parts of their range catering for gay and lesbian audiences. This does not include those retail outlets located in or nearby the ‘pink’ and ‘lavender’ (e.g. Oxford St) retail precincts of metropolitan Sydney, which carry greeting cards as part of their range of goods e.g. bookshops.
reconfigured in the emergence of the alternative greeting card and the development of the non-occasion greeting card.

**Alternative greetings**

The greeting card has diversified so that production is no longer limited to floral images with sentimental editorial content or a masculinised version of ‘sport’ images or ‘vulgar’ cards and greeting card producers offer multiple versions of what it is to be a ‘family’. The production of some contemporary greeting cards explicitly draws on and references many areas of cultural production: visual arts, the clothing fashion industry, furniture design, computer technology and the film industry, as well as greeting cards that draw on rather different sources, e.g. feminism, philosophy, politics and nursery rhymes.\(^{90}\)

These greeting cards are referred to by publishers as alternative cards or lifestyle cards. Alternative greeting cards have not replaced ‘traditional’ cards but are produced alongside them, differing from them in a number of ways. The language of alternative greeting cards is not of the same order as the sentimental pseudo-verse of traditional cards nor is it of the vulgar kind. Alternative cards may be constructed with the ‘snappy one liner’. For example, a figure is drawn, cartoonishly, as if quizzical. She is shaking a book, fanning its pages out and beneath the image, the sentiment reads, *Claire searches for a deeper meaning*, referencing a postmodern concern with text and meaning making. Such greeting cards are characterised in marketing discourse by publishers: as ‘on the mark’, ‘fashionable’ or ‘fresh’ (Fieldnotes).

Alternative expressions of love are treated in the same way and are not ‘flowery’ but playful, for example, *Be Mine // I insist*. The diversity of these cards makes it difficult to describe them in categorical terms but traced in the discourse of publishers can be

---

\(^{90}\) There are, for example, two versions of the ‘Georgie Porgie pudding and pie, kissed the girls and made them cry’ nursery rhyme in the corpus. In one, much of the original rhyme is given but has a ‘twist’: *Georgie Porgie pudding and pie, kissed the girls and made them cry, when the boys came out to play //Georgie Porgie turned out gay*. In the second, there is less of the original rhyme but an explicit reference to the card text as a ‘Modern Day Nursery Rhyme’. It begins as does the traditional rhyme but inside the card reads: *Georgie Porgie pudding and pie, kissed the girls // Senator Porgie denies the allegations and claims all the women who have come forward to accuse him are making the whole thing up. An investigation is underway.*
discerned a number of dimensions of ‘alternativeness’: design, audience, ‘attitude’ and visual style.

A strong sense of visual design, drawing on motifs other than florals, landscape or sport, often shapes the visual repertoire of alternative greeting cards. The editorial content is similarly diversified from traditional greeting cards. The social world into which the greeting card emerged in the nineteenth century was radically transformed over the course of the twentieth century politically and socially. Echoed in the labelling of the alternative greeting card are the conservative cultural values associated with earlier greeting cards. The classification ‘alternative’ references the temporal and social context of their emergence, during the 1960s and the changes wrought in so-called liberation movements: the women’s movement, black power and gay liberation – as an ‘alternative’ sexuality – and progressive left social movements – one strand of which was the ‘alternative lifestyle’ movement. The emergence of alternative cards is sometimes credited to retailers of Christopher Street, San Francisco who, in the early 1970s, produced and sold greeting cards with strongly sexual and transgressive images, for example, images of the drag diva Divine, or images of gay male bodies and text as part of a developing ‘gay’ identity and community (Fieldnotes). This strand of greeting cards has continued to develop, along with other commercial production of goods for gay and lesbian niche markets, although the publishers of greeting cards for lesbian and gay consumers may or may not be lesbian and gay businesses. Alternative greeting cards are not restricted to particular audiences, developing broadly alongside other greeting cards that draw on more traditional images and editorial content and engaging certain aesthetics and a particular mode of consumption, which is traced in their classification by some publishers as ‘lifestyle’

91 This dimension of the 1960s is marked out strongly by ideas about sustainable growth, self-sufficiency in food production and responsible community practices that took account of the ‘global and the local’ (captured for instance in the slogan, ‘live simply, so that others may simply live’).
92 Christopher St is a commercial and retail precinct that has developed gay and lesbian owned, and gay and lesbian targeted business.
93 Some cards obtained for this study are visibly gay and lesbian, e.g. 10 Percent Productions (the name signifying a reputed 10% of the population who are homosexual). These cards also declare: ‘We give back to non-profit gay and lesbian organisations within the gay and lesbian community’. Other publishers signify affiliations with a particular audience without necessarily identifying as a gay and lesbian business (e.g. Through Our Eyes a segment of Cardarthic, Inc).
cards. The audience for such cards is described by Langton of The Ink Group as, ‘trendy, fashion conscious individuals’ (Interview, 1995). It is members of this group, according to Langton, who originally purchased The Ink Group product in the 1980s. The continued ‘trendiness’ of this group is attested to, Langton claims, because the company has retained them as their major consumers despite the fact that these ‘boomers’ are now in their middle forties and fifties. This is understood to be characteristic of this group, which rather than tending towards a conservatism usually associated with ageing and a rejection of consumption, retain what in marketing discourses is understood to be consumption consciousness, a desire to be ‘in touch’ with fashion.

The explicit goal of The Ink Group in the formation of the company in 1980 was to develop such alternative cards and the growth of these cards in Australia is, in part, linked to that company. The alternative greeting card market expanded strongly at the beginning of the 1990s as a competitive response to the successful selling of alternative cards (Unsgaard, Interview 1992; Cook, Interview 1993). Since then, what was perceived as a niche market by the major publishers is now a considerable segment of the market in Australia. In response to the continued expansion of alternative cards, both Hallmark and John Sands established specific companies to manufacture non-traditional cards. This separation of manufacturing is unrelated to specialisation or pragmatic considerations; it is determined by marketing and profit concerns. The parent company, for example, Hallmark Australia, which espouses a conservative position, is, through this strategy not visibly associated with alternative card production which is carried out by a subsidiary company, Coolabah (Cook, Interview 1993). Coolabah now claim to be the second largest distributor of alternative greeting cards to The Ink Group. Similarly, The Colour House was established by John Sands to put alternative cards into non-traditional distribution channels, such as single product shops or card boutiques (Unsgaard, Interview 1993).

Non-occasion greeting cards

The non-occasion greeting card is discussed here separately from the ‘alternative’ card, but there is a something of a blurring of categories. The alternative greeting card is a category shaped by aesthetic and ‘attitude’ or values, the former refers to the way the greeting card industry establishes a disjuncture between certain culturally mandated
‘occasions’ (Mother’s Day, Easter) and non-occasions. The term ‘non-occasion’ inscribes certain kinds of non-occasions as occasions (perhaps ‘alternative’ occasions) and in the case of fun-and-love cards, these are, sometimes, romantic occasions. From a different perspective, the characteristics of alternative greeting cards are not restricted to any particular part of the range: there are alternative non-occasion greeting cards and traditional non-occasion greeting cards; there are alternative occasion cards and traditional occasion greeting cards.

Non-occasion cards contrast with traditional or everyday cards in the first instance by not being produced to meet the demands of a secular or religious calendar, although there are a variety of labelling practices used in the industry. More than half a century after the first modern cards, the earliest examples of greeting cards for ‘unclassified’ occasions and purposes appear from 1911, Chase (1971) reports. An early version of a one unclassified occasion, a friendship card, is reported by Chase, who finds its message – see Example 1.3 – to be ‘not very elegant’ (p.171).

Every Day

I would that each and every day
    There might go from me to you
A little message which would say
    “Kindly thoughts for you and true.”

Example 1.3 Friendship card 1912-1913 in Chase (1971:171)

Such sentimentality does not form all of the history of the non-occasion greeting card, particularly the fun-and-love card, which in turn does not have its relation to intimacy formed from the occasion romance card, the St Valentine’s Day greeting card, which has its own history.94

Publishers labeling practices also show some slippage with respect to alternative cards. For instance, the term ‘lifestyle’ is used to refer to both kinds of cards, although non-occasion cards are sometimes referred to as anyday cards. This is a category

94 St Valentine’s Day cards are another area where there has been a substantial difference between card use in Australia and America. In the US, expressions of affection are highly generalised (between children, teachers, boss to worker etc.), whereas in Australia the exchange of cards is at the time of this study largely confined to existing or potential intimate love relationships.
constituted in a contrast made by publishers between everyday occasions and anyday non-occasions, captured in one marketing slogan as, ‘everyday it is someone’s birthday, but with an anyday card you can send a thought or sentiment without the necessity of an event’ (Hallmark 1993a). The nature of the event is the point of the variation. ‘Anyday’ cards are perceived as enabling people to ‘essentially create their own occasion’, for example, Missing You and Thinking of You (Hallmark, ‘What is a family today?’ n.d., p.2).

Credit for the initial emergence of contemporary non-occasion cards is given to a group of Colorado artisans in the 1970s (Wandycz 1991). The financial success of the cards combined with slower growth in traditional greeting cards motivated major publishers to develop similar products in the late 1980s. The degree of similarity became the subject of litigation between Blue Mountain Arts and Hallmark America with an out of court settlement result. As is the case with alternative card production, the major card publishers (apart from The Ink Group) have established separate companies to produce non-occasion cards. Contradictory evidence exists with respect to the sales of non-occasion cards in Australia and while no publisher would release figures, the consensus among them is that while traditional everyday cards are the largest selling type of greeting card, non-occasion cards have been showing the greatest increase in growth in Australia (Cook, Interview 1993; McAuliffe, Interview 1996).

The growth in non-occasion greeting cards from the publishers’ point of view occurs paradoxically. An Australian publisher’s control (the overall production) may only

---

95 The lack of growth in demographically oriented greeting cards, for example, birthday greetings is attributed by Wandycz (1991) to slow population growth (p.88).
97 Sales of non-occasion cards in America are expected to account for 18% of all card sales in 2000 (Wandycz 1991). It is a market segment that has grown 25% per year against an overall 5% increase in card revenues between 1982 and 1986 (Waldrop 1989).
98 The full complement of greeting cards produced by a publisher is known as the company’s ‘control’. The control will include an everyday range and a seasonal range. The everyday range is a birth-death lifecycle. Its captions include greeting cards for birthday, baby, graduation, wedding, anniversary, get well, thank you, sympathy) with further sub-classifications of those captions by relationship or specific event (for example, Happy Birthday Mum (from son or daughter) or Happy 18th Birthday). The seasonal range involves occasions on both secular and religious calendars (Christmas, Easter, Hanukkah, Mother’s Day, St Valentine’s Day). Within
have one fifth of its total display available for categories other than birthday cards but non-occasion cards characteristically require a constant and rapid turnover disproportionate to the empirical sales level (Unsgaard, Interview 1992; Cook, Interview 1993). Asked to reason about this, publishers suggested there was a marketing problem to be solved, ‘consumers don’t know about them’ (Unsgaard, Interview 1992) or a cultural ‘transfer’ difficulty: for example, with one kind of non-occasion greeting card, the fun-and-love card, being ‘too intimate for Australians’ (Cook, Interview 1993). While such local reasoning is important, non-occasion greeting cards are not well understood by producers in America either. Wandycz (1991) reports the US executive director of the non-occasion greeting card subsidiary of American Greetings as saying of non-occasion greeting cards, ‘we don’t know too much about why a card is successful’ (p.90).

The non-occasion greeting cards specifically designated as fun-and-love cards are a diverse grouping, overlapping a number of the categories introduced above – alternative and traditional (the corpus of greeting cards includes both). The primary consideration in the production process of fun-and-love greeting cards is the linguistic text, which cannot be formulaic (e.g. it cannot be based on captions and sub-captions – such as ‘birthday greeting from sister to brother’). The nomenclature ‘fun-and-love’ designates what these cards range over: some are simply humorous with no reference to intimacy or romance: e.g. for one card, a woman in a ‘leisure-wear’ tracksuit has been drawn leaning against a washing machine with the paraphernalia of doing laundry all around her. There is a ‘speech bubble’ – as used in cartooning – that has her saying the following: *I used a new fabric softener today ... /*What’s new with you?*. Other greeting cards are intensely private in their sentiment, writing of desire and love and are not intended to be at all funny: e.g. *It only took me a moment to know ... //you were all I ever wanted*. Still others render romantic love in a non-sentimental, even mocking fashion: e.g. *And most of all, love is the warmth I feel when you give me ... //multiple orgasms*. Still others are warmly humorous and affectionate: e.g. one card’s
image is four repeated drawings of a woman and man which vary only by the position of the man in relation to the woman: sitting, standing, sitting on the floor, standing on a chair. Inside the card is the following text: You appeal to me on many levels.

The mass producers reflect on their practices

This study specifically sought response from members of the industry to certain criticisms of the greeting card and, by implication, of the greeting card industry. What was put to interviewees were a number of questions designed to prompt responses to critiques of mass produced ‘personal communication’ objects. These prompts included putting a version of the proposition that the mass production of greeting cards homogenises the emotional field and that the enmasse use of mass produced greeting cards produces a standardisation of emotion and social relations in the everyday and is not an appropriate way of performing interpersonal interaction.

One interviewee responded by dismissing claims about the ‘homogenisation’ of feeling as, ‘academic claptrap’, taking up what amounts to an embrace of capitalism as an account of ‘human progress’ and an antagonistic position with respect to any critique of it, especially from ‘outside’ by intellectuals (Unsgaard, Interview 1992). The intellectual or outsider expert was not a target for other interviewees but rather criticism was positioned through a discourse of fairness, as one ‘point of view’ among others. So, for example, it was acknowledged that cards are constructed for particular sending situations and, therefore, all aspects of a context could not be covered and that criticism of greeting cards will in any case be shaped by an analyst’s perspective as a member of the culture (Cook, Interview 1993). Point of view, in a rather different way, shaped another interviewee’s discourse on homogeneity (and was raised in this instance without prompting). Bodley of The House of Bodleigh suggested that the fewer producers there were, the less variety there would be, accepting a tendency of mass production towards homogeneity and drawing on the idea that ‘many producers means more choices’ as the solution to that tendency (Interview 1993). Bodley’s perspective is oriented to the survival of his company, given its market position as the

---

99 For example, ‘How would you respond to the idea that people should express their feelings directly to each other and not use greeting cards?’ Plus, ‘What would say to the criticism by some cultural analysts that if people use greeting cards they will not be expressing their own feelings?’.
The final response reported here is particularly interesting because it is related to a late twentieth century academic discourse on consumption as ‘empowerment’, as Winship (2000) puts it, that was favoured during the 1980s by a number of writers (p.24). Langton said she was ‘shocked’ that critical views might circulate with respect to The Ink Group product and went on to articulate a position of responsibility and solidarity with greeting card users, for example, acknowledging the demands, expectations and desires of women to do interpersonal interaction despite the context of busy and complex lives (Interview 1995).

Greeting cards publishers’ responses with respect to critiques of their practices are, in some senses, naïve, perhaps because they position themselves as part of the culture: as performing positive social functions. For example, Hallmark’s marketing documents represent the greeting card (at least, *its* greeting cards) as ‘enrich[ing] people’s lives and enhanc[ing] their relationships specifically by ‘help[ing] people formalize bonds and manage their communication in a warm, unthreatening way’ (n.d., p.2). It is not sufficient to see such claims as disingenuous or cynical. Individuals involved in producing cards naturally see themselves as ‘in’ the culture and, in a limited way, the already social and cultural experiences of producers provides the basis of publisher’s responses to sociocultural conditions with specific research seeking responses to card designs and patterns of buying seen as ‘unnecessary’ or at most, additional (Langton, Interview 1995; Cook, Interview 1993).

The range of responses to a critique of mass produced ‘personal communication’ commodities put to publishers does not suggest a self-conscious defence: a coherent

---

100 Bauman (1988) finds consumer choice, an individual freedom, is at the heart of the right to pursue private happiness (p.97).
101 Keeping in mind that Hallmark Australia can call up the extensive research resources of its parent company.
and rationalised strategy mobilised against such critiques. Despite the pervasiveness
and longstanding status of similar critiques of mass production and the rational
organisation that characterises advanced capitalism both as individual companies and
as manufacturing sectors (e.g. collective representative bodies which organise
economic and political strategies), no ‘set piece’ emerged. The greeting card industry
has not had an intensive engagement with consumer groups or other interest
groups – cf mining or farming industries – and, therefore, there has been no necessity
to develop such a response. Greeting card publishers, in this study, provided a set of
responses that are each already structured into the discourses of modern capitalist
culture – and would not look out of place in either casual conversation or in a letter-to-
the-editor of a newspaper – although there are strategies structured into the industry
that anticipate such critiques. Industry interviewees, for example, articulated a social
function for the greeting card as ‘mediating’ certain kinds of interpersonal interaction
for individuals who ‘naturally’ would, or pragmatically must, do conventionalised
social interaction, such as acknowledging birthdays and so on and other interaction
which is not produced as part of secular and religious social demands – e.g. fun-and-
love interaction with greeting cards. So, while what has been presented above forms
the bulk of the empirical material associated with the commercial production of
greeting cards, greeting card publisher’s discourse parallels certain demands placed on
women to do such intimate interactional work as will be pursued in Chapter 2.

Towards interpreting mass produced personal communication commodities

The greeting card industry’s production is always caught up in how social relations,
genre and emotion are understood by the publishers: in relation to each other and
with respect to the processes of mass production. What is reported above maps that
terrain through a set of discourses which, from the perspective of a binarised public
and private sphere, are antithetical but which, according to postmodern theory, signal
a fragmentation and multiplicity of cultural production. For example, a discourse of
certain kinds of interpersonal and intimate interaction as femininely gendered is
mobilised alongside formulations of social diversity; a discourse of rational
management associated with developed capitalism and marketing practices is
mobilised simultaneous with a discourse of individual ‘creativity’ and self-expression.
Individual self-expression is assumed to be performed as part of a specific and,
therefore, unique interactional situation, although publishers attempt to account for the
context with the abstracted ‘sending situation’. Exploring greeting cards as sociocultural texted artefacts along the lines traced through these discourses is one strand of what follows in the thesis: in Chapter 2 they are particularly inflected through the ‘consumer’ and in Chapter 5 through standardisation. The discussion here follows up on a small set of issues raised by the accounts presented above that are important with respect to the greeting cards that the thesis is most interested in, the non-occasion fun-and-love card.

Mass production: self-expression?

While differences among publishers exist, greeting card manufacturing generates a coherent sense of industry practices as part of its particular rationalism. For example, ‘the industry’ is representationally constituted through a particular set of terms: ‘social expression’ and ‘personal communication’ refer to the industry as a whole and the greeting card is known as a ‘self-expression’ product. While the term ‘social expression’ gestures to the importance of social relations, it is a category that captures the industry’s broad self image. Discursively organised as the ‘social expression’ industry, greeting card publishers articulate corporate goals in a style typical of developed capitalism: as ‘vision statements’. Organised in this way, critiques of the greeting card are anticipated and responded. For instance, in the following Hallmark presents a vision of its corporate goals simultaneously, socially positioning itself as a useful corporate citizen by writing of the desire to ‘enhance and nurture customs of self-expression, personal communication and celebration’ (Hallmark 1993b). These social goals are undermined by the self-expression industry’s self interest, although what is of most interest here is how these terms discursively map relations between the social and the personal.

The concept of self-expression, as it is mobilised in the discourse of greeting card publishers, is concerned with a number of related but different ideas. First, an idea of self-expression emerging out modernist concepts of ‘self’, in which self is idealised as an autonomous person with capacities that can only be constrained by an application of power, that is, as restrictions on any number of social or personal ‘freedoms’. In this

102 Or, ‘Did you know that every ton of recycled paper saves approximately 17 trees?’ which is part of The Ink Group message to consumers on the back of some greeting cards.
idealised state of freedom, the person has the capacity to choose (their ideas, their behaviour and their purchases). This sense of self-expression has two orientations: one is orientated toward the card user and their self-expression with the greeting card, the second is orientated toward the card originator. The first of these has in turn, two aspects: the idea of the authentic expression of emotions, and greeting card user’s self-expression or that using a greeting card is a way for individuals to claim particular aesthetic and social values.

Taken collectively, the terms through which the greeting industry represents itself evoke a communicative realm in which socially responsive individuals engage in the expression of emotion and thought by (and between) autonomous subjects. Cognition and affect are unproblematically located ‘inside’ an autonomous subject, rendering the greeting card in a functional manner: as a conduit for making thought or affect ‘visible’ or comprehensible. Greeting cards are represented as providing a means of communicating emotions. One of the most problematic aspects of this conception of the ‘expression’ of emotion and thought is that in a liberal humanist regime, this inner world is categorised as a natural site of production and is positively valued as authentic against ‘synthetic’ sites of emotional and cognitive production. As a consequence of this binarised structuring, it is possible for publishers, among others, to conceive of greeting cards as much more than they are: as a conduit between the inner world and ‘expression’.103 (Or even more problematically, as providing some kind of ‘helping hand’ to a ‘stuck’ or ‘blocked’ conduit). Greeting card publishers, like other English speakers, discursively construct an inner world that speakers attempt to ‘conduct’ out of themselves.

Within greeting card publishers’ accounts of the greeting card as self-expression, the personal communication that is envisaged is understood to vary in accordance with the

---

103 These ways of speaking about communication and emotion are difficult to avoid in English because the conduit metaphor is difficult to avoid, producing a number of difficulties for language users embedded in its linguistic and cultural context Reddy (1979) sets a challenge to the reader to avoid conduit metaphors, saying of his own attempts: ‘If I speak very carefully, with constant attention, I can do fairly well at avoiding them. But the result is hardly idiomatic English’ (p.298). To take Reddy’s example: ‘instead of ... asking, ‘Did you get anything out of that article?’, I have to say, ‘Were you able to construct anything of interest on the basis of the ... text?’ (p.298-299).
particular relations between individuals, as the elaborated notion of the ‘sending situation’ attempts to capture in a number of aspects. ‘Expressing’ oneself with a greeting card always involves an addressee, the card recipient. The concept of the sending situation does not attempt to be comprehensive but to inscribe enough specificity to the expectations of those sending and receiving greeting cards so that the card makes sense in the context of the social relations pertaining to those interactants. The lack of specificity, not unproblematically, invites the consumer to interact with the greeting card, specifying it further – a social practice that is described, drawing on the corpus of greeting cards, in Chapter 3.

Manufacturing practices that attempt to specify greeting card editorial content as a sending situation are in tension with discourses of individualism. While greeting card publishing practices recognise that people cannot say just whatever they please to whomever they like, expressions of emotion in the discourse of publishers are tied to liberal humanist concepts of ‘freedom’ of self-expression. A systematic and rationalised approach to ‘situation’ is not how individuals in Western capitalist societies in general imagine their social relationships. Constraints on the ‘sayings’ and ‘ways of doing’ is abhorrent to the notion of a free autonomous liberal individual, especially where that subject is politically located in a democratic liberal state constructed to protect those freedoms – in both political and discursive practices. Freedom in this configuration is not only freedom to be left alone to live one’s life but to be one’s own person, to define one’s self and what one wants from others apart from demands of conformity. So, the practice of organising love or sympathy in the way that greeting card producers map out through complexes such as the sending situation – as in Figure 1.1 above – is diametrically in opposition to liberal humanist concepts of emotion as an experience, which should be a ‘natural’ expression, for instance, in response to someone’s misfortune or illness.

In the production of the greeting card, the expression of emotion comes to be apparently rationally organised. This puts the stated purpose of the card – self-expression – in conflict with one of the central binary structures of Western thought, the Cartesian split between the mind and body which conceives emotions as located in the body and as natural, spontaneous and interiorised, not rationally organised. The ‘rational’ is a feature of the cognitive, not the emotive and, similarly, is a feature of the
public not the private domain and the individual. This coalescence of ideas shapes, in part, how greeting cards come to be a point of focus for concerns about mass produced commodities entering into the sacred area of the ‘person’. Cultural analyst, Finkelstein (1994a), for example, suggests the use of a mass produced commodity like a greeting card ‘amplifies’ feelings and information about the inner self in ‘patented’ language (p.162). The alternative, Finkelstein offers, is to ‘encounter[…] those same ideas in everyday conversation and human commerce’ (pp.164-165). This suggests that the inner world of the subject is accessible – but only in certain kinds of speech and interaction. That argument problematically posits that an ‘authentic’ realm of the interior can be serviced instrumentally but not by printed mass produced commodities. Finkelstein would likely agree that emotion is a sociocultural and bodily phenomena, that it is contingent and constitutive and not a ‘natural’ wholly private essence but champions certain conditions for the representation of feelings over others.

As a resource for speaking in certain ways, the mass produced non-occasion fun-and-love greeting card raises a number of issues: what it is that cards ‘say’ in the context of intimate relationships, who is saying it and how emotion is discursively constituted. What is left implicit in the ‘service’ discourse of greeting card publishers are questions about the resources that are available, or not, in English to do ‘intimate talk’. How, for instance, affection, sexual desire and intimate relationships can be spoken is a critical issue for ‘doing’ any of them or talking about them. These are issues not addressed in denunciations of greeting cards, except by invoking naturalness and ‘spontaneity’ and are, therefore, pursued in later chapters.

**Mass produced ‘authorship’**

The discourse of self-expression, as it is mobilised by greeting card publishers, has another dimension, involving ‘expression’ but this time not of a greeting card’s user but its ‘originator’. That figure has been given several names in the account above (manufacturer/publisher, designer, artist, printer) and is frequently inscribed on the back page of the greeting card as a named individual. The mass produced greeting card is thus stamped with a proper name, in the manner of Foucault’s (1987b) ‘author-function’: it is no longer the work of a ‘writer’ (and in the instance of a greeting card there is an ‘artist’ too) but that of an ‘author’ who is ‘tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourse’ (p.134). In
this way, the greeting card’s linguistic and visual text come to be subject to copyright, with the name on the greeting card authorising the image and the language legally, as a syntagm. With perhaps many individuals producing drafts of linguistic and visual text for the end product, the greeting card’s writers, artists and designers exemplify how text production is the work of what Kress (1985) calls text ‘assemblers’ (p.47), although the greeting card evinces a context of production in which a particular individual produces it, while its production is always the result of the practices of many individuals inscribing and working on it.

Certain individual contributions to the assembling of the greeting card are distinguished by the type of practices performed – as realised in the names of artist and designer. Some are designated as invention or ‘authoring’, others are designated as ‘technical’ or ‘writing’ to use Foucault’s (1987b) vocabulary. These distinctions are not restricted to the arena of mass production, although they are a critical nexus around which mass production and ‘other’ production is constituted. They are distinctions that also apply to cultural production that is otherwise thought of as ‘authored’. It is by considering such production that the assumptions constructing such differences are highlighted. So, for example, there is a long established practice in printmaking where expert (master) printmakers produce work that is signed by others. So, drawing (e.g. onto an etching plate or lithography stone) is considered to make up ‘authorship’ but not other practices in the printing process. These other practices are designated ‘technical’, although many of them involve critical and aesthetically important practices (the application of the ‘ground’ into which the marks are inscribed, the application of ink and the processes of its removal and other variations that make up the intaglio process). These are performed bodily, therefore, inscribing the plate or stone with residues of the ‘technician’, including perhaps literal inscriptions of skin marks and so on. These are not simply mechanical practices, but they are not positively valued in the way that aesthetic practice is assigned cultural value.104

104 This division of labour and artistic authority is exemplified with respect to printmaking particularly through responses to Andy Warhol’s print and film-making practices in the 1960s and 1970s. The same kind of responses are premised, in legal restrictions, to ‘sampling’ by music-makers.
One of the signs of ‘aesthetic labour’ having been performed is the artist’s name being inscribed on the work (Frow 1997a:62). Greeting cards not only have the name of the author on them but something that resembles a signature. Such signatures may be in a form of a ‘traditional’ artist’s signature on the ‘front’ of the work – as on the greeting card represented on the first page of the Introduction (Example 1). Others are inscribed on the back of the greeting card. The signature, separated from the image, becomes ‘attached’ to the whole greeting card. As a unique mark, the signature affirms that the work is the work of the Author or Artist. The signature, comes in for particular consideration by Derrida (1977; 1982). It is the signature that is the source of the enunciation, ‘this is my work’, embodying Western values of individuality and authenticity. Derrida argues that while the signature is a guarantee of both aesthetic and market value through the signification of ‘originality’, its authority is contradictorily constituted in its own reproducibility and its repeated recognition. Paradoxically an act of iteration guarantees individuation. While claims of individuality for certain objects, for example, artworks depend, therefore, on the status of a paradoxically constituted signature, the mass produced commodity ordinarily stands in opposition to ‘originality’ and is always a copy. The effect of the signature on the commodity is to re-individualise it but as a twice branded object, once by the manufacturing publisher’s logo and again by the ‘artist’. Such an effect is complicated with respect to the greeting card by the possibility of such a mark of authentication and authorisation being already a part of a series: a series of aliases – according to one interviewee – transgressing the author-function. These relations are pursued in Chapter 2.

During the social history of the greeting card, its ‘cultural biography’ in Kopytoff’s (1986) terms, a second proper name will be inscribed, a second signature, that of the card giver and a third proper name may also be inscribed (this time without a signature), that of the card recipient. So, whereas some commodities remain a ‘mass’ product, in that they can always belong to anyone, the greeting card always belongs to ‘someone’, although this rather simplifies the relation of ‘belonging’ and commodities. Commodities that have belonged to others may come to function as collectables, taking on new exchange value and losing any trace of use value (Stewart 1993:151). The new exchange value of a such objects is, in some instances, premised on its pristine condition that is, there is no sign of other ‘belongings’, other ownerships, on the object
(some stamps, for example) but in others such markings are a highly valued aspect of the commodity (something previously owned and marked by ‘Elvis’, for example). Greeting cards that are already in circulation would, if subject to such collection processes usually have the marks of those previous ‘owners’. What those marks inscribe is a relation between the giver, who temporarily ‘owns’ the card, as its consumer, and the card recipient, the ‘owner’ intended by the giver. The previous relationships constituted by the use of a greeting card remain, inscribing its histories, but also its possible futures, including the one here, as a research corpus. The question of ‘ownership’ and claims for the meanings made by greeting cards is pursued in Chapter 2.

**Mass produced greeting cards –mass consumption**

Certain aspects of the relationship between a commodity and consumption practice form the basis for both product design and advertising strategies, mobilising traditional marketing discourse around ‘demographics’ and ‘beliefs’ and more recently, concepts such as ‘lifestyle’ – elaborated below. The role of advertising in consumption practices related to mass production has been well described (Dyer 1982; Cook 1992; Lunt and Livingstone 1992; Schudson 1993). It is an advertisement’s job to enunciate a commodity as a particular position for individuals or social groups. The mass produced greeting card’s mass consumption in Australia is of a very particular kind. Specifically, it does not involve point of sale or retail advertising. The absence of retail advertising in Australia may constitute some of the importance of ‘styling’ greeting cards as part of an overall product line and the development of ‘collections’ described above. These collections may provide a way in which

---

105 However, one interviewee reported her grandmother’s practice of giving unsigned birthday cards to her grandchildren. As part of a lifetime of thriftiness, she explicitly tells them to use the card for someone else – hence making a gift of the card for them to use as they wish, an interpretation supported by her occasional practice of not giving a card at all but of including the cost of the card– the money – with her gift to them (Fieldnotes).

106 The collections conceived of here are not necessarily of greeting cards as valued for a new exchange value but those for example found in schools or in activity centres for elderly people where cards maybe re-constituted as part of other activities, such as for collage. In this way, the cards have use value in Marx’s (1990) terms, although in the instance of their collection here as a corpus, they again take on a specific kind of exchange value as an object for the performances of ‘Thesis’ and other intellectual production.

107 The site of marketing and advertising practices in the Australian context is the relationship between greeting card retailer and publisher or importer.
attachments to products are formed, indirectly creating brand loyalty in the generic greeting card market of Australia that may be played out via style ‘loyalty’.

While social relations between retail consumer and producer are typically understood as mediated through advertising, as there is no marketing work done to ‘sell’ the idea of giving a greeting card to the retail consumer, how are specific purchases are thought of by publishers? Interviewees spoke of non-occasion greeting cards as ‘fashion’ items, not signalling a mundane idea of seasonal ‘re-invention’ as, for example, in the area of clothing fashion, rather a positioning discourse linking individuals, as ‘identities’, with products as ‘style’ (Davis 1992). This is captured in the abstraction ‘lifestyle’, a problematic equation collapsing a set of social relations. ‘Lifestyle’ has been deployed in commodity production and advertising as a shorthand for a complex of allegiances and ideas about self and ways of living that individuals are taken to experience life through.108 So collapsed, those social relations are understood to be an ‘identity’ that is ‘expressed’ in consumption practices and a dispersed application of ‘style’ comes to be a marker of social value and certain practices that are taken as emergent from those values. One difficulty for the broad applicability of this idea of lifestyle, Hennessy (1995) argues, is the assumption that ‘styles of life that can be purchased in clothes, leisure activities, household items, and bodily dispositions all dissolve fixed status groups’ (p.166). Certain statuses cannot be dissolved through particular postures or performances because they are fixed, for example, poor, black, female individuals are constrained by economic, racial and gender hierarchies with respect to ‘fashioning’ a particular identity (p.167). In particular, Hennessy objects, the aestheticisation of life, as Foucault (1983a) conceives it, ‘making one’s life an art is an intelligible possibility only for the leisured class and their new yuppie heirs’ because it relies on the formulation of social relations without an analysis of the exploitation of individual

---

108 As part of an increasingly aestheticised everyday domain ‘lifestyle’ has emerged as a problematic concept used to refer to particular practices and identities, for example, the term ‘gay lifestyle’ which obscures a great deal about ‘gay’ as an identity category and as homo-sexual practice and yet ‘fixes’ it as something that is lived in a particular way. In a discussion of the term, Giddens (1991) cites a number of sources for its history, including Weber’s ‘style of life’ (p.81), which is also the source of Bourdieu’s (1984) use of the term: ‘a systematic commitment which orients and organizes the most diverse practices’ (p55).
human labour in such production (pp.166-167). There is merit in Hennessy’s argument as a general argument concerning the relations of capital, although its specific applicability to greeting card consumption is not clear. While the cost of greeting cards is more than the daily wage of some people in the ‘developing world’, that cost is not prohibitive for many (but certainly for some) individuals in Australia. Greeting cards are cheaper than the smallest denomination of ‘paper’ money in Australia. There is not much in the way of material resources to be marshalled here as a particular performance of consumption, although the most prosaic preferences for goods, Bourdieu (1984) shows, are consumption practices that form categories of ‘distinction’, constituting legitimate ways of speaking and doing.

The work of individuals involved in greeting card production is always the work of social subjects involved in diverse social relations. There are important ways in which individuals producing greeting cards are ‘caught up’ in the operation of capital but not all of them are necessarily as alienated labour power. Greeting card publishers are collectives of individuals, designing, producing and marketing commodities. These individuals ‘do’ what other people do: they take part in all kinds of popular cultural activities, visit cultural institutions, have political views, live ‘ordinary’ lives and inhabit bodies that are ‘sexed’, ‘raced’ and ‘classed’ in various ways. While it is obvious that greeting card publishers are members of the culture, this point is made explicitly in order to signal that the approach to the social relations of greeting card production will not reduce those relations to one dimension of social experience (‘class’ or ‘labour relations’) as in a classic Marxist analysis. To do so elides the multiple social relations and power relations in which individuals participate. A longstanding focus on the negative relations of production – the objectification of labour as the commodity and as an object, producing alienation – means it is possible to conceive greeting card publishers as, in a sense, outside ‘cultural’ production. While production in the private sphere or the production of goods for direct consumption (or small surpluses for direct exchange) is readily understood as cultural production, commodity producers are

---

109 Hennessy is particularly concerned to articulate the relations between capitalism and homosexual subjects as these are connected to the formation of gay and lesbian identities and processes of commodification (p.143).

110 Bourdieu’s account is not unproblematic and is considered further in Chapter 5 as part of a case study of one kind of non-occasion greeting card consumption.
understood as participating in the sociocultural realm in a predatory fashion: as cultural hunters. As an effect of this kind of distinction, some groups and perhaps some individuals come to have stronger claims on cultural production than others do, attributing authenticity and positive cultural value to one site of production, one set of social relations, over another. Such a distinction being drawn between ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ production means that the production of greeting cards for personal communication is positioned as inauthentic and other personal communication as authentic.

There is a trace of this logic in the ‘origin’ stories of non-occasion and alternative greeting cards reported above, although without entering into speculative or psychoanalytical realms this cannot be pursued. The accounts of non-occasion and alternative greeting card production provide an example of relations between capitalist producers and ‘other’ producers in the generation and circulation of cultural artefacts. Alternative and non-occasion greeting cards, emerging out of gay ‘street’ art, and a small ‘radical’ company of artisans were subsequently picked up as a new form by large publishers, although non-occasion greeting cards have a history almost as long as the greeting card itself. The ‘appropriation’ of ‘street’, or subcultural group production is never only a one way process but is a dynamic process of ‘invention’, appropriation and dispersal. One of the strongest characteristics of some subcultural groups is in fact their appropriative behaviour.111 Gays and lesbians, for example, have plundered all kinds of other sites for their own use, including traditional working class men’s clothing (boots, singlets and shorts) and the appropriation of sex-worker’s clothing, particularly ‘bondage’ and other fetishistic clothing, has been noted in cultural analyses of ‘punk’ (Hebdige 1979). As the successful legal action by the group of Colorado artisans against one of the global greeting card corporations suggests, the ‘street’ can also fight back. Certainly, artisanal forms of production may then be returned to the street via the shop window but the process continues on.

111 Cf the anxiety ‘underground’ subcultures have about their style and practices ‘gushing up’ to the mainstream (Thornton 1997:208).
From the perspective of recent marketing discourses, subcultural groups are captured by the term ‘niche’ marketing. Mass producers, like cultural theorists, have rewritten the production of meaning through local production and the fluidity of signification. Mass producers now anticipate that local (individual and ‘niche’ or ‘cohort’) meanings and uses of commodities will occur. So, while capital is transnational and global, production is necessarily configured by local contexts (Blundell et al 1993:7). From the production perspective, building in the assumption that consumers rewrite commodities (an inherent aspect of the greeting card as an artefact it will be shown in Chapter 2) means that marketing discourses and practices must be mobile, so that they can respond to particular sites. It also suggests some of the context for how medium and small greeting card publishers have thrived in Australia. While Australian greeting card publishers do not develop the localising approach with respect to point of sale marketing, their responsiveness is seen in the small companies set up to produce non-occasion and alternative greeting cards and in the non-rationalised processes they use to develop greeting cards.

In treating greeting cards as a localised complex of meaning making, greeting card producers assume in some senses that the product is a ‘text’, a social semiotic construct that is involved in processes of local taste formation. Hence, the input of a range of individuals working in the production process acts well as a way of tapping into the marketplace, without expensive marketing research. The practices of these commodity producing ‘collectives’ of individuals - designers, printers, graphic artists, editors etc., - are, to various extents, rationally organised and while rationalist procedures such as marketing surveys are not used by greeting card publishers, as reported above, the ‘ordinary’ lives of individuals participating in greeting card publishing informs the production. In Lyotard’s (1986) cybernetic modeling, corporate

---

112 Hence, during the 2000 Sydney Olympics, Nike ran a series of adverts involving athletes saying ‘sorry’ (for various things, e.g. for not being home much because they were training, or for only being interested in their sport etc). Publicly saying sorry in Australia, at this cultural moment, takes most of its current signification from discourses constituting colonial and indigenous reconciliation. The primary referents for the advert were the Prime Minister’s refusal to further the reconciliation process by saying ‘sorry’ to indigenous people for injustices juxtaposed to an extraordinary amount of media attention and national fervour around indigenous runner – and gold medal hope – Cathy Freeman.
'invention' of commodities drawing on personal experience would be treated as an operation with the express purpose of contributing to the necessary expansion of the system for its own viability. The use of personal experience to develop greeting cards is read here through Foucault’s (1991; 1990) conception of the power-knowledge regime, particularly as operationalised through surveillance. The greeting card’s inherently ‘to be given’ quality means that interpersonal social relations become the object of surveillance. This is seen in the elaborated discourse on the contemporary family described above and exemplifies how a pseudo-sociological discourse organises greeting card production. This pseudo-sociological discourse compares interestingly to the preponderance of psychological discourses through which advertising and marketing have tended to mobilise their practices. The kinds of processes that greeting card publishers practice are akin to the Foucauldian derived idea of ‘demoscopy’ – where such practices are seen as part of a knowledge-power regime in ‘which consumers in the market-place are made subjects of disciplinary control and at the same time produced as citizens, as active subjects of the consumption and political processes (Carter 1997, cited in Nava (2000:59)). What greeting card publishers ‘know’ about consumers may, therefore, serve to ‘subject’ those consumers, although evidence from the greeting card corpus discussed in Chapter 2 demonstrates ways in which such processes are disrupted through the practices of consumers with and on the greeting card.

**Conclusion**

The account of greeting cards given in the first section of this chapter shows how the greeting card selection process is envisaged by publishers as a motivated action initiated through an individual response to an event, a sending situation. Which card is bought, as the description of display and the materiality greeting cards has pointed to, is structured in part by availability but the greeting card market was also strongly fragmented along the lines of gender and ‘ethnicity’ and the selection of a greeting card engages an individual in positioning themselves and being positioned, for example, through choices of traditional and alternative greeting cards. Greeting card selection,

---

113 Nava (2000) points out that the Foucauldian derived idea of ‘demoscopy’ developed by Carter (1997) is apposite, being the German term for market research (p.59).
like all consumption, involves signaling certain values and positions, negotiating identity, status, aesthetic and other values and interpolates the card recipient with respect to those values. These are practices are pursued in later chapters.

This chapter has also set out and analysed the first of the thesis’ findings, that despite the rational procedures which organise capital production – including the central concept ‘sending situation’, greeting card publishing is not wholly rationally managed and greeting card publishers do not entirely ‘understand’ the terrain in which they are publishing (the paradoxical nature of fun-and-love greeting card production, for example). Even the largest manufacturers operating in Australia operate to some extent on the basis of inexplicit cultural knowledge, rather than rationalised market research. Without market testing, those contributions are tantalisingly unmonitored (cf the kind of rigorous market testing which most mass products commodities undergo). It is unclear though what the implications are of relation to how particular experiences and subjectivities and not others enter into the production-consumption cycle.

Greeting card selection is a choice mediated by the structure of the industry, quite apart from other mediating factors. If an individual retailer does not think a card will sell or is appropriate for a particular outlet, it may not be bought from publishers for selling on to consumers. The diversity of greeting card producers and retailers in both suburban and city areas constitutes a force for plurality. While ‘shopping around’ may be inconvenient for particular consumers, this diversity means that the greeting card market consists of all kinds of greeting cards: sappy, bawdy, clichéd, aesthetic, sentimental and risqué cards produced for both heterosexual and homosexual audiences.

The mapping done in this chapter of the greeting card industry, including an initial response to the exegesis of the publishers, provides a context for an elaborated discussion of greeting card use in Chapter 3, particularly with respect to the discursive location of greeting cards in a terrain that is ‘feminised’, by virtue of its predominantly women users and its orientation to interpersonal use.
2 Consuming Us/er?:
Commodification and social relations

Introduction

The commercial greeting card is not bought for oneself but is consumed in order to be given to another. The current chapter develops a view of the greeting card as a sociocultural artefact that is deployed in the work of performing social relations with others and, in the following chapter, in performing ‘self’. These are not unrelated performances, especially with respect to a gendered self. In order to examine this terrain, the chapter draws on a small literature specifically interested in greeting cards and a much larger literature concerned with consumption and commodification.

The greeting card’s contribution to social relations is the focus for a small number of critiques of greeting card use, that tend to coalesce around the diagnosis of a negative effect of certain commodities on individuals and on social relations, particularly on interpersonal relations between family members (Papson 1986, Finkelstein 1994a, 1994b). Underlying these claims are assessments of the users of greeting cards, and of the objects themselves, that rely on a version of the problematic distinction between cultural production and commodity production. It is that distinction which this chapter is concerned to elaborate as it is traced in discourses about greeting cards and social relations. The meanings of production are thus focused on in relation to consuming greeting cards. As the first part of the current chapter sets out, the thesis treats consuming as a complex relation, without championing consumerism. Having set out the approach to the relation between consumer and commodity, the chapter goes on to propose the greeting card is a-commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-

---

114 Sections of this chapter have appeared in the essay, ‘Non-occasion greeting cards and the commodification of personal relationships’ (Hobson 2000).
away, suggesting that what is at stake is not whether the greeting card is a commodity or gift. This does not involve positioning the greeting card as a novel object; rather it emerges from the thesis position that all production is ‘cultural’. In keeping with this, the chapter goes on to resituate the greeting card in the nexus of the twin processes of emotionalisation and commodification of the private. Emotionalisation is not only affecting ‘talk’ but goes on in a range of practices, for example, relations in the workplace come to be understood and practiced through discourses of care, trust, love and personal growth (this may involve employers paying for ‘at the desk’ neck massages or allowing personal life management in the workplace vs strict monitoring of personal phone calls). Following cues set down by Frow’s (1997b) reappraisal of a number of analyses of commodities and gifts, the greeting card is read as imbricated in community concerns about the status of love as a defining feature of the person. This account enables an argument to be pursued, in the following chapter, that such commodification is useful because it identifies what is at stake in the use of greeting cards and, from a feminist perspective, unsettles the relation between love, the private domain and ‘woman’s’ discursive location in that domain.

A different set of criticisms arises regarding the use of greeting cards with respect to their characteristics as a communication technology, distinguished in this study from their characteristics as commodities (although they are related). The current chapter takes up a set of issues in relation to the commodified space of the greeting card and the inscriptions of its first and second producers. The corpus of greeting card provides evidence of how consumers use and transform the already inscribed space of the greeting card, although ‘theories of use’ (de Certeau 1988, Miller 1987) are not unproblematic. Analysis of other issues with respect to the language of greeting cards, arising in relation to mass production, is pursued in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Consumer/User?**

The paradigm of consumption in cultural studies during the 1980s acknowledges that the decades post World War Two involved a reconstitution of relations with mass production, not only in labour relations but in consumption. This section initially reviews that literature briefly, setting out how this thesis treats those relations. The focus on consumption elaborated the increasing complexity of social relations with commodities. The most important effect of such attention was a repositioning of the
consumer in relation to production, in particular, a review of Marxist influence on the
analysis of consumption and its constitution of the consumer as a subject position
solely constituted in economic, that is, production relations. The view developed in the
current chapter owes a substantial debt to this reworking, without championing
consumerism or a ‘pleasure principle’.

Re-reading consumption

Mass production in the commercial industrial domain involves a relation between
volume, mechanical processing and standardising practices – so called Fordism.\textsuperscript{115} The
global reach of mass production processes, through distribution technologies
(especially rail, airfreight and now digital media), potentially brings ‘standardised’
products into every social domain. Accordingly, Williams (1983) identifies mass
production as describing ‘a process of consumption’, although he points out that
semantically ‘mass’ also has the sense of a ‘dense aggregate’, where only the grouping
is important and nothing is distinct (pp.158-159). Both these senses of ‘mass’ resonate
in the classic denunciation of mass production, Adorno and Horkeimer (1993) \textit{The
culture industry}. Adorno and Horkeimer’s main concern is that industrialised cultural
production, for example, cinema and television, will destroy ‘artisanal’ production and
produce only averageness by impressing ‘the same stamp on everything’ (p.30). The
force of such a technological rationale towards homogeneity, Adorno and Horkeimer
argue, is the rationale of domination itself, finding no hope in the culture industry for
individuals because it destroys any possible resistance:

\begin{quote}
[T]he technology of the culture industry [is] no more than the achievement of
standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a
distinction between the logic of the work and that of the social system. This is
the result not of a law of movement in technology as such but of its function in
today’s economy. The need which might resist central control has already been
suppressed by the control of the individual consciousness. (p.31)
\end{quote}

A fatalistic position on the individual’s capacity to resist mass production, fuelled by
discourses of ‘false consciousness’, sweeps aside specific social acts, which are

\textsuperscript{115} See Gilbert, Burrows and Pollert 1992.
constituted as ‘all the same’. In keeping with this position, Williamson (1976), for example, writes about the idea of the individual ‘identifying with’ commodities and warns that ‘they feel personal, freely chosen, self generated, but are alien’ (p.46). It is an argument that depends on there being the possibility somewhere and somehow of some kind of authentic relationship with those objects.

Written during and in response to European fascist regimes and the Second World War, Adorno and Horkeimer’s work has been much critiqued. As Cohen (1987) writes:

> It is precisely the Frankfurt School’s misrecognition of the emancipating potential of the cultural sphere that made them oblivious to the ferment about them – oblivious to the fact that some agents could not/would not accept administered definitions of themselves and their circumstances. (p.107)

One of the important things that Adorno and Horkeimer’s work has in common with more recent work on consumption is that it is not narrowly focused on ‘point of sale’ behaviour: the subject position ‘consumer’ and the behaviour of the ‘shopper’ are interwoven because they involve sociocultural relations with ‘goods’ and the places they are sold and used, over and over.

One approach to rethinking the subjugated position of the consumer is through a discursive analysis, such as the one Radway (1995) performs. Radway follows the assumptions, tropes and metaphors constituting the history of consumption via its discursive origins, transformations and uses. Metaphorical renderings extend the equation Marx constructs, that use is utterly distinct from production. While it is the case that individuals lack the capacity to control the means of production, ‘to equate the activities of selection, purchase, and use to the act of exhausting natural materials is to reduce a complex social process to a single, physical event’ (p.439). In effect, the presumption of a singular and fixable meaning which adheres to an object at the moment of its production is to presume that the user of the commodity object must ‘surrender, submit and become its consumer’ (p.441). This kind of meaning with

---

116 Adorno and Horkeimer, however, usefully analyse mass culture as ‘disclos[ing] the fictitious character of the ‘individual’ in the bourgeois era. The principle of individuality was always full of contradiction. Individuation has never really been achieved’ (1993:42).
respect to consumption not only reaches into relations between readers and texts but also processes of analysis, collapsing them because the formulation

occludes certain questions and ... obviate[s] the need for empirical investigation of the way actual people engage with the cultural products they purchase from others. ... In effect, traditional mass-culture methodology denies the semiotic capacities and social activities of large numbers of individuals. (pp.439-441)

In response to this kind of analysis, the ‘ethnographic turn’ brought a view of commodity use that worked against tendencies in Marxism to see the consumer as duped. It was a process aided by the conception of power being reworked along the lines that Foucault (1990; 1991) develops. Power, Foucault argues, is dispersed and localised, not situated in any single dimension of social life such as ‘class’ as Marx conceives it or, as some feminists conceive it, situated in gender. In the modern disciplinary society, techniques of surveillance, categorisation and regulation produce knowledge. Power is operationalised and exercised, for instance, in social practices through bodies of knowledge that distinguish between deviancy and normalcy (of bodies, minds, behaviours and so on), highlighting the subject as a ‘discursive effect’ produced by intersecting discourses of truth, power, knowledge and ethics.

Consuming women

The ‘consumer’ is a subject position that is particularly troubling with respect to both the category of ‘woman’ and to individual women’s everyday lives. An alignment of women with a feminised private domain is an alignment with the sphere designated as the site of consumption and is an alignment positioned against a masculinised public domain (the site of production). Practices of consumption and this discursive organisation of the spheres of production and consumption mean that, in Western capitalist societies, there is a readily available rationale for discounting consumption practices and for the positioning of men outside the private domain. Notwithstanding practices that blur these domains, Huyssen (1986) frames these alignments as a ‘divide’ between modernism and mass culture that is inflected through gender. Mass culture, as a trivial and banal form of production becomes solidly but problematically

117 This brings Foucault (and feminism) under the critical gaze of some feminists (see Ramazanoğlu 1993). Foucault’s methods, his focuses on techniques, the body and an understanding of knowledge and truth as structures through which power operates, have been
associated with women during the period of industrialisation in the nineteenth century (p.47). Huyssen argues that despite critiques of mass production in terms of processes of standardisation, rationalisation and ‘streamlining’ – all masculinised features – ‘real’, that is, authentic culture is retained, via this logic, as the prerogative of men (p.47).118

Women and social relations of consumption have come in for particular analysis, although reviewing theories of consumption, McRobbie (1997) traces how analyses syncopate between the ‘pleasure’ and ‘reality’ principles.119 The centrality of Marxist informed analyses of cultural studies was repositioned during the 1980s, a process that included taking a celebratory approach to consumption, collected by Winship (2000) under the motif of ‘shopping as empowerment’ (p.24). In this approach, the freedom of a wage becomes elaborated as ‘an active and creative engagement’ that may subvert productive for feminist theories, particularly the later genealogical approach for example, in the three volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, 1990; 1987; 1988.

118 The attribution of authenticity to certain cultural practitioners is not avoided in some early cultural studies analyses. While attention to popular and mass culture (e.g. Hall and Jefferson 1976; Fiske and Hartley 1978) worked as a kind of ‘affirmative action’, to invoke a certain feminist political discourse such analyses have not always been unproblematic given that relations between modernism, modernisation and Marxism also constitute particular relations of gender (McRobbie 1980). McRobbie’s intervention with ‘Settling Accounts with Subcultures: a feminist critique’ is framed particularly through a critique of the important urban ethnographies of Willis (1977, 1978) and Hebdige (1979). Women and girls cultural practices are invisible in these studies, McRobbie argues, because the private realm is elided and women and girls do not have ‘street visibility’ (p.46). Attention to girls and women’s sub-cultural and consumption practices has documented the complex pleasures in popular magazines (Walkerdine 1984; Winship 1987; McRobbie 1991) and soap opera television (Modleski 1984; Hobson 1982; Ang 1991). Women and girls writing also attests to the complexity of gendered identity (Steedman 1982). Such interventions not only contributed to feminist studies but the diversification of the trajectory of cultural studies, which is a process embodied in Johnson’s (1996) rewriting of the practice of cultural studies as [to] abstract, describe and reconstitute in concrete studies forms through which human beings ‘live’, become conscious, sustain themselves subjectively (p.81). Reconstructed in this manner, the object of cultural studies becomes the history of subjectivity and the signifying practices, the meaning making, that constitute that subjectivity. In this way, cultural studies has become a productive site for analysis of identity and its politics, for example, in postcolonial studies and in feminist cultural studies, focusing on texts and aesthetics, policy and institutional analysis, consumption and commodification with perspectives other than those informed by Marxist theories of reproduction.

119 Fiske (1989) seeks to avoid this dualism in considering popular culture by conceiving consumer society as a ‘cultural economy’. While Fiske acknowledges that difference is constituted in that economy, putting a power dimension to popular culture, his unsatisfactory conclusion is that ‘popular culture is always on the side of the subordinate’ (p.45). McRobbie (1997) points out there is scant feminist work looking at how women actually shop and what influences their choices (p.81).
or resist the shopping and consuming experience as it is constructed by the producer (p.25). The analysis of consumption, while benefiting from a view of meaning making as a fluid process and of the ‘authority’ for meaning making to be dispersed among those involved in the production and consumption of semiosis is thus in danger of dismissing women’s often mundane and difficult relationship with consumption practices. Certain experiences of consumption for women, who continue to do the household shopping, do not, for example, involve anything like the experience evoked, for example, in Mort’s (1996) descriptions of the leisure shopping of the newly fashioned and consumption oriented man. The consuming woman cannot be unproblematically constituted as a figure engaged in that modernist activity of flânerie, so evocatively described by Baudelaire (1964). Nor is the leisured pleasure of mall shopping by the newly wealthy twenty-somethings, invoked by Langman (1992), necessarily shared by their mothers. The experience of dashing desperately into a supermarket for a needed item, dodging obstacles in carparks and aisles, using public transport to do weekly household shopping, making surveillance ‘recces’ for the clearest supermarket checkout queue and, as de Certeau (1988) puts it, ‘making do’ with what is available on the shelf in the shop and at home has nothing to do with ‘liberation’ and everything to with surviving. Greeting card producers are mindful of the work involved, structuring production-marketing processes accordingly. For example, greeting cards are placed in supermarkets and chain stores, enabling women to pick up a card while doing other household shopping, and in department stores, where a greeting card can be purchased along with presents for birthdays and weddings and so on.

The consumer, even for the producer, as the evidence presented in Chapter 1 suggests, is no longer a demographic but a ‘readership’. Hence, there are three – overlapping – terrains of this thesis: production, consumption and textual semiosis. The greeting card’s first producers (designers, printers, packers, marketers, etc.), its second producer (the consumer-user) and its third producer (its recipient reader) all contribute to how the greeting card is situated in the ‘cultural economy’. While some of the work of consumption involves the specific activities of ‘shopping’, some of it involves practices performed with and on commodities (de Certeau 1988; Miller 1987; Belk 1995) which are considered below and which are contextualised further in Chapter 3 as part of an account of greeting card use in interpersonal interaction.
Newsflash! ‘Corporate invaders annihilate the everyday?’

If modernity is sometimes characterised through its relationship to the development of capitalism and, therefore, also in certain senses through critiques of capitalism – most centrally that of Marx (1990) – then pre-modernity is sometimes characterised through its relationship to a very different economy, that of the gift (Mauss 1966). It is accounts of these two systems that form the basis for many discussions of commodities and their consumption. This section, however, is concerned with a cultural moment more usually (but not unproblematically) imagined as temporally and analytically beyond modernity and the specific form of capitalism in Marx’s critique: the postmodern.

Haunting any analysis of popular or communication artefacts is Baudrillard’s (1983a) vision of ‘hyperreality’, where the material signifier is torn from the signified, the concept to which it is connected, and only simulacra circulate – weightless image-signs that are exchanged for each other with no (positive) effect because they have no relationship to any underlying meaning (p.2). Baudrillard (1983b) insists that while sign exchange used to signify things, for example, ‘class’ relationships (which can therefore be linked back to economic relationships), this is no longer the case (p.19). Signs now have no referential function (the sign and the referent are abolished) and all that remains is the play of signifiers that operate according to a different logic – their own.

As an antifoundational statement, Baudrillard’s account exemplifies postmodern abandonment of a belief that a sign refers to something ‘deeper’ than itself but he goes on to diagnose the effects of the simulacrum as the end of the social. The effect of the simulacrum is thus the loss of a way of life where the warmth of social interaction is confronted only by alienation. The simulacrum, in contrast, is a phenomenon belonging to a ‘cold universe one [of] ecstasy, obscenity, fascination [and],
communication’ (Baudrillard 1983c:132). This disconsolate vision is exemplified in two assessments of greeting cards, by Finkelstein (1994a;1994b) and Papson (1986), that will be drawn on repeatedly in the thesis to delineate a certain voice in cultural analysis. The artificiality of the greeting card, Finkelstein (1994b) suggests, ‘functions to expel meaning and value from the network of social relations in which we live’ (p.71). At the core of Papson’s objections to the greeting card is a vision of social interaction suffused with simulation, imitation, approximation and abstraction. Papson contends that the
corporate rationality that produces the greeting card imbues the actual communication between two individuals with that rationality, invading and annihilating the substance of everyday existence and replacing it with form (p.108).

While disquiet about the commodification of the personal is currently echoed in many sites, Baudrillard’s writings amplify such disquiet, although other accounts of the simulacrum are positive, for instance, that delineated by Deleuze (1994). Deleuze refuses to maintain the distinction between the model (the original) and the copy because it is through this relation that a whole world of ‘real’ is maintained. What Deleuze envisages is a relation between simulations – not between real and simulation: ‘overturning Platonism … means denying the primacy of original over copy, of model over image, glorifying the reign of the simulacra and reflections’ (p.66). Rewriting simulacra affirmatively provides a way to respond to what shadows both Papson and Finkelstein’s diagnoses: an ‘authentic’ and, therefore, preferable text with which to perform social interaction. Despite following Baudrillard’s diagnosis, both Papson and Finkelstein exhibit the symptom Baudrillard warns against: the panicked cult of the real (1983a:12-13).120 It is a spectre that takes on a particular shape in Finkelstein’s (1994a) reading, where there is a preference for ‘everyday conversation’ to express emotion (p.165). Elsewhere, Finkelstein (1994b) writes:

our pleasure in the greeting card is a sign of increasing cynicism, and … our overuse of it implies an emotionally cauterised, politically emasculated and intellectually pauperised generation. (p.67)

While Finkelstein’s perspective involves a sense of difference between one generation and another, the spectre of authenticity also appears in some accounts of greeting card use, as exemplified in the following anecdote from one of the study’s informants:

My boyfriend gave me this card with this poem he’d written, then [later] we were at this other guy’s girlfriend’s [house] and she showed me a card her boyfriend had given her and it had the poem in it! … Yeah, he’d copied it. (Amy, 19 years old)121

---

120 That panic is celebrated at web sites such as the ‘Panic Encyclopedia: The Definitive Guide to the Postmodern Scene’ [http://freedonia.com/panic/panic_contents.html] [accessed September 2000].

121 Not her real name.
Pen in hand and desire in his heart, Amy’s boyfriend’s action and her reaction captures a dilemma created by a modernist discourse where affect, originality and sincerity are mapped through each other: when originality comes to be doubted, so does the emotion that it has given an intensity to. The originality of the poem – for Amy and the other young women who were discussing fun-and-love greeting cards in the group – is what constituted much of the sincerity of the ‘poet’s’ affection. When that constitutive relation was apparently shattered, this produced a number of problems for Amy’s evaluation of the writer and their relationship. In the ‘original’ poem, she read his true and sincere expression of affection that was constituted, in part, by his aesthetic labouring but also by an essentialised relation between his production – the poem – and his ‘self’: the poem sprang from ‘him’. Amy’s boyfriend’s ‘insincerity’, however, was read as a path taken by an autonomous agent, a willful act that was inexplicable to her, unless it deliberately sought to give her something ‘false’.

In Amy’s tale, the poem ‘belonged’ to or was attached – if briefly – to her boyfriend: they were his ‘words’ and the realisation of ‘his’ affect and thoughts. As a temporarily unique utterance, the poem is seen by Amy to have an author but one who dies, as it were, in front of her eyes. What she witnesses is only one moment in an ongoing death: the author is not so much ‘dead’ as always dying, an entropic figure that can appear alive from the point of view of any specific moment or textual instance because the intertexts that constitute a text cling to it. The point here is that Amy’s boyfriend’s claims on the poem and Amy’s counter accusation, ‘emotional plagiariser’, both rely on the possibility of an impossibility.122

Amy’s account is spoken at a cultural moment when mechanical and electronic reproduction is everywhere and of everything. What Amy’s tale of betrayal demonstrates is that mechanical reproduction is not necessary to bring the authenticity of a work of art (a poem, for example) under pressure. Only a pen is required to exemplify Benjamin’s (1986) prediction that the ‘aura’ of the work of art, the experience or sense of transcendent uniqueness that the work of art is understood to produce ‘withers’ in the age of mechanical production (p.221). This idea leads Benjamin to

---

122 ‘He cheated’ she said.
understand that authenticity and tradition are shattered by the mass produced copy, evacuating the aura by ‘detach[ing] the reproduced object from the domain of tradition [and] substitut[ing] a plurality of copies for a unique existence’ (p.221). What is seen in Amy’s condemnation of her boyfriend and in her hope for something more genuine is how the original and authenticity are repeatedly put forward as a presence. This suggests against Benjamin, as Frow (1990) does, ‘that the commodification of culture has worked to preserve the myth of origins and of authenticity’ (p.419). What Amy speaks of is the desire for something original: something from her boyfriend, something of him and in doing so, she clearly believes in the possibility of that desire being fulfilled.

The self-knowing impossibility of love that characterises postmodern texts does not permeate Amy’s story.123 In Amy’s account, there is no sense that love has a history, rather, love begins with the two of them. Amy’s experience might be used instead to confirm Papson’s (1986) suggestion that the reason women use greeting cards is that they do not discern them as simulacra but are taken in by the greeting card’s appearance which is ‘buried in insignificance and innocence, belying the way it arises separated from material production’ (p.101). While these implications are swerved around by recouping the consumer and a refusal of the distinction between real and simulation, they raise a number of important issues. What is most worrying for Papson is the way women’s ‘expressive power’ – which while left undefined is taken here to be the terrain of emotions and interpersonal relations - is resold to them in the form of the greeting card ‘to maintain, reinforce, and re-establish social, particularly familial, relationships’, the thing that as simulacrum, the greeting card destroys (p.103). While Papson gestures to the historical location of women with respect to this ‘expressive power’, the implication is that having acquired or appropriated such power, women have a responsibility to use it appropriately. What is within both Papson and Finkelstein’s assessments of women’s greeting card use are assumptions

123 For example, the stories collected by Rose and Texier (1993) under a banner of ‘postmodern romance’. These tales are unsentimental: ‘The blackman’s guide to seducing white women with the amazing power of voodoo’, and stories that involve romantic seduction, include, the strange affair consummated between a teenage boy and his sister’s Barbie doll.
about meaning making, about what kind of objects greeting cards are and what kind of world of social relations those objects occupy.

**The-commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away**

In reclaiming the consuming subject from a discursive position isolated within binarised domestic and public realms and divorced from meaning making, questions about the use and meanings of commodities are not only possible but compelled. The commercial greeting card is mass produced in order to be bought by one person for the specific purpose of being given away to another person as a realisation of the relations between them. It thus touches (at least) two kinds of ‘object’ relations: commodity relations, especially as elaborated by Marx (1990) and gift relations, as conceptualised by Mauss (1966). These are not relations usually understood as inhering in one object. Therefore, these are initially outlined through a limited literature analysing greeting card use. The category of commodity, as formulated by Marx is then problematised, repositioning of the categories of use and exchange value as cultural categories. This usefully ‘unhooks’ these values from their discursive locations, enabling some writers to suggest that practices of consumption transform commodities into possessions. Such claims are read here as seeking to suppress the dangerousness of consuming.

A proposal for overcoming the nature of commodities for use as gifts has been developed in material anthropology, particularly by Miller (1987), following de Certeau’s (1988) reformulation of consumption as using. In particular, de Certeau distinguishes among different strands of consumption: as tactical, ‘the innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy [that users make] in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules’ cf strategic consumption practices which involve reproducing the dominant cultural economy, using its rules (p.xiv). It is the tactical strand that Miller develops, identifying practices of consumption as ‘recontextualising’ practices, transforming the impersonal commodity into the ‘possession’ of the consumer, by transforming alienated relations of commodity production into something social (p.191). Certain consumption practices associated with using greeting cards, specifically inscription practices, warrant considering in this respect. For example, the processes of inscribing the greeting card after purchase and before being given away would contribute to the greeting card’s
transformation, although Miller does not reduce such possession activity to direct work on the object. While not explicitly following the ‘transformation’ argument, some analysts of cultural practices with greeting cards treat the practice of giving greeting cards unproblematically as ‘gift’ giving (e.g. Johnson 1971). That is a view which necessarily ignores the social relations that produce the greeting card and configures those which involve its ‘giving’ in a particular way.

Perhaps anticipating claims for ‘personalising’ as made by Miller, and others, Papson argues, it is precisely such inscription processes that constitute the greeting card as a simulacrum so that it may not enter into gift relations (p.103). While the greeting card cannot shrug off its production context, there are important difficulties for the argument, as it is put by Papson. First, the pivotal role attributed to advertising. Second, Papson’s approach to language tends to treat the relation between context and text as a unidirectional one, that is, context as determining text.

In order to find a way through these issues, without promoting the greeting card as a novel object that formulates a new category of non-gift or non-commodity, the analysis takes its lead from Frow’s (1997b) analysis of accounts of commodity and gift exchange. That analysis is a critique of antithetical structurings of relations between the gift and the commodity and argues the concepts of commodity and gift are not distinct but always ‘seem to partake of each other’ (p.102). Analysing the circulation of objects and the social relations they constitute in a society, Frow champions a distinction between inalienable and alienable objects as categories that constitute a diverse configuration of relations between objects and persons, and between persons, and as the nexus of struggle in any social grouping. This formulation is drawn on to develop the analysis of the greeting card as a commodity consumed to give away texted love.

**Commodity, Gift and Value**

The commodity as a social relation is delineated by Marx (1990) through a number of qualities. In industrial production, Marx argues, there is a dominance of production of objects produced solely for exchange rather than for use. For Marx, this is an opposite condition of a pre-capitalist mode of production where use value (which attaches to those things produced for use or for simple surplus exchange) predominates. The
Consuming Us/er?

Social relation formed by production in exchange economies is, according to Marx, one of alienation. The commodity object is produced by labour power that is alienated from it and is opposed to labour as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer. The ‘alienable’ object is thought of as capable of being entirely separated from its producers (labour itself can be a commodity in Marx’s terms). The work – labour power – is not only imposed, it is unuseful and, therefore, not satisfying to those who perform the material production of objects as they are separate from those who control the raw materials and the knowledges necessary for production of an object.

Ultimately, via this process, Marx anticipates that qualities such as ‘love’ will come under the effect of those relations and be commodified. These previously inalienable qualities – possessed by, or understood as being intrinsically part of the person – become alienable from them, transformed from absolute use value into exchange value. What exacerbates this, in Marx’s view, is the invisibility of the social relations of capital/commodity production that always leads to the reification of things and their fetishising. This produces an essential difficulty for the use of greeting cards in everyday social relations and, in particular, for the performance of intimate social relations. The alien object, imbued with an abstraction of a social relationship or an emotion alienated from its first producer’s labour power, comes to circulate in social relations that are constituted in Marx’s discourse as non-alienated.

Different ‘object’ relations are described by Mauss (1966) in his work on small-scale communities. Mauss identifies gift economies, where objects circulate among individuals and groups in a manner that not only puts ‘goods’ for use into people’s hands but keeps social relations in a stable state. Mauss’ analysis of the social relations of gift giving has been used to understand social cohesion as based on ‘reciprocity’. The gift exchange constitutes a bond, usually understood as ‘obligation’ in its most social sense. Meeting the obligation constituted by a gift with a return gift cannot be immediate because that would cancel out the establishment of the obligation. While gift exchange cycles are usefully understood as symbolic systems, Mauss does not understand them as purely symbolic, although the kind of ‘interest’ that a commodity accrues in an exchange economy, oriented toward the accumulation of money, does
not accrue to the object or its holder in a gift economy. The importance of the symbolic nature of gift exchange is that giving unalienable objects away always involves a loss. (It is not like spending money to make money, as the capitalist term ‘investment’ suggests.) Benefits do accrue as the following exemplifies. In an extended and geographically dispersed gift-cycle participated in by Mae-Enga communities in Papua New Guinea, pigs are grown and given away in the Te ceremony that takes place over a long period of time (up to four years) with gift giving flowing in specific directions through the participating groups (Meggitt 1974). A reverse cycle of pigs, in the form of pork, requires the cycle to have been completed. The prestations are both public and private and involve a range of goods produced for exchange. There are immediate (that is ‘use value’) benefits such as food as well as symbolic (prestige) and other social benefits. While the Te cycle marks out the nature of the reciprocal dynamic among the Mae Enga, it is not all benign as the Te cycle is the key structure through which political power and control over resources and people is exercised by the men of the clans.

---

124 The ‘power’ of the gift is usually exemplified in anthropology texts by recounting Tamati Ranapiri’s statement about the hau (spirit and power) exemplified in an account of taonga (a gift) circulating, as told to and translated by Elsdon Best – a text that was at first missed by Mauss but about which he says ‘gives quite by chance the key to the whole problem’ (1966:8). Ranapiri says: ‘I shall tell you about the hau. Hau is not the wind that blows. Not at all. Suppose you have some particular object, taonga, and you give it to me; you give it to me without a price. We do not bargain over it. Now I give this thing to a third person who after a time decides to give me something in repayment for it, and he makes me a present of something (taonga). Now this taonga I received from him is the spirit (hau) of the taonga I received from you and which I passed on to him. The taonga which I receive on account of the taonga that came from you, I must return to you. It would not be right on my part to keep these taonga, whether they were desirable or not. I must give them to you since they are the hau of the taonga which you gave me. If I were to keep this second taonga for myself, I might become ill or even die. Such is hau, the hau of personal property, the hau of the taonga, the hau of the forest. Enough on that subject.’ (pp.8-9).

125 ‘Prestation’ (Fr.) involves a gift, or present and may include its formal presentation but in using ‘prestation’ rather than ‘cadeau’ (gift) Mauss indicates other significations, including ‘benefit’ but also the taking of an oath (‘une prestation de serment’) which imposes a burden.

126 What Meggitt (1974) demonstrates is that this is not a benign system in homeostasis, it engages political relations and is shown to be dynamic in the context of colonial and postcolonial government. New Guinea, where the Te operates, was an Australian colonial administration and while, with the transition to ‘independence’, the Te has lapsed into a significantly reduced form, the Big Men who mobilise the cycle are now involved in the political structures of the national administration. The character of the society is increasingly constituted through these more recent historical experiences.
Mauss’ work on tribal gift economies informs much work on objects and their circulation. In a study of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Christmas card use, Waits (1994) argues that paralleling an increased use of Christmas cards is a reduction of a particular kind of gift giving. This is the giving of ‘gimcracks’, gifts with no practical value. The exchange of gimcracks, Waits suggests, operationalises the reciprocity principle and its obligations, incurring a debt larger than its own worth. The obligations so instituted are drawn on over the course of the following year, calling on the recipient to fulfil various social obligations and for money (p.71). The Christmas card, Waits argues, is increasingly used as a replacement to this kind of gift giving, which had escalated in Europe and North America, creating potlatch like conditions – that is, a process where individuals and groups people amass goods and consume them ceremonially, demonstrating their wealth and status. Such consumption produces a competitive response, which at one extreme can be destructive of a whole group’s resources. While Waits’ analysis demonstrates how binarised exchange relations, as gift or commodity, are always already exceeded, its implication is that the ‘replacement’, the Christmas card is a benign form – a proposition the proliferation of names on Christmas card lists would offer a counter to. It is, more importantly, an analysis that tends to suppress the excessiveness of the potlatch.

Conceiving the greeting card as a gift means taking it to set up a cycle of reciprocity and constituting social relations that are important in constituting social stability and ‘sociality’ in general. In Mauss’ classic sense, objects reciprocally exchanged bring social responses, obligations and add value to both the gift and the social relation. Through gift exchange, an agonistic play of social power is offset by reciprocity. It is precisely in terms of such non-agonistic relations that family and intimate relationships are discursively constructed, in contrast to the agonistic relations of the public domain.

127 Mauss’ work on tribal gift economy has found a considerable audience outside anthropology. The Gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies came to wider prominence during the 1960s through the work of Debord (1977). Debord and the Situationists were interested in creating a world where everyone could express their dreams and desires. A past authentic tribal life cooperatively organised through a gift economy forms some of the foundation for their activism towards such a future.

128 This consumption can involve both gift giving on a grand scale and destruction of objects, for example, burning the group’s accumulated goods as a demonstration of wealth (Barnett 1938).
These are relations that women, in the context of the family and intimate relations, may be conceived as constituting. Women’s relations within the family are, in sociological terms, agapic love, gratuitous and disinterested behaviour or a ‘state of peace in which one gives one-self without any aim of control, struggle, power, or even reciprocation’ (Illouz 1997:245). So, are greeting cards, given in the billions by women to family and intimates, gifts of agapic love or is the giving of an interested kind, such as that conceived by Mauss in the gift relation?

To give a greeting card means that under the regime of the gift, the recipient is obligated to the giver. To be given an occasion greeting card means that another, perhaps, ‘like’ or equivalent occasion will be where the original recipient responds. If the card that is given is a non-occasion greeting card, an appropriate non-occasion on which a sentiment can be returned hovers around the relations between the two. While a birthday card has an easy equivalence, non-occasion cards do not. How does the original recipient ‘know’ what kind of non-occasion to reciprocate and when? Inflected through gender, non-occasion greeting card giving does not involve reciprocity. As greeting cards are overwhelming given by women and if fun-and-love non-occasion greeting cards are normatively given by women to men, then where is the evidence of reciprocity? On Mauss’ account and taking the most reductive approach to the issue of women and men’s consumption of greeting cards, women giving a greeting card are always the giver never the recipient.

The greeting card has an uneasy status as something given that is commodified texted-love. The analysis must find a way of explicating the position of the greeting card and its use in social relations. Marx’s distinction between use value and exchange value is not only premised on the identification of pre-capitalist modes of production but on the evaluation of those modes of production as being more desirable because they are ‘natural’, ‘real’. As a way of experiencing the world, these modes of production are imbued with a morally superior value but are a mode of exchange understood to be

---

129 De Rougement (1956) defines agapic love as christian love (p.67).
130 Marx’s concept of the commodity is things produced for exchange rather than immediate use and, therefore, Frow (1997b) argues, is a form found in pre-capitalist societies – although not as the dominant form (p.132).
rendered obsolete by capitalism itself. This is the position Finkelstein (1994a) and Papson (1986) are compelled to take, if implicitly, in critiquing greeting cards, suggesting instead that speaking directly to someone is preferable.\textsuperscript{131} Taken to its logical conclusion, it is a position that is tantamount to suggesting that since or before the industrial revolution, all social relations within and without the domain of the everyday have been, or are being, destroyed.\textsuperscript{132} If, however, as Sahlins (1976) suggests, the economic system is itself symbolically ordered, Marx’s classifications come under scrutiny: ‘which objects and why are they useful?’, ‘why certain needs and not others?’\textsuperscript{133} The naturalness of the category use value obviates these questions for Marx but Sahlins considers production according to cultural not material logic. Symbolic value is arbitrary – as de Saussure (1983) demonstrates – and varies according to individual locations within the economy. A culturally organised logic of use value enables these concepts, which have sedimented into naturalised positions as cultural categories, to then be considered with respect to that other characteristic aspect that usually distinguishes the commodity – its alienability.

What is proposed is not that the greeting card is a novel category of object or an object circulating in a system of gift exchange. In order to move forward from a round of arguments such as, is it a gift or is it a commodity, a rescue is performed by drawing on Frow’s (1997b) critique of the commodity and gift. Frow’s interest is in disrupting any necessary alignment between certain social orders, forms of exchange and categories of goods and their temporal and ontological statuses.\textsuperscript{134} What is seen in

\textsuperscript{131} Preferences for one form of language over another, as an issue of ‘appropriate’ or approved ways of speaking are analysed in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{132} On the grounds that such statements would necessitate refusing the inherent progress of the industrial revolution, Williams (1989) declines this position, pointing out that progress is, ‘not just mechanical, external progress either, but a real service of life ... more real freedom to dispose of our lives, more real personal grasp where it mattered, more real say. Any account of our culture which explicitly or implicitly denies the value of an industrial society is really irrelevant; not in a million years would you make us give up this power’ (p.10).

\textsuperscript{133} See Sahlins (1976) especially, Chapter 3, ‘Anthropology and two Marxisms: problems of historical materialism’ (pp.126-165).

\textsuperscript{134} While Waits’(1994) account is not unproblematic, it is interesting that it indicates that a form of gift giving strongly associated with ‘archaic’ social systems could have been operating in some form in twentieth century Europe, lending support to Frow’s (1997b) contention that what is at stake in the categories of ‘gift’ and ‘commodity’ is the periodising of modernity. Frow forms the thesis that categories like ‘gift’ and ‘commodity’ have come to be ‘integral to the more general logic that opposes traditional or archaic societies to industrial modernity’ (p.102).
Marx’s analysis of commodities, and what Frow contends is present in many analyses of gifts, is a tendency to imply is that capitalist modes of production are already ‘post’ a phylogenetically prior and, importantly, preferred mode of production. This necessarily means that the forms of social relationships so constituted are prior and preferred relations. By revisiting both Mauss and a number of other ethnographic accounts, Frow argues all social structures have ‘mixed’ economies and categories of personal possessions and that the commodity and the gift both involve ‘certain forms of calculation, strategy, and motivation’ (p.124). There is little evidence, for example, in the Te cycle, described earlier, of a benign homeostatic reciprocity. The gift, as a form of symbolic exchange, involves ‘calculations’, which are more ordinarily associated with economic exchange. The Big Men who operate the cycle of exchange draw their authority from their control of the cycle, which also provides the mechanism for that authority to be challenged. The social life of the greeting card is similarly blurred. The greeting card first constitutes social relations as a commodity, then as a gift. It is not, in any case, Frow reminds us, the object that is being given; it is the possession of the thing that is being given, directing attention to the cultural meaning of possession (p.103).

**Some consuming work (possessing and inscribing)**

Thinking the commodity and the gift as oppositional categories that ground antithetical economies and social structures illuminates a number of ways of thinking the greeting card as a-commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away. Consuming has come to be treated in the latter decades of the twentieth century not only as a practice involving the purchase and use of goods and services produced in the profit context of commercial activity but as necessarily involving meaning making practices through which the thing that is bought comes to have particular meanings for particular individuals. What some recent work on material culture has argued is that social relations of production are refigured by consumption practices and that objects originally produced as commodities can become possessed by individuals (Miller 1987). Certain consumption practices associated with using greeting cards, inscription

---

135 A thesis, Frow (1997b) points out, already seen in Mauss (p.102 and passim).
136 As it regularly is, giving most Big Men a tenure of around ten years and having to work to keep that tenure during that period (Meggitt 1974).
practices, are analysed through the corpus of greeting cards considering their contribution to such commodity possession. The greeting card illuminates these arguments in a particular way because if consumption practices succeed in refiguring the alienated greeting card into a give-able object, they do so always in order to ‘possess’ the object only temporarily. A specific challenge to the argument that inscribing the greeting card transforms it into something useable in social relations is put by Papson (1986). While Papson’s account of the greeting card as simulacrum has been countered above with respect to its diagnosis of the end of the social, the argument regarding inscribing and possessing greeting cards warrants specific attention.

**Possess it?**

The idea of possessing consumer goods, commodities, is one that is framed within a perspective of consumption as a cultural practice, rather than the simple acquisition of goods, in the sense of legal ownership. Inscription practices by the greeting card giver provide a view of one kind of work done around the consumption of greeting cards (Miller 1987). When a greeting card is chosen to do interactional work, there is no necessity to search the world, the arcade, or the mall for the perfect card. The greeting card buyer is not dependent on the greeting card publisher having imagined every detail of a sending situation and its ‘matching’ card. Unlike some commodities, the greeting card is almost always worked on by the card giver after it has been purchased, exemplifying de Certeau’s (1988) observation that mass produced goods are not completed objects that a person cannot interact with further.\(^{137}\)

A ‘perfect’ card can be made in any number of ways, as a few examples from the corpus exemplify. There are simple interventions such as an inscription, *Happy Anniversary, Mum and Dad* on a card from a child to parents, where the actual anniversary year (the 17th) is inserted. Pronouns may be changed – *she* to *he* or vice versa. Deletions may be made, or images altered to make a figure resemble the recipient – adding glasses to a face for instance. The text may be called up to be part of some personal joke – which may be more or less obscure to an outsider – or a more...

---

\(^{137}\) Recalling the thrifty grandmother who did not inscribe greeting cards she gave to her grandchildren.
Consuming Us/er?

accessible one such as a Christmas card recycled with the original sentiment crossed out and a new inscription inserted:

*Times are dry*

*Times are hard*

*Here’s your bloody Xmas card.*

**Example 2.1** Greeting card worked on and reinscribed by a consumer

A traditional friendship card obtained in this study was subject to work that made it ‘do’ things and make meanings that were never anticipated by its first producers. The card, an expensive card made of heavy textured paper, consists of three pages with a stanza of sentiment on each page. The greeting card was transformed in a number of ways, putting the producer’s purpose – a rather syrupy expression of friendship – to work in a particular sending situation (between gay men). The first stanza of the greeting card’s ‘verse’, acknowledging long term friendship and positive affect, was not altered. Both the second and third stanzas were re-inscribed with deletions and new wordings, the overall effect of which re-wrote the love expressed in the card as betrayal and anger. The final stanza, which in its original condition spoke of future friendship, was treated in a particular way: the text was mutilated but not obscured, compelling the reader to see what had been lost.

The greeting card’s original ‘friendship’ function in the example above has been called up specifically and re-signified via the material attack on the greeting card. The other unimagined context of the use of this greeting card is embodied by its user, a gay man, giving the card to someone who had sexually betrayed him. What is anticipated by this card user, as with all those second producers inscribing a greeting card, is that a greeting card recipient will appreciate the card giver’s efforts and recognise the ways a personalised greeting card engages the particularities of the relationship between the individuals (sardonic though they may be). These reciprocal efforts of recognition are part of the work that is involved in responding to the movement of the greeting card into the social and interpersonal domain.

In ways such as those described above, and more, greeting cards are inscribed, making them just right. This is not too difficult a process materially given that greeting cards are physically small and easily transformed, so there is more flexibility for greeting cards being made specific than other commodities. How, though, are such processes of specification to be read in relation to the greeting card as a commodity? The
personalising of greeting cards involves many kinds of textual interventions, the inscriptions ‘poaching’ the space of the first producer for the greeting card user’s purposes, insinuating the reader into another’s text (de Certeau 1988:xxi). Some of what might be inscribed is a space for the card user’s memories.\textsuperscript{138} Greeting cards form an important personal memento and are kept well past the occasion they were received for.\textsuperscript{139} Do such practices reconfigure the social relations of the greeting card’s production or constitute the ‘decommodification’ of the object, as Appadurai (1986) puts it, enabling the commodity to enter into use value relations or gift relations?

Inscribing the greeting card specifies the individual giver(s) and on Miller’s (1987) account contributes to transforming the commodity into something possessed by the consumer. The process of consuming is defined by Miller as this work of recontextualisation:

\begin{quote}
Translat[ing] the object from an alienable to an inalienable condition; that is, from being a symbol of estrangement and price value to being an artefact invested with particular inseparable connotations. (p.190)
\end{quote}

The effort of transforming not the object itself but the social relations constituted by the commodity-object – from alienable to ‘particular inseparable connotations’ or inalienable – is the work of consumption for Miller:

\begin{quote}
Work in this sense does not necessarily mean physical labour transforming the object; it may signify the time of possession, a particular context of presentation as ritual gift or memorabilia ... . The object is transformed by its intimate association with a particular individual or social group, or with the relationship between these. (p.191)
\end{quote}

The efficacy of such transformative work is an issue but first, from where does the necessity for such transformative work come about? Miller identifies the direction of the meaning making by commodities from commercial producer to the consumer. This retains the strength of the production context as a pre-existing hierarchy, a structure of

\textsuperscript{138} Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) find that memories are the highest ranked reason for cherishing an object (highest non-person reason) (p.85).

\textsuperscript{139} While some informants in this study had organised their greeting cards into separate boxes or brown paper bags, many others had cards in cupboards and drawers in an unorganised fashion, nevertheless retaining them perhaps indefinitely, although perhaps rarely looking at them.
constraint and agency: ‘people are forced to live in and through objects which are created through the images held of them by a different and dominant section of the population’ (p.175). This produces the necessity for the possibility of transforming and possessing commodities. Any scope for appropriation of the first producer’s meaning is with individual consumers and is conceived by Miller through the notion of habitus. Habitus is Bourdieu’s (1977) proposal for a sociocultural structure that produces individual action, enabling an analysis of (especially) language, cultural artefacts and cultural institutions that is politically not personally oriented. Bourdieu renders it as the dispositions, modes of operation, values and inclinations that the subject acquires interactively, especially in contexts such as the family and educational institutions (p.82). Miller takes an artefact to be read accordingly and although not rendering habitus as a deterministic concept, his account leaves room for a hierarchy of consumers: somewhat-duped consumers and some consumers not-so-duped.

This hierarchy is seen in the experience of one informant, Kaye, who received an unexpected response to sending a greeting card for the first time to friend. Writing back (by email) the card recipient told Kaye: ‘Thanks, but I’m one of those people who just doesn’t like greeting cards.’ In thanking and refusing the efforts Kaye had made, the card recipient did not simply put aside the greeting card but emphasised a difference between them. Kaye expressed a sense of embarrassment, suggesting the rejection involved a power relation, although just what else is involved in that relation is difficult to say. One possibility is that the difference being constituted between these women is a class difference. The greeting card’s inexpensiveness somewhat complicates this and so while this issue is pursued in a later chapter, there are other general difficulties for conceiving limits to who may possess commodities.

The kind of hierachising effect resulting from Miller’s account is rendered by Kress, in an interview with King (1997), as an inevitable consequence of ‘theories of use’, such as de Certeau’s (1988). Kress suggests argues that the limitation of such theories is that they have ‘convention at their core’ and ‘inevitably creativity and innovation are rare,
exceptional, prized’ (p.292). If the meaning making of representation, for example, is not treated as a conventional deployment of the resources of a social semiotic system (the common-sense norm) but as always dynamic and as potentially disruptive, then human semiotic practice is never seen as merely use (p.293). Consequently, there is no need to compare novel and conventional usage, avoiding the tendency to put those who perform such novel uses in a privileged position in relation to those who do not.

Inscribing is not possessing?

The possibility of inscription transforming greeting cards, Papson (1986) argues, is precisely the process that produces women’s misrecognition of the simulacrum as real social exchange (p.103;106). In particular, Papson targets advertising as creating those conditions for women’s consumption of the greeting card and use of a simulacrum for doing social relations (and hence in Papson’s view destroying the very relations women seek to maintain). There are two strands to the argument Papson puts that the current discussion is concerned with as part of the issue of ‘possessing’ the meanings made by greeting cards: a relation between the language of greeting cards and advertisements and a relation between the production context of the greeting card language and the social relations of use (the relationship between text and context more broadly is the concern of Chapter 4).

Papson argues that women do not recognise greeting cards as ‘prefabricated’ – utterances that come ready-made for use over ‘natural’ ones that are invented in their specific context of use – because greeting card language is the same as the language of advertising texts (p.102;104). The most obvious feature shared by greeting cards and advertising is a use of personal pronouns, producing in advertising language what

---

140 Kress’s concerns are with meaning making, developing a notion of a motivated sign. The motivated sign also involves the notion of the always newly made sign, a remaking, transformation of existing resources in the light of the interests of the sign-maker now, at this moment (for an elaborated version of this argument, see Kress 1993).

141 Papson (1986) follows Smith’s (1978) distinction between natural utterances as having a ‘material historical reality’ and fictive utterances, like poetry which, according to Smith, exist extemporaneous to specific contexts and are given a fictional history by the reader/listener. Papson modifies Smith’s description at this point, arguing that the language of greeting cards is fictive and prefabricated – ‘packaged’ ready for use in a particular way – and stays that way, despite its use in a particular context (p.106).
Fairclough (1995) refers to as the ‘synthetic personalisation’ of social relationships, e.g. uses of ‘we’ that constitute an imaginary inclusiveness between the advertising text and the reader (consumer) (p.141).\textsuperscript{142} While another important feature of advertising language, Fairclough (1994) suggests, is that its audience or addressee is not differentiated, the undifferentiated addressee of greeting cards is unlike that of advertising texts, always specified in the practices of purchasing and giving a greeting card. When a greeting card is given to someone, there is no difficulty tracking the ‘you’ or the ‘me’ or the ‘us’ of the card’s language. While greeting cards and advertising language have a number of characteristics in common and the selection of particular grammatical features is meaningful, they must be interpreted in relation to the specificities of the text and its contextual features. A pattern of personal pronouns in greeting cards cannot be interpreted as if the cards were in fact advertising – otherwise, everyday casual conversation would be equivalent to advertising.\textsuperscript{143} To claim that because both greeting cards and advertising are texts produced in the operation of capitalism that their grammatical selections mean the same thing is to elide the specificity of that production, to disappear the reader and to conflate the texts generically.

Papson’s argument is that in order for the greeting card to be a gift and, therefore, ‘naturally’ involved in maintaining social relations, the card giver must first possess the greeting card, not simply as a legally owned object but in an inalienable condition. If the greeting card is not ‘possessed’ by processes of inscription, then it remains a space through which commodity relations are enacted. Practices of inscription, Papson argues, do not have any power to transform the greeting card commodity because processes of production and marketing orient women to choosing ‘prefabricated utterances’ rather than self-producing natural ones (p.106). It is unclear if Papson intends his claim about marketing creating this effect to apply across the terrain of consumption of mass produced texted artefacts or if it is restricted to greeting cards. If it is a specific claim, it is undermined to some degree in the Australian context because,

\textsuperscript{142} There are other characteristics in common between greeting cards and advertising and other small texts such as ‘personal’ advertisements, even in spoken form (Coupland 1996), because they are ‘little texts’, as Halliday puts it (1994:397).

\textsuperscript{143} See Eggins and Slade 1997 on the personal pronoun in casual conversation.
as this study has found, retail consumption of greeting cards is not mediated by advertising. If Papson’s claim is a more general claim that advertising and the dispersal of prefabricated utterances generates the conditions for their acceptance over the natural, then this presumes that ‘the market’ is always entirely successful in persuading the individual consuming subject. This amounts to a version of Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1993) thesis that even if resistance to the realm of production is theoretically possible, it will not be effective because an onslaught of information numbs the subject which, therefore, cannot even consider resisting (p.27). This is patently not the case. Claims about the effects of advertising more generally cannot in any case be secured by virtue of attributing it indiscriminately with powers of ‘mind control’, as Irving (1991) puts it, despite whatever objections (and there are many) can be mounted to advertising practices, particularly their representational practices. The negative effect of women’s use of greeting cards on the social in Papson’s account is, therefore, reduced to an issue of language or more specifically, the relationship between text and context.144

Prefabricated utterances are something not only ready-made for use but, in Papson’s view, can only be used in one way, privileging one meaning making context (commercial production) and reducing and fixing the relation between text and context as a deterministic one (p.103). Signing and otherwise inscribing a greeting card is, accordingly, done in a space that invites inscription but is already shaped by the greeting card’s producers, constraining its use (p.105). In reducing the meaning making of greeting cards to its production context, the reader/user is again elided. A different kind of privilege is afforded to the everyday by Papson as the site of ‘natural’ utterance production, disguising the extent to which discourses are in a certain sense already ready-made as a resource for social action.

Leaving further aspects of the language of greeting cards aside for the moment, the arguments put so far are intended to establish grounds for ‘re-categorising’ the greeting card, although not as a novel category of object. Applying Frow’s (1997b)

144 While Chapters 4 and 5 take up a number of issues that coalesce around language and greeting cards, it is necessary to anticipate that focus here because it is directly concerned with the issue of possession and personalising commodities.
critique of analyses of objects and social structures, both Miller and Papson’s arguments emerge from formulations where social structure, the mode of production and exchange, the alienability (or not) of certain objects and the kind of social relations so constituted are aligned. The social relations that greeting card consuming and giving constitute should not depend on the ‘success’ or otherwise of consumption practices to transform the greeting card into an object which can enter into ‘real’ social relations. The greeting card commodifies love and is given away. It is by focusing on the relation with the possession, love, that the thesis moves forward with respect to what it is that is at stake.

**Giving away what is being held on to**

As a-commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away what is being ‘consumed’ and ‘given away’? If, as already accepted, the commodity and gift are oppositional categories problematically aligned with social orders, as analytical categories they become less useful. Facing a similar issue, Frow (1997b) follows Weiner’s (1992) cue, promoting distinctions among objects categorised according to their alienability or inalienability. The productiveness of this strategy leads this analysis in the same direction.

One of the most important features of love in Western thought is that it is taken to be ‘inalienable’. Inalienable objects – goods which cannot circulate freely – like ‘love’ contrast to those goods that are categorised as transferable (alienable) goods – food, for example. Love’s inalienableness is seen discursively in its being not only ‘attached’ to the person but inside the body (the heart, the blood etc.). Thus, greeting card publishing corporations and greeting card users are involved in practices that appear to alienate the inalienable. The idea that love cannot be alienated from human beings but has come recently come under threat through objects such as greeting cards – as Finkelstein (1994a) and Papson (1986) imply – is premature given that Marx already imagined it as alienable, anticipating its commodification as an effect of capitalism. What does this mean for those giving and receiving fun-and-love greeting cards? Illouz (1997) examines gifts in the general field of ‘romance commodities’. For Illouz’s informants, the most important of these in the romantic relation is the ‘little gift’, such as a greeting card (p.242). Illouz suggests that the lack of expense, the ‘smallness of the romantic gift’ is important:
The romantic gift inverts the rules of gift giving. The solidarity expressed by the gift is all the more convincing in that it is condensed into an economically worthless object. Where one would have expected the romantic bond to be most commodified [in gift giving], it appears, on the contrary, to evade the logic of the market and to retain as valuable only those actions and objects that signify neither by their economic value nor by the prestige attached to them, but by their capacity to communicate feelings. (p.243)

Such a romantic gift, Illouz suggests, ‘points to all that cannot be commodified or indexed to social status: spontaneity, originality, intimacy, effort, creativity, and authenticity (p.243). Love as a cultural category of inalienable things, in this cultural moment, has a quality that is intensified. Love has come to mean meaning itself against the emptiness of Baudrillard’s vision of the world and to stand for a world outside the ‘market’. Thus, love suffers from being overinvested against the process of its alienation and, as texted love, is both an inalienable yet alienated cultural category.

While under the Maussian sense of gift giving, the recipient would be obliged to a return of a gift, Illouz suggests that for the romantic gift obligation does not reside with the recipient to reciprocate but with the giver to ‘express sentiments, intimacy, and shared experiences that negate market value and status’ (p.242). From the perspective of categories of alienability, what the giver is expected to do is give up, or put into circulation, something ordinarily understood as inalienable from them, that is, their ‘love’. Weiner (1992) identifies just such a doubled category of objects in gift economies, examining what she frames as ‘the paradox of keeping while giving’. The ‘inalienable possession’ is an object associated with persons in the manner of inalienable objects but which under certain circumstances does come into circulation (p.33). What makes a possession inalienable

---

145 In the ethnography, *Inalienable possessions: the paradox of keeping while giving* 1992, Weiner attends to the cloth possessions made largely by women in Polynesia, noting that such artefacts are rarely considered by those studying Polynesian political hierarchy as an essential form of material wealth (p.47).

146 As part of a broader thesis regarding the constitution of gift and exchange economies, Frow (1997b) points out that while alienability is ordinarily designated as a central feature of analyses of exchange economies (i.e. the transfer of private property), it is not usually seen as part of analyses of gift economies (p.126). As the inalienable possession is a category over which there is competition, it is a category of things paradoxically formulating gift economies in ‘the need not to relinquish the things which are the objects of most intense desire’ (p.129 italics in original).
is its exclusive and cumulative identity with a particular series of owners through time. Its history is authenticated by fictive or true genealogies, origin myths, sacred ancestors and gods. In this way, inalienable possessions are transcendent treasures to be guarded against all the exigencies that might force their loss. (p.33)

The crucial feature of such possessions, Weiner argues, is that the authority accumulated in this way makes them a key source of social and political prestige, and hence of social hierarchy:

Political hierarchy arises out of the successful dual endeavors to preserve and expand one’s social identity, not only through marriage and alliance, but by being bold and wealthy enough to capture someone else’s inalienable possessions, embrace someone else’s ancestors, magic, and power, and then, transfer some parts of these identities to the next generation. (pp.47-48)

The ‘genealogy’ of love includes its constitution as a person’s experience of a natural phenomenon but it is both possessed and inalienable. Love, as ‘my love’ can under certain circumstances, come into circulation (from ‘me’ to ‘you’). This is a way of situating how love is understood as always attached to a one person but the effect of it, its ‘magic’, benefits another person. While Chapter 3, in part, looks at what amounts to being the conditions for the alienability of love, as an inalienable possession – when and why it can come into circulation and what restrictions or effects there are on its circulation, particularly with respect to the gender of those whose inalienable possession it is – the remainder of this section sketches some of what is involved in ‘interest’ in love. If love is an inalienable possession, then those to whom it is attached, those who constitute its ‘genealogy’ would have considerable interest in its possession.

**Possessing the inalienable**

Thinking back to Weiner’s point – quoted above – that successful endeavours to capture someone else’s inalienable possessions produce social and political hierarchies, there is an opportunity to analyse the desire and struggle over love as an emotion, in terms of power. One part of this struggle is over whether or not love is or, rather, should be alienable or not. This in a sense is the struggle in which Finkelstein and Papson, among others, are engaged with respect to greeting cards. For Papson and Finkelstein, it is a struggle manifestly between persons and greeting card publishing corporations. Not conceived as a struggle between social groupings of persons (e.g. as pertains between clan member affiliations with Big Men among Mae Enga) but as between a grouping of persons and non-persons for the right to possess
and, therefore, being able to ‘speak’ love. What is at stake is who controls the
discursive production of emotion. Emotions, as Weiner (1992) might put it, acquire
their essential force and their scarcity-value from being conceived as heritable within
what can be metaphorically treated as a closed descent group, among persons (p.6).147
The ‘magic’ of emotions that persons have possession of is desired by corporations.148
The personalising and emotionalising of corporations and the use of mass produced
commodities in the performance of intimate social relationships, in different ways
suggest that certain kinds of humanity and non-humanity are being struggled over. As
Frow (1997b) writes:

It is perhaps [an] ambivalence, or [a] sense of a tension between countervailing
forces, that now most precisely characterizes the status, midway between the
private and the publicly saleable, of that set of attributes of “the person” and
the personal that have defined in our society the protected domain of the
human. (p.145)

How is the love texted by fun-and-love greeting cards caught up in these relations? If,
as Foucault (1983a) suggests, emotion is currently the site of knowing self as a moral

---

147 Treating the idea of a ‘closed descent group’ metaphorically, as that which constitutes the
category of ‘persons’ (cf animals or other organic life forms) means rather different arguments
can be shaped. One such argument might appear within an evolutionary discourse, that
modern humans are more emotionally ‘evolved’ than the earliest humans. It is an argument
that is traceable in some racist discourses and practices. For example, it was unproblematic for
colonial and welfare authorities to ignore the grief and pain of indigenous Australians as part of
practices of systematically removing children from their families. (See, National Inquiry into the
separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families (Australia)
1997). From a different perspective – but one that still ‘centres’ modern humans – emotion is
critical in the discursive constitution of artificial (cyber) life. Artificial intelligence is in certain
senses highly valued but it is something around which considerable anxieties are formed – as is
explored in many science fiction texts where ‘synthetic’ beings or computers turn against their
human creators (cf Haraway 1985). The television science fiction, Star Trek, provides good
examples. An ongoing story line around the character ‘Data’, a cyber life form, is whether or not
‘he’ should be allowed to acquire or whether he wants emotions. As Data begins to accumulate
emotions, this provides plot opportunities for him to ‘lose’ or playfully use his acquired
humanity.

148 The pervasiveness of this process is seen in the staging of events such as the ‘3rd Annual
Conference on Spirituality, Leadership and Management’ conference (Ballarat December 1-4,
2000). Corporate management consultants now speak of workers bringing their ‘emotional
selves to work and also their meaning’ and of corporate environments as ‘love-based’. See, for
example, the following statement by Kerry Cochrane, president of the business organisation
SLAM (Spirituality, Leadership and Management Network): ‘right now, we are part of an
Australia-wide movement hoping to help restore the “heart” and ethics in business and
government operations. Our foundational premise is that the wealth of Corporations and
Institutions is not simply Intellectual Property, not only human knowledge and skills, but
human spirit as well’ [http://slam.net.au] [accessed 11th December 2000].
and ethical being, then perhaps a woman’s giving of texted love is a practice that affirms, ‘I am human’ (p.238). Might the giving of texted love produce in the other, not an obligation to return love, but a demand to say the same? If so, the use of texted love imbricated in relations between subjects positioned differently with respect to the sphere of emotions, especially feminine and masculine subjects and their intimate relations.

To treat the idea of a ‘closed descent group’ even more metaphorically leads to thinking about the way that as subjects of the interpersonal and emotional realms, women’s ‘ownership’ of the possession love is involved in the authentication of sexual difference. The commodification of the private and intimate realm of emotion and woman’s positioning as subject of the interpersonal set up a relation where greeting card publishing corporations and greeting card users – that is, capital and women – are involved in struggle over the possession and ‘right’ to circulate emotion. That struggle is not between corporations and women, although Papson (1986) sees it that way. Women’s use of the corporation’s greeting card is, in some senses, an alliance around the ‘magic’ of the inalienable possession love.

Conceptualising the greeting card as a site of tension with respect to a struggle over the category of things that are alienable and inalienable provides a way of resituating critiques of greeting cards. It also points to the way in which greeting cards are situated at a nexus of struggle: over the possession of inalienable emotion, and the twin processes of emotionalisation of the public sphere and commodification of the private. These issues as sketched here suggest some of what is pursued in the following chapter and beyond, especially Chapter 7.

**Conclusion**

The view of the greeting card that has been put in this chapter has been from the perspective of consumption embedded within social relations. The greeting card as a commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away illustrates that the categories of ‘gift’ and ‘commodity’ are always already exceeded. The question of whether or not consumption practices succeed in transforming the social relations of production is obviated by recognising that while the alienability of the greeting card produces certain practices, these are always potentially subject to failure, as Amy and Kaye’s remarks exemplify.
Most important is the struggle over the inalienability of love and competition over inalienable possessions. As something given away, the greeting card comes into the recipient’s possession, embodying something of both the first producer (collapsing all those involved in its construction into one) and the second producer’s (the greeting card giver) inalienable possession. While the greeting card’s production context constrains its recontextualisation – it may never be able to be food, for example – the productiveness of the simulacra relation is such that it may be other things (the ‘scratch and sniff’ cards mentioned in the Introduction come to mind: they are already ‘scent’). While the third producer is the recipient of a-commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away, the love texted by a greeting card may or may not be the subject of further struggles. The greeting card collection, for example, may enter into other relations, as something precious and personal belonging to a deceased mother over which daughters may struggle. The greeting card may also be re-alienated from its recipient/producer, entering into circulation as an object to be worked with by an individual constructing a homemade greeting card or an artwork or a thesis.
3 Performing social relations: gendered bodies

Introduction

If it is accepted that the greeting card is a commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away, the question remains as to what is ‘being done’ in giving away something alienable, a greeting card, and an inalienable possession, love. The current chapter considers that issue through the sexually differentiated use of greeting cards, delineating a complex of issues around gender and interpersonal interaction, particularly with respect to family and intimate relations and which form the conditions for women putting the inalienable possession ‘love’ into circulation. While, women and men’s uses of greeting cards are readable within particular histories with respect to the care and control of the inalienable possession ‘love’, of particular importance is how interactional practices are involved in the discursive construction of gendered subjects and how individual subjects understand, respond and perform that positioning.

The first section of the chapter outlines how women’s everyday performances of interpersonal interaction, what might in an ordinary sense be understood as ‘love’ practices, are viewed. It treats ‘women and love’ as part of the realm of the everyday, drawing on the ethnographically derived concept of di Leonardo (1987) of ‘kinwork’. Di Leonardo conceives ‘kinwork’ as embodying labour and struggle over meaning, resources and rights, refusing a binary of self-interest and altruism. The concept of kinwork is most appropriate to women’s use of occasion greeting cards, so it is expanded in the current chapter as ‘intimate interactional work’ or ‘intimacy work’ performed with non-occasion fun-and-love greeting cards.

While intimate interactional work benefits the intimate relationship (in what specific ways is considered in Chapter 7), commodification of the personal and interpersonal realms by greeting cards benefits women more generally. Given that women are
discursively constituted through their relation to personal and intimate relations, the
greeting card’s commodification of interpersonal and intimate relationships
destabilises woman’s naturalised occupation of ‘expressive’ social roles. The use of
non-occasion fun-and-love greeting cards is not necessarily clearly marked out along
gender lines (cf occasion greeting cards). Men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards
involves masculine subjects accessing modes of meaning making and meanings those
subjects have traditionally been excluded from. The importance of this is that while
the interpersonal and the emotional are problematically valued, culturally, they are
domains where women are constituted as subjects so that men’s intimacy work
necessarily impinges on that domain. To what extent and how should any
encroachment be interpreted? Men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards emerges out of
a different discursive history with respect to the interpersonal than women’s and thus
constitutes a differently embodied practice. Drawing on Foucault’s (1988) history of
sexuality, the second section of the chapter analyses men’s use of fun-and-love greeting
cards as a certain mode of self-care. Men’s use of fun-and-love greeting card is
readable largely (but not exclusively) within a history where techniques of the self
come to be formed in relation to the conjugal relationship. This means that any current
trend toward men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards is already different to women’s
use of the cards.

**Mediating social relations: love, labour, power**

The greeting card is constituted at a nexus of social relations, interpersonal interaction,
emotion and sexually differentiated consumption. Women’s positioning as subjects of
the interpersonal realm is realised in social practices such as giving greeting cards. The
greeting card thus occupies a social space in which key performances of ‘woman’ are
enacted in the culture. Practices such as giving greeting cards are involved in the
ongoing process of the constitution of a gendered subjectivity: what Probyn (1993)
realises in the phrase ‘sexing the self’ (p.165). These practices may be dubbed ‘moral’
behaviours, for example, nurturing and caring for others and may be understood as
essential to the constitution of family, community and society. A difficulty with this
perspective is that, in both social construction and essentialist discourses, it tends to
entrench stereotypical views of femininity and masculinity (Gatens 1995:53). This section situates women’s greeting card use among accounts of women’s interactional practices, developing a view of it as labour that constitutes conditions for loving and competition over the inalienable possession ‘love’.

The section begins by sketching approaches to women’s interactional practices with greeting cards and other commodified technologies, such as the telephone. It goes on to draw on the ethnographically derived concept of ‘kinwork’ to put women’s greeting card giving practices into relation with the performance of a particular sexed and gendered self without collapsing such practices into a binary of nurturing or self-interest.

**Love or labour or power relations**

Greeting card publishers, as reported in Chapter 1, foreground the ties among women. Similarly, a ‘network’ approach forms one of the important ways in which women’s social activity is analysed in a strand of feminist work. Greeting card giving, according to that approach, is a social practice that is constitutive of female kin and friendship networks and forms solidarity between sisters, mothers, daughters (Stivens 1978; Coates 1996). For example, Moyal (1992) identifies interpersonal networks threaded among the technological network of the telephone. The breadth of this network’s interests, that is, the depth of women’s social use of the telephone ascertained by Moyal’s empirical study includes

- family matters, child rearing, aged care, health, emergency decisions, grief, bereavement, trauma, household maintenance, crafts, hobbies, community and religious needs and interests; through sporting, environmental and diverse cultural activities, counselling and volunteer care, to wide-ranging political, economic and intellectual exchange. (p.67)

---

149 One form this takes is a fantasy constituted in both feminist and masculinist essentialist discourses which renders women as on a ‘higher’ plane of humanity compared to men who are mired in the dross of human existence.

150 While the telephone is increasingly used pragmatically to pay bills and to queue for information, it is also important interpersonally and is especially important for women with respect to family and friends (Moyal 1992:59). See also Rakow 1992 and Sarch 1993 for studies of gender and the telephone.
This list of everyday activities gives concrete shape to women’s association with the personal and the private and contrasts with pragmatic use of the telephone, for giving and receiving information or for emergencies.

Like the telephone, the greeting card may be used to perform interpersonal interaction at a distance. In contemporary conditions of globalisation, there is a flourishing diasporic flow of people who may or may not be able to maintain physical and imaginary connections to community and kin. The telephone and greeting card are technologies which enable intimacy when interaction must be done at a distance, although physical distance as a good or proper reason to use technologies such as greeting cards is rejected by Papson (1986:102) and Finkelstein (1994a:159). Connections between individuals in so called ‘virtual’ communities are sometimes posited as replacing traditional connections but virtual communities have existed since the letter, at least, although previously these have functioned at a different temporal pace (the question of proximity – both physical and social – is elaborated in Chapter 4). While all interaction is mediated, ‘at a distance’ interaction requires technological mediation for its performance.

As an approach to communicative practices, the network approach leads to detailed descriptions of women’s relations with each other but by interpreting those practices relations in terms of nurturance the operations of power are ignored. It is an approach that unintentionally aids and abets essentialist and functional arguments regarding women’s use of greeting cards. A non-network approach to the use of greeting cards is taken by Johnson (1971). In a study of the exchange of Christmas cards, Johnson focuses on the differentiation of individuals through the distribution of certain kinds of social value, rather than on the formation of solidarity. Johnson observes who sends greeting cards to whom at Christmas time, drawing on the problematic and narrow sample of her own friends, family, colleagues and acquaintances. The traditional Christmas card list, consisting of the families and individuals to whom a Christmas card will be sent, is identified not merely as a list of who is within the sender’s social circle, but as a map of status relations (these are institutional roles in Johnson’s terms (p.27)). Johnson focuses on the way reciprocity in the exchange marks these status relations out. Where there is reciprocity of sending and receiving, the argument goes, then it follows that the giver and recipient have equal status and where there is an
unequal sending and receiving expectation and behaviour, sending occurs in the
direction of lower status to higher status individual (p.28). Such ‘upward’ sending,
Johnson interprets as the cultivation of social relations with those individuals
(graduate student to professor, for example).

A serious problem with Johnson’s analysis is its reduction of power relations to
institutional status. As Foucault (1981; 1990; 1991) demonstrates, modern power is
dispersed and cannot be treated reductively. Johnson also problematically links
particular card choices to certain kinds of individuals. Using a combination of
socioeconomic and mobility aspirations and an unclarified category of ‘class’,
Christmas card use is identified as a phenomenon of a mobile educated middle class.
Cards are not sent by ‘lower class and working-class individuals’ because they see
family and friends all the time, living and working as they do in close proximity to
each other (p.28). The theoretical context for these (unsubstantiated) claims is not
identified by Johnson but would seem to be the post-war sociological work on English
family life by, for example, Bott (1968) and others. What is also striking in Johnson’s
account, from a perspective looking back on the prominence of gender analysis over
the last three decades, is its absence of a discussion of gender in any terms. Instead,
mixing and matching a number of other social categories of ‘identity’, Johnson finds
certain patterns of greeting card choice, distinguishing among ‘well-established WASP
[white anglo saxon protestant] professors …[and] Jewish and youngish, slightly left-of-
center professors… [and] people with strong political convictions’ (p.29).

Despite relying on a narrowly conceived notion of difference, Johnson recognises that
greeting card choice, like all consumption, involves signalling certain values and
positions and negotiates identity. The Christmas greeting card is a commodity that
makes cultural categories and social relationships visible and stable, in Douglas and
Isherwood’s (1978) terms, for instance, the cost and ‘quality’ of a Christmas card

---

(151) In Bott’s study, important for its positively oriented and empirical approach to working class
life, working class families are analysed as close and extended and middle class families as
substituting friends for family because, in part, they did not live geographically proximate to
family.
signifying the giver symbolically. Identity and social position cannot be resolved into descriptors such as, ‘well-established WASP professors’ or ‘women’, although giving greeting cards is constitutive of particular social relations.

**Love and labour and power relations**

In an alternative account of women’s communicative practices, di Leonardo (1987) develops a way of analysing women’s greeting card use that is useful and compatible with the position developed in Chapter 2 on the consumption of greeting cards as a commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away. While di Leonardo’s account treats the greeting card as a ‘gift’, paying no attention to its commodified form, what is developed is a way of analysing women’s greeting card use which acknowledges the ties that are formed among women and keeps sight of power relations, particularly familial love relations.

What is missing from ‘network’ accounts of women’s communicative practices is any sense of the labour that is involved in those practices. This is an issue that finds voice with respect to many everyday practices by women:

> Somewhere along the line, my female friends and I took on, unasked, a ‘third shift’ - the job of family-happiness manager, juggling not only lessons and games and school events and nights out with adult friends, but everyone’s emotional wellbeing. This is a thankless and exhausting task … . (Bolotin 1999:20, italics added)

An essentialist discourse would constitutes Bolotin’s resentment as fighting against her ‘nature’, and some feminist discourses would read it as an argument with ‘nurture’. Taking a labour focus, Hochschild (1983) would constitute what Bolotin is doing as emotional labour, a labouring that she demonstrates goes on not only in the private realm but in the public realm. Interpersonal interaction more generally accrues economic benefits, as is made clear by Hochschild’s (1983) account of the emotional labour required of airline flight attendants and their evaluation not only by what they do and say, but by their physical demeanour. For example, they are expected to smile under all circumstances at customers. Various kinds of interpersonal activity are

---

[152] This is terrain developed in a case study of the consumption of a particular kind of non-occasion greeting card in Chapter 5.
conceived as having a public value. In Moyal’s (1992) communication perspective, the public value of telephone talk is brought under the rubric of a ‘feminine information flow’:

the feminine “information flow” may be seen to represent a critical social support system that underlies family, community and national development, and to be, arguably, as important to national well-being and progress as the more politically visible and highly rated masculine business information flow. (p.67)

This claim parallels the significance of women’s domestic labour to a nation’s economic well being. Interactional demands and behaviours brought about as part of the structuring of capital in a service ‘industry’ involve demands placed on both women and men. While the benefits of such work accruing widely, emotional and interactional labour in the private realm is broadly differentiated across sex.

Di Leonardo’s premise is that across feminist work concerned with women’s everyday life experiences there is a tendency to put women’s social networks (or ‘culture’) in contrast to women’s activity in the public sphere. This produces a theoretical cul-de-sac and constitutes binarised subject positions for women:

Those who focus on women’s work tend to envision women as sentient, goal-oriented actors, while those who concern themselves with women’s ties to others tend to perceive women primarily in terms of nurturance, other-orientation – altruism. (p.441)

Through ethnographic work focusing on women’s communicative practices, including the use of greeting cards, di Leonardo sidesteps the ‘labour’ vs ‘network’ distinction, analysing it as a binary of self-interest and altruism (p.442). This enables her to argue that the binary cannot be mapped onto public and private domains respectively: after all, ‘why have women fought for better jobs if not, in part, to support their children?’ (p.452). Women’s use of greeting cards is instead analysed by di Leonardo as part of the social labour that women do, which keeps family and community units ticking over but in the place of the self-interest/altruism binary the notion of kinwork is developed. Kinwork embodies the effort involved in social relations and puts it in a relation with power. Kinwork enables the exchange of greeting cards to be seen as more than an example of “women’s culture” or an additional unpaid burden on women. The labour focus of kinwork is useful because it specifies that doing social relations and having an emotional life involves considerable effort being expended.
Sending greeting cards to acknowledge significant occasions (and non-occasions) in people’s lives is more than a market organised reflex. It involves keeping track of those occasions, noticing those moments, choosing an appropriate message and image, writing on the card, finding a stamp and finally, posting or hand-delivering it. The category of kinwork is also expansive - incorporating all of the kinds of things that were in Moyal’s list (above) of women’s social practices; greeting card giving is but one illustration of its operation:

[Kinwork is] the conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross-household kin ties, including visits, letters, telephone calls, presents, and cards to kin; the organisation of holiday gatherings; the creation and maintenance of quasi-kin relations; decisions to neglect or to intensify particular ties; the mental work of reflection about all these activities. (Di Leonardo 1987:442-443)

The importance of the notion of kinship work, as di Leonardo configures it, is that it embodies both labour and love, revealing the self interest/altruism dichotomy and reconfiguring what has been conceived of as a ‘labour of love’ into a politically viable term. Kinwork usefully specifies ‘doing’ social relations in a manner where what is culturally conceived of as the inalienable possession familial or nurturing ‘love’ circulates among women, producing, in Weiner’s (1992) terms, a certain sociopolitical hierarchy. Kinwork is where power comes into relation with love and labour.

Everyday routines, organising the space of kin – the home and family, involve ongoing effort and have both altruistic and self-interested outcomes for women, this ‘women’s work’ has other beneficiaries, in particular, men and children (di Leonardo 1987:451).

The kinwork of women

is not only women’s labour from which men and children benefit but also labour that women undertake in order to create obligations in men and children and to gain power over one another ... [to] creat[e] future obligations between individuals. (pp.451-452)

Di Leonardo’s illustration from informants’ accounts is kept. Two women are involved in a struggle over whose house Christmas dinner is to be held at – a woman and her mother-in-law. It is not just a matter of ‘competition over altruism’, according to di Leonardo, but the two mothers struggling over their mutual sponsorship of their children’s friendship – being both ‘nurturance and a cooperative means of gaining
power over those children’ (p.252). No amount of resources will enable women to
avoid it: kin members have to do kinwork. As a consequence, when the central kin
worker in a family dies, ties among kin, including siblings, may also die away.
Intimate relationships are organised along similar lines. Those involved in intimate
relationships must rely on each other to do interactional work and, like kinwork,
impressive interactional work is an arena where women take the greater part of
interactional responsibility. While complaints like those quoted above articulate an
unfair division of labour between men and women, what Bolotin’s remarks make clear
is that individual women do not necessarily occupy such positions and roles
unproblematically. So, while in di Leonardo’s account, there is a sense in which
‘women’ are constituted as a homogenous group with respect to doing kinwork, even
without applying any explicitly feminist analysis to their situation, individual women
may take up these ‘expressive’ and ‘nurturing’ responsibilities reluctantly, resentfully
or unsuccessfully. An informant in this study, for example, described a persistent
struggle to ‘know’ that there is ‘something’ that could or should be done
interactionally: ‘Even though I sometimes know that other people [would] do
something, [in a particular situation], I can’t because I don’t know what I’m supposed
to [do]’ (Helen 30 years old). So, while women’s use of greeting cards may involve
individual women occupying culturally ‘ready-made’ positions, for example,
‘emotional manager’ in an intimate relationship, women do not occupy them
unproblematically (if at all) and their struggle with that positioning is ongoing. This
puts a certain slant on the issue of women’s care and control of the inalienable
possession ‘love’. Some women do not participate and are thus not engaged in the
sociopolitical structures that kinwork produces. Those who are engaged in it may also
critically reflect on it.

It is not clear how some women’s increasing imbrication in ‘masculine’ styles of paid labour
may impact on this (given that some women are taken out of the house for long periods and
may have access to personal assistants who take responsibility for keeping both their personal
and interpersonal connections networked). In addition, the rise of various therapeutic
modalities – bodily and emotional – and ‘life coaches’ employed to ‘enable’ individuals to do
the things that make their lives ‘work’ could also be seen as doing some of that work.
It is labour that Fishman (1983), in an analysis of cross-gender talk, frankly calls interactional
shiftwork (p.99).

So apart from telephoning her mother, this informant did not initiate other kinds of kinwork
with family or friends and said that her family was generally ‘hopeless’ at a variety of things,
which might be termed interpersonal social capital (Fieldnotes).
While accusations that men benefit unfairly, without labouring, from women’s kin and interactional work may be experientially true, the benefit may be only peripheral compared to women’s ‘benefits’. As a result of their engagement in kinwork, many women feel a sense of belonging to their family, friends and local neighbourhood. It is a sense of belonging which, in Nancy’s (1991) terms, would be constituted by that kin and other interactional work. Nancy conceives a sense of belonging – community – in this way because he problematises the idea of community as ‘in-commonness’.

Community founded on ‘in-commonness’ is a condition of community formed by autonomous individuals and Nancy, therefore, reconceives community as an experience but not one that an individual ‘has’, rather as ‘an experience that makes us be’ (p.26). Thus, human existence emerges from that experience, it does not pre-exist the formation of community. Nancy’s conception of community offers a way of interpreting women’s sense of belonging to their family, friends and among each other, without drawing on notions of in-commonness among women with its attendant tendency towards biological essentialism. This way of thinking relations of belonging and community is taken up in Chapter 7 in relation to what is essentially a ‘community of two’, the couple relationship, arguing that the interactional work done with fun-and-love greeting cards are practices constituting intimate subjects and couple-ness.

So, while kinwork is performed by women and largely among women, it provides an approach through which the labour of intimate romantic relations – which may or may not be between women – can also be viewed. Intimate interactional work is also a labouring which exceeds the self-interest/altruism binary. However, di Leonardo’s account tends to promote the processes of kinwork as ultimately reciprocal – the effort put into children producing the reward of their attention to parental old age care, for instance (di Leonardo signals by the diversity of accounts that no such homeostatic state exists among that study’s informants). Furthermore, di Leonardo’s account is threaded through with a desire to resolve differences between women and men with respect to doing kinwork. Di Leonardo wonders briefly in her conclusion to what extent the world of kinwork will remain ‘female’ in the future and ‘what [the world of kinwork] would look like if it were not sex-segregated’ (p.453). These questions are generated from the political project di Leonardo frames for feminism: to effect a non-sex-segregated world of kinwork under a banner that takes the sexual division of
interactional labour to be a consequence of capitalism’s development. While this leaves the problem of how to imagine such work in cultures that are imbricated in developed capitalism, this question is eschewed here because it is taken to be an issue that emerges from an alignment of social and economic structurings declined in Chapter 2.

Women’s use of greeting cards is a practice that at first glance foregrounds the discursive position of women as responsible social beings and good ‘communicators’. In consuming and using a greeting card for intimate interactional work, women are involved in a social relation formed through the circulation of both alienable and inalienable ‘objects’, the most important of which is a commodified and abstracted inalienable possession ‘love’. While the commodification of the interpersonal and the intimate domain is not an inevitable or necessarily destructive consequence of the prominence of the exchange economy, it is precisely this abstraction that has a positive discursive effect for ‘woman’.

The greeting card-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away commodifies ‘love’ and intimate relationships in a manner that, while fraught, is useful from a feminist perspective because commodification offers a challenge to the privileged authenticity of that domain and ‘woman’s’ discursive location there. Discourses are never stable, and the use of fun-and-love greeting cards is not here claimed to be an object of ‘resistance’, a weapon against a binarised system of gender but a practice involved in the unstable but naturalised positioning of feminine subjects in the intimate domain. Commodification of the interpersonal abstracts the feminised terrain of ‘woman’ and some central qualities and attributes that go towards making up the category ‘woman’ in Western thought (e.g. altruistic, passive etc.). In doing so, commodification moves ‘woman’ as an identity out of the realm of use value and out of its naturalised discursive position. ‘Woman’ becomes a category of qualities, attributes, behaviours and positionings that circulate in an economy that is always mixed (that is, involving both gift and commodity ‘exchange’) and, therefore, those qualities and attributes and positionings are, to a certain extent, discursively ‘freed up’ and thus available to be associated with individuals participating in that economy.
The use of fun-and-love greeting cards in intimate relationships goes on in a cultural moment where the force of competing discourses over what it means to be a ‘woman’ is profound. To say nothing of what it might mean to be a ‘man’ with respect to doing intimate work with greeting cards. For both feminine and masculine subjects, the experience of love and intimacy is no longer a private matter. Intimate relations are informed by discourses of rationality and egalitarianism, constituting, at least in legal discourses, equal and autonomous subjects and achieving many of the objectives of first wave feminism for intimate relationships (Leach 1981). The fluid but heavily monitored discursive field of heterosexual intimacy, however, produces differential access to the interactional resources available through fun-and-love greeting cards. While the operation of disciplinary modes of power produces a degree of compulsion for women to do intimacy work, men may be excluded through similarly disciplinary operations of power. While feminist writings have elaborated upon women’s historical positioning within the emotional and intimate realm, only now is a history of men and the interpersonal being formulated (see Connell 1995).

**Different histories, different performances**

The sexually differentiated use of greeting cards is articulated by card publishers as being structured in women’s position as interactional workers (whether by nature or by necessity). Women’s use of greeting cards is rather less natural and rather less altruistic than the publishers’ version would have it. Men’s use of greeting cards, as was seen in Chapter 1, is construed through either a deficit or pragmatism discourse. The idea of the fun-and-love greeting card as intimate interactional work is linked to the performance of a gendered self by first setting out what is at stake and second by reading performances of intimate interactional work as techniques of self care, drawing on Foucault’s (1988) history of sexuality.

Women and men’s intimate interactional work with fun-and-love greeting cards is shaped by the particular historicised organisation of women and men’s sexed and gendered bodies (Gatens 1983, Butler 1990). Unless a masculine subject’s occupation of the intimate and its related domains of domesticity and the emotional is constituted through the historically specific corporeal configurations that constitutes women as nurturing subjects, then men’s occupation of those discursive positions and sites will be different. In tracing the ‘self’ as the masculinised subject of sexuality, Foucault
Performing social relations

(1988) provides a resource for outlining how men are situated with respect to the intimate relationship and the intimate interactional work that constitutes it. As many feminists have pointed out, Foucault is not interested in sexual difference. This becomes advantageous here. Intimacy work, men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards, is read as already present in the modern mode of self-care. The analysis thus retains a sense of productive rather than oppressive power and avoids two things: the necessity to reconfigure masculinity through persuasion or education, as is inherent in a liberal feminist model, and any necessity to revalue the emotional and domestic realm as a culturally positive site.

Giving a greeting card involves physical, that is material, action with the body of the card giver but it also involves ‘saying’ something – the sentiment realised by the greeting card’s linguistic text. The speaking subject of the greeting card, from the perspective of greeting card publishers, is a feminine subject or feminised subject, conflating women and feminine subject positions as part of pragmatic and essentialist discourses and conflating men with feminine subject positions in a deficit discourse. There are men writing/authoring greeting cards and women using those cards. Does this mean that men authoring greeting cards are feminised or that women using them are speaking ‘as men’? The field of language and gender analysis is drawn on to set out how such a complex of performances is understood by the thesis. Men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards is then analysed as readable within the positioning of masculine subjects as outside discourses of intimacy and, thus, as accessing modes of meaning from which they have traditionally been excluded. Women and men’s uses of those modes of meaning are different performances because there are different histories constituting feminine and masculine subjects within discourses of intimacy.

**Doing interactional work: speaking and writing bodies**

One set of questions which arises from the use of greeting cards to do intimate interactional work involves ‘whose’ meaning is being made. When women do intimate interactional work with fun-and-love greeting cards authored by a man (fictionalised or not), do they speak as a man? Alternatively, does a man using a fun-and-love

---

156 Foucault uses both the inclusive ‘man’ for humanity and then specifically attends to ‘men’.
greeting card draw on a ‘women’s language’? These are questions addressed here by applying to the greeting card work in field of language and gender. It is a disparate and extensive field of analysis, although it retains an essential quality of concern with the social position of women.\textsuperscript{157} While this focus in certain senses anticipates discussions in Chapters 4 and 6 with respect to the approach to textual analysis, it is necessary because the position is taken, with Threadgold (1988a), that the central issue is not one of ‘language’ at all but certain modes of meaning making and access to those (p.64 and passim). Declining ‘language’ as what is problematic with respect to differences in women and men’s social positions and discursive production provides the framework through which masculine subjects’ performances of intimacy work with fun-and-love greeting cards is then read.

Relations between sexual difference and language are usefully explicated by Grosz (1995). The field of women and language, Grosz suggests, is organised along the following lines. It is divided first, around the author’s sex or politics. Second, it is divided around the text, for example, whether or not it challenges patriarchy. If, for instance, the author’s sex is taken as a way of deciding the ‘gender’ of a text’s voice, the greeting card user may be speaking with/in a masculine voice. On the basis of the second category, a text may be written by a man but the ‘voice’ may be a challenge to phallocentrism. This possibility is embodied in the writing of Irigaray (1985) as the idea of women’s speech, \textit{parler femme}, and in Cixous’ (1980) idea of women’s writing, \textit{écriture féminine}. While these are not identical concepts, they take it as given that, as women are born into and born ‘of’ a phallogocentric\textsuperscript{158} language system: women’s

\textsuperscript{157} The issue of women and language has concerned writers from women’s studies (Daly 1978; Spender 1980), linguistics (Jespersen 1968; Lakoff 1975; McConnell-Ginet 1978; Tannen 1991, 1998; Coates 1993), psychoanalysis (Kristeva 1980; Irigaray 1985; Cixous 1980) and social semiotics (Poynton 1985; Threadgold 1988a) among others. Cameron (1990) delimits the field of women and language in the following way, for example: [Women’s] ‘silence and exclusion from language [and] the question of an authentic female voice’; how ‘the meaning of gender is constructed and contested’, and different linguistic behaviours as they pertain to ‘male dominance and female culture’ (p.3). Jesperson’s (1968) work is of rather a different status than these other, feminist informed citations, but is mentioned here because its explicit attention to women and language is in itself unusual and not all of its claims are considered undesirable by some feminists, for instance, a distinction between emotion vs rationality.

\textsuperscript{158} Phallogocentrism is Derrida’s (1976) term. It puts together phallocentrism and logocentrism, implying how psychoanalytical discourse identifies the phallus with \textit{Logos = speech, logic, reason, the word, God} – and as given, uninterrogatable systems of meaning making.
sexual difference is always dichotomised. As Grosz (1995) explains, they are political concepts:

[Their purpose is] to devise a strategic and combative understanding, one whose function is to make explicit what has been excluded or left out of phallocentric images. Unlike truth, whose value is eternal, strategy remains provisional; its relevance and value depend on what it is able to achieve, on its utility in organising means towards ends. (pp.110-111)

What is important about both concepts is that they are envisaged as developments of ways of meaning making that would enable women to realise subjectivity, although not in the sense of de Beauvoir’s (1976) desire to find a way to be a true ‘woman’. In postulating that there are other ways of writing the world (that do not foreground rationality or linearity, for instance) or other ways of writing sex itself (speaking as more than one gender as Woolf (1995a) has Orlando do, for example), or re-writing writing itself (as Stein (1966) does in her ‘destruction’ of the sentence and her play with the ‘genre’ of autobiography\(^{159}\)), some important categories forming Western thought are critiqued. Examples of ‘women’s writing/speaking’ in these ways should not be read as literal or essentialist claims but as realisations of the ‘other’.

A proposition that there is, or should be women’s ‘language’ or ways of speaking is, therefore, neither ‘separatism’ nor idealism: it is a claim that is strategic.\(^{160}\) Addressing the issue of women and language, Threadgold (1988a) refocuses the problem as an issue of access to modes of meaning making.\(^{161}\) Threadgold suggests that women can mean differently to the phallogocentric but for reasons to do with the operation of power, they are excluded, for example, from philosophy, or from public speech and ‘they are not permitted to mean differently in certain contexts’ (p.52 italics in original). Threadgold suggests it is possible to identify how men too can be excluded from certain ways of making meaning, citing Derrida’s complaint that language will not say what he wants it to mean (p.51). The interpersonal is a specific mode of meaning making that men in Western cultures, generally speaking, do not access and, therefore,

\(^{159}\) In The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas.
\(^{160}\) For a well developed fictional version of such a process, its purposes and the semantics of a women’s language see Suzette Haden Elgin’s (1984) novel, Native Tongue.
\(^{161}\) Threadgold (1988a) shows how misreadings of such strategies are produced by a focus on ‘language’ and its rendering as a neutral conduit or container for meaning and ‘Anglo-
men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards can be read as accessing a mode of meaning making that women, traditionally, have been more or less compelled to access. So, ‘who’ is writing is important from the perspective of which subjects, and similarly, what kind of meaning is being made and which subjects have access to that meaning making.162

Doing interactional work: inside and outside bodies

How to interpret men’s ingress of interpersonal meaning making is not straightforward; it is imbricated in the differences in women and men’s social positions. Differences in women and men’s social positions mean that women’s use of particular texts, such as greeting cards, and men’s position in relation to discourses of intimacy must always be treated as sociopolitical issues. Men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards is sketched here by problematising the positioning of ‘men’ as poor interactional workers and focusing on the positioning of masculine subjects in relation to intimacy discourses. If men do intimate interactional work with fun-and-love greeting cards, there will be certain benefits for them but these will be shaped by the historicised organisation of men’s sexed and gendered bodies (Gatens 1983; Butler 1990; 1993).163 An expansion of masculine subjects into a social space that is central to certain performances of ‘woman’ may be read as a colonisation of the subject position of that mode of meaning making164 or may be celebrated as working against a hegemonic masculinity. By drawing on Foucault’s (1988) history of sexuality, read, in part, as a history of masculine subjectivity, an alternative analysis is offered.

What was obtained in this study with respect to men’s use of greeting cards and what both industry and other informants were asked to comment on were, largely, accounts

American readings of French feminism ... read[ing] the texts as empirical fact instead of as metaphor/paradox and carnival’ (p.43).

162 Virginia Woolf (1995b) describes with force and eloquence the how women’s voices are not only silent in prestigious genres, but how they have been/are actively excluded and silenced.

163 Recognition of the body is important for feminist critiques because male and female bodies are culturally valued differently and, therefore, sexually differentiated behaviour is valued differently (Gatens 1983). What this means is that there will be qualitatively different values and experiences of the same behaviours by men and women, including women and men in love.

There are a number of difficulties for the sex/gender distinction, including an assumption that the body itself is outside culture (Butler 1990).

164 As was suggested by an anonymous reviewer of an essay in which some of this chapter is published (see Hobson 2000).
of interactional work by men using greeting cards (cf observation of interactional work). This material is thus interpreted here as public performances of masculinity.\textsuperscript{165} While acknowledging the problematic nature of many of identity terms used to describe the categories ‘man’ or ‘masculinity’, which are contingent and multiple, some identity terms are loosely drawn on here as part of interpreting these performances of masculinities and to ground the informants descriptively. Terms, such as, ‘working class’, ‘gay’, ‘educated, middle class’ and ‘bloke’ are taken as identity terms that can be mixed. The ‘bloke’ is a special category. In Australian vernacular, the ‘bloke’ is at the heart of masculinity in many versions, forming a category in an important relationship with a larrikin attitude to authority and egalitarianism so that the bloke’s male friendships, his ‘mates’ are as important to him as his wife, if not more so (Baggett-Barham 1988; Ernst 1990).\textsuperscript{166} The ‘bloke’ is, however, homophobic, even sometimes if he is a man who has sex with other men.

The relationship between interactional work and gender is not constructed in a straightforward relation to masculinity by greeting card publishers. If that was the case, then masculine subjects using greeting cards – individuals, who in the discourses of the publishers, are ‘deficient’ or ‘pragmatic’ – would stand in contrast to those masculine subjects who do not use greeting cards. The latter should, in that logic, be considered interpersonally ‘not-deficient’ or ‘unpragmatic’. Yet, this is not the case. Masculine subjects cannot be imagined by greeting card producers as not-deficient or proficient in interactional work because the ‘deficit’ model of men using greeting cards is structured through the location of interactional work in the devalued interpersonal realm. It is not a claim for masculine subjects having competence in interpersonal interactional work – and, therefore, a claim that they do not ‘need’ to use greeting cards. Men’s relation to emotion is not necessarily usefully considered as an issue of competence. If interactional work is an issue of labour, as Hochschild and di Leonardo

\textsuperscript{165} Informants were asked not only about their own greeting card use but asked, for instance, ‘do you know of other men who use cards like this?’ in order to require them to put their individualised performance into a more public discourse. This was done to counter – in a small way – the effect of a woman researcher, offering confidentiality, thus finding out only about a man’s performance of masculinity in that context.

\textsuperscript{166} ‘Mates’ is a term that refers to men’s male friends in Australia, not its broader use for ‘friends’, by women and men, as happens, for example, in British English.
demonstrate, whether or not men have the skills (from learned or ‘natural’ sources), as a form of labour associated with women, men may not bother to pick up those skills; they may not attend to those skills; and they may not apply them, even if they have them. What is performed by the deficit/pragmatic structure is an affirmation of a particular kind of masculinity. It operates by (literally) distancing men from interactional work. Men who do interactional work with greeting cards are tainted in the deficit/pragmatic discourses with the devalued domain of the ‘expressive’ and emotive which remains articulated with ‘woman’ as Other. The pragmatic discourse does not feminise masculine subjects because it is constituted in relation to cognition, particularly instrumental rationality. Such means to an end performances contribute to deflecting any positioning of the individual as a feminised subject.

Such discursive work is important because there is the suggestion that when men do emotion talk, it is indistinguishable in some ways from women’s emotion talk. Lutz (1990) considers women and men’s talk about emotion by considering the extent to which women and men ‘personalize[ ] the emotion experience - that is, on a variety of ways emotions, even as they are discussed, can be distanced from the self’ (p.83). While a normative model of emotion as feminised would suggest women personalise their experiences of emotion and men do not, by looking at tense, who is the grammatical subject of emotion, who or what is attributed as the cause of emotion, and negation, Lutz finds that there is no difference with respect to the distance between the experience of emotion and the speaker, in women and men’s talk about emotion (p.85). This is, in some senses, the position of fun-and-love greeting card publishers. In thinking about the use of fun-and-love greeting cards by men, there was no suggestion from the publishers of using strategies such as these grammatical ‘depersonalising’ strategies in producing greeting cards for men. The principle strategy for bringing men to consume fun-and-love greeting cards is the use of humour. While humour was understood as a safety mechanism when dealing with discourse that is dangerous for men (emotion being feminised as it is), humour does not necessarily operate through depersonalising or distancing mechanisms. As humour works through incongruity, it may require maintaining close connection with something, in order to realise the incongruity and, therefore, the humour.
Any fashion for men to perform interactional work need not be interpreted as a cynical performance – as is the case with the SNAG’s (sensitive new age guy) performance of ‘feminine’ qualities, for example – but as a tiny fracture in the fiction of a seamless twentieth century Western masculinity. It is, for example, possible for ‘working class blokes’ to move into ‘unnatural’ subject positions, as is suggested by the responses of some informants in this study.\(^{167}\) The kind of interactional work that male informants in this study describe included, doing interactional ‘repairs’ (for example, saying ‘sorry’), demonstrating affection (unbidden compared to expressions of affection structured by the marketing of St Valentine’s Day), demonstrating sexual desire and showing gratitude to their partner. Some men are doing relationship work that previously has been discursively constituted as not possible for them. One informant, a bus-driver, identified fun-and-love cards as suggesting ‘things’ [interactional work] that he ‘hadn’t even thought of doing before’ (Fieldnotes). Having ‘discovered’ such intimate interactional work, he found it rewarding. The object thus produced the practice and was not being sought out to fill an existing ‘need’. This is an example of consumption that ruptures a discourse, enlarging a personal repertoire for interpersonal interaction, by accessing a certain mode of meaning making. It is, therefore, possible to take a celebratory tone with respect to certain performances of masculinity that can be observed today.\(^{168}\) However, as bodies discursively positioned outside the emotional realm, men’s deployment of resources like fun-and-love greeting cards appropriates a particular social space – a space in which feminine subjects are constituted. What this means for the discursive stakes that coalesce around such a domain is unclear. The specific experiences of men may not necessarily impinge on the way women occupy the domain of the ‘emotional’, although in saying this, it is important not to obscure the way that some liberal humanist individualist discourses do seek to reconfigure male bodies in the same manner as women’s.

---

\(^{167}\) The ‘working class bloke’ is a subjectivity positioned precisely outside the domain of intimacy and emotions and the subject on whose behalf resistance to feminist analyses is sometimes invoked.

\(^{168}\) The Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s youth radio station (FM station, TripleJ) broadcast a talk-back program in which the main topic was ‘wussie boys’ (Anglo-Australian pejorative for a feminised boy or man). The focus was, ‘Who are you?, ‘What do you do that makes you a wuss?’. What emerged was an astonishing array of positive claims by young men for being a ‘wussie boy’.
A cautionary, rather than celebratory position, with respect to the same evidence of masculine subjects doing intimate interactional work is also possible. Masculine subjects accessing the intimate realm and doing intimate interactional work will necessarily impact on women in concrete ways, although it is difficult to assess in what specific ways that may so. It is possible to read men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards as a performance that appropriates and colonises terrain in which women are positioned as subjects (devalued terrain though it is), reformulating such performances as hegemonic masculinity. One of the ‘tests’ for whether or not such subjectivity is being enacted is suggested by Foucault’s (1997) observations on the conditions for the formation of the homosexual subject. Foucault suggests that ‘homosexuality became a problem’ since men became divided among themselves with the erosion of male friendship in the sixteenth century (pp.170-171). Friendship between men becomes a problem for the ‘army, bureaucracy, administration, universities, schools and so on [which could not] function with such intense friendships’ (p.170). It is this absence of male friendship that produces an absence of ‘care of the other’.

Given the importance of the homosexual subject as a subjectivity against which hegemonic masculinity is delineated, then the latter can be described, in part, through the absence of male friendship. This logic can be applied, for example, to a positively framed idea of the ‘wuss’, as a category of subject sexed as a male and masculine subject comfortable with serious talk about emotions, the public expression of emotions (including crying) and practicing caring behaviours towards others. If the ‘wussie boy’ is a subjectivity moulded as Foucault outlines masculine subjects – that is with men divided among themselves – then the intimacy work would not be put to caring for each other. This would meet the criteria of ‘appropriation and colonisation’ argument, suggesting that masculine subjects’ use of fun-and-love greeting cards and entry into the intimate domain should be thought of as masculine identities accumulating possibilities at the expense of women. (Men, on top of whatever else the culture ‘permits’ can now have feelings and talk about them.) Taking up this expanded subject position may have advantages in certain contexts. Women’s domain is not obversely seen to be expanding to their advantage. The more definitive movement of women into the public realms of work and political life over the course of the twentieth century is commonly said to have involved more responsibility for women but little change in position.
What seems clear is that the interactional work that husbands might do with fun-and-love greeting cards is an example of the way in which the disciplining effect of modern power continues to expand. It is an expansion that incorporates working class male bodies, have in many instances continued to disrupt the demands of governmentality and the production of docile bodies, by maintaining affiliations to violence toward institutions and persons. Such working class male bodies are disciplined by a regime ‘doing intimacy’ in a way that discourses of ‘law and order’ have not achieved. This involves a loss being grieved in the rise of masculinist essentialism. These comments sketch some issues framing men’s interactional work with greeting cards that could be developed, but according to Foucault’s (1988) history of sexuality, it is the intimate relationship and ‘the couple’ that provide the central site for the development of masculine subjectivity with respect to what is here understood as intimate interaction.

**Commodification and an aesthetics of existence**

Men’s intimate interactional work with the fun-and-love greeting card is a performance of a masculine subjectivity, a self, which occupies the interpersonal in different ways to feminine subjects’ occupation of that domain. ‘Identical’ practices by women and men are valued differently, including doing intimate interactional work (e.g. men score brownie points for doing what women are understood to do naturally or, in a different version, men are feminised). Some of that difference comes from the different histories of men and women’s relations to interpersonal interactional work and to the discursive realm of emotion and the domestic. ‘Care of the other’ is not necessarily the only way to read men’s (or women’s) intimate interactional work with greeting cards. In particular, what is pursued here are possibilities for masculine subjectivities in relation to the intimate relationship framed through Foucault’s (1988) history of sexuality and analysis of care of the self. Foucault develops an account of ‘the art of marriage’ and of the ‘husband’ and of the ‘wife’ as part of the conditions for a mode of self care in the constitution of an ethical subject. Drawing on that account, men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards is readable as a particular technique of self-care within a certain aesthetics of existence. This does not mean that women are excluded from a discourse of self care and do not perform the techniques of self care that Foucault describes. Rather, it suggests a set of comparisons between men and women’s practices of intimate interactional work, pursued in Chapter 7, and contributes to avoiding reducing men’s entry into the interpersonal as colonisation.
Foucault (1988) describes a historical shift in techniques for the ‘cultivation of the self’ and its valorisation of the relations of oneself to oneself (p.43). What is central to the formation of the ethical subject, Foucault suggests, ‘[is] the question of truth – the truth concerning what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing’ (p.68). While in ancient times this was a matter of self-mastery for the ‘cultivation of the soul’, it becomes concerned with learning to shape one’s inner character in accordance with an aesthetics of existence (p.45; p.67). Care of the self, as Foucault conceives it, involves techniques for creating a certain aesthetics of existence

the development of an art of existence that revolves around the question of the self, of its dependence and independence, of its universal form and of the connection it can and should establish with others, of the procedures by which it exerts its control over itself, and of the way in which it can establish a complete supremacy over itself. (pp.238-239)

What is most useful to the current chapter is the link Foucault identifies between modes of self-care and what has been designated here as the intimate relationship. Through an examination of various texts, Foucault argues that the cultivation of the self is tied to certain forms of marital or conjugal relations, producing new ways of seeing the self – in relation to others (p.71).

Specifically,

in this linkage the man had to regulate his conduct, not simply by virtue of status, privileges, and domestic functions, but also by virtue of a “relational role” with regard to his wife. (p.80)

The conjugal relation comes to be important in the husband constitution of himself as an ethical subject ‘with respect to ... social, civic, and political activities, in the different forms they might take’ (p.94). So, for example, the marriage may be central to the husband’s success politically. As relations between the spouses becomes historically less asymmetrical, the argument is that a greater place is accorded to the problems of sexual relations and love between the spouses (p.149).

The ‘couple’ of this cultural moment is traced as an emergent form in Foucault’s account. The intimate relationship has become very much less asymmetrical within Western capitalist democracies like Australia. The tendency is to render the intimate relationship, both heterosexual and homosexual, through equality discourses: as a

169 Concern for the self goes hand in hand with the valorisation of the other (Foucault 1988:149).
‘partnership’. Doing intimate interactional work is thus a mode of self care in the context of modern ‘conjugality’. A husband’s concern with certain modes of relating (feelings and sex for example) are important for his performance of an ethical self. It is a concern that is read in countless texts, both written and spoken, that discuss and interrogate the intimate relationship, the self and the other (e.g. American television talk shows such as Ricki Lake and Jerry Springer). These confessional texts are part of the modern regime of truth producing sex (Foucault 1990:57).

Men’s interest in the intimate relationship, a concern with ethical performances of self in performances of conjugal ity is already part of the modern mode of self-care and, therefore, intimate interactional practices need not be reduced to appropriation of feminine domains or feminisation of the subject. Given the current imperative toward symmetry in intimate relationships, a husband’s ethical self may be formable within an aesthetics of existence that incorporates intimacy work. Is it a way of living that is possible for all husbands (or wives)? Illouz (1997) considers the ways in which differently classed subjects conceive and use ‘romance commodities’ – such as greeting cards – in developing an intimate relationship. Illouz finds little difference empirically between the ways in working class and middle class subjects use romance commodities, although she concludes that economic capacity ultimately restricts individual’s capacity to experience romantic love as it is constituted at this cultural moment (pp.262; 294). Notwithstanding that wealth enables certain kinds of commodities to be accessed, this study found fun-and-love greeting cards are used for intimate interactional work by subjects who self identify as ‘working class blokes’, emphasising the fragmentation and instability of identities usually linked to hegemonic masculinity. The complaints recorded above by women with respect to the labour of love suggest that the ‘art of existence’ that some women are

170 This is not to say that such ‘partnerships’ are the typical form of intimate relationships but that this is the idealised form of many texts and practices. Thus, there may be the dilemma of inequality of intimate interactional work and equality of standing.

171 That is as part of one pole of ‘bio-power’, a term coined by Foucault (1990) to describe the mechanisms by which power has come to be exercised in the modern era (p.140). It acts on the body at both the disciplinary level of capillary power relations and the more global regulatory level of the political economy of power. This stands in contrast to older, judicial conceptions of power as the legitimate authority of the sovereign. Confession is involved in certain kinds of intimate relationship as analysed in Chapter 7.
cultivating self towards is a different aesthetic than that of their husbands, producing different modes of practice, an issue taken up in Chapter 7.

**Conclusion**

As feminist theory has argued and this study of greeting cards supports, narrow depictions of feminine and masculine subjects are always confronted by the multiple femininities and masculinities which women and men live. The extent to which interpersonal and intimate interactional work are implicated in ongoing processes of feminisation, for example, or re-configurations of masculinity, is a question that should be directed towards specific subjects. If subjectivity is intra-subjectively multiple and fragmented, attempting to analyse meaning making practices in too general terms is a reductive process. That said, how such subjects practice intimate interaction is not unconstrained. The use and consumption of greeting cards is embedded within particular kinds of social relations, alienable and inalienable, kin and intimacy relations.

Social practices of consuming greeting cards are carried out by individuals who are enacting performances of culturally specific subjectivities. The focus here has been on the performance of gendered subjects because women and men’s different sociohistorical locations with respect to the private sphere and the domain of emotions provide particular disciplinary nets, negotiated differently with greeting cards, although generational differences would also be a productive focus.

The intimate relationship is a site over which subjects struggle and there are losses and gains for women in sharing access and control of their ‘traditional’ if not ‘natural’ interpersonal domain and the inalienable possession ‘love’. While masculinist essentialist discourses are the most visible signs of such struggles, what is at stake here cannot be reduced to monolithic versions of femininity, masculinity or humanity. The consideration of sexually differentiated performances of interactional work with the fun-and-love greeting card, a-commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away, prepares the way for specifying, through close discourse analysis, how gendered subjectivities are constitutively realised by the language of fun-and-love greeting cards in Part II. In particular, this will enable a consideration of what Foucault (1988) delineates as ‘the cult of marriage’ defined by a ‘stylistics of the individual bond’, the
enactment of ‘couple’ by fun-and-love greeting cards (p.148). A set of related but different questions, with respect to greeting cards as a sociocultural, rather than a textual artefact remain. These coalesce around the mass production of greeting cards and are now taken up in Chapters 4 and 5.
Introduction

This chapter pursues a set of relations between greeting cards and speech and writing. Analyses of greeting cards either overlook how cards ‘language’ love in print (e.g. di Leonardo 1987) or treat this characteristic as one of the most troubling aspects of the use of greeting cards for intimate interactional work (Papson 1986; Finkelstein 1994a). The current chapter argues for greeting cards to be treated as interpersonal communication, that is intersubjective communication, using print and writing and for a particular kind of linguistic resource as a means of analysing text.

In the first part of the chapter Finkelstein’s (1994a) and Papson’s (1986) work is used to exemplify a set of issues around written and printed performances of intimate interactional work, identifying in those analyses a problematic conflation of language ‘channel’ with social relations of intimacy and physical proximity. The chapter then draws on social semiotic resources for analysing the greeting card’s ‘languaging’ of love in print, a perspective that treats differences between print and speech as social, following Halliday (1988). The central resource is register theory (Halliday 1978; Martin 1992; Poynton 1985, 1991b; Huisman 1999). Register, a theory of contextualised semiosis, is introduced in the current chapter to enable certain aspects of meaning making with fun-and-love greeting cards to be elaborated prior to the lexicogrammatical analysis in Part II.

Texted love: tainted love?

Some greeting card analyses and some of the informants in the study construct relations between greeting cards and speech and print through a naturalised and privileged relation between speech, particularly face-to-face speech, emotion and interactional work. Privileging spoken realisations of emotion over those that are ‘languaged’ in print conflates language ‘channel’ and social relations, in particular,
physical and interpersonal proximity are to some degree conflated. In intimate relations, if the speech of an individual is conceived as unproblematically, spontaneous, heartfelt and an ‘authentic’ expression of emotion, printed greeting card texts are concomitantly positioned as a ‘synthetic’ substitute. In order to situate fun-and-love greeting cards as intersubjective communication, the chapter does not seek to expand the concept of ‘authentic’ intimate interaction or to bring fun-and-love greeting cards under the rubric of ‘proper’ intimacy work, nor does it treat speech and print as the ‘same’. Greeting card text is, rather, following Derrida (1976; 1981), understood to be subjected by phonocentrism, a privileging of speech over writing, which traces a fictitious binary of speech and writing. The implication of the logic of phonocentrism for intimate interactional work with greeting cards is that such performances are delegitimated as realisations of emotion.

When greeting cards are given, they are commonly accompanied by their giver and, as Finkelstein (1994b) notes, ‘some of the pleasure of giving a card is derived from observing the recipient’s response to the card’s message’ (p.66). Elsewhere, Finkelstein (1994a) finds the accompanying presence of the giver to be ‘absurd’ (p.159). While the physical presence of the writer of a text may be redundant, what is of most concern to Finkelstein is the verbal ‘silence’ of the greeting card giver, who eschews their ‘idiomatic’ language for expressing feelings and thoughts (1994a:159; 1994b:67). Finkelstein does not indicate what that idiomatic language might involve nor describe greeting card language in terms that would enable it to be designated specifically, for example, as ‘everyday’ or ‘poetic’ (an issue taken up in Chapter 5). What Finkelstein does suggest is that greeting card language ‘is used to amplify what we know can be said but which we feel unable to say’ (1994a:162). It is problematic to assume that everyone (as Finkelstein’s inclusive ‘we’ suggests) knows what can be said in relation to doing intimate interactional work, as the discussion of performances of intimacy in Chapter 3 has suggested. Furthermore, Finkelstein’s comments imply a particular relation between

---

172 Some of that pleasure is in the experience of a sense of achievement in having constructed a joke, or a ‘just right’ engagement with the recipient’s sense of self or, more obvious delight any ‘surprise!’ they have performed (via various inscription strategies and negotiations of intersubjectivity as described in Chapter 2).
speech and emotion, one that is threaded through with the conduit metaphor; the
suggestion that there is a process of putting emotions and thoughts into words, a
process that may also be ‘blocked’ in some way.

Speech is not an unproblematic conduit for the expression of authentic feelings, despite
the importance of phonology in realising affect (Poynton 1985). The relation between
emotion and speech is not a unidirectional relation of ‘expression’ because emotion is
discursively constituted. When the emotional capacity and repertoire of human beings
is considered to be constituted, in part, by cultural, historical and social contexts, then
analysis of intimate interaction with greeting card text must be structured through a
metalanguage which treats emotion as a social and discursive phenomenon not only an
individualised or physiological experience. As Irvine (1990) explores, in a study of the
Wolof people’s ‘speaking styles’, performances and interpretations of affect are always
culturally embedded and a specific performance of emotion represents a sociocultural
and situational resource for such performances (p.131). As Irvine writes:

[The] communication of feeling is not merely a property of the individual, or a
function of transient irrational impulses, or an unruly force operating outside
the realm of linguistic form. Instead, it is socially, culturally, and linguistically
structured, and we cannot adequately interpret individuals’ behavior as
emotional expression until we understand some of that framework. (p.128)

If it is insisted the languaging of love must be by means of speech, rather than print, as
it is in the greeting card, this implies either there are no resources for the print
languaging love in the culture or that this is an ‘improper’ cultural practice. Both of
these positions are not supportable, as a writer of the poetic form the sonnet might
object.

The privileging of speech as a way of doing intimate interactional work over others is,
according to Derrida’s (1976) identification of a speech and writing dualism,
phonocentric. The logic of phonocentrism conceives language as based on speech and

---

173 While phonological resources are the primary resource for realising affect, they are not the
only resources available to English language users. Words are an important resource for
‘saying’ how one feels (for example, swearing). Poynton’s (1985) elaboration of Tenor shows
how affect is realised through a set of resources that are dispersed among lexicogrammatical
ranks and the different strata of language (p.81).
on the presence of speaking subjects, whose immediacy ensures a full presence of meaning and access to a ‘true’ state of mind and being and formulates writing concomitantly as a ‘mere’ technology for recording ‘real’ text. The ‘presence’ of speech takes on the specific outline of individual subjects in Finkelstein’s (1994a) implication that face-to-face speech may offer a counter to the ‘patented’ language of greeting cards (p.163). This reasoning suggests what is at stake – a discourse of authentically produced interaction, a ‘speaking from the heart’ that is privileged over printed ‘synthetic’ emotion.

Face-to-face speech is also privileged as way of doing intimate interactional work by some informants in this study, although individuals who gave a high cultural value to face-to-face interaction did not necessarily restrict their own practices to spoken face-to-face interaction and acknowledged the importance and usefulness of other cultural resources for doing interactional work. When statements were made that suggested face-to-face speech was a more sincere or authentic way for a speaker to do intimate interactional work, the informant was asked to respond to the following question: ‘Some people find certain things are better said at some distance, using the phone, for example, or a greeting card’. Have you ever had that experience?’ Most informants responded affirmatively, elaborating on a particular instance when they had chosen

---

174 Derrida (1976) analyses the pre-eminence of the spoken word and the privileging of the speaker in terms of notions such as ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’ as producing a concomitant projection of writing as corrupt. Against such claims about writing, Derrida argues that a transparency of meaning, a certainty of truth and authenticity that the presence of the speaking subject guarantees is an illusion of intelligibility. These arguments arise from Derrida’s interest in a privileging of the visual. Historically, with language ‘on the page’, hearing and memory become replaced by sight and presence. What emerges (to condense a lot of human history) is the dominance of representation as a system and the pre-eminence of the ‘conduit metaphor’ as a way of thinking signification (some of the latter’s consequences for a view of language have been discussed in previous chapters). In a typically indirect manner, Derrida attacks the dominance of the visual and the centering effect of presence (and all things that lead from it) by insisting that writing is not simply alphabeticised language but all kinds of inscription, undercutting the ‘conduit metaphor’ and demonstrating there is no one to one correspondence between ‘speech words’ and ‘writing words’ (p.9). To assume otherwise wrongly leads to the formulation of practices of inscription as a mere recording process, not as meaning making, and leads to the analysis/evaluation of writing as ‘nothing but the representation of speech’ (p.27).

175 While Finkelstein’s (1994a) use of the term ‘patented’ is metaphoric, it is nonetheless misleading. Copyright does not apply to the language of the greeting card but to the ‘object’ – image and wordings – materialised as a folded card (Fieldnotes). Elsewhere, Finkelstein (1994c) makes the rather unusual claim that the home-made greeting card is preferable because it is a little closer to having a ‘conversation’.
not to speak face-to-face about some matter. Some went on to reflect that these are ‘too hard’ situations and that ‘it would be better’ to speak face-to-face. The latter responses suggest that these informants idealise an intersubjective communicative context one in which one says whatever one likes to anyone at all, whenever one likes although this ‘face-to-face’ idealisation is contradicted empirically. Moyal’s (1992) survey of telephone users finds that, in terms of affective communication, many found the telephone superior to face-to-face contact for ‘performing sensitive tasks’ (p.66). Importantly, in the context of intimate relationships, interactants are not only performing sensitive interactional tasks, they are sometimes occupying dangerous discursive territory. Intimate relationships involve negotiating meanings that bring into discourse ‘dangerous’ ideas: feelings and attachments that are marginal in a culture or abjected (sexual or other bodily margin related topics, for example).

The idealisation of speech for expressing emotion, in part, relies on certain assumptions about speech, particularly about casual conversation, for example, that conversation is not instrumental or structured but ‘spontaneous’. These concepts are not necessarily useful ways of describing conversation. Conversational speech, as Halliday (1988) demonstrates, involves a non-linear development of ideas in contrast to a linear development of ideas in written texts, particularly in scientific texts or in the development of argument (p.87). The non-linearity of the spoken conversation, however, cannot be treated narrowly, as a lack of constraint and spontaneity. To do so would treat speech, as Halliday puts it, ‘as a caricature of itself’ (p.101). What Halliday’s observations, indirectly, point to is some of what it is about

176 For a developed analysis of science texts see Halliday and Martin (1993).
177 Halliday (1988) points out that, ‘the idea that spoken language is formless, confined to short bursts, full of false starts, lacking in logical structure, etc. is a myth – and a pernicious one at that ... . It arises because in writing people only ever analyse the finished product, which is a highly idealised version of the writing process; whereas in speech they analyse ... the bits that get crossed out, the insertions, pauses, the self interruptions, and so on’ (p.100). Halliday is concerned in these comments to argue for speech to be given greater value by some linguists, his remarks, therefore, serve to emphasise that the cultural value of speech varies according to disciplinary, as well as historical, contexts. So, while the privileging of face-to-face speech is traced in a number of linguistic approaches – conversational analysis, for example, takes face-to-face episodes of language as its basic premise and as ‘real’ (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974), those interested in speech are not privileged ‘speakers’ in the disciplinary context of linguistics. Similarly, the non-paradigm status of discourse analysis within linguistics is one of the reasons that Derrida’s claims produces puzzlement among discourse analysts, as Poynton (2000) has pointed out (p.38-39).
speech that comes to be privileged for interactional work, that is, a presumed absence of reflection and privileging of unrehearsed textual production.

Attributing spoken interaction with ‘spontaneity’ and ‘authenticity’ in the logic of a speech and writing dualism means that the ‘premeditated’ and ‘unspontaneous’ qualities of writing have a negative cultural value. The premeditated and unspontaneous qualities of writing could be read, alternatively, as realising a well considered and, therefore, a ‘true’ expression of the writer’s state. This is not the point, however. According to the logic of phonocentrism, writing competes with speech in a discourse of ‘speaking from the heart’ a discourse that is presumed to be direct or without reflection. An absence of reflection, in this discourse, signifies an absence of self-censorship by the text producer and, thus, ‘truth’ or presence. In interactions that involve face-to-face speech, this, in some senses, implies that the speaker’s affectual state is always discernible by the listener but as a kind of ‘freudian slip’, unintentional and revealing.

There are features of the face-to-face interaction that are specific to those interactions. The interactional environment of face-to-face speech involves, at least, two kinds of affectual semiosis that interactants may draw on towards their interpretation of meanings in the interactional context. Choosing face-to-face speech for doing intimate interactional work means, for example, that interactants have access to important affectual information carried on the face (Tompkins 1962). That affectual semiosis is combined with phonological resources, which are of primary importance with respect to speakers’ constitution of affect (Poynton 1985:80). Some of the imperative towards face-to-face speech, as it is delineated by Finkelstein (1994a), is not so much to do with the affectual richness of the environment but a link between speech and the authenticity of the affect. There is no guarantee that speech or face-to-face interaction produces ‘truth’, as it is ordinarily understood, or sincerity. While non-verbal signifiers may be used in assessing a person’s lying and truth telling, in equating emotion and ‘honest’ talk with face-to-face speech, there is an assumption about the success of face-to-face speech in producing such veracity.

Spoken performances of emotion are not only susceptible to being treated as more ‘sincere’ but to being naturalised as a feminine interactional ‘style’ because ideas are
developed in a non-linear fashion associated with certain rationalist and scientific genres. This configuration stands in a negative relation to ‘masculinised’ genres—certain philosophical texts, for example—that proceed analytically or ‘logically’ or ‘rationally’ rather than metaphorically, for instance (Threadgold 1988a). So, an imperative to ‘speak emotion’, rather than realise it in print, positions the emotion speaking subject as feminine. At the same time, greeting cards as print text do not contravene this gender arrangement. The feminine is aligned with the terrain of mass culture and the popular (Huyssen 1986). Given that greeting cards are texts which circulate among women, this would suggest that greeting card language is ‘women’s talk’ in print (although the issue of ‘women’s talk’ is problematic, as already seen in Chapter 3). Fun-and-love greeting cards, however, circulate between members of a couple, which will on occasions consist of women but also involve interaction between women and men or men with men.

The printed language of greeting cards is also problematic according to Finkelstein (1994a) because of a degree of ambiguity that makes them applicable across contexts (p.160). This break with context, as Derrida (1982) puts it, is precisely the point with respect to writing. It is how a text can be read in the future, have relevance and be understood and valued (p.318). As Derrida reminds, it is the nature of the written sign that it ‘remains’:

[I]t is not exhausted in the present of its inscription, giving rise to an iteration both in the absence of and beyond the presence of the [text producer]. … By the same token, a written sign carries with it a force of breaking with its context, that is the set of presences which organize the moment of inscription. This force of breaking is not an accidental predicate, but the very structure of the written. … No context can enclose it. Nor can any code, the code being here both the possibility and impossibility of writing, of its essential iterability (repetition/alterity). (p.318)

The use of a greeting card is thus a certain kind of ‘at a distance’ use of language but in constructing a relation which privileges speech for the expression of emotion between subjects doing intimate interactional work, Finkelstein (1994a; 1994b) stands in a long line of theorists who privilege speech over writing. It is a preference that is paradoxically formulated, as Ong (1991) points out, it is ‘textually contrived and textually defended’ (p.168).
The concept of a relation of ‘distance’ is some of what is involved in subjects negotiating the ‘technologised’ word (Ong 1991). This process of technologising the word is an ongoing sociocultural process. Writing now may be textualised immediately as print with word processing software. This already-printed writing may be produced in physical isolation but involve multiple individuals writing and revising the text in different places, thousands of kilometres apart. The point here is that computing technologies are an example of the way in which a long and complex history of technology, communication and ‘distance’ is reconfigured. Some technologies emphasise how all communication is always already mediated and that some is doubly mediated, by technologies outside the body, by technologies other than those required to vocalise language. The remote production by the first producer of a greeting card and its invocation by its second producer is such a double mediation. Printed greeting cards involve not only language but visual semiosis. While some of that visual semiosis is images, some of it is visual language, that is, print. When faced with the printed language of the greeting card, if speech is presence and writing an absence, according to the logic of phonocentrism, there is ‘nothing’ in the analyst’s ‘view’, nothing present that is to be considered as cultural practice. In order to closely analyse fun-and-love greeting cards, what is needed is an approach to text that makes use of resources that ‘see’ visual language, that is, includes graphology in linguistics. The next section outlines some analytical resources for handling printed fun-and-love texts.

**Resources for the analysis of printed love**

This section responds to the complex of issues outlined above by treating them as constituting some of the artefactual context of greeting cards. Context is complex and dynamic, infinitely recursive and, therefore, perhaps ultimately ‘unknowable’ (Eco 1979). It cannot, however, be avoided in analytical and interpretive work concerned with everyday social practices and text production is always ‘context-ed’. Context is sometimes treated as a question of channel, a concept arising in ‘transmission’ theories of language. Differences between ‘languaging’ love in speech and writing have only a little to do with ‘channel’ and much more to do with the context of text use. Social

---

semiotic resources for conceptualising and analysing instances of contexted-text are introduced, as formulated through the development of Halliday’s (1978) concept of register. Following a sketch of those resources, the issues around greeting cards’ languaging love as print are enlarged upon with respect to performances of intimacy.

**Contexted-text**

In some aspects, Halliday’s social and functional approach to language can be read as an elaboration on or development of Malinowski’s (1932) ethnographic observation that language is a function of both a context of situation and of the culture in which it appears. Via Firth (1957), Halliday abstracts this insight, avoiding the massive narrative about a culture that Malinowski had to produce in order to achieve context.\(^{179}\) The central resource for theorising context of situation is the category of register developed by Halliday (1978), and others. Register is developed to handle the expectation that

> the situation [is] embodied or enshrined in the text, not piecemeal, but in a way which reflects the systematic relation between the semantic structure and the social environment. (p.141)

This relation is not the more commonplace claim that certain linguistic features are more likely to occur in certain contexts of situation. Text producers not only produce shared meaning but successfully predict ‘what comes next’. Speakers may finish each other’s sentences and listeners may determine the ‘topic’ from an overheard snippet of talk or a fragment of written text. What Halliday suggests is that this predictability is based in a systematic relationship between social environment and the use of language. Choices from lexicogrammatical,\(^{180}\) phonological and other systems are produced and constrained within the context of situation. Elaborating on the insight that groupings of linguistic features can be correlated with situational features, Halliday embodies in the notion of register, the idea that the relationship between context of situation and language is probabilistic (Nesbitt and Plum 1988:9).\(^{181}\) This relation is a matter of

---

\(^{179}\) In a different sense, this narrative is the textualised version of the anthropologist’s experience of ‘immersion’.

\(^{180}\) Halliday’s theory does not assign responsibility for semantics to words and responsibility for structure to grammar but assigns responsibility for meaning making to lexicogrammar, as is elaborated in Chapter 5 and, further, in the Introduction to Part II.

\(^{181}\) The idea that there are groupings of linguistic features refers to Halliday’s (1994) suggestion that inherent in natural languages is a semantic tendency organising lexicogrammar with
which lexicogrammar systems – which semantic options – are put ‘at risk’. Thus, lexicogrammatical analysis identifies patterning of choice in grammatical systems as they are systematically related to changes in contextual variables. What this implies is that doing grammatical description is akin to describing ‘context’ because woven into the descriptive resources is the general recognition that text is produced in specific social, historical and cultural contexts.

In elaborating how particular systems of grammar are in a ‘natural’ (i.e. non-arbitrary) relation with certain contextual categories, Halliday develops relations between grammaticalised semantic resources and register categories, Field, Tenor, Mode which take account of the features of context of situation (capitals are in original):

The FIELD OF DISCOURSE refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place: what is it that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures as some essential component?

The TENOR OF DISCOURSE refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationships obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved?

The MODE OF DISCOURSE refers to what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organisation of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?) and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic, and the like. (Halliday and Hasan 1985:12)

‘Textual analysis’ means, in part, characterising text in relation to its context of situation: its configuration of field, tenor and mode variables, which are in a predictable and systematic relation with lexicogrammatical patterning. So, in the following greeting card, Darling, I’ve had it with you / and I want it again and again and

respect to different kinds of meaning: ‘metafunctions’ (ideational, interpersonal and textual) (p.xxxiv).

Although such variation is not restricted to lexicogrammar. The multifunctional grammar stratifies language and, therefore, social semiotics also recognises another multifunctional stratum – discourse semantics (See Martin 1992, especially Chapter 1).
again, the endearment *Darling* is a choice that is constitutive of a close personal relationship between speaker and audience. Its use is not ‘predicted’ as a choice for addressing someone who is in a less than close relationship than the speaker. This is not to say it will not be used in such contexts but when it appears it is doing something else. For example, the potential for a reciprocal close relationship gives a playful use, such as the drag queens’ *Daaarling*, some of its interpersonal meaning as a term of address when combined with an insult.\(^{183}\)

The formulation of ‘context’ as register goes a long way beyond the ethnographic category of ‘setting’. Register is not a category of language but has been abstracted away from language and Martin (1992) treats register as a semiotic system in its own right ‘instead of characterising context of situation as potential and register as (context’s) actual’ (p.502).\(^{184}\) Treating register as potential means that all contextual features are analysed as part of the semiotic context and kept in view of each other: given a ‘weighting’ in relation to each other. This is a difficult task theoretically and analytically but it is in fact some of the everyday (extra)ordinary accomplishment of language users. Register offers a resource to describe and account for situational features realised by the text, without reducing them to single outcomes. So whereas Johnson’s (1971) treatment of the choice of Christmas card discussed in Chapter 3 was as a direct function of institutional social role, register is a resource that is useful when envisioning the social subject as an assemblage of social relations and identities. While register categories have been considerably elaborated since Halliday’s early formulation, for this study the most important are those associated with Tenor and Mode.\(^{185}\)

---

\(^{183}\) Some of importance of ‘darling’ in the register of ‘drag’ is seen, for example, in its being taken as a name by one Sydney performer, ‘Verushka Daaarling’.

\(^{184}\) As Threadgold (1988a) explains, Halliday does not see text as equivalent to, language as forms with meaning attached, but rather as a meaning potential capable of realisation under the constraints of the text-context dialectic. This involves a view of language which sees the micro-structures of texts (their lexicogrammar) as in some sense a realisation of, a metaphor for, social structure and culture – and thus as realising, constructing, transmitting and changing the ideologies, the social meaning making practices, and the systems of ideas and beliefs that constitute the culture, the social system and speaking subjects (pp.41-42).

\(^{185}\) Most significantly, by those in the register working group at Sydney University in the 1980s, including, Jim Martin, Chris Nesbitt, Cate Poynton, Guenter Plum, Joan Rothery, Anne Thwaite, Eija Ventola.
**Languaging love in print**

With register introduced, the thread of a number of issues introduced earlier in this chapter can be picked up with respect to printed greeting cards languaging love. The resources of register enable a number of semiotic dimensions of greeting cards to be analysed as contextual features that are in systematic relations with certain kinds of meaning. Analysing text as context can be used now to give further consideration to greeting card text as semiotising social closeness and love – which in social semiotic terms are features of Tenor – and the printed characteristics of greeting card language and its abstractness or concreteness – which are features of Mode.

**Languaging intimacy**

If the relation between interpersonal meaning and how instances of text are languaged is not treated as an unproblematic ‘expression’ relation, then what is involved is seen to have a number of dimensions. So, while Johnson (1971) interpreted the choice of Christmas card from the perspective of status relationships inscribed through institutional social roles, Poynton (1985) problematises such a one to one correspondence, bringing a number of dimensions of interpersonal meaning under the rubric of Tenor: a social relations (power) dimension, a social distance dimension (contact) and an attitudinal dimension (affect). Each dimension is elaborated with respect to how the relationship between context and textual instance is systematic.186

In the fun-and-love greeting card example used above, the endearment ‘Darling’, makes a language choice that ‘belongs’, in cultural terms, in close relationships. What the contact dimension of Tenor makes clear is not just the context that this particular choice is ‘expected’ in but that as contact and, thus, intimacy increases, many more ways for addressing someone become available. So, for example, a proliferation of names is one way in which cultural expectations of intimate coupleness are realised. In discussing proliferation of terms of address, Poynton exemplifies as follows

> the process is seen clearly in the progression of a couple falling in love from the most commonly used forms of their respective names, when they first meet, to a variety of pet-forms of those names … , plus private nicknames and a good selection of endearments as the relationship develops. (p.82)

186 Poynton (1985) elaborates specific realisational principles for each: reciprocity, for Power; proliferation for Contact; amplification for Affect.
The individual members of a couple are highly ‘contactable’ for each other, each has a degree of access to the other, which is not the same as that for other people (a sexual and emotional fidelity expectation between those in intimate relationships, for example). ‘Contactable-ness’ is otherwise a feature of how discourses of femininity constitute women (p.83). The extent to which women are expected to be available to others and their resistance to that expectation is, as seen in Chapter 3, important with respect to how kinwork and emotion work are understood and practiced. So, coupling with its high degree of contactableness between subjects, in a sense feminises the man in a heterosexual relationship by constituting a subject who is normally not contact-able as highly contactable, at least for one other person. This is seen in certain discourses of masculinity which nominate coupling as domesticating or taming a man, that is feminising him, which is here understood, in part, through making a masculine subject contactable.

_Languaging distance_

It is not only intimate contexts that the language of love realised by greeting cards is involved in, however. The anonymous commercial greeting card is publicly displayed on retail stands, it ‘speaks’ intimacy within a commercial social relation. So, a greeting card text is involved in the negotiation of a relationship that is understood to operate instrumentally via a goods and services transaction in the public sphere, as well as constitute the kind of positive attachment and closeness that Western culture presumes intimate individuals to have in the private sphere. While Papson draws a link between social distance and physical distance, it is a relation between social distance (contact), ‘channel’, honesty and authenticity that this chapter has read in injunctions to avoid greeting cards because they are prefabricated text and instead to speak plainly and ‘face-to-face’.\(^\text{187}\) Having distinguished between each of these as differently semiotised features of context, it is nonetheless important to consider how physical proximity, which is a feature of Mode, is semiotised in text, although it cannot be unproblematically aligned with speech or writing and print.

\(^{187}\) Papson recounts how by living away from home he has become less close to his family (1986:102). Describing ways in which social distance is realised in greeting cards is part of the task of Chapter 6.
Interactants are not faced with a choice between either face-to-interaction or not and speech and writing cannot be unproblematically aligned with either of these, although these various ‘real life’ options (and many more possibilities) may constitute part of the semiotic complexity and delicacy of context and text that is negotiated with text. Written text cannot be unproblematically aligned with far social distance nor can it be aligned with ‘not-face-to-faceness’. Writing by students in classrooms, for example, is typically carried out while face-to-face with their expected audience, the teacher-as-reader, and email can be written and sent between persons sitting in view of each other. These are contexts that may produce personal ‘asides’ in the writer’s text and references to events that reader and writer witness during the writing process. This kind of sharing of knowledge about the immediate context is not possible when talking to someone in the next room (ignoring glass walls and so on), a situation where in order to share knowledge about an event witnessed by one of the interactants, an account of the event must be given (and may be spoken or written).

Text varies lexicogrammatically with respect to physical distance and the various technologies mediating that distance. When interactants speak, they may not be face-to-face and may be proximate to varying degrees (if the are in adjacent rooms some shared knowledge is assumed, for example, the ‘climate’, noise levels etc). These various semiotics are realised in text. Consider, for example, speaking face-to-face and speaking on the telephone. In a face-to-face interaction between two friends preparing to go out for dinner, a response to the query, ‘Which jacket are you wearing tonight?’, will vary depending on a number of situational features. If the interlocutors are in the house of the one to whom the query is directed, the responding speaker may perhaps hold up the item or point at it, saying ‘that one’ (the one that both interactants can see). If the interactants are on the telephone, the responding individual must specify, ‘the black leather’. The degree of specificity in the speaker’s choice, the assumption of shared knowledge – what can be seen by both or not – and so on are

---

188 And these examples do not give any consideration to non-verbal social semiotics such as Auslan, the signing language of deaf Australians.
features of Mode. Both shared knowledge and visual semiotics are relevant aspects of the Mode of greeting cards.

The Mode of the greeting card is organised with respect to the semiotics of intimacy: ‘that one’ is still possible in the printed language of the greeting card, although it is no longer visual knowledge of what is indicated that is shared but other kinds of personal experience (‘the night we met’, ‘the love we share’). The fictional version of such experiences that fun-and-love greeting cards realise constitutes something usually treated as private in the public domain. The greeting card’s Mode is that of a text that is, like the ‘seen’ poem, ‘written to be read’ (Huisman 1999:58). The kind of personal shared knowledge about a particular experience, ‘that night’, for example, is necessarily abstracted from the concrete experience of the particular and the greeting card is always only a potential interactional text, it is temporally ‘unplaced’ (how this is semiotised is seen in Chapter 6).

The abstraction of a specific experience is one of the ways in which Finkelstein would understand the greeting card as devaluing such experiences. The imperative to keep certain kinds of experiences in speech, or privatised writing between those who experience them is of most importance in shoring up a cultural view of the lover’s discourse as something ‘true’ and ‘real’. It elides, however, the importance of generalisable accounts as constituting a body of knowledge which constitute specific enactments, for example, how falling in love is understood and enacted through the ‘love story’ (Averill 1985; Illouz 1997).

---

189 The question of face-to-face-ness and proximity is further complicated by technologies, such as digital technologies, which enable internet relays and video telephones, which enable face-to-face interaction at a distance. Other technologies such as teleconferencing, for example, involve spoken language but not face-to-faceness. The semiotics of these kinds of interactional situations involve negotiating an absence of shared visual contexts as well as time delays between the interactants.
190 Cf texts which are ‘written to be spoken’ like a lecture or dialogue in a play (Huisman 1999:58). While there are long standing resources for treating certain features of visual language as doing something ‘like’ speech, suggesting intonation in writing, for example by the use of italics for realising emphasis, as Huisman points out, these resources are usually treated metaphorical which is a trace of phonocentrism (p.68). Huisman renders the relation directly so that, graphology is a ‘visual realisation of the several [semiotic] levels of language’ (p.53). While fun-and-love greeting cards are little texts, one of the tasks in Chapter 6 is to say something about their printed text with respect to textual meaning making, exploring how affect is realised at a greater degree of delicacy than simply ‘emphasis’.
Languaging whose meanings?

Languaging love in printed greeting cards is a problem for Finkelstein and Papson, in part, because the lines of responsibility or ‘ownership’ for the meanings being made are unclear (as Amy’s experience, Chapter 2, emphasises). One dimension of this is the issue of whose emotion is being languaged in printed greeting cards. If emotion is realised by speech in a face-to-face context, it is evident whose emotion is being realised because the relation of ‘ownership’ between the ‘speaker’ and the meanings is, apparently, transparent. ‘Apparently’ because, as Bakhtin (1981) observes, all texts are read in relation to other texts and this intertextuality is as important as ‘who’ utters a text.

If the issue of ‘who’ is speaking is treated literally, face-to-face speech has the effect of seemingly pinning down who is saying what, although treating face-to-face speech in this way also glosses over the ordinary resources of English for negotiating a speaker or writer’s ‘ownership’ relation with meanings. Which is to say, that speakers are affiliated with their meaning making to varying degrees. This is an embodied relation and, therefore, it is always difficult to retreat from something once said, from having ‘meant what you said’, although text producers negotiate fine degrees of ‘ownership’ or affiliation to meanings through resources such as quoting. Quoting enables speakers and writers to put a view without necessarily committing themselves to that view but nonetheless put it into discourse. This process of ‘projection’, as Halliday (1994) calls it, is an important way in which negotiating the distance between self and the meanings made by a text is enacted. In the context of speech quoted in the newspaper or a writer’s words cited in a publication, a speaker/writer’s ownership rights to a text are affirmed.\(^{191}\) Obversely, some sayings are taken to belong to

\(^{191}\) Under contemporary conditions, claims on the ‘ownership’ of text have begun to slip and copyright law is currently under pressure with respect to controlling the re-use of published text. Digital technologies, in particular, have led to the texts of many individuals, finding their way into other texts that are presented as belonging to a legal author, for example ‘sampled’ music constituted from prior recordings. In some contexts, it is highly problematic but increasingly the case, that the texts of some are re-used by others (this includes speech, writing, music or art), especially for instance in contexts such as the internet (both music lyrics and tunes and book/journal contents). With respect to greeting cards, copyright applies to the combination of language and image.
speakers, for instance in a juridical context where someone can be compelled to identify themselves as the ‘owner’ of text being asked: are these your words?

A different kind of relation is implied in Finkelstein’s view of speech for doing intimate interaction. This is not a relation of affiliation as much as one of ‘attachment’. How affiliation and attachment are related is seen to some extent in the ordinary understanding of having ‘meant what you said’, as a way of pinning down a speaker’s affiliation to a text and the closely related idea of ‘saying what you mean’, which Finkelstein and Papson might enjoin intimate interactants to do. Using the term ‘attachment’ to suggest something about a relation of distance between text and subjects derives from an important comment Poynton (1990) makes about the affect dimension of Tenor. Poynton insists that the importance of affect is not its realisation of some feeling which the ‘feeler’ or speaker has a disinterested relationship with but that realisations of affect signal a speaker/writer’s commitment to ideas, beliefs and ‘positioning vis a vis other people and phenomena’ (p.252). The more general implication is that these commitments shape social practices and have concrete consequences for social actors (sometimes dire consequences for example, so that how one feels about something or someone can bring a person to murder). Using the term ‘attachment’, as part of this discussion, therefore, gestures to a point of articulation between the semiotics of affect and the Mode of greeting cards.

A ‘speaking subject’ is always understood to have certain kinds of relations of affiliation and attachment to both meanings, ‘positionings’ and particular texts. Text producers affiliate themselves to texts in various ways. Jokes, gossip and anecdotes heard in one context are performed in others, the speaker/writer sometimes signalling that explicitly: let me tell you this great joke I heard the other day. These are not claims to ‘originality’ but signal speakers’ participation and understanding that texts circulate among community members. Applied to the greeting card, this shifts the focus from considering the organisation of the first producers’ textual meanings to thinking about the relationship between the greeting card as a textual artefact of the second producer’s interactional work. In one sense this revisits the question of personalising from a perspective of ‘attachment’ or affiliation with a text. The greeting card is a text whose Mode must negotiate personal distance, not between the giver and recipient (the relevant semiotic dimension of which is contact and, therefore, Tenor), but between the
first producer and the second producer, negotiating ‘distance between meaning and the self’.

It is now possible to make some general comments with respect to the way the thesis envisages languaging love by a printed greeting card and the card giver as a meaning maker. One dimension to this semiotics of affiliation constitutes the second producer of a greeting card text not as a text producer but as audience. A greeting card may be given by one individual but its meanings shared with the recipient in a way where both greeting card giver and recipient share the position of ‘addressee’: I had to get you this card – isn’t it great? (cf seeing givers and recipients as sequential readerships of the first producer’s text). Such a relationship with the text involves treating the relation between greeting card user and the text as one similar to that of a ‘performer’, as in Goffman (1972) and Turner’s (1974) dramaturgical metaphors for social action theory. The greeting card text may be treated like a play or dance performance that is already in circulation. Its meanings retain the sense of being the performance of another but may be read and re-performed by the audience. This is similar to the way in which poetry, for example, is appropriated for seduction, although Amy’s tale suggests that other kinds of affiliation implying certain kinds of attachment may be construed. Where there is a high degree of attachment to the meanings being made, this could be glossed as a kind of claim: these are my words.

Greeting card users negotiate a range of affiliations between themselves and the greeting card text as is seen in alterations to the text and other inscriptions by card givers modifying the first producer’s meaning making, as described in Chapter 2. Drawing further on the dramaturgical metaphor, the greeting card text may also be constituted as a ‘stand in’ for the card giver. This kind of semiotic relation means the card giver is the principle social actor but does not claim ownership of the text. The idea of the stand in is useful because it recognises that the texted cultural artefact is not an artificial replacement of a ‘real’ text producer, as the ingestion and invasion metaphor of consumption would tend to suggest but that, for example, the fun-and-love card may be given as part of a social process in which the individual is already enacting a particular performance. The dramaturgical metaphor is appropriate in the relation between card giver and text because ‘scripts’ are always provisional, even those of canonical texts. A script does not determine an actual performance nor how
any actual performance may deviate from it. A theatrical actor in this way occupies a ‘speaking’ position without being annihilated by, deploying it with degrees of attachment and affiliation that are embodied (for example, through the rehearsal of movement and through the verbal and non-verbal realisation of affect). If a similar relation is allowed between individuals and the greeting card text, then the text of the greeting card is available as a prefabricated, that is, an already written resource but the degree of affiliation is contingent, according to the conditions of a particular performance.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that intimate interaction is not restricted to that performed with speech. Rather than relying on a shaky extension of the concept of ‘authentic’ interaction to include the fun-and-love greeting card, the argument is offered that claims made for speech and face-to-face interaction are phonocentric traces based on a fictitious binary of speech and writing. The chapter has delineated how privileging spoken emotion over printed emotion is, in part, a conflation of language ‘channel’ and social relations of intimacy and physical proximity. Register, a theory of contextualised semiosis, was introduced to enable aspects of semiosis to be elaborated in general terms prior to the lexicogrammatical analysis which will elaborate on the Mode and Tenor of the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards in a later chapter.

Phonocentric discourses attempt to secure certain kinds of text as appropriate or legitimate ways of languaging love. Anxiety about printed ‘patented’ utterances is both a recognition of the significance of cultural diversity and a recognition of a tendency against diversity and complexity in rationalist modes of production. In a increasingly globalised context, there are serious material effects of such rationalist modes on production and consumption. There is also a long standing anxiety about homogeneity that arises from enlightenment discourses, putting an autonomous subject as the source of original production. Some of the history of that anxiety is tied to the spread of print culture. As Ong (1991) points out, ‘[m]anuscript cultures had few, if any, anxieties about influence to plague them, and oral cultures had virtually none’ (p.134). The assumption that utterances are never ‘standardised’, or already ‘existing’ in a culture in some kind of preassembled forms to perform social acts is examined in the following chapter.
5 A discourse on love's language

“As you see,” writes the Marquise de Merteuil, “when you write someone, it is for that person and not for yourself, so you must be sure not to say what you think, but rather what will please that person”. (Barthes 1992:158)

Few people ever wrote letters. For the messages that it was occasionally necessary to send, there were printed postcards with long lists of phrases, and you struck out the ones that were inapplicable. (Orwell [1949] 1970:114)

Introduction

The commercial greeting card is caught up in conflicting discourses on mass production that are involved in constructing twentieth and twenty first-century modernity. When mass production is discursively tied to democratic governing regimes, it is typically in attempts to secure an idealised vision of progress and prosperity. When allied with totalitarian regimes, as exemplified in the writings of George Orwell,\(^\text{192}\) or where standardising practices come into contact with the private domain and the individual, mass production becomes a practice that threatens the idea of an individual constituted by a discourse of creative freedom and uniqueness. A third avenue for interpreting mass production is as a process that simultaneously differentiates and standardises members of a culture as consuming subjects. While the fun-and-love greeting card is a resource for intimate interaction punctuated by a motif of standardisation, this chapter argues that greeting cards do not reduce, standardise or homogenise resources for intimate interaction, drawing on both linguistic evidence and critical cultural and discourse theory. In particular, greeting card text is read in

\(^{192}\) For example, in the world of *Nineteen Eighty Four* with the limited vocabulary of Newspeak.
this chapter through social semiotic resources for analysing context. Woven into those resources is a sense of play between ‘standardisation’ and ‘creativity’ that acts as a critique of dichotomised relations between standardised and creative or synthetic and authentic textual production.

Greeting cards are susceptible to a reading of them as antagonistic to individuality in part because Western conceptions of an individualistic self articulate with modernist aesthetic discourses of verbal and visual originality. This is exemplified in a generalised view of greeting card language as clichéd, sentimental or at best vernacular and, therefore, as inadequate for the expression of an ineffable and quasi-religious idea of love and desire as has developed in Western culture (de Rougement 1956). Love and desire, conceived in this way, are more usually understood as spoken by aesthetic discourses, for example, poetic discourse. In this way, greeting cards come to be subject to evaluative processes, which are interpreted in this chapter as performances of ‘taste’. One such performance involves the use of a particular kind of greeting card, one without linguistic sentiment and with only an image. The exegesis of users of so-called ‘blank’ greeting cards suggests the cultivation of a sense of self as a ‘self-expressive’ or ‘individual’ subject using a mass produced commodity. This apparently contradictory enactment of subjectivity is, in the first instance, treated as a performance that goes on in a cultural context where there is a compulsion to consume. Drawing on Butler’s (1997) conception of subjectivity as performative, it is argued that the practice of using blank greeting cards involves social subjects ‘working on’ their positioning as a consumer of mass produced artefacts concomitant with their positioning as an ‘individual’.

**A mass produced vernacular for doing fun-and-love**

Historically, standardisation and language have a long and important association. It is a history that is involved in developments of spoken and written languages as they are intertwined with sociopolitical structures (Milroy and Milroy 1991). The emergence of nation states has typically been accompanied by the rise in prominence of a language spoken in a particular geopolitical terrain and dialect variation arises in relation to diversity of social structures such as social hierarchies (Labov 1972; Bernstein 1973). Lexicographers may, on occasions, act as prescriptive word standardisers, setting down rules for correct usage (Samuel Johnson being the most famous), and various
institutions are implicated in monitoring and prescribing pronunciation and spellings. Educational practices, for example, are important with respect to the organisation of language in relation to everyday usage, a situation highlighted in relation to written language (Halliday 1988; Bernstein 1990). These public sphere operations do not, however, have the capacity to organise everyday life and practices in a blanket fashion. This is demonstrated, for example, by the persistent presence of non-standard language production and anxieties and claims about non-standard language production, for example, in letters to newspaper editors.

An important, if implicit, proposition in discourses on greeting card text is considered in this first part of the chapter. Papson (1986) and Finkelstein (1994a) might predict an Orwellian ‘cardspeak’ for intimate interaction as a result of the use of mass produced texted artefacts, that is, that resources for doing intimate interactional work become standardised through the use of greeting cards. The issue of standardising ‘love’s language’ is, therefore, first analysed by focusing on words, taking seriously the idea that mass produced text may diminish sociosemantic possibilities for doing intimacy. Words are not the only way that language ‘means’ and, therefore, social semiotics expanded and semantic account of language as resource is outlined. The discussion of ‘love’s language’ then shifts its scope from words and grammar to text involved in performing social processes, for instance, in doing ‘greetings’. At each point, arguments are developed which problematise the proposition that the language of greeting cards standardises and, therefore, homogenises intimate interaction.

‘Let me count the ways’

One way of assessing how language as a resource for doing intimate interaction may be vulnerable to becoming standardised by greeting cards is to consider the more general issue of how changes to the resources of a language occur over time. This is

---

193 The title of Milroy and Milroy’s (1991) work, Authority in Language: investigating language prescription and standardisation, points to what is at stake. Standardisation, with respect to grammar, involves the organisation of structures and prescriptive approaches provide one direction in which issues of standardisation can be explored.

194 Sharing common ways of saying and writing is important but various sites, such as letters to the editor of daily newspapers, frequently have examples of attempts to restrict instances of language to standardised forms that the letter writer has allegiances to, for instance, the ‘Britishness’ of Australian-English rather than its ‘Americanization’.
the terrain that Westcott (1979) is concerned with in a focus on the genesis of words. Westcott argues there is no evidence that vocabularies are shrinking, indeed, they are not only maintaining their size but are probably increasing (p.90). It is a view apparently shared by English language lexicographers, who have resorted to issuing ‘interim’ dictionaries to cope with both expansion and changes in the meanings of words.195

Westcott argues that there are social pressures producing lexical proliferation and that they come from many directions: a word’s genealogy is polygenetic – overdetermined with multiple causation and motivations (p81). This contrasts to a view that Westcott is concerned to problematise, that new words result from single ancestors, are monogenetic, or are ‘simple’ blends of words and fused compounds (p.81). There are two specific areas of language, Westcott identifies as ‘conspicuously’ polygenetic: slang and proper names (p.83). These areas of language Westcott nominates as privatised areas of lexis – slang, for example, is restricted by social and occupational grouping – and they are, therefore, particularly implicated in linguistic invention.196 Other types of language do not necessarily demonstrate the same extent of polygenesis. Vernacular speech, for example, is less likely to produce new vocabulary because it is ‘public linguistic property’ and is necessarily already standardised, reducing ‘free verbal association’ and the cross fertilisation of words (p.83).

The language of fun-and-love greeting cards is not slang and is ‘ordinary’ because it has to be accessible to a broad audience. Fun-and-love greeting cards, however, are deployed in a privatised sociosemantic domain of love relations. Westcott’s assessment of vernacular speech as non-proliferative may, therefore, appear to support the idea of fun-and-love greeting card language as having standardising effects but there are some important reasons that this conclusion should not be reached. While invention and proliferation will not necessarily occur via vernacular usage, all aspects of language ‘are in constant creative interaction, such that each domain

196 This characterisation of slang is not to differentiate hierarchically among speakers – that some use slang and some do not – but refers to the way particular words tend to be part of the slang vocabulary of specific groups, for example, slang varies across age groups.
continually stimulates the generation of new elements in others’ (p.90). Second, ignoring for a moment the problematically binarised view of language as public and private, the language of greeting cards is, in Westcott’s sense, both ‘public’ and ‘private’. Individual readings of card meanings are also always socioculturally specific and produced in the play between utterance, intertexts and producer. As the discussion of personal re-inscriptions of the greeting card by card users in Chapter 2 addressed, the texts may be intensely private, perhaps undecipherable (except in general terms) by someone outside an intimate pairing.

While the vernacular language of greeting cards would tend, following Westcott, toward non-proliferation (that is, not creating new words and meanings), importantly, the language of fun-and-love greeting cards would at the same time not necessarily tend towards standardising lexical resources for realising fun and love. However, while the discussion of standardising love’s language above has focused on ‘words’, from the perspective of social semiotics, text as meaning making involves an expanded conception of resources.

**More than words can express**

Greeting cards are ‘little texts’ (Halliday 1994:397) doing all their linguistic meaning making perhaps in one word – for example, *Dream* – but whether the text being considered is a single word, four pages of verse, a cartooned interaction in ‘speaking balloons’, or even non-words, for example, *hpj@(%U!%a%)W5hic!* each is text involved in the constitution of meaning. A critique of the ‘conduit’ (Reddy 1979) and ‘container’ relation between words and meaning is woven into Halliday’s (1978) sociosemantic conception of language. Treating text as a sociosemantic ‘unit’ in the context of semiotic exchange means the example above – *hpj@(%U!%a%)W5hic!* – can be understood as realising meaning making (although how it may be realised phonologically is a problem). This bit of gobbledygook is thus a comprehensible social act in a number of

---

197 Gender provides a perspective on the issue of language change, particularly with respect to the instability of the various categories of ‘public’ and ‘private’ language. Cameron (1990) finds that eighteenth century writers target women as ‘wanton innovators’ with respect to language but scarcely a century later, men are praised as ‘the chief renovators of language’ (p.21-22). The nineteenth century is also the time Huyssen (1986) identifies women being increasingly associated with standardisation and mass production as a negative value.

198 On one greeting card, this represents the ‘speech’ of a drunken cartooned character.
situations, including its representation of drunken ‘speech’ and its use as an exemplification of an approach to text analysis.

A sociosemantic formulation of text avoids shattering text into structure and semantics and it is this expanded view of meaning making that is now introduced. Responsibility for meaning making through the social semiotic construct ‘text’ is expanded by Halliday to include both words and structure: lexis and grammar – lexicogrammar. Grammar, in this way, is no longer the glue for lexical ‘content’, it is repositioned as social semantic resource. This understanding of grammar as a meaning making resource provides a compelling reason for doing the kind of close textual, or grammatical, analysis of the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards that is carried out in Chapter 6.

An expansion of linguistic resources as lexicogrammar is enhanced by Halliday’s (1978; 1994) generalised theory of meaning making. Halliday identifies a general semantic tendency across language that organises lexicogrammar with respect to different kinds of meaning: metafunctions. Three kinds of meaning are posited, organising lexicogrammar metafunctionally: ideational and interpersonal meaning, with a third, the textual, ‘which breathes relevance into the other two’ (1994:xiii). Ideational meaning has the general purpose of understanding the environment (p.xiii). With the resources of ideational meaning experience is construed as physical, biological and mental ‘realities’. Interpersonal meaning involves acting socially with language, with and on other people in that environment (p.xiii). Textual meaning constructs coherence, providing local contextual relevance to the other two metafunctions (p.334). In this way, lexicogrammar is a richly semanticised resource, in contrast to more traditional grammatical units which carry responsibility for meaning at one level. The importance of the metafunctional hypothesis cannot be overstated, since it displaces the authority of representational meaning. The historical primacy and privileging of experiential meaning and conventional conceptions of meaning as referential meaning

\[199\] Word and lexis are not in fact co-extensive units: ‘head over heels’, for example, is a lexical item that is agnate to ‘smitten’, ‘lovesick’, ‘bewitched’ etc.

\[200\] Ideational meaning is further distinguished between experiential (representation of experience) and logico-semantic (language as natural logic) (Halliday 1994:179).
or ‘content’ is dispersed because the experiential metafunction, the referential aspect of meaning making, is not given all the responsibility for meaning making. Instead, Halliday assigns experiential meaning a ‘place’ within the sociosemiotic constitution of text. In this way, social semiotics provides a rich resource for analysis that locates itself as part of ‘post’ approaches to text and meaning and it is particularly important for work such as this that is interested in interpersonal meaning making and social processes involved in intimate relations.

**Ways of doing love’s language**

Greeting cards, as vernacular and mass produced texts, are suspected of constituting the standardisation of experience. Papson (1986), for example, suggests that the family is ‘so emptied of emotional intensity that formalized affection has invaded even childhood’ with a child expressing affection through a standardised form, such as the Mother’s Day card (p.103). The content and the form of emotional expression are, in Papson’s view, both ‘standardising’. As a proposition about how linguistic resources for doing social relations should be deployed by social actors in particular contexts, Papson’s statement above implies that the relation between language and performances of culture is a ‘creative’ process and that novel instances of such performances are vulnerable to being swamped by standard forms. Following a social semiotic approach, the thesis sets out a different view of love’s language, one that takes text to be socially organised ways of doing. The account of the relation between text and socially organised ways of doing outlined below draws on a conception of social processes and text that realises them, as both ‘organised’ and as ‘fluid’ (Kress and Threadgold 1988).

While some of what is traced in Papson’s statement is nostalgia for lost innocence and childhood as an ideal state, it is also a view of what constitutes a ‘natural’ language of love. The act of giving a Mother’s Day card is an empty ritual, according to Papson,

---

201 Its ‘place’ is actively repositioned by Halliday in *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1994) because he begins with Textual, goes on to address Interpersonal meaning and only then turns to Ideational meaning. Cf Jakobson (1960) who says: ‘Obviously we must agree with Sapir that, on the whole ideation reigns supreme in language’ (p.353).

because it is a socially organised opportunity for individuals to ‘express feelings for
other family members on socially approved occasions in socially approved ways’
(p.103). In being opposed to conventionalised or ritual expressions of affection, Papson
does not propose that family members express feelings in socially unapproved ways
(nothing so transgressive). Of greatest concern to Papson is that such occasions are
spectacle, invading natural and spontaneous expression of feelings of ‘natural’
relations of affection, for example, mother-child love (p.103). Papson appears to segue
from socially organised ways of doing affective interactional work – treating it as a
kind of standardisation – to socially approved ways of doing. It is a move that
problematically draws a distinction between individualised, spontaneous expressions
of ‘natural’ affection and conventionalised, ritualised and socially ordered
‘expressions’.

A distinction between performances of interactional work on such grounds is not
supported by social semiotic resources for analysing ‘ways of doing’. Children, or
anyone else learning a culture’s ‘ways of doing’, learn how to do things with text
embedded in those ‘doings’ not separate from them.203 Some of what is acquired is the
way that particular social processes are what can be loosely termed as ‘shaped’. For
example, waving at someone and saying ‘hello’ realises a ‘salutation’ and is
constitutive of a performance of the social process of ‘greeting’. As text varies
according to the particular cultural context, a salutation will vary accordingly, for
instance, a ‘meeting’ salutation (hello, how are you?) compared to a farewell salutation
(bye then, thanks for dinner). There cannot be just any way of doing things in a
culture.204 The shape of a social process is some of the ‘texture’ of a text. For example,
to tell an account of ‘dog bites man’ as a narrative or to choose to tell it as a scientific
report constitutes particular meanings and positions for a reader. These shaped ‘ways

203 Key sites implicated in the distribution of sociocultural repertoires and discourses are those
of family and school as Bourdieu (1976) and Bernstein (1990) have demonstrated.
204 In oral cultures such ‘shaped-ness’ is, in a sense, what is relied upon to maintain cultural
knowledge. Goody and Watt (1990) suggest that ‘formalized patterns of speech, recital under
ritual conditions, the use of drums and other musical instruments, the employment of
professional remembrancers – all such may shield at least part of the content of memory from
the transmuting influence of the immediate pressures of the present’ (pp.315-316).
of doing’ things with text (genres in social semiotic terms) provide members of a culture with resources through which they can perform the culture:

as members of this culture we have somehow acquired a knowledge about how people use language to achieve different things. When called upon, we find ourselves familiar with not only the schematic structure of everyday genres but also the typical realisations: the typical types of meanings that get made in each stage of a genre, the typical words and structures that get used to express them. (Eggins 1994:46)

For example, celebrating a young child’s birthday may involve a ‘birthday party’ and include, among other things, the child being given gifts and birthday cards. How text is deployed in the process of giving and receiving a gift, for example, involves the organisation of semiotic resources in a culture, as complex and dynamic social processes. In a discussion of the phenomenology of gift-giving, Berking (1999) attends to what he refers to as the ‘ritual context’ of gift-giving, describing its stages and their social meanings:

A social encounter defined through the exchange of gifts operates within the solid framework of a ceremonially controlled performance. Implicit knowledge of the forms of interaction already prescribes the next step: that one should behave towards the other with dignified composure, that the actual presentation of the gift should be followed by its receipt and then by a visible show of thanks... (p.8)

‘Doing’ culture, according to both Eggins and Berking’s descriptions, is a ‘shaped’ experience. Berking goes on to give an exemplar of how the ‘solid framework of the ceremonially controlled performance’ can be contravened, suggesting that children, for example, need not behave with ‘dignified composure’ when faced with a gift (p.8). Children, Berking suggests, are allowed something forbidden to adults: ‘unbridled curiosity and a drive to possess, which treats the [present] wrapping as a mere hindrance’ (p.8). By treating difference as an exception – contextualised though it may be – there is a prominence given to the ‘shaped-ness’ of this social process that is at the expense of its dynamism and the social relations constituted in its performance. In order to read specific instances of a social process as both shaped and ‘messy’, genre has been developed within social semiotics (see Kress and Threadgold 1988; Threadgold 1988b) in a number of useful and complementary directions.

Genre is treated as always both shaped and fluid by Kress and Threadgold (1988). The fluidity of social processes points to the heterogeneity of the social, whereas the
stability of genres points to the particular way that social processes and the ‘unfolding’ of the genres that realise them are predictable and, therefore, produce expectations for participants in social and historical contexts (p.241). Predictability signals the possibility of such expectations being ‘played’ with (certain jokes mobilise this potential, for example, greeting cards that do not open because their folded pages are glued together). The dual aspect of genre as shaped and fluid is given a specifically social dimension by Kress and Threadgold, who locate genres within social practices and discourses as a power-knowledge relation, writing genre as both the codification of a certain social state of affairs (the inertial element) and the domain of contestation and conflict (the processual/dynamic element) (p.238).

A social approach to genre is also an important way in which differences realised between individuals and social groups may be identified. Genres involve the acquisition of cultural knowledges and the generic resources for performing social processes. An individual’s familiarity with particular resources and their skill in enacting them can vary, according to age or gender, for example. In the social process of gift-giving, what comes after the opening of the present, according to Berking’s description, is ‘a visible show of thanks’ (this could be verbal or non-verbal, for example, a kiss). If the birthday-girl is a very young child and it is their first experience of gift-giving, this stage will require the cultural apprentice to be initiated into the social process, for example, by being prompted: say ‘thank you’, when Grandma gives you your birthday present.

Explicit instruction in how the social process of gift-giving proceeds takes on a different dimension when the child is older. A prompt to say ‘thank you’ may become a chastisement premised on sociocultural expectations that ways of doing gift-giving are established in the child’s repertoire: That’s not how we say thank you. Say thank you properly! Texts thus not only enact particular social processes, they engage human beings as a subject: as birthday-girl, lover, author etc. The child, for

\[205\] Accepting Derrida’s (1980) critique of the purity of genre, Kress and Threadgold (1988) suggest that the more stable a genre, the more its multi-genericness stops being noticeable and the more a genre appears ‘coherent’. Without this stability, texts continue to exhibit their multi-generic character; ‘such texts are marginal’ (p.241).
instance, is constituted in their subordinate position – as cultural apprentice. Moreover, the child who performs birthday-girl by drawing on parentally approved manners with all the positive cultural values such behaviours carry – for example, saying ‘thank you’ and showing gratitude for gifts and respect for their elders – is constituted as a good girl and, concomitantly, one who does not know or do those things is positioned as a bad girl. Such a social and productive view of genres, as positioning practices, leads Kress and Threadgold (1988) to an analytical praxis:

To describe a genre involves specifying its possible subject-matters and its possible textual forms and constructions. It may also involve specifying the relations which it allows between writers and readers, writers and narrators, narrators and characters, and so on – that is, not only its internal dynamics but also the generically constrained ways in which it unfolds materially in space and time. (p.218)

This suggests how to proceed, particularly in Chapter 7, but the fun-and-love greeting card was also described in previous chapters as the product of manufacturing processes and as an artefact given in interactional work. Those descriptions of the greeting card provide some of the context of culture (e.g., industrialised capitalism, literate individuals, kinwork and intimate relationships) for the social process that the text constitutes. Given these aspects of context, the fun-and-love greeting card is involved in performing certain social processes, rather than others: it cannot, in any normative sense (bracketing ‘madness’ or playfulness), perform ‘buying petrol’, ‘giving a lecture’ or ‘going to the cinema’. It is not immediately obvious that these little texts can be treated as ‘a genre’. This issue is specifically considered in Chapter 7, after the presentation of the close textual analysis of the corpus in Chapter 6.

**Love(r)s language: discoursing the ‘real’ thing**

Fun-and-love greeting card text is organised in the following discussion around an analysis of ‘love’s language’ as a sociocultural category associated with particular values. While the linguistic argument put via Westcott (1979), above, has its merits in making the thesis argument that the mass produced printed language of the greeting card does not, by virtue of its ordinariness constitute a threat to resources for realising love and desire, it does not engage with a more generalised distaste towards the use of greeting cards for performing intimate interaction, such as Papson (1986) and Finkelstein (1994a) exemplify. Such distaste is read, in part, as a metaphorical expression of a certain anxiety about homogeneity constituted in Western discourses of
individuality together with distinctions constituted between aesthetic and quotidian texts. Certain discourses, especially the poetic, are designated as love’s language, leading the ordinary language of greeting cards to be negatively evaluated in relation to poetic discourse, as Barthes (1992) does. How the ordinary language of the greeting card is caught up in such a dualism is analysed as a case of ‘mistaken textual identity’. Specific textual characteristics, specific meaning making resources, are identified in order to consider how this ‘mistake’ is enacted, drawing on Huisman’s (1999) analysis of the written poem.

A particular kind of aesthetic discourse appears in the exegesis of some informants in the study, when print text is eschewed altogether. Some greeting card users are proponents of the blank greeting card – cards with images only, no linguistic text – for doing interactional work. This choice is analysed by drawing on Bourdieu’s (1984) work on consumption as a classificatory practice, producing ‘distinction’ among consumers. The value of Bourdieu’s account is that it is a social theory, although as a model it tends towards reductiveness (Frow 1995; Butler 1997). To rescue Bourdieu’s rendering of the relation between the social and the subject, Butler (1997) uses the concept of performativity, which is drawn on in this analysis of performances of greeting card giving with blank greeting cards to situate those performances, particularly within a cultural compulsion to consume.

The background to the discussion is a complex of issues around cultural production and standardisation. While commercial mass production is always premised on standardisation and on certain practices of regularity and automation, cultural production in non-commercial fields may also be premised on regularities and ‘standardisation’ – if not on volume – for example, in institutional textual production, like legal judgment or making an ‘oath’. In the context of the intimate heterosexual relationship, the way some couples now write their own marriage vows is premised on the institutional standardisation of vows. Other cultural production is highly valued precisely because of its apparent non-conformity and absence of standardisation, artwork, for example. The illusory quality of non-conformity or ‘originality’ is highlighted, when certain instances of cultural production do not conform. For example, staging an opera or choreographing a ballet in accordance with an ‘original’ text is an important way in which the textual canons of those fields are
produced, therefore, invention and creativity in a particular production may be viewed as transgression.

**A taste for the poetic**

In conventional denunciations of mass production, the quality of individual self-expression is held to be seriously undermined by the use of the same resource as millions of other persons. The cultural value of greeting card text is also caught up in distinctions with respect to what kind of discourse is the ‘language of love’. Greeting card text according to Finkelstein (1994a) and Papson (1986) has a taste for *cliché*\(^\text{206}\) and sentimentality. Evaluating greeting language in that way leads Finkelstein (1994a) to argue that greeting card text is inadequate for the task of expressing ineffable emotions such as passion, love etc. (p.161). Such a position mobilises an aesthetic discourse and leads to the idea that a fun-and-love greeting card is, therefore, problematic, generically speaking, for individual performances of emotion which are held to be specific or original to a particular person and to be constitutive of a unique ‘self’. Expressing love and desire and doing intimate interactional work should not, according to Finkelstein, involve the use of mass produced greeting cards because their ‘abbreviated, simplifying language’ reduces the complexities of emotional and everyday social relationships to slogans (p.163):

> What does it suggest about our cultural times when the *Peanuts* comic strip characters, which appear in thousands of newspapers worldwide, are employed to express our interest in existential angst, the death of God, mid-life crises, unhappiness and economic failure? (pp.163-164)

Finkelstein’s stance equates repetition with an absence of value or meaning across the sociocultural landscape, implicating the greeting card user in such a way that if the card user does not notice such an effect, they are repositioned as a duped consuming subject. The use of stock characters and cartoon figures, such as Snoopy, Charlie Brown etc, to do intimate interactional work are, rather, read through a metaphor of the ‘joker’. Such figures are liminal and can be made to take responsibility for saying things in the difficult and dangerous territory of love and desire.

\(^{206}\) That is, trite, stereotyped expressions, e.g. *trials and tribulations* or ‘frozen’ metaphors (*The Macquarie Dictionary*). A borrowing from French, where *cliché* is glossed as a photo-negative, print and printing plate, providing an etymological clue as to how a sense of mimesis is folded into the English usage.
A presumption of classifying greeting card language as clichéd and sentimental is also problematic, although raising this issue necessarily involves anticipating certain aspects of the analysis in Chapter 6. While there are examples of romantic clichés and sentimental language in the corpus of greeting cards – e.g. *There are no endings.../only beginnings* – one of the features of some fun-and-love greeting cards is the constitution of love in a number of non-romantic ways, including as an impermanent and illusory state. Such texts suggest a certain ‘self-knowingness’ about love that clichés of romantic love do not demonstrate. Any such ‘post’ textuality of some greeting cards is, according to Finkelstein (1994b), not sufficient to redeem them because even ‘[t]he attempt to enunciate worthy, serious and complex sentiments on the face of a greeting card has the effect of trivialising the message’ (p.67). This is a conclusion that the mass produced language of greeting cards is inherently a corruption of the enunciation of serious and complex sentiments, including love and desire.

A generalised distaste for vernacular, clichéd and sentimental language for doing intimate interaction is organised in the culture largely through aesthetic discourses. Love and desire have long been associated with poetic discourse. Mobilising an aesthetic discourse, Barthes’ (1992) treatise on love, *The Lover’s Discourse*, argues that a lover’s discourse is never tactical or quotidian, it is purely expressive because its terrain is that of the self (p.158). So, while in one of the epigrams heading this chapter, the Marquise de Merteuil imagines her writing to be a lover’s discourse, Barthes pronounces that ‘[t]he Marquise is not in love; what she postulates is a correspondence, i.e., a tactical enterprise to defend positions’ (p.158 italics in original). A lover’s discourse that is ‘purely expressive’, as Barthes proposes, is a discourse which is outside the public domain, in the realm of the ‘private’ and, furthermore, delineates that ‘private’ domain as interiorised in the lover’s self. Barthes is here drawing on Jakobson’s (1960) structuralist formulation of language, making a distinction between aesthetic and pragmatic discourse. Jakobson claims that the function of verbal art is aesthetic, taking the poetic function as definitively supreme over the referential in poetry (p.371). By removing the experience of love and desire from context, as Barthes does, and putting it into a transcendent form, it can be kept ‘uncontaminated’ by the everyday. Such a reductive approach is undermined by a social account of text.
If the relation between text and context is constitutive, as introduced in Chapter 4, text ‘tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life’, as Bakhtin puts it (1981:239). If words, utterances and texts ‘taste’ of their context of production, they must ‘speak’ more than an ‘aesthetic’. The aesthetic and the pragmatic are not mutually exclusive. As Hasan (1985) points out: ‘it is simplistic to argue that if literature is aesthetic then it cannot be pragmatic’ (p.99). A pragmatic or ‘communicative’ function, Hasan suggests, is central to poetic texts, ‘verbal art’, in that ‘it embodies precisely the kind of “truths” that most communities are deeply concerned with’ (p.100). The issue of whether or not greeting card text can embody such ‘truths’ has, in part, already been responded to. ‘Truths’ for a community are not just those which concern themselves with seeking a deeper nature of human beings or about their social lives. ‘Truths’ including those solidified knowledges and practices of a community that may be embodied in clichés.207 This is the value of analysing clichés:

Clichés are cultural stereotypes-socially prepared ways of seeing, thinking, feeling. [Using them] we are not only saying something about ourselves, we are also talking in culturally defined ways and thus saying something about what we have internalized of the social order... . (Crawford et al 1992:146)

Clichés realise familiar sociocultural knowledge and their analysis will, therefore, suggest particular discursive regularities that have solidified around love and desire. Analysis, rather than dismissal of greeting cards that draw on cliché, may delineate where interventions for social change may be directed, although, importantly, this presumes a desire for such change.

Distaste towards the clichéd or quotidian language of greeting cards for the realisation of love and desire is, in part, constructed in the constitution of certain emotions as part of an aesthetic realm. This leaves other emotion somewhere else, ‘outside’ the aesthetic: in the everyday. Where does that leave everyday intimacy in

---

207 Verbal art, as Hasan (1985) glosses it, examines certain truths and explores possibilities and the constitution of shared general meanings about the human condition for a community (p.100). Poetic texts can thus be described loosely as imaginative, drawing on metaphor and having a scope that is not personal but ‘human’. The human condition, however, is always socioculturally contingent. Hasan writes that ‘it is not that there is art, and the job of language is to simply express it; rather, it is that if there is art, it is because of how language functions in the text’ (p.91). Thus social semiotics focuses on how particular patterns of linguistic resources (tense, conjunction, reference, foregrounding, metaphor etc.) are realised.
terms of the realisation of love and carnal desire? What resources are there for ‘sex talk’? There is ‘dirty’ talk (as may be exemplified by vulgarity) and there are various vocabularies (for example, in naming genitalia with medical and ‘childish’ terms). There are colloquial forms constituting sexual pursuit (Australian English provides an international travel agent advertising in Australia with the following in its poster campaign: ‘Do you want a cheap route?’). Ways of doing sex-talk have also been an important aspect of public health action campaigns for HIV/AIDS, where spoken interaction has been considered important in providing strategies for ‘safe-sex’. While ‘sex talk’ may be constituted with such resources (and its lexis is polygenetic, in Westcott’s terms, described above), ways of speaking sexual intimacy in Australian English are not well described.

This is not a love song

If the vernacular and clichéd language of some greeting cards is taken as inherently different and as differently valued to the poetic, why does any kind of evaluative discourse of similarity get applied to greeting card texts? Why are they not treated as entirely different? A debate about whether or not greeting cards can be ‘love’s language’ is, in another sense, a non-debate. Poetic discourse and greeting card discourse are not the same thing at all. They do occupy some of the same generic ground; fun-and-love greeting cards and some poetic texts tread the social terrain of love and desire. Is this debate then a ‘turf war’? If not, what is the similarity between these texts that forms some of the basis upon which to organise a debate? Some of the answer to these questions lies with the Mode of greeting card texts. By drawing on Huisman’s (1999) social semiotic analysis of written poetic texts, certain textual characteristics are seen to be involved in reading greeting cards through an aesthetic discourse.

How are greeting card texts realised that they are sometimes treated as ‘failed’ poetry or as stepping illegitimately into the terrain of the poetic? One aspect of this is that the cultural value of the language of greeting card, organised, in part, through an

---

208 In order to pursue those questions further with a degree of specificity, what is needed is a way of talking about particular texts, in order to be able to describe what linguistic resources are in play, for example, ‘who’ is involved and what is being ‘done’ as is done in Chapter 6.
aesthetic discourse, is involved in ‘a case of mistaken generic identity’. It is treated as if it has been classified as poetic. Such a ‘mistake’ is constituted, in the first instance, in the idea of generic identity. It is a mistake that relies on there being ‘a’ legitimate type of language for ‘a genre’ and a ‘fixity’ of generic function. These are issues that Derrida (1980) analyses, problematising generic ‘purity’. Deconstructing ‘genre’ by deploying a metaphor of contamination, Derrida’s argument, in summary, is that a fiction of generic corruption is premised on a fantasy of purity. It is this fantasy and the fiction it produces that processes of generic classification necessarily play out. How though do greeting card text and poetic discourse come together under this regime?

Greeting card text may be mistakenly classified as ‘bad poetry’ or counterfeit or synthetic poetic texts as a consequence of a mimetic effect, activating certain expectations in the reader’s engagement with the text. In a study of the written or ‘seen’ poem, Huisman (1999) demonstrates how the graphic display of poetry, realised by a particular spatial arrangement of written and printed lines of text, is related to the differentiation of poetic discourse from other categories of discourse. The designation ‘poem’ is applied to a text that is constructed in a particular graphological fashion – separate lines of text rather than a continuous flow (prose). Therefore, the following is recognised as a poem:

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm’d;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature’s changing course untrimm’d;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander’st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee. (Shakespeare, Sonnet XVIII)

Sonnets, such as above, consist of 14 lines, rhyme patterns and often alter their perspective towards the end. If the reader is aware of the status of the sonnet in Elizabethan poetry, they understand that it is a love poem. Without these characteristics, the example above is just a 14 line poem. Nominating text as an
instance of a ‘poem’ is also always historically and socially contingent but it is the
classificatory process itself that is analysed by Huisman and which provides a way
forward with respect to making a textual case for how the greeting card comes to be
caught up in a case of mistaken identity.

Huisman draws on sociologist Bernstein’s (1996) work on language to explicate how
poetic discourse is recognised. Where categories of discourse are strongly
differentiated (e.g. poetic and prose discourse), Bernstein would recognise strong
processes of ‘classification’. Where practices realising poetic discourses are explicit and
prescriptive, Bernstein would describe the environment as having strong ‘framing’.
What Huisman traces with respect to poetic discourse in English is that since the
nineteenth century it is an increasingly weakly classified and framed discourse
(1999:34). From the perspective of weak classification, categories of discourse ‘leak’
into each other and, therefore, other kinds of texts ‘violate’ a classification (p.35). The
period Huisman identifies as being the beginning of a poetic discourse’s weak
classification and framing coincides with the period in which the greeting card
emerged together with a set of social conditions associated particularly with
industrialisation: mass literacy, textual proliferation, education and the dispersal of
people as a labour force. How closely any relation between these conditions and the
classification and framing of poetic discourse should be interpreted is difficult to
assess. While the scene is set for classificatory ‘violations’ because of weak
classification and framing, the specific textual features that realise an instance of
‘violation’ vary.

There is one characteristic of the seen poem and of greeting card text that is most
implicated in this process of mistaken identity. For poetic discourse, Huisman
suggests, the habitual writing and printing of poetry in lines is critical because the
‘presence (or absence) of lineation has provided the basic classification/’ differentiation
of poetic discourse’ (pp.15-17). (Cf Hasan’s (1985) more social and literary gloss
above). Lineation also forms a central feature of greeting card texted sentiment (or
‘verse’ as it is sometimes called). The weak classification of poetic discourse and the
graphic lineation of greeting card text may produce expectations in the reader that ‘this
text is a poem’. To assume lineation accounts for all generic ‘reasoning’, either for the
greeting card or the poem, would overdraw that argument, however. A reader’s
engagement with the greeting card is also framed by other contextualising processes. For example, consumption practices associated with romantic occasions (e.g., St Valentine’s Day buying of roses, going out for dinner) and non-occasions (e.g., the little ‘thoughtful’ gift, the surprise weekend away) frame the reading of a fun-and-love greeting card. The greeting card also involves other classifications. As a texted material object, the greeting card is a folded card with an image; it is a sign of a ‘greeting card’, not of a ‘poem’ (or a postcard). Furthermore, the greeting card is read and used by literate subjects, not simply subjects skilled in reading and writing but immersed in visual and print culture or, as Huisman (1999) puts it: a ‘subjectivity which sees written language as a visible consumer object, an object of meaning [and], values that object’ (p.92).

One kind of reading in particular is susceptible to this configuration of weak classification and framing of poetic discourse. While lineation may contribute to a reader ‘mistaking’ the generic identity of the greeting card, such a ‘mistake’ is a process that is in a sense already in train in phonocentric readings because phonocentric vision ‘sees’ speech not writing. The printed text of the greeting card is not seen as a way of ‘speaking’ love and desire in Finkelstein (1994a) and Papson’s (1986) analyses. Those phonocentric analyses treat the greeting card as ‘not-speaking’ self-expression because it is print text. The production context of such a text in those analyses comes to have a certain prominence over the context in which the text is used. In focusing in on the text in this way, as an ‘analytical object’, a certain perspective to the analyst’s field of vision is produced. As a visual metaphor, this amounts to the effect of adjusting a camera lens for ‘depth of field’, bringing certain objects into prominence over others. If a reading treats the greeting card text as analytical object, rather than as a text produced and used in non-analytical contexts, then its lineation may be foregrounded contributing to it resembling poetic discourse.

**I am the real thing?**

An absence of lineation altogether, in the image-only greeting card, involves different kinds of classificatory processes. In this study, blank greeting cards – cards with images only – drew specific comment from informants and are, therefore, described and analysed as a particular instance of greeting card use. The use of a blank greeting card is analysed here as tracing a complex of relations, including the enactment of
‘individuality’ by subjects, in a context in which all subjects are compelled, everyday, to be consumers. A taste for an absence of linguistic text over the greeting card’s vernacular language of love is, like other consumption, implicated in social relations. In the context of developed capitalism, individual production-consumption activity differentiates members of communities and cultures, putting people at odds with each other. One of the key ways that individual consumption is differentiated is that some people have more money to ‘dispose of’ than others and, therefore, variable access to goods – so certain individuals may not participate in commercial greeting use because their wealth enables them to deploy other kinds of texted artefacts to do intimate interactional work – but greeting cards are both cheap and are roughly all the same cost (other than ‘to my wife’ anniversary cards as already reported).

Blank greeting card use is analysed as involved in constituting a distinction between blank and texted card users in which the latter are positioned by the former as ‘masses’ while blank card users constitute themselves as ‘non-masses’ or individual. Performances of taste activate and make distinctions among individuals and groups as Bourdieu (1984) shows. It is not only capital wealth that is involved in consumption but processes of judgement, a context in which knowledge – usefully abstracted by Bourdieu as ‘cultural capital’ – is critical. One difficulty for such an analysis is that blank greeting cards are always already mass produced. Drawing on Butler’s (1997) conception of subjectivity as performative, it is argued that the use of a blank greeting card is the enactment of a subjectivity that is recognised by greeting card users as fraught, given that they are using an artefact with characteristics that tends to position subjects as consumers.

**Blank greeting cards: just for the taste of it?**

What are these blank greeting cards and how do their specific characteristics contribute to their consumption? The visual images of blank greeting cards, while varied, fall into three broad groups: works of art; images of nature, for example, landscapes, seascapes

---

209 Bourdieu’s (1984) study of consumer taste in contemporary society – in particular, in France – proposes that individual choices in art, the everyday (e.g. food) and substantial consumption (e.g. a house) are personal preferences that are social acts within a given cultural system and which are also constitutive of the cultural system.
or signifiers of nature such as trees, flowers, animals etc., and a heterogeneous group that includes representations of everyday objects, for example, soap, books and shoes rendered as aesthetic objects.\textsuperscript{210} These images are realised by a variety of representational techniques: photographic and other hyper-real imaging as well as painting and drawing techniques, for example, ‘watercolour’. Specific artworks may also be represented.\textsuperscript{211} While representations of two-dimensional works are favoured, three-dimensional works, including sculpture, installations and ancient objects (e.g., fertility figures) are also in the corpus of greeting cards. An entire work may be represented or only a fragment.\textsuperscript{212} The card stock itself for such ‘art cards’ tends to be of a quality that enables better reproduction of detail and colour.\textsuperscript{213}

The blank greeting card was talked about by informants in this study in a number of ways. First, as a necessary choice, when the editorial content (of the first producer) was not suitable. This is in keeping with manufacturers’ recognition that not all sending situations can be covered by mass commercial production of greeting cards. This pragmatic response was overshadowed by other comments on the choice of a blank greeting card, which, commonly, but not always overlapped. These responses were, in brief: that choosing a blank card was ‘normal’, that is, formed most of the greeting card use by an individual; that choosing a blank card involves selecting for the images; that by choosing a blank card the giver sought to avoid being a ‘consumer’ of mass or standardised messages.

\textsuperscript{210} Papson (1986) suggests ‘the dominant images on greeting cards are images of Nature and Nostalgia’ (p.108). The size of that sample is not stated and it is difficult to compare non-occasion and occasion greeting cards. Blank cards are a staple of publisher The House of Bodleigh where they are known as ‘art’ cards. The third group at this level of description also includes images of mass media characters, for example, the filmic Batman, or cartoon characters, e.g., Ren and Stimpy.

\textsuperscript{211} Those artworks represented in the corpus include European and Australian artists from various centuries and include images attributed to the following: Toussaint, Monet, Santerre, Fildes, Olive Cotton, Cossington-Smith, Picasso, Reubens, Puruntatameri, Julien Williams, Goltzius, Gentileschi, Sally Morgan.

\textsuperscript{212} However, when blank greeting cards are published for the purpose of sale at art galleries and museums, the image will usually represent the entire work limited only by printing technology and paper stock.

\textsuperscript{213} See Schor 1987 on the relation between aesthetic detail and the feminine.
Blank greeting card users exegesis suggests that the inscription of a blank greeting card, rather than one already linguistically texted, is, in effect, the voice of the card giver being raised against that of the first card producer(s), although the space through which this other voice is heard, the greeting card itself, is provided by the first (industry) producer(s). While some blank greeting card users speak of ‘personalising’ communication against ‘standardised’ communication, the use of a blank greeting card does not in Papson’s (1986) view constitute consumer ‘resistance’, although resistance is, in his view, necessary: ‘Resistance has to be re-established at the point of production itself … material production’ (p.110). What kind of written text might constitute such resistance is unclear. ‘Home-made’ greeting cards would not fulfill the proper gift value, according to Carrier (1993). Carrier’s analysis of Christmas gifts finds no positive value in the handmade gift because it does not embody the necessary work, for example, the giver has not had to stand in queues, get sore feet and experience the general difficulties associated with Christmas shopping (p.63). While the homemade greeting card may avoid certain kinds of work – the effort of finding ‘a just right’ card, or the effort of personalising through reinscription – it involves imaginative and physical work that is necessary for its realisation as a material artefact. In response to the positions just outlined, it is suggested that greeting cards are not a singular mode of production with ‘dominant’ or ‘resistant’ forms. Homemade, handmade small-scale commercial cards and mass produced blank and texted greeting cards are all produced in the sociocultural realm simultaneously. A distinction among kinds of ‘work’ is, therefore, not especially useful with respect to the different kinds of cultural value attributed to commercial greeting cards, as exemplified by blank card users who distinguish themselves from card users who use the ‘prefabricated’ language of the texted cultural artefact.

While blank greeting cards cost the same as other greeting cards, in a limited way the blank card provides an opportunity for users of commercial greeting cards to deploy consumption practices as part of their identity formation but without income differentiation. A distinction between blank card users and other greeting card users

---

214 The home-made, for Bourdieu (1984), is sometimes associated with the kind of ‘family property, amassed by successive generations’ of the dominant classes (p.75). The home-made is also associated with the kind of ascetic taste Bourdieu finds in teachers (pp.286-287).
is, in part, drawn through the aestheticised image of the blank greeting and its paper stock, which construct a certain alignment with ‘legitimate’ culture, for example, art, poetry and music. Where the blank greeting card represents traditionally aesthetically valued objects (for example, art works or ancient objects), the use of a blank greeting cards produces difference that is not constituted simply by the absence of a ‘prefabricated’ greeting but through the deployment of aesthetic knowledges and values attached to those objects. For example, the following comment was observed in this study, accompanying a blank card being given with an image of a sculpted object: ‘I thought you’d like this because I know you love Moore’s work’ (Fieldnotes). In this interaction, there is a degree of solidarity formed between the interactants that is constructed, in part, through the activation of shared cultural capital involving an alignment with ‘legitimate taste’ constituted, in part, through the knowledge that the object represented is the work of Henry Moore. The deployment of cultural capital enables an individual to discriminate themselves in relation to others involved in the use of greeting cards: both givers and recipients.

As a commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away the greeting card provides certain opportunities for constituting differences not only between card consumers but between greeting card giver and recipient; it involves the greeting card user in negotiating the ‘taste’ of the card recipient. If, for instance, the blank art card recipient of the representation of the Moore sculpture does not share the cultural capital being drawn on, there is no easy alignment of their subjectivity with ‘legitimate’ taste. Similarly, other knowledges cannot be assumed as shared. Feminist greeting card designer Judy Horacek (1994) suggests that the exchange of her greeting cards creates and or maintains a shared world view in opposition to the dominant world view, as in Example 5.1, which treats assumptions of heterosexuality as problematic. So, while some blank greeting card usage draws on aesthetics as an alignment with ‘legitimate taste’, in the ‘high’ culture sense, greeting card consumption more generally can negotiate social relations through other knowledges. In the instance of Horacek’s feminist greeting cards, instead of the constitution of a sense of sameness or solidarity among individuals – conventionally understood as ‘community’ – what may be

---

215 Taste in music is the key defining quality of class, according to Bourdieu (1984:15).
constituted instead is a space where certain differences between women are marginalised and some voices silenced. For example, while the feminist concept of ‘sisterhood’ assumes shared values, it is an assumption that breaks down in face of difference, such as the racism experienced by indigenous Australian women at the hands of white feminists (Lucashenko 1994). The greeting card recipient who does not ‘appreciate’ the aesthetic or other values that the card giver is aligning themselves in some senses with suffers from the operation of ‘symbolic violence’: the euphemistic operation of violence where violence would not otherwise be possible (Moi 1991:1022).

Claims for the images of the blank greeting card may be made concomitantly with the exegesis of some blank card users that their practice is a rejection of other ‘texted’ greeting cards. The blank greeting card is also, therefore, an object involved in consumption practices that rather than claiming an ‘identity’ or ‘lifestyle’ seek to mark out how the user is not something. The broad proposition of some blank greeting card users is that the mass produced texted greeting card is consumed by the ‘masses’ and the practice of using a blank greeting card inscribes the subject as distinct from those ‘masses’, although a mass produced artefact is used. Such a position, in part, involves the problematic assumption that images, representations of art and/ or nature, are somehow less susceptible to standardisation than print linguistic text, privileging one kind of visual social semiotic over another. The practice of selecting and giving a blank greeting card mobilises a discourse of authenticity, constituting ‘individual’ and ‘authentic’ self-expression (of emotion and a ‘view’ of the world) as necessarily related. In order to pursue these performances of ‘individual’ through consumption, as realised in the exegesis of blank greeting card users, Bourdieu’s work is again initially helpful.
Inscribing self with blank greeting cards

The blank greeting card user enacts a subjectivity that is ‘individualised’ against the ‘masses’ through the realisation of ‘my words’ – not those of the first mass producer – inscribed on a mass produced object. Such a performance, it has been argued, has the potential to claim a certain kind of social power through a limited alignment with legitimate taste – symbolic violence. The choice of a blank greeting card can be read not only as a certain kind of aesthetic claim and performance of cultural capital but also as the constitution of an ‘authentic self-expression’ in an apparently contradictory practice – through the use of mass produced artefacts. Given that objects may be understood as a symbolic extension of the giver, the fiction that a blank greeting card may manage to be more from ‘me’ than a texted greeting card is one that is useful in the performance of a particular self. The question then is: who is doing this and what kind of interpretation can be given about the use of blank greeting cards?

Blank greeting cards were the preferred choice of professional people and women under 50 years old in this study. Some of these informants spoke of the desire to say what they wanted, rather than the ‘sappy’ or ‘ridiculous’ things that texted cards said (Fieldnotes). Certain texted cards (‘sentimental verse’) were seen by blank greeting card users as something women of a certain generation use, ‘my mother sends me those’ (female scientist, 35 years old), although not exclusively.216 A woman of the same age (clerk, 35 years old) did not like blank greeting cards and was hurt if her husband did not read the printed text of cards she gives him: ‘it’s led to arguments … he knows he has to read them’.

In thinking about ‘who’ uses blank greeting cards, the question Bourdieu would ask of their consumption is what habitus does it delineate? Habitus – briefly introduced in Chapter 2 – is Bourdieu’s (1977) proposal for a sociocultural structure that produces individual action. It is an attempt to answer the fundamental question of the relation between a social act and the social, which is rendered as a ‘dialectic of social structures

216 This woman reported a particular ritual on receiving such a greeting card from her mother. She said she reminds herself that the greeting card text says exactly what her mother wants to communicate to her and so she reads the text carefully. If she did not read the text (and this would be obvious from the amount of time spent looking at the relevant page), her mother would let her know that she felt hurt.
and structured, structuring dispositions through which schemes of thought are formed and transformed’ (Bourdieu 1990:41). Bourdieu treats habitus as ‘dispositions’ that the subject acquires interactively, especially in contexts such as the family and educational institutions (1977:82). The blank card was overwhelming the choice of professional sociocultural analysts spoken with during the study (academics, journalists, artists, writers). For those cultural analysts who may be concerned to argue a positive case for popular culture, their consumption of blank cards, as a rejection of mass produced popular culture, could be read as at odds with their intellectual production. Given the descriptions of what blank card use involves by card users in this study, the habitus of the blank greeting card user is a disposition to promote ‘individuality’ over conventional social forms and ‘authentic self-expression’ over standardised expression.

The explicit discourse of professional cultural analysts on ‘mass production’ and ‘popular culture’ may involve one set of ideas but what is practiced and said about personal experiences of greeting card giving involves another set of ideas. One is a position of power over the commodity and the consumerist ethos of late capitalism, the other is a position that is constituted in the arena of capital (the ‘consumer’). Such contradictions are, according to Featherstone (1983), based on economic positioning: ‘the wealthy have always been able to display style by demassifying and individualizing commodities’ (p.8). A difficulty for Featherstone’s reductive treatment of consumption contradictions is that the blank greeting card does not involve economic distinctions among greeting card users. The Henry Moore blank greeting card, according to Bourdieu’s analysis, might involve a particular kind of judgement: an aesthetic or an emotional judgement (p.41). Such judgements are, in Bourdieu’s analysis correlated to social class (p.13). Middle class subjects make aesthetic judgements and working class subjects make emotional or moral judgements (p.40). With its representation of a sculpture, the Henry Moore blank greeting card might involve an aesthetic judgement being made by a middle class subject but the

---

217 That professionals and cultural analysts practice blank greeting card consumption would be no surprise to Bourdieu. The exegesis of blank greeting card users not only may involve associations with legitimate taste that Bourdieu identifies among professional’s consumption (p.291) but also involves associations the kind of anti-consumerist ethos that Bourdieu attributes broadly to the consumption of commodities by teachers and members of the middle class (p.286).
accompanying comment – ‘I thought you’d like this because I know you love Moore’s work’ – in some senses deploys an emotional judgement: what she likes, I like enough to give her. In one sense, the kind of correlations Bourdieu makes is what is most useful about his analysis, teasing out fractions of social class, cultural capital, and cultural practice, but it is also what is most problematic. Despite acknowledging there is scope for individual action, Bourdieu overinvests the social. As Frow (1995), among others, demonstrates, habitus, as Bourdieu renders it, is ultimately fixed and stable in its attachment to individuals. Correlating cultural capital and social group, Frow suggests, comes down to a kind of essentialism:

Bourdieu opposes two formally and functionally autonomous aesthetic universes’ [rigidly] and correlates these ‘universes with social classes’, making cultural forms appear as non-contradictory expressive unities rather than as sites of tension. (p.39)

While ‘habitus’ provides a mode of analysis for particular tastes, its usefulness is limited by this correlation between cultural capital and social group (dominating and dominated) – despite his fractionalising of class. So, despite Bourdieu’s acceptance of the potential for ‘self-consciousness’ in the production of subjectivity, habitus does not allow for a context where there will be enough velocity produced for a subject to escape the force of habitus in a particular performance. As Schirato and Yell (1999), analysing the production of masculine subjectivities in men’s lifestyle magazines, write

the production and performance of subjectivity are always potentially the site of some degree of self-consciousness because subjects are required to script their performances in terms of two mutually exclusive orders – the habitus, and the objective structures and discourses of the field(s) they inhabit. Unfortunately, Bourdieu closes off the way to self-reflexivity … by arguing that subjects are required to ‘cover over’ this discrepancy by moving, seamlessly, to a new habitus – which is (always) already out of synch with the field – more or less ad infinitum. (p.88)

In Bourdieu’s formulation, the subject’s awareness is recuperated back into the next iteration of a deterministic habitus. It is an entropic spiral that compels the subject to a positionality. So, while so far there is little in the findings above which would be a surprise to Bourdieu, the determinism of habitus proves to be a critical difficulty for accounting for social action as self reflexive and for the constitution of ‘new’ subject positions.
The necessity for such an account is seen in comments of informants in this study. Some informants reflected on how the blank greeting card appears to offer some kind of ‘escape’ from mass production but indicated that it is not necessarily the case. When first hearing about this study, one informant, Shelley (courier, 40 years old), asked the following question: ‘What’s with those blank cards … do you think they’re as bad as the others?’, signalling both the distinction between blank greeting cards and others as well as their ‘sameness’ as mass produced artefacts. The blank greeting card’s fictitious effect of liberating the greeting card giver from the effects of mass production and asserting ‘individuality’ is not approached naively. Greeting card users know that the greeting card, whether texted with image only or texted linguistically, is first produced elsewhere and for profit. In Shelley’s comments is a trace of how the habitus of a blank greeting card user is also always a way of operating produced through the pervasiveness of consumption and the impossibility of not consuming. Consuming is a key formative structure with the individual interpellated as a consuming subject even before the experience of formal education. So, while Shelley’s question is informed by many years of consuming experience and knowledges about consumption as a practice, the difficulty in analysing blank greeting card use is how to escape the determinism of the social, as Bourdieu characterises habitus, without reaching for the kind of self-expressive individualism that Finkelstein (1994c) and Papson (1986) seek.

A rescue

What is needed is a way of conceptualising the use of a blank greeting card as a performance of a certain subjectivity, e.g. ‘individual’, without resorting to evaluating such performances as successful or unsuccessful, as resistant or subversive or as fixed to class positionings. In order to rescue the determinism of Bourdieu’s model, Butler (1997) offers an intervention that provides way of moving forward, in a limited way. Butler reanimates the process of ‘subjection’, that is, the production and negotiation of subjectivity. While the social determines a subject’s propensity for certain social acts, that subjectivity is not fixed, in Butler’s formulation, because each performance of subjectivity involves the negotiation of that subjectivity (p.147). This means subjects can change. Butler insists on habitus as a site of the production of difference through the notion of iterability. Subjection, as the production and negotiation of subjectivity akin to the constitution of an individual’s embodied habitus, contains within it a logic
of the more or less inevitable production of difference: each negotiated subject formation not only goes on in a different context, but each iteration of subjectivity is itself the production of difference (p.147). This means that each iteration, the way in which ‘context is invoked and restaged at the moment of utterance’, resignifies those iterations (p.13-15). Subjectivity is a work-in-progress that cannot, in Butler’s account, be a fixed relation between the social and the subject.

While Butler’s account is not unproblematic, the sense of ‘iteration as difference’ creates a space for the next specific performance.218 The practice of blank greeting card use, while it is the enactment of a socially and culturally embedded subject – greeting card consumer of mass produced artefact – is always enacting a specific performance. Through the iteration of ‘my’ words/thoughts/perceptions/feelings with a blank greeting card, the positioning of the greeting card giver as ‘consumer’ is apparently being ‘worked on’. It is not work that moves the subject towards liberation from consuming because it fails as an enactment of resistance within a discourse of authentic self expression. What is proposed is that what surfaces in blank greeting card use is an ongoing negotiation by subjects of the dilemma of consuming. The use of a blank greeting card is a practice that goes on in a cultural context where consuming is, in general, compelled and where the social field (love, desire, romance, intimacy) is already constituted in consumption (Illouz 1997). So, given that one must consume in order to live – and to write – then, as Derrida (1991) writes:

> the moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the nonliving, man or animal, but since one must eat in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat ... how for goodness sake should one eat well (bien manger)? (p.115, italics in original)

218 A difficulty for Butler’s theory of performativity and ‘iterativeness’ is suggested by Threadgold (1997; 2000). Threadgold points out that Butler’s claims for the possibility for social change are based in a presumption that discourse can change bodies (1997:82-84). Cautioning that Butler, in effect, muddies the difference between ‘performance’ and Austin’s (1980) ‘performativity’, as rewritten by Derrida, Threadgold reminds us that Derrida does not see iterativeness as sufficient for resignification (2000:56). What is important, as Threadgold accepts, is that theorising iterativeness makes visible discursive sedimentations because it deconstructs ‘the opposition between repetition and change, understanding that repetition always involves a certain instability’ (p.56). As Threadgold is well aware, however, this is no more than a limited possibility and the potential in making such instability visible should not be overstated. Instead, as Deutscher (1997) puts it, ‘[i]nstability can be read as simultaneously destabilising and stabilising, consolidating and subverting (p.198).
In the practice of blank greeting card use, what is negotiated is an ethical dilemma, although not a relation between self and other (consumer and ‘eaten’), rather, the relation between self and self (as is the case in the consumption of Derrida’s words, written for one purpose, and put to another here). A subject’s performance of ‘speaking love’ is always already constituted in consuming practices. The practice of using a blank greeting card enacts a subjectivity that is different from, although it is constituted in greeting card consumption. The ‘out of synchness’ of individual self expression using a mass produced artefact is not always ‘covered over’, as Schirato and Yell (1999) argue and as Shelley’s question makes clear. The performance of individuality with the blank greeting card is always problematic in that respect. This is the kind of space where consuming blank greeting cards has to go on. Iterations of an implied enunciation ‘I am a blank card user’ realised in the habitual practice of using blank greeting cards do not liberate the mass produced greeting card user as a ‘self-expressive authentic individual’. Iterated performances of interactional work with blank greeting cards and ‘my words’ suggest that such practices exemplify an ongoing and ethical struggle between being consumed (by capital and standardised production – positions already problematically reductive) and being a consumer: one who must ‘eat’.

The argument above also provides a reason to reprise the issue of masculine subjects and greeting card use discussed in Chapter 4. While Illouz (1997) accepts a romantically compromised position of working class men’s embodied subjectivity as a necessary structural effect of capitalism, the rescue of habitus performed by Butler hints that there is an escape for working class masculine subjects without the kind of structural change that Illouz’s Marxist analysis requires. The kind of incremental subjection that ‘iteration of difference’ constitutes are identified by Illouz who notes that working class men are already divided among themselves with respect to their ‘romantic competence’, with younger, working class men more likely to ‘deconstruct romance’ than those who are older and work in traditional jobs (p.342). The ‘wussie boy’, who embodies generational change, is potentially joined by a self-reflective subject who is always already consuming and consumed. In the context of a cultural moment in which love is increasingly spoken in the public sphere (as part of the emotionalisation of that sphere), Western masculinist discourses which are
‘emotionless’ – the pragmatic or the deficit discourses outlined in Chapter 1 – are redefined against these and other discourses, for example, feminist discourses.

Conclusion

The central focus of this chapter has been on how the text of mass produced greeting cards comes into relation with certain aesthetic and classifying discourses, as they impinge on what constitutes a ‘language of love’. The chapter has addressed an implicit, although fundamental, issue: whether or not the ordinary language of the greeting card reduces possible performances of intimacy talk, finding that while vernacular language will not necessarily produce proliferation, neither will it necessarily standardise meaning making.

In organising the analysis of greeting card texts around motifs such as love’s language, authenticity and taste, the chapter sought to both elaborate on the central discourses constituting greeting card texts and to keep sight of the way the greeting card as a texted cultural artefact always involves social processes such as consumption and intimate interaction. Through consideration of the Mode of the greeting card as ‘seen’ text, in Huisman’s (1999) terms, the way in which certain kinds of readings of greeting card language may be motivated were suggested. Visual language or ‘seen’ text is shunned by some greeting card users who favour the pictorial visuality of ‘blank’ greeting cards. What is being cultivated by the use of a blank greeting card is a self shaped through a discourse of authenticity, an inner self that is nurtured as an individualised self but is contaminated by the awareness that such a performance is always problematic. The value of Butler’s (1997) reanimation of Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of habitus is that it enables a social subject’s particular performance of individuality of authentic self to be treated as both contextualised and potentially self-reflexive. In a cultural context where consumption is compelled, this means that a sense of ‘authentic’ self is cultivated with an ‘inauthentic’ object. That contextualised performance can be further delineated, drawing on social semiotic’s resources for describing and analysing text as in Part II.
Part II  Introduction

The second Part of the thesis, consisting of Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, is now introduced. Part Two is oriented toward the classification of the greeting card as texted cultural artefact and this Introduction also sets out aspects of technicality drawn on in the following chapters. Chapter 6 presents a lexicogrammatical analysis of the corpus of greeting cards. That analysis provides the basis for Chapter 7's consideration of social processes and exploration of the discursive realm of the intimate relationship. The motivation for moving to a grammatical analysis is built on both the thesis’ requirements for a ‘micro’ view of text and the possibilities grounded in Halliday’s (1978, 1979) social semiotic theory. As an analytic strategy, the technical resources associated with social semiotics enable elaboration on the social environment and a text’s constitutive relation with it. For an analysis text that is interested in power/knowledge relations, as this is, what is important is the built-in multiple meaning potential (the metafunctions) of those resources, together with resources for contextualising text with respect to its instance of use (parole) and the system of language (langue).

A concern with how semiotic resources are deployed in the constitution of the sociosemiotic ‘realities’ of greeting card use involves a concern not only with linguistic variation but with social and cultural variation – with difference. Part II’s focus on how semiotic resources mean is, therefore, a concern with how institutions and social and cultural practices ‘mean’ through language or, more specifically, through text. The lexicogrammatical analysis highlights resources negotiating personal and intimate social relations. The lexicogrammatical analysis thus provides the basis of discussion about how specific instances of greeting card text can be understood in relation to broader discursive fields of ‘greetings’, intimacy and the performance of feminine and masculine subjectivities, for example, the differential distribution, access and use of resources by positioned social subjects, particularly gendered and ‘classed’ subjects.
The analysis in the chapters that make up Part II enables important questions to be further explored, including: How is the production of particular kinds of meanings by fun-and-love greeting cards (love, for example) implicated in the positioning of individuals with respect to gender? The analysis describes the resources deployed and considers how individuals may occupy and be positioned as subjects within normative discourses and regimes of truth through the texts. In Chapter 7, this normative account is fleshed out in a different direction but it is also abandoned. Chapter 7 is also interested in how individuals come to be positioned or occupy subject positions, constitutively producing themselves and ‘reality’ in ways that are non-normative. In particular, such practices are considered through a segment of the corpus that is produced by and for gay and lesbian audiences.

The focus of Chapter 6 is, largely, on linguistic text (with some analysis of visual images). The analytical ‘unit’ for that analysis is the clause, which in Halliday’s ‘sociosemantic’ approach is conceived as a meaning making ‘unit’ (1978). While meaning may be realised as a sentence, and in written text the clause and the sentence may be conflated, the sentence is an orthographic unit, developing along with other technologies for organising text. The clause, however, is a ‘social act’: it is simultaneously textual and social practice. It is the clause that traces social action:

Halliday’s functional grammar is, in effect, a grammar of microlevel social actions, their patterns of use, and their modes of deployment in their textual realizations. (Thibault 1991:17)

Every clause, moreover, simultaneously realises the three metafunctions introduced in Chapter 5. A clause is a ‘complex polyphonic’ structure, not a singular layer of ‘content’ meaning (Halliday, in Thibault 1987:611). Experiential meaning potential is realised through choices from the lexicogrammar system of Transitivity, interpersonal meaning potential is realised through choices from the lexicogrammar system of Mood and textual meaning potential is realised through choices from the lexicogrammar system of Theme (Halliday 1994). Each of these systems is detailed in Chapter 6 prior to specific analysis of the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards but there is one aspect of the description given above that is elaborated here. To this point, the term ‘realise’ has been used without a gloss but in order to avoid it being treated as an ‘encoding’ relation, its use in social semiotics must be clarified. ‘Realisation’ is how social semiotics rewrites the conduit metaphor. The realisation relation as it is used in social
semiotics is developed from Hjelmslev’s (1961) stratified account of language as ‘content’ and ‘expression’ planes (Halliday 1978). Language content is related to its ‘expression’ so that, for example, meanings/content are ‘encoded’ or ‘expressed’ by ‘soundings’, that is, are realised phonologically or ‘expressed’ by ‘letterings’, that is, realised orthographically (Halliday 1994:15). Rather than treating the relation between language and context as an ‘encoding’ process, social semiotics conceptualises the relation between the planes as bi-directional, formulating it as an ongoing dialectic (Halliday 1978:139). Conceived in this way, the technical resources of social semiotics enable the analysis of instances of fun-and-love greeting card language to be interpreted as constitutively related to discourses of love and gender.

Halliday’s conceptualisation of lexicogrammar as semantic resource amounts to seeing instances of lexicogrammar, text, as the contingent production of text producers. Lexicogrammar is an elaborated descriptive apparatus that enables an analysis of the inscription of positioning discourses in greeting cards to be grounded in the resource through which those discourses are realised, that is, language as text. One of a number of innovations that enables social semiotics to achieve this is that lexicogrammatical choice is, in Halliday’s view, skewed through context (1978:149). More formally, the lexicogrammar is constructed as probabilistic so that a given social context puts particular lexicogrammatical systems ‘at risk’.

While text is the sociosemantic product of choices made from both lexical and grammatical resources, this idea of choices is emphatically not a liberal humanist view of infinite choice being available to an autonomous agent, rather it constitutes a view of language as a paradigmatic system. As such, language is a resource from which the (iterated) selection of lexicogrammatical options produces and constrains possibilities for the next choices. Building text as an iterative process is the way in which social semiotics is able to attribute equal importance to Hjelmslev’s system (langue) and Saussure’s process (parole). Any specific lexicogrammatical realisation, any text, is an

---

219 Threadgold (1997) describes it thus: ‘any particular linguistic item in a linguistic chain (the grammar of a natural language, for example) is simultaneously part of a structure (a context/concatenation) and part of a substitution set (a set of equivalent alternatives, concurrence). It always has at least two interpretants’ (p.106).
instance of language. From a paradigmatic perspective, any ‘instance’ is related to choices not taken up and which could have been at that point in the process, enabling instances to be connected as available choices. Thus, text is not only sociosemantic ‘product’ but sociosemantic ‘process’, as Martin (1985b) puts it. Text production conceived in this way enables a text analysis praxis that is able, loosely speaking, to ‘track’ selections. An instance of text is kept in view in relation to other possible lexicogrammatical choices:

It involves the difficult task of focussing attention simultaneously on the actual and the potential, interpreting both discourse and the linguistic system that lies behind it terms of the infinitely complex network of meaning potential that is what we call culture. (Halliday 1978:4-5)

The accomplishment of language users is that this is achieved in ways that make system unobtrusive. Speakers and writers and listeners and readers are not aware of language as system, perhaps only finding themselves confronted with this dual perspective at a moment of ‘stuttering’: when caught looking for a word or a way to produce some meaning – or when ‘doing analysis’.

Text is a semiotic record of the deployment of resources positioning individuals within discourses, constitutively forming subjects of those discourses (Lemke 1995). The contingency of discourse, in Foucault’s sense, is played out in the specific utterance and linguistic exchange, which is in turn always already situated sociohistorically and culturally. This semiotised polyphonic lexicogrammar is the critical analytical resource that will be drawn on, grounding the sociocultural analysis already done and enabling further analysis in Chapters 6 and 7.
6 Texted love – texted how?

Introduction

This chapter presents analyses of a corpus of contemporary fun-and-love greeting cards, using the technical resources of social semiotic theory. The analysis is concerned with how textual practices trace and enact aspects of social relations, in particular the performance of intimacy as enacted by fun-and-love greeting card texts. The current chapter’s focus on meaning making comprises two social semiotics, language and visual resources. The centrality of the linguistic text to meaning making by fun-and-love greeting cards is, in part, signalled by the processes of its production where ‘the words come first’ (McAuliffe, Interview 1996). Visual semiosis is considered at two junctures and is concerned with interpersonal and textual meaning making. A stylistic ‘collection’ of greeting cards provides the focus of the first visual analysis and, later in the chapter, graphological resources are considered.

The current chapter’s analysis is developed with respect to experiential, interpersonal and textual meaning making but pushes beyond questions of lexicogrammatical structure into more overtly semantic realms and, therefore, into social and political realms, using a variety of resources. As Part I elaborated, what is at stake in using fun-and-love greeting cards is subjectivity itself, fun-and-love cards constitute texted ‘voicings’ of positioned social practices. So, while Halliday (1978) suggests that ‘there is much to be found out from little texts’ about grammar, the current chapter’s account of meaning making by fun-and-love greeting cards is not framed through concerns about grammar, rather with the kinds of subject positions that are constituted by the texts and, concomitantly, ‘who’ gets to speak the meanings made by these texts (p.141). The analysis suggests there is a complex of positioning practices realised by the texts. Fun-and-love greeting cards build shared experience towards intimacy, ‘texting’ love as romantic and sexual and as something less idealised, more ‘everyday’ than romance. Fun-and-love greeting cards are print texts but given that all texts are inherently
interactive, the current chapter sets out how fun-and-love greeting cards perform interaction. While this will necessarily mean drawing on the technical resources developed for work on spoken text, a central contribution of this chapter in treating fun-and-love print texts as ‘seen’ language, is an account of the importance of textual resources in enabling generic expectations and experiential and interpersonal meaning making in these little print texts.

The task of the chapter is to present an account of how fun-and-love greeting card texts constitute a particular kind of a ‘world’ or domain. More specifically, it is an account of how that ‘world’ organises and, is organised by, relationships between kinds of ‘goings on’ and those participating in them. In this exploration, certain characteristics and features of their textuality are enlarged upon in comparatively more detail than others. Thus, some aspects of interpersonal meaning, language as social action, are elaborated upon because they move the more general focus forward – for instance, by considering aspects of text which contribute to the concern with subject formation (how, for example, propositions about the world position speakers and listeners, writers and readers as certain kinds of subjects in relation to each other, as more or less intimate, as more or less equal). The lexicogrammatical analysis and interpretive work of the chapter motivates the more ‘macro’ concerns of Chapter 7 with social processes and genre together with its exploration of the discursive realm of the intimate relationship and the constitution of emotion with respect to different kinds of love.

The current chapter’s organisation emerges from social semiotic’s conception of text. While language, as conceptualised by social semiotics, is a paradigmatic system multifunctionally organised, this provides a number of possible points of entry into the system for going about description/analysis. It is a conception of the organisation of language that constitutes itself here as the practical matter of which particular aspect of meaning to begin with. In response, the chapter is organised metafunctionally, beginning with experiential, going on to interpersonal and then textual meaning making. Each section begins by introducing the necessary theoretical terrain of the lexicogrammar, gives a description of key findings and is followed by a discussion of those findings.
What is of most interest as the focus for analysis in the current chapter is the clause which, from a social semiotic perspective, is the ‘pivotal’ meaning making resource for text producers (Eggins 1994:139). The multifunctional grammar describes the clause, in one orientation, with respect to a number of constituent units (groups and phrases, words, morphemes) (Halliday 1994:19). The analysis presented in the current chapter pays virtually no attention to morphemes, some to words and most attention to clauses and groups/phrases. There is one other unit analysed in the current chapter, the clause complex, but this is not a bigger unit than a clause. The clause complex consists of multiple clauses in a logical (logicosemantic) relation to each other (p. 216). Two clauses may necessarily precede and follow one another in a relation of addition, *Nicola went to school, then Rosa went to school*. Two clauses may stand in a dependent relationship with one another. For example, *If Rosa was going to school, Nicola was determined to go too*.

The account of the multifunctional grammar associated with social semiotics so far has tended to foreground lexicogrammar as a semantic plane. That focus is, in part, related to motivating a close textual analysis as part of a sociocultural inquiry into a texted artefact. It is an emphasis that has, however, backgrounded another aspect of the ‘content plane’, the discourse-semantics stratum (Martin 1992, see Chapter 1). Discourse semantics, from an analytical point of view, is the stratum at which the analyst begins to move towards a concern with larger chunks of text, for example, relations of sequences of clauses or clause complexes. From the perspective of discourse-semantics, relations between clauses in this way are relations of ‘texture’ or ‘cohesive’ relations (Halliday and Hasan 1976:2). The most important discourse-semantic systems for the analysis in Chapters 6 and 7 are reference, conjunction and conversational structure. While the latter may seem incongruous, given that fun-and-love greeting cards are little print texts, this is, in part, an effect of the phonocentric label ‘conversational structure’ (Hobson 1992). Conversational structure is most broadly concerned with is mapping interactivity. As already argued at a number of points previously, whether conversational or not and although texts vary in a number of ways, semiotically speaking all text is interactive. For example, in relation to the degree of ‘delay’ associated with an interactant being able to respond. Discourse semantic systems, like lexicogrammatical systems realise metafunctionally diverse meanings and ‘conversational structure’ is an interpersonal meaning making resource.
An important way in which an analysis of the deployment of these resources in fun-and-love greeting card texts is taken up in the current chapter is how such resources position readers (whether the card giver or recipient) interpersonally through, for example, forms of address. As Chapter 6 is organised metafunctionally, analysis at different ranks and strata associated with those metafunctions are dealt with as part of the respective sections.

Representing fun & love: experiential meaning making

The historical primacy and privileging of experiential meaning in some senses provides a reason to begin the presentation of this close textual analysis with the experiential. Beginning with experiential meaning making also enables the key ‘goings on’ in the world of fun-and-love greeting cards to be presented as representational resources constitute them and it enables grammatical participants to be identified. The chapter then develops a view with respect to the importance of those participants and how they are represented. Two key participants identified – ‘I’ and ‘you’ – are picked up on in a different way, as part of the discussion of Interpersonal meaning.

Identifying the ‘goings on’ and ‘who’ or ‘what’ is represented as involved in a text is achieved through analysis of the part of the lexicogrammar that organises the clause with respect to processes and participants (the people, places and things) and the associated circumstances. The process is the feature of the lexicogrammar that organises experience, it is in a sense the nucleus of the clause and the participants organised with respect to that experience are its satellites. This assemblage of information, the grammar of transitivity, provides a view of how areas of experience are constructed grammatically: as different kinds of ‘goings on’ (e.g. as an experience of falling/hitting/bathing/yelling/wanting/being/having/meaning). Halliday (1994) distinguishes six process types with a number of sub-types and labels their related participants with respect to their functional role in the clause, as set out in

Process types differ in respect of the number of inherent participants associated with the process. The participants inherently associated with a process are those that are obligatory – the participant engaged in the process. See Halliday (1994), especially Chapter 5, ‘Clause as representation’, pp.106-175.
Figure 6.1 below (p.107). The brackets indicate optionality with respect to the functional roles being present in the clause.

The grammar of transitivity is constituted by various patterns in which the process, participants and circumstances are configured. So, for example, processes of doing (material process) have one participant which is grammatically ‘responsible’ for the process and may have another, the participant to which the process ‘extends’. For example, ‘the tree branch smashed the car’, has a process ‘smashed’ grammatically ‘acted’ by the tree branch and ‘done to’ the car. Other process types have only one participant inherent for example, the Sayer of a verbal process.\textsuperscript{221}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>process</th>
<th>participant 1</th>
<th>(participant 2)</th>
<th>(circumstance(s))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>material (‘does’)</td>
<td>who/what ‘does’ Actor</td>
<td>thing done to Goal</td>
<td>How, when, where, why, with whom etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mental</td>
<td>one who ‘thinks’ etc</td>
<td>what is thought, felt, perceived etc</td>
<td>Extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mental</td>
<td>Senser</td>
<td>Phenomenon</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verbal (says)</td>
<td>one who ‘says’ Sayer</td>
<td>inherently only one participant</td>
<td>Manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behavioural (self doing)</td>
<td>one who ‘behaves’ Behaver</td>
<td>inherently only one participant</td>
<td>Cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relational: attributive (is)</td>
<td>‘bearer’ of quality Carrier</td>
<td>quality Attribute</td>
<td>Contigency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relational: identifying (is)</td>
<td>thing identified Token</td>
<td>what it is identified as Value</td>
<td>Accompaniment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>existential (there is/was something)</td>
<td>entity present Existent</td>
<td>inherently only one participant</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                         |                                        |                  | Matter |
|                         |                                        |                  | Angle |

\textit{Figure 6.1} Functional roles in English transitivity and labels, following Halliday 1994

From the point of view of experiential meaning, a clause is structured through the choice of process, the central feature organising experience through text and one or more related participants. The relevance of these resources, when considering a text or a corpus of text, is that patterns of transitivity choices ‘map’ the representation of experience in the text, delineating, for example, ‘who’ gets to ‘say’ and ‘who’ gets to ‘feel’ and with respect to the latter, what kind of Phenomenon is felt. In this sense, \textsuperscript{221} Processes also involve particular realisation patterns of tense choice and ‘voice’ in the traditional grammatical sense.
experiential resources are important with respect to organising and positioning individuals and groups in relation to particular processes. In some genres these are differentiated across gender and the organisation of experiential resources maps how that is organised. For example, Poynton (1991a) among others, shows how women, children and indigenous people rarely get to speak authoritatively about external events in the world in print news.222

A functional transitivity represents speakers and writers as having a range of resources with which to construe experience, therefore the distribution of process types in the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards is constitutive of the construal of experience for the ‘world’ of the text. Which processes are selected to represent experience in the corpus is presented in Table 6.1. Fun-and-love greeting cards construe experience largely through mental processes, in particular, affective and cognitive process. Perception type mental processes rarely appear and when they do are largely metaphoric. A substantial number of texts are realised by relational processes and, quantitatively, material processes follow these.

The importance of the distribution of process types is that a process is the realisation of experience in ways that are constitutive of, and constituted through, context. In a different register, it inscribes a subject’s ‘investment’ in particular discourses (Holloway 1984).223

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>100%</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental</td>
<td>39.80</td>
<td>want/ed, hope, wish, need, know, realised, love, enjoy, think, adores, desires, like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>30.55</td>
<td>is(was/were), are/not, means, have, seem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>lick, scratch, kiss/ed, searches, takes, met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>exist, arise, occur, is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>said, insist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>dance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1 Transitivity patterns in the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards

222 What they get to be authoritative speakers about is their feelings, which, in the language of news writing, is ‘reaction’ not ‘action’ (Mencher 2000).
223 In particular, the field, or social action.
The significance of mental process clauses in fun-and-love greeting cards may appear unremarkable, given that the semantic differences between some processes appear to be transparent. In a commonsense way, for example, the experience of ‘adoring’, the experience of ‘scratching’ and the experience of ‘being’ are each very different. There are contexts where the semantics of processes, such as ‘adore’ and ‘scratch’ are not as clear cut, for example, where these experiential resources are drawn on as part of sexual practice discourses (\textit{Lick me, Scratch me, Make me arch my back} says one fun-and-love greeting card).\footnote{The image is of a cat.}

Similarly, apparently transparently different processes are conflated in sexual practice discourses. For example, those which traditionally come under the rubric of marginalised sexual practices such as ‘bondage and discipline’ and sadomasochism. In these fields, texts involving processes of ‘hitting’ cannot be presumed to involve or not involve ‘adoration’ or ‘love’. In other, very different, fields ‘love’ and ‘hitting’ may be conflated. When, for example, a child is smacked in order to prevent harm to the child (e.g. if the child is about to touch something hot), the hitting may be understood as motivated by ‘love’ for the child, by saving her/him from (one kind of) harm, although such instances are immediately problematic in the context of social and cultural expectations with respect to ‘child welfare’ and more recently children’s ‘rights’ discourses. There are other contexts which involve the conflation of ‘hitting’ and desire in ways that are less likely to involve ‘love’ at all – for example, the colloquial ‘hitting on someone’ (which refers to relations between persons who do not have an existing love or sexual relationship; ‘hitting on’ someone is about trying to achieve something along the lines of such a relationship).

Metaphoric uses of experiential resources expand the repertoire for meaning making, although not unproblematically. These complexities suggest that in order to understand the significance of process choice by fun-and-love greeting cards, it will be productive to consider specific instances from a sociosemantic perspective. The next section works towards such as description, beginning with a description and
discussion of the investments constituted by realising the texts as mental process clauses.

**Fun and love: an interior world**

The choice of affectual or cognitive process (over other types of process, for example, material, verbal, relational, etc.) is constitutive of a particular domain or ‘world’ of fun-and-love. This section enlarges on that world – an interiorised world – and discusses its implications with respect to the discursive positioning of social subjects in intimate interaction. First, though, what does this interiorised world ‘look like’, ‘who’ occupies it, and how is it grammatically realised?

The world constituted by mental processes is initially framed by Halliday (1994), in terms of the difference between mental and material processes, as a ‘discontinuity’ between processes external to the subject (material) and processes internal to the subject’s experience (mental), the processes of consciousness (p.106). These fundamental differences are realised grammatically in English, for example, in the way the relationships between the participants associated with the process vary for different process types. The active participant of mental process type clauses (Senser) is a conscious human or anthropomorphised being involved in a process that is ‘held on to’ by that participant; the process does not extend beyond the participant. This ‘containment’ of the process differentiates it from material processes, where the process may extend over another participant in some way and where almost anything, including abstractions, can be Actor in a clause. A fundamental difference of scope between ‘ways of doing’ is brought out by probing the process. For example, the clause ‘she loved the kitten’, probed by ‘what did her love do?’ is responded to by ‘it was felt by her’ cf ‘the kitten scratched her’ which when probed, ‘what did the scratch

---

225 Halliday (1994) identifies five main grammatical features which differentiate mental from material processes: tense – unmarked case is simple present; the active participant is a conscious or anthropomorphised participant; a wider range of things can come to be the second participant than is the case for material processes; there is a reversibility to mental processes (like/please); they can project other clauses) (pp.114-118). This ‘discontinuity’ is an example of the way in which Whorf’s (1979) hypothesis can be seen operating. In English, subject/object relations are constituted as discontinuous: cf Walbiri and Pitjantjatjara languages where cosmological ‘continuity’ of subject/object relations is realised in the linguistic constitution of subjects (Munn 1970).
do?’ is responded to by ‘it broke the skin on her arm’. In selecting mental processes, fun-and-love greeting cards tend to construe experience as ‘embraced’, distinguishing it from the ‘extending’ quality or agency of a material process, where the grammatical participant is constituted as bringing events about. In this way, mental processes construct a comparatively interiorised world.

Despite the absence of an external trajectory, thinking, feeling and perceiving processes are not ‘bounded’. Mental processes realise this interior experience through a particular quality of temporality realised grammatically with simple present tense (Halliday 1994:116). The characteristic selection of this tense means mental processes have a potential to represent an event as enduring beyond the ‘now’ and they are less bounded both in spatial and temporal terms than those experiences realised as material processes.226 Thinking and emotional ‘goings on’, while bounded by the body, realise events that are understood as existing in an interior space that is vast. The boundlessness of imagination, the ‘unfathomable’ depths of emotion, these constitute a world that is infinite (as claims about possibilities for individuals being constrained only by the limits of one’s imagination exemplify). This boundlessness compares to the ‘fixedness’ of material processes. The temporality of material events is bounded because they typically select present in present tense, a very ‘here and now’ tense, and the concrete qualities of linear time and ‘actual’ space provide an ‘enclosure’ within which the process occurs. Interiorised experience as constituted by mental processes is not attributed as having the same ‘fixed’ quality of external events. This investment in present tense suggests one way in which the language of fun-and-love greeting cards constitute the texts as personal interaction because it brings the ‘action’ closer to the speaker and implies habituated experiences.

226 The English simple present marks something habitual: for example, Rosa roller blades to school, meaning not that she is roller blading there now, or even that she roller bladed to school on a particular day but rather that when she goes to school, she usually roller blades. The simple present also narrates something (like a dream) that has a particular temporal trajectory chronology (‘I’m falling down this sheer rock face but I catch on to this wooden beam and then we’re having dinner with Tom Cruise). The events strung together this way have a certain concreteness and lifelikeness.
Fun-and-love greeting cards pattern this interiorised world as a world of affect and thought. Where fun-and-love texts represent mental ‘goings on’ they are representing the world of fun-and-love as temporally unbounded, ‘interiorised’ but infinite and as not extending beyond a sensing participant. As previous chapters have described, this interior extrudes into the external world materially as a texted cultural artefact produced and displayed for consumption in public domains, generating tension (and debate) around the cultural value of greeting cards.227

But is it love?

The most semantically obvious process associated with the field of intimacy is love. Romantic love, for example, constitutes virtually the entire field of St Valentine’s cards with ‘love’ predominating as the choice of process for St Valentine’s greetings. The representational resources selected for fun-and-love greeting cards do not, however, organise the overall field of social action through the affectual process ‘love’. Love appears rarely as a process in fun-and-love greeting cards, although when it does appear, it is the thing that is at stake, as in the following: Will you love me forever? What is at stake is realised as part of the lexicogrammatical system of mood, which is an interpersonal meaning making resource. What is arguable with respect to Will you love me forever is its finiteness, whether you will or you will not love me forever as seen in Figure 6.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will you love me forever?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finite Subject Predicate Complement Adjunct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Senser -cess Phenomenon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.2 Love ‘at stake’ in fun-and-love greeting cards

What is of interest in Chapter 7 is how this extrusion constitutes the fun-and-love greeting card as a confessional text in the constitution of an intimate relationship.
‘requirement’; the processes enjoy and like together via ‘taking delight’ or ‘having an inclination’ for something; and trust as expectation in others or self. Most broadly, the semantic categories of mental processes of fun-and-love greeting cards in the corpus demonstrate a concern with experiences of the self. Within the context of an intimate relationship some of these experiences of the self could be understood to involve carnal desire. They also involve experiences that are organised by the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards with respect to a set of ideas around which romantic love and relationship management. These are some of a bundle of attributes that, with others, form a sociosemantic category ‘fun and love’. They are, to a greater or lesser extent, aligned with the sociocultural category ‘feminine’. For example, romantic love and trust are strongly aligned with the ‘feminine’, although processes themselves are not feminine or masculine, so fun-and-love greeting card texts construct a world in a manner which can be occupied by subjects contiguously with other subject positions which are constitutive of discourses of femininity or feminine love. Such patterns of representation are not reflections of a ‘social fact’ that women are trusting and trusted or loving but are a discursive pattern constitutive of gendered domains, in particular, of intimate interaction and emotion as a feminine domain. Experientially, fun-and-love texts constitute a discursive pattern, which contributes to gendering intimacy as (fictitiously) feminine and, therefore, (again fictitiously) excluding masculine subjects. However, while an interior world and investment in romantic love and relationships is readily understood as occupied by feminine subjects, the field of sex is less readily understood as occupied by such subjects. As feminists, among others, have demonstrated the active subject of sexual discourses is a masculine one or when a woman occupies the position of subject of such a discourse it is as a denigrated subject (as whore etc.) (Holloway 1984).

‘Who’ occupies the world of fun and love? From process to participant

The grammatical participants of fun-and-love texts are presented in this section, enabling a discussion of the people, places and things represented by fun-and-love greeting cards. A key finding presented here is that the corpus selects personal pronouns as participants. There is one other participant in the corpus that is notable. Love, as mentioned above, rarely appears as a process; it is more often a participant. The selection of ‘love’ as participant in the corpus rather than as a process of affect is interpreted here through the opportunities it provides for elaborating on what love is
in the sociosemantic domain of fun-and-love. The discussion, therefore, develops a view on love according to fun-and-love greeting cards.

The grammatical participant of the mental process clause that is predominant in the corpus is the Senser, which must be a conscious being or a thing attributed with consciousness. In the corpus, this is typically a human being, although occasionally an anthropomorphised Senser is suggested by visual representation (cartooned figures and animals commonly function in this way). In either case, the Senser is realised pronominally by, ‘I’ or ‘you’ and less frequently ‘we’, producing an important grammatical pattern of fun-and-love greeting card texts. ‘I’ and ‘you’ realise the key transitivity participants in the corpus of greeting cards and realise the sensing subject of the cards (there is much more said below about pronoun choice in the corpus as part of the account of Interpersonal meaning making).

To interpret the prominence of pronouns as the grammatical participant of fun-and-love texts, Poynton’s (1991a) concept of patterns of representational meaning as delineating extent and types of control exercised by the grammatical agent is drawn on. A grammatically ‘indirect’ control is exercised in mental process clauses of the Senser over self and others (p.229). The domain of control over which the Senser has authority is the self. Thus, ‘I’ and ‘you’ or ‘we’ is invested in control over self and, in the corpus, invested to a lesser extent in a concern with control over the classification of ‘objects’ through relational processes (including ‘love’ as is discussed below). This type of control and the cultural value of its domain is contrasted by Poynton to a more direct control of external world events (external to the self) by a grammatical Actor in a material process (p.229). There are two issues here. The corpus of greeting cards constitutes an interiorised world in which grammatical participants exercise indirect control and authority over a domain – the self – that is already part of its domain. The importance of this, according to Poynton’s analysis, is that different kinds of control are, according to Poynton, sexually differentiated in certain genres. For example, beyond the specific demands of the genre of news writing, for reporting events and the

---

228 From the more formal systemic linguistic perspective, ‘love’ as a participant in relational processes provides opportunities for taxonomising love.
imperatives of news-values (conflict, the unusual, currency etc), women and children are represented as having indirect control or control only over self (their own feelings, for example). The knowledges about which women and children may speak authoritatively are those concerned with self and interior worlds, not external worlds (p.230). Men, on the other hand, speak and know about others and are represented as having direct control over the external world (p.230). While access to certain kinds of domains of control through representation is always already a differentiated resource, the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards is caught up in the constitution of a world in which grammatical participants exercise control and authority over themselves with respect to emotion. Practices of representing control of emotion are both evidence of the cultural view of the danger of emotion - and those most associated with it: women - and is constitutive of that view.

_I am, you are, love is_

In thinking about representational resources as constituting a domain or ‘world’, the question arises as to how this world organises the categories of things which go towards making up its objects, its peoples and its concepts. The key things that are considered here as part of that world are: ‘I’ and ‘you’ (self and other) and love itself. Grammatical participants can be particularised via different kinds of resources. The discussion below is of two resources used by fun-and-love greeting cards. One is at clause rank and involves the primary resources for taxonomising in English (relational processes). The second is at group and phrase rank (nominal group) and is important with respect to particularising love through lexical resources.

This thing called ‘love’ predominantly appears not as a process in the corpus but as a participant. In this way love is also lexically ‘attached’ to a pronoun. It appears, for

---

229 Some media texts tend toward not producing personal thoughts and feelings as ‘news’, whereas others do. This is made explicit in journalism teaching-texts. Journalism students are taught that in broadsheet newspapers, emotion appears either as ‘reaction’ to events (in news writing) or in ‘human interest’ or ‘colour’ stories (Granato 1997). In ‘women’s’ magazines or newspapers nominally identified as tabloids, feelings may be given more prominence, although they are never ‘news’ (Withnall et al 1999). Both these latter sites are problematically located in terms of cultural value, being persistently treated as ‘low’ culture, or as contaminated by capitalist concerns and therefore ‘infotainment’ cf ‘news – although this glosses over the way all media production is enmeshed in capital relations of production.
example, as *my love*, *your love* and *our love*. Pronouns are discussed below in interpersonal terms but, representationally, love does important semiotic work in producing experience as something identifiable with specific interactants, as personalising the thing ‘love’. This personalising makes an important contribution to greeting card texts, which necessarily negotiate contesting discourses of commodification, mass production and intimacy. A different kind of specification of participants is achieved, however, through the resources of relational process clauses.

Relational processes are the lexicogrammatical resource for identifying and classifying classes and sub-classes of things, providing text producers with resources to constitute semantic taxonomies, construct ownership and attribute qualities to things. Relational processes provide an important resource for the little texts that make up the corpus of greeting cards to neatly say something else about ‘love’, ‘I’, and ‘you’. Relational processes do this representational work, in the corpus, in the following way. The predominant type of relational processes in the corpus is the attributive process, construing class/subclass relations, ascribing qualities (Attributes) to a participant (Carrier) in the direction of subclass to class (it is not reversible). The proportions of attributive and identifying processes are set out in Table 6.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relational Process</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attributive processes</td>
<td>70.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying processes</td>
<td>29.16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6.2** Proportion of two kinds of relational processes in the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards

Characterising ‘love’ is achieved via its realisation as a participant in attributive process clauses, for example, *My love for you is an endless river, an eternal ocean*… where *my love* is attributed as a sub-class of endless rivers and eternal oceans. ‘I’ and ‘you’ are similarly ‘classified’, e.g. *You’re part of me*. A slightly different kind of work is done by identifying processes. Identifying processes are concerned with defining,

---

230 Relational processes are, therefore, particularly important in texts that build fields through definition, such as in scientific registers.

231 These two types of relational processes do not exhaust the types of relational processes that occur in the corpus but make a general point about the significance of relational processes as the resource for classifying and identifying in English. For an account of further distinctions among relational processes, see Halliday 1994:119-138.
grammatically establishing relationships between things. In the following, the process defines love first as one thing, then another, *Love is sharing feelings and being real // Love is what we have*. Love, in the first clause, is constituted as an idealised notion of emotional exchange between authentic selves. The text goes on to revise that definition in the second clause, drawing on the prior definition but elaborating it from being a general feature of love to a local feature of what *we have*, as seen in Figure 6.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Token</th>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Token</th>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Love is sharing feelings and being real // Love is what we have</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.3** Identifying relational clause, defining love

Such a procession from general to specific over the course of the text is an important pattern of fun-and-love greeting cards and is analysed later with respect to textual meaning making. The initial definition of love set out in Figure 6.3, *sharing feelings and being real*, characterises love in terms which also resonate with more specialised definitions. For example, Averill (1985) defines romantic love, in part, as ‘a state of absorption in thoughts about the other’ (p.93). A different kind of angle on ‘absorption’ is constituted in fun-and-love greeting cards that are concerned not with romantic love but desire. In the following example, ‘thoughts about the other’ are realised humorously and as sexual thoughts: *Excuse me Darling but I’d like to spend a quiet evening velcroed to your groin*. What preoccupies the greeting card giver making this proposal (*to spend a quiet evening velcroed to your groin*) is bodies rather than ‘feelings’. In proposing one body to be *velcroed* to another body at the *groin*, what is suggested is not a gentle ‘sharing’ of minds and feelings. While what is desired – a *quiet evening* – suggests something uneventful, it is reconfigured in the latter part of the clause as a process to do with bodies. It is rather more invasive and fierce than Averill’s gloss of romantic love, although it is such a conception of romantic love, with a focus on feelings not bodies, that the text plays with.

The *velcro* text modifies what is desired by drawing on nominal group resources in a manner that patterns fun-and-love greeting cards. To exemplify how nominal group resources are exploited, in the example above, a fuller account is given via analysis of the nominal group(s). Elaborating on the nature of the *evening* being proposed, the *velcro* text draws on two resources, modifying the nominal group prior to *evening* (pre-modification) and after it (post-modification). These are lexicogrammatical resources
that modify the central ‘thing’, putting various glosses, spins, flavours and angles on participants. In the velcro text’s first kind of modification, the ‘nature’ of evening is expanded on in indefinite terms (a) and is classified (quiet), as a private and uneventful evening. The post-modification of a quiet evening (of romantic absorption between ‘I’ and ‘you’) is achieved with a clause which shatters preconceived ideas about ‘quiet’ by putting forward an image of ‘I velcroed to your groin. This suggests a process of bodies being slammed together and torn apart only after some force is applied resonating with the ‘stickability’ of velcro and the sound of tearing that characterises it when being undone. Thus, absorption with the other is resignified as absorption of the other, realising carnal desire between Darling and I, not other kinds of ‘liking’. What is interesting from a lexicogrammatical perspective about the manner of nominal group modification in the corpus of fun-and-love cards is that it is deployed at a point where chunks of meaning can be dealt with – which means these little texts may have a lot of information packed into them.

Whether angled as love or sex, postmodification is a pattern selected for grammaticalising an experience as shared by fun-and-love greeting cards. For example, those who have loved construes those (of us) [who have loved] as having experience in common. The inclusiveness the text presumes and constitutes formulates certain knowledges (about ‘those’) or about, for example, your side [of things] (that we both know about). The constitution of certain shared things demonstrates an important way that fun-and-love greeting cards constitute intimacy between card giver and addressee. This inclusiveness also suggests a degree of incommonness of the experience of intimacy more generally, which tends to elide difference in the experience of intimacy.

A pattern in the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards is to foreground interiorised events, realising a world of ‘sensed’ experience, a world where love is a participant rather than an affectual process, which means it can be construed as both romance and sex, sometimes in the same clause. These two strand of meaning making – fun and love – are not only realised experientially. This experiential view of the ‘world’ of fun-and-love greeting cards can now be folded into other simultaneous meaning making the texts constitute. First, interpersonal meaning making is considered, initially analysing a segment of the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards visual semiosis
because it develops the ‘love’ strand in a particular direction, taking love further away from ‘fun’ or sex.

**Love, soft as an easy chair**: visual semiosis (i)

Images carry a considerable amount of semiotic weight for both first and second greeting card producers: in the design process for fun-and-love greeting cards, the image must be married to the linguistic text, although card users are understood by greeting card publishers to select greeting cards, at least initially, on the basis of a card’s image. While the images selected for fun-and-love greeting cards show considerable variation, what is striking, given that variation, are patternings, where particular discourses are drawn on in the realisation of those images. Visual analysis of a particular set of fun-and-love greeting cards forms a case study.

There are certain kinds of visual signifiers that can be predicted for texts constituted through discourses of romance, for example, love hearts, although these are not frequent in the corpus (cf St Valentine’s Day greeting cards). Fun-and-love greeting cards in the corpus frequently represent a ‘setting’ and may figuratively represent ‘a couple’, although not one that is defined as a particular couple. The settings vary but include seascapes and landscapes. Other fun-and-love greeting cards represent images that draw on discourses that circulate as part of a mundane sphere. Many of these images realise domestic settings, including banal domestic activity, for example, representations of household laundry with clothes and tea towels hanging on lines. In certain fun-and-love greeting cards, the linguistic text constitutes a similarly domestic field of *fabric softener, cooking*, including *ingredients* (quite specific ones, such as *thyme*), gardening and clothing (e.g. *shoes*).

One view of these domestic settings is from ‘outside’, providing a perspective for the viewer that is a voyeuristic glimpse, for example, of an interior space through a window softly veiled with curtaining. More commonly, the point of view of an interior is from ‘inside’ a room. This perspective provides the viewer with visual detail of

---

232 The opening line from a popular wedding song, ‘Evergreen’ (music, Barbra Streisand, lyrics, Paul Williams (1976).

233 Interiors here include ‘exteriors’ such as backyards, which are private domestic spaces.
the setting: clear representations of certain kinds of objects (side tables, lamps, vases of flowers), although some representations are more gesturally realised, suggesting the shape of an object, for example, an armchair. Other representations are ‘close ups’, for instance a view of objects on a desk, including one with a view of a calendar diary entry. The interiorised domain of fun-and-love greeting cards is thus also visually realised, specifically, as a domestic space. There is a group of fun-and-love greeting cards that not only draw on the domestic but, somewhat surprisingly, also on images that constitute and are constituted through discourses of childhood. These warrant considering here because there is a disjuncture between romantic love relationships and childhood as conceived through Western discourses constituting the child as a subject.

The analysis is focused on one ‘collection’ of greeting cards, exemplifying the broader ranges available. A greeting card collection is involves a style (as introduced in Chapter 1) and may be used for both occasion and non-occasion greeting cards. The collection focused on here is called ‘Forever Friends’ and is ‘signed’ by Deborah Jones but is part of the ‘Andrew Brownsword Collection’ (published by Coolabah Gallery, which is the John Sands non-occasion/alternative greeting card company). It is exemplified in Example 6.1. As a collection of greeting cards these form a ‘visual semiotic set’; they have a ‘style’. The collection also exemplifies other cards that are semiotically contiguous with those discussed here.

Teddy bears are not uncommon, forming a broader set of ‘cutesy’ cards. In such collections, teddy bears are dressed in a variety of clothing, for example, an apron, shorts, etc., and are represented doing human activities. These include mundane activities, such as watering plants, but also romantic activities, for example, offering flowers, or a ‘couple’ sitting outdoors gazing at the moon (and in the occasion card part of the range, a ‘mother’s day teddy’ lays in a four-poster bed, tray on lap, waiting for her traditional breakfast-in-bed). Anthropomorphising of non-human
creatures is not unusual in certain texts, for example, illustrated children’s books, comics and cartoons and so on. In such texts, an ‘animated’ teddy bear is part of a whole world of fantasticalness (animation is explored in many ways in texts for children, for example, in stories where toys come to life when the children are asleep). The teddy bear, as these examples suggest, circulates in general as part of commodities targeted at the child (directly or indirectly through the adult carer); the teddy bear is in those contexts not targeted at adults, as it is in certain fun-and-love greeting card.

The use of teddy bears in fun-and-love greeting cards produces a certain incongruity. These ‘cutesy’ cards with their teddy bears come to be displayed alongside other texts that realise ‘racy’ and sometimes sexually explicit meanings, as well as other more traditionally romantically imaged texts. While sentimentality and nostalgia contribute to a reading of these cutey cards, to make that point and go on to dismiss the cards would be to dismiss the subjects using the cards and, furthermore, would gloss over what is read here as the contradictory location of these fun-and-love cards, circulating as they do between adults in intimate (romantic sexual) relationships. As analysed here, as a way of organising fun and love, these ‘cutesy’ cards not only constitute sentimentality of the kind that is conventionally associated with greeting cards, but a particular version of romantic love. The texts pose certain questions about love and desire, given that as a cherished object of the child, the teddy bear signifies a period in life when in western modernist idealisations, life is safe and secure and the child is (supposedly) the recipient of unconditional love but is also powerless and feminised. What kind of fun-and-love is constituted by such representations? What is explored below, drawing on an analysis of visual semiosis, is the realisation of a kind of intimate relationship that is distanced from desire.

Intimate realities

The analysis of the visual semiosis of these greeting cards draws on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) discussion of visual modality, a visual system construing interpersonal meaning. Modality as a visual semiotic system realises degrees of credibility, ‘realness’ versus fantasticalness, or the degree of idealisation or abstraction. ‘Real’, in this formulation, is meaning making realised visually that is contextualised historically, culturally and situationally. So, a scene photographed from ‘life’ with detailed visual information and high saturated colour, such as is provided by a 35 mm
colour photograph, is evaluated as ‘real’ because it is in keeping with broad but historically specific semiotic orientations for reading a ‘snapshot’ (p.163). Such a modality would be evaluated as ‘unreal’ in some contexts, for example, a part of a scientific report describing an experiment because the codes organising that discourse visually take a line drawing (with labelling) as most ‘real’ (p.170). Colour is central in the realisation of modality. ‘Cutesy’ fun-and-love greeting cards select desaturated colour that is rendered as if drawn with colour pencils or crayons – a child’s choice of medium (ignoring for the moment adult artistic or playful uses of such materials). Detail in these cutesy cards is, however, specified in a way that a child’s crayon drawing would not be: trees have leaves with veins rendered and light reflects on objects which also cast shadows.

From the perspective of representing romantic love, ‘real’ is realised by a red rose. Barthes (1984b) describes the signification of the rose as ‘passionified’ (p.113). The rose of romantic love is not only red, it is often a bud, a potential bloom of abundance. This red rose of promise and desire is distinguished from the roses in Example 6.1 above, which are not saturated red, but a desaturated orangey-pink (reddish). This shift in saturation subtracts from the signifying power of the rose. The roses in Example 6.1 also differ in terms of their development. They are already in bloom and already on display as a decorative domestic feature, rather than being represented in a gift form, as ‘bunched’. The visual modality realised by ‘cutesy’ fun-and-love greeting cards, therefore, constitutes an intimacy that is attenuated with respect to carnal desire. Here is a different moment in the intimate relationship to the first flushes of love, suggesting perhaps a later period of the relationship or, as will be suggested below, a different kind of relationship altogether.

Conflating discourses of childhood, as realised through the use of teddy bears, with discourses of closeness is not unusual in itself. There are many examples in textual practices, including the use of pet names for children and the use of special intonations in interaction with children (Poynton 1985; 1991b). St Valentine’s Day greetings in newspaper and magazine classifieds demonstrate an array of intimate terms of address between adults and the use of ‘childish’ terms in what is a very public display of the private. Children, however, are not usually permitted in Western culture to participate in romantic intimacy, except in role plays (e.g. dressing up and playing at getting
married) that are seen as productively socialising them into heteronormative subjectivities (Walkerdine 1997). In combining discourses of childhood and romance, these ‘cutesy’ texts apparently construe meaning potential that is not permissible in the culture and is more usually positioned as monstrous and secret, e.g. in pedophilic relations. In these ‘cutesy’ cards, this discursive combination is not only public but popular, in quantitative terms.

Framed as a discursive disjuncture, these cutesy fun-and-love greeting cards cannot be understood as simply out of place. There is a tension between the discourses mobilised: a discourse of adult intimacy and a discourse of attenuated sexuality. To situate the cards, the analysis draws on a study of adult intimate relationships by Langford (1997). Langford’s particular focus is couples whose intimate relationship is paralleled by an ‘alter’ relationship (p.170). In the ‘alter’ relationship the couple use animal character names for each other. So the couple ‘John and Jane’ may also be ‘Fluffy and Muffy’ (Tigger and Pooh, Toad and Mole, Mr Wombat and Mr Pussycat, for two men, Swanbeat and Kingfisher, Monster and Furball). The use of these names is not the use of nickname or a term of endearment or a diminutive of an adult name. Langford’s argument is that these are the names of ‘alter personalities’ that some adults in an intimate relationship constitute for themselves and each other (p.170). While it is largely a secret relationship, despite being a commonplace practice, a highly elaborated parallel world is built for these personalities. Of most interest here is how Langford’s informants characterise alter relationships as different from the adult-adult intimate relationship that the individuals are publicly understood to be engaged in. The alter relationship is playful, affectionate and asexual. It is a safe and cheerful world that is positively valued over the world of the adult intimate relationship, which is serious, may be hurtful and is sexual (p.172).

234 Langford suggests that humans tendencies to identify with other species ‘increases in proportion to the degree to which these are furry, warm and podgy’ a finding supported by the absence of any examples of reptiles, spiders, insects and fish being used for ‘alters’ (p.171).

235 One indication of the extent of these practices is suggested by the Valentine’s Day supplement to The Telegraph, a Sydney tabloid daily newspaper, published each year with many Valentine’s Day messages of this kind.

236 Accepting the illusory nature of the alters’, Langford suggests romantic love is already illusory (p.181;184). The ‘oneness’ of the love bond, Langford suggests, is threatened by the reality of difference which is everywhere between the lovers. This produces an existential dilemma – real life adult happiness cannot be constructed from the inarticulate, selfless, oneness
It is this world that ‘cutesy cards’, as exemplified by the teddy bear collection, fit into (while not suggesting they are the only ways in which these fun-and-love greeting cards are deployed). The ‘alter’ relationship rewrites these texts, giving the cutesy cards a context in which they no longer jar with adult sexuality. While Langford pursues an object-relations approach to interpreting alter relationships, conceptions of intimacy and sexuality in relationships are taken up again in Chapter 7, drawing on recent feminist writings. Having briefly discussed some aspects of interpersonal meaning in analysing the visual realm, the realisation of interpersonal meaning in the language of the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards is now considered.

**Interpersonal meaning making with a corpus of fun-and-love texts**

From the viewpoint of the Interpersonal metafunction, the ‘social’ aspect of text is made explicit in the lexicogrammar and the discourse semantics. The view of the clause that the Interpersonal metafunction enables is not from the perspective of the representation of an event, as with experiential meaning, but as an event in its own right, an ‘interactive event’ as Halliday (1994) puts it (p.68). The participants involved in interactive events are not part of a process-participant configuration, as they are in transitivity terms, but are viewed from the perspective of particular roles or positions that can be taken up in relation to the interaction itself. Participants do not ‘sense’ or ‘do’ interpersonally, among other things they give and demand information or goods and services (p.68). The analysis in this section contributes to the picture of how, in giving and demanding information or goods and services, the grammatical participants of fun-and-love greeting card texts, together with their interlocutors, are realised as positioned subjects.

of ‘love’ but to separate out from the one who is that ‘whole’ is a ‘terrifying prospect’. Lovers in this view are faced with a choice between accepting the fleeting and transitory nature of love (leading, sooner or later, to a broken heart) or maintaining a naïve view of love which will be strangled by power struggles and emotional trauma generate a third possible response: ‘the mutual creation of a new culture, a world in common’ (p.182). This is something of an adult revisiting of the transitional object (teddy bear, blanket), posited by Winnicott (1971) which negotiates the child’s separation from the first love object – the mother. Thus, ‘life in the burrow’ as Langford calls it, is an intermediate area – saving the love – keeping the love object that is both lover and not lover (p.184).
Picking up on the prominence of ‘I’ and ‘you’ in the corpus, the analysis in the current section begins by considering pronominal choice (it is, therefore, a view ‘below’ the level of the clause). The second part of this section considers fun-and-love greeting card texts specifically as a resource for interaction. As Halliday writes, utterances are functional, they achieve social purposes: confronting, questioning, answering, refuting, accepting and so on (p.69). What particular kinds of ‘speech acts’ are constituted between interactants by fun-and-love greeting cards? The description of fun-and-love greeting card texts as interacts supports the thesis’ contention that they are dialogic texts. While they are print texts, they are dialogic in Bakhtin’s (1986) sense of being attuned to entering into ‘dialogue’ with an addressee, having the expectation of a response and involving a social relation between the card giver and recipient (p.95).

What personal pronouns ‘do’ and ‘mean’ in fun-and-love greeting cards

The most frequent participant in the corpus of fun-and-love cards is a conscious participant realised by a personal pronoun, ‘I’ or ‘you’ (see Table 6.3 below). Personal pronouns are differentiated semantically because the meaning of ‘I’ and ‘you’ (and ‘we’) is produced in the context of use. As Benveniste (1973) makes clear, ‘I’ is related to the constitution of a speaker as an individual but also as ‘a subject’ and a subject engaged in dialogue:

I use I only when I am speaking to someone who will be a you in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of person, for it implies that reciprocally I becomes you in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as I ... I posits another person, the one who, being, as he is, completely exterior to ‘me’, becomes my echo to whom I say you and who says you to me. (pp.224-225).

In English, the use of ‘I’ constitutes one interlocutor as ‘speaker’ and another as ‘addressee’ and in the context of this ‘condition of dialogue’ personal pronouns enable interlocutors to realise both person orientation and singular and plural reference.237 It is the relationship between person orientation, reference and speaker that is the nexus...
for complaints about greeting cards being impersonal because there is a disjuncture between the greeting card text producer and card giver as textual ‘person’.

The relation between the semantics of the personal pronoun, pronominal choice and social relations is the subject of Brown and Gilman’s (1990) classic paper, ‘The pronouns of power and solidarity’. In that paper, they demonstrate how the Tu and Vous forms of second person pronouns in European languages have, over time, moved from being indicative of differences and similarities in power to, more recently, being indicative of differences and similarities in solidarity (p.261). These changes to the governing semantic principles of pronoun choice are understood by Brown and Gilman as related to the constitution of an ‘equalitarian ideology’ in modern democracies (p.269). With a relation between linguistic choice and social relations established, personal pronouns ‘mean’ more than person orientation (addresser/addressee) and ‘do’ more than indicate reference (singular/plural). They realise and constitute particular social relations, positioning subjects and producing particular social realities. The analysis of the personal pronouns of fun-and-love greeting cards takes these linguistic phenomena to be resources that are constitutive of social relations.

In the corpus, personal pronouns are overwhelmingly chosen to realise grammatical participants. The most frequent personal pronoun choice is first person singular ‘I’ followed by ‘you’, then ‘we’ and possessive determiners (my, our, your) as set out in Table 6.3. Instances of ‘you’ are mostly singular, referring to the card recipient/addressee but there are examples of the indefinite form where ‘you’, means ‘people’. There is also ambiguity, where ‘you’ may refer both generally and specifically, for example, You know what they say about love. It takes two to tango // Partner. ‘We’ in the corpus realises speaker plus addressee, the card giver plus recipient. Other kinds of greeting cards have examples of other types of ‘we’. Greeting cards given on the occasion of a work colleague’s ‘farewell’ by a collection of people will have a ‘we’ that refers to a group excluding the recipient.
A number of possible relations of affiliation between greeting card giver and the
greeting card (and its enunciative position) were suggested in Chapter 4. On the basis
of that discussion, ‘I’ may or may not be read as a reference to the card giver. Greeting
cards give ‘voice’ to cartoon characters, animals and other objects through ‘speaking
balloons’ or representing speech by quotation marks. How though is the ‘I’ of the text
is meaning and in what relation to the addressee? The semantics and social relations of
pronominal choice in the corpus are analysed, drawing on Wright’s (1989a; 1989b)
semantic differentiation of personal pronouns, discussing ‘I’ and ‘you’ first as the key
grammatical participants in the corpus, then ‘we’. In a physical educational setting,
Wright semantically differentiates personal pronouns used by teachers and students,
identifying a personal ‘I’, an authority ‘I’ and an active ‘I’. Using the active ‘I’, a
speaker is an agent, for example, realised by ‘I’ as Actor as the subject of a material
process (for example, I put my clothes on and thought about you some more). Using an
authority ‘I’, a speaker positions themselves with ‘the right to direct, to inform and
evaluate’ (Wright 1989b:12). For example, I want to grow old with you. Using a personal
‘I’, one speaks from the position of one ‘who thinks, feels, shares an understanding’
(p.12). For example, I’m ready to rock your world. While examples of each kind occur in
the corpus, what is of most interest here is the personal ‘I’ and the authoritative ‘I’
because, according to Wright’s study, they are more likely as subject of a mental
process and these predominate in the corpus of fun-and-love greeting card texts.

In the following example from the corpus a number of different kinds of ‘I’ are
realised: When I [active] close my eyes, I [personal] can picture anything that I [authority]
want to... //I [personal] only wish that when I [active] open them, I [active] could see you here
with me. The active ‘I’ are concerned with agency over the body of the clause’s subject
(e.g. my eyes) and imagined seeing. These, in cultural terms, are not very powerful
activities. The authority ‘I’ is a provisional authority, in a projected clause. In reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Quantity as a rounded percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my, our, your</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3 Proportions of pronoun selection in the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards
the selection of particular ‘I’ choices through gender as a dimension of difference, Wright finds that certain choices are associated with female and male teachers: female teachers selecting personal ‘I’ and male teachers selecting the authoritative ‘I’. Wright suggests that while by using a personal ‘I’ a female teacher does not ‘abdicat[e] her position of authority’, the selection by female teachers of a thinking, feeling, understanding and disclosing ‘I’ is a selection that compares to male teachers’ investment in the authoritative ‘I’ (1989a:94). Interactional ‘styles’ thus have sociopolitical implications, for example, the mitigation of the authority ‘I’ in the example above delineates a particularly pervasive idea of a feminised subject.

If a pattern of personal ‘I’ is realised by fun-and-love greeting cards and constitutes the self in personal rather than authoritative terms, what kinds of meanings are being made? The personal ‘I’, according to Wright, is related to the realisation of solidarity and intimacy (1989b:6). What might be meant by ‘intimacy’ and how it might be realised in an educational context cannot be applied unproblematically with respect to intimacy in relation to fun-and-love greeting card texts. As the account of experiential meaning making suggests, the language of greeting cards situates the texts as ‘talk’ about ‘relationships, as talk concerned with ‘hope,’ ‘love’, ‘forever’, ‘divorce’, ‘kiss’, and so on. While these processes may appear in the social context of talk/writing to do with intimacy in a number of fields, for example, ‘psychological’ therapies, their position in the educational discourses Wright studied is less secure (similarly so for closing one’s eyes and imagining). Solidarity is also better understood as something that can be built in a variety of ways. Drawing on both contact and affect dimensions of Tenor, for example, solidarity can be built in contexts of infrequent contact with uniplex role relations and high affect (positive and or negative) (Poynton 1985). So, for example, being an occasional player on the same sport team may constitute solidarity on Saturdays.

239 Whereas Poynton (1985) differentiates social distance and affect from Brown and Gilman’s (1990) solidarity, Wright puts social distance and affect back together as intimacy and keeps solidarity.

240 Uniplex refers to a single or limited kind of relation between persons.
As the following illustrates, fun-and-love texts also inscribe card givers as speaking from a position of authority. In Example 6.2 below, this is used to build a domain that is carnal in its desire, not ‘nurturing’, and it also exceeds the terrain of the personal.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I want you} \\
\text{I want your love} \\
\text{I want your heart} \\
\text{I want your body} \\
\text{I want it all!}
\end{align*}
\]

**Example 6.2** Authority ‘I’ in a fun-and-love greeting card

For each clause, in the example above, the Senser/mental process/Phenomenon structure is repeated, with the Phenomenon identifying the scope of the process. A conscious human being is configured as in a desiring relation with another conscious being and parts thereof: your love, heart, body. While in the first four clauses the speaker is staking a claim over another person, their emotions, reciprocated emotion and sex, the anaphoric reference of the last clause’s Phenomenon, it, delimits and bounds the sensing, so that it is not just over you, your love, your heart and your body, but over it all.

The subject spoken by this clause is occupying not only the affective and interpersonal realm of intimate interaction but, through the use of an authority ‘I’, claims certain other ‘rights’. The Senser ‘wants’ marking out a desiring relation between conscious thing (self) and conscious thing – other (you). It is not a relation between subjects but between subject and object, an articulation of desire constituted in terms of claims over, and possession of, the other. It is desire circumscribing another’s body and emotions for oneself.

What kind of subject, ‘who’, can claim this set of things, which includes another being, body parts and feelings and can not only want these but can demand it all – demand the world? This actively desiring and demanding subject realised by Example 6.2 is a particularly troubled and troublesome position for women. Within a discourse of romance, feminine subjects ‘wait’, they do not actively ‘want’ (Barthes 1992:14) and within certain discourses, an active desiring woman can only be a whore (Holloway 1984). Woman, in discourses of male desire is an object of desire not a desiring subject. Romantic discourse constituted feminine subjects as able to claim love and the heart but not necessarily the body. Where a body is claimed in speaking romantic discourse, it is the loved one’s body, claimed for the speaker alone, for example, in the vows of
Western marriage decreeing sexual monogamy between heterosexuals. That is to say, a particular body is constituted as a site of control and containment of that body. In Example 6.2, *you, your love, your heart* plot discourses of feminised desire, *you, your love, your heart*, but these are also exceeded. The text constitutes a demand for ‘everything’, a boundlessness of desire and a subject of both discourses of ‘love’ and carnal desire. If this is a position spoken by a feminine subject, it positions feminine subjects with respect to desire in a way that resonates with a post-feminism subject – where ‘post-feminism’ does not indicate an end to feminism but signals a subject position realised ‘literally’ after the work of feminism has begun. It is not an unproblematic repositioning. Inside Example 6.2, the text is *Greed is good*. This references the catch cry of the ultra-capitalist character Gordon Gecko in the 1980s film *Wall Street*. In the text being considered here, the slogan offers an evaluation of the demands made on the front the card by ‘I’. The authoritative ‘I’ constructed as an active desiring subject in this text is thus also situated through a discourse of sexual liberation traceable in individualistic liberatory discourses, where individual ‘freedoms’ are only limited by the constraint ‘unless it hurts someone’ often constructed narrowly as physical hurt.241

So, while in Example 6.2 there is no mitigation of the authoritative position constituted by the text, the authority is constituted in relation to the kind of personal freedom that wealth ensures. This is authority, which if viewed from the perspective of gender, is distributed unevenly, bringing a post-feminism subject into what is now a familiar tension with material conditions which do not coincide with the rhetoric of equality discourses.

‘*we*’ entails?

A different set of social relations to that produced in the use of ‘I’ and ‘you’ is entailed in the use of ‘we’. There are conventional uses of ‘we’, glossed above as plural: as ‘group including speaker and/or hearer’, representing ‘we’ as a kind of addition. While ‘I’ and ‘you’ create an opposition between speaker and addressee – self and other – ‘we’ produces a ‘joint’ subject. ‘We’ is a participant in joint actions, possessor of objects and is attributed with certain qualities (we are family). The ‘we’ in the corpus is mostly of this conventional kind, referring to addressee/addressee, with some instances of the ‘we’ of formal writing that refers to the writer but claims universality.

241 The issue of linguistic hurt is explored by Butler (1997) in *Excitable Speech*. 
Have you ever noticed that the things we desire most are usually right under our noses?
The analysis of the choice of ‘we’ by fun-and-love greeting cards also benefits from Wright’s (1989b) systematic differentiation of personal pronouns for considering social relations constituted in the texts.

The semantics of ‘we’ and ‘us’, differentiated according to social relations, means that ‘we’ is not simply the result of an equation, ‘I’ + ‘you’ = ‘we’/’us’ but realises particular configurations of social relations. The importance of ‘we’ according to Wright is in the constitution of shared experience and a shared sense of community or ‘solidarity’:

Solidarity is signalled in language by the linguistic choices that indicate communality and in terms of personal pronoun use this means incorporating the other into activities, beliefs or knowledges etc through the use of a communal ‘we’ instead of ‘I’ and ‘you’. As with power and intimacy, the solidarity may be real or implied. (p.6)

Solidarity, constituted through a range of resources in the Tenor dimensions of affect and contact, may be agreed to by both interactants (‘real’) or, as in the rhetorical ‘we’ of political discourse, implied. The conventional ‘we’ is a resource of scope, constituting the inclusion of the other, as in the following: You’re part of me // even when we’re apart. This we is made to do something rather more than inclusiveness and something more like incorporation, an annexation of the other. The potential of inclusiveness is ‘loaded up’, semantically, in the local context of the clause, via interpersonal resources of alliteration, a verbal play, but also experientially (see Figure 6.3).

The attributive relational process constitutes ‘you’ and ‘me’ in a sub-class/class (of things that are a part of me) relation. This relation is ‘held on to’ in a sense in the second clause, where you and me are reconfigured as a new subject we. In the context of intimacy, personal pronouns of solidarity are demanded in the construction of ‘a couple’. Becoming a ‘couple’ in the context of having an intimate relationship is not instant, automatic or natural but discursively constituted, in part constructed through pronoun choice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You</th>
<th>part of me</th>
<th>//</th>
<th>even when we’re</th>
<th>apart</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Attribute</td>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.3** Semantics of inclusion and incorporation in a fun-and-love greeting card
The solidarity of ‘we’ or ‘us’ is a resource that simultaneously constitutes both
‘grouping’ and the presumption or construction of ‘incommon-ness’. How far this
incommon-ness, as ‘togetherness’, may exceed ‘addition’ is also seen in the following
element, There’s you, There’s me, There’s us // and that’s all that matters. The rhetorical
weight of ‘togetherness’ is carried through the text onto the inside page of the card
where that references the togetherness in that’s all that matters. The cultural value of
‘togetherness’ in this text is seen to outweigh that of a self realised by ‘you’ and ‘me’.

In the constitution of intimacy, processes of constituting ‘we’, ‘incorporating the other
into activities, beliefs and knowledges’, as Wright puts it, are critical (p.6). The shared
knowledge constituted by the ‘communal inclusive we’, as Wright categorises it,
presumes a degree of ‘incommon-ness’. The ‘communal inclusive we’ operates in
terms of two dimensions of social relations conventionally conceived as separate, but
as already seen in Chapter 4, Poynton’s (1985) model reconfigures this opposition.
This is important for example in addressing texts that involve a conjunction of contact
and affect with power. For example, in the following: We need to talk…/ /…soon!, affect
is realised orthographically by the exclamation mark (a fuller discussion of
orthography and graphology with respect to meaning making appears below) and the
communal inclusive ‘we’ is not about solidarity, additive relations, but power. A
power dimension, the constitution of inclusiveness – we – realise equality between
speaker and addressee but not unproblematically. Any possibility of a challenge to the
need to talk or to the level of investment (an urgency realised by the temporality, soon!) is diminished by this choice, although not removed. The ‘communal inclusive we’ is
potentially coercive in its constitution of solidarity. As Wright points out: ‘While “I”
and “you” create an opposition that is explicit, “we” creates a communality in which it
is difficult to be the odd one out’ (p.9). Disagreeing with this jointly constructed need
to talk may be realised in many ways but any refusal to participate in the talk or a
refusal to accept the need for a talk offers a challenge to the speaker. A diminished
possibility for refusal or challenge realises a dimension of power because of the
importance of reciprocity in organising power relations in text.242 We need to talk…//

242 The most important linguistic and discourse features that realise power relations are
summarised by Poynton (1985): control of interaction (by initiating rather than responding in an
exchange, approving and maintaining topic rather than suggesting topic), speaking rights (able
to speak without interruption cf being interrupted), modulation (must, should, ought) cf
modality (perhaps, might, maybe), speech function choice (commands), terms of address
...soon! brings together ‘equality’ and solidarity as a conjunction of affect, contact and power that anticipates and resists any counter identification with the proposition of the clause. It is not possible to judge with certainty what may be in play in respect of solidarity and power in the relations between card giver and recipient or in what distributions but there is some aspect of power being mobilised and accordingly, these issues are returned to below during the analysis of speech function.

The coercive potential of the ‘we’ above is usefully put alongside the same clause’s transitivity structure. The Senser (*we*) embraces *needs* that are more usually attached to and interiorised within individuals. ‘We’, therefore, constitutes a joint subject position with joint *needs* in a way that is at odds with the individualised subject of modern Western conceptions of self. A certain kind of subjectivity – a certain kind of ‘self’ is being constituted by this particular configuration of affect and contact. In Chapter 7, the semantics of the plural personal pronoun in romantic love discourses and the production of a joint ‘subject’ is pursued. ‘The couple’ is re-read as the constitution of a kind of ‘community of two’ that is renewed and re-invented by fun-and-love greeting cards in the context of a narrative of the romantic relationship – a love story. The construction of social relationships between speaker and addressee, continues to be the focus for this chapter’s account of fun-and-love greeting cards, moving now to a consideration of how the corpus interactionally realises these relations through investments in speech functions.

**The interactional language of fun-and-love greeting cards**

The exploration of personal pronouns in fun-and-love greeting cards above has been concerned with what kind of relation between self and other is being constituted. From a different perspective but similar focus it is productive to consider how fun-and-love greeting cards constitute speaker and addressee in interactional terms: what kind of ‘interact’ is being constituted, that is, whether it is a ‘greeting’, ‘question’, ‘challenge’, an ‘opinion’ and so on. While interaction is treated in a variety of ways by linguists, philosophers of language, sociologists and ethnographers, social semiotics

(friendly cf polite) (p.81).
understands text producers and audiences – writers and readers and speakers or
listeners – as engaged in constructing and exchanging information or goods and
services with text (Halliday 1994:69). A modification of that model as it has been
developed by Eggins and Slade (1997) is drawn on in this section to give an account of
interactional work done by fun-and-love greeting card texts.

What kinds of resources are mobilised interactionally by fun-and-love greeting cards
and how might those choices enable card users to position themselves and others?
Exploring interpersonal meaning making from this point of view is important for this
account of print text, as part of arguing that fun-and-love greeting card text is dialogic.
The analysis suggests that, unlike the saccharine and singular view of social
relationships that some critics have argued are fictionalised in greeting cards, fun-and-
love greeting cards realise social relations multi-dimensionally. While fun-and-love
greeting cards realise declarations of positive affect and idealised versions of romantic
love relations, they also realise the negotiation of difference.

There are two simultaneous investments a speaker makes in constructing an ‘interact’: its lexicogrammar or Mood and its speech function. The Mood and speech function
aspects of an ‘interact’ are distinguished in social semiotics and related through the
notion of typical/untypical (unmarked/marked) relations. So, for example, while
the speech function ‘question’ is in an unmarked relation with the Mood structure that
realises an interrogative (where the finite precedes the subject, Fi^Su), it is perfectly
possible to formulate a question using other Mood structures, e.g. declarative (where
the Subject precedes the Finite, Su^Fi), with the ‘question’ function realised in a choice
of rising intonation, rather than the falling intonation associated with Statement – the
unmarked speech function for declarative Mood (Halliday 1994:302). This reference
to intonation obliquely points to a challenge shaped for print texts by phonocentric
models of interaction. Speech function is designated within discourse by sequences of

243 This distinction and its explicit tie up between discourse moves and the lexicogrammar
distinguishes Halliday’s (1994) account and makes an important improvement to analysing
discourse in context over other accounts that may rely on descriptive contextual information or
even the analyst’s assessment for identifying ‘turns’ and their discursive force.
244 Interrogatives are distinguished between ‘closed’ (polar or yes/no) and ‘open’ (WH, that is,
who, what, where, when, why and how forms).
utterances produced by interactants as they negotiate an exchange of meanings. Proceeding in a dialogue involves a retrospective and interactive orientation to speech function, which is ‘analysed’ by interactants ‘looking back’ at what is said and assessing Mood and speech function together. Analysts modelling and analysing dialogue proceed in the same retrospective fashion, laying out an unfolding interaction. Given that the language of print text fun-and-love greeting cards constitutes only one contribution to an interaction, the analysis presented here is synoptic.

The nature of what is being given or demanded provides the basis for elaborating types of speech ‘interacts’ in social semiotics: i.e., what is exchanged is either goods and services or information, giving the following matrix of basic speech functions of Offer, Statement, Command and Question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity exchanged</th>
<th>Goods &amp; services</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving</td>
<td>Offer</td>
<td>Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. Will you have some coffee?</td>
<td>e.g. She’s drinking coffee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demanding</td>
<td>Command</td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. Go and make another coffee.</td>
<td>e.g. Will she accept coffee?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.4** The four basic speech functions (based on Halliday 1994:69)\(^{245}\)

Added to the four basic speech functions are response categories: e.g. an answer to a question, a refusal to comply with a command and so on. Departures from expectations provide various possibilities: for trouble (a student not responding to a teacher’s question with an answer) and may have legal consequences (refusing to answer in a court of law) and for humour. The potential for ‘playing’ with the system is also an important resource for interactants, for example, realising a Command with an interrogative (who left the door open?, for instance, may be readily treated as a demand that who ever left the door open should close it).

\(^{245}\) Non-verbal realisations are possible for Commands and Offers: an offer may simply be realised non-verbally by someone holding out the expresso pot and raising an eyebrow.
The account used to enlarge on this concept of speech interacts and provide a vocabulary for the discussion below is that developed by Eggins and Slade (1997) from Halliday (1994) and Martin (1992). Eggins and Slade’s development is motivated by a corpus of casual conversation. The fun-and-love greeting card corpus has important resonances with casual conversation, as a genre of discourse concerned with roles and relationships, intimacy and the constitution of shared experience between interactants. What is formulated by Eggins and Slade and taken up in this analysis of a greeting card corpus is an interactional ‘unit’ of text, the discourse move, which combines lexicogrammar, semantic functional analysis and discourse function in order to perform analysis of complex spoken text. The discourse move captures meaning making from the point of view of both clause and ‘turn’. So, for instance while a move is congruently realised as a clause and, therefore, realises Mood, it can be realised by a grammatical unit other than a major clause. A speaker’s ‘turn’ may involve more than one move. A discourse move initially either opens or sustains interaction, positioning another interactant as ‘addressee’ and potential ‘responder’. What an interactant can ‘do’ with that responding move is related to the opening move, which produces possibilities for the responding move, including ‘non-compliant’ versions. Discourse moves position interactants in relation to each other. So, for example, the power dimension of Tenor is realised by who controls interaction by initiating rather than responding in an exchange, who approves and maintains the ‘topic’ and what kind of speech function is selected.

The discourse moves realised by the corpus of fun-and-love print texts and described in the current section demonstrate that the texts constitute a resource for doing a range of interactional work, although mostly, the texts realise declarative Mood. This is a choice that constructs a semantic pattern of putting forward a view of a world of self and a world of self and other. This ‘view’ is not necessarily congruently realised as Statements (giving information), a choice that is important with respect to realising the Tenor dimension of power. The account below suggests that the texts position the addressee as someone whose response is not determined but who is positioned as able to accept, decline, clarify, counter, refute etc., information that the text gives. This suggests that, while some of the work the texts do is making pronouncements about the world, these statements may or may not be supported.
What is less clear is how print fun-and-love greeting cards may respond to or sustain interaction.

The tendency of interactional models of language to be phonocentric is illustrated in the way that initiating and responding moves are treated as problematic for print text, although they are more or less expected in spoken interaction. While in casual conversation the expectation is that interactants take ‘turns’, this is not entirely straightforward. One does not respond to a ‘rhetorical’ question or in other kinds of interactional contexts, for example, in the role of ‘witness’, one does not initiate questions to a barrister in a courtroom because witnesses are questioned by court officials. Taking turns is not the whole story with respect to interaction. Rendering interaction as ‘turn taking’ is to deploy a mechanistic model, as if constituting interaction as a ‘to and fro’ between interactants unproblematically represents all that goes on interactionally, including the social relations of interlocutors. Despite these limitations, it is the case that taking up an interactional role or not constitutes a meaningful choice. To not respond at all in certain contexts is strongly disapproved of (e.g. when asked a question by a journalist, a refusal to respond at all is typically read as having something to hide – hence the minimal response, ‘no comment’ (Hobson 1992). Silence rejects the obligation inherent in being positioned by another as ‘you’. Not responding is a rejection of the shift from the position of ‘you’ and addressee and becoming ‘I’. Not responding is a refusal to occupy the position of speaker ‘I’ in ‘turn’ and is thus an interactional investment, a strategy, which operationalises power. It is also an interactional pattern that impinges on gender differences. The refusal to respond in the context of a heteronormative intimate interaction between men and women is a pattern that constructs women as ‘nagging’. She speaks. He does not respond. She speaks. He does not respond, ad infinitum. This kind of refusal to be speaker, the refusal to take on the position of addressee is, in commonplace terms, spoken of by women as ‘not being listened to’ but is also part of attempts to pathologise women’s interactional behaviour.

246 People do but in doing so they demonstrate they have not grasped that the question was rhetorical.
Taking up an interactional role is a potential that is available to a range of print texts, where there is a sociocultural expectation of response (e.g. classified advertisements). While there are limitations to treating texts in this manner, it provides a starting point for considering how a print artefact like a greeting card can be semiotically situated. The materiality of the greeting card, in part, compels some response from a recipient, even if it is a non-verbal response, e.g. returning the card unopened to the sender, or throwing it in the rubbish bin (opened or not). These non-verbal moves reject the greeting card’s texted discourse move but respond all the same, suggesting that greeting cards are located towards the ‘expect response’ end of a continuum of response expectations (Martin 1992). The texts, however, are not simply a ‘greeting’ or salutation, that is, fun-and-love greeting card texts are not restricted to being an opening or initiation of interaction. It is possible to say something about the texts from the perspective of continuing or reacting moves because these do not all occur away from the analyst’s view. An extended exemplification below outlines the way in which lexicogrammatically fun-and-love greeting cards can realise ‘responding’ or sustaining discourse moves. The example is elaborated with interpretive glosses for the discourse moves being made by the text because the text, Example 6.3, Alright, alright! I’m sorry! Okay? // can we fool around now?, also exemplifies another common feature in fun-and-love greeting cards: it constructs a series of discourse moves as part of its one ‘turn’.

The initial move of this text, Alright, alright! is not an opening move, it responds to a previous, unknown utterance. Its grammar, a minor clause, provides the support for this interpretation. Minor clauses rely on shared discursive history and, therefore, typically realise responding moves (Eggins and Slade 1997:152). While the particular shared discursive history is ‘missing’ from the analyst’s view, the response move being realised can be interpreted. It is identified as a sustaining move. The first move, Alright, alright!, is followed by a fully grammaticalised clause, I’m sorry! Given that sorry indexically realises an apology, the move is interpreted here as a supporting one, elaborated by Eggins and Slade in the following way:

---

247 See Coupland (1996) for a useful discussion of the personal advertisement, which is particular example of the register Sinclair (1988) calls ‘compressed English’.

248 Or Mood adjunct.
[it] indicates a willingness to accept propositions or proposals of the other speakers. [The text producer is] therefore non-assertive, even deferential.

Identifying *I'm sorry* as a support move suggests re-interpreting the previous move as a react move (cf a continuing move) but what follows it is particularly interesting. The support move is immediately followed by a discourse move monitoring the interactional context: *Okay?* This monitoring *Okay?* constructs a familiar discourse move, checking do I proceed? *Okay?* is also where the material ‘break’ in the linguistic text occurs and, therefore, the move is best understood in the context of what follows, over the page on the inside recto page of the card. (The relationship between the layout of text on the page and the material interruption of the clause with respect to fun-and-love greeting cards is enlarged upon below as part of the consideration of textual meaning making). Over the page, is a euphemistic request for sex, realised by the question *can we fool around now?* With this discourse move, the ‘speaker’ tests the limits of acceptance of the apology that precedes it. The checking goes on at the material point where the card will be opened, it is a point where there is a semiotic moment where it is possible to negotiate further the status or acceptance of ‘okay’ or ‘not okay’. This is a critical point in the exchange. What is interactionally already ‘on the table’ is deference and an apology but the monitoring discourse move anticipates what is over the page and what, therefore, is ‘unknown’. While the monitoring process may suggest a negotiation which could be considerably extended and produce the interspersal of other discourse moves, it is also the semiotic moment where the greeting card text deploys anticipation and expectation point in the genre (surprise!), with the text ending on that page propelling the reader on to the next page. So, while the semiotic space constituted provides an opportunity to negotiate much more, for example, by shifting into spoken interaction, that potential is in tension with the momentum towards opening the greeting card. Figure 6.5 below summarises and glosses the discourse moves introduced above.

The personal ‘I’ is undermined by what follows it, making its disclosure provisional. The request for sex is realised through a question but is in fact a demand, selecting an atypical or marked Mood to realise a Command. The congruent speech function for interrogative Mood is a Question, seeking information (yes/no or WH) about which there can then be an ‘argument’.
While there is certainly an interrogative in Example 6.3, there is also a demand that the request is conformed to: that the ‘sex’ be enacted. It is this combination of features that realises the Tenor dimension of contact as between close interactants but not between two equally powerful interactants. What is going on in this text is of interest here because such a demand is circulating in the domain of intimate relationships and romantic love which are, notionally, domains idealised as not involving power relations. Power is elided in traditional conceptions of romantic love and in contemporary versions is rewritten through a discourse of equality. The way in which power relations are enacted in Example 6.3 above is that the text realises a concession under duress and sarcastically positions the addressee as able to determine the state of play, as having some authority – but not quite sufficient. It goes on to tests the limits of acceptance of the apology by euphemistically requesting sex. The request for sex is not a generalised statement with respect to the domain of desire, it puts ‘the hard word’ on the addressee to move on, get over what ever has gone on and come through with the required goods. The speaking position constituted here is one which involves an attempt to re-establish sexual ‘rights’ and in doing so assumes a position of already having those rights.

For this fun-and-love greeting card, given and received, there is a discursive history, an intersubjective space designated between the ‘I’ and ‘we’ that makes its text readable for the speaker and addressee through other texts about which the analyst cannot begin to speak. The shared knowledges and experiences of a specific ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘you’ are readable through another intertext, the social process of the intimate relationship itself. From cultural knowledge about the intimate relationship, the
Alright, alright! text can be read as an enactment of ‘making up’ or at least an attempt at doing so – its efficacy cannot be assessed.

Within the context of an intimate relationship, the diverse ways in which a fun-and-love greeting card like the sorry text may contribute to other talk around making up can only be imagined. What provides scope for discussing one particular future intersubjective space is the text’s visual representation of a man and woman (see Example 6.3b). This suggests that one of those possible futures will be heterosexual ‘post-make-up-sex’. The sorry text can be read in relation to intimacy and sexual difference. In the constitution of an intimate relationship, women are particularly caught up in both sexualizing and de-sexualising discourses that are mobilised as part of forming normative, gender roles, including interactional roles. Interpersonally, fun-and-love greeting cards may realise supporting moves, solidify bonding and be constitutive of shared discursive realities. These are discursive moves that have been, not unproblematically, associated with women’s interactional behaviour (Coates 1997). Fun-and-love greeting cards, however, realise speech functions that while responding to previous discourse moves do not necessarily support the previous discourse move, providing a contrast to the idealised or sentimentalised love of other greeting cards (e.g. the St Valentine’s Day occasion card). Through its mode of address, the sorry text specifies a particular speaking position, positioning its audience with respect to a particular future and the interaction it realises.

A close, equal relation and having sexual rights over an individual are, in the example above, constituted as going ‘hand in hand’, mobilising a very particular intimacy discourse. Sexual ‘rights’ are foregrounded through being positioned as the ‘news’ in this text or what the addressee must attend to, constituting and anticipating an acquiescent addressee (for a developed discussion of the realisation of ‘news’ see...
below in the section concerned with textual meaning making). The text does not speak from a position of Other. The speaking position constituted here is one that sexes the speaker as masculine and the addressee as feminine. It is constitutive of discourses that realise masculinised interactants as less interested in talk and more interested in sex. These are versions of the binarised ‘male sex drive’ discourse and the ‘have/hold’ discourse, which suggests women are concerned with emotional closeness and security (Holloway 1984).

The dispersed and mobile nature of modern power means there may be a number of bases for the operation of power relations between interactants. While gender has been exemplified through the analysis of Example 6.3, age, physical coercion and health may be in the mix. Furthermore, an analysis moves into uncertain and unknown terrain with respect to how, for example, in the sorry text, a card giver’s concession, support and demand are responded to by the recipient. One thing is less uncertain. Individuals in romantic heterosexual relationships perform a complex of roles – partner, lover, mother/father – and interactants are positioned in relation to multiple and contesting discourses, including gendering discourses.

In this section, the corpus has been described with respect to negotiating the exchange of information and goods and services, demonstrating a range of discourse moves in print. These are resources that are important for constituting intimate romantic relationships (as developed in Chapter 7). This patterning of a broad range of discourse moves rather than a single tendency towards initiating and supporting moves contributes to the sense of the texts as dialogic, in Bakhtin’s (1981) sense. In more specific terms, while supporting moves function to close off an interaction, for example, by resolving to agree with a proposition put by another, confronting moves function to open up or continue an exchange as an effect of the way that challenges or contradictions can be followed by further negotiations (Eggins and Slade 1997:182). The realisation of confronting moves in the corpus, for example, can we fool around now?, demonstrates that intimate interaction as performed with fun-and-love greeting

---

249 Eggins and Slade (1997) find, for example, that interactants in casual conversation may volunteer or be asked to provide justifications or explanations for their proposition or proposals (p.182).
cards is not all ‘support’, not all idealised love relations. To interpret confronting discourse moves in their casual conversation corpus, Eggins and Slade draw on Kress’s (1985) claim that, in a general sense, difference rather than sameness motivates the production of text (p.12). In making this claim, Kress goes against the grain of much analysis of conversation and interaction but the importance of it is seen in processes constituting closeness and intimacy:

If interactants wish to explore their interpersonal relations, they must choose speech functions which keep the conversation going, and this frequently means that intimate relations involve interactants reacting to each other in confronting, rather than supporting, moves. (Eggins and Slade 1997:54)

The importance of keeping interaction going\textsuperscript{250} and in developing and sustaining the intimate relationship is critically tied to the meaning of intimacy in Western cultural terms and is pursued in Chapter 7.

**Writing on the page: visual semiosis (ii)**

This section returns to the social semiotics of visual resources deployed in fun-and-love greeting cards. Print text is both a language and a visual semiotic and an analysis of fun-and-love greeting cards as ‘seen’ language brings attention to the terrain of ‘the page’. While there is a considerable literature on document design, typology and layout etc (Bernhardt 1985; Banham 1996), the approach here draws on the work of a small number of social semioticians. Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) work on multimodal texts takes it as axiomatic that all texts involve multiple signifying practices that are constitutive of the social, in effect making it difficult for any one signifying practice, for example language, to be privileged, at least theoretically.\textsuperscript{251} This repositioning of language is seen, for example, in Huisman’s (1999) work on ‘seen language’, which develops a particular aspect of Mode relevant to the texts analysed in this study. As already seen in Example 6.3b among others, the ordinary resources of sentence punctuation and typographical layout can be deployed semantically.

Analysis and comment in this section is concerned with Interpersonal meaning making


\textsuperscript{251}A non-hierarchical relation of language and images contrasts to Barthes’ (1980) early formulation of visual signs as dependent on the linguistic: ‘it is true that objects, images and patterns of behaviour can signify ... but never autonomously (p.10).
resources, particularly the visual realisation of Affect by fun-and-love greeting cards.\textsuperscript{252} An analysis of graphology as phonology, as Huisman (1999) puts it, shows that Affect is realised at a greater degree of delicacy than ‘emphasis’ in print text.

The broad terrain within which an analysis of print text is situated involves a number of possible perspectives. For example, print text may be considered from the perspective of orthography – the art of writing with proper letters and accepted usage (especially, letters and spelling), typography – the art of printing with type (especially the character and appearance of printed matter) and graphology – referring to a concern with units of writing and print.\textsuperscript{253} These resources bring into prominence the sentence.\textsuperscript{254} Following Huisman (1999), the preference in this account is to use the term graphology to refer to the general semiotic terrain of ‘the page’ and the representation of visible language, leaving orthography and typography as defined.\textsuperscript{255}

Graphological resources are important for the realisation of Affect by fun-and-love greeting cards. As print text, fun-and-love greeting cards must realise all their affect without drawing on phonological resources (except ‘voice’ cards). An example analysed earlier in the chapter, Example 6.2, is reprised here in order to emphasise the importance of the graphological contribution to meaning making. When presented previously, Example 6.2 was represented in a way that suited the purposes of discussing personal pronouns and experiential meaning. As a consequence, meanings

\textsuperscript{252} Visual textual meaning making resources are also important in relation to the constitution of Field, for example, the single word \textit{Lush} at the bottom centre of an image of a green gerbera on a red background has the letters \textit{us} in different colour to the \textit{L} and \textit{h} and \textit{us} is circled, enabling word that is semantically unrelated to love to realise the domain of fun-and-love by signifying the ‘couple’.

\textsuperscript{253} In a vernacular sense, graphology may be defined as the study of handwriting that is regarded as an expression of the writer’s character.

\textsuperscript{254} The sentence is a structure that the semantic functional grammar, as outlined in the Introduction to Part II, is not usually concerned in its mono-modal manifestation, hence again the significance of Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1990;1996) work.

\textsuperscript{255} From a formal perspective, Sefton (1990) suggests ‘typography is paralinguistic in a global sense but [is] a prosodic feature in a local sense’ (p.17). Aspects of a text such as the spatial organisation and type face selected for realising linguistic choices are systematic within the text and therefore can be considered as ‘locally systemic prosodies’ (p.17). Localness expanding – with a contextual theory it becomes possible to argue for recognising that the local specificities of a text can be carried over to other texts and are part of the text ‘typing’.
realised graphologically were disappeared. An omission rectified here as Example 6.2b.

Visually, ALL is salient in the text. Its salience is realised through resources from a number of textual meaning making systems: ALL is isolated from the rest of the clause to which it belongs; a colour shift is rendered, from lighter to darker saturation and hue; its size is increased in relation to the font selected for the rest of the text; and it is positioned in the bottom centre of the text – it is ‘grounded’ giving a certain weight to its ‘reality’. The salience of ALL provides another view of the importance of a ‘boundlessness of desire’, as it was analysed above, that is mobilised in this text.

The graphological choices across the whole text contribute to interpersonal meaning. By visually turning up the intensity (or turning it down) with variations to font size, visual signifying practices realise different degrees of Affect within a text. While ALL ‘shouts’ out from the page, realising a strong degree of intensity, other greeting card texts deploy font size, in other ways. The realisation of Affect with font size is read locally, for each text. In Example 6.4, a movement from small font size to larger is reversed, although not in a straightforward way. The movement of affect over the page in Example 6.4 is a diminishing one. This is realised by decreasing font size, although there is one clause that realises an important exception, considered below. Over the course of the text affectual movement parallels a semantic shift from general to specific.

---

256 Salience is a composition principle that ‘creates a hierarchy of importance among the elements’ of text that is spatially organised (cf those that are temporally organised such as speech where the rhythm of salience and non-salience operates) Kress and van Leeuwen (1990:96).
The first and largest font realises a dictum attributed to American President George Bush used to preface an election promise of ‘no new taxes’ and now repeated in many contexts, having entering the vernacular in British, American and Australian English. Each clause following Read My Lips is realised by a smaller font size until the final clause, baby we’re through, which has little general applicability and is highly specific: you know who you are. This movement from general to specific, simultaneous with a movement from more affect to less is interrupted at the penultimate clause, call me tonight, which goes back up a size in font, with a decrease in font again for the final clause. The graphology reassures by minimising the affect relative to previous. Experientially, the text keeps certain options open, insisting that this is not necessarily any kind of permanent arrangement because the last clause suggests that perhaps one day baby we may be through but until then, it’s your lucky night.

It is not just size that matters with respect to interpersonal meaning, as realised by graphological resources in constituting intensity. In Example 6.5, there is a configuration of graphological resources that includes serif typeface and the omission of standard spacing between words which visually ups the ante with respect to affect. An increased rate of speech – a blurring of the heard spaces between

Example 6.4 Interpersonal meaning making realised by graphology

Example 6.5 Graphology realising affect

who would have thought that a little clean fun would get us into such a lather? p.s. I had a great time
words – is an important phonological resource for realising increased affect. This example may also be usefully read with respect to Field. Huisman (1999) suggests that experiential meaning is, in graphological terms, a matter of the arrangement of items in relation to each other in the same line or adjacent lines, for example, where raising or lowering is mentioned the characters are raised or lowered on the line (p.87; 89). This is what Huisman calls, graphic iconicity, where the ‘graphic display glosses, or is glossed by, nouns or lexical verbs or even phrases in the lexicogrammar’ (p.87). Example 6.5 realises the Field of sexual desire, through the iconicity of a line which ‘foams’ in an agitated manner, while mentioning ‘lather’. This signification is ‘anchored,’ in Barthes’ (1984b) sense, through the visual image of the text on its front page: a representation of lathered soap.

In the discussion of textual meaning making below, graphological resources are seen to be also an important resource for organising the ‘messages’ of fun-and-love greeting cards.

**Textual meaning making and material reading practices**

This section focuses on textual meaning making by fun-and-love greeting cards. Textual meaning is not simply a ‘vehicle’ for other kinds of semiosis; it is the ‘relevance’ metafunction and gives ‘texture’ to a piece of discourse (Halliday 1994:36; 344). The account provided here of the fun-and-love greeting card is particularly interested in the demands of meaning making in what is an abbreviated textual space.

**Beginnings: Theme in fun-and-love greeting cards**

The key resources for making a clause textually ‘relevant’ are related to the way clauses (and texts) are produced over time, not all at once. A speaker must choose to begin somewhere and go on to somewhere else. These aspects of a clause are organised in different ways, so that what is selected to constitute that beginning is semantically important. In a traditional fairy tale of the bedtime story kind, the story may begin with a scene setting clause, e.g. a beautiful princess lived in a far-a-way land. The story could begin not with ‘person’ (a beautiful princess or the

---

257 Which is distinguished from pattern poems, for example, which are typographically set out to resemble a shape (a butterfly, an egg timer etc.).
grammatical participant) but with place: once upon a time, a far-a-way land was ruled by a beautiful princess. The effect of such a choice is to shift the ‘point of departure’, the Theme of the clause from ‘who’ to ‘when and where’. Ordering the elements of a clause is itself meaning making, Halliday (1994) points out, because Theme, in English, is identified as what comes first in the clause (p.38).

Text producers organise the meaning potential of a clause in ways that are related to both the ‘world’ constituted through the text and its genre. These choices are related to the context of situation, they are in social semiotic terms produced in relation to the register variable Mode. As Mode varies, for example with respect to the kind of distance between interactants, the degrees of abstraction, interactiveness and monologicness, so Theme varies as the resource for contextualising the clause in relation to preceding discourse. In the realisational model of social semiotic’s lexicogrammar:

Thematic choices realise meanings about the organisation of the communicative event (how the text hangs together), and the experiential and interpersonal distance involved (how the text relates to its context). The Theme system contributes to the realisation of such meanings by offering us choices about what meanings to prioritise in a text. (Eggins 1994:298)

What a speaker/writer elects to begin with (and go on to) will, accordingly, vary in relation to Mode. The corpus, in general, selects unmarked Theme. The effect of the selection of marked thematic choice is pronounced. Processes, for instance, are rarely thematised, except in imperatives (e.g., stop in the name of love!) but, as seen in Example 6.6, the choice of marked Theme for each clause gives prominence to the process: adores, desires and loves.

Adores you completely
Desires you constantly
Loves you madly

**Example 6.6** Marked Theme (process) fun-and-love greeting cards

---

258 Where Theme conflates with the Mood element that comes first in a particular Mood class: Subject in declarative, Finite in polar interrogative, Predicator in imperatives, WH (Subject) in wh interrogative.
This choice ‘uses up’ all the thematic potential of the clause because Theme ‘ends’ at the first bit of the clause that has a transitivity function.\textsuperscript{259} The implication of this is that it enables text producers to ‘front load’ a clause, putting other kinds of meaning – not a participant or process – into the clause before a transitivity element is used. This thematic meaning is textual and interpersonal Theme (and appears in that order). It is a choice that fun-and-love greeting cards rarely pursue, a pattern that appears related to their littleness, and requirements for brevity.\textsuperscript{260} The interpersonal Theme that is realised in the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards is largely the obligatory kind (in polar interrogatives etc.). Given that some of what can be realised as interpersonal theme is modality, negotiating likelihood and certainty, the small quantity of interpersonal thematic meaning suggests an important feature of fun-and-love greeting cards: they realise their position with certainty.

Selection of Theme in the corpus is related to organising experiential meaning (see Table 6.4 below). Table 6.4 describes the overall pattern of Theme for fun-and-love cards as a per cent of the total corpus. The majority of clauses in the corpus involve only experiential thematic meaning (53 per cent) with 47 per cent also realising other kinds of Theme. Of that 47 per cent, 29.82 per cent realise interpersonal Theme and 17.18 per cent realise textual Theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme (clauses)</th>
<th>% (100=890 major clauses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiential and Other</td>
<td>47.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>29.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textual</td>
<td>17.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Table 6.4 Theme in the fun-and-love greeting card corpus}

By definition, a major clause will have experiential Theme but the overall pattern of ‘experiential Theme only’ is realised typically in single clauses by personal pronouns,

\textsuperscript{259} What ‘remains’ of the clause after Theme is designated as Rheme.

\textsuperscript{260} The only example from the corpus with multiple themes of each kind is the following: \textit{Mummy, how come men usually die before women?}

\textbf{Interpersonal \underline{experiential}}

Well dear, \underline{no one} knows, \underline{but we think it’s a pretty good system}

\textbf{Well is analysed as textual Theme, the kind of ‘well’ that is used as a preliminary to further speech but there is a case to be made for it to be glossed as, ‘I’m considering here’ in which case it is interpersonally oriented.}
providing a different view on the prominence of participants ‘I’, ‘you’ and ‘we’ in the
texts. (Thematic choice for clause complexes is dealt with below). Theme overall in the
corpus of greeting cards is oriented to ‘self’ (not other). The patterning of thematic
orientation to self is interesting with respect to what it forms the point of departure for,
in social semiotic terms: the information ‘news’ that the clause realises, for example,
what the news about ‘I’ is. The next section introduces the information structure of the
clause in order to set out how the textual meaning of fun-and-love greeting cards
structures a movement from self to other.

**News in fun-and-love greeting cards: information structure**

There are two information aspects of the clause in textual terms. Initially information
is differentiated in two related directions: one is speaker oriented (Theme), the other is
listener oriented (Information Units) (Halliday 1994:299). In information terms,
Theme bundles what the clause structures as already known as what is **Given**. What a clause goes on to, the something else other than the ‘beginning’ is in
information terms ‘news’ and is labelled as **New**. In this respect, Theme is glossed by
Halliday as ‘what I am starting from’ and New as ‘what I am asking you to attend to’
(p.336). As Halliday conceives it, information structure is

> the tension between what is already known or predictable and what is new or
> unpredictable. … It is the interplay of new and not new that generates
> information in the linguistic sense. Hence the information unit is a structure
> made up of two functions, the New and the Given. (p.296)

Typically (but not necessarily), Given conflates with Theme but New does not conflate
with Rheme. In identifying New, print texts present a further challenge to the degree
to which the functional grammar is oriented to spoken text. The New element in
Information Structure is realised in spoken text phonologically as a ‘tonic’ element, that
is, where the ‘accent’ falls (p.296). The identification of New in spoken texts is
provisional. Intonation realising New may be equivocal. Where intonation

---

261 Information (and message) both used here in their specific social semiotic technical sense. They are words that have various histories in considerations of meaning making and ‘communication’ theory. In some approaches to discourse, especially content analysis already critiqued in an earlier chapter, they are typically collapsed and signify ‘meaning’ or ‘content’, that is, referential meaning.

262 Given is typically something that is phoric, or already present in the verbal or non-verbal context, although it may be ellipted (Halliday 1994: 296).
is inconclusive or competes with expectation, it may produce the necessity for
clarification of New, although such clarification is not equally available to all listeners.
In face-to-face interaction the check is of the speaker (what are you on about?), whereas
in some at-a-distance modes that option is unavailable. Listeners seek clarification
where they can. For instance, in a lecture setting uncertainty might be checked not
with the speaker but with a fellow listener (what’s her point?).

While spoken interaction produces a variety of practices, these do not assist the reader
of visual language. In print texts constituting New involves different resources (see
below). While New is not necessarily easily discernible in print texts, this glosses over
the more important issue that news is in fact constituted in printed clauses. Writers
may deploy graphological resources (e.g. italics or bolding) mimetically realising
phonology but even without such graphology, readers may apply intonation to print.
Such a process for constituting New is most visible when it goes awry. For example,
when readers mistake the New element in a clause, producing (perhaps) an impression
of something not making sense, for example, when one questions how the writer got
there when I thought they began there. One thing that goes ‘wrong’ in reading text
and impacts on determining New is not noticing certain kinds of punctuation. It is,
not only readers that go ‘wrong’, writers do not always make the relation between
Theme and New clear.263

To work through the question of New in print texts, various steps may be taken, as
exemplified in two analyses below. The first instance, Figure 6.6, has all the linguistic
text on one page (inside recto) and it is the visual image that establishes certain
‘givens’: I’d like to go another round with you. The image is of two women in a boxing
ring. The image is represented in ‘sepia’ and according to linguistic text on the image

263 Readers dealing with unfamiliar registers may not attend to these symptoms of the writer’s
sense making gone wrong. Apprentice readers of abstract registers, for example, undergraduate
students reading scholarly texts that involve clauses that take a very long time to get to the
New, with lots of qualification and embedding along the way, may assume the lack of ‘sense’ is
to do with their unfamiliarity with the field of social action, rather than either writing or
reading practices.
is a photograph circa 1900. Analysed in a straightforwardly phonocentric manner, if the end of the clause is taken to be in the ‘natural’ position of the tonic element in spoken text, Thematic I contrasts with New, you (Halliday 1994: 297). The interpretation of Theme/ New in Figure 6.6 is in keeping with other aspects of the analysis of fun-and-love greeting cards that suggest an interplay between the key participants ‘I’ and ‘you’.

\[
\begin{array}{|l|l|}
\hline
\text{Thematic} & \text{Rhematic} \\
\hline
\text{I'd like to go another round with you} & \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

**Figure 6.6** Theme- New pattern ‘I’/ ‘you’ in fun-and-love greeting cards

As a pattern of thematic selection and news, in the direction of ‘I’ to ‘you’ as in Figure 6.6, this would not be out of synch with the semantic thrust of the textual corpus. Applied to the following example, *Your love is the most important gift I ever got*, this analytical approach produces a contrasting Theme/ New of *Your love* and *got*. A different analytic reasoning for New, presented below, suggests otherwise.

**Your love**, in *Your love is the most important gift I ever got*, provides the speaker with their point of departure. Thematic investment is critical in positioning the listener/ reader in relation to the speaker’s ‘take’ on the message, setting up anticipation and the fulfillment of expectations or the non-consummation of expectations. What it is that the speaker will tell about *your love*, ‘the news about your love’ is something in Rheme, but what?

\[
\begin{array}{|l|l|}
\hline
\text{Thematic} & \text{Rhematic} \\
\hline
\text{Theme} & \text{Rheme} \\
\hline
\text{Given} & \text{New} \\
\hline
\text{Token} & \text{Pr} \\
\hline
\text{Su} & \text{Fi} \\
\hline
\text{Mood} & \text{Residue} \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

**Figure 6.7** Provisional Information Structure added to Theme and Rheme analysis mapped onto Transitivity and Mood analysis

---

[
\textsuperscript{264} The image is also marked E.L.F Paris 12. The women are half smiling, looking at each other and are in playful pugilistic stances. The woman who is ‘front on’ to the viewer is revealing most of one of her breasts.

\textsuperscript{265} Reversing the clause emphasises how Theme functions. A different local context for the ‘message’ is produced in the reversed version, *The most important gift I ever got is your love*, with the choice for Theme shifting the speaker’s point of departure from *your love*, to being ‘about’ the most important gift *I ever got*.\]
Theme, *Your love*, is, in information terms, constituted as familiar or already known in the discursive context, Given. All of Rheme is a candidate for New: each individual word. These candidates can be reduced by one, initially, on a grammatical basis because in an identifying relational process clause like this one, the verb is typically unaccented, leaving a set of options listed below. Each option, each potential ‘tonic’ or intensity is bolded in Figure 6.8. Each of these bolded terms is a possibility but the most likely candidates can be identified when two other things are considered: positioning in the clause and graphological realisation. These are seen in Example 6.7, which reproduces the inside recto page.

- *the* most important gift I ever got
- *the* most important gift I ever got
- *the* most important *gift* I ever got
- *the* most important gift I ever got
- *the* most important gift I *ever* got
- *the* most important gift I ever *got*

**Figure 6.8** Candidates for New

The strongest cases can be made for each of these three: First, *I*, second, *ever*, third, *got*, reasoning in the following way. Together, these form an embedded clause, *I ever got*, qualifying *the gift*. Providing more information about ‘the gift’ (other information modifying the nature of the gift comes before *gift*), in effect leaves the most important to last. Reasoning from spoken text, *I ever got* is at the end of the information unit, putting it in the ‘natural’ position of the tonic element.
Most weight for New being among these comes not from this phonocentric argument but from the graphological realisation of the qualifier. The qualifier is centred on the page and is in this way salient in compositional terms. There is another kind of salience involved in meaning making. Huisman (1999) points out that in seen poems what comes first in the line may not conflate with what comes first in the clause (grammatical theme) (p.90). What comes first in the line, Graphic Theme, is graphologically salient. The beginning of a line in poetry is a graphic position which may receive more than the usual attention from a reader, more that is, than the same words would receive in unlined prose if they did not also have some significant grammatical function. (p.91)

When what comes first in the line, Graphic Theme, does not conflate with grammatical theme, what the text is ‘about’ is built in two, not necessarily coinciding, sets of information. The difficulty with respect to print texts in relation to deciding New for other print texts, such as greeting cards, is whether or not ‘significant grammatical function’ can be applied to a particular bit of the text without applying phonocentric reasoning, that is, relying on the pattern of the tonic coming at the end of a spoken clause. The Graphic Themes of the text being presently considered, *Your love is the most important gift I ever got*, are – on the inside page – the following: *is, important,* and *I.*

While *is* has already been rejected as New, the graphological case for *important* as New is not considered strong, although in this instance Graphic Theme constitutes interpersonal meaning, thematising the speaker’s attitude to the *gift*. *I* is graphically thematic – it gets more attention from the reader than otherwise – and is already graphically salient: it is realised centre on the page, is indented and, contrasting with the rest of the clause, is realised in the same line as the lexical items that make up its functional structure. It is, therefore, considered to have a strong claim to be New, although the whole line, *I ever got*, must also have a considerable claim, providing the news about *Your love*.

The pattern of thematic selection and news in fun-and-love greeting cards is at clause rank an interplay between the key participants ‘I’ and ‘you. It is this contrastive emphasis between I/you or you/I as Given/New that patterns fun-and-love greeting cards, particularly single clause texts (a different kind of Theme/New relation is constituted where clause complexes are realised and these are considered below). This
interplay is principally in the direction of ‘I’ to ‘you’ but only by a small margin and thematic ‘you’ or possessive ‘your’ also contrast with ‘I’ as New as in the above example.

Theme, information and reading practices with fun-and-love greeting cards
The procession of meaning making from Theme to New in fun-and-love greeting cards is often disrupted, materially. Clauses do not necessarily appear on just one page but may be ‘broken’ across pages (as the \ has indicated throughout), as in the example just considered. *Your love is the most important gift I ever got* is materially ‘interrupted’ after *Your love*, at the nexus of Theme/Rheme. The reader must turn the first page, coming to the rest of the clause on the third page for New. The analysis is interested now in the kind of relationship that choices for realising text graphologically have to other kinds of meaning being constituted through the texts.

Meaning and the page
The distribution of linguistic text over the fun-and-love greeting card pages is related to Theme/New and both single clauses and clause complexes are implicated. How the text occupies each page is less programmatic than for many types of texts. Reading a book, for example, proceeds materially with the unfolding of page after page filled with text, as determined by generic expectations and as dictated by publishing conventions and constraints, especially financial ones. The end of the page may compel the typographer to ‘break’ a clause but no such imperative drives the orthography of the fun-and-love greeting cards, although material interruptions to the clause are commonplace. The relationship between orthographic structure, information structure and reading practice is not driven by the material space of the text but by meaning making. Theme and Information structure are metaphorised by Matthiessen (1995) as two movements, producing a wave with peaks and troughs of prominence over the course of the clause. When conceived as if in ‘cross-section’, the process of reading and opening a card materialises this wave movement, inscribing it as a reading practice. The opening of the greeting card materialises how a text ‘unfolds in space and time’ (Kress and Threadgold 1988:218). Analysing the composition of visual images, Kress and van Leeuwen (1990) suggest that the horizontal axis of images

---

266 Theme/New ‘I’ to ‘you’ is 51 per cent of the corpus.
realises Information structure (pp.102-115). Reading across an image left to right realises Given and New. The unfolding of this information is exploited in particular ways across the texts in a manner related to the littleness of the texts, as already implied in the discussion above (see, Example 6.3, the sorry text.). The analysis and discussion below, therefore, addresses the relationship between the material and textual organising structures, between pages and clauses in these little texts.

The folio formation of fun-and-love greeting cards and contemporary printing technology means greeting cards may have linguistic text on all their pages (typically four pages but some, particularly occasion cards, may have six or eight pages). If there is editorial content on the first (front) page (and there overwhelmingly is), there may also be sentiment on the following pages, particularly the inside recto page (with publishing information occupying the back page). What even a cursory glance at fun-and-love cards indicates is that there is a range of ways ‘wordings’ are realised orthographically. The ‘spread’ of text over the course of the card involves an initial choice to create or not create a disjuncture between clause and sentence. Where clause and sentence do not conflate, a number of further choices are realised and these are considered below.

Where grammar and orthography conflate, then reading on and turning the page of a greeting card is motivated generically. Greeting card readers browsing the card stand can be observed negotiating expectations set up through this structure, they open the card to see what other text is there and sometimes there is none. For the recipient reader, there is also the importance of the personal message and the signature, which motivates opening a greeting card. Such expected patterns and generic conventions generate departures from themselves and so there are greeting cards that play humorously with this particular expectation, for example, the manufacturer gluing the card together so it cannot be opened. These kinds of departures from the form usually

---

267 The options for conflating orthography and clause are either as a single graphological entity on the front page or a sentence on the front and one on an inside page or no linguistic text on the front page but a ‘whole’ sentence on an inside page.

268 This is enculturated at an early age. Observation of children who are inexperienced at birthday celebrations and greeting card giving practices, that is 1 or 2 year olds, suggests that they will not necessarily open the card; cf a five year old.
involve a physical ‘gag’ which is tied to linguistic text, for example, the text may suggest that only discerning readers will open this card so that the joke is a mild insult because the recipient will not be able to open the card.

In constructing a fun-and-love greeting card, text producers choose which pages are ‘texted’ and, therefore, whether there is a disjuncture or conflation of clause/sentence. What analysis of these choices demonstrates is that disjuncture between clause and sentence in the fun-and-love greeting card corpus is typically at the articulation of Theme/Rheme, for both single clauses and clause complexes.\(^{269}\) One kind of clause complex is of particular interest here, the hypotactic (independent/dependent) type because these ‘permit’ a choice of ordering the clauses.\(^{270}\) In ordering a hypotactic clause complex, either the dependent or the independent clause can be ‘fronted’. Selecting one or the other is, therefore, a meaningful selection of order as exemplified in Figure 6.9 below which first gives the corpus version (1) and then reverses it (2).

| 1. you’re a part of me // even when we’re apart |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| independent \(\alpha\)    | dependent \(\beta\)       |

| 2. even when we’re apart // you’re a part of me |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| dependent \(\beta\)   | independent \(\alpha\)    |

**Figure 6.9** Hypotactic clause complexes: selecting dependent or independent clause as first clause

Hypotactic clause complexes are rich thematic territory. In the corpus, hypotactic clause complexes are realised in both orderings, independent^dependent and dependent^independent in roughly equal quantities. Where the dependent clause comes first in hypotactic clauses, thematic potential is not exhausted by the Theme of the first clause and both clauses’ thematic structures can be analysed with the

---

\(^{269}\) In clauses where the disjuncture is not at the articulation of Theme/Rheme, the lexicogrammatical structure ‘splits’ logicosemantically, at the juncture of a paratactic clause complex.

\(^{270}\) Theme for paratactic clause complexes is not analysed across the clauses because paratactic clause complexes do not permit such options in ordering; their order is inherent in the logicosemantic structure.
dependent clause realising thematic structure for the clause complex, exemplified in Figure 6.10 below.\footnote{271}

$^b$Even when it’s not going smoothly / / I trust our love

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme$_1$</th>
<th>Rheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modifying (dependent) clause</td>
<td>Theme$_2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme$_3$</td>
<td>Rheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given</td>
<td>New</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.10** Thematic analysis of hypotactic (dependent\^independent) clause complex.

In the dependent clause, the thematic structure to the clause complex, the first experiential information is an impersonal pronoun, *it*. What *it* refers to is clearly being posited as a bumpy ride but while *it* is Given, what is actually experienced as ‘up and down’ refers to something not in the immediate discursive context. Unusually, *it* refers forward. Turning over the page is necessary to identify what it is that the impersonal pronoun refers to, *our love*. So why this structure? The dependent clause functions to establish the Given, the shared discursive context and the independent clause realises New in the clause complex. By making the text depart overall from the ‘not smooth going’ of the first clause, the effect is to foreground an imperfect state of intimate relations over idealised love. So, while something that is irksome or worrying perhaps constitutes the point of departure for the text, the reassuring news comes in a form of re-commitment to the relationship. A different (and rather more cynical) reading may also be done, taking Theme as constituting trouble-in-paradise over trouble-free (idealised) love. So, while ‘trouble’ is the departure for the text (trouble, as most members of the culture know through various clichés, is one of the features of true love – which never runs smooth), the news is that love conquers all.

Organising hypotactic clause complexes with the dependent clause as ‘fronted’ and the independent clause texted on the inside of the card contributes to a ‘read on’ imperative. If the clause on the first page is a dependent clause, the message is ‘unfinished’, producing some motivation to read on. Texting fun-and-love greeting

\footnote{271 The clause complex is analysed first for individual clauses then the dependent clause is treated as Theme for the independent clause (Halliday 1994:56-58).}
Texted Love - texted how? 255

cards as a ‘split’ clause or clause complex, in effect, ‘interrupts’ the clause as message. The effect of this hiatus is to heighten anticipation and expectation with respect to what comes next, upping the ante with respect to the rest of the text. With this discursive strategy, the card texts are thus able to build some of the experience that narratives structure but into very little texts. In some senses, visual semiosis of fun-and-love text metaphorises an ‘unwrapping’ of a gift (sometimes a surprise).

A number of patterns of textual meaning making by fun-and-love texts can now be recognised. Those patterns are constitutive of complex Mode relations realised by greeting cards. Creating a disjuncture between clause and sentence is a choice that is atypical for many written or print texts. The kind of grammatical complexity that hypotactic clause complexes produce is in keeping with spoken registers but thematising the dependent clause signals a degree of ‘pre-planning’ that is typical of written genres. Fun-and-love greeting cards thus deploy textual resources that are important in the context of the competing demands of a print text used in the negotiation of personal relationships, as intimate interaction.

**Conclusion**

The language of fun-and-love cards constitutes texted ‘voicings’ of positioned social practices, putting subjectivity itself at stake. The knowledges about which fun-and-love greeting card users speak authoritatively are those concerned with an interior world of self and intimate relations, not external worlds. Two kinds of ‘worlds’ are mapped by the performance of interactional work with fun-and-love greeting cards as presented in this chapter: a discursive ‘inner world’ that is concerned with thoughts and feelings about self and other in relation to each other; and a world where social relations between card giver (I) and recipient (you) are positioned as close (sometimes, ‘we’) but in complex and fluid relations of power and affect. That affect is not always positive and it is not always ‘love’. By realising love as a participant, fun-and-love greeting cards are able, particularly through relational processes and resources of modification, to say a lot about what love is in the world of fun-and-love.

From the perspective of the corpus, fun-and-love is both romanticised and sexualised. Fun-and-love is also involved in negotiating everyday aspects of social relationships (differences that produce the necessity to ‘make up’ for example). Such negotiations do not necessarily sit comfortably within either discourses of love as passion or as
sentimentality because they suggest interactions that involve an expectation of egalitarian relations, equal interests and investments in an intimate relationship.

While all text is interactive, this chapter has drawn on analytical resources that emphasise how, as written-print text, fun-and-love greeting cards are organised with respect to interaction between greeting card giver and recipient. While undialogised text is authoritative and absolute, fun-and-love greeting cards constitute the sociosemiotic domain of fun and love in the expectation of dialogue and as a corpus demonstrate competing definitions of love and various speaking positions. There are both heteronormative notions of femininity and masculinity and other possibilities for feminine and masculine subjects constituted, although some subject positions are problematically linked to capitalist notions of individualism. While love is idealised in this respect, as involving social subjects who are unproblematically equal, in some sections of the corpus that illusion is shattered by the way social subjects are involved in, for example, constituting control of sexual rights over self and other. Sex disappears entirely in some fun-and-love greeting cards and the analysis of visual modality in a collection of greeting cards demonstrates asexual intimacy is also constituted within the world of fun-and-love.

The fun-and-love greeting cards analysed here are widely and generally available and, in keeping with that orientation, the analysis has described patterns that constitute field, tenor and mode in ‘heteronormative’ configurations, that is, patterns normatively constituted through discourses privileging heterosexual relations, although heterosexual relations are not a singularity. Ways in which the texts may function for atypical performances of intimacy and how fun-and-love greeting cards specifically produced for gay and lesbian audiences realise fun and love have not been explored, the latter, in order to not skew the analysis but are considered in Chapter 7.

Giving a fun-and-love greeting card occurs within a particular context – the fun and love ‘occasion’ – which inserts itself as a particular kind of discourse move within other interactional exchanges. These interactions go on in complex social and cultural contexts and, therefore, must be considered in relation to what it is they are doing, not just in terms of realising particular social relations as part of an interactional situation, but with respect to the social processes they enact. The lexicogrammatical analysis and
interpretive work in this chapter motivates the more ‘macro’ concerns of Chapter 7 with social processes and genre and its exploration of the discursive realm of the intimate relationship and the constitution of emotion with respect to love.
7 Fun (sex) and love:
Doing intimacy; rewriting love stories

Introduction

The focus of this final substantive chapter is on the fun-and-love greeting card as a generic strategy for doing intimacy through analysis of the corpus of greeting cards, in relation to the most important intertext for the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards: the ‘love story’. The chapter elaborates a constitutive relationship between text and intimacy, analysing fun-and-love greeting cards in relation to desire, discursive sameness/difference, and narrative structure. Discursive practices, particularly disclosures between lovers, produce a version of intimacy that privileges sameness. This kind of intimacy is strangely idealised in a cultural regime that valorises individuality and privacy. The analysis develops an account of what such intimacy involves according to fun-and-love greeting cards. Some discursive history between subjects is a requirement of intimacy and there are a number of consequences for discursive production in idealised versions of intimate relationships. In one idealised version of intimacy, a bonding of the lovers is required that obligates intimate subjects to know everything about each other – and about themselves: we tell each other *everything*. This is too much discursive history and sounds the demise of intimacy and the love-story’s subject, the ‘couple’. In particular, there are negative effects for the individual’s relation to self and other, including desire for an other, a defining feature of the intimate relationship.

Narrative versions of the love-story constitute cultural knowledge of the intimate relationship in various idealised and fantastic forms (and at a very young age). By drawing a narrative arc through the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards, certain repetitions, omissions, gaps and tendencies are identified in the unfolding love-story as it is played out in the texts. The love-story’s heteronormative trajectory toward ‘happy
ever after’ is in narrative terms a coda, that is, a closure in particular terms. Some fragments in the corpus, however, disassemble happy-ever-after. While a discourse of sameness works to fold such differences back into the love-story, organised through practices of confession and self-actualisation analyses, this chapter is interested in developing certain tendencies toward difference that such fragments suggest. In keeping with that trajectory, a narrative space for such difference must be developed. This is achieved by dispersing the coda function, which is distributed in iterative components of the genre. Intimacies that escape heteronormative sameness may be written in that space. For both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, the analysis in the current chapter, articulated with that of the previous chapter, becomes the basis for adding to calls for a rewriting of the intimate relationship as difference. Rewriting intimacy as difference does not involve the lovers turning away from each other. Its ethical and erotic posture, as Diprose (1998) elaborates it, is an opening toward the other without destroying the other’s alterity. In the spaces constituted by the dispersal of the coda, the subject of fun-and-love is not a coupled ‘we’ but a line of movement between ‘you’ and ‘I’.

**Between you and me there’s a great love story being written**

An initial sketch of a love-story is given, drawing on a range of popular and theoretical texts: including children’s fairy tales, romance novels, popular magazine articles and interactional literature concerned with accounts of intimate relationships. Fun-and-love greeting cards are read against this outline of a love-story. By analysing the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards as fragments of social processes, for instance, ‘falling in love’ and ‘being in an intimate relationship’, the chapter sets out an idealised version of what ‘doing intimacy’ looks like. The analysis identifies what is broadly understood as the trajectory of an intimate relationship and considers the constitution of the subject of the love-story, ‘the couple’. This is a heteronormative subject in fun-and-love texts for both heterosexual and homosexual audiences. A key finding of the analysis is that ‘coupling’ fragments proliferate in the corpus. This provides the

---

272 As one fun-and-love greeting card puts it.
273 This interactional literature is also a lens on a realist perspective on intimacy. While the analysis in the current chapter is textual, desire, love, passion and attachment are embodied experiences. Toward the end of the chapter, discourses on ethical and embodied love gesture toward material practices of intimacy.
impetus to explain a paradoxical growth in non-occasion greeting cards sales reported in Chapter 1 that involves non-occasion cards requiring a constant and rapid turnover disproportionate to the level of sales.

**Generic fragments and the idealised love-story**

These little texts do not in and of themselves constitute ‘genres’. They are, rather, analysed as constituting generic fragments. As cultural resources, genres are both shaped and fluid ‘ways of doing’ (Kress and Threadgold 1988). As a corpus, the representation of an idealised love-story by fun-and-love greeting cards does not fit neatly – as is to be expected given what Derrida (1980) argues with respect to generic impurity. Fragments of genres fun-and-love greeting cards retain a central quality of genre, that is as positioning practices. Genres speak and address particular social subjects, enunciating social subjects in social relations. So, when grandma gives her granddaughter a birthday card, a ‘good girl’ says thank you (and kisses grandma), while a ‘greedy girl’ just puts the money that was in the card in her pocket.

There is no one way of doing intimacy constituted by fun-and-love greeting cards, despite the linguistic regularities across the corpus. This is not to say that the texts are not available for doing any kind of social process but compared to the kinds of text produced in social processes such as ‘doing a yoga class’ or ‘paying a motorway toll’, the category ‘fun-and-love greeting card text’ does not consistently illuminate a ‘doing’ in any commonsense way. There are some specific ‘doings’ that fun-and-love texts realise, as seen in Chapter 6. For example, one text was analysed as a sequence of discourse moves that constituted an apology (a particular version) and a ‘request’ for sex: Alright, alright! I’m sorry! Okay? / can we fool around now?

Contextualised through the social relations of heterosexual intimate relationship, it was provisionally treated as an attempt at ‘making up’.274 ‘Making up’ is itself part of other

---

274 It is necessarily a particular version of a ‘making up’. Fighting siblings are told to ‘make up’ by their parents and friends occasionally have to ‘make up’ but these processes do not involve requests/demands for sex. ‘Making up’ is a positioning practice that is also inflected across gender. Girl siblings or friends are more likely to be made to or feel compelled to ‘make up’, or not fight in the first place, in keeping with the way girls and women are positioned as mediators, peacemakers, etc., as the textual production of girls traces (e.g. see Steedman 1982).
social processes. It is only a coherent thing to do given another context: there having been a ‘falling out’, which it necessarily follows. Both of these, making-up and falling-out, are not unexpected in the context of ‘doing’ an intimate relationship. The nature of the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards is that they are all little texts and there is almost no opportunity for them to develop generically in the way that larger texts do. They are, therefore, treated as ‘fragments’, or traces of genre. As a generic fragment, fun-and-love greeting cards retain traces of ‘completed’ genres. A generic fragment, for instance, has inhering within it the quality of ‘addressivity’ or ‘turning to someone’ (Bakhtin 1986:95;99). So, while the sorry text (analysed in Chapter 6 and referred to above) is more properly a fragment of making up, it addresses someone (a someone specified in the giving) and the analysis suggested it was a feminised addressee, despite both male and female figures being represented on the greeting card. The corpus of generic fragments is analysed in relation to more fleshed out genres, cultural narratives and discourses through which the fun-and-love greeting card will always be inscribed. While there can be nothing said about texts produced by the card giver and recipient that occur out of view of this analysis, they too constitute some of the context in which a fun-and-love greeting card is embedded. A fun-and-love greeting card text is always in dialogue, surrounded, as it were, with both romantic discourses and other texts produced between greeting card giver and recipient, including those that constitute the story of their love.

The love-story constitutes certain sociocultural knowledge through which the fun-and-love greeting card makes meaning. It is a realm of knowledge into which subjects are interpolated at an early age. A particular kind of love-story, the fairy-tale, is one of the first narratives many children meet. In an adult’s repertoire, the love-story may go on to be an important narrative, insofar as stories of one’s ‘first love’ or ‘true love’ and talk about ‘this relationship’ are texts through which performances of self may be enacted. The implicit narrative structure of the love-story shapes fun-and-love greeting card texts and these structures, in turn, act to shape other social processes, of which the most relevant is ‘having’ an intimate relationship. How individuals in contemporary

275 Bakhtin (1986) makes clear that the concept of addressivity is not limited to a specific someone, ‘an immediate participant-interlocutor’ but may be an undifferentiated grouping so, text has an ‘audience’, or an ‘indefinite, unconcretized other’ (p.95 italics in original).
Western cultures perform their own love relationships is thus tied up with their sociocultural knowledges about love in narrative and other forms. So, while an intimate relationship is not a text, its retelling as a personal or coupled history becomes one (for example, in answer to the question: how did you two get together?).

The experience of emotions associated with an intimate relationship is similarly cultural. Here is how Kelley et al (1983) understand the relation between sociocultural knowledges about love and their specific experience of love: ‘people’s beliefs about love are part of the causal conditions governing the behaviour and feelings that occur in love’ (p.271). This social construction account recognises a relation between knowledge and the experience of love but relies on vague conceptions, ‘beliefs’ that are represented as a causal antecedent to the experience of love and its performance.

Crawford et al (1992) pursue a social construction view but extend it, taking emotion to be constituted intersubjectively, in interaction with institutions as well as individuals:

> Emotions are socially constructed: not in the weak dyadic sense present in much interactionist psychology, but in the strong sense, ... which recognises that human consciousness is produced and organized in participation in sociocultural practices. (p.114)

This is a view of emotion that provides grounds not only to insist on the sociocultural and historical specificity of emotion, including how it may be differentiated for gendered subjects, but how desire may be reappraised as love.

The romantic love-story in its most reduced narrative form is as follows: girl meets boy, they fall in love, get married and live happily ever after. Elaborating on this provides a number of moments and features of the intimacy constituted by the love-story. The justification for initially drawing on this ideal, narrow and romantic love-story is its pervasiveness and its acceptance even, Illouz (1997) finds, among individuals who denounce it as a Hollywood fantasy (p.160). The romantic relationship begins with ‘pursuit’. A pursuit phase may segue into ‘going out’ or ‘dating’, which can itself be elaborated as a social process (see Illouz 1997 for an

---

276 An initial sketch of this version of the love-story genre is followed later in the chapter by an analysis of how fun-and-love greeting cards, as fragments of generic strategies, constitute certain aspects of an individual’s experience of an intimate relationship.
elaborated analysis of ‘dating’). The sexual consummation of pursuit distinguishes the relationship from other potentially close relationships, although it is love, not sex, which signifies the relationship as romantic. In a narrativised structure, romantic love is an experience that produces the necessity for a declaration about that experience. It requires the enunciation of ‘I love you’ because in declaring love both the speaker and the object of love take the experience of the emotion to be ‘true’. The declaration represents ‘authentic’ feelings unambiguously. This is the significance of the moment of declaration, the speaker indicates that now, I love you, whereas before I did not.

A declaration of love between the lovers is one of many confessional procedures that constitute idealised romantic love relationships. Individuals build knowledge about each other through information that is not only biographical but about ‘thoughts, feelings, tasks, values or life goals’ (Averill 1985:91). These declarations are critical practices (seen later to be a recursive demand on the subjects of some intimate relationships), bringing lovers toward coupleness. Once coupled, the love pair is understood to have a harmonious relationship, although there is a particularly blissful period, a ‘honeymoon’ phase. This bliss is solidified through coupling, it is institutionally formalised through legal/religious structures, especially marriage. Idealised versions of the love-story culminate at this point. In certain narratives, mainly children’s fairy tales, this is realised by an explicit coda: and they lived happily ever after.

The process constituted in the love-story is elastic in its temporal structuring. Different texts expand and compress narrative moments, so that some love stories get to the ‘give’ rapidly, while others involve drawn out pursuit phases. For example, in popular culture texts such as ‘series’ television programs, romances forming the core interpersonal tensions between the main characters exploit the resources for meaning making at the beginning of an intimate relationship (pursuit) and expand it for a television ‘season’ or more. The consummation of a pursuit is said to sound the death

277 Coupling is socially recognised through various ways of pairing, including ‘going together’, ‘living together’ and ‘defacto’ relationships. While the latter is a poor cousin in the romantic stakes for permanent coupling (there is no wedding, in the first instance), the other two may precede getting married, not hindering the sense of romance around the couple.
knell of television series (e.g. the 1990s hit series ‘The Nanny’ when the desperate-to-be-married live in nanny finally snags the handsome rich widower), although a tendency to foreground temporality in narrative structures always generates a sense of inevitability to the relations configured by the texts; and this in turn, privileges the ‘fate’ angle of romantic love. The strength of the predestined qualities of the love-story is seen when individuals or institutions seek to intervene in romantic relationships, e.g. when the pairing involves legally underage individuals or if there is parental disapproval to the love-match. One important counter argument to disapproval of a pairing is to render such interventions as an (unnatural) interference in the ‘natural’ course of love. A sense of inevitability produced through this meaning constitutes an inbuilt resistance to contesting discourses, providing a transcendent quality to romance.

Fun-and-love greeting cards: fragments of a love-story

The analytical strategy here for teasing out meaning potential generated intertextually through fun-and-love cards is a loose ‘mapping’ of the fragments (the fun-and-love card texts), drawing the narrative arc of the schematic love-story outlined above (pursuit, consummation, declaration of love, honeymoon, coupled, happy-ever-after) through the fragments. The analytical process involved individual texts being linked to one or more particular ‘narrative moments’. While some fragments are narrowly constituted generically, that is, strongly ‘shaped’, others can be assigned to one or more narrative ‘moments’: I thought about you naked today // Then I put my clothes on and thought about you some more, which could apply to many moments, except perhaps a declaration of love. One fun-and-love greeting card captures a number of narrative moments of the love-story in a list: Choose the word which best describes our love. Heavenly Deliciously Affectionately Romantically Passionately Completely // Exactly.

278 The transcendent qualities are seen in Western marriage vows where marriage is for ‘better or worse, in sickness and health, for richer, for poorer’. All kinds of obstacles to love (narrative ‘complication’), including hunger, are overcome by the richness of true love (narrative ‘resolution’). Illouz (1997) suggests romantic love, founded in an era where marriage was the most important financial operation a family would transact, was, therefore, historically, something ‘transgressive’ (pp.8-11). For Illouz, Tristan and Isolde’s love exemplifies this because their love transgresses political institutional power (p.318 n.23).

279 Meaning potential is a term deriving from social semiotics (Halliday 1978). Social processes such as ‘having a relationship’ can be thought, for example, as being ‘made up of forms which past discursive practice, condensed into conventions, has endowed with meaning potential’ (Fairclough 1992:75).
Fun-and-love greeting cards in the corpus realise all the moments of an idealised romantic love-story. Assigning a greeting card to any category does not assume it cannot function in another (and already, in Chapters 2 and 3, categories formed by greeting card publishers have been shown to be used in unanticipated ways). The key narrative moments are exemplified by particular fun-and-love greeting cards in Figure 7.1 below. The mapping strategy identifies fragments up to and including the coda. The example assigned to the pursuit phase in Figure 7.1 indicates the card giver and recipient already know each other, although in what ways and to what extent is not obvious, except that it is not already sexual. The example used in the honeymoon phase is assigned there because it suggests itself to be a fragment that is part of a generic strategy after the declaration of love, *We* as the joint subject of a relationship, therefore a ‘relationship’ is already in existence, at least in the world of the greeting card giver. That it is a perfect relationship suggests romantic love which involves the ‘idealisation of the other, suddenness of onset, absorption in thoughts about the other and a willingness to make sacrifices’ (Averill 1985:53). In glossing the phase in which the relationship is solidified as ‘coupled’, that is completed, the conclusion is that the trajectory of this version of the love-story is toward a ‘forever’ in which the perfect relationship continues as perfect.\(^{280}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative ‘moment’</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pursuit</td>
<td><em>Have you ever noticed that the things we desire most are usually right under our noses?... / Yoo Hoo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consummation</td>
<td><em>Who would have thought that a little clean fun... / wouldgetusintosuchalather? ps I had a great time</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration of love</td>
<td><em>Have I told you lately that I love you?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honeymoon</td>
<td><em>We have all the ingredients for a perfect relationship.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coupled</td>
<td><em>There’s no one quite like you... / There’s no two quite like us!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda (implied)</td>
<td><em>I want to grow old with you</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7.1** Narrative structure of the love-story, as exemplified by fun-and-love greeting cards

The example assigned to the declaration of love phase is one of only two instances in the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards where ‘I love you’ appears. Given the

---

\(^{280}\) Later in the chapter, this version of romantic love is seen to be unhooked from this finiteness and the couple is understood to be involved in an ongoing process of coupling.
importance of such a declaration in the trajectory of the romance story outlined and its implications for the romantic relationship this is an interesting paucity in fun-and-love greeting cards. The example used in Figure 7.1 also has an insecure position in the love-story outline. The clause structures the declaration of love at some distance by realising it as the projected clause of a verbal process. Its reference to lately clarifies that this is not the first declaration of love but a repeat performance. The only example of a directly stated ‘I love you’ is also interesting. The front page of the card is cut-out, giving it a central ‘window’ in the negative space and is rendered in the positive space as if it were the frame of a painting. This device frames an image – a vase of flowers represented in a gestural or painterly style – on the inside recto page. On the inside page under that image, the linguistic text declares ‘I love you’. This is an unusual placement choice for an image for greeting cards. The card is rather coy, not making its declaration ‘up front’ but behind a layer of material that is then removed. Such a declaration of love is a fragment of intimacy that occupies a very small part of the domain, as it is constituted by the first producers. While such declarations may of course be inscribed by the second producer on any greeting card or accompany a card verbally, the few ‘I love you’ in the corpus of fun-and-love cards should be considered against the background of discussions in Chapters 2 and 3 about speech and writing in intimate interaction. Is, ‘I love you’ an interactional moment envisaged by greeting card publishers as ‘properly’ performed verbally? Is this why such a declaration is sheltered inside the card described above? If so, greeting card producers take a view of this aspect of intimacy akin to that of their most strident critics. It is a stance that serves to emphasise the cultural embeddedness of those producers and the cultural value of ‘I love you’ as a moment of ‘authentic’ expression of emotion.

While fun-and-love greeting cards realise an idealised structuring of the love-story, other fun-and-love texts are not fragments that can be unproblematically assigned to any of the narrative moments outlined above. Some of the texts are ambiguous (e.g. I’m ready //to rock your world or How could I ever look at another? //You’re always watching me) or indirect (e.g. My forecast for our relationship? //Sunny) and others blur or cross

---

281 Certain first time declarations may be realised through St Valentine’s Day cards. These would depend on timing, as St Valentine’s Day cards are seasonal greeting cards not available at all times of the year.
narrative moments (e.g. Go on, get out of here. Who needs you? // It is I who need you) and could be used not only in intimate relationships but in other close or familial relationships (e.g. Hold on tight // I'll catch you if you should fall). Certain fragments in the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards do not necessarily realise moments of the romantically idealised love-story at all and are considered below. The ambiguity of various fragments, their sliding away from particular narrative moments, suggests a pragmatic consequence: that the text is available for more than one narrative moment and, therefore, may be available for consumption as part of a number of fun-and-love occasions. The ambiguity of many fun-and-love greeting cards is, as already mentioned, a feature that draws criticism from Finkelstein (1994a) and Papson (1986) because in effect the particularities of an intimate relationship are backgrounded. Against this negative reading, a degree of abstraction from the particular is recognised as already constituted, by the ubiquitousness of the love-story in Western discourses of intimacy.

Mapping the corpus shows that fun-and-love greeting cards can be apportioned to ‘coupling’ more than two-thirds of the time (69.16%) than other narrative moments in the love-story. This proliferation provides the basis for an initial response to the production paradox that publishers note where, unlike occasion greeting cards, which have developed in type and kind as part of an expanding secular calendar (including those occasions created by market forces), fun-and-love cards have proliferated ‘in kind’ and new cards are produced at a rate disproportionate to their sale quantities in numbers and the effort publishers put into producing new cards. Interpreting this, greeting card publishers ventured weak arguments, including that there was a ‘marketing problem’ (Unsgaard, Interview 1992) or a cultural ‘transfer’ difficulty between American and Australian fun-and-love greeting card consumers (Cook, Interview 1993). This intercultural reading is not supported by what Wandycz (1991) reports: that American greeting card publishers do not understand the success of non-occasion greeting cards (p.90). The clustering of fun-and-love greeting card production around ‘coupling’ specifies the demand for more fun-and-love cards in a way not recognised by manufacturers. Interpreting the production paradox within the framework of the

Cf the more practical consequence that if a single text may do a variety of interactional fun-and-love work in this manner, greeting card publishers necessarily have a reduced number of texts to produce (with all the attendant financial savings).
love-story means consumer ‘demands’ for new fun-and-love cards cannot be dismissed as responses to fashion or demands for variety. The demand for new cards or a publishers’ urge to produce new cards is tied to the way in which the cards are used and situated in the social process of the intimate relationship as a generic strategy for iteratively doing intimacy, in particular, for constituting a couple. More of the same narrative moment is produced for fun-and-love greeting card users, not something different.

A second level assignment of semantic labels – to coupling fragments – as summarised in Figure 7.2 suggests what the coupling process may involve. Mapping the corpus through the trajectory of the love-story demonstrates how fun-and-love greeting cards constitute a coupling in which intimacy is not all bliss and idealisation of the other. The corpus realises generic fragments that delineate a love-story other than the ideal. Some fragments of a different future beyond the coda have already been analysed in Chapter 6, for example, fun-and-love greeting cards such as, *We need to talk...soon!* and *Alright alright! I'm sorry! Okay? /can we fool around now?* Fragments such as these provide a view of a future beyond the coda that is not a window on blissful love forever.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doing intimacy</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating conflict</td>
<td><em>Even when it’s not going smoothly... /I trust our love</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successfully</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating conflict, less</td>
<td><em>Well, I’ve considered your side of things and I’ve considered my side... /I don’t care about your side</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>successfully</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewal of romance</td>
<td><em>Everyday is an anniversary of something special we’ve shared</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating responsibility</td>
<td><em>If you really want a beautiful garden... /you’ll have to plant the seeds yourself</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment of separation</td>
<td><em>Even before your divorce, I always knew you had a Chuck and Di relationship... /You were a princess and he was a royal pain !!!</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7.2* Intimacy beyond the coda exemplified by fun-and-love greeting cards

---

283 While the last example in Figure 7.2 would normally not be given by a member (or ex-member) of a couple, rather someone outside the couple, it is nevertheless a fun-and-love greeting card, concerned with the field of intimacy and love.
The future for love beyond the coda, according to these examples from the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards, is one where the negotiation of conflict appears and ‘endings’ other than the one idealised in Western marriage vows, ‘till death us do part’ arise. Coupling, as its non-finite grammar constitutes, is an ongoing process. Fun-and-love greeting cards with their clustering around coupling constitute a love-story that is, accordingly, not necessarily focused on endings. Coupling may involve a renewal as may be constituted in a return to romance through the restoration or re-presentation of prior coupling moments. By referring to past and future in the same fragment, *Everyday is an anniversary of something special we’ve shared*, the text reconstrues the story of a relationship. It is a re-invention of ‘us’ and a re-invention that is in contrast to ‘them’. Such renewals of this community of two suggest a certain precariousness of ‘the couple’ necessitating the resolidification of ‘coupleness’. It is not only a return to coupled-ness as romance that is constituted in fun-and-love greeting cards, rather the narrative mapping strategy suggests how the meaning potential of fun-and-love greeting cards both meets and exceeds the generic structuring of a traditional love-story.

**Fragments: discursive histories, discursive futures**

While in outline form the idealised romantic love-story ‘ends’ at the point of the coda, the analysis of the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards suggests a more elaborated account is required. The story told so far about idealised intimacy through the corpus fragments is one with two faces: one which implies passion and destiny, a sacred love relationship that forever joins the lovers; and another, which inflects a different future and is elaborated under a variety of labels, although two are used here: ‘therapeutic’ intimacy (Bellah et al 1985:92) and ‘self-expression’ intimacy (Vogler 1998:328). Both these versions of intimacy are constituted through egalitarian discourses, although they also involve the ‘cultivation of the self’ as Foucault (1988) sets that out. Individual romantic subjects in these forms of intimacy are held to simultaneously ‘discover’ their own ‘self’ through the intimate relationship, as an impulse of self-actualisation.284 The discursive space of the intimate relationship in the self-expression

---

284 In self-actualisation discourses, the authentic individual is understood as corrupted by society or as having lost sight of the ‘true’ self (for example, in the intimate relationship). An authentic self may be found through acting in ways that are ‘true’ to that self, creating authentic experiences of self. Bellah (1985) et al trace how this impulse toward self-actualisation and its
or therapeutic love-story is an ever-deepening one, a revelatory movement in which individual subjects simultaneously ‘discover’ themselves and each other through the exploration of similarities and differences. Intimacy as constituted in this discourse is a process of straining toward some imagined authentic self via disclosure that offers an ‘inner’, ‘real’, ‘authentic’ self for the other but mostly for the self. The most important technique toward mutuality and its corollary, self-actualisation is, as Foucault (1990) demonstrates, confession. For example, via serial self-disclosure of the biography of ‘I’: one’s life story; childhood misdemeanors; secrets; and, more recently, perhaps sexual health status. For both the idealised romantic love-story and therapeutic/self-expression love-stories, the subject constituted by the story is the ‘couple’, a heteronormative construction, although it is constituted differently in each. The trajectory of the love-story suggests the constitution of this subject, ‘we’, is a narrative imperative, so what are the implications of this imperative for ‘I’ and ‘you’?

**Becoming couple**

The couple in the romantic love-story unproblematically fuses self and other, obliterating the alterity of the other. ‘We’ in this equation is an additive relation that brings together two halves: ‘incomplete’ soul-mates combine to make each other whole. What is seen in discourses constituting the therapeutic/self-expression love-story is tension around this process. Love stories constituted through self-expression and therapeutic discourses involve a certain ‘will to know’ not about the other’s biography, but about the self. Tension around the constitution of shared discursive history and expansion of meaning potential for the subject of the intimate relationship, the couple, is at the expense of meaning potential for the self.

Fun-and-love greeting cards are taken up during a social process that has as one of its central features the necessary generation of shared discursive history, of a particular kind. Individuals setting out on a first date may be virtually strangers (and actually so, on a ‘blind’ date). The discursive history shared by strangers is of a general kind that relates to being members of the same culture and this lack of specificity is a ‘problem’ that in a sense motivates getting to know someone: finding out what aspects of shared realisation through self-help is a demand that priority be given to the realisation of an authentic individual experience over all else, including commitment to the intimate relationship (p.93).
discursive history interactants have in common or hold to be most important (for instance, subcultural identities, ethnicity and social class). In a cultural context such as Australia with mass education and a highly technologised mass media culture, there are a great many experiences and knowledges that constitute this shared discursive history. So, assuming, correctly or otherwise, one’s interlocutor shares one’s general discursive history, what motivates text production in the context of a first date is not difference of a cultural kind but of a personal kind. A first date, for example, may involve establishing if there is in fact any specific shared history (by exploring who they both may know or what experiences they both may have had – for example, finding out they were both at a certain event in the past on the same night or who they may both have in their circle of friends). This shared cultural knowledge contrasts to the unknown of the other’s self. As the lexicogrammatical analysis of fun-and-love greeting cards mapped in Chapter 6 suggests, there is a presumption of difference among the ‘inner worlds’ of interactants, motivating particular kinds of text production between interactants pursuing the development of an intimate relationship. Acquaintances might know each other’s name and job and other kinds of broadly public information but may or may not know what one’s views are on love and marriage. Acquaintances would not ordinarily know if someone feels unloved and despises their marriage partner (ignoring the kind of intimate information audiences are given in, for example, television talk shows). Hence, the importance of meaning making concerned with feelings in the constitution of a sense of ‘knowing’ someone.

Central to the formation of the subject of the romance narrative, that is, the ‘couple’ of the intimate relationship, is a reduction in differences of both social, cultural and individual discursive history. The couple, it could be said, is produced as a merging of discursive histories: we think, we like, we believe. The love-story’s subject, from the perspective of certain interactional theories analysing intimate relationships, occupies a space of ‘mutuality’, a kind of intimate end-state (Forgas 1985:224). Mutuality is an idealisation of the constitution of a discursive history between the lovers, Forgas

285 There are various tensions: for example, in a system of celebrity (see Marshall 1997), while strangers cannot usually speak of everlasting love for each other this, and other constraints, are not prohibitions and so, ‘fan-love’ is between strangers. Infamously, John Hinkley’s fan-‘love’/ obsession with film actress Jodie Foster resulted in an attempted assassination of US President Reagan and famously, resulted in the outpouring of grief at the death of the Princess of Wales.
problematically treating it as a relation ‘where some real in-depth interaction takes place’ (p.224). Establishing mutuality, becoming a couple, is based on ‘mutual expectancies’ (an appropriate greeting card from the corpus might be: *I want to grow old with you*) and built through ways of talking about shared experiences, for example, referencing events such as ‘the first time we met’. Such a sense of intimacy is considered to be problematically ‘[the moment] of greatest virtue in a relationships’ by Bellah et al (1985), although what is useful about Forgas’s account is that it makes explicit that there is a constitutive relationship between ‘text’ and ‘intimacy’ (p.91).

In the intimate relationship, discursive histories established between interactants as a process of merging and the construction of the couple as subject of the love-story can be read as social semiotic space constitutive of a couple’s particular love-story. As an intimate relationship develops along the lines of mutuality, it is the erasure of difference and the iteration of sameness that increasingly becomes the context for interpretation. From a place of limited shared discursive history (strangers) and the potential for a great deal of difference at the beginning of an intimate relationship, there is the constitution of a shared discursive history, which is and idealised. That process produces an expanse of meaning potential for the couple with a concomitant loss of meaning potential for the self. This is schematically presented below in Figure 7.3.

![Image of Figure 7.3]

**Figure 7.3** Meaning potential in the romantic relationship is maximally expanded at the point of mutuality via a reduction of discursive difference between ‘I’ and ‘you’.

---

286 Forgas (1985) bases the discussion on a continuum of ‘involvement’, proceeding from a theoretical null state (complete strangers) through a limited number of stages: where only one individual is aware of the other but no actual interaction occurs (unilateral); then a surface stage with superficial impersonal interaction (sitting on a bus talking about the weather, for example); moving toward mutuality (p.224).
How does this expanded area of meaning potential for the couple impinge on the intimate relationship as a social process in which social actors are engaged and through which those individuals are positioned? Becoming a couple is, in part, achieved through a way of talking about ‘you’ and ‘I’, a way of speaking the constitution of a different subject, ‘we/us’ (as analysed in Chapter 6).\textsuperscript{287} If, at the point of mutuality, meaning potential in the intimate relationship is maximally expanded for the couple via a reduction of discursive difference, this has a concomitant effect of reducing meaning potential for the individual in the intimate relationship constituted as a love-story. In the idealised romantic love-story, this is expected and unproblematic.\textsuperscript{288} The fusion of ‘I’ and ‘you’ in the romantic love-story is a permanent process, precluding de-coupling and re-coupling. It structures a particular kind of intimacy, where ‘they’ live happily ever after and the matter of ‘I’ and ‘you’ is never raised again. Treating the constitution of the couple as something less mythic and more democratic, as therapeutic or self-expression love-stories do, the reduction of meaning potential for the individual is more problematic. Forgas (1985) renders the tension between the expanded meaning potential for the couple and reduction for the self pragmatically, as a matter of swings and roundabouts, by suggesting that in the intimacy so constructed, it is perhaps inevitable that ‘the greater the individual freedom people enjoy, the less likely it is that their close relationships will survive intact’ (p.263). Individuals, however, complain strongly of ‘losing’ themselves in relationships (Bellah et al 1985:92). This is a particular difficulty for the love-story told about self-expression intimacies, particularly for constituting the couple as subject of the story.

A lack of tolerance for a loss of sense of self is tied to the privileged position of the individual as an autonomous subject in the culture. While what is fused cannot be

\textsuperscript{287} A conjunction of ‘I and you’ also stands in opposition to ‘them’. So, while there is an equivalence between ‘I’ and ‘you’, there is a relation of difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This relation is played out in a discourse of privacy through which the couple is constituted as a haven – against the world. Visual representations by fun-and-love greeting cards confirm the isolation of the couple. While there are instances of persons being represented on their own, they are overwhelmingly represented in pairs and never in groups.

\textsuperscript{288} Bakhtin (1986) interestingly does not problematise ‘intimate genres’, writing that they are ‘based on maximal internal proximity of the speaker and addressee (in extreme cases as if they had merged). Intimate speech is imbued with a deep confidence in the addressee, in his sympathy, in the sensitivity and goodwill of his responsive understanding. In this atmosphere of profound trust, the speaker reveals his internal depths’ (p.97).
uncoupled – as in the romantic love-story – therapeutic and self-expression intimacies structure the formation of the couple differently. The couple constituted by the idealised and mythologised romance discourses is produced via a conventional additive relation (two halves making one whole). Therapeutic intimacies, constituted through egalitarian discourses, involve a different structuring of the couple: a metonymic structuring, where each ‘element’ is already a whole. Autonomous individuals come together to form a new structure, ‘a couple’. The value of rendering the couple as a metonymic subject, rather than as a joint or fused subject, is that ‘I’ is retrievable, whereas in a fused subject of romantic discourses, ‘self’ is (impossibly) transformed through its unification with the other. ‘I’ is always present in the couple-as-metonymic subject. A metonymically constituted ‘couple’ is a discursive subject distinct from ‘I’ but occupied by ‘I’ and ‘you’, which are both always already present in the ‘we/us’.

A loss of personal boundaries between ‘I’ and ‘you’, as part of the process of constituting the subject ‘we’ - despite the metonymic structuring of the couple - may be read in a number of ways: for example, as an effect of the oppression of the ‘real’ self by the specific love partner; as an institutional effect that is structured by marriage and family; or as a loss that is diagnosed as a personal pathology. It is a commonplace to represent women as having poor self-definition; to say that women have tendencies toward defining self through others, e.g. through her husband and children. For this reason, the logic runs, women experience a sense of loss of self, whereas the strong self-definition of men resists this. The process of reduction and expansion of meaning potential for self and couple is problematic for men, instantiating particular generic strategies to ‘escape’ it (as is seen below). Treatments for such a loss of self appear commonly in popular cultural sites, such as women’s magazines and ‘self-help’ books and television programs such as Oprah where self-actualisation is a repeated topic. Such treatments target the individual, rather than considering the effect of the expansion of meaning potential for ‘the couple’ and its concomitant reduction in meaning potential for the self.

289 Other ways in which a sense of self may be ‘lost’ are through the operation of power relations that dis-able the performance of self. An important way in which this occurs is when one partner restricts (either by physical or verbal force) the other’s access to family and friends.

Beyond the coda

What kind of narrative space is there for either the fused or metonymically constituted couple to occupy? In the idealised version of the love-story, the coda closes off the narrative trajectory, so that what goes on beyond it is out of sight, narratively speaking. The world beyond the coda is not texted by the idealised mytho-romantic love-story, other than as happy-ever-after. The narrative arc of the love-story travels through a romantic and unreal space but what is beyond the coda is hidden through this lack of textual realisation, disguising a paradoxical moment where the unreality of idealised romance and the everyday collide (for example, when a couple get married and passion is confronted with the work of shopping and cleaning and perhaps parenting). The coda is treated in different terms to that of the mytho-romantic love-story in the therapeutic version of the love-story because the occupation of most of the available meaning potential is by the couple and not the ‘self’, in accordance with the individual’s position in egalitarian discourses. It is a site of tension between ‘self’ and couple. The love-story in its therapeutic guise is, in some senses, where getting to know ‘you’ is a parallel project to getting to know ‘myself’ that is ongoing.

To consider post-codal intimacy, two analyses are drawn on, a sociological analysis of romance and its commodities by Illouz (1997), and an analysis of discursive practices by Vogler (1998). While Illouz to some degree champions therapeutic intimacies constituted by egalitarian discourses, her central thesis is that intimacy in the therapeutic mode is the domain of middle class couples and that romantic love configured in this manner structures inequalities in the social fabric (p.279). This again raises the thorny issue of class within a deconstructive discourse. While texted love offers one approach toward access to certain generic strategies, providing access to generic resources does not necessarily rewrite intimacy as difference rather than sameness. The therapeutic version of intimacy that Illouz opts for is not a positive construction of the ‘post-codal’, according to Vogler’s (1998) account of middle class heterosexual relations, rather it is destructive of those intimate relationships. Vogler’s attention to middle class couples doing self-expression intimacy is a useful focus on the site of tension between meaning potential for the couple and the self. What Vogler reads in the discursive practices of middle class couples is the desire for a different kind of coupling than either the romantic or self-expression intimacy: desire for an intimacy that allows them to escape from the particular
selves constructed by that self-expression intimacy (p.331). The discursive practices they deploy are divergent and gendered: men discursively constituting their desire for a different kind of intimacy as sex and women discursively constituting their desire as talk (p.331). Fun-and-love greeting cards, the analysis in Chapter 6 suggests, are texts that may be deployed for both strategies.

*The classed couple*

Differences among social groups, according to Illouz (1997), emerge in the realm of the mundane. During the dating phase of the relationship, there is no difference between social groups with respect to what Illouz calls, after Bourdieu, ‘romantic competence’ – forms of doing and taste in romantic intimacy that are marked by access to ‘linguistic, cultural, economic, and time resources’ (p.248). During what has been rendered here as the narrative space beyond the coda, working class and middle class couples part ways with respect to romantic relations (p.266). Illouz attributes the key difference in post-codal romantic competence between middle and working class couples to the cultural dominance of the therapeutic version of intimacy (p.266). As a talking performance of intimacy, working class couples are disadvantaged because while women, including working class women, have the right kind of self-expressive competence acquired through their socialisation, working class men do not (p.279). This produces inequalities within working class couples, eroding the couple’s constitution of a discursive sameness and thus the solidity of a post-codal space (in more experiential terms, that is, it leads to a wife’s dissatisfaction with her ‘romantically incompetent’ working class husband) (p.278).

In accepting a positive value of the therapeutic mode of post-codal romance, Illouz necessarily homogenises middle class men and all women against working class men and firmly keeps working class men positioned outside the interpersonal.

---

291 The ‘lower segments of society’ are also, according to Illouz, already culturally deprived because of their differential access to romantic commodities (1997:266). What has been argued in previous chapters, however, is that the cheapness of greeting cards means economic resources are not as important in constituting differences in social practices among groups of people as other consumption might be.
Differences between gendered and classed subjects with respect to performances of intimacy – discourses of competence for women and incompetence of men, including working class men, with respect to intimate interactional work – have been previously problematised in this thesis. A different difficulty for Illouz’s argument is suggested by Foucault’s (1990) analysis of confession. In the post-codal space of a self-expression love-story, the couple performs intimacy with the confessional talk that Foucault analyses as a mechanism for the exercise of bio-power. The confessor, the one hearing the confession, has the authority; and is the one who requires the confession, judges it and prescribes absolution (pp.61-62). Confession as a strategy for doing intimate relationships does not produce an egalitarian intimate relationship, although it may be idealised as such. Within a morbid relationship this may be realised by what is confessed becoming ammunition between ‘I and ‘you’. Confessional practices are not only a basis for the formation of knowledges that can be used for social control over individual subjects. Confession binds the subject’s desire to the desire to produce discourse (p.63). Such practices generate more and more ammunition and solidify positionings: as confessor and the one who confesses.

Faced with a nexus of class and gender, Illouz’s overall conclusion about doing intimacy through self-actualisation and therapeutic discourses is unsatisfactory. Middle class couples’ access to discursive and socioeconomic resources is evaluated by Illouz as ‘ha[ving] their cake and eat[ing] it too’; and a therapeutic mode for post-codal romance is given aspirational status for working class couples (p.286-287). Illouz does not consider therapeutic discourse as ideal for doing intimacy, however, because it has arisen as part of capitalism’s requirements for individualism:

the commodified language of individualistic self-realisation is, at present, the only language we understand well enough to open our relationships to a project of autonomy, equality, and emotional fulfilment. [However,]… this language is an impoverished one … we will eventually need to transcend it. (p.295)

The pursuit of other ways of ‘doing’ intimacy with text is problematically tied to assumptions of autonomous and equal subjects doing intimacy (and Illouz does not

---

292 Giddens (1992), for example, argues that a democratisation of the private domain with emotional intimacy and sexual fulfilment contracted between individuals not only puts intimate relationships onto a footing similar to public relationships that are constituted between autonomous and equal citizens but constitutes a ‘pure relationship’ (p.185).
indicate with what this impoverished way of speaking might be ‘transcended’). While Illouz anticipates an eventual need for change, Vogler’s (1998) analysis of what goes on in an intimate middle class relationship constituted through self-expression discourses and practices of confession suggests more urgency, a more widespread problem, and a different target for change. Middle class women and men, Vogler argues, want to escape precisely the kind of intimacy that Illouz values, although not by drawing on the commodities that Illouz suggests they use to escape mundanity beyond the coda.

Vogler’s account adds to the analysis by identifying what happens to the self in the space of expanded meaning potential of the couple. Warning against the self-conscious post-codal intimacy constituted in persistent confession toward mutuality and its application to the self toward actualisation, Vogler reads such intimacy as a domestic scene ‘mired in something like epistemic overkill’: ‘[e]ndless conversation about the relationship; sex as a collective-action problem calling for creative solutions; a habit of probing for knowledge of each other’ (p.329). It is not an intimacy that these middle class ‘exemplary heterosexual’ wives and husbands thrive within (p.331). Through confession and the constitution of a discursive history that has eroded difference, once mutuality has been achieved, ‘I know myself’ in a very particular and problematic way. The sense of self and of one’s spouse that is produced through mutuality, in the space of expanded meaning potential for the couple, is a ‘calcified’ one:

husbands and wives grow rigid, their senses of themselves calcify, and they can neither forget who they are, what they want, what they’ve been and done to one another, and how disappointingly it’s all come out, nor allow their partners to forget these things. … [A]ll that is left between them is the tedious yammering of selves: “I’m like this: “you’re like that,” “you never,” “I always: “you always,” “I never,” that sort of thing. (p.330)

If mutuality and self-expression as a mode of intimacy constitutes such calcified selves, it does not seem that such intimacies should be aspired to for working class couples, as Illouz suggests (p.287). The intimacy Vogler describes has more to do with ‘tracking or expanding the borders of selfhood’ than desire, although she finds a germ of desire for

293 The detail of which and the extent of which Vogler reads in scholarly relationship case-studies and paperback self-help books – some of which are based on those case-studies.
another kind of intimacy in the discourse of those calcified husbands and wives (p.331). It is a desire for a ‘depersonalizing intimacy’ in which this calcified sense of self might be forgotten (p.329). Both men and women wish to escape this sense of self, although the strategies each use to achieve a ‘forgetting’ are very different: wives inscribe it in their requests for talk (with their husbands) and husbands inscribe it in requests for sex (with their wives) (p.332). This analysis provides another angle on popular descriptions of intimacy as gendered: that women prefer their intimacy as talk and men prefer it as sex. Women and men, on Vogler’s account, both prefer their intimacy depersonalised. Talk and sex are both (unsuccessful) strategies for achieving that intimacy. This analysis also provides an opportunity to revisit the sorry text analysed in Chapter 6 (Alright, alright! I’m sorry! Okay? / can we fool around now?). This fragment of ‘making up’ can be read as serving the card giver by constituting an apology – for a falling out between calcified selves. If Vogler is right, then this greeting card exemplifies the kind of strategy a husband might deploy for sex toward forgetting a well-tracked self. If intimacies are ‘classed’, as Illouz (1997) suggests, then such a strategy would be used by a middle class husband. This adds further weight against an argument that fun-and-love greeting cards are used by men who are ‘deficient’ with respect to the kind of confessional talk required by those intimacies (as was proposed by one greeting card publisher reported in Chapter 1). While Illouz is concerned to articulate certain disadvantages of self-expression intimacies

294 Vogler links sex and talk non-self-expressively, being careful to not attribute more political force than is due to the particular strategies of husbands and wives. She does not suggest these gendered strategies for depersonalising intimacy are inherent to the sex of the spouse, rather she reads in both men and women’s strategies ‘a kind of inadvertent, inchoate (and to that extent impotent) protest against [exemplary] heterosexuality’ (p.332). And, while accepting that ‘seeking refuge from the burdens of heterosexual masculine selfhood in the “little death” is a time honored strategy’, Vogler points out these husbands want depersonalising sex with their wives (p.332). This she reads as a ‘long[ing] for a mode of intercourse at home that does some violence to their sense of themselves as husbands, fathers, heads of households, authorities, and so on’ (p.332). The depersonalising talk that women want with their husbands, women already ‘know’ about because it is the kind of talk they have with other women: ‘trouble’s talk’. While this is talk about one’s troubles, it is not a problem solving discourse, rather it is the creation of a ‘mood of happy submersion’ and hence ‘the reason that proposing solutions to problems is such a spoiler for troubles talk, the reason it’s so annoying when people do this rather than join in, is that it breaks the whole mood of happy submersion by hinting that the speakers ought instead to become conscious of themselves as autonomous persons with wills that might more productively be turned to the task of solving the problems “under discussion”’ (p.360). This (kitchen table) talk is not a way of connecting, as Coates (1996) would have it, rather, Vogler argues, troubles talk is impersonal: ‘the problems are everyone’s at once, and therefore no one’s in particular’ (p.345). This ‘means that these most personal things no longer ‘mark one off as unique … in all the world’ (p.361).
for working class men, confessional practices refracted through gender also bring
bring women, who use ‘talk’ toward intimacy, under the social control of their husbands.

What goes on beyond the coda has a historical and sociocultural specificity that is tied
to discourses of ‘self’; relations between private and public spheres; and confessional
modes of discourse, among other things. The intimate relationship – a romantic and
sexual relationship – is now formed by individuals choosing their lovers (although the
grounds for doing so vary widely and for various lengths of time with other features,
such as adding children). Such a choice of relationship constitutes a freedom that did
not exist in the social milieu before the twentieth century, particularly for women. An
individual’s ‘right to choose’ intimacy with someone is, however, at odds with
discourses that promote the family as the basic social unit of communities. The
heterosexual family is in tension with the ‘love rights’ individually based freedom
endows on non-heterosexuals, creating a dilemma for socio-politically conservative
positions, which otherwise valorise individuality.

The homo-romantic couple

Vogler’s identification of distinctions within middle class heterosexual relations
draws out gender differences but what about same-sex intimacy? Romantic discourses
determine how it is possible to think and carry on an intimate relationship, including
for homosexual subjects. A segment of the corpus produced for gay and lesbian
audiences is therefore analysed. Romantic heterosexual coupling is projected by
heteronormative discourses as given, natural and ahistorical. It is an exclusionary strategy
that has negative legal and social consequences for individuals, especially for same-sex
couples who, no matter how many children they may have, are not properly able to
constitute a ‘family’. The identity categories ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ (particular configurations
of male and female homosexuality) have recently been reconstituted as a niche group

295 Compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980) has a corollary in the compulsory addition of
children. ‘The family’ must be male and female couples who then add children to the unit. This
is realised in the unquestioned importance of infertility and, therefore, the extraordinary
measures taken to solve this ‘problem’. In-vitro-fertilisation technology is premised on this
compulsory fertility.
or target audience in market practices and greeting cards are produced for that audience. In analysing fun-and-love greeting cards for homosexual subjects, certain features of heteronormativity are brought into relief, there is an opportunity to consider what discourses are informing the particular construction of gay and lesbian niche audiences, relate it to the social process of an intimate relationship, and the constitution of desire.

Fun-and-love greeting cards produced for lesbian and gay audiences differ from those produced for heterosexual (nominatively – not necessarily ‘actually’) audiences with respect to how they represent themselves; the audience is explicitly differentiated in terms of their sex. The object of desire is designated as man or woman, in contrast to rest of the corpus where representations of persons is not common and where it does occur is likely to be of a couple. Representation of lesbians and gays by the cards is usually visual, for example, male and female figures but also involves other resources: including a set of interpersonal linguistic resources, e.g., exaggerated pronunciation and speaking in exclamatives such as may be attributed to gay men, e.g. ‘Daaarling!!!!’. In the non-homosexual segment of the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards the absence of designation of women or men as the object of desire may reduce production and expand consumption simultaneously, within the constraints around consumption already discussed for certain groupings.

As fun-and-love greeting cards for gay and lesbian audiences are delineated around ‘gay’ (male) and ‘lesbian’ (female) cards, the analysis considers these separately, analysing fun-and-love greeting cards for lesbians first. The stereotyped representation of lesbian as ‘masculinised’ woman appears in both commercially distributed fun-and-love greeting cards and cards made by small scale producers (e.g. using photographs attached to cards rather than offset printing) that are sold in various commercial sites. This stereotypical version is thus a self-referenced and self-identified representation. The lesbian represented in fun-and-love greeting cards is

296 The economic strength of the so-called ‘pink’ dollar is tied to the political muscle of the gay and lesbian community in Australia, although Hennessy (1995) argues the distribution of wealth in the gay and lesbian community is demarcated along gender and ‘race’ lines.

297 Including retail shops and stalls at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, Fair Day.
also a ‘feminine’ woman who engages in protective, nurturing and romantic behaviours.

For instance, Example 7.1 represents one woman as particularly feminised – i.e. heterosexualised (with longish blonde hair and obvious lipstick) and the other as less so.\textsuperscript{286} The lesbians in Example 7.1 are, more importantly, represented within a non-sexual discourse. They are concerned with romance or friendship, sharing a coat in a rainstorm or, elsewhere, gazing into each other’s eyes. One card declares to the card recipient: \textit{I enjoy spending time with you}. Time perhaps spent in a domestic setting but while the domestic and private is normatively the place for sexual activity, sexual practices are not hinted at either visually or linguistically in such cards. These lesbians are not involved in sexualised activity and, therefore, never pose a threat to phallocentric heterosexuality. The lesbian represented on the left of Example 7.1 is a version of the figure of the ‘lipstick lesbian’, who is constituted within a broader aesthetic or style movement that has been referred to as ‘lesbian chic’. The importance of lesbian chic is that it generates representations of ‘lesbians’ who are available for commodification in a way that the lesbian as sad and lonely ‘butch’ (for example, Radclyffe Hall’s realisation of ‘Stephen’ in the Well of Loneliness) never could be.\textsuperscript{299} The ‘lipstick lesbian’, for example, is a figure that has a wide currency within capitalist discourses, particularly in advertising practices, but also as seen here in the production of goods for lesbians by lesbians. In this way, while the commodified identity ‘lesbian’ is not a singular thing

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{Example 7.1} Commercial fun-and-love greeting card produced for lesbian audience, exemplifying de-sexualised lesbian representation
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{286} This is not to deny that lesbians can ordinarily ‘pass’ for heterosexual women nor is it to deny that heterosexual women’s bodies may be inscribed in ways which may be stereotypically understood as ‘masculine’. These commonplaces make a mockery of the stereotypes but emphasise that commonplace everyday ‘realities’ have little resistance value against the discourses mobilising such stereotypes.

\textsuperscript{299} The lesbian has been an important figure of female abjection and is intelligible in relation to heterosexual relations as other. If the lesbian is not-not-woman, then what figure stabilises these relations? How the figure of the lipstick-lesbian functions in the heteronormative matrix is an important issue but not within the scope of the thesis.
and cannot be controlled, produced as it is in the sub-cultural space that lesbians occupy (and arising perhaps out of a desire to have a few things of her own), it is not unproblematic.300

The absence of sexual discourses in which lesbians are represented is ironic and also predictable under the logic of heteronormativity. It is ironic because when the term lesbian is used to describe a woman, aspects of sexuality are foregrounded over any other identity categories with which she may have an affiliation. As an identity category ‘lesbian’ is normatively formed around same-sex female sexual desire and sexual practices, although within a heteronormative matrix of sexuality and gender, female bodies and feminine gender are constituted as passive in sexual discourses and as objects of desire rather than active sexual subjects. One segment of the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards, however, suggests a somewhat different representation of lesbian. Example 7.2 represents lesbians who cannot be read as unproblematically feminised, heteronormative or asexual. The representation of women in the clothing of bondage and discipline practitioners, as in this example, or posing in sado-masochist roles with sex-toys, in others, has a long and continuing history that has nothing to do with lesbian identity but is part of heterosexual desire and pornographic visual traditions. Current production and consumption, however, has a more recent history. During the 1980s, lesbian sexuality and lesbian sexual practices became contested within feminist theory.

The debate is usually referred to as the ‘sex wars’, a phrasing taken up as the title of one book documenting the period (Healey 1996). A part of these debates on sex and feminism was the constitution of a subject position that was self-consciously

Example 7.2 Commercial fun-and-love greeting card produced for lesbian audience exemplifying sexualised lesbian representation

300 A predicament and a practice that I have explored in some detail in Hobson (1997).
oppositional to both stereotypical heterosexual femininity and positions constituted by so called ‘radical feminism’ of the 1970s.\footnote{Radical feminism is sometimes referred to as lesbian separatism and has become identified with conservative stances on sex (see Mackinnon 1989; Jeffreys 1994).} The so called ‘sex-radical’ is a position often represented by figures of ‘sado-masochism’ or ‘bondage & discipline’. The sex radical refuses alignments of ‘sexuality’ with sexual practices and gender. This is a sexualised lesbian subject, a figure that has little to do with the female solidarity championed by Jeffreys (1994) and a great deal to do with desire and sexual practices.\footnote{It is the sex radical lesbian, Williams (1996) argues, who provides the conditions for the emergence of queer theory and its unpacking of the heteronormative matrix (Butler 1990). In disarticulating sex, sexuality, gender and the body, queer has enabled, gender, sexuality and bodies to multiply and be reconfigured theoretically (possibilities that on the sexual margins of the culture are practiced). While these possibilities, as Williams suggests ‘cannot claim any greater liberatory potential than older forms [of sexualities] they nevertheless work against normalizing moves to consolidate and stabilize singular identity categories’ (p.288).}

There is no necessary conflation between representations of sexuality and individual sexual practices but it is telling to now turn to representations of male homosexual subjects in fun-and-love greeting cards. Male homosexual subjects – gay men – are less successfully construed as participating in the romantic domain. The coupling experience is self-mockingly represented: \textit{Ours is a love so sweet../...No wonder it’s making all our friends sick.} Visually, however, gay men, like lesbians, are represented in limited ways. While the stereotyped representation of ‘gay’ is the effeminate homosexual, in fun-and-love greeting cards the gay man is not, overall, constituted as a feminised subject. Certain stereotypes are represented, for example, there is an arch, self-consciously stylish inner city gay man but this figure is rarer than two other representations: the drag queen and the masculine gay man (see Example 7.3). The latter is not surprising. The overwhelming choice for the visual representation of

\begin{example}
\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{example7.3.png}
\end{center}
\textbf{Example 7.3} Commercial greeting card produced for gay audience
\end{example}
gay men in the last two decades of the twentieth century has been a hyper-masculinised figure. Visual representations of the hyper-masculine male body on cards for gay audiences, as exemplified in Example 7.3, attest to how greeting card images are related to discourses about male sexuality (Harris and Sargent 1983).

Male homosexual subjects, like their heterosexual counterparts, are constituted as active sexual subjects. In Example 7.3 these are naked bodies but they do not signify flesh as a softness or a feminised interior. The muscles are flat and even the most rounded feature, the buttocks, are made visually flatter by diffusing the roundness through lighting, reducing definition. The arrangement of the bodies in relation to each other and the frame of the image is a set of strong diagonal vectors, realised by the limbs and torsos of the bodies and made salient through high-light lighting, together with contrast shading. These are clearly seen when the image is manipulated, dropping out the gray tones and rendering it as black and white (see Figure 7.4). There are two main vectors bisecting the space, with a third repeating the movement across the space from top right to bottom left). Such vectors realise visual momentum, ‘action’ according to Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) ‘grammatics’ of visual semiosis. It is a realisation of action by masculinised bodies in Example 7.3 that contrasts with the women’s bodies represented in Example 7.2 above. The short vectors of Example 7.2 realise muted action – see Figure 7.5 – formed as they are not by the play of light and dark of the bodies but by the expanses of the women’s exposed breasts against the dark of the image’s background.

**Figure 7.4** Vectors realising action in commercial fun-and-love greeting card for gay audience

**Figure 7.5** Muted action realised by women’s bodies

While representations of gays and lesbians in the economy of identity in both
‘mainstream’ and gay and lesbian greeting card production houses work to re-make heteronormative possibilities for gay and lesbian identities, there is another set of texts, providing a somewhat different picture again. In Example 7.4 the image works to deconstruct the heteronormative matrix with a representation that ‘flaunt[s] some aspects of (homo) sexual desire which pose a threat to (hetero) sexual males [with a body in] a passive position – bum up, exposed, ready to receive’ (James and Sargent 1983:8). The explicit representation of homosexual desire in Example 7.4 is given a warm glow with sunset hues, a romantic colouration, nevertheless, the text puts into discourse a subject position that disrupts the hegemony of heteronormativity.

What is particularly of interest in the lesbian and gay segment of the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards is that these texts keep hold of a more singular sense of identity, at least in relation to sexed bodies. Fun-and-love greeting cards for gay and lesbian audiences represent male or female figures making the object of desire evident. In this way, lesbian or gay fun-and-love greeting cards visually proclaim gay or lesbian love or desire. This is read here as a political discourse. The ‘love that dare not speak its name’ is put on display in the public context of commodity purchase. ‘Visibility’ is a discourse that informed the ‘gay liberation’ movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Imaging the objects of gay and lesbian desire is a representational practice that extends the confessional impetus to ‘come out’ into the commercial realm. Gay and lesbian visibility, however, is not unproblematic. What has been argued by Düttmann (1997), among others, is that the intersection of a political discourse of visibility and commodity production is constituted by a discourse of tolerance and incorporation. Lesbian chic is susceptible to being read in this manner. Against tolerance and incorporation, sexualised images of

---

303 The example touts itself as a ‘Thank you’ card, ‘for dinner’. The central argument here is with respect to the way in which homosexual desire is represented.
homosexual desire – e.g. Example 7.4 and Example 7.5 – disrupt the discourse of tolerance that commercial interests require. For a politics of difference, such representations usefully work against difference being ‘re-cognized’ \(^{304}\), as Düttmann puts it: against the gay and lesbian subject being rethought and reincorporated as safe subjects (p.29). In a heterosexualised and family oriented culture, it is, for instance, impossible to be tolerant of representations of anal sex or the promise of it through male-to-male sex.

What conclusions can be drawn from these texts and this brief analysis of greeting cards produced for lesbian and gay audiences? While the social process of an intimate relationship and the generic strategies for doing intimacy in gay and lesbian relationships as some of these fragments realise them is heteronormative, others propose sexual subjects that remain constituted on the margins or ‘outside’ the heteronormative (e.g. Examples 7.2 and 7.4). While the commodification of gay and lesbian identities may involve being desexualised and ‘re-cognized’, visual representations of same-sex desire by greeting cards is a way in which such re-cognition is made difficult. The representation of homo-romantic subjects by fun-and-love greeting cards means that gay and lesbian subjects occupy a position similar to other romantic subjects. What is seen in the corpus is how this is skewed through the heteronormative matrix: while lesbians may be homo-romantic subjects, gay men are more problematically so. Gay men are more easily accommodated as active, desiring and, therefore, masculinised subjects.

Representation of same-sex desire in an everyday manner is a version of the political discourse of ‘visibility’. Representations of same-sex desire in the mundane

---

\(^{304}\) Düttman uses the German Wiedererkennen (re-cognition) which is distinct from Anerkennen (recognition).
commercial world by the greeting card constitute, for homo-romantic subjects, a happy-ever-after coda to their love-story. While it is a risky strategy, such an ending troubles heterosexual desire as a regime of truth in a way that representations of homo-erotic desire in aesthetic discourses (and its tolerance within liberal discourses of individualism) does not. The coda of the heteronormative love-story after all involves both permanent coupling and ‘family’ which produces a dilemma, particularly for conservative political voices. In championing ‘freedom of choice’, especially where such freedom pertains to the market-place, a conservative political position means discourses of ‘choice’ may be applied to commodities representing same-sex desire. Homo-romantic subjects of a love-story in turn lead to ‘equal rights’ with respect to family. For example, ‘rights’ discourses tied to individualism and capitalism are involved in current debates over lesbian claims for publicly funded access to reproductive technologies, such as in vitro fertilisation. (It is a truism to say that the stakes are very high with respect to what constitutes family.) If what constitutes ‘family’ changes in developed Western cultures, the implications for many aspects of the culture would be immense, suggesting some of the significance of the production of homo-romantic love stories. The representation of same-sex desire as heteronormative also suggests that like ‘exemplary heterosexuals’, homosexuals need to unlearn heterosexual gender, to unlearn desire as personal-ised; to ‘queer’ desire as Probyn (1995) puts it. Desire that is queered is not directed at someone – their mind, their personality, their soul or any part of a whole being but is instantiated by images. The instantiation of desire by images does not mean euphemising desire, as in Example 6.5– wet soap and a foaming lather suggesting sexual desire – but abstracting it and separating out desire from sexed bodies, gender, sexuality. The line and movement of desire, in Probyn’s Deleuzian vocabulary, is not between ‘two individual elements’, it is not a relation of sameness (two equivalent subjects, two lesbians, two heterosexuals) and does not have an object but is a ‘force that connects or disconnects images and things’ (p.14). Queer desire is thus nothing to do with the sex of the object(s) and thus same-sex desire can be heteronormative and different-sex desire can be queered. How though could such desire to be realised between ‘I’ and ‘you’ in the love-story given an insistent trajectory toward obliterating difference?
**Toward re-writing intimacy as difference in the love-story**

Idealised love stories are compelling structures through which subjects know and perform the social process of an intimate relationship. Such narratives privilege a heteronormative couple and reduce meaning potential available for the self, although the fused subject of the mytho-romantic love-story and the metonymic subject of the therapeutic or self-expression love-story realise differences between those stories. Both these ‘sameness’ discourses write love stories that involve accumulating certain kinds of discursive history and have trajectories that can be summarised as constitutive of a discursive history toward extinguishing difference. The metonymic subject of the love-story is something of an innovation on the fused subject of the traditional love-story but what kind of narrative of love and what kind of intimacy and desire might be constituted with it is not clear. After a successful ‘coupling’ through a therapeutic discourse of intimacy, there is nothing to be negotiated: everything is known about each other and about the self. The effect of mutuality is to reduce text production and, reconfigured along a temporal trajectory, it is eventually mortifying to intimacy. If strategies such as demands for sex or talk fail to re-produce intimacy, and Vogler’s account, among others, suggests they will, then things might proceed to silence. Too much shared discourse of this kind destroys the very thing it seeks to build.

As a set of relations, this process has been mapped with respect to the narrative structure of the traditional love-story. The story ends at the coda as it is impossible for it to proceed into a future beyond mutuality. Difference and, therefore, text has been apparently erased or, rather, replaced with a ‘tedious yammering of selves: “I’m like this;” “you’re like that,” “you never,” “I always;” “you always,” “I never,” (Vogler 1998: 330). While Vogler and Illouz attempt to reshape the narrative space beyond the coda, the force of the coda and its sense of closure is retained in both, as is also exemplified in the analysis of a heteronormative constitution of lesbian and homosexual desire by fun-and-love greeting cards. As is known from Derrida (1976), while there is a compulsion toward closure, it is a fiction that difference and,

---

305 The self-help texts Vogler (1998) draws on are texts that a couple would read at a point in the relationship where they are both still working at disrupting their calcified selves.
therefore, desire can be closed off. The difficulty is that if the coda persists, where can
desire be imagined as existing narratively? The response is to disassemble the
narrative with respect to the coda. It is suggested that spaces in which intimacy as
difference may be developed are dispersed throughout the love-story, in iterative
components of the genre. In the dispersal and iteration, possibilities are generated for a
love-story in which self and other are not obliterated and sex is put back in the
love-story.

There is a difficulty posed by the cultural value of love itself, particularly its
position vis a vis sex. In the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards both love and sex
are present, although there are few instances where love and sex are together in
one text. So while dispersing the coda of the love-story opens up certain possibilities,
in one sense, sex (carnal desire) itself comes to be at stake in discourses constituting the
love relation. If constituted through mutuality, intimacy works to obliterate sexual
desire, as seen in the absence of sex from the ‘cutesy’ fun-and-love greeting cards
analysed in Chapter 6. These were linked to the safe but sex-less ‘alter’ relationship
(Langford 1997). From a different perspective, Vogler’s (1998) analysis suggests sex is
a generic strategy of middle class husbands toward achieving a particular kind of
intimacy. Illouz’s (1997) Marxist analysis leads her to argue that it is capitalism that
has constituted love and sex as parallel narratives in romance and romanticised
commodities (pp.159-160), although sex and love have been constituted in an
oppositional relation since Plato. Under all these conditions, an oppositional
structuring of love and sex effects to keep lovers apart in the love-story. Bringing them
back together, without obliterating alterity, needs to be effected. One kind of
performance of intimacy, which accepts Derrida’s analysis of the impossibility of
erasing difference, is offered by Diprose (1998) in an articulation of an ethical
enactment of love and desire. Diprose posits ‘generosity’ in an embodied erotic
encounter that does not require the destruction of the other’s alterity (p.16.n.2). It
contributes a way of putting sex back into the love-story without remaking sameness
or keeping love and sex away from each other, for example, by desire being appraised
as love.
Disassembling the narrative: dispersing the coda

The importance of the coda is that it signals the beginning of an ill-defined happy-ever-after, a time that has been analysed above as a series of movements toward the obliteration of intimacy. In response to the desire for different kinds of intimacy by heterosexual and homosexual subjects, the strategy now is to disperse the coda of the love-story, instantiating a space for other kinds of desire, other kinds of intimacy and other kinds of subjects. This strategy also enables an elaboration on the production paradox associated with non-occasion greeting cards.

How to disperse a coda? What is already immanent in certain narrative structures is that the coda is always already dispersed. This is how television ‘soap opera’ or any ‘serial’ is structured. The motivation and pleasure in repeated ‘tuning in’ to TV soaps is constructed by the program ending with a new complication of some kind (Modelski 1984). In order find out what the resolution is the viewer/listener/reader must tune in again (same time, same channel, tomorrow). If the coda is dispersed, a different kind of structuring comes into prominence. It is a structuring that is already part of the narrative, as is seen by illustrating the narrative structure in a more formal way:

Abstract (Hey, want to hear something?) ^ Orientation (It’s about Tom and Nicole) ^ Complication (He’s left her for another woman) ^ Resolution (Her career is on the up and up) ^ Evaluation (The break up must have been for the best) ^ Coda (Anyway, now although its Tom and Penelope, Tom and Nicole are best of friends).306 When the coda is ‘dispersed’, what reassembles in that space is a complication ^ resolution (^evaluation) structure, where something out of the ordinary appears and is resolved or attempted to be resolved. The narrative is thus infinitely expandable.

It is this expanded narrative that is exploited by those whose bread and butter is such crises: what is often referred to as tabloid press and some ‘women’s’ magazines. These crises are real or imagined, happy or sad. Crises concerning famous individuals may provide or, rather, are constituted as material for these publications and their audiences over many

---

306 The ^ carets indicate sequencing, the brackets indicate that the evaluation is optional. This ‘formalist’ and structural representation of the narrative has particular value here for purposes of focus. As Barthes (1984c) points out, such namings are both ‘metalinguistic’, solely the province of the analyst, and part of the inner metalanguage in the reader (pp.101-102).
One such ongoing story involves Pamela Anderson, of television ‘Baywatch’ fame, and her husband, Tommy Lee (famous in his own right as a member of the band Motley Crue). Anderson is reported as saying she and Tommy Lee went out one night and then got married after being engaged for four days. Following two children, a series of break ups involving repeated scandals (domestic violence, sex and drug revelations), a divorce and ‘a getting back together’, the couple have since remarried and re-separated. Their love-story is a ‘saga’, each version accruing further narrative moments, including some which are recursive. What is striking about Anderson and Lee’s love-story is that its ‘tabloid’ features (the accounts of violence, sex and drugs, the public nature of the private lives of the individuals) provide a stark contrast to the stultifying intimacy constituted in mutuality and self-expression. Whatever it is that Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee experience as intimacy, it involves difference. This is not to suggest that such an intimacy is preferable to one that does not involve elements of violence, dislocation and family break-up but it does have a quality of vigour compared to the quiet desperation of Vogler’s middle class couples’ lives.

It is the iterative quality of this structuring and the always already dispersed coda that underlies the paradoxical production of fun-and-love greeting cards. A proliferation of fun-and-love texts at the ‘coupling’ moment of the love-story is constitutive of the recursiveness of the social process of having an intimate relationship through complication^resolution (evaluation) structures. What is visible in the proliferation of coupling fun-and-love greeting cards is the way in which the recursive process of coupling, including the therapeutic mode of intimacy, is based on the impossibility of coupled-ness. This conclusion comes via Derrida’s (1976) analysis of desire (différance). Any resolution to a complication is temporary, perhaps only momentary (theoretically impossible but for a temporally oriented cognition in narrative mode this

---

307 For instance, popular magazine *Woman’s Day*, according to the media kit it uses to market itself to advertisers, provides a ‘combination of gossip, glamour and extraordinary real life stories’ because it is a ‘watch’ on the antics of the famous (1999).

308 Almost all media stories about Anderson involve some version or reference to this saga. Recent ones include, a profile story in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (D’Souza 2001) in which an up to date version is recounted and in the magazine *Who Weekly*, April 23rd 2001, which includes a photograph of the couple captioned ‘Old flames Pamela Anderson and rocker Tommy Lee let bygones be bygones when they teamed up in LA to support the TV Cares Ribbon of Hope, an AIDS education charity’ (p.11).
impossibility is difficult to allow). If, as Derrida argues, différance cannot be annihilated, then ‘mutuality’ and all those couplings are a symptom of desire to close the gap, to overcome difference. This impulse is a compulsion that is seen in the repetition of attempts Derrida (1987) replicates in *The Post Card*. If the fun-and-love greeting card’s sending situation (desire) comes under a discourse that idealises desire as overcoming difference and achieving sameness, it destroys the relationship within which that process goes on. This is because, despite the impossibility of difference being overcome, the process of all of these sendings and non-arrivals has, as already described, the effect of creating a particular discursive history between self/other, sender/recipient, greeting card giver/greeting card reader, ‘I’/‘you’. The senders and recipients seeking ‘closure’, while repetitively sending, are not only dissatisfied with the lack of results, but are also not satisfied with that idealised desire, according to Vogler’s (1998) account. However, while Vogler seeks a ‘new’ post-codal space for her dissatisfied wives and husbands, as Derrida has set out desire, this is impossible. In any new post-codal space, desire would still produce sendings that do not arrive. This is only a problem, if the desire to overcome difference (and a belief in the annihilation of desire) is the discourse through which senders shape their desire. If ‘sendings and non-arrivals’ is how things are, then as Derrida puts it, ‘this is really how it is, it is not a misfortune, that’s life, living life’ (p.33).

The movement into a realm where the coda is dispersed is not simply the extension of narrative temporality, rather it constitutes possibilities for different kinds of meaning making where, for example, coupling is not realised as a singular inevitable movement toward mutuality but where there is the possibility for an iterated movement of desire between ‘I’ and ‘you’. A dispersed coda offers a way of conceptualising how the narrative structure already contains within itself the possibilities for moments ‘outside’ itself; spaces where ‘coupling’ as love and sexual desire is iterated. In the space created by the dispersal of the coda, possibilities for other intimacies emerge for a narrative that foregrounds not endings but recursive structurings: where there is both fun (sex) and love.

---

309 Derrida is not saying these are communicative ‘failures’ but is referring to the impossibility of closing the gap that is différance.
Other desires, other intimacies

Carnal desire and love are both involved in constituting the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards. The corpus of greeting cards proclaims itself as ‘fun and love’ with plenty of evidence of word plays constructing ‘fun’ as amusement but also playfully putting desire into publicly displayed texts. The appearance of sex and love together in specific fun-and-love greeting cards is, however, only occasional: When love like this happens…/clothes are the first to go. This latter example, produced for a lesbian audience, has an almost exact ‘pair’ in which what ‘goes’ is not clothes but shoes: When love like this happens to people like us…/the shoes are the first to go. This suggests heteronormative love constitutes comfortable domesticity because again sex is nowhere to be seen. This pair exemplifies the tendency toward parallel narratives, the constitution of sex and love as separate, together with a tendency to appraise desire as love. These are tendencies that pose an obstacle for a re-writing of the love-story, despite the dispersal of the coda.

Such tendencies, together with the valorising of love over sex, are a feature of egalitarian political philosophies (Diprose 1998:3). Such traditions are anti-sex and pro-love discourses ‘insofar as [they are] anti-body, promoting a politics of immunisation, through egalitarian love and friendship, against the threat the body seems to pose to freedom and autonomy’ (p.3). Where self is consciousness, then sex, in overrunning consciousness, overruns the self. This produces both the desire to make sex safe and, for Vogler’s (1998) exemplary heterosexual husbands, the hope that sex will enable an escape from self. Both are futile: sex – even jouissance - does not liberate existence and sex is never safe. This does not pose a difficulty for desire, rather it requires the acknowledgement that sex always poses a threat to the self because bodies by definition invite ‘possession’, the antithesis of freedom (Diprose 1998:7). In danger, unable or not desiring to escape, the love-story’s metonymically constituted couple

---

310 Diprose is interested in the way that the discourse of safe sex that pertains to HIV/AIDS has ‘rekindled a broader ideal of women’s safety from the perceived dangers of erotic life’ (p.1). In finding a way through this, while ‘still accounting for the feminist concern that sex can be violent and a violation of being’, Diprose reads de Beauvoir against Sartre’s antithesis to the body and in particular to the female body as a threat to individual freedom (p.3).

311 Sex is never safe because it involves ‘the pain of transfiguration inherent in the erotic encounter: the pain of tearing away from self’ (Diprose 1998:11).
doing egalitarian intimacy resort to self-expression. Having worked hard to constitute
couple as ‘self’ and ‘other’, they deserve a way of ‘resolving’ the iterated complication
of desire without it being the kind of ending of desire that mutuality is. What can be
offered, on Diprose’s analysis, is generosity\textsuperscript{312} in the erotic encounter. The enactment
of desire through generosity between ‘I’ and ‘you’ involves:

a generosity of mind and body, love and desire which undermines those
distinctions and which, by assuming ambiguity of existence, views the erotic
encounter as one means of extending a woman’s own existence through others
without entrapment. (p.3).

Sex, in Diprose’s account, can be an opening of the lived body to the other, ‘a giving
without calculation’ and is not driven toward self-actualisation but neither is it
altruistic, getting something in return through the future possibilities it opens (p.10).
Usefully, the erotic encounter formulated through generosity does not require its
subjects to be economically secure or to be all the ‘same’ (in this manner it is ‘queer’).
Desire may thus be realised for subjects whose relations are structured through gender
inequalities in heterosexual relations. Sex can in this way come back into the love-story
without being re-written as love or egalitarian self-expression.

A love-story with the coda dispersed in iterative components means the trajectory of
the narrative is not toward overcoming difference, rather it is non-finite: coupling.
Such a re-writing of the love-story is immanent in its structure and provides space for
the kind of ‘depersonalising intimacies’ or queering of heteronormative intimacy that
will involve both sex and love having a place in the story, as fun-and-love greeting
cards already hint and some cards already tell it.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has given a textualised account of doing intimate relationships as
structured through the love-stories that constitute fun-and-love greeting cards. Both

\textsuperscript{312} Generosity is defined by Diprose as ‘a giving that enhances the self through the other’
This, she points out, goes beyond the English meaning of generosity defined as nobility,
magnanimity, or liberal giving, taking as precedent for this extended meaning, its use in French
philosophy and citing, in particular, Descartes: generosity is ‘a virtue based on the knowledge
that nothing truly belongs to me and on the will to do what I judge to be best, a virtue that is the
cause of rightful self-esteem and that prevents feeling contempt for others’ (Descartes 1985:384
mytho-romantic and self-expression or therapeutic versions of the love-story were identified in the corpus. Fun-and-love greeting cards texts realise many generic fragments of those stories. As a meaning making fragment, the fun-and-love greeting card’s advantages over occasion greeting cards is that it is available for many more sending situations: it does not realise a specific social process, such as ‘getting married’. The fragmentary nature of the fun-and-love greeting card, its ambiguities and multiplicities – the very qualities that are so problematic to Papson (1986) and Finkelstein (1994a) and not understood by greeting card producers – are the qualities that suggest its productiveness, despite certain cards tending towards heteronormative romance.

From one perspective, the love-story is a stable genre but the particular way fun-and-love cards proliferate traces its instability. Coupling, analysed as a key moment in the love story, provides an explanation of the paradoxical growth pattern of this group of non-occasion greeting cards. Coupling, as a process of merging toward mutuality was seen to swamp the couple’s desire for each other, re-writing the intimate relationship as either sex-less or antagonistic, although the metonymic subject of therapeutic egalitarian intimacy provides the glimmer of a different kind of coupling relation. An important difficulty for the metonymic subject is the insistence on confession toward solidarity and unity in therapeutic and self expression discourses. In achieving intimacy through confession, the lovers are caught in a complex of power relations. While ostensibly egalitarian, therapeutic intimacy, if refracted through gender brings women – who Vogler (1998) suggests, use talk to escape from their calcified sense of self – under the social control of their husbands. A particular kind of confession, realising a political discourse of visibility, informs the production and consumption process of fun-and-love greeting cards for gay and lesbian audiences. It is a strategy not without certain risks. Fun-and-love greeting cards constitute fragments of ‘doing intimacy’, constituting for interlocutors love and sex, occasionally, love and sex in the same ‘breath’ and sometimes desire that is queered. In the proliferative context of non-occasion greeting cards, mytho-romantic and therapeutic love-stories do not manage to take up all the meaning potential of the genre. Fun-and-love greeting cards realise fragments of an intimacy that is, largely, but not entirely romanticised or therapeutic. The central difficulty for any attempt to re-write the great love story between you and me is
the privileging of the coda function, which has been understood here, through Derrida (1976), as the desire for and the impossibility of closure. The strategy was to redistribute the coda function across the narrative structure (so, for example, falling in love contains within itself the knowledge of the end of that love). A particular process, complication\resolution, comes into prominence through the dispersal of the coda and one ‘complication’, carnal desire and its relation to love, was focused on. Desire (sex) is only occasionally tied to love in the corpus, in keeping with the privileging of love and its oppositional structuring in egalitarian discourses, although Diprose (1998) offers an ethical and erotic posture between the lovers, an opening toward the other in which the other’s alterity is not destroyed. In order to bring love and sex back together in the love-story, as it always already is, the story’s metonymically constituted couple is written as coupling with generosity. According to the analysis of fun-and-love greeting cards, these rewritings are necessary for both heterosexual and homosexual love-stories. Written into those love-stories may be an intimacy that does not eradicate desire/text.
Conclusion

Introduction

The fun-and-love greeting card’s recent emergence and proliferation is related to a particular configuration of the fluidity between the public and private, a confessional mode of discourse, a ‘self’ defined in relation to emotion and its alienability, and instability in the systems of gender. This is not news in the sense that these are a confluence running throughout this cultural moment but the thesis has traced how these come together with respect to a particular sociocultural artefact’s production and practices associated with that artefact.

As a technology for the performance of intimacy, the greeting card’s commodified texting of love is both troubling and troublesome. The last issue for the thesis to address is thus an issue of implication: does it matter that intimate relationships are terrain commodified by printed artefacts that invent, renew and constitute interactants as romantic, desiring, intimate subjects? The answer to that question will take the form of a recapitulation of the main concerns of the thesis.

Texted love: little texts and emotional moments

The greeting card has long been either dismissed as trite or charged with ruining real social relations. By taking meaning making resources to be social, heterogeneous and multiple and by analysing how fun-and-love greeting cards deploy those resources, in particular, lexicogrammatical and visual resources, and by treating the terrains of intimate relations and cultural commodity production to be in a fluid relation, the thesis’ analysis of greeting cards offers a more complex account.

Texted love constitutes a social practice that is enacted as part of the conditions forming what an emotionalised and commodified cultural moment enables and allows as intimate relations. Affect is proliferating, spreading throughout public as well as
private discourse: in advertising, talk-back radio, work-place relations and politics.

This ‘emotionalisation’ of discourse involves a complex of relations, although the thesis has focused on gender relations. Given a long tradition of women being the legitimate speakers of affect – a fraught position in a sociocultural context where public discourses of rationality have been privileged – the twin processes of the emotionalisation of the public domain and the commodification of the private constitute a positive rupture of the naturalised relation between women and the emotional realm, although it is not unproblematic. The idea of the rational, in the form of corporatised love, invading the private is useful in that discourses of rationalism and individualism as they operate in the public sphere understand persons to be autonomous and equal. For feminists this has enabled an analysis of intimacy as a relation between equal partners who must necessarily negotiate their intimacy. For example, in privatised intimate love relationships physical violence is no longer considered legitimate (and is now subject to legal sanction in Australia). The logic of this conclusion is derived from an acceptance of important liberal ideas such as equality and freedom. So, while the language of the market place has produced important gains for women, such as certain freedoms under a regime of individualism, its usefulness is balanced to some extent by contradictions. For instance, the inconsistency in liberal individualism and conservative politics exemplified by intolerance of homo-sexual practices and attempts to refuse lesbian claims for access to reproductive technologies and fulfill a homo-romantic version of the heteronormative love-story.

Accounts by informants for this study suggest that texted love is an important and useful resource for doing the dangerous discursive work of intimacy. In a ‘deconstructive’ spirit, the thesis rejected analysing those informants through a dichotomy of a ‘duped’ or ‘postmodern’ consumer (in the guise of a subject contiguous with a commodified and dissimulated life). The greeting card was designated as a-commodity-that-is-consumed-to-be-given-away, treating it as an example of the way in which cultural artefacts instantiate both exchange and gift economies. Love, as what is being bought and given away, has the status of being an inalienable possession in the culture, a value that makes it a site of struggle and contestation. How fun-and-love greeting cards are involved in that struggle was explored specifically through gender relations, although by focusing on a low priced
communication commodity, the thesis also examined a complex set of relations between social groups and fun-and-love greeting cards as romantic commodities that are otherwise backgrounded through economic differentiation. Greeting card users, for example, differentiate themselves with respect to certain ideas about mass production and self-expression, as seen in a hierarchy of texted and blank greeting card use. Specifically, blank greeting cards were analysed as being involved in the cultivation of a self shaped through a discourse of authenticity, although that sense of self is nonetheless contaminated by the awareness that performances of ‘authentic self-expression’ with an anonymously and mass produced text are problematic. Rather than decrying such performances, blank greeting card use was read as exemplifying a certain kind of work consuming subjects do to position themselves in capitalist relations. As there is no avoiding consuming in large scale contemporary industrialised societies, it is the necessary work of enunciating social relations with commodities, constituting a position from which to consume. The ways subjects negotiate the dilemmas of consuming will continue to have salience, suggesting a site for further investigation.

The thesis has sought to position texted love, as realised by the sociocultural artefact fun-and-love greeting cards, as a productive assemblage. The domains of the intimate relationship and sociocultural artefact fun-and-love greeting cards articulate in ways that are ‘new’ and unpredicted historically, making meaning potential available in unanticipated ways and making certain social practices available to culturally unanticipated subjects. This was not seen as a liberatory effect, however. While print technology, in the form of fun-and-love greeting cards, generates access to ways of speaking and doing intimacy, against this democratising impulse, as Frow (1990) has pointed out, mechanical reproduction has seemingly worked to raise the value of the ‘original’ (suggesting similar predictions about the democratising effects of multi-media digital technologies are equally problematic). In particular, the cultural value of the ‘original’ makes a claim for ‘authenticity’ against the ‘synthetic’. This binary is a thread traced in discourses on greeting cards and the intimate relations they may be deployed in. While recognising the imperative to consume – although implicitly – critiques of greeting cards nevertheless specify them as simulacra destroying social relations and enjoin women to give up using them, promoting face-to-face speech as an authentic way of doing intimate interactional work. Against such a diagnosis, the
thesis, following Derrida (1976; 1981), has suggested that the inscription of writing as an untenable aestheticisation of speech is unsustainable and face-to-face speech is an idealised form of communication. The use of fun-and-love greeting cards challenges ‘talk’ as a privileged mode of ‘expressing’ love and doing intimacy. It is a mode relying on the force of presence to constitute a distinction between authentic ‘from the heart’ speech and ‘synthetic’ texted love. Fun-and-love greeting cards constitute and are constituted by an instability in the privileging of speech and a shifting power relationship between social subjects, as speakers, and the ‘word’ (in Derrida’s sense). Technologies, literacies and democracies have produced possibilities that mean social subjects are able to have a closer relationship with the word, challenging the authority of all those who have laid claim to it, including experts from various disciplines and fields. The issue of who is using the fun-and-love greeting card to do intimate interactional work was, therefore, in part, answered as: a subjectivity for which texted love is a valued and meaningful artefact (Huisman 1999).

While greeting card industry accounts of the use of greeting cards suggest that card givers and recipients are women, those accounts are limited to data on the use of occasion greeting cards. Fun-and-love greeting cards are not doing the same kind of interactional work. The occasion card occupies the domain of the familial or kin relationship, whereas the non-occasion fun-and-love greeting card is constitutive of the intimate relationship. It was accepted that women continue to be the predominant users of non-occasion greeting cards, therefore, the recipient of a fun-and-love greeting card, in a normative account of intimacy, is not a woman but a man. A traditional heterosexual pairing is not the only kind for whom the fun-and-love greeting card constitutes meaning making, although heteronormative discourses continue to constitute a normalising power in social relations. Homo-romantic intimacies realised by fun-and-love greeting cards are infected with heteronormativity, according the analysis of texts produced for lesbian and gay audiences in Chapter 7. The heteronormative is also always struggling to represent itself as an impossible purity and its conservative tendency has a counter in the corpus, particularly as seen in visual images. The visual representation of homosexual and lesbian desire puts into the discursive sexual subjectivities that disrupt the hegemony of heteronormativity. Visible signs of homo-sexual desire in popular and everyday sociocultural artefacts like greeting cards, while bringing certain risks of ‘incorporation’ (Düttman 1997), erupt
out of an absence that an image saturated culture has otherwise constituted for homosexual subjects.

Interactional work using fun-and-love greeting cards by individuals in intimate relationships is a practice that unsettles a discourse of naturalness around doing intimacy. This is most important with respect to women, who are naturalised as the subjects of the private and intimate. While texted and commodified emotion constitutes a fissure in the naturalised relation between feminine subjects and performances of intimacy and emotion, it simultaneously creates an opportunity for the intimate/emotional domain, which has been compulsorily occupied by feminine subjects, to be re-occupied by masculine subjects. Some headway was made in describing conditions of men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards. From a social semiotic perspective, some of the sociocultural capital involved is generic repertoire – the genre/s through which intimate interactional work is performed in the culture, although fun-and-love greeting cards are only fragments of such genres. A limited shift in the distribution of sociocultural capital is suggested by this study. Some men it seems are doing certain kinds of intimate interactional work that was previously a discursive unknown: that, according to one informant, he ‘hadn’t even thought of doing before’. That men may be doing interactional work with fun-and-love greeting cards in intimate relationships is not just a case of picking up a new tool to do an old job; the fun-and-love greeting card does not simply replace the bunch of flowers bought out of obligation on a partner’s birthday or as an act of contrition. Intimate interactional work is a practice that contests current hegemonic discourses of both masculinity and of a naturalised intimacy. Such an analysis does not answer the question of whether or not a ‘bloke’ can engage in such practices and still be a ‘bloke’. This cannot be answered unequivocally. The ‘bloke’ is not a fixed and singular identity and is realised in individual instances over and over, as a particularity. A masculine subject’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards for doing intimacy is an example of the deployment of a semiotic resource in ‘inventive’ ways by subjects engaged in construing intimacy (as they may understand it) in the context of contemporary socio-sexual relationships.

If men are using fun-and-love greeting cards, they are occupying a domain that is not traditionally mascuinised. Arguments that this is a process of ‘colonisation and
appropriation’ of a feminine domain were analysed as making visible a struggle around control of affectual discourse that has traditionally engaged feminine subjects in an alliance around control of the ‘magic’ of the inalienable possession love. This analysis enabled a recognition that while the issue of who gets to speak affect is at stake, woven throughout are losses and gains for women and men. So, for example, working class men’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards might be applauded by Illouz (1997) who treats their ‘romantic competence’ as requiring improvement, suggesting, as a pedagogy, certain therapeutic intimacies discourses that emerge within individualism and commodification. Such discourses were traced in the lexicogrammatical analysis of the corpus of fun-and-love greeting cards. Fun-and-love greeting cards are concerned with constituting affectual relations between ‘I’ and ‘you’, constituting a couple and excluding others. The texts pattern an inner world, one constituted by mental processes, concerned with self. While stereotypically feminised subjects are constituted through interiority discourses, they are usually considered to be concerned with others not self. Self expression and therapeutic intimacies were analysed as problematic processes constituted by and constitutive of egalitarian discourse.

As a social semiotic resource for ‘inventing’, renewing and reconstituting a romantic and desiring subject, the couple, specified most cogently in the formation of ‘we’, is the privileged subject of fun-and-love greeting cards in the romance love-story and therapeutic or self-expression versions. In the register of the fun-and-love card, ‘the couple’ is constituted as both a mytho-romantic subject of unification and an egalitarian combination, a metonymic structuring of the intimate pair. The metonymic couple is iterated through discursive strategies such as the mobilisation of a language of solidarity, confessional discourse and relationship management strategies, as well as romantic love and carnal desire. A metonymically constituted coupling is an imperative of the privileged position of the individual in Western egalitarian discourse, although it was analysed as in tension with the love-story’s tendency towards erasure of discursive difference between ‘I’ and ‘I’ in the formation of ‘us’. The most important technique for achieving such an erasure are disclosures between ‘I’ and ‘you’, a process that not only builds a discursive history in which everything is known about each other but promises self actualisation. That assemblage of practices was read as an expansion of meaning potential for the couple, coming at the cost of meaning potential
for the self. This is an impossible tension in a love-story constituted by Western individualistic and egalitarian discourse and it is a process that ‘erases’ desire. Egalitarian discourses and confessional modes of doing intimacy constitute a unity that silences the production of difference that is, text, or put another way, intimacy as sameness through talk inevitably produces its own extinction. This constitutes a limit to the usefulness of certain fun-and-love greeting cards.

The value of a therapeutic mode of doing intimacy (and thus its value as a pedagogy for working class men’s romantic ‘incompetence’) is problematised by this analysis of the erasure of difference and by Vogler’s (1998) argument that the subjects Illouz identifies as having already learned certain romance skills – middle class men and women – are trying to escape this mode of doing intimacy because it produces a calcified sense of self. A regime of therapeutic or self-expression intimacy brings women and men’s bodies in different ways under the disciplining effect of modern bio-power. Heteronormative intimacy organised by therapeutic discourse means women’s use of fun-and-love greeting cards is a disclosure (of feelings, thoughts, etc.), affirming the position of the husband as confessor. For men, the intimate relationship constituted through therapeutic discourse has become a site where they must do interactional work. So, by taking a Marxist approach to power, Illouz sends working class subjects into the arms of modern bio-power. That working class masculine subjects (and it could be argued some working class feminine subjects, e.g. as Helen’s experience of interpersonal social relations exemplified) do not do intimacy ‘competently’ means they have not been incorporated or ‘recognised’, in Düttmann’s (1997) terms, as docile, middle class selves. This disciplining effect appears to involve specific benefits for women, among others, whose safety is compromised by the operation of masculine interpersonal violence (silence or the refusal to respond is included in this idea of interpersonal violence). Certain masculinist discourses have accompanied this movement. So, while mutuality is a greater danger to intimacy than fun-and-love greeting cards, these masculinist discourses and their legitimacy in the sociopolitical realm hold greater danger for women than texted love. While the thesis does not speak directly to the analysis of these masculinist discourses, what is derived from the analysis is an imperative to re-write the love-story in a way that intimacy as difference can be written, spoken and practiced (and therefore write a love-story where such masculinst discourses might have more difficulty being spoken).
While Vogler’s conception of a depersonalising intimacy as an alternative post-codal scenario might produce the effects that her exemplary middle class heterosexuals seek, such a ‘queered’ desire – required also by homo-romantic subjects – cannot be straightforwardly transplanted into the post-codal space of the love-story. The coda itself is a problematic site, a site of erasure in Derrida’s (1976) terms. This suggested the strategy that was followed: to rewrite the love-story in terms of the structural configuration of the coda. A space for intimacy as difference, the thesis has suggested, is a possibility immanent in the structuring of the narrative. It is a possibility energised by the dispersal of the coda through iterative elements of the love-story. The importance of this from the perspective of doing intimacy is that it is a space where emergent feminist discourses on intimacy as difference, for example, the embodied generous intimacy that Diprose (1998) imbues desire and love with, can be written. This is not to suggest that such rewritings are not already going on in everyday practices of intimacy. And, while the interpersonal and emotional realm has, at long last, become a focus for analysis in a number of fields and has been taken up usefully in textual, cultural and feminist work, as greeting card producers have found in their attempts to apply rational marketing practices to the production of fun-and-love cards, the realm of emotion in some senses suggest the limits of theory.


Banham, Stephen. 1996 Ampersand: [text and design], Melbourne: Letterbox.


______ 1984b Mythologies, London: Paladin
______ 1983b In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities or, The End of the Social and Other Essays, P. Foss, J. Johnston, P. Patton (trans.), New York: Semiotext(e).

_______ 1990 *Class, Codes and Control: the structuring of pedagogic discourse, Volume IV*, London; New York: Routledge


Bolotin, Susan. 1999 ‘Because he says so!’ in *Good Weekend*, supplement to *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney: John Fairfax, April 10, pp.16-20.


Brabandt, Sarah and Mooney, Linda. 1989 ‘Him, Her, or Either: sex of person addressed and interpersonal communication’, *Sex Roles* vol. 20 no. 1 & 2, January, pp.47-58.


Chase, Ernst. D. [1926] 1971 *The Romance of Greeting Cards: an historical account of the origin, evolution and development of the Christmas card, valentine and other forms of...*
engraved or printed greetings from earliest days to the present time, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press., Republished Tower Books: Detroit.


Clifford, James. and Marcus, G. (eds), 1986 Writing Culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography, Berkeley: University of California Press.


D’Souza, Christa. 2001 ‘I’ll show you mine’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 7, p.5.


______ 1972 The Archaeology of Knowledge, London: Tavistock
Frow, John. 1990 ‘The Last Things Before the Last: notes on “White Noise”’, South
Atlantic Quarterly, vol. 89 no. 2, pp.413-430.
______ 1997a ‘What was postmodernism?’ in J. Frow, Time and Commodity Culture:
______ 1997b ‘Gift and Commodity’ in J. Frow, Time and Commodity Culture: essays in
Frow, John and Morris, Meaghan. 1996 ‘Australian Cultural Studies’ in J. Storey (ed.),
Game, Ann and Pringle, Rosemary. 1983 Gender at work, Sydney: George Allen and
Unwin.
(eds), Beyond Marxism? Interventions After Marx, Leichhardt, NSW: Intervention.
pp.143-161.
______ 1995 ‘Between Sexes: care or justice’ in B. Almond (ed.), Introducing Applied
Giddens, Anthony. 1991 Modernity and Self-Identity: self and society in the late modern age,
California: Stanford University Press.
______ 1992 The Transformation of Intimacy: intimacy, sexuality, love and eroticism in
Gilbert, Nigel., Burrows, Roger., Pollert, Anna (eds), 1992 Fordism and Flexibility:
division and change, Macmillan: Hampshire.
Gilligan, Carol. 1982 In A Different Voice: psychological theory and women’s development,
Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
Goffman, Erving. 1972 The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Woodstock, New York:
Overlock Press.
Language and Social Context, London; Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books,
pp.311-357.
Granato, Len. 1997 Newspaper feature writing, Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University
Press.
Grosz, Elizabeth. 1995 ‘Sexual Signatures: feminism after the death of the author’ in E.
Grosz, space, time, perversion: the politics of bodies, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
Hall, Stuart and Jefferson, Tony. (eds), 1976 Resistance Through Rituals: youth subcultures
in post-war Britain, London: Hutchinson.


Hallmark Cards Australia Limited. 1993a *Our ranging philosophies.*


______ No date, obtained 1994. *What is a family today? For Hallmark, a challenge.*


Harris, Gavin and Sargent, Dave. 1983 ‘Miles and Beyond: looking at physique(s)’, *Outrage*, no. 5, August 1983.


______ 1997 ‘Cannibalism and Community: the commodification and consumption of ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ identity’ in *Queer Zone, Working Papers in Feminist Cultural Studies*, no. 4, University of Western Sydney, Nepean, pp.18-25.


Liell, Pam. 1998 Before the phone: 100 years of postcard messages, Strathfield North, NSW: P. Liell.


Lucashenko, M. 1994 ‘No Other Truth?: Aboriginal women and Australian feminism’, Social Alternatives vol. 12 no. 4, January.


Mac an Ghaill, Máirtín. 1996 *Understanding Masculinities: social relations and cultural arenas*, Buckingham: Open University Press.


McCracken, Grant. 1988 *Culture and Consumption: new approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.


McRobbie, Angela. 1980 ‘Settling Accounts with Subcultures: a feminist critique’ in *Screen Education*, (34), Spring, pp.37-49.

_______ 1991 *Feminism and Youth Culture: from Jackie to Just Seventeen*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.

______ 1997 ‘Bridging the Gap: feminism, fashion and consumption’, Feminist Review, no. 55, Spring, pp.73-89.


National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children from their families (Australia). 1997 *Bringing them Home: report of the National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children from their families* [Commissioner: Ronald Wilson], Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.


*Panic Encyclopedia: The Definitive Guide to the Postmodern Scene.*


Poynton, Cate. 1985 *Language and Gender: making the difference*, Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University Press. 

_____ 1990 ‘The Privileging of Representation and the Marginalising of the Interpersonal: a metaphor of contemporary gender relations’ in T. Threadgold


Prices Surveillance Authority Australia. 1990 *Investigation into the Greeting Card Industry*, September.


Rakow, Lana. 1992 *Gender on the line: women, the telephone, and community life*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.


Sarch, Amy. 1993 ‘Making the Connection: single women’s use of the telephone in dating relationships with men’, *Journal of Communication*, vol. 43 no. 2, pp.128-44.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1983 *Course in General Linguistics*, Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye with the collaboration of Albert Riedlinger (eds), Roy Harris (trans. and annotations), London: Duckworth.


Schor, Naomi. 1987 *Reading in Detail: aesthetics and the feminine*, New York: Methuen.

Sefton, P. 1990 *Making Plans for Nigel, or Defining interfaces between computational representations of linguistic structure and output systems: adding intonation, punctuation and typography systems to the PENMAN system*, unpublished B.A. Honours thesis, Department of Linguistics, University of Sydney.


Spirituality, Leadership and Management Network (SlaM) http://slam.net.au/ [accessed December 11, 2000]


Stewart, Susan. 1993 *On longing: narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection*, Durham: Duke University Press.


Tannen, Deborah. 1991 *You just don’t understand: men and women in conversation*, Random House: Milson’s Point, NSW.


_______ 1988a ‘Language and Gender’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 6, Autumn, pp.41-70.


Tomkins, Silvan S. 1962 *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness, volume 1*, New York: Springer.


Usherwood, Barbara. 2000 ‘“Mrs Housewife and Her Grocer”: the advent of self-service food shopping in Britain’ in M. Andrews and M. M. Talbot (eds), *All the World and Her Husband: women in twentieth-century consumer culture*, London; New York: Cassell, pp.113-130.

Valentine, Virginia. and Evans, Malcom. 1993 ‘The Darkside of the Onion: rethinking the meanings of “rational” and “emotional” responses’, *Journal of the Market Research Society*, vol. 35 no. 2, April, pp.125-143.


Williams, Carolyn. 1996 *Identity, difference and the ‘other’: a genealogical investigation of lesbian feminism, the ‘sex wars’ and beyond*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Sydney, Nepean.


_______ 1983 *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*, London: Fontana.

Williamson, Judith. 1986 *Consuming Passions: the dynamics of popular culture*, London; New York; Marion Boyars.


Appendix A

Primary Sources


Interview with Paul Cook, *Hallmark Cards Australia Limited* (Sales Promotion Manager), 3rd December 1993.


Interview with Kathy McAuliffe, *John Sands Greetings Pty Ltd* (Marketing Manager), 5th February 1996.

Other primary sources