

Derivation and Application of a Model of Lens Meaning

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## Abstract

The twofold purpose of this study was to ground a model of *Lens Meaning* in the literature of the Fine Arts and Social Sciences and to use that term as a referent in evaluating three Media Studies curricula.

*Lens Meaning* is a term derived from a variety of sources, particularly Peirce (1955), whose semiotic theory described three systems of signs used as terms on one axis of a matrix or model by which *Lens Meaning* can be described. These terms are: "index", "icon", and "symbol". DeLauretis' (1984) expanded understanding of another system of signs described by Peirce, interpretants, is the foundation for the three terms on the other axis of the matrix. Those terms, which describe interpretation or response, are: "emotional", "energetic", and "habit changing". These, and other terms identified in the literature, provided a conceptual model that might be applied to the analysis and evaluation of programs of Media Studies, and similar documents.

Three Media Studies programs were selected for study: from Western Australia, Ontario, and Scotland. Application of the model permitted conclusions to be drawn on the extent to which current issues of an ideological and sociopolitical nature were addressed by these programs. It was concluded that the model achieved the purposes required of it and that it may be of further utility for educators.

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# Chapter 1

## Criticism and the Camera

### Introduction

*"It has been said that not he who is ignorant of writing but ignorant of photography will be the illiterate of the future."*

(Benjamin, 1980, p. 215)

The early vision of the revolutionary impact of photography cited above has not been shared by many of those educators whose supposed job it is to guard society against ignorance and illiteracy, but that doesn't mean that the writer was wrong. The barrage of messages about self and society conveyed to us via the lens is so vast that, like the numbing silence of white noise, it has become effectively invisible. Photo-historian and critic A.D. Coleman (1986) has gone so far as to make the suggestion that we have been a lens culture since a specific point in the 16th century, and that lens tools in various forms have metaphorically defined the way we know ourselves and our world. A statistical litany of instances of photography, film or video in our daily lives would be a monotonous reprise of the obvious. Just try to imagine what life would be like if all the products of television, film, and photography were to vanish today. Unplug the televisions; lock up the family photo albums; board up the movie theatres; paint over most advertising billboards; and, of course, eliminate from the classroom all lens products, from pictures in textbooks and filmstrips to overhead projectors and educational video. Both figuratively and literally, the term "dark ages" comes to mind.

## The Problem and Key Questions

The problem is to determine how existing Media Studies curricula address the study of meaning in lens imagery.

The questions which this study will consider are:

1. Can a theoretical understanding of the concept of *Lens Meaning* be supported by the literature of the various disciplines which have addressed the uses and meanings of lens media?

2. Can a conceptual rendering of *Lens Meaning* be devised that is suitable for the analysis of Media Studies program materials?

3. To what extent is *Lens Meaning* applicable to educational practice?

Chapter two will offer a brief survey of major positions considered in the literature on the philosophy of meaning, followed by an argument for the term *Lens Meaning* as philosophically sound and useful for this study. The importance and difficulty of building or adopting categorization schemes will be addressed as part of this chapter. Peirce's tripartite system of signs (Peirce, 1955) as expanded by DeLauretis (1984) will be used as a foundation for this research, but the study is intended, in part, to examine the literature for patterns and potential categories that make up a conception of *Lens Meaning* in the literature without promising a rigid structure to that conception.

Chapters three to six will identify and survey the literature that can address the legitimacy of the term *Lens Meaning*. While the array of fields surveyed may seem chaotic including, as it does, extensive writings in the arts, social sciences and education, these disciplines do represent the scope of media study. As Geertz (1980) has suggested,

The properties connecting texts with one another, that put them, ontologically anyway, on the same level, are coming to seem as important in characterizing them as those dividing them; and rather than face an array of natural kinds, fixed types divided by sharp qualitative differences, we more and more see ourselves surrounded by a vast, almost continuous field of variously intended and diversely constructed works we can order only practically, relationally, and as our purposes prompt us. (p. 166)

Chapter six also synthesizes the material in the preceding chapters into a conception of *Lens Meaning* in the form of a matrix. Chapters seven, eight and nine together represent analysis and evaluation phases directed toward the three Media Studies curricula considered by the study. Each specific curriculum will get a chapter of its own. The first portions of chapters seven, eight, and nine will involve the descriptive analysis of the respective Media Studies curricula with regard to their teaching of *Lens Meaning*, within the terms of the matrix. These qualitative summaries will use what Worthen and Sanders call "informal content analysis" (1987, p. 314). Examples of similar approaches to curriculum evaluation in the Arts and Media Studies include: Bayer (1983), Bazalgette (1986), and Shoemaker (1987). Quantitative methods of content analysis, as described by Weber (1985) and Dym (1985), are inappropriate for understanding the complex interrelationships under consideration in this study.

The evaluation of each of the three Media Studies curricula described above will be addressed at the end of Chapters seven, eight, and nine. As Eisner (1985) suggests: "The significance of [curriculum] content can be determined only with criteria that flow from a set of values about what counts educationally. But whatever these criteria are, and they will differ for different groups and individuals, the application of such criteria is

important for appraising the value of the curriculum in the first place" (p. 201). Thus, implications of the scope and focus of each curriculum will be discussed in relation to the literature surveyed, and in relation to those terms identified in the matrix presented in Chapter six.

### **Justification for the Study**

"The media" has become an inclusive term that covers the mass production and distribution of still and moving images presented cinematically, electronically and in print, as well as the aural and printed mass presentation of words, and the presentation of music and other nonverbal sounds. The media communicate visually, verbally, and aurally via global, popular communications networks such as newspapers, magazines, computers, radios, films and, of course, television. Without question, governments and giant industries which largely own or regulate the media have particular interests, such as profit and control, that are served by these popular means of distributing news, entertainment, and advertising (Nelson, 1987). When viewed as a tool used in building and maintaining economic and cultural hegemony, it is understandable that Hans Magnus Enzenberger coined the term "consciousness industry" (Enzenberger, 1974) in describing the institutional use of mass media.

Echoing the optimism of theorists such as Brecht and Benjamin, recent empirical studies (Manley-Casimir, 1987; Boeckmann & Hipfl, 1987) have argued that children are not just "passive victims" of the media. Instead, it is argued, children construct meaning from media messages using the tools of their life-experience. The circularity in this is that if the child's life-experience is based in large part on the television that they have viewed, then they may be victims of a closed system. It does not seem reasonable to expect an individual whose knowledge is mainly the

result of exposure to the mass media to be "naturally" able to bring a critical stance to reception of that "mediated" information, but this is not because of a fundamental lack of potential for critical awareness. The suggestion that children's (and adults') interpretations of the media are active implies the potential for a critical consciousness that should be developed and expanded (Brecht, 1977; Hefzallah, 1987).

Given the impact of the various lens media as ubiquitous tools of communication in our society, it is puzzling that so little has been done in schools to equip children with the fundamentals for thinking critically about those images. Art educator Vincent Lanier's very tentative suggestion that "some newer media can be looked upon as ends in themselves" (Lanier, 1966, p. 7), that is, as legitimate art forms, was a comment hidden in an article otherwise devoted to encouraging teachers to teach with, not teach about, newer media. This is a long way from recognizing the capacity to convey meaning that is a demonstrable aspect of the lens images that surround us. Rogena Degge (1985), Dan Nadaner (1985) and Terry Barrett (1986) are among the very few North American art educators who teach about the pervasiveness of media images.

In a recent study of children's development in understanding television, Jaglom and Gardner comment that "our culture has not yet invented ways of presenting [television] or teaching its structure to children" (Jaglom & Gardner, 1981, p. 35). And while Media Studies programs are in place or being developed around the world (Masterman, 1980, 1985; Dake, 1982; Horsfield, 1987; Adams, 1988), fundamental pedagogical and curricular questions such as whether media are more appropriately taught across the curriculum or as a separate specialty (Learmouth, 1985, p. 6) or, in fact, if the media should be taught at all (Evans, 1985, p. 1), are still being hotly debated. There is also

fragmentation in the field as to whether the tools of the media function neutrally, so that any meaning found in a media text has been transparently conveyed from other "meaningful" sources; or if the media function as unique visual languages with systematic codes that differ from natural language; or if McLuhan's aphorism (1964) about the medium itself being the message is applicable.

While the structure of those parts of media messages that rely on words to communicate needs to be studied and taught, at least some of the knowledge and critical skills necessary to deal with that task are currently a part of most language arts programs. The fact that most current Media Studies programs are a part of Language Arts curricula (Duncan, 1988; Horsfield, 1987) and that many media educators took their training as students of Literature (Bazalgette, 1986) suggests the strength of representation by this field in Media Studies. The same cannot be said of the fields that concern themselves with the visual and aural aspects of Media Studies' interdisciplinary whole. In reviewing *Making Sense of the Media* (Hartley, Goulden, & O'Sullivan, 1985) a British media studies curriculum, Bazalgette (1986) draws attention to the principal split in media studies, which he identifies as being between a literary/aesthetic approach and a sociological approach. In discussing the relationship of film theory to instructional television, Degraff (1985) suggests that the literature on television has a sociological critique, but little sense of the form and structure of the medium. This study's thesis is, in part, that a rich understanding of the visual in the media can and should inform both literary/aesthetic and sociological approaches to Media Studies.

The lens image's presence and impact in our society is undeniable. What is it then that keeps educators, and the public generally, from

recognizing these pictures as the constructed objects that they are? Why do we all too often accept them as unmediated reality?

The issue of "realism" has always been central to discussion of the lens image. From the beginning, the camera offered a kind of "realistic" image (Kracauer, 1960) that seemed to go far beyond "mere" representation. Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre described photography in almost biological terms when he called his invention "a chemical and physical process which gives Nature the ability to reproduce herself" (Newhall, 1964, p. 17). George Bernard Shaw, one of many late nineteenth and early twentieth century literary figures fascinated by the camera, declared that:

If you cannot see at a glance that the old game is up, that the camera has hopelessly beaten the pencil and paint brush as an instrument of artistic representation, then you will never make a true critic: you are only, like most critics, a picture fancier. (Cited in Bunnell, 1980, p. 3)

More recent writers, such as Susan Sontag (1973) and Max Kozloff (1979, 1987), discuss the realism of lens images in terms of their capacity to fascinate and disarm the viewer. Film theorist Dudley Andrews (1984) sets the image in motion, suggesting that:

Psychologically, cinema does indeed affect us as a natural phenomenon. Viewers employ their eyes and ears to apprehend visual and aural forms corresponding to things, beings, and situations in the world. The full machinery of cinema, the cinema as an invention of popular science, ensures that we can see anew, see more, but also see in the same way. Most important, this naturalness suggests an attitude for spectators that involves curiosity and alertness within a "horizon" of familiarity. (p. 19)

From the field of television education, Len Masterman (1980) adds that:

The study of television is vital not simply because it is such a pervasive and influential medium, but, as we have seen, because of its apparent transparency and naturalness. Knowledge of the mediated and constructed nature of the television message, and of the ways in which pictures are used selectively ought to be part of the common stock of every person's knowledge in a world where communication at all levels is both increasingly visual and industrialized. (p.13)

Because we perceive lens images in all their forms in a way that differs only minimally from our perception of reality, that is, because we receive them as virtually natural, we tend not to bring to those images the kind of critical sensibility that would allow us to form a reasoned interpretation and valuation of their message. There is ample evidence of this in the successes of politicians and advertisers in persuading consumers simply to act on the basis of the careful manipulation of an image (Taylor, 1987). Part of the camera's power as a tool of communication lies in the fact that our first response to lens imagery is often uncritical. We do not readily recognize these images as intentional objects that have been constructed by another.

### **Summary**

This study has three purposes.

1.) To survey the literature, and to identify various disciplines' contributions to a theoretical understanding of the concept of *Lens Meaning*.

Part of the work of this study is to critically survey the literature of film, photography and television, in order to build a comprehensive sense of the debate about critical response to lens imagery. This survey will include, in addition to writings in aesthetics and film technology, those areas of the social sciences which have made the understanding of lens images a central concern. Writings in education, especially as they pertain to television studies where educators have taken critical leadership, will also be included as an introduction to the final, evaluative portion of this study.

Edmund Feldman, in *Varieties of Visual Experience* (Feldman, 1972), argues that the end of art criticism is a broadened understanding of the meaning and value of an image, and the means to that end is through talk. The general absence of talk about lens media in the schools, as evidenced by the continued call for the development of such programs (Jaglom, L. & Gardner, H. 1981; Finn, P., 1980; O'Rourke, B., 1981; Boeckmann, 1985; Trend, 1988), suggests that the school system doesn't consider the interpretation of the filmic, photographic and video images surrounding us to be a problem. I would argue that the real problem is that teachers are not in a position to teach students to understand the media because they don't understand the media very well themselves. This may be, in part, because the mass media cross categories. It is unusual to find a teacher who feels competent in film, photography, video, aesthetics, anthropology, sociology, history, and psychology. It is hoped this study will help to rationalize media studies through a clarification of terms and purpose, and point the way to those aspects of various subject fields offering the greatest relevance for education in Media Studies.

It is the thesis of this study that understanding lens media requires interdisciplinary activity. Furthermore, while few teachers have all these

competencies, most teachers use the media in their classrooms. Just as Language Arts educators argue that every classroom, regardless of the content of the course being taught, is (for better or worse) a language class, every classroom, whether incidentally or intentionally, is a media studies lab. Introductory statements in existing Media Studies curricula reflect this sense of mission

In modern society our view of the world is heavily dependent on our exposure to the mass media. The ways in which we see our collective selves and the global environment into which we fit are increasingly affected by television, the press, radio, cinema, and advertising...Our school system must pay proper attention to the ways in which the mass media exert influence. (Adams, 1988, p.1)

Because the media play such an important role in our culture and because they are so significant in our understanding of ourselves in society, it would seem essential that the school curriculum should make provisions for the study of the processes and mechanisms by which this occurs. (Ministry of Education, Ontario 1987, p. 20)

A curriculum that comprehensively considers strategies for critical viewing would play an important part in equipping teachers to recognize and direct the lessons being learned in their classrooms about the meaning of media messages.

**2.) To provide a conceptual rendering of *Lens Meaning* that may be applied to the analysis of program materials.**

Despite the scope and seeming diversity of the disciplines being addressed in this study, there are conceptual threads held in common. It is

these interconnections that will function as the foundation of the conceptual schema.

**3.) To effect a practical connection between theory and educational practice through application of *Lens Meaning*.**

In providing a meeting place for philosophy and education around the issue of *Lens Meaning*, this study may have relevance for the larger issue of meaning in the media.

Each of these parties—the philosopher and the educator—learns something from the other. The philosopher gets hints about what knowledge is from studying the learning and teaching process, which shows what actually counts as knowledge in the practical context. And the educator picks up suggestions about what knowledge is, but perhaps more importantly, is not, by listening to philosophers make distinctions or clarify the relationships between knowledge, on the one hand, and instincts or attitudes or skills or habits or feelings, on the other; and between learning on the one hand and experiencing or living or changing or trying on the other. (Scriven, 1988, p.132)

It is not the purpose of this study to pass judgement on the desirability of adopting these curricula that are to be evaluated.

Criticism and evaluation have much in common: in purpose, process, and impact. Both can be useful. Both can injure. Both are potentially harmful when the critic-evaluator presumes to be a surrogate decision maker, recommending to another what course to take without revealing the values to which he is responding. The critic-evaluator can play a different role, a helpmate role (even, of course, with negative findings), enabling another to make his decisions on

the grounds of additional experience, vicarious experience. Two measures of the value of evaluation are its increment of added experience and its increase in response alternatives. (Stake, 1975, pp. 26-27)

This study will analyse Media Studies curricula and evaluate them only in relation to a model of what could become a curriculum that teaches *Lens Meaning*. The ultimate aim is for media educators, (including art educators) to be better equipped to select or design curricula that fit their own and their students' needs and values.

## Chapter 2

# The Meaning(s) of Lens Meaning

### Introduction

As a photographer and an art educator, I want to come to a better understanding of how lens images (photographs, film and television) convey meaning. This is not a trivial or purely academic concern. Recently American media educator David Trend observed that

Media studies of any kind are virtually nonexistent in elementary and secondary schools. Yet serious studies of film, photography, and video are most needed in these latter areas, as students encounter powerful mechanisms of socialization that will follow them the rest of their lives...Without a pedagogical imperative, the broader mission of progressive culture stands in jeopardy. (Trend, 1988, p. 10).

The argument being initiated here is intended to draw further attention among educators to the meanings conveyed by lens media. To this end this chapter will describe three key metaphors drawn from film and photographic theory and connect them with Peirce's semiotics (1955) to build a foundation for further discussion.

### Lens Meaning

In his essay "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning" (1984), Allen Sekula suggests that:

All photographic communication seems to take place within the conditions of a kind of binary folklore. That is, there is a "symbolist"

folk-myth and a "realist" folk-myth. The misleading but popular form of this opposition is "art photography" vs. "documentary photography." Every photograph tends, at any given moment of reading in any given context, toward one of these two poles of meaning. The oppositions between these two poles are as follows: photographer as seer vs. photographer as witness, photography as expression vs. photography as reportage, theories of imagination (and inner truth) vs. theories of empirical truth, affective value vs. informative value, and finally, metaphoric signification vs. metonymic signification. (pp. 20-21)

Sekula refers directly to two layers of signification (form as meaning and content as meaning) and indirectly to a third (context as meaning). His argument suggests that there is a constant tension between form and content notions of meaning. Sekula's allusion to context outside this struggle suggests that it functions as an over-arching influence on meaning, much as the arena is the larger context in which two boxers vie for domination.

Sekula's tripartite conception of photographic meaning is a useful starting point for discussion. However, in order to expand his notions to include photography, film, and television, I must create a term "*Lens Meaning*," by which I mean the understanding that results from use (whether through making or viewing) of lens images. By lens images I mean any visual representation, whether projected on a screen (including a television screen), or in the air (as in a holograph), or printed on a page or other surface, that has been created or reproduced with the aid of a lens and any chemically or electronically light sensitive matrix. I hope that I am avoiding the pitfalls that Michael Scriven attributes to redefinition in conceptual analysis (in Jaeger, 1988, p. 138), simply because *Lens*

*Meaning*, as far as I can tell, is a new term, not a redefinition of an older one. In one sense the term narrows considerably a large field in philosophy, by limiting concern to meaning only as it refers to lens images. At the same time, by combining the technologies of photography, film, and television, it runs counter to much modernist writing in the aesthetics of these media, which tries to explore the "nature" and uniqueness of each separately.

One purpose of this study is to analyze terminology that people use to critically discuss lens media and imagery, and to suggest that the new term, *Lens Meaning*, can be applied to much of what has been said about photography, film, and television. Additionally, I want to argue that collapsing these three technologies into one larger category is both a useful and an appropriate (if not final) step when considering visual signification. Bright (1989), in discussing ideological issues related to mass-media representation, recommends not considering photography as a separate category apart from television or film, or any other mode of "photographic" representation. [She calls] the separation of objects of study by medium...a rather dated conceit of formalist art history which tends to obscure issues of content and history in favour of the seemingly self-evident unity of expressive form and materials" (Bright, 1989, pp. 12-13).

Coleman has applied J. David Bolter's concept of "defining technology" (Coleman, 1986, p. 10) to the lens. Bolter (1984) suggests that:

A defining technology develops links, metaphorical or otherwise, with a culture's science, philosophy or literature; it is always available to serve as a metaphor, example, model, or symbol. A defining technology resembles a magnifying glass, which collects and focuses seemingly disparate ideas in a culture into one bright, sometimes piercing ray. Technology does not call forth major cultural

changes by itself, but it does bring ideas into new focus by explaining or exemplifying them in new ways to larger audiences. (p. 11)

It is intriguing that Bolter, in discussing the computer, which he wants to label a defining technology because it has resulted in a "general redefinition of...mankind's [relationship] to the world of nature" (p. 9), uses the metaphor of the lens just in the way that he suggests a defining technology would be used. Coleman starts from this base and traces the impact of the lens from its beginnings to the 16th century. Between 1550 and 1553, Coleman argues, western civilization became a lens culture. In that three year span Girolamo Cardano built the first "modern" camera by affixing a lens to the light-admitting aperture of a camera obscura; Franciscus Maurolycus first suggested that the human eye is like a lens; and two British mathematicians, Leonard and Thomas Digges, designed the first compound lens (Coleman, 1986, p. 13 ).

Coleman's notion of technology's impact on the nature and rapidity of cultural change does not correspond to contemporary theories of culture (Fiske, 1989). His argument does, however, make the important point that in that short, three-year period the *groundwork* was laid for the lens as a technology to become a defining metaphor. The photographic recording of information; the generation of new visual information in the sense that a compound lens makes it possible for us to see what our eyes naturally cannot; and, perhaps most importantly, the acceptance of the images produced by the lens as being like what our eyes see, have been incorporated into the mass communications network that Hans Magnus Enzenberger has labelled "the consciousness industry" (1974).

Thus...it would seem to be vital to our advancement as a culture that we come to understand the extent to which lenses shape, filter and otherwise alter the data which passes [sic] through them—the

extreme degree to which the lens itself *informs* our information. This influence, though radical in many cases, often manifests itself subtly. Yet even the most blatant distortions tend to be taken for granted as a result of the enduring cultural confidence in the essential trustworthiness and impartiality of what is in fact a technology resonant with cultural bias and highly susceptible to manipulation. (Coleman, 1986, p. 18)

Coleman's concern is for what is often referred to as the "transparency" of lens images. There is a tendency for the constructedness of these images to go unrecognized. As Oakeshott argues, it is reasonable to speak of any human product as meaningful.

A human being is the inhabitant of a world composed, not of "things", but of meanings; that is, of occurrences in some manner recognized, identified, understood and responded to in terms of this understanding. It is a world of sentiments, beliefs, and it includes also artifacts (such as books, pictures, musical compositions, tools and utensils) for these, also, are 'expressions' which have meanings and which require to be understood in order to be used and enjoyed. (1975, p. 19)

But in addition to this general sense, lens images are both systematic and institutional, with the lens providing the system, and the mass media providing the institution. This implies that talking about *Lens Meaning* can have much the same logic as talking about meaning and language.

Brian Barry, in his discussion of three theories of meaning in *Political Argument* (Barry, 1965), suggests that the most naive notion of meaning is what he calls, "the causal theory" (p. 17). He describes meaning in this context as being conceived in Pavlovian terms. "An utterance corresponds

to the dinner-bell and the effect of the utterance to the dog's salivating" (p. 17).

In contrast, the "intentional" theory of meaning keys on the speaker's intention. Somehow, meaning is molded by the speaker and the listener's job is to discover that intention. Barry's own conception of meaning takes into account the linguistic forms and conventions of a language, on the one hand, and the social context of particular speech acts on the other.

Just as an individual word may have different meanings and one discovers which meaning is relevant by seeing which fits in with the rest of the sentence, so a sentence may have different meanings and one discovers which is relevant by examining the *context* of its utterance, which includes both the linguistic context (what was said before) and the non-linguistic context (when, where and by whom the sentence is spoken, etc.). (Barry, 1965, p. 24)

Barry's tripartite division of meaning, as will be seen, has direct application in the consideration of *Lens Meaning*. The three categories of *Lens Meaning* that follow are offered not as definitive or exclusive so much as potentially plausible and useful.

In *Speech Acts*, John Searle (1970, pp. 12-13) argues that the linguistic characterizations of one who is deemed to have mastery of his or her native tongue are a valid representation of that language's structure. While Searle's approach has been problematic for some (Derrida, 1977), on the grounds that it side-steps some ongoing theoretical debate regarding structure and intention in communication, it has the advantage of being useful. We have overwhelming evidence that languages are conventional. Similar evidence for the conventionality of *Lens Meaning* is an important foundation for this thesis.

Though the theoretical grounding [in *Lens Meaning*] for most members of this culture is skimpy at best, the direct experience with lens systems and lens imagery is extensive for most of us. Thus, to borrow a concept from Noam Chomsky, the visual equivalent of *linguistic competence* in the language of lens imagery is now commonplace in western society and, increasingly, to be found world-wide. (Coleman, p. 10)

Material provided by Searle, Chomsky (1972), Coleman, Barry and John Wilson, who suggests that meaning is the sum of the various ways that a concept is used (Wilson, 1966, p. 26) allows me to claim the lenticular competence necessary to make valid representations of *Lens Meaning*. By describing the various ways in which lens images are used, I hope to build a framework for discovering *Lens Meaning(s)*.

### Three Key Metaphors

Three key metaphors have grown out of film and photographic theory which emphasize how viewers use images. Images are conceived of as windows, as frames, or as mirrors (Andrews, 1984, pp. 12-13). Perhaps the most common and most disarming way of using lens images is as a window. Film theorist Andre Bazin (1967, and photographic theorist John Szarkowski (1966) have each described this metaphor. Lens images are construed to be windows on the world. What we see in the image is unmediated reality, which we can respond to (i.e., use) accordingly.

It is questionable whether we can even discuss, in terms of meaning, lens images responded to as a window. There are two basic opportunities for the mediation of meaning in lens images: the first is in the production and distribution of the image, and the second is during the reception of the image by the viewer. If the entire filmic or photographic process is

unmediated, then both the producer and the consumer of the image can be seen as looking through the same "window on reality". At that point lens images correspond to Peirce's (1955) notion of indexical signs (see Figure one, pg. 30), and viewing lens images is like being a hunter trying to decipher the meaning of tracks in the snow. If the viewer's response to a lens image is seen as unmediated, then *Lens Meaning* may be described in the Pavlovian terms of the causal theory discussed by Barry.

The subtlety of the effect of the window metaphor can be seen any evening on the television news. We tend to respond to the various news stories as thirty second facts, without much thought of the impact that various framing and editing devices have had on reducing that item of news to thirty entertaining seconds. Consider the often broadcast scenes of twisted automobile wreckage, followed by the blanketed and barely visible form of a victim/survivor being whisked away on an ambulance gurney. This type of scene (subgenre?) is typically bracketed by the words of a trenchcoated and microphone-clutching reporter. We, the viewing audience, feel that we understand the reality of that accident and yet, based on what we have (and have not) seen, we have no conception of the ramifications of that tragedy. How painful is it to see one's family injured or killed on television? For how many months or years will the survivor of an accident be dealing with the physical and emotional damage? Entertainment must be "tasteful"; it isn't until we experience a tragedy like one in the news that we come to realize how much of the "reality" has been left out. The argument here is not that televisual news could or should offer a global image of an event. Considering *Lens Meaning* through the window metaphor draws attention to the limitations that function to frame in and frame out visual information. The window metaphor becomes troublesome when those limitation go unrecognized.

A different example can be seen in family photographs. If film and television are "windows on the present", then photography is a window on the past. Consider the boxes of family snapshots gathering dust in most households, those images judged too poor to be placed in a photo album. It is difficult for most people to destroy even poorly photographed or duplicated images of family members. Even those visually inferior images refer strongly to personally significant people, places, and events. In this sense, photographs take on the indexical significance of a religious relic. Like the sliver from the "true cross", the family photo can be perceived as being one step closer to "what was" than would a drawing or another more iconic representation. In talking about an indexical sign, significance is derived from the causal or physical relationship between a sign and its referent. Virtually every writer in film, photography, and television has had to deal with the apparent "reality" of the lens image. The point being that, regardless of our lenticular sophistication, we (in the west, and increasingly the rest of the world) continue to use lens images as evidence of past events and even as literal emanations of them.

In using a photograph or film as a framed image, we respond to the image as a construction (like a painting) by an artist. This corresponds to Barry's description of the intentional theory of meaning, but using what Peirce would have called iconic signs (see Figure one, pg. 30). Along with the indexical signs of the artist's labor in, for example, a painted portrait, iconic signs have a qualitative connection with their referent (the subject of the painting) that is meaningful. Our task as viewers of this art-image is to discover the layers of meaning that the artist has intentionally (and occasionally unintentionally) built into the image. Early theorists who subscribed to this notion of filmic meaning include the Russian filmmaker

and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein (1949) and Gestalt psychologist Rudolf Arnheim (1974).

A film released in the late 1980's in North America, *Commissar* (Askoldov, 1967), specifically draws attention to this tradition through the heavy use of montage in combining unlikely imagery and musical fragments for metaphoric effect. As a specific example, consider the following three-shot sequence: In shot one three young children squirm naked in their bathtub with their mother in attendance. Off-stage a clatter of hoofs on cobblestone is heard. Shot two cuts to the front of the children's home where the three children, still wet and naked, are watching the road. The camera pans from eye level down to ground level as a horsedrawn caisson carrying a cannon pulls noisily along the road. As the shot progresses we see alternately the wheels of the wagon, which are rolling between the camera and the children, and the three children's genitalia effectively stop-framed by those same wheels. The third shot dissolves to ground level looking up as the caisson rolls over the camera's position. As this final shot progresses the huge and unavoidably phallic cannon advances across the screen. Indexically this sequence shows children watching a noisy procession, but the shifting point of view so common in montage alerts us to an iconic level of meaning. Our task as viewers is to make sense of these images of innocence and war, sexuality and power. There is no reason why any lens image cannot be used in this way. Any time that we recognize and try to interpret (in a literary sense) the "signs of suture" (that is, the work of the cinematographers, actors, editors, directors, etc.) "by means of which cinematic texts confer subjectivity on their viewers" (Silverman, 1983, p. 195), we are using that image in a framed and intentional sense. To the extent that studio portraiture or

family photo albums function as historical fiction presenting an ideal self-image or an ideal family narrative, they are being used as iconic signs.

The most complex of the three metaphors is that of the lens image as mirror. A mirror not only reflects a viewing subject, but also a context (the viewer's environment). A mirror is a site for self-examination and fantasy, for critical realism and narcissistic self-absorption. Like a mirror, the lens image reflects, and some would argue constructs, social conventions, and, like a mirror, is a site for viewing subjects to work out (consciously or subconsciously) their relationship to those conventions. The mirror metaphor corresponds to Peirce's understanding of symbolic signs (see Figure one, pg. 30).

Drawing from psychoanalysis and Freud's appropriation of the myth of Narcissus, lens images can be seen as reflecting back on their spectators. In *The Imaginary Signifier* (1981), Christian Metz combines semiotic theory with Freudian psychoanalysis in an analysis of film meaning. The issue becomes one of discovering the nature of spectatorship in relation to lens images. If one assumes, as Metz does, that there is a deep structure driving, or at least guiding, our relationship with lens imagery, then understanding from this perspective can only be derived through the careful discovery and analysis of that structure. Whether working from a Saussurian linguistic mode, as Metz does, or a multiple systems model, such as Peirce's, arguing for the lens media's status as a symbolic language has proven to be difficult. The referential nature of lens images gets in the way of the arbitrariness that is basic to symbolic language systems.

Kaja Silverman (1983) uses semiotic analysis and Lacanian psychoanalysis to discuss what she calls suture. In her sense of the term, suture is a metaphor for narrative. Just as castration creates an absence, and presumably a dissatisfaction or desire, awareness of the limited vision

implied by the film frame creates a dissatisfaction that can only be healed (just as literal sutures help a wound heal) by helping the spectators feel that they are a part of the filmic narrative, so that they will forget about themselves. The shot/ reverse shot sequence, the camera movement and editing commonly used when filming a conversation between two people, is offered as an example of this strategy at work. By allowing the viewer to see the second person involved in the conversation, the person occupying the viewer's (the camera's) position, is nudged toward adopting that new character's persona. Our dissatisfaction over our inability to control the images that are being presented to us can be temporarily relinquished (or appropriated) in favour of a voyeuristic projection of ourselves into one of the characters (See footnote 1).

### **The Complexities of *Lens Meaning***

Many writers using semiotic analysis in the context of the cinema set photography outside the discussion. For them the basic unit of signification is the shot (one continuous run of a movie camera), which may literally be the result of thousands of individual photographs. Their concern is less with the visual, per se, and more with narrative flow and its signification. Max Kozloff (1987) argues that much advertising photography, and some art images as well, work in a narrative way. He describes the ambiguous sexual relations depicted in the bedroom scenes used by Calvin Klein to sell blue jeans and cotton underwear. Using dramatic stage lighting, young, muscular male and female models, poses that dramatize triangular (and even more complex) relationships, and various degrees of nudity, the ads create a world that is lurid and desirable and into which we are drawn as spectator/consumers.

One approach to criticism recognizes the active interplay of the conscious and unconscious within the receiver of a visual sign, that sign being a product of a signifying system at work in a cultural context. This multi-dimensional conception of communication creates problems for adherents to a "pure" semiotics. But, as Julia Kristeva has argued:

One phase of semiology is now over: that which runs from Saussure and Peirce to the Prague School and structuralism...The theory of meaning now stands at a crossroads: either it will remain an attempt at formalizing meaning-systems by increasing sophistication of the logico-mathematical tools which enable it to formulate models on the basis of a conception...of meaning as the act of a transcendental ego, cut off from its body, its unconscious, and also its history; or else it will attune itself to the theory of the speaking subject as a divided subject (conscious/unconscious) and go on to attempt to specify the types of operations characteristic of the two sides of this split. (Kristeva, 1973, p. 1249)

This kind of approach can imply a kind of rigorous analysis of lens images that would have a very narrow, academic application. Semiotic analysis of film, television or photography is simply too arduous a task to expect of a general viewing public. If, however, we relax the metaphor somewhat (use a larger mirror!) this critical analysis implies, in a general sense, merely that we become aware of ourselves in front of the lens image and in a social context. From the theatre of Brecht, Walter Benjamin drew much of his inspiration for his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (Benjamin, 1935), wherein he celebrated the lens media's potential to replace art with something more like visual communication, in which the audience played a conscious and critical part.

Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art. The reactionary attitude toward a Picasso painting changes into the progressive reaction toward a Chaplin movie. The progressive reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert. Such fusion is of great social significance. The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public. The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion. With regard to the screen, the critical and the receptive attitudes of the public coincide. (Benjamin, 1985, p. 688)

Whether the potential for a fusion of criticism and reception is often met, it is still argued that the lens media can be used for critical reflection on both self and society.

DeLauretis (1984), writing on the semiotics of film from a feminist perspective, has argued that a more complete understanding of Peirce's semiotics must include a conception of a viewer or reader. Peirce describes the semiotic chain as including what he called an "interpretant" (1955), which is a new sign created in the mind of the reader/viewer. This new sign is a result of the original or external sign, and has three classes of effects, according to DeLauretis.

1. The first proper significate effect of a sign is a feeling produced by it. This is the *emotional* interpretant. Although its "foundation of truth" may be slight at times, often this remains the only effect produced by a sign such as, for example, the performance of a piece of music.
2. When a further significate effect is produced, however, it is "through the mediation of the emotional interpretant"; and this second type of meaning effect he calls the *energetic* interpretant, for

it involves an "effort" which may be muscular exertion but is more usually a mental effort, "an exertion from the inner world." 3. The third and final type of meaning effect that may be produced by the sign, through the mediation of the former two, is "*a habit change*": "a modification of a person's tendencies toward action, resulting from previous experience and previous exertions." (DeLauretis, 1984, pp. 173-4)

Figure one on page 30 incorporates DeLauretis' recognition of the role of the viewer by introducing the three categories of response (emotional, energetic, and habit changing). This enriches Peirce's semiotic categories by including the use that viewers make of visual imagery. As DeLauretis describes them, interpretants, the viewer's new internal signs, are based on an increasingly profound response to an external sign. The viewer is described as progressing from a simple and immediate **emotional** reaction, through a more physically or intellectually engaged **energetic** response to the life/culture altering level of a **habit change**. The overlapping layers represent visually the progressive quality of interpretants as DeLauretis describes them. The vertical and horizontal dimensions created by these categories of signs and interpretants create a system of cross-references. One of the functions of the survey of the literature in Chapters three, four, five, and six will be to discover the ways the intersection of different signs and viewer responses draw attention to issues and concerns that can expand understanding of *Lens Meaning*.

### Summary

The term *Lens Meaning* can be seen to involve three overlapping sign systems and three progressively more profound degrees of response. A lens image's indexical meaning is determined by the process of that

image's manufacture, as well as our belief in its physical "truthfulness", a belief not unlike our belief in the reality of what we see through a window. The extent to which a lens image has a physical relationship with its subject determines the image's capacity to function within the window metaphor. Of significance to critical study of media is an appreciation of the limits of the indexicality or "truth value" of lens images. The extent to which a lens image has (or is perceived to have) a qualitative relationship with its subject determines the image's capacity to function within the "frame" metaphor. The perception of an image's qualitative similarities with its subject can cause the viewer to consider intention on the part of the image maker or to weigh the significance of what the image reveals about its subject. The extent to which a lens image can function as a symbolic sign that reflects or inflects its social context determines the extent to which we can understand its meaning in terms of the "mirror" metaphor. It is possible and reasonable, by way of conclusion, to describe these three metaphors in combination. In the perhaps dimly lit room of our experience, we peer through our window at a darkened landscape. We are conscious of an external reality that is not entirely clear because poorly lit. We are also conscious of the window's frame and the carpenter's or architect's decision as it influences our view. Finally, because it is slightly darker outside than in, we see, mixed with the "out there", dim reflections of ourselves and our room. All three layers of significance function at once, though in all probability we can only focus on one of them at a time. In almost every instance of our experience with *Lens Meaning*, "reality" is a combination of what is being described through the metaphors of window, frame, and mirror. For the purposes of this thesis we will continue to focus on these different layers one at a time.

That the visual qualities of a lens image can all be influenced by physical contexts such as sequencing, accompanying words, music and general noise, gives some sense of the further complexity of response to the mass media. Add to this the fact that each of us, as a viewer, brings a personal context of desires, beliefs, and experiences that contributes to the construction of meaning and it becomes clear why trying to come to grips with *Lens Meaning* is a substantial task. Whether a viewer of the mass media becomes a critical user of lens imagery, as described by Fiske (1989), or remains simply a consumer of those images, is determined, in part, by the breadth of critical understanding that that viewer brings to the viewing experience.

# UNDERSTANDING *LENS MEANING*

		<u>SIGNS</u>		
<u>INTERPRETANTS</u>		INDEX	ICON	SYMBOL
EMOTIONAL		1) Realism	4) Expression	7) Conceptualism
ENERGETIC		2) Mechanism	5) Control	8) Production
HABIT CHANGE		3) Presentation	6) Representation	9) Acculturation

Figure one

## Chapter 3

### Live Television

#### Indexicality and *Lens Meaning*

##### Introduction

It is the purpose of this chapter to survey various fields in the Fine Arts, Education and the Social Sciences which have used or considered the meaning of the use of lens images as indexical signs. Surveying the literature that considers how we make sense of the visual media requires the assumption of what Robert Allen (1987), has called "the spirit of post-structuralist humility," (p. 5), that is, a recognition that from this literature's breadth and complexity one can discover a number of useful if sometimes contradictory perspectives rather than one law-like structure. Not every category of discourse in the literature will be described as it applies to each of the fields of film, photography, television, visual anthropology, visual sociology, visual history, and visual psychology. Such a survey would be both unwieldy and redundant. In many cases writers in these fields are drawing on a common theoretical literature of contemporary criticism for their particular ends. Instead, Chapters three, through six will explore specific visual texts and issues that each field has identified as exemplary, and that will function as the foundation and reference point for the later analysis and evaluation of media studies curriculum materials with reference to *Lens Meaning*.

Indexicality can be seen to have a denotative and a connotative level. All lens images, regardless of media, denote indexicality. We know that the

physics of the lens requires that a lens image's subject had to have some kind of existence in order to be recorded. It is this denotative indexicality held in common by all lens images that allows us to group them together in this discussion. Indexicality's connotations build on the fact of a lens image's manufacture to support our understanding of lens images as truthful, or real. While the denotation of indexicality is fixed and empirically measurable, its connotation slides over a range of possibilities that suggest what the indexicality of an image can mean to a viewer. Again, it is important to recognize that there is a distinction to be made between the indexicality of a sign, and indexicality as a sign. Where indexicality itself is the sign, the signified is often some notion of "truth". All of the lens images are indexical in fact as well as carrying indexicality as a sign. This double indexicality accounts in large part for the lens media's disturbing, delightful power over us. The remainder of this chapter will explore the connotation of indexicality because it is in exploring the connotation of indexicality that the different lens media can be distinguished from each other (Deleuze, 1989; Metz, 1990).

Television has been selected as the most useful medium from which to explore indexicality and *Lens Meaning* because it is the only one of the three major forms of lens imagery that is also a broadcast medium. As such, television's supporting technology makes it possible to talk about the reality of "seeing now" as well as the reality of "seeing over time" as one can with film, and the reality of "seeing better", or gratuitous detail, as you can with photography.

### **Televisual "Reality"**

An advertisement broadcast in the late 1980's opens with a series of shots of various wholesome, energetic looking, "country folk" (denim pants,

plaid shirts rolled up at the sleeves, etc.) gathering around buckets of Kentucky Fried Chicken. The look and blocking of the ad borrow heavily from the boisterous bonding typical of contemporary beer ads. Most intriguing are the lyrics to the jingle accompanying these images of deep-fried camaraderie, which say, "This isn't Dallas or Dynasty, This isn't a fantasy. This is reality." The viewer is, presumably, to take the images brought to the screen by Colonel Sanders as being real, in contrast to prime-time soap images of the characters J.R. Ewing and Alexis Carrington, which are supposed not to be. This interesting self-referentiality, which is an increasing feature within the medium of television, begs the question: Are ads more real than prime-time soaps? More generally, are there in fact more or less "real" genres in TV?

In another context, two feminist photographic exhibits (Wilkie, 1987, pp. 58-59) (Bociurkiw, 1989, pp. 18-19) each argue in different ways that "the visual history of women is an incomplete record. If we don't make a [photographic] record of our lives it's as if we didn't exist" (Wilkie, p. 59). One show is a documentary presentation of young women living together in group homes (Wilkie); in the other, lesbian sexuality is expressed through erotic/ pornographic photography (Bociurkiw). In both cases the artists felt that the socially marginal subjects of their camerawork were given the status of "existing in society" by the images produced of them. At least in part, the message here seems to be that to be photographed, filmed, or videotaped is to be real. In a curious inversion of the notion of "stealing the spirit" with a camera; the lens is seen as the avenue for giving people on the margins of the cultural mainstream an existence, or as Ann Kaplan describes it, "to structure a community" (Kaplan, 1987, p. 152). What can be discerned here is a collapsing together of sign as symbol and sign as index.

In these examples, various facets of lens media and its capacity to reveal "reality" is a central issue. Can the lens transmit, reflect, or create "reality"? From Daguerre's early pronouncements (Newhall, 1964, p. 17), to current writing on the ideology of realism in mainstream Hollywood cinema (Klinger, 1984, pp. 30-44) and commercial television (Fiske, 1987), lens images are often attributed a kind of truth value that Barthes (1981) called "the photographic ecstasy" (p. 119) and which he described as a kind of madness: a madness that Jameson (1983) sees as symptomatic of a Lacanian kind of schizophrenia.

When we speak of the real, we may be talking about personal perceptions, cultural norms, or supposedly objective measures. When we use the term "realism" to refer to any contemporary art form we are typically assuming that such work is an aesthetic representation of the real. But for some, "real" may mean that the work transparently transmits some "out there" reality for our perception (Kracauer, 1985), while for others it may mean that the work constructs a self-contained reality that we accept at a conceptual level (Bazin, 1967). To argue that this range of possibilities is simple or even linear does an injustice to a centuries-old debate that continues.

### **The Four "Realities" of Television News**

Without conceding any higher degree of truth value or trustworthiness to television than may be attributed to film or photography, the literature argues that television, on a number of levels, is perceived as being more "real" than either of the other two lens media (Arlen, 1981; Fiske, 1987; Rapping; 1987). This perception can be understood, in the face of art's problematic relationship with realism, as a kind of naivety. With television at least four potentially contradictory

understandings of "reality" may be recognised. For television, "reality" can be understood to mean: **presentness, immediacy, normativity** and **contradiction**. Meaning is found in the way that (in this case) images are used. Thus, lens images are described as being real or realistic. This is not so much an attribute of the images as of ways in which those images are perceived by the sender and, perhaps more importantly, the receiver.

### **The Reality of the Present**

The literature that deals with the reality depicted by television as a universal, to be ever more effectively captured as technology and technique improve, requires the additional study of the technologies behind the production and distribution of the television image, as well as its semiotic and psychoanalytic analysis. That part of the literature that considers reality a social construction of a viewer surrounded by media messages is especially suited to ideological analysis, and to the development of reception theory as applied to the televisual image.

In a simple physical sense, the presence of television sets in the majority of North American homes places televisual imagery in a position to dominate leisure-time activity. The access that the public has to that imagery means that it may be the information source of choice or even necessity for whole segments of the population where illiteracy and economic restrictions bar many from other sources of media information (Williams, 1986). While photographic print images may cycle in and out of many homes, the T.V. is constantly there, constantly ready to relay an ever-growing selection of broadcast signals. Where film viewing involves a decision with fairly active consequences, television viewing is typically incidental to daily routine. Thus, television is more **present** (and more a part of daily experience) than are either photography or film. This daily

presence can give television the status of being part of every-day, or "real" life.

Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1987), in linking psychoanalysis, as it has grown out of film theory, with television, draws attention to a critical difference between how the viewer looks at film and at television. The phenomenon is discussed by Metz in *The Imaginary Signifier* (1982) in Freudian terms, and then evolved through Lacan and beyond by a number of feminist writers (Mulvey, 1975; De Lauretis, 1984; Tebbatt, 1988). The film text is built visually to demand (through editing for continuity, and the darkened theatre environment) and reward (through pleasurable, dream-like regression) a sustained gaze. "Th[is] gaze implies a concentration of the spectator's activity of looking" (Flitterman-Lewis, p. 187). In contrast, "the TV viewer's attention is, at best, only partial (for all kinds of reasons, from the commercial, "interruptions" to the domestic location of the TV set); there is a diffraction of the cinema's controlling gaze" (p. 187). "As John Ellis (1977) has pointed out, instead of demanding the sustained gaze of the cinema, TV merely requires that its viewers glance in its direction" (Flitterman-Lewis, 1987, p. 187). Where film viewing elicits, through image and viewing context, the suspension of "real time" in favour of an illusory dream-reality, TV "is not Plato's cave for an hour and a half, but a privatized electronic grotto, a miniature sound and light show to distract our attention from the pressure without or within" (Stam, 1983, p. 23). Instead of experiencing the pleasures of the omniscient dreamer that film offers, the TV viewer functions as a blissfully irresponsible gardener, building a kind of order out of the chaotic fragments of TV programming or letting a particular channel's offerings, announcements, and ads proceed according to their institutionally pre-ordained plan.

## The Reality of the Immediate

Depending on whom you ask, the quintessential televisual form is the 24 hour Rock Video station, news programming, or the soap opera (Flitterman-Lewis, 1987). Some would argue that the latter two forms are in many ways indistinguishable.

There is a phrase that has gained currency among TV folk lately: "Reality Programming." It is the industry term for the phenomenon signalled by the success of local news—the fact that more and more people seem to prefer nonfiction on TV. They watch local news in the same spirit that they watch soap operas—in an effort to feel some intense, ongoing human drama in which no matter how bad things may get or seem, there is always a silver lining, an upbeat ending, a hero to solve the problem or at least explain it. (Rapping, 1987, p. 59.)

Rapping's conception of the news as upbeat fiction is often contradicted by the form's immediacy. In discussing televisual realism, this notion of **immediacy** is especially recognizable as a key to news programming.

It is television's peculiar form of "presentness"—its implicit claim to be live—that founds the impression [and the fact] of immediacy: TV's electronically produced, present-tense image suggests a permanently alive view on the world; the generalized fantasy of the television...image is exactly that it is direct, and direct for me. A sort of "present continuous" is created, confusing the immediate time of the image with the time of the events shown, and thereby reducing the interplay of presence and absence that we find in the cinema (where we're always seeing the present image of an absent object/actor). Put another way, a film is always distanced from us in

time (whatever we see on the screen has already occurred at a time when we weren't there), whereas television, with its capacity to record and display images simultaneously with our viewing, offers a quality of [immediacy] "here and now" as distinct from the cinema's "there and then." (Flitterman-Lewis, 1987, p. 189)

Television news programming goes to great lengths to strengthen the technological fact and visual impression of televisual immediacy. "No other TV genre brings together such a range of technological competence. Arguably, the network news show is essentially a showcase for the latest in electronics hardware and a celebration of television itself. Over the past thirty-five years, the technological goal of television news has always been to achieve more up-to-the-minute coverage of events on location" (Nelson, 1987, p. 98). What does "liveness" look like, and how does this impression of immediacy influence the way we understand television news messages?

The first question focuses attention on semiotic analysis, the systematic analysis of signs. Film theorists, among others, have drawn heavily on the philosophical writings in structural linguistics of Saussure, (1966) and Peirce's (1955) theories of signs in efforts to come to a more systematic understanding of visual communication. The lens mediated text of a daily local news broadcast points to those visual qualities which connote "live," with its concomitant connotation of "real." There are any number of examples of the semiotic analysis of television texts in the literature. These typically involve a classification of a sequence into cinematic shots with the content of each shot, listed in some detail (Seiter, 1987, pp. 32-5), followed by an interpretation of the significance of each camera movement, detail of setting, costuming, blocking, lighting, and dialogue. This second, interpretational stage is important because it draws attention to the bias built into, but for a time ignored in semiotic analysis.

The universalizing tendencies of early semiotic analysis in film (Metz, 1974) have given way to more interpretationally based strategies. As Allen suggests, "semiotics can most usefully be seen as a descriptive method [which can be used] as a tool to ask larger questions of the television text" (Allen, 1987, p. 38).

In British Columbia the prime 6-7 p.m. news slot is occupied by two competing programs whose offerings are visually typical of news programs across North America. CBC, the Canadian national (and nationalized) television network has a local news offering in this time slot, as does BCTV, the regional affiliate of "the other", somewhat more governmentally independent, Canadian national network. In each case, the sets, the graphics, the on-screen personalities, and the camerawork function to define a different presence for each program. In both cases there are layers of "reality" built into the programming's realism which exist at varying distances from the viewing present. Two features of news programming generally have been identified in the literature as key to TV news' immediacy: the anchor's visual relationship with the viewing subject, and the camera's relationship to the anchor in the context of the newsroom set.

I will describe the specific visual qualities of two Canadian TV news personalities, but I do so knowing that each represents a particular type that will be commonly recognized across North America. Both Tony Parsons of BCTV, and Kevin Evans of CBC address us (through the camera) directly, as they introduce or comment on the evening's stories. This direct mode of address is almost a universal convention in television news, and represents one of the major visual differences between most film and television. It is a convention of film (at least in the classic Hollywood mode) that actors should never look at the camera. Psychoanalytic film theory argues that

such a look would break down the illusion that is central to the film experience. Television, set as it is in its domestic viewing context, struggles to create a filmic illusory realism, but it can claim a different and perhaps more potent reality by allowing Tony, or Kevin (we know them by their first names, like any "friend") to speak to us directly in our homes. Within this broad context, subtle visual differences work to create different realities for the viewer of either BCTV news or CBC news. Kevin, who has been described as having the the trimmed and wholesome look of a young R.C.M.P. officer, is consistently cheerful regardless of the topic being discussed, while Tony, who is older, is allowed to editorialize more with his face. Kevin presents the news with virtually no apparent reference to notes, while Tony is constantly working at and reading from a sheaf of papers. There seems to be a contrast between signifiers of performance and "real" work. Kevin keeps his comments with his fellow newscasters to a minimum while Tony's transitional discussions, whether joking or serious, can occasionally take more time than the story they are leading to.

BCTV also uses a wider visual vocabulary, as demonstrated through the camera's relationship to the anchor and the set. We are allowed to see the extent of the BCTV newsroom at various moments during the program, where the CBC cameras limit themselves to views of the set. The contrast here is between a workplace on the one hand, and a performance space on the other. Both anchors are framed in one particular way when they are introducing a story (head and shoulders close-up with room for a computer graphic over one shoulder). When Kevin goes into a more extended commentary, the CBC programmers cut to a second camera that shows a backdrop of institutional pillars and a small banner that displays the CBC logo. There is a definite impression of pulpit-like authority. Tony Parsons, on the other hand, has several avenues for commenting on a story. If he is

talking to us, the same camera angle is used as when he is anchoring a story; the camera just shifts slightly so that he is centered on the screen. BCTV's second camera is at a right angle to the first so that the programmers can cut to a profile shot of Tony. This is used in varying degrees of close-up as the punctuation at the end of stories just before a commercial break. If the story is happy the profile shot is in close-up and Tony often shows a cheery smile. If the story is more serious the camera will still be in close-up but Tony will look down and shuffle papers. If the story was about a personal tragedy, especially one involving children, the camera backs off to a respectful distance so that Tony can "recompose" himself during the commercial break.

Ultimately, the contrast here is between the authority and presence of the CBC as a national institution, and Tony Parsons of the BCTV as a locally recognized personality and "father figure". Not suprisingly BCTV's news programming places more emphasis on local stories, giving a different sense of the immediate than does the CBC's more national perspective.

If reality isn't just what we see, but how we make sense of what we see, then those practices in television news which act to interpret the selection and reception of the day's stories take on the hegemonic role of "helping" us to construct reality.

Those groups with authority (those that constitute what Barthes [1973] calls the bourgeoisie) try to prevent a struggle over meaning by naturalizing *their* meaning - their economic and social power is mobilized discursively, ideologically, and culturally to exnminate itself beyond the realm of potential opposition...As those with social power are, amongst other things, white, male, middle-class, of conservative religion, middle-aged, and living in an economically and

politically powerful region, we may expect the metadiscourse [see footnote 2] of television realism to originate from that social point where these discourses intersect, and therefore to naturalize that point of view and to work toward establishing it as the common-sense consensus of the nation. (Fiske, 1987, p. 44)

Visually, the lens media go to elaborate lengths to place viewers in relation to the image. This visual placing differs in television and in film. Television visually pushes us to identify with the anchor and the reporters as guides rather than as alter egos. In film, the shot-reverse shot sequence is the code in continuity editing that we are seeing things from a particular character's point of view. This is seen in film theory as a door into spectator identification and will be discussed in Chapter four. In news broadcasting we spend a lot of time peeking over reporters' shoulders, barred from identifying with either reporter or subject, before we are allowed to approach the particular newsworthy person or event more closely. Also, newsworthy people rarely address the camera. More often they address the reporter. It isn't until the reporter or anchor interprets and summarizes the story that we are returned to direct address mode. Thus a system of privilege and authority is defined.

### **The Reality of the "Normal"**

Two aspects of television news can be seen to present an impression of every-day normality. One visual code that supports the news broadcast's authority to interpret and thus construct reality is the "nothing up my sleeve" approach to set design and camera movement. Coughie (1980a) differentiates between dramatic and documentary realism. In documentary realism, revealing the technical apparatus involved in creating an image is a sign of honesty. In both BCTV and CBC news, it is

typical, as part of a break to commercial, or closing, for the active camera to dolly or zoom back to reveal the other cameras and technicians at work. With the BCTV news, this approach is more apparent, both in terms of camerawork and set design. On the BCTV set we see, behind Tony and the other newscasters, a distant, out of focus bustle of staff people busily doing what we must assume is real "reporter-work".

Television news also normalizes the disturbing contradictions of reported news events through the figure of the news anchor. In a sense the white, middle class males who typically anchor news programs serve the same function that continuity editing does in film. That is, these news readers function to normalize and smooth over the jarring transitions from segment to segment, by what they say and by the simple fact of their recurring presence. So long as the newscaster keeps reappearing and using a soothing tone of voice, the "realities" of world conflict are normalized and controllable.

### **The Reality of the Contradictory**

Perhaps one of the most common themes running throughout the literature on television studies is the recognition of television as a composite constructed from fragments. Television programming is designed to be interrupted every ten to twelve minutes so that the programme's sponsors (the advertisers) can have access to the viewing audience. Television is, after all, in the business of providing an audience for ads. The epitome of this approach is seen in music video networks such as Much Music, MTV, and the Nashville Network, where the bulk of the programming is also a form of advertising for an entertainment product (records, tapes, and compact disks)(Kaplan, 1987).

Television news is also an essentially fragmented genre. It is made up of a number of sub-genres such as: hard news (international, national, provincial, local), human interest, weather, sports, economics etc. Each of these sub-genres has its own set of conventions in terms of the kinds of stories that can be presented, the tone and manner of the on-scene reporter's and anchor's narrations, as well as the graphics, camera techniques and time allocated. Fiske (1987) points to two results of this fragmentation that are important to the medium's realism and impact. First he draws attention to the importance of surprise in television news.

It is perhaps paradoxical that a convention of news should be its "surprisingness." But the tension between the predictability of the conventions and the assumed unpredictability of "the real" demands some recognition. The whole operation of news gathering and reporting resists this unpredictability, for news stories are essentially prewritten; all that the reporter does is fill in the local details. This conventionalization of the real must never be acknowledged, however, for to do so would expose the transparency fallacy. Surprisingness is therefore valued as a sign that the unpredictability of the real triumphs over the conventionality of news: that it is, finally, reality that determines the news. (Fiske, 1987, p. 286)

Fiske's representation of television news as a kind of prefabrication is useful as far as it goes. Without question, the institutional demands of television networks do not often allow news events to totally determine programming, but it does happen. Events such as earthquakes or other natural disasters will sometimes overtake the television network's capacity to control and program the news. A fairly recent (1990) example positioned between these two extremes is the American network, CNN,

giving Iraqi president Saddam Hussein direct-feed access to the network's U.S. audience for 70 minutes during the political crisis between Iraq and the U.S. In that instance, the network consciously gave up direct control over the message it was sending. Natural surprise, and CNN's temporary transfer of power contrast with the more formalized surprise that Fiske describes. But each reveals a facet of the fragmented presentation of television news which has been identified by Fiske and others (Kaplan, 1987) as characterizing the medium as an agent of cultural normalization and a potential site for cultural contestation. "The semiotic and political practice of categorizing social life into neat compartments-the economy, education, crime, industry, etc.-is essentially a reactionary one, because it implies that a problem can be understood and solved within its own category...and discourages any critical interrogation of the larger social structure" (Fiske, p. 287). On the other hand, it is the gaps, the **contradictions**, between these carefully prepared fragments and the gaps created by network powerlessness or unanticipated viewer perspectives that open a space where viewers can, if they choose, construct "a more radical, or socially literate understanding" (p. 287). Fiske (1989) defines popular culture not as what we buy, but what we do with what we buy. In his example, when we buy blue jeans and then rip them or spatter them with bleach, we are making a consumer product conform to our culture. Similarly, strategies such as time-shifting, channel hopping, an ironic or critical awareness of television content, as well as the more formal responses developed by consumer activists in the last decades, all represent popular cultural responses to television.

## Summary

The connotation of indexicality, as one aspect of *Lens Meaning* can be seen to have spacial, temporal, and cultural aspects. Spacially the lens image can be present in our lives and at the same time allow us to be present in other's. Temporally, lens images allow us to close gaps of time and, in the case of television, to visually experience multiple or simultaneous passages of "real" time. Culturally the lens media's indexicality makes the models of normality offered through the mass media more "real", and this believability is actually strengthened by the contradiction contained in the lens media's fragmented form.

## Chapter 4

# The Visual Aspects of Narrative in Film: Iconic Signs and *Lens Meaning*

### Introduction

As the previous chapter suggests, television is used regularly as direct or documentary evidence, in addition to its use as entertainment. In considering film's place in the lens media, especially in the context of concern with meaning, it is useful to recognize that film is the contemporary visual mass-medium most completely dedicated to entertainment. At its most typical, film is a commercial medium that orders spectacle, dialogue, and sound into fictional narrative presented in the specialized environment of the theatre. It is not surprising, then, that the viewer's conscious and unconscious responses to film have been discussed at length in the film literature. This chapter will explore film as an iconic sign (see Figure one, pg. 30). As such, our concern will be with the literature that explores film as an evocative aesthetic construction.

Theories of film have been around for as long as film has had a significant presence in society. Up to the late 1960's these theories could generally be classified as proposing either realist or formalist aesthetics. Realists, such as Bazin (1967), Kracauer (1985), and others (Freeburg, 1970; Sparshott, 1971; Cavell, 1979; Lewis, 1984; Jarvie, 1987) who have looked for the aesthetic essence of film using criteria of realism, rationality or beauty that are anchored in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have found a kind of *fait accompli* in cinematic technology. Kracauer

argues that, "as in photography, everything depends on the 'right' balance between the realistic [representational] tendency and the formative [expressive] tendency; and the two tendencies are well balanced if the latter does not try to overwhelm the former but eventually follows its lead" (Kracauer, 1985, p. 19). Additionally, critics writing about film in the popular media have often dealt with the medium in literary terms, devoting much of their energy to paraphrasing and analyzing a movie's plot, and simply accepting, unquestioned, the realist's understanding of film as a visual medium. Formalists such as Munsterberg (1916), Eisenstein (1949) and Arnheim (1958) argue that film, as "artwork, does not provide truth in any empirically verifiable sense, but poses an environment which makes possible the experience of perfection" (Lewis, 1984, p. 50). In either case, critics identify aesthetic unity as the sign of good film.

The combination of a romantic modernist valorization of the work of the artist and popular criticism's interest in commercial film can be seen in the Auteur Theory (Wollen, 1972) of the late 1950's and beyond, which designated particular directors of popular (usually Hollywood) films to a canon of artists. As an auteurist, a critic's job is to discover consistencies of style (visual form) and theme (narrative or visual content) across a number of films which can be attributed to the director's personal vision. This type of criticism is typically quite idiosyncratic and, like the aesthetic that is its foundation, assumes an ideal viewer, thus avoiding the issues of possible social or institutional impact by or on the film. Traditional approaches to film criticism talk about meaning at two levels. In a literary-critical sense, meaning is found in discovering the full richness of the film's plot according to critic and convention. Visually, meaning is found through the careful analysis of the *mise en scène* (see footnote 3) the control of which is attributable (at least by auteurists) to the artistry of the director.

Traditional criticism applied to film has thus been essentially realist, which means that the film medium is taken as transparent. Cinematic effects that draw attention to themselves (such as abrupt editing) are seen as aesthetic failings.

Functioning as a counter to traditional aesthetics are the works of those writers who draw from psychoanalysis in their discussion of the role of the unconscious in looking at film (Metz, 1975; Mulvey, 1975; MacCabe, 1976). These more recent critics have found meaning described in psychoanalytic terms, in cinematic devices such as framing, editing and camera movement, which are seen to influence viewer identification and pleasure. Much of this kind of criticism, which is based on the Freudian concept of an unconscious that functions in sexual terms (Freud, 1953) and Lacan's re-working of Freud in the light of structuralist theories of language (Bär, 1974), has been developed in the literature of feminism. Laura Mulvey's pivotal essay (1975) linked the fascination experienced in film viewing with Freud's concept of scopophilia, the narcissistic pleasure to be had through looking at and recognizing the human form. Mulvey goes on to describe how film builds gender difference into its visual structure. The dominant look (both in terms of actors and audience) is male, sadistic, and voyeuristic. Women in film are typically passive and objectified. Many of these relations are coded visually through mechanisms, such as the manipulation of point-of-view, that are such a subtle part of popular film's use of continuity editing (see footnote 4). The female viewer, according to Mulvey, is put in a position of masochistic passivity. More recent feminist criticism (Modleski, 1988; Penley, 1988) has tried to break through Mulvey's vision of patriarchal determinism by positing a bisexual identification in women's experience of film.

Feminist critical methodology finds significance in the film's visual text.

The major breakthrough in feminist film theory has been the displacement of its critical focus from the issue of the positive or negative representations or images of women to the question of the very organization of vision and its effects. This has the decided advantage of demonstrating that processes of imaging women and specifying the gaze in relation to sexual difference...are far more deeply ingrained than one might initially suspect. (Doane, 1987, pp. 176-177)

Feminist visual analysis that draws from psychoanalysis tries to determine who is acting and who is being acted upon; who is looking and who is being looked at; who is controlling and who is being manipulated. This analysis does not limit itself to the dialogue or the *mise en scène*, but considers the cinematic operations in the film and the viewer's relation to the film spectacle. Whether this analysis is specifically feminist or not, if it is considered in psychoanalytic terms it will offer an understanding of the film in terms of absence, desire, and pleasure.

Like the traditional, aesthetic approach to criticism, psychoanalysis limits itself. While it recognizes both conscious and unconscious levels of response to film, psychoanalytic criticism on its own still works within a closed system. The film object is still seen as dominating the viewer's response, and the social and institutional mechanisms at play in the specific film experience are of secondary importance.

That part of contemporary criticism which has been loosely classified as reception theory (Allen, 1987, p. 74), and which is influenced by perceptual psychology, and phenomenological literary criticism, broadens the area of discussion around meaning in narrative fiction by

"foreground[ing] the role of the reader [or viewer] in understanding and deriving pleasure from the literary [or visual] text" (Allen, 1987, p. 74) (see also: Bordwell, 1985). Growing out of Husserl's phenomenology, reader-oriented criticism pays special attention to the work of the reader (or viewer) in filling the gaps that exist in any narrative form. Paralleling, to some extent, psychoanalytic concern with viewer identification in film, reader-oriented criticism concerns itself with identifying and analyzing both implied and "characterized" (Allen, p. 93) narrators and readers. Some recent work in reader-oriented criticism (Fish, 1980; Bennett, 1982) has concentrated on the social conditions that have an impact on reading. Inherent in this critical perspective is a relativism created by the reader's input into meaning. The extreme end of this relativism can be found in Derrida's deconstruction theory, where critical judgement is neither correct nor incorrect. Rather "what counts is the technical skill or verbal brilliance with which the interpretation is put forward" (Medill, 1985, p. 262).

Bordwell (1985) discusses the implications of a reader-oriented approach to film criticism from a more moderate, constructivist perspective (see note 5). He suggests that visually we complete the mental "picture" of a visual experience by scanning and gap-filling. In other words, the "picture" we have in our head of the world around us is the result of constant ocular and mental work. Important to this notion of perception in experience of narrative as it is extended over time are what Bordwell identifies as four motivations based on Russian Formalist film theory. Compositional motivation, according to Bordwell, features "the spectator justifying material in terms of its relevance to story necessity" (p. 36). With realistic motivation, a story element such as a character's behavior or appearance is interpreted as fitting with a reader's "common sense". Transtextual motivation occurs when a reader accepts an element

in a story as being appropriate to its genre, which suggests that the reader is familiar with other, similar stories. Finally, artistic motivation calls for acceptance of a story element as an aesthetic device, regardless of its relevance to the story. Clearly, each of these categories can be applied to visual, as well as literary or aural elements in narrative fiction film. The reader (viewer) works constantly to discover one or several "rational" explanations for what she or he is experiencing in the theatre.

Based on the expectations implicit in these four motivations, Bordwell goes on to cite

Meir Sternberg's theory [that] the pattern of story information *withheld* in the work prompts the perceiver to make hypotheses of various sorts. A hypothesis may pertain to past action that the text refrains from specifying; Sternberg calls this a *curiosity* hypothesis. By contrast, a *suspense* hypothesis is one that sets up anticipations about forthcoming events. Hypotheses may also be more or less *probable*, ranging from the highly likely to the flatly improbable, and more or less *exclusive*, ranging from either/or choices to mixed sets. And since hypotheses arise in the course of time, they may be held simultaneously or successively, as when one hypothesis simply replaces another. (Bordwell, 1985, p. 37)

Bordwell refers to the visual elements in a film that can be understood as motivated, as the film's style. The work of the critic in discussing the visual qualities of a film from a reader-oriented perspective involves identifying those visual cues and gaps (whether they are part of the *mise en scène* or the cinematography) which motivate the film, and discussing how they influence our narrative hypothesis building. Presumably our interest and attention as film viewers is closely associated with the amount of involvement we bring to hypothesis building.

The expectations and schemata brought to the film viewing experience are a critical factor in reader-oriented criticism. In order to avoid a total relativising of film meaning, some framework of standardized expectations is necessary.

Genre theory has provided a useful vehicle for focused critical discussion, using both traditional and contemporary models. Working out of a particular genre can help link discussion of the critical impulses of traditional aesthetic, psychoanalytic, and reader-oriented criticism. As Ryall (1978) suggests, genre theory of the 1960's and 1970's has allowed critics to include the audience (with its expectations and desires) along with the artist/director in what is essentially an institutional understanding of film. In general terms

genre movies are those commercial films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations. They also encourage expectations and experiences similar to those of similar films we have already seen. Genre movies have comprised the bulk of film practice, the iceberg of film history beneath the visible tip that in the past has commonly been understood as film art. They have been exceptionally significant as well in establishing a popular sense of cinema as cultural and economic institution, particularly in the United States, where Hollywood studios early on adopted an industrial model based on mass production. (Grant, 1986, p. xi)

### **The Horror Genre**

A particular filmic genre that has been the subject of much passionately critical debate and has been continuously commercially viable from the medium's inception is Horror. If genre is, in fact, about

institutional and audience awareness and use of codes and conventions, then Horror films, which quite commonly quote extensively from their own history and iconography, represent a critical archetype. As Brophy (1986) has argued, the Horror genre is so self-referential that it has effectively distinguished itself from the other recognized genres. The modern Horror film:

is involved in a violent awareness of itself as a saturated genre. Its rebirth as such is qualified by *how* it states itself as genre. The historical blue-prints have faded, and the new (post-1975) films recklessly copy and re-draw their generic sketching. In this wild tracing, there are two major areas that affect the modern Horror film: (i) the growth of special effects with cinematic realism and sophisticated technology, and (ii) an historical over-exposure of the genre's iconography, mechanics and effects. The textuality of the modern horror film is integrally and intricately bound up in the dilemma of a saturated fiction whose primary aim in its telling is to generate suspense, shock, and horror. It is a mode of fiction, a type of writing that in the fullest sense "plays" with its reader, engaging the reader in a dialogue of textual realism, cultural enlightenment or emotional humanism. The gratification of the contemporary Horror film is based upon tension, fear, anxiety, sadism, and masochism—a disposition that is overall both tasteless and morbid. The pleasure of the text is, in fact, getting the shit scared out of you—and loving it. (Brophy, 1986, p. 5)

Jean Mitry's *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma* (1963, 1965), which Metz (1972) characterized as the end of the traditional era in film literature, was a massive attempt (in 2 volumes) to reconcile formalist and realist film aesthetics. Whether realist or formalist, the notion of a

universalizing unity was important to early theories of film. Given these early attempts to impose a unified theory of aesthetics onto a field that is influenced by so many individuals, institutions and cultures, it is not surprising that the Horror genre has been a problem for many critics. Horror, after all, depends for much of its impact on irrationality and the general breakdown of unifying social structures.

In considering various critical approaches with reference to Horror, I will limit my survey to two films. Murnau's *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922), and *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960). I have selected each film as being emblematic of a significant aspect of the Horror genre as well as of film aesthetics generally. *Nosferatu* evokes the genre's literary origins in the nineteenth century Gothic novel as well as the aesthetics of German Expressionism which, although marginal to most contemporary film, offer an important and fundamental structural contrast to the classic Hollywood model. The filmic process of adaptation from a literary source highlights the transformation of literary imagery into visual imagery and is a key element in our understanding of lens imagery as iconic sign. As the prototypic vampire movie, studying *Nosferatu* also allows us to consider the visual aspects of a genre at its inception.

*Psycho* is recognised as a milestone for its manipulation of psychoanalytic themes through camera work and editing, as well as for introducing an explicit blending of predatory sex and violence. When we attend to editing as meaningful, we are brought to recognize film's capacity to create a fictitious passage of time, or space, both of which are important facets of iconic signification and *Lens Meaning*.

## Nosferatu

Epitomized in André Bazin's writing (1967, 1982), early realist criticism was able to admire the craft of Horror films such as *Nosferatu* while maintaining a certain distance from the genre's themes. In fact, Bazin repeatedly drew attention to the realism of *Nosferatu* in its use of natural settings, rather than the specially manufactured visually distorted sets (Bazin, 1967, pp. 27, 109) of other German Expressionist films. Bazin's comments suggest an emphasis on *mise en scène* over cinematography. Other more recent writers (Manvell & Fraenkel, 1971; Barlow, 1982) have drawn attention to Murnau's use of cinematic techniques such as montage, severe camera angles, negative images and abstract shadows as expressionistic devices designed specifically to build suspense or to horrify. The apparent fragmentation in German Expressionist film, which is being revived in rock videos today, functions for the viewer as a site for both emotional and energetic response (see Figure one, pg. 30). Confronted with a montage sequence the viewer will work from a very personal level of understanding to a position where meaning is brought under control.

One scene in *Nosferatu* can show how a reader-oriented approach to criticism can clarify the visual dynamics of a film. After Thomas Hutter has been victimized by *Nosferatu*, both he and the vampire journey to Wisborg, Hutter's home. Both are journeying to Ellen, Hutter's wife, although neither is aware that that is the other's goal. During the journeys of the two male lead characters we cut back and forth between the two, as well as to Ellen, who has dreamt of her husband's danger and is awaiting his return anxiously. Ellen awaits her husband by walking to the seashore to watch for ships, not realizing that *Nosferatu* is travelling by ship while Hutter is travelling by land. The rhythm of the edits creates a tempo that builds emotional meaning for the viewer. At the same time, viewing the

chain of shots of the three characters in constantly rotating sequence forces us to recognize that the three sets of actions are temporally parallel and geographically converging. Parallel editing has played a part throughout the film to link activities in Wisborg and Transylvania. Participation in this sequence's suspense is dependent on the degree to which we recognize and appreciate the visual clues offered through the rhythm of the cuts that create a visual impression of a closely run race, and the horrific realization that Ellen is looking to the sea, and to *Nosferatu*.

Discussing the visual qualities of *Nosferatu* in psychoanalytic terms is, in some ways, an act of projection, in that critical consensus (Manvell & Fraenkel, p. 32) suggests Murnau was not explicitly concerned with psychological issues in this film. Nonetheless, the use of the subjective camera does cause us to identify with the two "monsters" in the film far more than in most recent *Dracula* movies. We are *Nosferatu* when he is looking at Ellen, the pure and faithful woman who is offering herself to him in order to destroy him. We are Knock (*Nosferatu*'s insane assistant) when he looks down on the citizenry of plague-ridden Wisborg, who stone him to death in the deranged belief that he is somehow responsible for the town's horrible fate. It has been argued that these sympathetic identifications are keys to the horror of this film. Also, Ellen's passivity (which is her weapon against *Nosferatu*) is accentuated by our view of her through the use of many minimally edited long shots, while the ineffectuality of Thomas Hutter, her husband, is emphasized by almost comically choppy editing.

In feminist film theory, concern with how women are represented in film (their qualities of character, and their appearance) evolved into a concern with how the filmic apparatus positions viewers in a gender. The

notion in psychoanalysis of identification is seen as key to film. *Nosferatu* uses fairly crude visual techniques and broadly developed characters to build this identification.

Later variations on the vampire theme make much more of its psycho-sexual implications. In *Psycho* we can see how visual techniques for positioning viewers to identify with specific characters developed over a short 40 years.

### Psycho

The formalist *politique des auteurs*, established in the late 1950's by the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and focused on American film by Sarris (1962), first argued for the recognition of the works of certain directors of popular film. The prime example of this "scandalous" (Cook, 1985, p.126) conferring of artist's status on a director of popular films is Alfred Hitchcock. Bazin, who struggled within *Cahiers du Cinéma* over the editorial bias toward valorizing directorial authorship, also admired the cinematic craft of Hitchcock. In the dozen or so articles that Bazin devoted to Hitchcock, he was unswerving in his praise of the director's seamless use of editing and point of view to build narrative, but at the same time Bazin typically qualified his praise by drawing attention to Hitchcock's choice of a "minor but standard genre" (Bazin, 1982, p. 135).

Hitchcock's films have been at the centre of the discourse in feminist psychoanalytic film theory. For these critics the infamous shower scene in *Psycho* (1960), with its multiple stabbing murder of the female lead, is key. Instead of admiring the wizardry and control displayed in Hitchcock's editing, they draw attention to its consequences. Kaja Silverman (1986), in discussing suture (see note 6), suggests that *Psycho* "obliges the viewing subject to make abrupt shifts in identification. These identifications are

often in binary opposition to each other; thus the viewing subject finds itself inscribed into the cinematic discourse at one juncture as victim, and at the next juncture as victimizer" (Silverman, 1986, p. 223). In fact, in the shower scene, while our sympathies may be with Marion as a victim, visually we are positioned, through point of view editing, in two roles. Regardless of our actual gender, we become an omniscient and voyeuristic observer as we watch Janet Leigh in her character as Marion, disrobe and begin to have a shower. This illicit pleasure is soon marred by the omniscient observer's awareness of an intruder. With this awareness, our image of Marion comes, somewhat ambiguously, through the eyes of the attacker. During the 40-second duration of the attack, our voyeurism becomes murderous sadism at the expense of a woman placed before us as a helpless, naked object of our gaze. It has been argued that "the stylization and allusiveness of the shower scene in *Psycho* has provided critics with the rationale for lovingly and endlessly recounting all the details of its signification in the very process of self-righteously deploring its signified" (Modleski, 1988, p. 113). Silverman concludes that "what *Psycho* obliges us to understand is that we want suture so badly that we'll take it at any price, even with the fullest knowledge of what it entails" (p. 227). That is, our desire to immerse ourselves in the flow of the fictional narrative is so strong that we will allow ourselves to identify with abhorrent characters, even, as in the case of *Psycho* (1960), when it is blatantly obvious that that is what the film is trying to get us to do. We will accept being positioned as a murderous psychotic for the thrill of a well-told story.

From a reader-oriented perspective, the pleasures in Hitchcock's films generally, and *Psycho* (1960) in particular, are the innumerable visual and narrative misdirections placed in the way of our reading of the

film. A good example of this is the work we must do to determine the existence and ultimately the significance of the mother of the murderer, Norman Bates. Throughout the film, Hitchcock leaves often misleading clues. Hitchcock leads the viewer to assume that the fleeting glimpses of and references to Mrs. Bates mean that she is sinister and mysterious. Ultimately, the discovery that Mrs. Bates is a taxidermied corpse and Norman is a murderous schizophrenic can function at both a factual and symbolic level in considering the meaning of mother son relationships. Through Hitchcock's control of the visual and the clues it offers, we are brought to a moment of shocking realization that our first understanding of Norman is a misrepresentation.

### **S u m m a r y**

I have suggested that psychoanalysis and reception theory follow parallel paths in explaining the viewer's response to the visual in lens media texts. In both cases, theorists assume certain motivations on the part of the viewer. The constructivist branch of reception theory treats the viewer as consciously concerned with the apparent gaps in the visual information presented. The viewer resorts to hypothesis building to bring a sense of completeness to the filmic structure. Psychoanalysis understands viewer response to be substantially unconscious and driven by the desire for sexual completeness or satisfaction.

In both cases certain visual operations in film are understood to be the sites where the viewer's work is the most intense. Framing functions in film to include and exclude portions of what most viewers recognize as a larger field. The viewer's response to the frame can be understood as fetishizing the visual fragment that is offered, or speculating about the larger world outside that frame as it relates to what we can see. Camera

movement and lens magnification are used to build point of view, and attempt to define a position in the filmic narrative for the viewer. The viewer's response to camera position and movement can be understood as scopophilic ("If I could only see a little more") or as a kind of constructivist riddle ("Who am I?"). Editing joins disparate fragments of people, places, and events into what viewers often perceive as a visually seamless continuum. Whether the viewer's response to the visual construction of narrative through editing is a product of an unconscious desire for "suture" or a conscious concern for structural completeness, that viewer's capacity to consider a film critically has to be affected by his or her ability to recognize edits. Certainly one of the functions of Media Studies must be to cause viewers to attend to and critically analyse this sort of visual construction in the lens media.

## Chapter 5

### Photography and Cultural Invisibility:

#### Symbolic Signs and *Lens Meaning*

The historical debate over the lens media's, and especially photography's, use as either a means of artistic expression or objective documentation has been reflected in the earlier consideration of televisual realism and cinematic pleasure. From the early and ongoing conflicts between straight and pictorialist photographic methods (Goldberg, 1981) to any number of contemporary museum shows that contrast painting and photography (Galassi, 1981), or that try to link photography with the various movements of modernism (Grundberg & Gauss, 1987), the art literature is full of words and images exploring photography as an expressive means of visual communication. Contemporary criticism argues that these (perhaps false) polarities of objective and subjective meaning are contained within a larger cultural context, with the result that

the study of "visual art"—for so long confined within artificially narrow intellectual and institutional limits—now ranges across the broader spectrum of what [Victor Burgin has] called the "integrated specular regime" of our "mass-media" society. "Art theory", understood as those interdependent forms of art history, aesthetics, and criticism, which began in the Enlightenment and culminated in the recent period of "high modernism", is now at an end. In our present so-called "postmodern" era the *end* of art theory *now* is identical with the objectives of *theories of representations* in general:

a critical understanding of the modes and means of symbolic articulation of our *critical* forms of sociality and subjectivity must be contextualized. (Burgin, 1986, p. 204)

There are any number of examples in film (Andrew, 1984), photography (Burgin, 1986), and television (Allen, 1987) of texts that trace art criticism from its traditions, through semiology to contemporary criticism. Contemporary criticism in its various strands has developed over the past fifty years as a result of efforts to confront the subjectivity that is so much a part of discussions about meaning in the artworld. The structural linguistics of Saussure (1966) and Peirce (1955) were attempts in the first half of this century to rationalize the study of language and communication. Rosalind Krauss (1985) draws attention to the relationship between writing and vision in surrealism and argues that surrealists exploited photography "to produce a paradox: the paradox of reality constituted as sign—or presence transformed into absence, into representation, into spacing, into writing" (p. 112). Surrealist photography of the 20's and 30's can be seen as constituting the first steps towards recognizing in the lens media a language-like form of communication. In the 1960's this impulse became a more formal effort to impose semiotics on film.

Two problems arose in the early film semiotics (Metz, 1974). One of the foundational assumptions of semiotics is that signs are arbitrary. For words built out of letters that represent sounds this makes sense, but lens images are referential (or as Peirce would say, "indexical") (1955, 160) in a way that makes them very different from language systems. Also, writers in semiotics have come to realize that in any given visual text a number of signifying practices (lighting, pose, costuming, set design, contained within the larger system of photography, contained within the still larger system

of periodical literature, etc.) may be at play. Further, where semiotics emphasizes the structure of a particular sign system, contemporary criticism, in addition to the complexity of "things", reintroduces the viewing subject. Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis has been used, most notably by feminist writers, to enlarge upon semiotics. It has been argued that "semiotics can most usefully be seen as a descriptive method [and that] other approaches—feminist, psychoanalytic, ideological—can employ semiotics to ask larger questions" (Seiter, 1987, p. 38) of the lens media.

In many ways, traditional critical and economic practices still dominate the artworld, but photography, as a popular art, is not as restricted by these fine art institutions. "Photography is too multiple, too useful to other discourses, ever to be wholly contained within the traditional definitions of art. Photography will always exceed the institution of art, always participate in non-art practices, always threaten the insularity of art discourse" (Underhill, 1989, p. 25).

One result of [this] situation is that photography has been more readily accepted as a starting point for an interdisciplinary study that, following the logic of its methods, is [potentially] able to move out into a radical dismantling of social relations without having to bring these discoveries back as nothing more than meanings for the hallowed [artworld] series. (Rifkin, 1988, pp. 162-163)

Within this context of photography as a radically accessible and popular practice on the one hand and a convention-bound institutional practice on the other, I would like to discuss notions of cultural visibility and invisibility and the lens media.

"Martin Heidegger once called this 'The Age of the World Picture.' To him 'the fact that the world becomes a picture at all is what distinguishes

the essence of the modern age.' Nothing in the world, he contended, *exists any longer* except in and through representation" (Jussim, 1989, p. 10). More recently, Burgin describes "a picture of a new subject for the new society of information technology—a subject (like the subject known to psycho-analysis) radically "decentered", a subject formed "in the wake of the signifier" (Burgin, 1986, p. 168). The signifiers Burgin mentions are the traces of data scattered throughout institutional computer banks which, when they are gathered together, represent the "decentered" individual's existence in society perhaps more powerfully than does her/his body. Add to this a second layer, "spectacle"—imagery in the mass-media which works to form and define the visual subject—and it becomes clear why Burgin claims "in a (Platonic) word, upon which Jean Baudrillard has elaborated, we are a society of the *simulacrum*" (p. 169). Our place in society and our notions of what is real are defined in large part by data bases and mass-media imagery. Burgin's use of "simulacrum" represents a fairly extreme understanding of a slippery term. Simulacrum can mean anything from simply a representational image to something akin to and as dangerous as a mirage. In choosing to use this term I am consciously introducing a sliding scale of potential meanings. This, I feel, is an accurate representation of the condition of the term "*Lens Meaning*" which the term "simulacrum" addresses.

In an essay called *Through the Narrative Portal* (Kozloff, 1987), critic Max Kozloff opens a discussion of narrative photography by looking at a black and white ad typical of those created by Bruce Weber for Calvin Klein designer jeans and cotton underwear.

The scene illustrates a possible sexual contretemps that has been calculated to appeal to both genders. Asking us to speculate on the fascinating pass to which the couple has been brought, the image

switches its narrative lure to an object display that conveys, in fact, the real story message. Ours not so much to wonder about the history of this tense, mysterious pair, as to acknowledge that wearers of Calvins are likely to have such a history. Suitably denimed, we, too...can embark on the sensual and other adventures of the role reversal. (Kozloff, 1987, p. 93)

What he is describing is a simulacrum, or visual symbol, now common in the mass-media, that has come to be called a "lifestyle ad". The advertising industry has taken the psychoanalytic notion of identification to heart and is now, as often as not, providing imagery like that described by Kozloff for both the conscious and unconscious consumer. Because the mass-media are subsidized by business institutions that expect sales to result from their support, it is not surprising that "desirable" lifestyles dominate mass-media imagery. Because the styles of life represented in the media's lens imagery exist only as simulacra, the viewing subject is brought to desire some "thing" that for all practical purposes doesn't exist. Even if the viewer of a media-generated lifestyle image could buy all the objects and re-enact the uses represented in the image, that viewer could not reproduce the hermetic seal of idealization represented by the images' lack of the critical dimension that creates depth. As Benjamin (1985) pointed out, photography is potent both because of the kind of image it can be used to produce and because those images can be reproduced. Mass-media imagery represents the bulk of many people's world information. It therefore becomes clear that people whose life or lifestyle is somehow undesirable and thus not represented in the mass-media are, in a very significant way, invisible. This results in the "postmodern" irony of our dependence on simulacrum to anchor "reality". To illustrate the point made about cultural invisibility, the remainder of this section will be devoted to

the consideration of photographic work by women photographers and other "invisible" people.

Jo Spence (Dennett & Spence, 1982) and Judith Golden (Grundberg, 1987) are among those who have used photography to explore the invisibility of being old, plain, female, and sick. Golden's imagery includes somewhat comical self-portraits where parts of her face peer through holes torn in the faces of media celebrities depicted on the cover of *People* magazine (Grundberg, 1987). Spence practices a personal form of phototherapy through explicit documentary photographs of the fleshly impact of her own and her mother's surgery (Hoy, 1987), and the re-enactment, presented in family photo album form, of childhood fantasies about their fathers by Spence and a male friend/collaborator (Spence, 1987, pp. 24-5). Spence produced an autobiographical text and guidebook designed to document her explorations and suggest how others might do the same (Spence, 1986). Spence's images are "theoretical" (McGrath, 1987, p. 71), in the same sense that Burgin (1986) used the term with reference to painting. An expansion of the concept of "conceptual" as it was used to describe that art in the 70's that de-emphasised individual objects in favor of ideas played out through social interaction and technological mechanism can help us to understand a viewer's emotional response (see Figure one, pg. 30) to photographs at a symbolic level. Spence's work is to be taken as Art, but these images of the "unspeakable and invisible" (p. 71) are not only offered as challenging aesthetic objects in the traditional sense. Spence "suggests that the task at hand for any radical photographic practice is both to unpick the apparently seamless photographic web and simultaneously to weave new meanings" (p. 71). There is a pointed irony in Spence's work being collected in the form of a photographic how-to manual for the invisible. The text acts as a powerful antidote to the

multitude of soft-porn photographic manuals on the market, epitomized by *How to Photograph Women—Beautifully* (O'Rourke, 1986), with its amply illustrated selection of poses, costumes, lighting and make-up tips. It functions as a visual dictionary for creating simulacra.

The technical and economic accessibility of photography explains, in part, the medium's popularity as an avenue for oppositional cultural practice. It is still true, however, that we tend only to see the work of those (young, feminist, gay or lesbian) among the invisible who have gained access to the artworld. One of the great fallacies that has grown out of the age of mechanical reproduction is that the value or import of an image somehow inevitably corresponds to the size of its viewing audience. This assumes that the mass production of images, with the distance this puts between an original image (if it exists) and the viewing audience, unavoidably frees that audience from a kind of "false consciousness" implicit in the extreme value placed on the uniqueness of the art object. Walter Benjamin suggested in 1935 that mechanically reproduced art, "instead of being based on ritual, begins to be based on another practice—politics" (Benjamin, 1985, p. 681). This capacity of photography to move the viewer to an energetic response (see Figure one, pg. 30) is an ideal that may not often be met. When Marcel Duchamp complained that "I threw the bottle-rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty" (Richter, 1966, p. 207-208), he pinpointed the artworld's capacity to undermine opposition by co-opting it into the institutional fold. The "business" of symbol making is a precarious one that involves mounting effective social criticism within an institutional artworld that will either deny you access to an audience or market you as an "Artist". Economist and former Canada Council director of research Harry Hillman-Chartrand has suggested that the artworld today

is, in effect, the research and development arm of the advertising industry (Hillman-Chartrand, 1989). Richard Bolton's article, *Enlightened Self Interest: The Avant-Garde in the 80's* (Bolton, 1989, pp. 12-18) with its images of feminist photo-artists Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger as cover-girls for *ARTnews* and any number of ads depicting the desirability of the artworld lifestyle, is explicit evidence of Hillman-Chartrand's claim. Clearly the issue is more complex than this. Use of the lens media to produce representations from within specific cultures does not require mass distribution or artworld recognition to be effective. It is nonetheless arguable that institutionally supported imagery is the most widely visible.

*Cultures in Contention* (Kahn & Neumaier, 1985) is a good example of a selection of cultural works (some using photography and other lens media) which generally side-step the artworld in favour of representing people and issues that have otherwise been absent from the mainstream media. Much of this work has used the formal presentation and context of advertising or journalistic photography to inject oppositional imagery into the mass-media. Some interesting examples of this kind of work include the Super-Bowl bus ad project (Sisco, 1987), where three artists produced a photographic work, presented in the form of poster ads displayed on the outside of city buses, intended to draw attention to San Diego's dependence on an impoverished workforce of illegal aliens, at a time of national media attention when the community was especially sensitive about its image. Fred Lonidier's work with unions involved producing documentary photographs combined with written text that were presented to the union workers as a kind of mirror (Lonidier, 1985). The work of Hans Haacke involves the billboard form with explicitly political content in an artworld context (Haacke, 1985). Organizations have explored alternative venues for their art work like Group Material which produced a black and white

newspaper insert that contained imagery ranging from the traditionally artistic to the overtly political (1988). What is described here is a kind of counter-acculturation that attempts to get viewers outside of the artworld to question appearances and to change our habits (see Figure one, pg. 30).

### Summary

These are examples of photographic works whose meaning and import can be discussed with reference to the artworld and the broader context of cultural work. Photography's potential for allowing popular input into cultural production, as well as its key role in the mass production of commercial imagery, makes understanding the many uses of the medium of central importance to the individual's critical participation in contemporary society. Or, as John Berger (1974) has put it:

We think of photographs as works of art, as evidence of a particular truth, as likenesses, as news items. Every photograph is in fact a means of testing, confirming and constructing a total view of reality. Hence the crucial role of photography in ideological struggle. Hence the necessity of our understanding a weapon which we can use and which can be used against us. (Berger, 1974, p. 294)

## Chapter 6

### The Uses of *Lens Meaning*

#### Uses in the Social Sciences

This section of the text will function on one level as a summary of findings resulting from the survey of the literature in Chapters three, four and five. At the same time, it will survey briefly the expanding consciousness within the social sciences of lens imagery as both a research tool and a cultural phenomenon. At both levels the aim is to show how elucidation of those constructs that make up *Lens Meaning* can move us to a better understanding of how we use and understand lens images.

Bernard (1988) has suggested that the idea of a social science can be traced back to Locke's belief "that the rules of science applied equally to the study of celestial bodies...and human behavior" (Bernard, p.17). Historical development of the social sciences since Locke has resulted in three sometimes conflicting general goals: **understanding, prediction and improvement**. Behaviorist social science is premised on the assumption that we can only know that which we can see, or at least measure. Until the late 1950's, psychological and sociological research was dominated by the development of systems of measurement and statistical analysis. Whether information is gathered experimentally or naturalistically, quantitative approaches have tended to emphasize external validity through the replicability of its experiments or findings, which is useful in **predicting** and engineering human behavior. Anthropological research, on the other hand, has emphasized description in

increasingly phenomenological terms or, more recently, has looked to hermeneutic interpretation of cultural phenomena. Typically, interpretive research methodologies weigh internal validity as a function of **understanding** phenomena that may not be reproduceable. Bringing empirical or interpretive research findings to bear on efforts to improve the human condition can be most directly observed in the clinical applications of psychology through psychoanalysis.

A small literature exists on the uses of photo and video-therapy (Krauss & Fryrear, 1983; Heilveil, 1983). Lodziak (1986) also describes a sociologically based "critical media theory [that is] steeped in emancipatory interest, and [which has] identified the prevailing forms of exploitative domination—imperialist, class, gender, and race—as the major obstacles in the way of the creation of a truly egalitarian and just world" (Lodziak, 1986, p. 202). Whether one is dealing with individual or social "therapy", this critical use of social science is built on an assumption that the therapist knows or can help the "client" discover what is needed to improve. It is assumed that lens images, as symbols, can function as powerful instruments of change.

In discussing the increased use of interpretive methodologies in preference to empirical data over the past ten to twenty years in the social sciences, Geertz (1980) suggests that this

recourse to the humanities for explanatory analogies...is at once evidence of the destabilization of genres [such as "sociology", "anthropology", and "psychology"] and of the rise of "the interpretive turn," and their most visible outcome is a revised style of discourse in social studies. The instruments of reasoning are changing and society is less and less represented as an elaborate machine or a

quasi-organism than as a serious game, a sidewalk drama, or a behavioral text. (Geertz, 1980, p.168)

My aim, in light of this blurring of the social science genres, will be to describe the quantitative, qualitative, and therapeutic uses of the lens media in the social sciences, without trying to speculate on what might make an anthropological, sociological, or psychological approach unique.

The quantitative uses of lens imagery in the social sciences are grounded in a belief, discussed earlier, in the indexical nature of these images, as well as the significance found in the quantification of observable human behavior. In discussing the microanalysis of lens images, visual anthropologist John Collier describes "three behavior patterns that constitute...evidence...:*proxemics* (measurements of space); *kinesics* (messages of body behavior); and *choreometrics* (patterns of behavior through time)"(Collier, 1979, p. 168). It has, for example, been argued that:

The patterning of eye movements is one of the most important aspects of social interaction, and some of the most interesting recent advances in the study of interaction have been concerned with the role of vision. (Argyle, 1974, p. 105)

A number of researchers have concerned themselves with the reliability and validity of video as a research tool (Lassiter & Irvine, 1986; Collins, 1986). Beattie and Bogle (1982), in their experiments with a variety of techniques for analysing gaze, conclude that the use of video allows for the most accurate analysis. The bulk of those psychological experiments that try to determine the effects of television on children have attempted to correlate eye movement with attention, and social interaction with effect (Wober, 1988). Often, in these experiments, lens imagery performs a dual role. Children are viewing, and presumably interacting, with video imagery, while at the same time they are being recorded as video imagery

for later quantitative analysis by a clinician who must assume the role of viewer in order to make observations.

In this same vein, field study and survey research have been used to discover and predict the effects of advertisements and political messages, as well as television generally. Williams' (1986) longitudinal study of three Western Canadian communities is perhaps one of the more comprehensive and exciting of these effects studies. She applied a number of fairly sophisticated measures of intelligence and behavior on members of three similar communities: one was a non-isolated community with no television reception at the beginning of the study, the second received one Canadian television channel, and the third was on cable and therefore received a wide range of Canadian and American programming. Tests were administered, and then repeated two years later when community one had begun receiving television, and community two's service had expanded. Williams' conclusions included the important notion that television's influence is strongest where there are no other competitive influences available. That is, if television becomes a viewer's only avenue for gaining information about the world and its values, then televisual information and imagery is received far less critically than it might otherwise be. Williams emphasized the importance of studying displacement, that is, the effect of television viewing on other daily activities. The value of studies such as this are often in giving a cloak of scientific truth to ideas that were not recognized as significant when they were only "common sense".

This broader application of quantitative methods in measuring aspects of lens media can also be therapeutic (or perhaps manipulative) in that it aids change by supporting the engineering of viewers' buying or voting patterns. The Nielsen ratings system and the Preview House in Los Angeles, where experimental methods are used to measure viewer

response to advertising and new television programming, are both examples of organizations using quantitative data based on lens imagery for commercial ends (Nelson, 1987). While this methodology has also been directed towards the production of what has been called "prosocial" television (Winett, 1986), the behaviorist assumption that the effect of television viewing is essentially one-way has been challenged (Manley-Casimir, 1987). Ethical issues involved in media control are an active concern, unfortunately more often of artists and philosophers than of scientists and media executives.

A conception of *Lens Meaning* that takes into account both the social sciences and the arts will function as the basis for the analysis and evaluation of media studies curricula that will follow this chapter. In order for this analysis to be as focused as possible, the categories of signs and interpretants described in Chapter two are cross-referenced (Figure one, pg. 30). The remainder of this chapter will address 9 areas of inquiry that grow out of this cross-referencing and the literature surveyed in Chapters three, four and five. It is argued here that these 9 areas of inquiry, while not exhausting the concept of *Lens Meaning*, represent a balanced and comprehensive foundation for the study of *Lens Meaning* in media studies or art programs.

## **Aspects of *Lens Meaning***

### **Realism**

If indexical signs show an existential relationship between the sign and signifier, then in analysing emotional response to lens media, the concept of Realism as it is understood as a visual category in the artworld (Chilvers & Osborne, 1988, p. 114-115) and as a visually induced necessity in the news media (Fiske, 1987), must be explored. A recurring theme in

the literature pertained to the relative honesty or truthfulness of lens imagery and the conventions of realism. An artworld perspective argued by Burgin (1986) and others teaches that realism is a style that has meaningful conventions recognizable in the form that the image takes. Essentially realism forms a category of unanalysed response. Arguably, the moment a viewer is asked to respond to an image in a public or an academic way, that viewer moves out of this category. The description that Barthes' (1981) offers of the disturbing and poignant sense of his dead mother's presence induced by a photograph is a good example of this sort of response. In another example, media studies curricula present images to student viewers. These are undeniably real. These materials must be analysed for how students and teachers use those images, and indirectly, how they encourage student viewers to look critically. When this occurs, other categories of response are invoked.

### Mechanism

A viewer's energetic response to the indexicality of a sign may centre upon the issue of Mechanism in image production. As argued by Masterman (1984) and others, learning to operate the tools of the lens media, as well as exploring the psychology of image making (Sontag, 1973) are fundamental to a complete understanding of the visual in the mass media. Popular examples where mechanism is part of the text can be found in films about the making of special effects films like Star Wars. When we ask, "How did they do that?", we are exploring the mechanistic indexicality of a lens image. Energetic response implies thinking as well as acting, and suggests a kind of modernist exploration of the "nature" of lens apparatus. A student's experience with the mechanics of image making can increase understanding of a lens image's manufacture *and* meaning.

### Presentation

In analysing the habit changing or cultural impact of lens images as indexical signs, the total viewing environment, that is, the Presentation, should be investigated. Viewer positioning, a central concern of feminist critics of the lens media (Kaplan, 1986; Penley, 1988) can help us to understand these images. At a very simple level, the environments in which lens images are viewed (the darkened theatre, the home, through outdoor advertising forms, books, newspapers) need to be analysed. The significance of time as an aspect of indexicality, discussed briefly earlier (Deleauz, 1989; Metz, 1990), can further help appreciation of the differences in presentational environments in which we view lens images. The social sciences, and the literature on design and advertising pay particular attention to exploration of the meaning of presentation and the lens media.

The qualitative use of lens imagery in the social sciences exploits its application as iconic sign. Instead of responding to the lens image as a fact, we see it as a representation that must be interpreted. Anthropology is especially full of examples where the lens media have been used in this broader, qualitative sense (Bateson & Mead, 1942; Blackman, 1981; Banta & Hensley, 1986). There is an interesting blending of the quantitative and qualitative when "natives" are used, either as producers or interpreters of lens imagery. At the quantitative end of this blended spectrum, sociologists such as Mussello (1979) and Boerdam and Martinius (1980) have brought methods of content analysis to their study of family photo albums. Through this analysis they hope to come to understand what the making, collection, and presentation of family snapshots means. Somewhere in the methodological middle is the visual anthropology of Sprague (1978). He

collected Yoruba-made photographic portraits and placed them beside portraits he had made of the same people. Sprague analysed the images he collected and the ones he created for content and compared them for differences, but, interestingly, left much of the interpretation of the data to the viewer. At the more qualitative end of the continuum is research that uses informant or native interpretation to clarify either the content of an image, or the social situations linked to that image. Collier (1986) links this last use with other projective interview tools such as ink blots and TATs (thematic aperception tests). "When...interviews are conducted with photographs...the focus is on *what is in the photographs*. Such examinations can be like a personally conducted tour through the culture *depicted in the photographs*. Realistically, the interview return is a blend of precise reading of exact graphic content and projected attitudes" (Collier, 1986, p. 124).

### Expression

A viewer's emotional response to iconic signs brings together expressive intention on the part of the image maker and expressive reception on the part of the viewer. With its foregrounding of authorial intention and personalized communication (Chilvers & Osborne, 1988, pp. 171-172), expression, as it is framed in traditional literary and visual aesthetic criticism, can offer guidance in understanding this kind of response. Reception theory and ideological critique may suggest some of the limits. The kinds of informed critical forums that are implied for classroom discussion of expressive reactions will be a challenge for both teacher and student in that they would involve open but very focused critiques of particular media artifacts. Media studies curricula that try to address a viewer's expressive response to lens imagery will need to

function in a creative context. This may include the use of visual media, or creative writing as a medium for critical response to the lens image under analysis. Experiments with and explorations of the lens media in the art world, whether in the obviously iconic portraits of Karsh (Borcoman, 1989) or Cindy Sherman (Hoy, 1987) or the photographic abstractions of Man Ray (Ray, 1982) are expressive works that could be studied in the context of expression.

### **Control**

The image as icon is a blend of visual reference and convention with which the image maker links sign with signifier. When we try to understand how the lens media can be brought to produce iconic signs, we are addressing the issue of expressive Control. Montage, as an early approach in film, draws attention to the director's decisions, but also demands that the viewer play a part in anchoring the meaning of the images. From a practical perspective, students must learn about the kind of work involved in communicating with visual images. By studying lens images in a fictional mode such as cartoon animation, where the indexical reference is to a drawing, students can come to understand the work that goes into creating iconic meaning. Where curricula call upon students to produce videos or newspapers, and particularly when they address the editorial process, they are addressing control. The challenge in this will be to allow for the collaborative nature of much media work, as this group approach will be very different from what is typical in classrooms.

### **Representation**

When analysing the habit-changing impact of lens images as iconic signs, theories of Representation focus attention on the cultural meaning of

image content. Feminist criticism offers one perspective on this issue, but careful content analysis followed by interpretation from any number of cultural perspectives is possible. Recent studies of the stereotyping in Edward S. Curtis' representation of native Americans have explored both the nature of Curtis' manipulation of native culture in his images, as well as the consequences of the acceptance of those images. The production of artists such as Jo Spence (1986) can act as a model for student work, since they explore the consequences of stereotypical representation and suggest strategies for breaking down those images.

Projection plays a big part in the critical uses of the lens media. The critical or therapeutic use of lens images in representation may be associated with what has been described as the symbolic use of the lens media.

In the field of psychology, an understanding of the nature of metaphor has been used for years in the areas of dream analysis, hypnosis, projective work fantasy, and art therapy...A good deal of the power of the phototherapeutic technique derives from the photograph's ability to function simultaneously as both an object, such as the picture of a family, and as metaphoric representation, such as a symbol of all families, and/or what I am reminded of when I see a family photograph. (Krauss & Fryrear, 1983, p. 60)

Video and still imagery are used for a variety of purposes in psychotherapy (Krauss & Fryrear, 1983; Heilveil, 1983), including offering patients the opportunity to create expressive imagery, to view and discuss the behavior of others, to view and discuss their own behavior, and to desensitize themselves through repeated visual exposure to particular images or experiences that have created emotional problems in their lives.

At the level of social criticism, photography, film, and video's apparent blending of the real and the symbolic have been used for socially therapeutic purposes for years. The photography of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine drew angry attention to the abuses of industrialization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as sensitively documenting the life of the worker (Trachtenberg, 1988). The photo documentation of war, from the U.S. Civil war onward, as well as of many other natural and political disasters, has functioned as evocative evidence of problems in need of change. The art work of photographers such as Hans Haacke (1985), and Jo Spence (1986), as well as Jim Goldberg's subject-interpreted portraits in *Rich and Poor* (1985) among many others, blend social science and politics with art through the manipulation of potent visual and linguistic symbols.

### Conceptualism

The sign as symbol is an abstraction that functions through social convention. Just as the iconic aspect of a sign invokes a belief in the empirical truth of a lens image, the symbolic or culturally conventional aspect of an image carries a kind of truth value. Emotional response to symbolic signs can be understood through a study of Conceptualism in the artworld. Placing the values imbedded in symbol systems ahead of more traditional art values (Chilvers & Osborne, 1988, p. 115) such as beauty or formal order might move students toward the study of the emotional impact of advertising images. If it is possible to teach aesthetics in the public schools, as some proponents of Discipline-Based Art Education in the U.S. argue, it may best be achieved through a bonding of media studies and art education. Media studies will bring its concern with cultural criticism and art education will bring its focus on the visual. In the classroom, work on the analysis of symbols in the lens media may draw on some of the

approaches used in semiotics. Kozloff's essay (1987) on Calvin Klein's print ads is a good model of this sort of work. The careful analysis of visual "basic units" may pose more questions than produce answers about a lens image's meaning, but it can also foreground the image's position in culture as a meaningful artifact.

### **Production**

In exploring how the visual in the mass media becomes conventionalized, production, and the collaborative, institutional structures that operate behind mass media images, should be understood. Student production can certainly provide material for discussing the joys and frustrations of collaborative work. Genre theory can also clarify some of the constraints involved in producing imagery for a defined audience. Following a particular genre as it evolves over time can help to clarify the institutional responses to a changing audience. Making apparent the work and workers involved in seemingly authorless media is critical to full understanding. Knowing how a lens image moves from its initial exposure, through a particular mass media institution, and out to a viewing public, can draw attention to the notion of institutional intentionality as one of the layers of meaning in a lens image.

### **Acculturation**

Lens images as symbolic signs function as mechanisms of Acculturation or habit change. This category can function to provide insights about the mass media as a major cultural force capable of replacing one world view with another, or of altering an individual's cultural identity. Notions of hegemony (Gramsci, 1957) and the consequences of normalizing a particular world view are issues that must be critically explored to evaluate the impact of the lens media on world

cultures. An interesting example of study in this vein is Carol Squiers' look at the manipulation of the media and thus public perceptions in the Reagan White House (Squier, 1990). Acculturation as defined here is a form of social studies intended to critically analyse the media as institutions through the careful study of their visual messages.

### **Curriculum Documents and the Matrix**

The first six chapters of this study have ranged across a number of disciplines, identifying concepts of meaning as they have been applied to lens images. It has not been assumed that a single, coherent theory of *Lens Meaning* exists, nor has it been assumed that this text would perform the epic task of designing such a theory. Instead, the indexical, iconic, and symbolic strands of signification identified by Peirce (1955; Iverson, 1988), matched with the emotional, energetic, and habit changing interpretants described by DeLauretis (1974), have provided means to characterize lens imagery (see Figure one, pg. 30), and specific examples from the lens media have been discussed from a variety of perspectives within the context of this framework.

The critical review of media education curriculum documents and texts in Chapters seven, eight and nine is offered as an example of applied media study and provides a platform by which to judge the efficacy of the model developed from the literature. Textbook publication is as much a part of the mass-media as is television, film or newspapers. As Fred Schroeder suggests in *The Genesis of Dick and Jane*, (Schroeder, 1977) textbook "publishing is unquestionably a popular art in its attempts to woo its peculiar audience, an audience which is assembled under compulsion, an audience with no buying power, an audience with scheduled impermanence" (Schroeder, p. 84-5). But "the various attempts at winning

the interest of [students] to [textbooks] are only partially motivated by respect for children,...at least an equal motivation is the size of the potential market for book sales" (Schroeder, p. 84). The difference between television and a textbook can be seen to represent two sides of the role of the audience in the mass media. Concerning the motivations of the primary consumer (the student), with a textbook, clarity and substance have to be the (perhaps unwilling) concern, while a demand for "entertainment value" is the inevitable legacy of TV culture.

Visual and verbal codes and the institutional constraints that influence the consumption of media products are important referents for the critical consideration of textbook production. In evaluating three media studies curricula I will focus on the ways principal texts (whether traditionally printed or in visual form) teach students to think critically about the visual information in the media. Media education involves more than the visual, but as I have argued earlier, the visual is of central importance to the media.

In the description and evaluation of texts and curriculum documents that is to follow, the model titled "Understanding *Lens Meaning*" (Figure one, pg. 30) will be used in two ways. As an evaluator, I will analyse the curriculum documents as visual objects (indexical signs), as packages of ideas (iconic signs), and as elements functioning in the context of public school educational systems (symbolic signs). At the same time I will assume that these three strands of signification are at least the potential content of the curriculum (from the students' point of view) and will describe to what extent and from which theoretical perspectives these curricula teach about lens meaning. Additionally, I will be looking for what Clark and Zimmerman identify as the three criteria for evaluating

curriculum antecedents: "Coherence,...Completeness...and Appropriateness" (Clark and Zimmerman, 1983, pp. 77-78).

I have chosen to analyse Media Studies curricula from Western Australia, Scotland, and the Province of Ontario, Canada. It had been my hope to include a U.S. curriculum in the analyses, but Media Studies has (ironically) made few inroads into the American educational system. The Australian and Canadian curricula are both mandated components of their respective school systems. The Scottish curriculum is not, but is currently working toward gaining that institutional status. The Scottish curriculum is government funded, in that much of it is produced by the Scottish Film Council. In each case the focus will be on those materials that constitute an introduction to the media for students in the 13-17 year age range. Special attention has been given to curriculum guides and principal texts, those materials which, due to availability or government prescription, constitute the foundational material for the curriculum.

### Summary

The first six chapters in this study have explored many facets of the meaning we derive from the visual in the mass-media. Three general streams have been identified that correspond roughly to Peirce's system of signs: the indexical, the iconic, and the symbolic. The initial rigidity of the semiotic system was broadened and personalized through the addition of DeLauretis' understanding of Peirce's concept of interpretants. The resulting model accounts for many of the qualities of lens imagery and posits types of viewer responses to those images. As has been demonstrated in this chapter, bringing a multi-perspectival approach to the consideration of *Lens Meaning* can reveal the richness, contradiction, and power of the mass-media and the visual tools they use. The following

chapters will show the extent to which this conception of *Lens Meaning* is reflected in educational practice.

## Chapter 7

### Media Studies in Western Australia

#### Curriculum Guidelines

The first curriculum to be analysed is also one of the most established, in terms of its duration and support. "Australia is rightly regarded as one of the world leaders in Media Education. For almost twenty years a variety of Media Education programmes, courses, curricula, texts, and associations have been produced in Australia" (Pungente, 1985, p. 34). Included in the package of material to be discussed are: *The Unit Curriculum in Media Studies* (Ministry of Education, Western Australia, [MEWA] 1987); *Media Conventions: A Teachers' Resource Book for Secondary Studies* (Ministry of Education, Western Australia, [MEWA] 1980); *Media Studies Resource Catalogue* (Ministry of Education, Western Australia, [MEWA] 1988); *Media Workshop Vol. 1* (McRoberts, 1987); *Media Workshop Vol. 2* (McRoberts, 1987); and *Meet the Media* (McMahon & Quin, 1988).

The Western Australian rationale for Media Studies states that:

Media Studies is the study of the modern mass media, namely television, radio, film, mass print and photography as it occurs in the mass print.

These communication systems are seen as being most significant forms of communication in modern society. In order to understand their impact it is necessary to understand the languages of the mass media. This involves understanding the links between

the languages and the cultures which generate them, the economic factors which affect the production or reception of mass media messages and the ways that audiences develop understandings from the media messages. The latter involves audience perception of both surface and deeper (cultural) meaning associated with the mass media messages.

The organising pedagogy for the study focuses upon the nature of communication, the codes and conventions associated with the language systems, the narrative patterns that are developed and the social implications of the messages. (MEWA, 1987, p. 3)

To support this rationale, the Western Australian curriculum guide divides Media Studies into six stages with each stage consisting of between one and three units (see Figure two).

The specific objectives for each unit are organised under headings of:

- A. The Nature of Communication
- B. Codes and Conventions
- C. Narrative
- D. The Social Context
- and sometimes,
- E. Skills

These organising principles emerge from the general objectives of the programme for years 8 to 10. These objectives are to:

- A. Develop an understanding of some general principles about communication and identify some models which assist in comprehension.
- B. Understand the codes and conventions which create the languages of the various mass media.

- C. Understand the narrative patterns that are predominant in mass media messages.
- D. Understand the interaction that occurs between the society and the media messages it produces and consumes.
- E. Demonstrate some practical and analytical skills associated with the modern mass media. (MEWA, 1987 , p. 8)

It is the purpose of this thesis to focus on those aspects of Media Studies curricula that would be considered introductory. Stages 1 and 2 (units 1.1, 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3) are the introductory portions of the Western Australian curriculum and will thus be highlighted here.

Unit 1.1 is the most global of the units, as is appropriate for a basic introduction to media studies. *The Media Studies Resource Catalogue* (MEWA, 1988) lists Part A's introduction to communication theory in *Media Workshop Vol. 1* (McRoberts, 1987); Unit 1 "What is Communication?" from *Meet the Media* (McMahon & Quin, 1988); and selections on the communication chain from *Media Conventions* (MEWA, 1980) as the bulk of the recommended student resources for this unit.

Unit 2.1 is an introduction to film and television. For this unit, recommended portions of texts include: Chapters five on film and seven on television in *Meet the Media* (McMahon & Quin, 1988); Unit 3 on film and Unit 4 on television in *Media Workshop Vol. 2* (McRoberts, 1988); and selections on the construction of media images from *Media Conventions* (MEWA, 1980).

Unit 2.2 is an introduction to photography and print. For this unit, recommended reading from *Meet the Media* (McMahon & Quin 1988) includes Chapter three on newspapers and photographs; from *Media Workshop Vol.1* (McRoberts, 1987) Unit 2 on the history and conventions of newspapers; from *Media Workshop Vol. 2* (McRoberts, 1987) Unit 2 on

photography; and selections dealing with photography and mass print from *Media Conventions* (MEWA, 1980).

Unit 2.3, which introduces radio and music, will not be evaluated here because the visual aspects of the media are the emphasis of this study. Suffice it to say that the texts to be analysed do cover the aural aspects of the media, thus completing their roles as introductory Media Studies textbooks.

### *Media Conventions*

*Media Conventions* (MEWA, 1980) is the oldest of the texts to be considered here. It is actually a teachers' resource book, which lists 121 briefs (lesson plans) in various categories. The text opens with a general introduction for both teachers and students, along with seven shorter introductions for each chapter on the conventions in particular media. The book concludes with technical appendices.

*Media Conventions* (MEWA, 1980) is printed in black ink on light weight magazine stock. Less than 10% of the text is made up of photographs, and these have been screened at the resolution of newspaper imagery. Of these photographs, fully two-thirds are images of students working on media studies projects or students as the subject of these projects. The remaining third are examples from, or in the style of, the mass media that are being studied. The rest of the text is made up of about 30% pen and ink illustrations and 60% text which has been typed rather than typeset.

*Media Conventions* (MEWA, 1980) devotes sections to five media: film, photography, radio, television, and mass print. In each section the briefs emphasize either production skills or critical analysis. The balance between skills and analysis varies enormously from section to section. The

briefs for the photography and mass print sections each have at least 50% analysis lessons while in the film section all lessons are skills oriented, with analysis incidental to production. Even in the photography section, much of the analysis is formal. That is, design considerations such as the "busyness" of a picture are discussed, while the content and meaning of the image are left basically unexplored. It is only in the mass print and television sections that issues about the social and individual consequences of an image arise, and this discussion tends to focus on representations of gender, race, or violence. There is no discussion of aesthetics and response to lens images, or of the impact of physical context on various viewing experiences possible through the mass media.

While this book is presented visually and textually in the dry, utilitarian style of a teacher's resource book, it is also intended to be used directly by the students. This is implied in the book's own introduction, but made explicit in the *Media Studies Resource Catalogue* (MEWA, 1988), where it is listed as a student resource rather than for the teacher's use. It would seem that the book is intended to be used as a source for student projects, and it is suggested in the introduction that the students be given some freedom in selecting which portions they might attempt.

### ***Media Workshop (Vol. 1 & 2)***

*Media Workshop Volume 1: Words* (McRoberts, 1987) and *Media Workshop Volume 2: Images* (McRoberts, 1987) are intended to be used as a set (McRoberts, Vol. 1, p. vi). Within the two volumes five large sections may be identified. In the first, Volume 1 Part A has one unit that functions as an introduction to communication theory. The mass media are presented as extensions of basic written, aural and visual modes of communication which are explored in the units that follow. Volume 1 Part B on extensions

of writing has three units (Unit 2 Newspapers, Unit 3 Books, Unit 4 Magazines), Volume 1 Part C on extensions of the ear has two units (Unit 5 Sound Recordings and Tapes, Unit 6 Radio), and Volume 2 Part A on the extensions of the eye has 4 units (Unit 1 Images in Print, Unit 2 Photographs, Unit 3 Films, Unit 4 Television). There is also a summarizing section, Volume 2 Part B. Unit 5 in this section is on advertising and explores its subject as a cross-media issue, which is also the approach used in Unit 6 to explore the personal consequences of media exposure. As mentioned earlier, units 1 and 2 of Volume One and 1, 2, 3, and 4 of Volume Two are recommended as content material in the introductory sections of the Western Australian curriculum and will be the focus of this portion of this study.

These books are the most heavily illustrated of the Australian texts to be considered here. Emphasis is placed on the reproduction of historic materials such as early magazine and newspaper covers as well as images of older forms of film and photographic equipment. Like the other Australian texts, the most commonly used illustrations in *The Media Workshop* texts are very gestural cartoons. These are employed as how-to diagrams, as illustrations of specific content, and as diversionary imagery. Photography is used throughout the two books, although, not surprisingly, it is more prevalent in Volume 2, which concentrates on the image. In both volumes, photographs are most often used as documentation to show the equipment or procedures used in various media studies, or as samples taken from film and advertising. McRoberts employs an extended photo essay in Volume 1 (McRoberts, pp. 57-61) to present the stages in the production of newspapers. He also includes a number of snapshot-like images as raw material for student exercises in sequencing images.

In each of the units in *Media Workshop* there is a progression from historical and formal description of a medium to issues surrounding the selection of content. Each unit concludes with a section that explores the issue of meaning in that particular medium. Interspersed throughout the unit are little clusters of curious facts about the medium in question, as well as review questions and activities.

At the heart of each of these units is the notion that any medium of communication is framed by codes or systemic limitations, and that within these limitations users develop conventions for the application of that particular means of communication. Unit 1 in Part A of Volume I of *Media Workshop* (McRoberts, 1987) distinguishes between personal and mechanical codes, while defining a generic structure to effective communication that accounts for both the sender and receiver's part in communication. In this introductory portion of the book, societal or institutional influences on the effectiveness of communication are not explored. It is, however, appropriate that the unit concludes by citing Marshall McLuhan's aphorism about the medium being the message. This reference is used to briefly suggest the complex interrelationship between form and content.

The text concentrates on the mass media as extensions of personal, physical means of communication. Like McLuhan, McRoberts places emphasis on the impact that formal and mechanical elements in the mass media have on meaning. One of the consequences of putting the formal aspects of the media in the foreground is the de-emphasis of the psychological and political-institutional consequences of the media. While McRoberts places a welcome emphasis on the role that the visual plays in communication, it isn't clear in this first chapter if he will go far beyond an analysis of media forms.

Unit 2 in *Media Workshop Volume 1* (McRoberts, 1987) explores newspapers. McRoberts' thesis in this unit is that "newspapers are first and foremost a medium of the written word"(p. 51). His approach places emphasis on the structure of the newspaper as an institution and the structure of news stories as narrative. While making mention of the roles that photography and typographic design play in the modern newspaper, McRoberts completely subordinates their impact to that of the word. The result of this will undoubtedly be some well-written student work. This unit carries with it a variety of text-based student exercises, but collectively these can not possibly empower students to deal critically with the weight of visual information in today's newspapers.

Proponents of this text will justifiably argue that the Western Australian curriculum calls for the unit on print and photography to include this chapter, along with the chapter in *Volume 2* (McRoberts, 1987) on photography. A kind of balance can be struck between photography and its role in the print media if taught in tandem. It is essential for a unit such as this to emphasize the notion that visual, typographic, and textual content are all immediately interactive in newspapers. Each has an impact on the meaning of the other and it is misleading to lose sight of that.

Each of the units in the *Media Workshop* (McRoberts, 1987) texts closes with student work related to a relevant media issue. In this unit on newspapers it is both appropriate and revealing that the notion of truth, which was discussed with regard to the televisual news media in Chapter three of this dissertation, should be the topic. The fact that lens images are effectively set aside in this unit suggests that the truthfulness or realism, that is the indexicality, of these images is not an issue.

The introduction and unit 1 of *Media Workshop Volume 2* (McRoberts, 1987) is an extended discussion of the development of visual

images into symbolic sign systems. Moving through examples from ancient cultures to more recent fine art and advertising, the text argues that, "whether because they are deliberately presented that way, or because, seeing them repeated often enough, we begin to see them as representing a whole class of things—pictures can become charged with extra meanings" (p. 19). In these opening pages no distinction is made between drawn images, photographic reproductions from the media and photos taken as illustrations for this text. Thus the ample illustrations offered in this first unit are a mixture of types of images.

The point about the potency and impact of mechanically reproduced images is narrowed down by the end of unit 1 by concentrating on the images in comic books and cartoons. By discussing comic books, McRoberts is able to introduce some of the history and issues that have led to the "effects studies" which have been such a dominating part of one branch of psychological inquiry into the mass media, and which address concerns about symbolic signs as emotional and acculturating forces. McRoberts addresses the question, "Are comics good for you?" (p. 33-34) by describing the controversy that has surrounded the more explicit and violent comics in publication since the fifties, but concludes this portion of his text by admitting that the effects studies connected with comic books have been inconclusive. Rather than leaving the unit at that, McRoberts concludes with a two page comic strip that visually re-enacts the content if not the style of the sex and violence comics under discussion. The text that accompanies the cartoons is used to draw attention to the blatant and unsophisticated nature of this type of literature.

This conclusion creates some real ambiguity. By appropriating the visual luridness of these comics to promote his negative evaluation of them, is McRoberts effectively undermining his own criticism? Why does

he seem critical in words while feeling free to use what are (according to his text) problematic images? He seems to be using visual illustrations of sex and violence to sell his critical observations that sex and violence are used in comic books.

Part A Unit 2 in Volume 2 of *Media Workshop* is divided evenly into three portions. The introductory pages follow the history of photography from the 1830's to the present and are amply illustrated with historic photographs and technical drawings. This section basically follows a technological version of the "great man" approach to history by presenting a chronology of inventors and their inventions. The last section in the unit concentrates on the how-to side of the photographic process and employs both photography and drawing for the many technical illustrations used. It is the centre portion of this unit that is of special interest. The section opens by asking the question "How do photographs communicate?" (McRoberts, 1987, p. 44). McRoberts responds to this by exploring both visually and in writing what are called "the codes" (p. 44) and "the conventions" (p. 46). According to McRoberts, the codes of photography are the formal, physical limits of the medium and include: subject, frame, light and dark, colour and monochrome, mass, pattern, texture, and composition. Although this section asks students to compare different versions of photographs, the accompanying captions emphasize the changes in mood or meaning caused by different physical qualities in the image without mentioning that a photographer has brought about those changes. The emphasis is oriented toward reception and student preference without extended exploration of the conditions leading up to those preferences. It models a fairly uncritical approach to photographs as iconic signs.

In discussing the conventions of photography McRoberts states that "what a picture means is largely a matter of what it's used for" (p. 46). He

then identifies four broad categories of use: social function, communication, expressive function, and persuasion. McRoberts links, through word and example, the social function of photography with family photos and the indexical (my term, not his) quality that such images are seen to possess. He argues that this connection has come to play a part in our response to the use of photographs of famous people. "Owning someone's image is not quite the same as knowing him personally, but it seems to be heading in the same general direction psychologically" (p. 46). McRoberts further extends this notion of the indexical side of photography when he briefly discusses documentary or news images. He tells but does not show us that "what is shown, and how it is shown, can be manipulated very easily" (p. 47).

In discussing the expressive side of photography, McRoberts states that from its invention some photographers have made art with the camera. Yet he marginalizes art photography by suggesting that it is "less well known than other types" (p. 47), defining what he means by art photography only through one visual example, a traditionally beautiful landscape photo.

McRoberts' final category describes photography as a tool of persuasion. Where he did not specifically use the term "indexical" to describe the realism supporting the social and communicative functions of the medium, McRoberts does specifically explore the term "icon" as it has been used to describe those images of persuasion "which dominate people's thinking" (p. 48). His definition collapses icon and symbol as they have been described in Chapter two of this study. He presents images that show gender-based role models and stereotypes of cuteness and family function and then argues that these iconic mass-media images have a powerful negative affect on those many viewers who cannot meet the standards set

by the icon. Although he gets close to the gender issues discussed in feminist contemporary criticism, McRoberts limits his brief discussion here to photography's role as a source of images of same-gender role models. He does not introduce the notion that photographic mass-media images are often meant to affect members of the opposite sex although several of the images that he offers as examples could certainly be discussed in that context. The general impression given in this unit is that viewers are generally too susceptible to the meanings built into photographs. Photographs are presented as constructed objects, but issues such as how that construction is carried out at a physical level (which would suit the orientation of the unit) and the significance of that construction (which would expand the unit beyond its apparent purpose) are not explored at any length. These expansions of the chapter would take the unit beyond reception theory into formal and social criticism.

For a variety of reasons *Media Workshop Volume 2 Unit 3* (McRoberts, 1987), on film, is one of the key chapters in these texts. It is the longest unit in the two texts, and has the greatest quantity and widest stylistic range of illustrations. The number of photographic images of students and the scope and nature of the projects assigned both suggest that this unit is intended to be the biggest "hands-on" experience the texts have to offer.

Like the previous chapter on photography, Unit 3 opens with a brief history of the medium, but in this case the emphasis is on the content and narrative of particular films, with technical history playing an important but secondary role. In addition, an element of cultural/institutional history is introduced through a discussion of "Classic Hollywood" cinema in comparison with Australian cinema. In exploring the relationship between Australian and Hollywood cinema, issues such as economics and cultural

sovereignty (or what has been identified as symbolic sign as production and acculturation in this study) are introduced. These early discussions lay the groundwork for the exploration of film as a cultural construction in later exercises in critical inquiry and in student film production.

Like the previous chapter on photography, Unit 3 offers a list of codes and conventions of film. The codes, which correspond in form to those identified in early semiotic theories of film, include: the shot, the sequence, the soundtrack, editing and special effects. The lists are more extensive than were those on photography, and particular items in the code, such as the synchronization of sound with image, are discussed in some detail. In addition, McRoberts is careful to point out that even this listing is far from complete.

It is not clear what McRoberts means by "the conventions" of film. He divides film into fiction and documentary and focuses on fiction, under which he vaguely introduces the notion of genre and auteurism as "form" and "style", as well as "stars", "themes", and "production values." In the photography unit McRoberts is explicit in framing the conventions of the medium as "the ways photography is used." In this chapter on film, the term "conventions" has come to mean the narrative structure and the *mise en scène* of a film. This shifts the emphasis from reception and interpretation to construction, which suggests that a semiotic model is at work in this chapter.

Following this theoretical portion, a number of heavily illustrated pages are devoted to the production of student films. This section takes students from initial conception to the final projection of a film. Included in this portion of the unit, along with a selection of stills from known movies, are a large number of technical diagrams, as well as a relatively short but complete storyboard and script. The collaborative nature of the

medium is detailed through a number of job descriptions included in this section.

The unit closes with the issue of criticism and film. McRoberts responds to the question of what makes a "good" film by introducing very briefly the four major streams of film criticism: auteur theory, genre theory, semiotic theory, and aesthetic theory. McRoberts summarizes his response to these theories by suggesting that "it's safe to say there's an element of truth in all of them, but that the whole truth is not to be found in any one" (McRoberts, 1987, p. 119). Although he avoids saying so, McRoberts' comment that "all [good] films must be integrated and harmonious" (p. 119) suggests that he operates under a notion of aesthetic unity that would place him in the camp of the aesthetic theorists.

McRoberts concludes this chapter on film by asking "Why are films important?" (p. 122). His intriguing conclusion is that film "bypasses traditional authority structures (parliament, education, church and social leaders) and goes straight to the individual viewer" (p. 122). He argues that film offers a non-traditional, fictitious world view that can make "Chewbacca...more 'real' to most people, than the Secretary-General of the United Nations" (p. 123). What McRoberts doesn't say is that this world view is the product of another institution, the film industry, which is, while not a singular, unified corporate body, a large collection of commercially motivated corporations. Film is somewhat less obviously linked to the advertising industry than are the print media and television. Nonetheless, in selling entertainment, the film industry is in the business of defining, refining and communicating our desires. As psychoanalytically and semiotically oriented criticism suggests, the institution of the film industry allows particular, powerful individuals to have a profound impact on our perception of the world and its people.

Without question, the emphasis placed on student production, with detailed information on the collaborative nature of film process, acts to draw attention to the mechanism as an aspect of the indexical meaning of film. No student would come through this unit believing that a film is the same as the life it may represent. At the same time, the difficult issue of discovering some critical perspective from which to respond to film is left largely unexplored.

*Media Workshop Volume 2* Unit 4 is on television. As before, this unit opens with an historical look at the medium. This unit places even greater emphasis on the local, cultural issues related to the development of television in Australia than did the previous unit with regard to film. The first third of the unit is devoted to exploring television as institutionally based sources of symbols. This unit studies the development of the various commercial and governmentally funded networks that fill Australia's airwaves. Cultural concerns such as content, and related economic concerns such as the financial viability of producing original Australian programming, are discussed in pages framed by stills from a variety of Australian programs.

The now-familiar section on codes refers to the information presented in the previous chapters and then draws attention to differences the televisual domestic viewing environment imposes on production. The technical consequences of T.V's small image size, compared to film, such as simplified sets and greater use of close-up shots, are presented. On the other hand, the significance of this changed viewing environment on the viewer is not explored.

Like the unit on film and unlike the unit on photography, the section on television conventions emphasizes the form of televisual programming rather than its use. This unit describes at some length the importance of

genre or format, personalities and styles. Brief mention is made of the uses of television in the contrast made between entertainment and news programming, but the emphasis is still on how these types of programming have come to be organized for broadcast. Advertising, and its impact on the form that television takes, is not presented as one of the conventions of the medium. The issue is confronted briefly later in the chapter but is not linked strongly to either the conventions of the medium, or its effects.

Between the sections on codes and conventions early in the unit, and the brief discussion of the impact of commercials on the medium, there is an extended section on production. This section picks up many of the production exercises explored in the film unit, and through text and technical illustration, expands on them. Again a script is provided, but this time the project takes the form of a news broadcast. The content of the script is, however, fiction, so that the students are actually producing something of a hybrid in this exercise. This approach acts as an explicit critique of the apparent immediacy and realism of television news, but the significance of realism in television news is completely subverted by not encouraging critical exploration of visual selection and presentation, which is at the heart of the news genre.

The chapter concludes by exploring the effects of television. The effects of the representation of gender, race, economic position, and violence are discussed with reference to psychological studies. Much is made of the quantity of television viewed by children as compared to other activities, such as reading, that provide information about the world. Once again the unit focuses on program content but does not explore advertising. Emphasis is placed on the world view depicted in television programming without considering the world view depicted through the advertising that accompanies the program. In fairness to the text, the final,

cross-media units in Volume 2 do explore issues such as advertising at length. At the same time, the impact of advertising is separated from the initial discussion of the experience of viewing television. In doing so McRoberts would seem to be sidestepping the issue of viewer positioning discussed at such length by contemporary feminist critics.

### *Meet the Media*

*Meet the Media* (McMahon & Quin, 1988) is the most recently published of the material in the Western Australian curriculum and is specifically designed for use by junior secondary level students. Chapters one and two are umbrella chapters, the first exploring communication theory while the second deals with advertising across the media. Chapters three (Newspapers and Photographs) and four (Magazines and Comics) focus on the print media. Chapter five is on film, six is on radio and audio, and seven is on television.

This book places emphasis on black and white photographic reproductions from the various media as well as media-like images for student manipulation and analysis. Collectively these photos represent approximately 25% of the book's content. Some fairly crudely done pen and ink drawings are used to illustrate student involvement in the many projects and assignments that the text sets, but these, together with a smattering of charts and graphs, represent less than 10% of the book's content. The remaining two-thirds of the book is made up of written text, the bulk of it brief introductory paragraphs followed by instructions for projects or activities.

Portions of *Meet the Media* are prescribed for seven of the 16 units that make up the Western Australian curriculum at this level. The three units (1.1, 2.1, and 2.2) defined as introductory in the *Media Studies*

*Resource Catalogue* (MEWA, 1988) refer to Chapters one, three, five and seven in this book. Given my focus on introductory material and understanding the visual in the media, the analysis that is to follow will concentrate on Chapters one, three, five and seven.

Chapter one defines communication as a chain made up of sender, message, medium, and receiver (McMahon & Quin, p. 11). It is suggested that we communicate via languages and that these languages can be written, spoken or visual (p. 14). Emphasis is placed on the importance of recognising that both sender and receiver play a role in meaning to be drawn from a message. The text suggests that four questions should be asked of the media:

1. **What products do the media offer us?**
2. **How are these messages or products constructed? What codes do they use? How do we make sense of (decode) these messages?**
3. **At whom are these messages directed? Do we all make the same meanings out of the messages or do the meanings vary? If there are differences, what causes them?**
4. **What effects do the mass media have on us? What are the surface and deeper meanings of the products or messages they offer us? (p. 10-11)**

These questions are important, not only because they represent the organising framework for each of the chapters to follow in *Meet the Media*, but also because they establish the theoretical scope of media studies in this text. Question 1 asks the student to investigate empirical questions of content in the media. Question 2 is grounded in a contemporary understanding of semiotics that sees communication as a message assembled in a culturally recognizable code and then disassembled (decoded) by the receiver. Question 3 implies that media messages are

directed at particular groups. This introduces the possibility that differences in message receivers have an impact on their reception of a given message. On the one hand this posits an institutional agenda on the part of the mass media (the messages are directed at particular groups), and on the other implies, as do feminist and ideological critiques of the media, categories based on culture, race, gender, age or economic status of receivers or targets for the messages. Question 4 goes one step further in the area of reception and introduces the notion that there are levels of meaning in media messages. The kind of interpretive analysis implied here can be found in psychology's interest in the media as well as the psychoanalytic, narrative, and reception theories discussed in Chapters three, four and five of this dissertation.

Chapter three in *Meet the Media* concentrates on newspapers and photography. It addresses only three of the four questions posed by the text, ignoring number four and its concerns with **effects**. The greater part of the chapter is devoted to **what** constitutes the content of newspapers. This exploration emphasizes written content: ads and news stories of various genres including topical, event oriented, sensational and ethnocentric articles (p. 51). The study of photographs is limited to several exercises where students are asked to select newsworthy images or portions of images. Presumably the students' criteria for making these selections are to be based on the same notions of newsworthiness discussed in the written content of the chapter.

The **how** portion of the chapter devotes a brief three pages to the conventions of the newspaper. It concentrates on formal design considerations as well as the conventions of writing for the newspaper. It does not describe or discuss conventions of photography or photojournalism.

The **for whom** section of the chapter is only one page long. It discusses very briefly newspaper circulation and tells the students (but does not explore the idea) that newspapers have points of view and particular target audiences.

Chapter five explores the film medium. The **what** question is answered in three pages of exercises that focus entirely on the "persistence of vision" phenomenon. The **how** question constitutes the bulk of this text's study of film. In thirty pages twelve exercises are offered, grouped under the headings: Scripts, Artistic Decisions, Editing, and Actors and Acting. Most of the twelve exercises function as introductions to various ways by which films are constructed, including: original ideas, framing, camera angles, camera movement, lighting, effects, props and set design, costuming, characterization, montage/narrative, and point of view. Often in these exercises reference is made, in simple terms, to the notion of viewer positioning. For example, the introduction to an exercise on selecting a point of view states:

Editors have a choice of many shots of an action. Shots of the same action have been taken from different positions. The editor decides which view of the action we get to see. Do we see the action from where the hero would see it? The position from which we see the action is called the *point of view*. This is not done simply for variety, but to change the way we understand the action. It can make us feel part of the action or separate from it. (McMahon & Quin, p. 122)

The four activities that follow this statement concentrate on the technicalities of editing shots and adding sound, but in no way explore the notion that our understanding of the action may have been influenced by these changes.

The **for whom** section briefly introduces the concept of genre and then uses its two pages to explore popular film with reference to attendance and sales figures. The **what effects** portion of the film chapter is basically a statement to the effect that films are constructions that are important because they create a representation of reality. It goes on to suggest that this representation should be viewed critically. The chapter then concludes with a variety of practical exercises that further explore the creation of a sense of place in film. One of the final exercises is a reproduction of Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov's montage experiment where a character's expression seems to change because of the changing content of a second image that the first is paired with. This is the only exercise in the chapter that gives the student the opportunity to explicitly address the issue of meaning in the visual construction of film.

Chapter seven in *Meet the Media* looks at television. The **what** section in the television chapter presents information on the demographics of television ownership and viewing, as well as introducing the concept of genre or "formats". Student exercises in this nine page section concentrate on student analysis of their own viewing patterns.

The **how** section of Chapter seven opens by reintroducing the issue of symbols that was discussed very briefly in Chapter one. Students are asked to analyse the visual and aural codes in television news and situation comedies. Also touched on are issues such as newsworthiness, point of view used to create an impression of authority, and characters as types that represent different social groups. Compared to other sections and other chapters, this section de-emphasizes original student production in favor of exercises that concentrate on student manipulation and analysis of imagery from the media.

The **for whom** section of this chapter on television addresses two issues: television as an economic institution, and its role in the family. In many ways, these six pages pick up the ideas introduced at the beginning of the chapter. By drawing attention to the amount of money involved in television broadcasting, and connecting that with those visual qualities of programming that make television look like a natural extension of the family living room, the issue of the hegemonic power of television is introduced, if not explored in any depth.

Finally, the **what effects** portion of Chapter seven in *Meet the Media* picks up the exploration of characterization in television introduced earlier and links it with values. The suggestion is made that the values represented by characters and genre on television have an impact on viewers' values, as well as their perception of the world. The exercises that follow in this section use both analysis and production approaches to consider the values implied in televisual characterization. Most of these exercises are word based rather than visual.

### Critical Review

The concluding portion of this chapter is intended to establish a critical overview of all the Western Australian curriculum materials reviewed here. The intention is to establish a sense of the scope of the program at large rather than to focus on limitations of particular texts.

Bound textbooks represent a significant portion of the Western Australian curriculum foundational material. It is therefore fair to generalize on the basis of those materials about the way the lens media are used in the curriculum at large. Though all the books reviewed here have limited themselves to black and white image reproduction, of more concern is the way that those images are used in the texts. The largest

proportion are used as documents divisible into primary and secondary categories. Images such as photos of students working on media projects, and technical illustrations of either media equipment or processes represent primary documentation. Images reproduced from the various lens media are often photographs of photographs, and represent secondary documentation. Regardless of their origins, the majority of these images are offered as either evidence or example, and students are not often called upon to analyse them to any great extent. The image sequencing exercises in *Meet the Media* (McMahon & Quin, 1988, p. 129-131, 185-189) and the family snap-shots in *Media Workshop Volume 2: Images* (McRoberts, 1987, p. 44-47) are two notable exceptions to the general use patterns of images in these texts. In these two examples, the expressive qualities of photographic imagery and the impact of the images' visual context are explored in situations where critical viewing on the part of the student is encouraged. The weight placed on the use of lens imagery as indexical signs in these texts is in some ways at odds with the critical perspectives promoted by the texts' written content.

As a package, the materials reviewed here cover an enormous amount of ground and offer some insight into the curriculum. The study of photography tends to come early in each text and emphasizes the mechanisms of the camera and "rules of composition". Critical or aesthetic issues that might be considered an art educator's domain, and photographs as an art form, are basically ignored. Narrative and semiotic theories that emphasize the use of visual media as icon have generally focused on film, and so it is not surprising that photography is not explored in this context. This may account for the fact that those texts that touch on newspapers and the other print media do not explore the relationship between photographic images and the text that surrounds them. Issues such as the

realism and newsworthiness of lens images is typically left for discussions of television news.

In terms of the student work required and the amount of space used in these texts, film studies seems to be the foundation of this curriculum. This is, perhaps, attributable to the fact that this and many other media studies programs grew out of film studies courses offered in the schools in the 1970's. Narrative and semiotic theories are at the heart of this area of inquiry. When film is being discussed as a story, notions of narrative, point of view, and character are described. When the production and sequencing of images (especially in terms of student work) is under consideration, the basic vocabulary of semiotics as it has been adapted to film is used. When students are called upon to respond critically, the approach seems to be drawn from either a generalized iconic/aesthetic model, or from early notions of representation that could be linked to a variety of perspectives. Generally speaking, the text avoids identifying or using any one particular point of view in its criticism, which really means that it is following rather than resisting the status quo, or the viewer-at-large's attitude toward film.

Where this curriculum emphasizes form in its consideration of photography, and content in its consideration of film, the study of television is used to explore contextual influences such as the institutional nature of the mass-media and its effects on individuals in society. More than in any of the other media-based areas in this curriculum, the television sections are used to focus on the economic institutions driving the mass-media. The *Media Workshop* text (McRoberts, 1987), especially, concentrates on who owns what. Unfortunately, this critique does not become very specific in terms of the relationship between advertising and programming. The reader is told that more popular, less challenging programming tends to be more profitable, but the relationship between

world views and the ideological implications presented in programming and advertising (its function as a symbolic sign system) are not explored.

*Meet the Media* (McMahon & Quin, 1988) uses its television section to offer an extended visual study of representation as an aspect of characterization as iconic sign. The section details the physical qualities that characterize types, stereotypes, and symbols. Though the notion that these symbolic characters can be used as visual shorthand is introduced, this information is presented more as a psychological phenomenon than as the kind of socially defining structure that various streams of cultural criticism see in it.

The television sections do a comprehensive job of introducing the "use studies" and "psychological effects studies" that have been a part of the medium since the 1950's. The emphasis is on children and the consequences of exposing them to television in general and representations of violence in particular. The television sections do not move into the social effects of gender and race representation that are largely the domain of cultural critics.

Contextually, these curriculum materials represent a substantial portion of the introductory content in Western Australia's Media Studies program. Given their form and the fact that the curriculum is a component of a larger language arts program, it is not surprising that emphasis, especially in the area of the construction of meaning, is biased toward print. This is especially evident in the way that photographs are used and critiqued, or left uncritiqued. In their use of generalized terminology from semiotics, these texts do move students toward an understanding of the visual as a systematic means of communication that is both effective and expressive. Psychological interpretation, contemporary critical thought on iconic signs, and ideological critique of mass mediated symbols, admittedly

difficult terrain for junior secondary students, as well as the lens media as aesthetic forms, are far less adequately addressed.

## Chapter 8

### Media Studies in the Province of Ontario

#### Curriculum Guidelines

The media literacy curriculum in the province of Ontario is the result of some interesting changes in Canadian education, at least as it is reflected in the Ontario school system. In 1987 the Ontario Ministry of Education revised the Secondary English curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education [MEO], 1987), and adopted a media education requirement for students in grades 7-12. For the intermediate grades, 10% of course content is to involve media studies. For the secondary grades, fully 33% of the mandatory content in the language arts program is to be media related. This change was the result, in part, of lobbying by the provincial Association for Media Literacy (AML) whose president, Barry Duncan, has authored *Mass Media and Popular Culture* (1988), the classroom text which we are considering here. *Media Works* (Anderson, 1989) and *Media Focus* (Ingram, 1989) are two secondary level texts that have just been published and will undoubtedly work their way into the school system. As well, a "Canadianized" version of *Meet the Media* (McMahon & Quin, 1988) has gone to press and is aimed specifically at the junior secondary student. The fact that Duncan's book is the only one that has been in use, and the only one, for the time being, which is mentioned in Ministry of Education text book circulars (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1989) justifies focusing on *Mass Media and Popular Culture* (Duncan, 1988). As well, *Mass Media and Popular Culture Teachers' Guide* (Duncan, 1989) and *The Media*

*Literacy Resource Guide* (Ministry of Education, Ontario [MEO] 1989) are considered.

### ***The Media Literacy Resource Guide***

The *Media Literacy Resource Guide* (MEO, 1989), published by the province of Ontario, is a large, expensively produced handbook "predicated on the conviction that teachers can teach the key concepts of media literacy *in some form to all students at all levels*" (p. 3). The guide includes chapters on television, film, radio, popular music and rock video, photography, print, and cross-media studies, as well as support chapters on other available resources and an important introductory chapter where key concepts and a variety of possible teaching strategies are laid out.

In explaining the rationale for media literacy programs in the schools, the writers of the guide concede that the school system is "primarily print-oriented" (p. 6). While the guide argues for the study of the electronic media, and by implication, greater critical understanding of the visual, the format of the guide itself seems to have been influenced by the print and word biases in the system. There is not a single photograph in the entire guide. Instead, there are dozens of well-crafted cartoon illustrations, many of which reprise images from television, film or mass media photography. The choice to go with one (unnamed) artist's illustrations results in a unity of design which is visually quite attractive. The consequences of weighting design over lens-generated illustrations with a more direct visual reference to the study of the mass media will be discussed in the closing analysis.

Chapter one lists eight key concepts:

1. All media are constructions.
2. The media construct reality.

3. Audiences negotiate meaning in the media.
4. Media have commercial implications.
5. Media contain ideological and value messages.
6. Media have social and political implications.
7. Form and content are closely related in the media.
8. Each medium has a unique aesthetic form. (1989, pp. 9-10)

These are eight potent statements that don't necessarily fit neatly together. If, for example, the media constructs reality, is it possible for an audience to negotiate meaning in the media? Most of these concepts have the potential to be explored in visual terms.

The first chapter lists ten possible approaches to the study of the media, including: inquiry and critical thinking models, values education, the use of creative experiences, and semiotic analysis. Both the inquiry and critical models represent mainstream pedagogical practice in education and this is reflected in the detailed coverage given to these approaches here. The term semiotics, which is described in a brief paragraph with bibliographic references, is used in the loose sense of "a research strategy" described earlier by Allen (1987, p. 1). Finally, the chapter concludes by touching on various subject areas in the public school curriculum where media studies could play an important part. Rightly, the writers suggest that much of the impetus for media studies has come from language arts educators. It is not surprising, then, that the sections describing the application of media studies in the language arts and the social sciences are pages long while other subject areas, including the visual arts, merit only a paragraph. The brief comment on the appropriateness of media studies as content in the art program is reflective of the lack of input that art educators have offered to this program.

Chapter two, (MEO, 1989, pp. 27-72) which is devoted to television, is the longest of the sections on a specific medium. The first major section in this chapter, called "television's construction of reality", is basically oriented toward content analysis. The recommended exercises involve quantifying the kinds of people and activities as a means to discovering the role of iconic representation on television. The next section concentrates on decoding activities. In this, students are asked to break down televisual information into its components. After naming, but not explaining, the notions of storyboarding and "jolts per minute" (Wolfe, 1985), students are called upon to analyse soundtracks, sports, advertising, and stereotypical characters. There is a missed opportunity to introduce in detail some of the complexities in the indexicality of the visual in the media.

Having developed some analytical skills, the students are then to be presented with the concept of genre in the sections of Chapter two called "types of programs". The emphasis in this section is on the analysis of narrative content or plot. Several exercises draw attention to the visual content of game shows, talk shows, and sitcoms among others, but there is no extended analysis of the visual qualities of these programs. There is, for example, no exploration of the visual relationship between a talk show set and the living room of the viewer, or the importance of eye contact in news broadcasting.

The chapter closes with a section on the commercial implications of television. In some ways this is the most technical portion of this chapter. Along with exercises that explore cereal and Christmas season advertising, this section introduces terminology and concepts related to television programming. The focus of this section is clearly economic. How economic pressures drive both the visual and narrative content of television

programming is secondary here to simply laying out the institutional structure of the television industry.

Chapter three (MEO, 1989, pp. 73-98) is on film and is about half the length of the chapter on television. The first section introduces terminology (such as shot, scene, sequence, etc.) that gives the students words to describe some of the features of visual construction in a film. The meaning of various angles and points of view is discussed very briefly. Students are then asked to apply this terminology in student production work as well as in the analysis of commercial films. The last two-thirds of this chapter focuses on the literary qualities of film. In this portion students are introduced to film reviewing, genre (in terms of narrative content), and filmic adaptation of literary sources. The chapter includes a selection of hands-on experiences in animation and video. This is followed by a brief introduction to avant-garde and rock video which sets interpretation of meaning as its priority, with the visual in some ways subsidiary to emotional expression. Given the brief attention paid to introducing visual form in film, this section would seem to be relying on students' previous exposure to the medium, and thus adopts a discovery learning approach to the visual construction of filmic imagery.

Chapter four will not be discussed, since its focus on radio is outside the emphasis on visual material covered in this dissertation. Chapter five (MEO, 1989, pp. 117-134) deals with popular music and rock video. This chapter is interesting because the visual, aural, and literary elements receive equal weight. In terms of the visual, the section called "decoding: content, values, aesthetics" (p. 126) is central. Although there is no discussion of montage and its importance to rock videos, students are asked to analyse the visual construction of these entertaining advertisements. Most of what this analysis will entail is left unstated.

Presumably some reference to the terminology in the chapter on film would be needed.

Chapter six on photography (MEO, pp. 135-144) is the shortest in the *Media Literacy Resource Guide* (MEO, 1989). More than any other chapter, it concentrates on visual images and our response to them. Interestingly, having focused this chapter on the visual, the authors choose to emphasize aesthetics, and a fairly traditional artist-as-genius-creator approach at that. Both Gary Winogrand and media critic John Steinbeck are quoted to emphasize the I/eye of the photographer. Having established a photographer-based notion of who is responsible for the meaning of a photograph, the authors then ask the students to analyse family photographs for what they say about family life. Further exercises ask the students to use photographs as the springboard for creative writing and to analyse the environment surrounding photographic art in a gallery. This chapter concludes with exercises involving sequencing images to create different meaning, and with production assignments where the students are called upon to carefully plan studio tableau or advertising images.

Chapter seven on the print media (MEO, pp. 145-170) devotes one page to photographs in print. The authors pose the question: Are photographs as important to newspapers as the written text? Responses to this question are drawn from the students through suggested analysis of news photographs with reference to captioning and the articles that accompany them.

Chapter eight on cross-media studies (MEO, pp. 171-220) covers five major themes in the media: advertising, sexuality in the media, violence and the media, Canadian identity and ownership, and reporting the news. The first section, on advertising, almost seems to have been written by a different editorial committee. Rather than offering statements on the

media followed by student exercises meant to reinforce their understanding, this section employs checklists to be used in analysing various sorts of ads. This analysis places approximately equal weight on the visual form and the literary content of the ads. These checklists are followed by several pages of terminology and then a group of student exercises and productions intended to explore such issues as narrowcasting, political advertising and consumer advocacy.

The delicate/indelicate issue of pornography is dealt with in the section on sexuality. Using media images and advertising, the objectification of (usually female) models and actors is described. The pornographic representation of women is linked with the cultural determination of self image in both men and women. A number of the student assignments concentrate on theatrical concerns such as blocking (i.e., who is standing where, in what pose, and who are they looking at?). That the viewer might be part of that blocking is not discussed; hence, important developments in contemporary feminist film criticism are ignored.

Where the section on sexuality in the media tends to concentrate on its negative consequences in our culture, the section on violence offers a more diverse set of opinions. Where media representation of sexuality is "real" and thus detrimental in its stereotypicality, in the authors' view there seems to be some room for recognising the artifice in some media violence. Nonetheless, this section, along with asking students to "deconstruct" fight scenes in television, also asks them to consider the consequences of stereotyping certain classes of people as irrational, violent, or as enemies.

Finally, the last section of Chapter eight, which looks at reporting the news, asks student to do a comparative analysis of print and televisual

news media. How this kind of exercise might be carried out is not spelled out in great detail, but it does leave open the possibility for some interesting comparisons of the different uses of the lens media in these two forms.

### *Mass Media and Popular Culture*

*Mass Media and Popular Culture* (Duncan, 1988) consists of an introduction to key concepts followed by eight chapters. These chapters deal, in order, with: Popular Culture, Television, Film, Sound and Music, Journalism, Advertising, Violence, and Gender Roles.

Key terms throughout the book which are presented in the introduction are "construction", and "deconstruction"; "ideology", and "values", "forms", "codes", and "conventions". These dense and difficult terms, which are some of the foundational jargon of semiotics and critical theory, are minimally defined in four pages, with examples generally derived from television. There is an assumption on the part of the author that students will have some technical understanding of what it means to say, "that the producers of media 'construct' their product, whether it is the 6 o'clock news, a T.V. drama, your daily newspaper, a magazine ad, or a record album, to create an illusion or to make a world that is exciting and entertaining enough to keep audiences interested" (Duncan, 1988 p. 10). Such assumptions lead to a kind of sweeping generality. Thus, "construction" as it is described in the text implies a conspiratorial badness to which "deconstruction," whatever that may entail, is the antidote. "Ideology," "beliefs," and "values" are individual attributes that a group of "middle or upper-class white males" (p. 13)(who are probably American) are trying to influence to their advantage. And Nixon lost the 1960

presidential election because he sweated too much, thus demonstrating McLuhan's aphorism that "the medium is the message" (p. 12).

I have described this first, important portion of the book in a critical tone. While the concepts at issue are, as Duncan implies, essential, he adopts a simplified, banking approach in the Frierean sense (Friere, 1974) to their study that runs counter to the "more critical perspective" (Duncan, 1988, p. 7) that he claims as the cornerstone of the text. Identifying dominant groups by gender, social class and nationality as part of his very first definitional steps can make it very difficult for a student to genuinely explore notions of value and ideology as they are evidenced in the media. Media education ought to be devoted to the *exploration* of the construction and deconstruction of meaning in the media, the ideologies, beliefs and values built in to either of those first practices, and the forms, codes and conventions that are used in their expression. It seems more appropriate that the definition of these terms should be the end of this course rather than its beginning. Giving a list of "good guys" and "bad guys", however cautiously done, seems to run counter to the critical method being promoted here. It would be more appropriate for students to view a current candidates' debate and discuss the significance of the visual images that are created than to be told, with no visual support, that Richard Nixon sweated his way out of the U.S. presidency in 1960.

Like the introduction, Chapter one, "Popular Culture," could be a book and a major course of studies on its own. The term, Popular Culture, is variously defined in the book as, "mainstream culture—the arts, artifacts, entertainments, fads, beliefs and values shared by large segments of the society" (Duncan, 1988, p. 16); and "first and foremost, business" (p. 18). One of the real dangers involved in defining popular culture in terms of business is the disenfranchisement of the students. If business creates

popular culture, then studying popular culture takes on the flavor of what Len Masterman called "Leavisism" (Masterman, 1984), that is, media education seen as a kind of inoculation against all that is tasteless and crass in the world. Herbert Gans, in *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (1974) is far more open-ended in his discussion of popular culture. He distinguishes between popular culture and media fare. While they may at times seem interchangeable, "still, some popular culture continues to be created in the home" (Gans, p. 11). And as both Gans and Fred Schroeder (Schroeder, 1977) note, a key element in popular culture is the notion of choice. An even more recent definition of popular culture (Fiske, 1989) contrasts the term with consumer culture and argues that popular culture is only those activities and objects that run counter to the pressures of mass consumption. Nonetheless, the economic component of popular culture is an important question that students should consider from their own perspectives.

By emphasizing popular culture as business, Duncan reinforces the myth of the overnight sensation. If celebrity (a subsection of the Popular Culture chapter) is entirely a product of astute marketing, then anyone can be a celebrity. Certainly there are plenty of examples of individuals getting the fifteen minutes of fame that Andy Warhol said would be ours. Duncan's text, both in terms of the articles he chose to print, and the questions and exercises he asks the students to pursue, is critical of what he calls "celebrity worship" (p. 55). While noting the celebrity status of heroes such as Rick Hansen, Duncan spends more time on the toppling of "false gods." There is, however, a distinct contradiction between what the words in the text say and the images show. All the photographic images that he chooses to use to illustrate this section are attractive images of attractive and/or successful people. Two contradictions are at work here. By criticising

celebrity status as largely meaningless or trivial, Duncan positions himself as a critic of pop culture without accounting for the admiration we often feel for our cultural heroes beyond the imagery and the hype. At the same time, the images supplied in the text are not effectively deconstructed by Duncan's criticism. His words do not make the media stars look meaningless or trivial.

Like other aspects of popular culture, celebrity is often part form (marketing) and part content (the talents or personal qualities of the celebrity). Pam Cook suggests that celebrities "require an analysis capable of explaining the resilience of these images which we pay to have haunt our minds...an account which must attend to both industrial and psychic processes" (Cook, 1985, p. 50). A thoughtful approach to critically analyzing any aspect of popular culture must take the time to separate the people from the machinery, the manipulation from the entertainment and communication; otherwise the whole project becomes nihilistic rather than educational.

My general impression of Duncan's first chapter on popular culture is that the author has a sense of what is important. Unfortunately, he prefers to skim the surface of a number of issues rather than analysing a few concerns in depth. Building a model for careful analysis is far more important than trying to "hit all the bases" in a first text. Since most North Americans (including children) have an extensive empirical knowledge of the media and its products, media education should offer an analysis of this material that results in a high degree of technical and conceptual understanding.

The next three chapters can be discussed collectively because each (Television, Film, and Sound and Music) is a part of the entertainment industry and each depends on a form of non-verbal communication. Each

of these chapters moves from perceptions of a medium to its form, and ends with approaches to criticism in that medium. The strength of these chapters lies in the fact that each offers as its text a wide range of articles by a variety of authors. While these chapters could each easily be extended, a sufficient range of opinion is presented so that students can find room to test their own values.

The chapter on music is also about sound while the chapters on television and film have no parallel emphasis on vision. The strength of the chapter on music can be found in the fact that there is an attempt to lay a foundation in the technical, formal, and perceptual qualities of sound before discussion of lyrics and the institutional status of music gets too far along. In some circles, music is considered more abstract than the visual arts. It is seen as a purer art form which is further from our linguistic heritage and thus, perhaps, more difficult to understand in an analytical sense. It might be argued, therefore, that one cannot assume too much about a student's foundational knowledge in music. This dissertation argues that one of the great weaknesses in our educational system generally and in media education in particular is that we assume too much about students' and teachers' understandings of *Lens Meaning*.

Between the chapter on television and the chapter on film, five pages are devoted to technical concerns and virtually all of that is lists of vocabulary used in the industry. Knowing the word "editing" is a linguistic problem. Knowing how editing can affect the meaning of a film or video sequence is largely a visual problem. Most people are not going to "deconstruct" television and film images if they have no practiced understanding of how those images were constructed in the first place. As Masterman argues:

The whole area of visual coding deserves specific attention in any consideration of how the medium constructs meanings. This would cover the hierarchy implicit in different eye-contact-to-camera patterns, but also take in the way in which the image is framed, the appearance, dress, and gestures of participants, what is communicated by the sets, and the codes of geography within a studio which tells who is important and who less so. (Masterman, 1985 p. 159)

An example of the direction that these chapters could take can be found in Masterman's 1984 article for UNESCO called *Theoretical Issues and Practical Possibilities* (Masterman, 1984), where he suggests that the careful analysis of personal photographs can be an excellent way to learn to understand the indexical and symbolic meaning that is a part of lens images. He suggests further that this sort of first step is an important prelude to the study of the more fleeting and thus more analytically difficult images of television and film.

Barry Duncan does try to touch on some of the major concerns of film and television studies, such as genre, auteurism, and, of course, the institutional aspects of these media. As well, he makes sure that many of his examples are from media fare that will be familiar and popular among his target audience (secondary students), giving more than equal time to Canadian productions.

After these three chapters on specific media, there is a reference section that offers a number of inquiry models for gathering information on the media as well as information for writing scripts and another two brief pages on creating visual images. Following this, Duncan includes two chapters on particular types of explicit information: Journalism and Advertising. Explicit is used here to help distinguish these types of

information, which we know we are seeing, from that which is implicit in many media genres, such as violence and gender stereotyping. The last two chapters of the text deal with that sort of implicit information.

The Journalism chapter in *Mass Media and Popular Culture* is strongest when it is dealing with the issue of truth and objectivity. The collection of four articles under this subcategory include a "new journalism" piece on old age homes (*As Time Goes By* by David MacFarlane [pp. 245-252]) which draws attention to the potential in journalism for bias to be "a good thing". Next there are a pair of articles giving two sides to the misadventures of Canadian journalist, Barbara Amiel, in Mozambique (*A Flagrant Violation of Rights* by Barbara Amiel (pp. 253-255), and *Amiel: Beyond the Fringe* by Rick Salutin (pp. 256-257). These two articles combine to demonstrate the contestability of a particular journalist's apparent objectivity. Finally, an editorial piece by David Suzuki called *Television's Electronic Curse: Views of World are Distorted* (pp. 259-261) draws attention to the problem of having bias and questionable sources in journalism go unrecognized.

The pedagogically difficult area of the institutionality of the various journalistic media is dealt with briefly in the Journalism chapter. There is a danger, in dealing with media institutionality, of either boring the students to death or imposing a "conspiracy mentality" about the media. This chapter's light coverage in combination with the information and exercises provided in earlier chapters brings sufficient attention to the role that the profit motive plays in the information that the media transmit. Yet, the selection process in the journalistic media is far more complex than simple economic determinism might suggest. Especially in the case of most newspapers, there is no compulsion placed on the public to buy them. The problems of monopoly and editorial selection in newspapers are, of course,

important, but readers' buying and use habits also have an impact on the final product. This just cannot be dealt with, as it is in Duncan's book, in a page of statistics on Canadian use of the media (p. 222).

Finally, the absence of any significant comment on the importance of visual information in the journalistic media cannot go unremarked. Duncan implies at one point (p. 234) that visuals are of more concern in television journalism than in the print media. While this may be true, the importance of visual information in the print media can be illustrated by Duncan's use of it in this chapter. David MacFarlane's *As Time Goes By* (pp. 245-252) is offered as new journalism that accepts a certain amount of bias but tries to make that bias explicit and thus "honest." The article is illustrated with seven handsome portrait photographs of the old people who are the subjects of the piece. It may have been the journalist's intention to give us a "real" sense of these people through his writing and responses to them, but there is no mention by Duncan of the fact that the accompanying photographs are iconic idealizations. Rather than photographing these people in the environment that he is at such pains to describe, he has them photographed in casual but posed positions against a seamless studio backdrop. This combines with strong side lighting that both emphasizes the lines of age in their faces and provides hardness in the high contrast of light and shadow, to create an image of strong, weathered nobility. They are beautiful photographs, but they also make the story far more palatable than would images of "guests" in the old folks' lodge who are beginning to lose control of themselves. These images avoid many of the problematic undercurrents of retirement-home life that are an important element of MacFarlane's text.

Chapter six, on Advertising, is also concerned with the explicit attempt to transmit information to the public. In this case the information

preys on a material desire to have, rather than on a cognitive desire to know. This chapter touches on issues of the form, content, and context of advertising messages. In considering form, the text focuses on two sides of the same coin. The reader is first introduced to David Ogilvy, one of the "idea" men who have long been the tradition in the ad business. He describes how, through hard work and intuition, he makes his decisions about the direction that particular ad campaigns will take. Next we meet William Meyers and his notion of Psychographics. Advertising has moved toward a style that sells products as accoutrements to a particular lifestyle, rather than as objects that serve practical purposes. The use of demographics to identify the lifestyle and desires of a target group has become important to advertising research. Moreover, as ads rely less on factual text, they begin to rely more on metaphoric language and visual constructions as symbolic signs.

The second portion of this chapter focuses even more sharply on mental images and desire as they are played out in advertising. John Fisher's article takes a comical look at the stereotypes that surround the "typical family" in ads from the 1960's. Anne Steacy discusses sexuality as a selling tool. It is pointed out that advertising constructs images of "the good life" that we often passively accept, and that advertisers tap into our fears and desires in order to sell products. A follow-up to this observation must be some reflection on what we see as "the good life," as well as some honest discussion of desire and fear. This critical self-reflection can ultimately be a much more powerful tool against media manipulation than the examples of popular censorship described in this chapter, if for no other reason than that value laden and manipulative messages will continue to surround us. This is not to discount the importance of voicing

our opinions about our media environment, but even this sort of activism can only be as strong as the individual's convictions.

In summary, the importance of visual imagery in constructing the content of advertising cannot be underestimated. If this text is the students' only formal background to understanding those images, then they are not equipped to do meaningful analysis. The kind of advertising analysis that Roland Barthes did on spaghetti sauce ads in *Rhetoric of the Image* (Barthes, 1977), requires an understanding of the images as both indexical and symbolic signs.

The final two chapters in *Mass Media and Popular Culture* deal with two of the more serious issues implicit in much of the media message: Violence, and Gender Roles. One of the real challenges in considering violence and gender roles as topics of study is that each plays itself out visually in the media, but our discussion and interpretation of them must, generally, be through words. The subtle power of the visual in media can be seen in the way violent or sexual images affect us.

The chapter on violence is probably the most balanced and thought-provoking in the book. Nine articles are included, plus commentary and questions covering everything from cartoons to the news, wrestling to rock videos, and a large dose of Canadian content in discussing violence in hockey. Like most of the rest of the book there is a sense of a "right answer" in this chapter. Violence is bad, but only to a degree. Yet this is the first chapter where some of the articles suggest that there might be shades of grey to be found in the issue under discussion. Writers like Tom Englehardt in *The Shortcake Strategy* (pp. 314-320), and Rocco Rossi in *Hype is the Key to Wrestling Mania* (pp. 336-339) at least explain why violent programming is viewed as entertaining.

The chapter on gender roles is a disappointment. A "folk tradition" among Secondary English teachers is that they can get all the students to read action-adventure stories but it is very difficult to get boys to read stories that focus on relationships and "quieter" narrative. That tradition seems to have had an impact on this text. The chapter on gender roles is only half as long as the chapter on violence. The resulting brevity weakens the chapter's capacity to represent the complexities of gender as it is used in the media. Six articles express a "proper" point of view: that gender stereotyping, especially of women, is bad. There is no dissenting voice, and no explanation of why this "obviously" bad practice has such a hold on the media. The whole issue of pornography, of turning people into objects (or icons) for visual consumption, which is at the heart of the sexual stereotyping of women, is not discussed. The images of man as dominator and predator, which are the other part of the pornographic formula, not to mention the concepts of voyeurism and fetishism which are such a fundamental part of the lens media, are not discussed. Where the chapter on violence acts to open discussion, the chapter on gender roles seems to be acting to limit the range of considerations. What is offered is worth reading, but it isn't enough.

### ***Mass Media and Popular Culture Teachers' Guide***

In 1989 a teachers' guide (Duncan, 1989) was published to support *Mass Media and Popular Culture* (Duncan, 1988). Much of the text is devoted to further analysis of the articles offered in the student textbook. It is not surprising that this teachers' guide emphasizes the literary interpretive mode as an approach to ideological analysis, as this is also the foundation of the student text. Fortunately the guide goes beyond this perspective by referring regularly to a wide variety of visual materials

that a particularly determined teacher could track down and incorporate into the curriculum. The other significant contribution of this guide is the bibliographic information at the end of each of the chapters. Cumulatively there are at least 100 annotated citations that touch on a wide range of issues and perspectives. A careful reading of writers such as Kuhn (1985) on the construction of the male gaze; Williamson (1978) on decoding advertisements; Flitterman-Lewis (1987) on the spectator's relationship to news broadcasting; Grant (1986) on film genre; and Newcomb (1982) on a variety of critical perspectives on television, among many others, can equip a teacher to make this curriculum strongly grounded in the visual qualities of the media.

### *Critical Review*

In my original structuring of this critique I suggested that I would consider the teaching of the visual in media education through the indexicality and notions of realism; the iconic and the construction of narrative; and the symbolic, acculturation and social critique. The referents were to *Mass Media and Popular Culture* (Duncan, 1988); its accompanying teachers' guide (Duncan, 1989); and the *Media Literacy Resource Guide* (MOE, 1989). Issues of indexicality have been touched on throughout this dissertation, but require further discussion at this point.

The proposed curriculum that these texts embody is weakest in its handling of the indexical aspects of the visual in the media, both in terms of how it lays the foundations for visual decoding of the media by students, and in ways that the curriculum documents actually use the visual. The *Media Literacy Resource Guide* (MOE, 1989) is a rich text that must be read as an introductory survey of theory and practice in media studies for those many public school educators who will be attempting the

subject for the first time. If the text does function as the foundation for many teachers in their first attempts to teach media studies, then it is a real concern that the book has chosen to completely avoid any use of the lens media in its own production. It does call upon teacher and student to "decode" media messages, but without visual examples of what that means, the potential for interpretative relativism is strengthened. *Mass Media and Popular Culture* (Duncan, 1988) opts for a kind of realism in its use of lens images. Virtually half the photos in this text are quite dark, coarsely screened reproductions from the mass-media. Many of the images are from promotional packages originally produced for the celebrities pictured. Despite the low reproduction quality, most of these people look very good; but the text does not spend time helping students to understand how lens media were used to create these illusions. What is missing from the text are everyday images that could be visually contrasted with and draw attention to the role of mechanism and convention in these mass-media products. Without evidence to the contrary, these mass-media images become what is real. In many ways this curriculum is thought-provokingly critical of the "false consciousness" (White, 1987, p. 137) resulting from naive consumption of the mass-media, but its own visual images belie the accompanying text. Not surprisingly, these curriculum materials place very little weight on guiding students through visual analysis. Lists of terms used in film or television do not constitute an introduction to *Lens Meaning*. Nor do they take advantage of the rich body of literature to apprehend the power of the visual in the mass media.

A number of perspectives that touch on iconic signs and *Lens Meaning*, such as psychoanalytic theory, feminist film theory and reception theory, that offer contemporary, alternative explanations for responses to the mass-media, are not addressed explicitly in Duncan's text. It is

understandable that much of the work surrounding response to the media is to be found in the exercise portions of these texts. After all, in those exercises students are called upon to respond in some sort of public form, and to produce visual responses to the media theories being studied. Unfortunately, much of this work is built around an unspecified aesthetic, and if the aesthetic remains undefined then the media themselves will become the criteria against which the media is measured.

This curriculum is at its strongest in the analysis of the media as symbolic sign systems. In the Althusserian sense (White, 1987, p. 139) ideology can be understood as a complex of social, political, and economic practices that together "comprise the *social formation*" (p. 139). Much of the exploration in these curriculum materials is devoted to decoding media products in search of the economic agenda behind them. More specifically, social practices such as response to, representation in, and viewing patterns of the mass media are examined in depth. The analysis of the meaning of these various practices (which would be the terrain of psychoanalytic theory, feminist film theory, or reception theory) is not explored to any great extent. Rather, using issues such as violence, and practices such as advertising as its focus, this curriculum concentrates on the more apparent consequences of media messages.

## Chapter 9

# Media Studies in Scotland

### Introduction

According to Schwab (1971) there are four commonplaces of education: "the learner, the teacher, the milieu, and the subject matter" (Schwab, 1973, p. 508-509). In the context of curriculum development and evaluation, the milieu is dominated by administrative and political authorities, and the subject matter is typically dominated by scholars in that subject area. The impact of behaviorism and discipline-based approaches to curriculum in the past thirty years can serve as evidence that, despite Schwab's call for a balance (p. 508) between the four commonplaces in curriculum development, the process is most typically dominated by the milieu and subject matter. As will be seen, the Scottish approach to Media Studies works from a model that shifts the emphasis away from curricula prescribed and controlled by administrative or governmental agendas to one where the individual teacher is recognized as a dominant force in curriculum planning.

In the context of this study, this means that the reading of the Scottish curriculum will be based on slightly different kinds of materials and will have a somewhat weaker internal validity, for the simple reason that the Scottish governmental documents are less prescriptive in terms of content. At the same time, analysing the effects of this decentralized structure in the Scottish approach to Media Studies with reference to the other two curricula under consideration will offer useful insights into all three curricula.

The Scottish curriculum cites as one of its foundational influences the work of F.R. Leavis (1948) "not because Leavis was a proponent of a view sympathetic to the position of contemporary Media Studies, but because his work established that the products of the media and the contexts in which they were produced were worthy of study, even if it was to decry their effects" (Dick, 1987, p. 3). The current development in Scottish Media Studies is linked with the initial publication of *Media Education in Scotland: Outline Proposals for a Curriculum* (Robinson, 1980) and the resulting establishment in 1983 of the Association for Media Education for Scotland (AMES). At the same time, the Scottish Film Council appointed a Media Education Officer. Together, the classroom teachers involved with AMES, and the Scottish Film Council, in the form of its media education officer, have been the prime advocates for Media Studies in Scotland.

In this analysis and evaluation, curriculum documentation will include: *Media Education in Scotland: Outline Proposals for a Curriculum* (Robinson, 1980); *Media Education: A Report on the Media Education Conference Jointly Held by the Scottish Film Council, Jordanhill College of Education, and The Scottish Council for Educational Technology* (Cowle 1981); *Teaching Media Studies: An Introduction to Methods and Resources* (Cowle & Dick, 1986); *Signs of Success: Report of the Media Education Development Project* (Dick, 1987); and *Media Education Curriculum Guidelines* (Scottish Film Council [SFC], 1988).

Consistent with a teacher-centered approach to curriculum development, its formulators are loath to designate particular texts as fundamental to Media Studies. The Scottish Film Council has, however, produced a limited number of audio-visual resources designed to address issues laid out in the curriculum guide. A selection of these A-V materials—*Picturing Women: Scottish Women in Photography* (Dick &

Moffat, 1989); *Another Time Another Place* (Dick, 1987); and *Open to Question: Mary Whitehouse* (Dick & McLean, 1988)—will be analysed.

### Curriculum Guidelines

Ten years of papers, proposals and conferences in conjunction with an ever-expanding offering of locally developed courses in the schools have led only recently to the publication of the Scottish *Media Studies Curriculum Guide* (SFC, 1988). The following is an analysis of significant points along that documentary trail, with particular attention given to teaching from theories of meaning as they apply to lens imagery in the mass media.

*Media Education in Scotland: Outline Proposals for a Curriculum* (Robinson, 1980) represents the first major move toward Media Studies in Scotland. As in many other countries, pockets of teaching about the media evolved out of film studies courses in the 1970's. Unlike both Western Australia and Ontario, a lobby group not considered one of the principal stakeholders in the educational system, the Scottish Film Council, played a significant role in the development of Media Studies programs.

Whether as the result of the Scottish Film Council's input, or a particular approach to education in Scotland, the first documents on Media Studies in Scotland adopted a global approach to Media Studies that has persisted. Media Studies is understood as

a means of helping children and adults towards a greater understanding of their own experience of the media by studying media messages or other products in the context of the various industries, institutions and professions involved in their production; the economic, political and constitutional background to the development of these bodies; and the broader social and cultural

setting in which production and its reception by a variety of audiences operates. (Robinson, 1980, p. 6)

From the outset, curriculum outlines were proposed for Primary, Early Secondary, Late Secondary, Further and Community Education, and Teacher Education. As well, it was argued that Media Studies in the public school system ought to be "situated within the subject areas of English and Modern Studies [geography/sociology/political science] coordinated with one another and at least recognized (perhaps aided) by other departments such as Art" (p. 11).

This notion of Media Studies functioning as a discipline across subjects was carried further by Coughie (1981) when he suggested that "its real value would not be as a new subject but as a complicating factor for existing ones" (p. 20).

These first documents saw interpretation (based on aesthetic theory, reception theory and narrative theory), decoding (based on semiotic theory) and institutional analysis (based on theories of culture and ideology) as the three kinds of work appropriate for secondary level students. While ample evidence has been offered in this dissertation for the application of these various approaches to the production and interpretation of the visual, little specific mention is made in the first Scottish documents of how these models would translate into student production, analysis or criticism.

The next major document leading up to the 1988 curriculum guide is *Teaching Media Studies: An Introduction to Methods and Resources* (Cowe & Dick, 1986). First published in 1983 and revised twice since then, this guide serves the dual role of resource guide and introduction to the discipline. *Teaching Media Studies* (1986) consists of 32 pages of

unillustrated text. The first several pages of the text offer a general introduction to Media Studies with a particular focus on

- a. Knowledge of how broadcast programmes, newspaper articles, feature films, etc. are produced: who is involved, what kind of skills and techniques are applied, what equipment is used etc;
- b. Analysis of the ways in which meaning and messages are constructed;
- c. Information about the media institutions in terms of finance, management and social function;
- d. Experience of practical creative work involving selected media;
- e. Heightened enjoyment of media artefacts through a process of critical appreciation. (Cowle & Dick, 1986, p. 1)

The visual possibilities implied above are made explicit at the bottom of the first page of *Teaching Media Studies* (1986). This section, in assuring teachers new to the idea of Media Studies that they don't have to teach everything, suggests two approaches to focusing the curriculum. The second suggestion, which relates specifically to the visual aspects of the media, is to

begin with the language of images: photographs, posters, advertising designs and graphic work. This approach can be very useful in examining the idea of visual meaning, and the extent to which we "read" a photograph, for example, by interpreting the elements within it, rather than simply "reading" a fixed message. (Cowle & Dick, p. 1)

After this introduction, the guide goes on to advocate a clarified version of the concept "Media Studies" that was introduced at the beginning of the decade. The key notions of interdisciplinary study, and of courses from kindergarten through to continuing education, are augmented

with an added emphasis on the importance of production work at all levels. The bulk of this text is devoted to lists of human and textual resources. Of significance here is the fact that almost all the resources that are recommended for use in the classroom come from three sources: The British Film Institute (BFI), The Scottish Film Council (SFC), and The (now disbanded) Society for Education through Film and Television (SEFT). All three of these organizations are government funded, but none of them would be considered principals in the public school system. Two of these organizations, the SFC and the BFI, are directly involved in the cultural work of media production and distribution as well as education. It is not surprising, then, that much of the material they offer includes video or slide artifacts with supporting guidelines and booklets. Consistent also with the general approach described thus far, *Teaching Media Studies* (1986) does not generally suggest which material is appropriate for a particular group or grade level. This reintroduces the emphasis that is placed by the Scottish approach on the teacher's role in designing a curriculum suitable for the subject area and age of the students.

*Signs of Success: Report of the Media Education Development Project* (Dick, 1987) functions both as an overview of and an advocacy statement for the development of Media Studies in Scotland. Like all the Scottish materials discussed thus far, this report is entirely text-based and aimed at teachers and governmental authorities in a position to further Media Studies. It is not necessary to reiterate here the many self-perceptions quoted in this document. Suffice to say that the details of Media Studies' evolution in Scotland from 1983-1986 are presented and analysed. Of relevance to this study are the descriptions of various teaching resource materials, which will be referred to in more detail at the end of this chapter, and the recommendations at the conclusion of this report. Of

particular interest are recommendations for "responsibility for media education within the school sectors" (Dick, 1987, p. 47), on the one hand, and the retention of the SFC's "key developmental role" (p. 47) on the other. Concern is expressed in this text over a potential narrowing of the Media Studies curriculum if the Consultative Committee on the Curriculum (CCC) were to mold the discipline to fit a more "standard" approach to education. At the same time the need for a definite place in the curriculum is addressed. We can only speculate on the resolution of this ongoing relationship between a "cultural" institution (the SFC) and an "educational" institution (the CCC). In the general conclusions at the end of this chapter a comparison between the SFC's visual products, and those of the Western Australian and Ontario curricula developers will offer access to these issues as they influence the form and content of teaching materials.

The *Media Education Curriculum Guidelines* (Scottish Film Council [SFC], 1988) are presented here as both a culmination and as a starting point. In publishing these guidelines the SFC has formalized (to the extent that they are institutionally able) the development of Media Studies in Scotland through the 1980's. At the time that this dissertation is being presented the SFC is about to publish the results of field testing this curriculum in several schools, so this curriculum document is also functioning as the starting point for the next level of development of Media Studies in Scotland.

Much of the content of these guidelines will not be reviewed here. Of particular interest to this study is a structural chart (see Figure three) that outlines a proposal for media education at the S3 and S4 (grade 9 and 10) levels. This chart has been borrowed from Western Australia (see Figure two) and the Scottish modifications to this chart and its application are instructive. Like the Western Australians, the Scots propose 16 40-hour

short courses, but the courses are presented as extensions to existing subjects such as Art, English, and Modern Studies, rather than as free-standing Media Studies courses under the umbrella of English, Languages and Communication, as is the case in Australia.

Subtle but important differences in language create very different approaches to studying the media in the two curricula. In a very broad sense, the Australian chart reveals a formalist understanding of the media while the Scottish chart emphasises an understanding informed by semiotic theory. For example: under the heading "Media Language", the Australian curriculum lists particular media such as television, film or photography as *areas of study*, while the Scottish chart identifies *communication systems* such as stills and words or moving images. Stage 3 for the Australians emphasizes narrative and genre by studying three categories: broadcast radio and television, film genre, and popular fiction and popular magazines. The Scottish Level 3 is organised around the idea of narratives (note the plural) and also has three categories: fact and fiction, genre, and authorship. Throughout the Scottish chart, terms such as "narratives" and "representations" are pluralized and the categories under these terms push the curriculum toward cross-media study. The differences in the Scottish chart are consistent with a curriculum that has, throughout its development, moved away from Media Studies as either a free-standing subject or as the domain of one of the subjects already fixed in the school curriculum. They are also consistent with a curriculum founded on the semiotically based notion of multiple, intertwining language systems functioning through the mass media.

### *Picturing Women: Scottish Women in Photography*

The Scottish Film Council is one of the most important sources of curriculum support material for Media Studies. In conversation in March of 1990, the SFC Media Education officer, Eddie Dick, was unwilling to describe any instructional material as "foundational", as that term has been used in this dissertation. This attitude is consistent with the teacher-centered approach already described in the Scottish curriculum. Nonetheless, a limited list of support materials is made generally available to teachers across Scotland. A selection of SFC materials that touch on a broad range of theoretical issues will be analysed under the assumption that they give a fair impression of the Scottish approach to Media Studies. The first of three SFC curriculum packages to be considered is: *Picturing Women: Scottish Women in Photography* (Dick & Moffat, 1989). It is a collection of essays and photographic portfolios exploring the photographic representation of women. The package consists of 133 unbound pages of images and text. About one third of the content is made up of four portfolios of black and white photographic reproductions created by Scottish women photographers. That the images are the core of this package is made clear by the fact that the essays bracket the visual work and function as introduction or commentary.

The first 10 pages of the package introduce the people and aims of the project. Appropriate to a collection of critical work about images, the editors suggest that this package is not intended to function in a linear or narrative way. "*Picturing Women* is a resource rather than a predetermined path which leads to a foregone conclusion." (Dick & Moffat, p. 1) The editors go on to offer suggestions for using this material in the classroom. They suggest as a starting point, the kind of image analysis that art educators will recognize from the writings of Feldman (1972) and

others, but couched in literary terms such as "denotation" and "connotation". The importance of the viewer's part in meaning is discussed, and cropping exercises using the photos in the package are offered as an introduction to this aspect of reception theory. A discussion of stereotyping leads to a definition of ideology. All in all, the introduction is quite sweeping and open-ended in its efforts to suggest to teachers the kind of work that could be done with this package.

An essay by Halla Beloff (Dick & Moffat, pp. 10-18) further explores stereotyping from a feminist perspective. Notions such as representation and the male gaze are introduced in an essay that describes the ideologically normalizing aspects of photography. Beloff concludes with a remark pointed at the critical community generally, which might be applied to this package to some extent. She argues that the photographic representation of males has not been critically investigated in the same way that the photographic representation of females has. Her conclusion is that, despite the theoretical appropriateness of the kind of investigation carried out by this curriculum package, it still reinforces the notion that women in our culture should constantly concern themselves with their appearance, while men need not.

Lorna Bates' portfolio (Dick & Moffat, pp. 19-41) consists largely of family snapshots which she uses as the starting point for a short series of responding images. Many of the images involve Bates and her mother. Her introductory comments suggest, with some bitterness, a desire to re-present the original images made by her father in a way that can offer a female view of the family. This section of the curriculum package concludes with a critical essay that describes some of the sub-genres and social structuring surrounding family photography written by Jo Spence. Bates' images and Spence's essay walk a fine line by arguing for the

fundamental need to be "slyly disruptive" (Dick & Moffat, p. 34) in the face of family images that often work to idealize and rigidify family relations even in home situations that are healthy and functional.

Spence's contribution includes a number of suggestions for further work aimed at the teachers and students using this package. These projects involve looking and image making framed by the critical issues explored by Bates.

The second portfolio is of the work of Andrea Cringean (Dick & Moffat, pp. 41-64). Her images consist of a wide range of female subjects, all of whom are making use of the health and beauty industry. The images take a documentary stance in that some of these location shots are obviously posed, but most are not. Because the images sample a number of environments rather than exploring one at length, the portfolio emphasizes visual meaning and viewer response over artistically controlled narrative. This emphasis on the visual and the personal is appropriate to Cringean's concern with the fact that "the flood of health and beauty products onto the market...carry with them the ironic implication that if you aren't worried about some facet of your appearance or health, there must be something wrong with you" (p. 41).

Sheena McDonald's brief response (pp. 55-56) to Cringean's portfolio consists of her own enthusiastic review of the images and a series of questions that push the reader to consider the social relations involved at the moment of image making. She asks for consideration of the artist's aesthetic and political intentions and balances them against the subjects'. Much of this questioning seems consonant with responding to the images as documents.

The final component linked with Cringean's portfolio is the artist's notes (pp. 57-64). These consist of comments on the technical and social

considerations involved in each "shoot", and function as an interesting frame for discussing the way the artist's intentionality and technical limitations have an impact on image and meaning.

Franki Raffles' portfolio (pp. 66-81) examines women working in the school environment. As described by Porter in the essay that follows the portfolio, women in this workplace are not all teachers, but they share in common the fact that they "use few tools and machines, and make no product - no visible, tangible output" (p. 82). Both the portfolio and the essay comment on the difficulty of portraying work in the service industries. Both the portfolio and the essay explore power relationships and the ideologies that drive different aspects of culture within schools. By showing groupings of women doing their separate jobs as teachers, maintenance people, and cafeteria workers, Raffles draws attention to their isolation, and to the hierarchies that are part of the school system. Porter picks this up and asks us to consider how various interest groups (the school administration, the press, pupils, teachers) might choose to use these images; then concludes by offering a more detailed analysis and interpretation of five images. Details such as lighting, composition and point of view are interpreted with reference to Porter's knowledge and experience in the workplace and in schools.

This section on Raffles' portfolio concludes with the artist's notes (pp. 86-89). These emphasize the work involved in making meaningful images. Her most interesting comment in this section is that she "needs to have a clear idea of issues, particularly school as workplace. [sic] Danger of just documenting the school" (p. 87). The notion that some documentary (such as that produced by shopping mall surveillance cameras) can be almost meaningless from the photographer's point of view opens up the whole issue of the mechanical "reality" in photographic images.

The final portfolio in this package is Della Matheson's images of second generation Asian women in Scotland (pp. 90-107). The images present Asian women in Scotland in a number of traditional and contemporary environments. The subjects are most often casually posed before the camera, and the relationship between subject and photographer could be interpreted as friendly.

Rowena Arshad's brief commentary (pp. 108-109) on Matheson's portfolio introduces two issues left untouched by the earlier work in this package. Arshad explores the importance of text in relation to images, both because it is an important aspect of the way we confront photography, and because she has problems with some of Matheson's images that she feels captions would resolve. While introducing an important issue, Arshad's critique also demonstrates the capacity to shift and control the response agenda. Several of Matheson's images contain background text that is important to them, but generally her work is not about text commenting on imagery. This issue is an imposition of Arshad's. The imagery and commentary in this portfolio demonstrate how quickly criticism can become complicated. Here, consideration of representation is broadened to include both race and gender. Response is expanded to include images and text, and ideological analysis has to account for race, class, gender, and generational difference.

The section on Matheson's portfolio ends with excerpts from the diary she kept on her project. The dominant concerns for her were getting to the point where the Asian women she wanted to photograph trusted her, and learning through her contacts with these women what the issues were in their lives. There is no question that Matheson is aware of her status as an outsider. This brings us back to Arshad's critical concerns. By being more explicitly "other", the Asian women of Matheson's photographs

draw attention to the manipulation and the point of view that is inevitably built into all the portfolios in this package, and into the medium generally.

### *Another Time Another Place*

The *Another Time Another Place* package (Dick, 1987b) includes a video of the film by that title (Radford, 1983) and a booklet of exercises based on the film. The film itself was produced in 16mm color in Scotland for commercial distribution, and after four years the rights to distribute it as an educational vehicle were arranged. The film concentrates on the relationships between a Scottish woman and several Italian prisoners of war toward the end of World War II. Visually, the bleak fall and winter landscape in Scotland is used to parallel and accent the characters' emotional worlds.

Like most of the other packages offered by the SFC, the *Another Time Another Place* support material is aimed at older students in the school system and in adult education. In this case, the film *Another Time Another Place* has a 15 certificate which means that students under that age are not to see it. Given 101 minutes of visual source material, the teaching package concentrates, in eight sections, on different modes of word-based critical response.

Section 1, The Opening (Dick, 1987b, pp. 4-9), applies a number of variations of semiotic analysis. Part 1 asks the students to make a detailed "denotative" (p. 2) analysis of the first 13 shots in the film. Students are then asked to predict the nature and direction of the film based on this empirical evidence. Still working from the opening 13 shots, part 2 of this section introduces the students to five codes that can be used as analytic tools. The "enigmatic code", based in reception theory, draws attention to the questions that viewers are asked to hypothesize about at the beginning

of the film. The "action code" is a broader, more culturally defined interpretation of character action in the film. The "referential code" refers to a variety of visual and aural sign systems that set cultural, historic, and geographic frames in the film. The "semic code", as it is applied in this guide, seems to function to summarize the specific information derived from the referential code. The "symbolic code" has to do with the literary work of indentifying symbols generated by the narrative and discussing how these symbols influence each other.

Section 2, Representations (Dick, 1987b, pp. 10-16), has five parts that explore racial and sexual presentation and stereotyping. The first part offers a grid system for identifying character traits in 10 of the film's characters. While some of the qualities listed may be presented visually in the film, the exercise is essentially a process of converting impressions into a list of terms. Part 2 focuses on gender by asking students to use their research from the last section as the basis for evaluating two female-male relationships in the film. The approach here combines visual and narrative information in bringing students to consider gender representation.

Section 2, Part 3, Representation: (Stereo)typical Italians? (Dick, 1987b, pp. 12-13), uses the representation of the principal Italian characters as an approach to discussing stereotyping. Details of characterization are at the heart of this investigation, so the text lists and explains various important features in the three Italian characters. This inventory and interpretation approach to analysis is typical of approaches to film theory concerned with representation. With some exceptions, it tends to ignore motion and action in film. It is therefore appropriate that the portion of *Another Time Another Place* (Radford, 1983) discussed in this section of the curriculum package includes images of still photographs of each Italian's "loved ones" (a movie star, a family photo, and a picture of

mamma). These images clearly act to set the content of each character's stereotypy.

Section 2, Part 4, Representation: Nationality and Gender (Dick, 1987b, pp. 14-15), expands on the issue raised in parts 2 and 3. It does so by resorting to semiotically based, visual analysis of Italian and Scottish party scenes presented in the film. This section demands a detailed analysis of everything from lighting and camera angle to sound and the relationship between shots. The section concludes with a series of questions intended to focus students on the sense they made out of these sequences, especially as it informs their notions of nationality and gender.

Section 2, Part 5, Representation: The Highlands (Dick, 1987b, p. 16), is essentially an essay question on the stereotypy of the representation of a region of Scotland.

Section 3, The Main Narratives (Dick, 1987b, pp. 17-19), introduces an outline of a classic narrative structure. The two parts in this section ask the students to outline and discuss the main character, Janie's, narrative, and the larger, community narrative. This is essentially a word-based exercise, although certainly some of the students' evidence in support of their particular ideas about these narratives will be visual information.

Section 4, Else's Rape (Dick, 1987b, pp. 20-24), asks students to deal with Else, a minor character's, sexual victimization towards the end of the film. The editors' tack in this section is to present the original novel's version of the rape, along with a close analysis of the role this moment in the book played in that narrative. This is followed by a comparison between the novelistic presentation and the very different presentation of the rape in the film. Issues like the commercial and formal (in terms of narrative) reasons for this scene are addressed. The final part in this section is a response by Balides, a feminist film critic, to this scene. Her

analysis takes a more detailed look at the role the visual, and especially viewer positioning, plays in this scene. At the same time, she judges the scene to be exploitative and unnecessary to the plot. The notion of the rape having taken place and the accusations that follow are important to the plot, but in Balides' estimation presenting the scene rather than implying it (as the novel did) places this film firmly in the patriarchal mainstream of filmmaking.

Section 5, Selling the Product (Dick, 1987b, pp. 25-26), mixes media in that it asks students to study the print advertising that accompanied the promotion of *Another Time Another Place* (Radford, 1983). Students are then called upon to identify the genre of the film, an important consideration in film promotion. This section is brief but asks several important questions about the significance of camera point-of-view in the publicity stills; the dominance of black in the design of the brochure; and the brochure's use of language.

Section 6, Report (Dick, 1987b, pp. 27-30), is not particularly concerned with the visual. It provides reviews and other resource material and gives fairly specific guidelines for how a student should write a report on the film. Students are instructed specifically to avoid incorporating their own opinions into this project.

Section 7, Critical Essays (Dick, 1987b, p. 31), sets 5 more open-ended essay topics. Of these, one asks the student to comment on some aspect of the visual in the film, and another two ask students to discuss representation and stereotype. The remaining two questions pose additional word oriented problems to do with narrative. Interestingly, the question (number 4) that most directly addresses the visual in the film, is no question at all. It sets the vaguely aesthetic task of having the student discuss the success of the film in terms of its visual elements. Obviously,

the students are called upon to define success in some visual terms, but given that all the other questions identify a problem or an issue as a starting point, this question is odd. It suggests a lack of clarity with regard to the issues at stake in a discussion of film aesthetics.

Section 8, Imaginative/Discursive Essays (Dick, 1987b, p. 34), offers five essay topics that give the student the opportunity to argue around or respond creatively to some of the issues raised directly or indirectly by the film. There is no suggestion in this or any other part of this guidebook that students could or should respond using visual media.

### *Open to Question: Mary Whitehouse*

*Open to Question: Mary Whitehouse* (Dick, 1988) is different from the previous two packages for a variety of reasons. It reveals many things about the structure and production of a television question-and-answer program while giving the students the chance to debate the effects of television violence and sexual representation. The package contains a 30-minute video of the program "Open to Question" on which Christian media critic and censorship crusader, Mary Whitehouse, defends her opinions before an audience of adolescent questioners. In addition, the package supplies 85 pages of unbound support material to help students both understand the processes involved in the production of the program, and to explore censorship and its effects.

Along with the obvious content differences, this package also takes a very different teaching strategy. Where the first two packages took great pains to focus the students' attention on the impact of the visual in the medium being studied, *Open to Question: Mary Whitehouse* (Dick, 1988) concentrates on the ideas being debated and warns teachers against over-exposing the students to the video. Thus, in the first portion of the printed

material background, documentation is provided on Mary Whitehouse's watchdog organization, the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, and production guidelines relating to the representation of violence and sexuality for both the BBC and the IBA television networks. In the second portion, the BBC's background information on Mary Whitehouse is included, as well as sheets of questions submitted by the students in the audience. From these questions, a short list of scripted questions is developed and supplied along with the text of the actual program, which is made up of some of those preplanned questions as well as more spontaneous supplemental questions.

The third portion of the print material includes detailed descriptions of the various kinds of work involved in producing the final program. In this portion there are job descriptions, shooting scripts, and studio floorplans. The final portion of the print material includes a variety of published responses to the broadcast, reproductions of letters sent by viewers to the BBC, and the ratings for the program.

This package offers students the opportunity to follow a program from conception to completion, making it possible to analyse the twists and turns that meaning takes at each level of editing. The materials supplied certainly make it possible to look at the impact that the visual has had on the final program, but the obvious emphasis here, as mentioned earlier, is on words.

### **Critical Review**

This curriculum is made of two distinct components: curriculum documents and resource materials. The curriculum documents offer sweeping definitions of Media Studies supported by brief theoretical

references. The resource materials function as sources of original visual material supported with critical writings.

The curriculum documents are firmly grounded in the kinds of contemporary critical understandings implied by the term *Lens Meaning*. As just one example, the five points in *Teaching Media Studies* (1986) listed earlier can be seen to address many of the topics found in Figure one (pg. 30).

Referring back to page 138 and from the perspective of this study, "a's" formal and technological approach to studying the visual in the media corresponds to a concern with indexical and iconic signs; "b's" concern with the analysis touches every corner of *Lens Meaning*; "c's" institutional concerns correspond to symbolic signs and *Lens Meaning*; "d's" explicit call for student production would encourage an understanding of lens images as indexical and iconic signs; and "e's" concern with aesthetic response combined with critical analysis opens the door for the consideration of DeLauretis' (1984) notion of interpretants.

The resource material follows up on this critical foundation by building in a critical edge not only to the material's content, but to its form as well. The preceding pages demonstrate that these materials explore *Lens Meaning* with real scope. By avoiding the bound text format wherever possible, the SFC has put theory into practice by offering a very specific visual critique of the conventions of educational publishing. Art educators will appreciate the fact that most of the visual material is original. For example, the photographic portfolio, *Picturing Women: Scottish Women in Photography* (Dick & Moffat, 1989), was commissioned for publication in this form. This is the way these images were meant to be seen and used. The idea that these images were meant to be actively used by students and teachers, and that the physical form of the production

reflects this, is important. This sensitivity to the visual in the media is reflected in all of the Scottish material reviewed here.

Of all the critical bases, the one that the Scottish curriculum materials touch on with the least amount of conviction is the area of technical competence. It is assumed in this dissertation that there is a correlation between a student's experience with the tools of the media, and his or her capacity to critically discuss *Lens Meaning*, especially in terms of indexical signs. While it is listed in curriculum guidelines, the materials reviewed here assume that competence as a given.

## Chapter 10

### **Findings, Conclusions, and Implications of *Lens Meaning* for Education**

In the methodology designed for evaluating media studies curricula in this dissertation, certain assumptions have been made about curricula that have functioned both as guides and limits to the study. Specifically, I have assumed that formal curricula generally have published guidelines which are accompanied by foundational support material such as textbooks, resource guides and audio-visual material. Findings based on the evaluation of this material can offer a generalized image of the curriculum's direction and substance. No claim has been made that this survey and the accompanying analysis represents the experience of particular students or teachers. Rather, the findings represent general trends across a number of school situations. Behind these assumptions is a deeper assumption that school systems generally strive toward a structural unity in their approach to curriculum planning. How that structure influences practice in individual teaching situations, while an extremely important concern, is not within the scope of this study.

#### **Summary of Comparisons of Three Media Studies Programs**

In terms of form, the Western Australian and Ontario curricula have many similarities. Both offer a range of support material that is produced largely through the print media. By using traditional production and presentation techniques that offer most of the photographic images as

information, the visual material in these two curricula is often presented uncritically. In this formal sense, the Scottish curriculum is quite different. Actual teaching materials combine media artifacts with often unconventionally designed publications. The "original" media material is meant to be critically analysed, while the textual material is not. At the same time, that often unbound print material is designed to be photocopied, and to be aesthetically noticed. Both of these qualities make some critical response to the visual form of the printed curriculum material more likely.

Each of these three curricula owes something of its content to the others. There is clear evidence that Scotland has borrowed from Western Australia and that Ontario has borrowed from the other two. A Canadian version of *Meet The Media* (McMahon & Quin, 1988), for example, has recently been published for use in Ontario. Nonetheless, each curriculum emphasizes different approaches and issues. The Western Australian curriculum is most obviously trying to strike a balance between production and criticism. In doing so, a fairly broad form of semiotic analysis seems aimed ultimately at a student response that combines appreciation with ideological criticism. The Ontario curriculum, still very much in its formative stage, places far less emphasis than the others on the visual in the mass-media, while offering a more "literary" critical edge. Issues such as pornography and violence are specifically addressed through the analysis of representation and ideological criticism, but these approaches do not operate from a clearly defined foundation in feminist, psychoanalytic, or visual semiotic analysis.

The Scottish curriculum is, in some ways, much more difficult to frame. This is partially due to the fact that the materials and the guidelines are intentionally open-ended. The curriculum is designed to encourage a

wide range of uses by teachers in a number of subject areas. Despite this, the Scottish materials are much more specific in their reference to original media artifacts and primary theoretical sources. In the three Scottish Media Studies packages surveyed, sophisticated approaches to feminist and narrative theory, semiotics, and ideological analysis were presented and applied to visual qualities in the media.

The contexts in which these three curricula operate are each quite different. The Western Australian curriculum is a well established part of the general curriculum. It is recognized as a distinct subject under the umbrella of the Language Arts. As such, it has its own budget and curriculum time, as well as support in teacher education institutions. A consequence is that the Western Australian curriculum attempts to cover a lot of ground. If students are going to be both critical and production-oriented as a result of their experiences in this one space in their timetable, this breadth in the curriculum is not surprising. Another implication of the breadth and place of the Western Australian Media Studies curriculum is that it is intended to be taught by Media Studies specialists, which should mean instructors familiar with media processes and contemporary criticism. Fortunately, Australian post-secondary education is in a position to provide these specialists.

The Ontario curriculum is a unit inserted into an existing Language Arts curriculum. As such, Media Studies in Ontario is the domain of English teachers. It is therefore not surprising that this curriculum is the most text-oriented in its approach to criticism. Add to this the fact that currently there are no Media Studies positions in any of the Faculties of Education in Ontario, and it becomes clear why there are, today, relatively few instructors with student-production experience and a knowledge of contemporary criticism.

The Scottish curriculum addresses the widest age-range and the largest number of existing subject areas. Lack of concern for the usual categories in the school system may be a result of the "outsider" status of the Scottish Film Council (the toehold gained by the SFC in the schools is more difficult to account for). It may be the SFC's influence that has resulted in this curriculum being the most attuned of the three to contemporary visual criticism. While the curriculum does make mention of the importance of student production work, the materials reviewed don't. The materials assume a critical, visual sophistication on the part of teacher and student. Further investigation would be required to discover if the Scottish school system, perhaps under the guidance of the teachers' organization, AMES, is actually supporting this kind of visual education. At the level of government this curriculum appears the most fragmented of the three; the pieces do not fit into a tidy whole. If it ultimately gains the status of required study in the Scottish school system, its present, decentralized openness may well be questioned and replaced with something closer to the structured curricula of Western Australia and Ontario.

Given the many approaches that media educators could take in dealing with the visual in the mass-media, it is not surprising that each curriculum has had to limit itself, and that the various strands of criticism identified in this dissertation are not dealt with equally. Notions of narrative are dealt with at length in each curriculum, but "because this [critical approach] is concerned with general mappings of narrative structure, it is inescapably 'formalist' and largely unconcerned with questions about 'content' and thus with political or ideological judgements" (Kozloff, 1987, pp. 42-43). Narrative theory only makes sense in terms of visual analysis with reference to semiotic methods and the analysis of

discourse, or "how the story is told" (Kozloff, p. 45). While the analysis of narrative is a central issue in each of the three curricula, moving from simple plot recognition to the more visual level of discourse analysis is dependent on materials and analytic methods most strongly supported by the Scottish curriculum, where the examples are presented in depth, and understanding is achieved layer by layer.

"The concept of genre stems from a conception of film as an industrial product. That is, the particular economic organization of the film industry led to a kind of product standardization antithetical to the literary concept of an authored work. Thus, film [and media] genre study has always referred back to the capitalist mode of production" (Feuer, 1987, pp. 116-117). Genre theory, as it has evolved through semiotics, offers a visually-based approach to the consideration of both aesthetics and ideology represented through setting, story, and character. Critical approaches such as genre theory, and aesthetically-based criticism such as auteurism, that most commonly function at the level of the visual, have been handled lightly if at all in these three curricula. Various approaches to aesthetic criticism, as well as visual theories of reception and perception like those described by Gestalt psychology (Arnheim, 1969), do not play a significant role in these curricula. This means that criticism of the design of an image or the layout of a newspaper will often be based on student and teacher "common sense" built up through exposure to the mass-media, rather than as the result of consciously applying any set of aesthetic criteria.

Ideological analysis, if this is taken to mean the institutional analysis of the mass-media and its products, is a common theme throughout all three curricula. If, on the other hand, ideological analysis functions to reveal the interactions between cultures, genders, and races, there are few

examples explicit in these materials. *Picturing Women: Scottish Women in Photography* (Dick & Moffat, 1989) is the only example in all three curricula of non-student work that functions as a visual response to the visual in the mass-media. This occurs despite the fact that the political left in the artworld can offer any number of examples of imagery functioning as cultural critique in this mold.

These Media Studies curricula have not and cannot be expected to deal with all of the sometimes conflicting strands of contemporary criticism applied to the visual in the mass-media. Western Australia, Ontario, and Scotland stand as examples of leadership in teaching children about the world of mass imagery and mass information. Nonetheless, all educators, but especially those in the Language Arts, Fine Arts, and Social Sciences, must continue to refine their efforts to teach about the mass-media and its images.

### The Questions Readdressed

This study set out to address three questions.

1. Can a theoretical understanding of the concept of *Lens Meaning* be supported by the literature of the various disciplines which have addressed the uses and meanings of lens media?

2. Can a conceptual rendering of *Lens Meaning* be devised that is suitable for the analysis of Media Studies program materials?

3. To what extent is *Lens Meaning* applicable to educational practice?

Evidence provided in Chapters two, three, four, five, and six came from sources in film, television, photography and the social sciences. A

wide-ranging literature was concerned with the meaning of the media as an institutionally based source of mass-produced visual information intended for a popular audience. An array of critical approaches was uncovered, each having as a primary concern understanding lens media. Rather than contribute to a simple structure, media criticism has taken a variety of approaches to understanding, each functioning as an optional framework with specific consequences for critical discourse.

In the definition of *Lens Meaning* several contributing strands may be discerned, varying from one situation or topic to the next. Peirce's sign systems (indexical, iconic, and symbolic) contribute to a matrix in which De Lauretis is also represented, by interpretants labelled emotional, energetic, and habit changing. Within this matrix, and growing out of the literature, nine descriptors have been identified that, while perhaps not exhausting the definition of *Lens Meaning*, certainly offered a useful range of issues to consider in the analysis and evaluation of curriculum documents.

Ample evidence was found in the literature to support a definition of *Lens Meaning*, and contributed to a complex matrix incorporating Peirce's system of signs and DeLauretis' interpretants. The matrix proved useful in analysing media studies curriculum, but some referents proved more useful than others. Discussion of emotional response to indexical signs played a big part in the curriculum writers' perceived need for media studies. Habit-changing responses to iconic signs played a big part in explaining the political concerns of feminist film critics. In many ways, the whole form and content of the Western Australian and Ontarian curricula are a reflection of an understanding of energetic response to the media as symbolic signs. In a broad sense, therefore, it is clear that the matrix offered not only an orderly means of talking about the visual in the media, but also a very useful tool for analyzing the underlying orientations of the

curricula which were examined. It is accepted that some areas of *Lens Meaning* delineated by the matrix are under or unrepresented by the curricula studied and this may point to deficiencies in the curricula or in the matrix.

When the resulting conception of *Lens Meaning* was applied to three curricula, from Western Australia, Ontario, and Scotland, analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each was accomplished. It was observed that curricula that operated from a multi-disciplinary perspective offered more opportunities for understanding media messages. Of special interest to this study was the limited extent to which these curricula drew from the fine arts in considering the meaning of lens images. The Western Australian curriculum introduced some image making, and at least one instance of the analysis of a photographic art image in a Media Studies program whose context is the English classroom. The Scottish program offered a variety of "original" media materials for analysis. As the Scottish curriculum was intended to be used by art teachers as well as others, detailed visual instruction and student production work seem likely, but are not prescribed for the introductory units. Of the three curricula, Ontario's places the least emphasis on visual analysis and production. Analysis of the visual where it existed tended to be limited to formal structural qualities. The link between those qualities and the various notions of meaning described in this thesis was rarely made explicit.

Coming to a critical understanding of lens imagery is an unavoidable step toward gaining a critical appreciation of the mass-media. This dissertation's findings regarding the range of critical thought on lens imagery, as well as the way these artifacts are currently being explored in media studies curricula, have implications for art education and media studies, some of which are now explored.

## Directions for Further Research

A recognition of the visual in the mass-media as a fundamental source of expressive and informational meaning in the world must be reflected in the school system. The means by which we can make the mass-media a two-way system of communication must be sought.

I would argue that research that leads to the cultivation of informed critical response through education is the most obvious vehicle to bring about that understanding. It is this kind of research that can enable practitioners to make a fundamental shift in their understanding of education. The many cross-disciplinary references in the literature make it clear that Media Studies is not another subject to be wedged into an already overcrowded timetable. Rather, communication takes many forms and influences every corner of society, including school curricula. Not surprisingly, in a world where communication is global, rapid, and multi-layered, students and teachers alike must learn to bring a variety of critical approaches to their part in the conversation.

For teachers, taking an active part in Media Studies will mean, at the minimum, demanding information on the media well beyond the "how to plug in a projector" courses that many experienced as part of their training. It may mean insisting that some curriculum content and teaching materials shift from "testable" to "contestable". Taking Media Studies seriously may also involve a teacher coming to grips with what she or he doesn't know. This could involve courses team-taught by English, Art and Social Studies teachers and will inevitably involve respecting the contribution that students have to bring to the study of their own visual cultures.

With regard to the matrix, it is clear that much more research is needed to determine both its full range and its limits. The matrix has served to provide referents by which the three programs of studies might be described. Each referent is accompanied by a set or fringe of values, so that description of materials in the Media Studies curricula implicitly invites judgement of their work. The degree of satisfaction one experiences about the adequacy of these judgements in turn serves to validate the referents. The matrix, in short, hangs together because of its conceptual and practical "rightness".

This sequence of identification and reinforcement seems at first glance to be circular. Closer examination shows, however, that the system is sufficiently open to admit new, unexpected material that may arise during examination of curriculum, and which may result in modification or refinement of the referents or of the matrix itself. The form taken by this sequence is not circular, but spiral, with phases of analysis and reflection alternating.

The term *Lens Meaning* must take into account the viewers and producers of lens images as well as the images themselves. Research in *Lens Meaning* might profitably explore the extent to which information gleaned by mass viewers of the various lens media differs, in order to discover the limits of the term's usefulness in generalizing across lens media. On the other side of the camera, it would be important to explore the psychologies of camera operators. Brief reference has been made to this kind of image making as predatory. Examination of that attitude as it functions across the lens media, might not only add to critical understanding, but could have implications for how the lens media are taught in the schools as well.

Art educators can make specific contributions to the consolidation of the expanded definition of media study that emerges from this investigation. At the very minimum, a very serious effort to incorporate contemporary critical approaches into the art classroom must occur. This in itself could reorient many art curricula toward a consideration of popular and mass-media imagery. It would also lead students and teachers toward the tools of the media as means of image production. Assuming that this shift towards contemporary criticism occurs within the art context, the next move is to cross the barriers between subject areas, so that relationships between words and images, narrative and visual editing, meaning and social institutions, become more apparent.

In a sense, teaching about mass-media is dangerous in that it encourages students to recognize the many ways in which visual symbols are used institutionally. This awareness of symbols and their meanings implies a potential critique of society at large and educational institutions in particular.

In the final decade of the 20th century, devoting special energy to both critical retrospection and projection seems especially appropriate. Looking back, we can see the furious development of communication technologies which have resulted in the sense that we, as individuals, know more about the world than our ancestors did. At the same time, it is clear that the structures that allow this rapid and global communication are becoming larger and more anonymous. Projecting into the future, it would seem that we can expect more and more information. Of key importance will be how that information is controlled both institutionally and by the individual. If we work from a somewhat cynical modernist model of specialists and special knowledge, most of what will be communicated to us through the media in the future will be directive, and

the visual means used in that communication will be beyond our understanding or control. If, on the other hand, we assume that individuals use whatever critical tools are at hand to understand their lives, then the hope exists that we and those who will follow us will be able to respond productively to our world. Being fully alert to *Lens Meaning* will be essential for communicating adequately in that future world.

## Footnotes

1. The peculiarly masculine qualities and metaphors that surround the notions of subjectivity, spectatorship, and desire in the cinema are explored by feminist semioticians such as Teresa De Lauretis (1984).

Delauretis argues that

while semiology disregards the question of sexual difference and subjectivity as non-pertinent to its field, and while psychoanalysis assumes them as its primary focus, both theories deny women the status of subjects and producers of culture. Like cinema, they posit woman as at once the object and the foundation of representation, at once telos and origin of man's desire and of his drive to represent it, at once object and sign of (his) culture and creativity. In this context subjectivity, or subject, that is to say, with man as the sole term of reference. Hence the position of woman in language and in the cinema is one of non-coherence; she finds herself only in a void of meaning, a place not represented, not symbolized, and thus preempted to subject (or self) representation. (DeLauretis, 1984, p.8)

2. McCabe (1981) describes realism as being made up of a number of contradictory discourses which are unified by an unnamed (and thus universalizing or hegemonic) metadiscourse. In television and film the "spectatorial privilege" created by lens, microphone and editing is this unifying metadiscourse.

3. Strictly speaking, *mise en scène* refers to the practice of stage direction in the theatre in which things are "put into the scene", i.e., arranged on the stage. When applied to film, it refers to whatever appears in the film

frame, including those aspects that overlap with the art of the theatre: setting, lighting, costume, and the behaviour of the figures. By this definition, the term does not include specifically cinematographic qualities such as photographic elements, framing, and length of shot, camera position, and movement or editing. (Cook, 1985, p. 151)

4. In classical Hollywood film practice, the "all-purpose answer to problems involving space, authorship, point of view, and narration" (Bordwell, 1985, p. 9) is continuity editing. Through the careful splicing of shots filmed at different times, with different camera angles, and possibly in different settings, it is possible to create an illusion of space and narrative time, as well as encouraging spectator identification with particular characters.

5. The Constructivist theory of psychological activity, "descended from Helmholtz (Warren & Warren, 1968) has been the dominant view in perceptual and cognitive psychology since the 1960's. According to Constructivist theory, perceiving and thinking are active, goal-oriented processes. Sensory stimuli alone cannot determine a percept, since they are incomplete and ambiguous. The organism *constructs* a perceptual judgement on the basis of nonconscious *inferences*" (Bordwell, 1985, pp. 30-31).

6. For Silverman (1983) suture is the stitching over of the visual gaps created by editing in film narrative so that we identify with characters rather than remaining self-conscious of the artificiality (described here in Lacanian terms as a lack) of the viewing experience.

**Subject:** Media Studies  
**Component:** English, Languages and Communication

**Unit Map**

**Subject Units**

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5	STAGE 6
<b>EMPHASIS: Media Introduction</b>	<b>EMPHASIS: Media Language</b>	<b>EMPHASIS: Narrative and Genre</b>	<b>EMPHASIS: Representation</b>	<b>EMPHASIS: Australian Social Context</b>	<b>EMPHASIS: Media Issues</b>
Media Studies- Introduction 1.1  (1211)	Film and Television- Introduction 2.1  (1221)	Broadcast Radio and Television 3.1  (1231)	Stars and Stereo- types 4.1  (1241)	Film, Television & Photo Documentary 5.1  (1251)	Media Case Study 6.1  (1261)
	Photography & Print- Introduction  (1222)	Film Genre 3.2  (1232)	Advertising 4.2  (1242)	Film, Television & Print Fiction 5.2  (1252)	School-based Media Project: Document- ary or Fiction 6.2  (1262)
	Radio, Music- Introduction 2.3  (1223)	Popular Fiction, Popular Magazines 3.3  (1233)	Popular Culture: Video Games to TV Game Shows 4.3  (1243)	Media Images of Australia 5.3  (1253)	Community-based Media Project & Research 6.3  (1263)

**Figure two**

## SCOTTISH MEDIA EDUCATION SHORT COURSES: S3 AND S4

LEVEL	1	2	3	4	5	6
Organizing Idea	Introduction	Media Language	Narratives	Representations	Scottish Context	Media Issues
	1.1 General Introduction	2.1 Stills and words	3.1 Narratives in Fact and Fiction	4.1 Stars ( eg pop, film, politics, media )	5.1 Scottish representations: images and industries	6.1 Case Study
		2.2 Moving Images	3.2 Narratives and Genres	4.2 Advertising	5.2 Broadcasting	6.2 School-based production ( eg school magazine, video, tape-slide )
		2.3 Sound	3.3 Narratives and Authorship	4.3 Youth culture	5.3 Print ( eg newspapers, magazines, comics, books )	6.3 Community-based production

Figure three

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