

TELEVISION AND FILM,
THE REALITY THE MIRROR?

J. LAWN.

292
NC 0041000 4



T334

MOOS6560NC

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TELEVISION AND FILM. THE REALITY OR THE MIRROR?

SECTION I

MESSAGE

LITERACY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:
THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN & COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

FILM AND TELEVISION CONVERSATIONS

AND

SECTION II

POPULAR AND

CONTEMPORARY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF FINE ART
DEPARTMENT OF SCULPTURE

by

JAMES LAWN

April, 1985

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION PAGE i

SECTION I

LANGUAGE PAGE 1

LITERACY PAGE 5

INFORMATION PAGE 12

FILM AND TELEVISION CONVENTIONS PAGE 18

SECTION II

POPULAR AND MINORITY CULTURE PAGE 27

CONCLUSION PAGE 40

BIBLIOGRAPHY PAGE 43

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, it is proposed to explore some aspects of the new visual media - film and television - which have become such important factors in capitalist society within the last few generations, and the implications which these developments hold for art.

Firstly, to put these media in a proper social perspective, one must consider the revolution in Communications which has been gathering momentum since the early years of this century, and which is now reaching its optimum development. This revolution has its roots in the industrial and educational revolutions of the 19th. century, which changed both the form of Western Society, and the relationship which men and women bore to that society. As the industrial revolution radically changed the economic face of those cultures which it touched, so the Communication Revolution is now giving rise to new social skills in its turn. These changes will in time equal those brought about by the industrial revolution, and if they are allowed to go forward without direction, will be as traumatic and potentially more tragic than the worst features of the economic upheaval.

The progress of this revolution is, as was the progress of the earlier one, inexorable. Even if it could be slowed or halted, such intervention would not necessarily be desirable, for in addition to its potential for ill, it possesses what may be an even greater potential still, for more complete communication between societies and individuals, and all the benefits such knowledge brings. Furthermore, film and television can become accepted and accessible media for the development of new forms of popular cultural activity.

The new media - and I speak of them as 'new' because even the cinema is at most only in operation since the beginning of the century - are still in the first stage of their development. This is the same early period which every cultural form must evolve through on the way to the development of a set of criteria, as well as the definition of its limits and real concerns; for not only do people need to be equipped to deal with the new circumstances brought about by the media revolution, but they also need to become aware of how these new circumstances can be made to serve their needs and interests. It is through the mass media that society acquires most of its information

and thereby its global view. And it is through this world view that individuals perceive their relationship in their society. The choice is between a passive alienated group of consumers, and an active and involved public who are aware of and in control of the media which wields such influence. The way to do this, I believe, is to make the public conscious in the modes of communication current today. They do not function in a manner which in any way resembles those symbols of communication which are traditional.

Symbols have evolved with man, they are concerned with what is of greatest importance to man, his life and his mind; the central focal point of both, his intelligence-like two halves of a broken plate which fit perfectly once they are brought together, one complementing the other to form a third. Such plates are the origin of the word "symbol". As well as playing his own unique part in the order of things, the individual shares in the destiny of all things. Individual destiny and human destiny, are interwoven inseparable.

Symbols express the binding force of all nature; from macrocosm to microcosm and back.

SECTION I
LANGUAGE

Before discussing the necessity for awareness in the mass media, the nature of that dialect and its status as a separate form of communication, must be defined.

Language is mankind's primary tool. It permits the species, whose young are brought forth all but devoid of genetic programming, and singularly ill-equipped for survival, to avoid the certainty of extinction. Language enables the individual to encode his/her reality, and thereby to assimilate events of great complexity, as well as events remote in space and time. This encoded form of experience can then be passed on to the next generation, a kind of alternative to the acquisition of the information necessary for survival through inheritance. Language is the medium through which reality is apprehended among humankind. It appears to be a feature of human behavior which is present to some degree in all individuals, regardless of their intellectual capacity; yet, being the medium of abstract thought it follows that intellectual growth is dependent upon the acquisition and manipulation of language skills.

Is intelligence the symbol,
is it the object?

Has the symbol become
the object?

What is language?

If society objectifies,
does subjectivity become
a separate object?

Speech is, of course, the most basic manifestation of language in communication. Other uses of language, as well as types of silent symbols develop as societies become more complex or dispersed, and the problems and functions of communications change. Iconic Pictograms direct traffic and guide passengers through ferryports, customs-posts and airports where no lingua-franca could hope to reach every nationality. In addition, languages have developed which are entirely visual. They appear to be absolutely iconic and their conventions are well concentrated by this de^cptive simplicity. In fact, they operate by these conventions - based upon familiarity and expectation - as rigidly as the more obviously symbolic languages operate by means of grammatical laws.¹ The difficulty in their interpretation lies in their appearance to the contrary.

These 'languages' are the tongues of the modern mass-media. Although their messages are accompanied by images, their target - overtly in the case of advertising more subtly in the case of information and entertainment - is the opinion of the viewer. Opinions, their formation and modification are parts of the function of language,

¹ See for example Noam Chomsky's "Syntactic Structures", Methuen 1965.

Are the external realities
the internal confusion of
what intelligence is trying
to be?

Is society dependent on objectified
belief or disbelief?

What kind of intelligence is it
that symbolises in beliefs?

and so the messages communicated by these means are
primarily verbal, or symbolic.

The mass-media - film, television - are powerful
new tools in contemporary society, and they are now
familiar features of day-to-day communication in
this society. By exposure to the media, we have
become conversant with their conventions, and our
expectations are formed upon these invariable factors.
Superficially, at least, we have become capable of
'reading' the media. An example of this superficial
skill would be the ease with which viewers accept
that they are being vouchsafed insight which is not
available to the characters on screen - they know that
the gunman cannot see the bank clerk pressing the alarm,
even though the camera can. As people become more
sophisticated in their approach to the written word,
it is seldom asserted any more that something is true
simply because it has appeared in the newspapers.
Literacy and experience have all but put paid to that
attitude. Instead, credulity has been transferred to
the seemingly more objective ubiquitous visual media.
One is more likely nowadays to hear "It's true. I
saw it on the telly."

Is intelligence liberated by
holding a belief or disbelief?

Has society become the object,
the superficial of whose
intelligence?

In view of the development it is appropriate, I believe, to equate media skills with literacy, both being extensions of the use of language in the formation and dissemination of ideas and opinions. This analogy between media and conventional literacy has many implications; if, as any one who is aware would agree, it is necessary to foster independence of judgement with respect to the written word, it is equally important that these new and ascendent forms of communication be seen as subjects both worthy of, and in need of, critical evaluation; in order that the individual may perceive a wholesome reality subjectively and objectively.

Is intelligence invested
by authority?

What is authority?

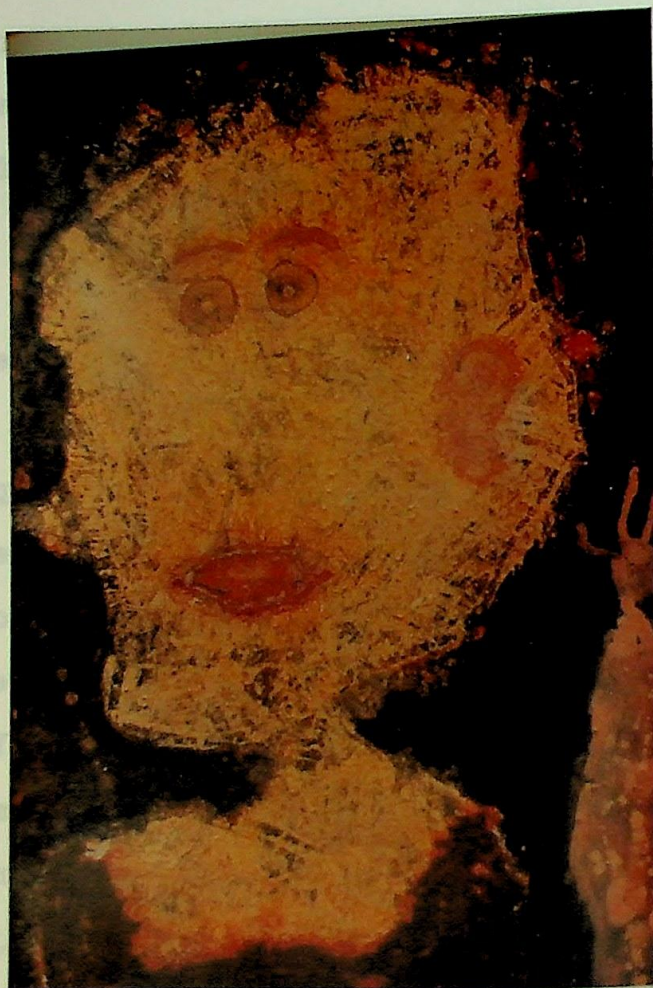
Who assumes authority?

LITERACY

Literacy is the learned capacity to decipher certain arbitrary signs in order to comprehend the messages encoded in them. There is no immediate relationship between the sign and what it signifies, and so one must be initiated into the conventions of the signs before the message is available to one.

In western society, a high premium has been placed upon conventional literacy - the ability to decode the mass of records which it has built up during its history. In spite of this, it must be remembered that we belong to the first generation for whom access to this system (which transmits and perpetuates all kinds of imagery) has been common. Yet, FOUR HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE, moveable type had made the mass production of books, a practical and economic proposition. The will to educate the majority in order that they might avail of it, simply did not exist until the middle of the last century.

It was assumed that the 'news' was not a matter of concern to the people, and since government and policy, debate and ideas were matters over which the



people had no control, this was undoubtedly true, if not justifiable. The 19th. century saw the growth of parallel movements advocating universal suffrage and universal education, and in the changing cultural and political climate a popular press and popular literature were germinated. Popular literature does not fall within the scope of this discussion, but the methods and style of the popular press have something to contribute to an understanding of the modern mass media, as they are in the same line of descent.

Rupert Murdoch, owner of several British daily tabloids is quoted as denying any distinction between 'quality' and 'popular' newspapers: there are papers which sell and papers which don't. (Mr. Murdoch's papers 'sell'). This view ignores the divisions which exist between, say, 'The Observer' or 'Irish Times' and 'The Sun', in terms of content and viewpoint. It is not possible to easily categorize these papers in class political terms, since those aimed at the working-class market are frequently reactionary and jingoistic in policy, whilst those aimed at the higher social end of the market are quite likely to express liberal and even radical opinions. This must be seen as related to the

Is intelligence speaking
symbolically at you, to you,
or for you?

What is memory?

What are emotions?

role played by the press as censor and manipulator of popular opinion. In a literate and increasingly secular society, this role is the very one which the Church and other traditional institutions are becoming redundant. Kinball Young of Queen's College, N.Y. states that propaganda is "the more or less deliberately planned and systematic use of symbols, chiefly through suggestion and related techniques, with a view to altering and controlling opinions, ideas and values, and ultimately to changing overt actions along predetermined lines". Furthermore, the aim of propaganda is frequently as abstract as the arousal or repression of emotions. Given these characteristics, it must be seen as diametrically opposed to rational argument, which, avoiding the application of emotional pressure, attempts to achieve a precise aim which is compatible with personal integrity for all involved.

With the addition of specific instances, the above definition could be adapted to describe quite exactly, the tenor of either sections of the British Press during the Falklands dispute, or of the Irish Press during the Constitutional Amendment controversy. Critical awareness of the aims and methods of the press is the only sure means of protecting the public from

Is intelligence memory,
thought or belief?

Can the actualities of now
be perceived by memory and
thought?

What is doubt?

its worst excesses. Censorship is ineffective and undesirable. Awareness in criticism and evaluation is the most effective alternative. Historical evidence of the degree of manipulation to which people are exposed through the press abounds, yet more subtle pressures are also brought to bear upon the public through the media, and their effects are less quantifiable. The approach taken by advertisers in the media, and this is especially true of television, closely approximates the propaganda style described. This can also be said of serial or dramatic type television entertainment, although it is a lifestyle which is being sold in them, not a commodity. (The relationship - a surprisingly close one - between advertising and entertainment will be described later).

These methods have an inverse relationship with literacy; that is, their propaganda is dependent for its success upon the suggestibility of the viewer. However, the appeal of the authoritative voice, free from doubt and always right, declines as language skills are acquired and perfected. Ideological suggestibility likewise begins to decline as literacy skills and the capacity for abstract thought develop.

To return to the parallel between the press and the visual media as an illustration of this, it is necessary when dealing with the barrage of edited and selectively presented material in the newspapers, not only to have been informed by a wide range of sources within and beyond the press itself, but also to have developed a mature critical capacity. To understand the material which one is brought into contact with through experience of one's literacy skills, one must exercise them further and wider still. This process of discrimination cannot be taken for granted when one is dealing with the new media. A new medium, like television, has not got the wide basis of tradition, experience and informed expectation which defines the old ones. Despite the very obvious function of social control performed by the old media of communication (and to a lesser extent, art), a hundred years of experience has served to largely de-mythologize them. One expects a journalist to present the facts with a bias towards his own viewpoint. The symbols by which he communicates with use are codes of personal communication. They assume meaning only retrospectively when processed through the consciousness of an individual.

Does memory patronize
thought, if thought is
conditioned by beliefs
or disbeliefs?

Can intelligence see its
own actuality now?

It is in this, and not their attempts to manipulate opinion that the technological media differ from the older media. One who is illiterate in the conventional sense is obviously and apparently so. In the technological media, however, one can achieve a superficial understanding of the subject without any effort at all. The seeming objectivity of the media and their 'see-it-with-your-own eyes' image of ^veracity conceals the great potential the media have for subtle propaganda. By associating (or dissociating) some features of normal living with the ideal presented on the screen, subtle changes can be effected in attitudes - if the association or dissociation can be repeated often enough.

The danger inherent in the visual mass media is not that they attempt to manipulate opinion, but that they are not clearly seen to do so, since the average viewer lacks the experience needed to de-code the symbolism, the conventions within which they operate. Conventional literacy is of no use in coming to even a superficial understanding of how these media achieve their effects, and what the precise nature of their influence is. The criteria by which older media are judged in the popular as well as in the more rarefied intellectual spheres cannot be successfully

applied to the new. The new media have not been sufficiently explored nor have their natures been sufficiently defined for a vocabulary of criticism to be formed.

The viewer is thus 'illiterate' by the definition with which this section began - she/he lacks awareness to decipher certain arbitrary signs in order to comprehend the messages encoded in them.

If vision is a source of
objectified power in a
society where the symbol
has become the object;
whose vision is it?

Whose intelligence is it?

INFORMATION -

Whilst film and television drama operates according to strict conventions (and even the most documentary style is fundamentally reliant upon these), television news functions by means of a set of formulae which is even more rigid than, though quite different to, the dramatic one. The vocabulary of television reporting is restricted by two factors, firstly, a mechanical factor; the possibility of transmitting an event instantaneously, and secondly a complementary psychological one; the need to impress upon the audience the significance of that event even though at the moment of screening, its significance, if it exists, might not be apparent. Subtle distortions also occur, such as the psychological effect of isolating one selected item from its circumstances within the confines of the small screen. As these limitations are inherent in the medium, however, their effect is inevitable, given the mutations through which a given message must pass in translation from the language of event into media dialects, and from dialect into the code of communicated experience.

The mechanics of instantaneous transmission of news prove beyond doubt that the extent to which, despite

Whose authority is it?
Whose belief or disbelief it it?
In whose control is it?
Who is being conditioned by it?
Whose power is it?
Whose wealth is it?
In whose memory is it seen?

regional variations, a world culture exists and functions. We can know of, actually see, and thereby vicariously experience an event on another continent within hours of it actually taking place. If we know in advance that it will occur, we can see it on our screens as it actually happens. Those states or blocs of states who wish to dissociate themselves from the network of this world culture do so most pointedly by reserving their 'news'. (For instance, the famine in Ethiopia is reported in Northern Europe immediately. An earthquake in China is not reported to the western press for weeks, or even months). Many advantages as we have seen are derived from such communication - for famine victims, for instance - yet the system is often disadvantageous when it comes to informing people of events which require more analysis than a natural disaster. One's response to an earthquake is, or should be, sympathy for those involved; that's simple. Responses to the words or actions of a world leader should be more complex. The medium itself maintains its apparent objectivity, and so criticism and analysis must be done by the viewer for him/herself.

Analysis is made difficult by the very operation of the medium. By its instantaneity it not only communicates

When time and space exist
in the physical world,
what kind of intelligence
is there?

but creates news. An event has become known in sittingrooms across the world before the dust has settled, and its true significance become apparent. However, energy generated by the media is often enough to give artificial impetus to an event which would have rolled to a stop of its own accord soon after occurring - the media must then cover the further developments caused by their own publicity.

There is also the subtle matter of viewpoint. The viewer identifies with those people she/he sees involved in the event being screened. So, whereas one who saw a broadcast from a station or agency which placed its cameras behind the police, saw a different event to the person whose programme was shot by a cameraman standing behind the demonstrators. In the event of a clash, the first will proclaim - it was awful, they just rushed the cops, and some of them were throwing bottles - while the second will protest that the police started it by pushing some of the demonstrators around, and that everyone has a right to protest. It's a free country. Both will proclaim though, - it's true, I saw it on the news. And neither of them will really know what happened, no more than anybody in the crowd, or on crowd control

If time and space are visions
of an objectified reality, is
it a cause of fragmentation
subjectively?

duty will know, because the mechanics of any such situation are too complex for a simple cause-and-effect conclusion. The television will have given each of them a view which is artificially simplified, yet which masquerades brilliantly as the whole story.²

If television is limited by its very nature, there is another feature of media reporting which operates within a structure so formalized and circumscribed as to have no possible end for those participating, beyond performing well by the rules; the political interview or debate. These encounters are of necessity quick-kill affairs. The participants must concern themselves totally with immediate responses - their own, their opponents', and those of the audience. The most urgent need is for the participant to make his/her statements as concise and memorable as possible. The broadest level of appeal is the currency of such a debate; accuracy is not a matter of consideration, since the responses of the audience cannot be gauged. Once a statement has been made, the response is evoked and denial or contradiction cannot make an equal impact. Only a few replies are even possible when resisting an attack,

²The effects of T.V. propaganda have been well documented by the Glasgow Media Group. Their studies are concentrated upon solely British Broadcasting institutions, however.

When space is fragmented
does time exist?

When time and space are
fragmented objectively,
what kind of intelligence
exist subjectively?

Can intelligence see the
actuality of this?

since one must play within the rapid rhythm of statement and response. Reasoned argument is not possible, since it cannot be developed at the pace at which the debate is usually conducted. Subtle differentiation of opinion suffers similarly. When the responses traded in such debates are analyzed, can they really be said to mean anything?

Television debates and interviews are nonetheless highly prized by the politicians who use them, and by the public which feels itself to be informed by them. Opinion polls are commissioned to gauge how the popularity of the players has been affected by their performance, and elections decided on the basis of their media skills.

It is in the power of the media to effect great changes in society when it is sensitive to the true currents of popular feeling. It was only when the American media, aware of widely-felt distaste for the war being played out in Vietnam, gave a platform to the people to express it, that the politicians gave serious consideration to it. The reverse of this coin, however, is the phenomenon of the media war, where groups in conflict utilize the power of the media as their weapon, and actions are conceived

If inner vision is objectified
by beliefs, disbeliefs and
physical objects, that symbolise
intelligence;
what kind of perspective is it?

Does it attract?

Why?

and carried through with the object of manipulating
public opinion through the means of mass communication.
If these messages are consumed uncritically by the
viewer, then the media of communication are in grave
danger of becoming media of propaganda.

The implications this carries was realized by George
Orwell in his essay 'Looking back on the Spanish war',
... "I saw newspapers in London retailing these lies,
and eager intellectuals building emotional superstructures
over events that had never happened. . . If Franco
remains in power his nominees will write the history
books, and that Russian Army which never existed will
become historical fact".

FILM AND TELEVISION CONVENTIONS

"Although it is a good thing if a spectacle is created to make the world more explicit, it is both reprehensible and deceitful to confuse the sign with what it signifies"

Roland Barthes - Mythologies, 'The Romans in Films'.

The dual and deceptive nature of film and television language is nowhere more obvious than in the conventions which it uses to formulate its statements, and sustain its illusion of realism. Even the most objective documentary style of film or programme-making cannot convey the total ambience of any situation. The viewer is presented with a point of departure at an arbitrary moment in the action, and his/her perception of the action as it proceeds is contained within an arbitrary frame is being artificially edited, and his/her attention is being artificially concentrated. Then, at yet another arbitrary point, the action is stopped. In no respect has the viewer been offered a view of the situation which even approximates the director's/cameraman's/reporter's one in opportunity for understanding and experience. This is due, not to any inadequacy or fault on the part of the film-makers,

but to the inherent limitations of the medium. In order to make sense of even the baldest sequence of photo-journalism, some form of commentary is required, usually a voice-over applied after editing, and featuring either the reporter or one of the subjects of the film depending on the slant of the production.

This style of presentation only works well when the overall tone is informative rather than dramatic. In any play or serial which depends upon simple, dramatic action, some method must be applied which enables the viewer to understand and thereby to vicariously participate in it as it occurs. Otherwise the effect would be lost. The majority of cases, the solution chosen to this problem is a formulaic one. The viewer is, or is made familiar with certain specific modes of representing sequences of action. Therefore, when these modes re-occur during the film, comprehension is immediate. This is not to say that the device or convention which represents a specific sequence of action or set of circumstances is iconically related to those action or circumstances. The more familiar the audience is with the medium, the greater the gap it can bridge between symbol and symbolized.

As the media have developed, as their aims become more ambitious, and their methods, consequently more sophisticated, so have they moved further and further from iconic representation and towards a complex grammar of symbol and device, of which the audience is not always sufficiently conscious. These conventions employ iconic images of reality in such a manner that their meaning can be changed and manipulated. The possibilities inherent in a sequence of images are reduced by expectation and previous experience, so that of all the possibilities, one alone becomes the indubitable meaning which is communicated alike to the entire audience, as it supports the easily perceived surface action.

In the early cinema the introduction of the close-up as a device for mimicing intense interest was greeted with uproar from the audience, which was accustomed to seeing their entertainment as they saw reality - feet and all. Today, great distortions of image are accepted by the audience without comment, for people are familiar, not only with the device, but with what the device symbolizes.

Such devices are entirely abstract, symbols in fact, whose meaning is related, not to any material phenomenon, perceived through the senses, but to purely mental ones. They relate, not to what is happening on the screen, but to what is passing in the mind of the subject, or to what the film maker desires to put into the minds of the audience.

Put more exactly - mental functions such as interest, sudden realisation, memory or excitement, do not manifest themselves in ways which can be transferred directly to the screen. The image is, instead, manipulated so that these functions are mimiced in symbols which the audience can recognize as having a precise meaning. These symbols relate to the action mimiced only through convention.

The flash-back or flash-forward are devices which we have become accustomed to interpreting as representations of memory - a sudden cut to action which has already transpired on the screen - or expectation - action is cut in which bears no relation to what is proceeding at that moment, but which is placed in a meaningful context later in the scene. Had we never seen such devices before, we would be utterly confused by their intrusion into the narrative flow of the film or play.

Other such conventions are the familiar centre-spot diffusion filter, which gives a soft-focus, romantic aura of imprecision to thoughts or memories, and the depiction of both parties engaged in a telephone conversation on the screen at the same time, apparently separated only by the wall of the kiosk. Some of these devices have been overplayed to the extent that they have become clichés and some have even become extinct, only to live on as legends; such as the white-hatted hero of westerns, or the Chicago gangster with a tommy gun in his violin case.

More interesting and more relevant than these, however, are the conventions which operate in a genuinely symbolic and even grammatical fashion. Examples of these are extremely common, since directors and cameramen are forced to find some method of associating place and action, or characters and role which can be accomplished in seconds. In order to set a scene inside an impressive building, when that scene in fact was filmed on a set perhaps thousands of miles away, all that is required is that a shot showing any of the characters playing the scene crossing a foyer or leaving a lift which looks as if it belonged to the building in question. This shot is then cut in

between a shot of the building and the scene supposedly taking place within it. In this apparently simple sequence, a complex grammar - a set of laws - is operating to ensure that the correct inference is drawn by the audience.

On screen, any individual, but particularly a man, who flashes the inside of his wallet at any other individual is, of course, a police officer showing his credentials, he may even be a member of a security or intelligence force, she/he is NEVER a petty criminal selling pornographic postcards. And it is NEVER necessary for the audience to see the inside of the wallet to know this.

There is another level on which this grammar operates unconsciously upon the audience - the level at which osmosis occurs between the mores and conventions depicted in film and television and those current in real life. This is the most controversial and the most problematical area of media studies, posing questions of what influences whom, to what extent and for how long. None of these questions, however, can be answered empirically on statistics. What alone can be safely assumed from all of this, is that some transference does occur.

For example, take the treatment of erotic scenes. Particularly in television plays and serials, whose average length being around $1/3$ to $1/2$ the length of the average film, precludes time consuming subtle development, these scenes require a type of artificial symbolism similar to that required by functions of imagination or memory. The forms of communication employed in an actual erotic encounter being so subtle and individual as to be beyond the perception of a camera, it is necessary for artifice to be employed, in their screen depiction. This simulation actually went so far in pre-war Hollywood, that kissing was performed according to a formula - the man kissed the woman's top lip, while the woman kissed the man's bottom lip at the opposite side. This rendered the act both visible to the cameraman and photogenic. (Though hardly erotic to either party). Were the kiss to be rendered naturally, it would in all likelihood be neither. Had one not had one's expectations cultivated by experience in the media and their language, such scenes would be totally devoid of erotic charge, stilted and unnatural.

This type of artifice has implications for the uses to which film and television are put by their audience.

These uses are both social and personal. It is possible for the variety of scenarios presented in different films and plays to be seen as different approaches to problems which occur in the ordinary existences of their audiences. The experiences of movie characters are also vicariously those of their audiences. This is true of both boy/girl situations and wider social situations relating to personal rights, responsibilities, and so forth. The Dirty Dozen, a gang of resentful unshaven misfits are turned into a crack outfit and wins the battle.

If the audience which perceives these situations as possibilities for resolution of their own problems is not critically aware of the degree to which these situations deviate from reality, it is possible that modes of communication, and resolution of situations which are not adequate to reality will enter into common usage. If the modes imitated are simply inadequate this is bad enough, but if they are distorted also, the potential for personal and social misfortune is considerable. This potential, unfortunately does exist as long as people do not learn to look critically at what appears on the screen.

"Shall we therefore readily.... listen to any stories made up by anyone, and to form opinions that are for the most part the opposite of what we think...?"

Because the issues at stake are even greater than they appear, and neither honour nor wealth nor power nor poetry should tempt us to neglect the claims of justice and excellence of every kind."³

³Plato - The Republic.

What is education?

Is it the realization of a
consciousness that is aware?

SECTION II

POPULAR AND MINORITY CULTURE

In the preceeding section, the dialect of the media has been outlined. But how, (one may ask), does the media relate to education.

The mass media, film, television are new media. They are fairly the media of the majority. They are not concerned with the same message as the traditional fine-art media. Nonetheless, it must be noted that these media do have concerns of their own, areas in which they can operate fluently, where the older media are inarticulate. The new media are the media of mass man.

However, an attitude towards mass art prevails amongst those with pretensions in the arts; it is characterized by a disdain of those media, naturally, a broad section of the film industry is exempted from this sweeping condemnation. Fellini, Chaplin and a selection of cult figures from the cinema are perceived as artists, their works as art, and they are absolved from the stain of commercialism.

Is it possible for education to exist in a society that is subjectively and objectively bound in general by a single belief; or a political system based on tradition?

However, since the greatest part of film and television production is purely commercial - it is ignored on a critical level. This also applies to most forms of popular music - the kind performed in pubs as well as the kind released on record. This attitude towards unawareness is dangerous in two respects: firstly, the majority of people attend, watch or listen to this popular material out of choice, and few are sufficiently involved with their chosen form of entertainment to engage in comparison and criticism. Therefore, a kind of vacuum is created between passive acceptance due to lack of informed standards and attractive alternatives, and the irrelevance of much 'high' culture to the tastes and circumstances of the popular audience. Secondly, as the opinion that such material is, beneath critical consideration holds sway over cultural establishments, it stands in the path of development of genuine popular standards. Change and improvement in the scorned media is then securely blocked, both from above and below, since change imposed from 'above' is unlikely to be commercially successful, and change from below is unlikely to emerge spontaneously in commercially controlled media.

Criteria for the evaluation of cultural activity such as literature and fine-art are of course well established but can they be brought to bear upon the new media? I believe not. The nature and interests of film, and television are too radically different for the same standards to apply to both. Television, for instance, is episodic when compared with the continuous development which is the feature of the novel. Its impact must be primarily visual or aural whilst literature has the entire range of psychological response at the disposal of its abstract, symbolic means. The development of a vocabulary of criticism suitable for the evaluation of the mass media must develop naturally through the active awareness and participation of those who are at present passive consumers. The prospects for popular involvement in the media are excellent. They only require the means, both financial and cultural to realize them.

The establishment in one area will, as a matter of course, support the establishment in any other area. In keeping with this universal law, we find that the government, through the Arts Council, supports the

recognized forms of traditional 'high' culture, subsidizing them heavily whilst allowing most forms of popular culture to fend for themselves. However, in spite of this the majority of people retain a strong urge to participate in one or other type of art activity, and would welcome any opportunity to do so. Community participation, personal responsibility, active involvement and intelligent awareness are the raw materials for a vigorous and relevant art form, and they exist in abundance in this country.

A survey carried out by the Arts Council in 1981 bears this out. (Lansdowne Market Research, March 1981). Its major findings were;

- Despite huge increases in expenditure on the arts during the past decade, attendance at events has remained static.
- Activities and events upon which expenditure was lavished were the 'high' or middle-class cultural variety, e.g. ballet, opera, classical music and 'serious' theatre. This was done despite the fact that;

- Traditional and folk music is the single most popular type of live event, regardless of a low level of sponsorship.

But most important, the survey disclosed a massive interest NOT in attending artistic events in a passive capacity, but in ACTIVE PARTICIPATION in artistic activities. This interest was manifest even among people who expressly denied interest in film, theatre, concert or any art form where they would be expected to belong to an audience. For example, in the Connacht area, 2/3 of the people questioned would be interested in active involvement in some art activity if the opportunity was available. A vigorous tradition of participation has always existed in this country, especially in rural areas. This survey shows that the inclination persists, and could be a vital force in all cultural areas, given sufficient encouragement.

Interest in the new media is widespread, on a deeper level than mere novelty. The video system, like the flicks and the telly, is on its way to becoming a popular domestic amenity. The opportunity exists now to widen and deepen the extent of this interest.

Since such a widespread inclination to participate in the traditional media exists, it is likely that the appeal of the new media either for their own sakes, or in combination with any of the older ones, would be even wider still. The type or types of activity embarked upon in amateur societies would hardly approach the professional gloss of commercial film or television, it would certainly not be sophisticated in the cosmopolitan sense, but it would be active, engaging and meaningful to those who were involved in it.

Would such activities qualify for support from bodies such as the Arts Council? Can technological media be regarded as art media, or is the ennobling title 'Art' reserved solely for those media which have traditionally borne it? And lastly, should not those bodies whose concern is the sponsorship of art activity reserve their funds for work which does not have the support of commercial interests?

The first two questions can be answered by drawing an analogy between the new media and other forms which served a long apprenticeship to art before being accepted by the arbitors of high culture. Jazz

music is perhaps the most recent example having made, within living memory, the transition from vulgar entertainment to laudable art form. A more unexpected example of a form whose native merits triumphed over the premature judgements of the cultural establishment, is the novel. It was tinkered with by writers for nearly a hundred years, never quite achieving respectability before its potential was realized. Thereafter, respectability was no longer a consideration. The 'new' mode had become a cultural force and the major literary form of the next century. So it appears that the arbiters of culture have been proved wrong in their judgements often enough for their slighting of the popular media to require re-examination. It has fallen into the trap of denying the existence of any standards in a form, simply because its inherent criteria deviated from those known in the past or current at the time.

As to the third question posed above, -the commercial factor - participation in the cultural force with which one is most concerned is very commendable, but the possibilities already outlined for such participation are limited by this factor. Even where one's primary interest in the media is concerned one must take the fact of commercial control into consideration. This

is, after all, the question of who controls the media, and to what end.

It would be naive in the extreme to suggest that any structure could be planned for the communications network, under any political system, which would be independent of that system and totally objective. (Even R.T.E. is legally obliged to serve the interests of the government, above and beyond its dependence upon the State for finance). The nature of this control and its aims will, as a matter of course reflect the style of government in the case of state-sponsored broadcasting, and the general disposition of the society it broadcasts to, in the case of both state and commercially controlled networks.

Regardless of the precise structure and priorities of those networks operating in Western Europe or North America it is obvious to any viewer that the vast majority of programmes broadcast on T.V. and films distributed to the cinemas, are the products of a strongly commercially oriented system. Aside from the implications this holds for the quality of

material produced, (this will be dealt with later), it is questionable whether these concerns are acceptable as arbiters of public taste. The situation, unfortunately, is a circular one, the audience is only aware of what is presented to it by the commercial producers, and with a general lack of critical awareness, no dissatisfaction is expressed at the quality of the material; the businessmen at the supply end of the line, being cautious, respond only to demand from the consumer, so the standard remains unchanged.

More important than this is the vital consideration of how far people, and the media themselves, are being manipulated in the interests of commerce, and taking the widest possible application of the word - politics. There is evidence that such manipulation does occur, and is widespread. In the commercial sector, the form it takes is obvious since even government subsidized stations depend heavily, as do newspapers, on revenue from 'paid space' - that is, advertising. Large corporations, such as Coca-Cola, the tobacco combines, and the motor factories like Ford, Talbot or G.M., can make considerable investments

in stations through the deployment of advertising. These corporations not only invest directly in production companies - Universal Studios is now a division of the Coca-Cola company - but subsidize some productions by supplying vehicles. (An expensive element in a show these days, where a freeway pile-up is nearly as inevitable as death, taxes and the ads). Naturally, these plays or serials whose overall tenor is likely to glamorize the product by association are chosen for patronage. It is then accepted practice for advertizers to threaten withdrawal of their accounts should the station not agree to screen the shows which they have chosen to use as reinforcement for their advertising message. Viewers are thereby exposed to material designed to promote a lifestyle, which complements the advertizers message, and made more receptive to it.

For example, a Coca-Cola ad, was clearly derived from a particularly saccherine and glamorized serial set in a showbiz school. The agent who handles the Coca-Cola account might demand, as a pre-condition to opening an account with a station, that the serial be screened in order to soften up the public for the message in the ad. If this happens with a number of

potential advertizers, then the programming of the station is no longer in the hands of those who are employed to control it on behalf of the public. The amount of money and time that they have at their disposal for experiment, and for locally relevant material is radically cut.

The suitability of commercially-oriented material is in doubt in areas other than advertising. When one considers the purely narrative standards of the material which is put out by studios large enough to be beyond the financial grasp of big business, this becomes evident. Where commercial interests dominate the broadcasting scene, the potential for active community involvement in the selection of material is limited, and the possibility of active involvement in the production of material becomes very remote. As long as this situation is tolerated, then the relevance of this important medium to the real lives of its consumers will remain minimal.

The urge which people feel to participate in cultural activities has been pointed out by the Arts Council Survey quoted earlier in this section. Participation, if it is to engender progress in the medium of broadcasting particularly, needs to be intelligent, informed

and critical. At present the average viewer (and cinema audience) is in the position of the individual who says that while he can't tell you exactly what he wants, he'll know when he sees it. The public can at least vote with its feet on the merits or demerits of a particular item, but only after it is presented to them with all the decisions already made. Lack of information, and more acutely, (since theoretical knowledge is easily acquired, and virtually useless) lack of experience of the possibilities inherent in the mass media keep their audience passive before them. Attempts to 'raise the tone' of broadcasting have generally been embarrassingly inappropriate. The technique most frequently applied has been that of television drama - usually not adapted to the new medium and played as if on stage before a live audience - opera or dance. Most viewers simply switch channels.

The only valid way to bring about change and improvement is through demand from the viewers. That is the only kind of demand which will impress the programmers and their accountants, and imposition of change from 'above' is unlikely to impress the viewers. What eventually emerges may not resemble

Can education begin in a society that is subjectively conditioned by history, emotionally controlled by beliefs and objectively predetermined by the gains of material things?

Can intelligence be aware that it has to educate itself?

any known cultural or artistic form, but will probably be better broadcasting if only for having shed its pretensions to being something else.

Given the gigantic potential which the mass media possess for manipulating an audience, it has become imperative that some means of counteracting this influence be found. The most effective and most rational solution is to familiarize the viewers with the language of the media. As matters stand, there is as little genuine understanding of the media in the attitude of the addict as in the attitude of those who condemn everything on the box as rubbish. Somewhere removed from either is a middle-of-the-road attitude of informed respect for the potential of mass broadcasting, not as a soporific, not as a means of manipulation, but as a channel of intelligent communication, incorporating critical awareness and enjoyment.

"In themselves, the mass media are neither good nor bad, but simply a tool for communication to be used towards ends which are ultimately determined by the audiences themselves..."

CONCLUSION

Historically, we have seen that news, information about the world and the realm of ideas were the concern only of those who were actively participating in the formation of an industrial society. Within that society the law is the creation of surplus value, that is the law of profits.

Each day in society people consume pseud-artistic memories and products offered by film and television. The numbers involved on a global scale are awesome: thousands or millions of viewers - at times watch a single show or programme broadcast by a single station, which sometimes link into other networks, forming a chain which mystifies the minds of their consumers. This enormous potential for intelligent communication is put at the service of the distributors of pseudo-artistic products; whom does it benefit or harm? Who stands to lose or gain from it? What is discouraged or encouraged? The one who stands to lose is man himself, man who absorbs the products of man's art; for pleasure or consumption nearly for pure enjoyment. For both media often present fear as an innocent distraction; affirming man in his hollowness

What is fear?

Does thought dwell on memory
to create fear as a
conditioning of intelligence?
What kind of conditioning is it?
Whose conditioning is it?

and the fragmented nature of his society.

Even when it is presented in the most banal form, or when it glosses over the most profound human problems concealing their underlying real and living contradictions, mass art plays a well defined ideological role: to keep man in his place behind closed windows through which he might catch a glimpse of a truly human world and with it the possibility of becoming conscious of his alienation.

It is not man alone who suffers; it is a loss for all things that are truly human, more precisely it is a loss in turn for authentic art as an expression of what is specifically human and joyful. The kind of programming which is appreciated is thus conventional; built around cosmetic characters, false solutions and cheap sentimentalism. In man's consumption, the loss suffered by art is therefore dramatic: the addict does not behold truly aesthetic objects but those artistic products offered by mass art. Even when true art is offered to the viewer he is incapable of recognising it because he cannot establish a truly human aesthetic relationship with it.

Primarily, nobody is more interested in mass art than the capitalist or communist, for three reasons; one economic the other ideological, the third being the product or symbol containing the former aspects in physical existence. From the economic point of view, man's consumption ensures the highest possible profit. This implies that mass art is fundamentally an industry, whose interests lie in standardising both artists' production and the tastes which determine its enjoyment. Under present conditions when the manipulation of consciousness on a massive scale has become vital to the economists and ideologists, the consumption of mass art is a reflection on the intelligence of society.

Symbols, articulate the intelligent relationship between the different parts; without a clear expression of interaction, the singular motion of the macrocosm becomes fragmented. Society divides into factions of ideological, economical religious and political self interests. When one fragment assumes authority over another, it may be said to be the wasted energy of effort; fashioned superficially by opinions and styles. These in turn are projected at the conscious or unconscious to create obsessions, compulsions and phobias, etc. In this way symbols become divorced from their function, which is to work from intelligence to see the whole and relate the parts as a singular motion.

When the mind is unified
what exists?

When energy is unified
what exists?

When sound is unified
what exists?

When time is unified
does space exist?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BROWN J.A.C.,
 BRONOWSKI J.,
 JARVIE I.C ,

 KRISHNAMURTI J.,
 LUTYENS M. ,

 NIETZSCHE F.,

 VAZQUEZ A.S,
 NIETZSCHE F.,
 WILLIAMS R.,
 WILLIAMS R.,
- Techniques of Persuasion - Pelican.
 William Blake - Penguin Books.
 Movies as Social Criticism
 Scarecrow Press.
 The impossible Question - Pelican Books.
 The Second Penguin Krishnamurti Reader.
 Penguin Books
 Twilight of the Idols The Anti Christ.
 Penguin Classics.
 Art and Society - Merlin Press.
 Beyond Good and Evil - Penguin Classics.
 Communications - Fontana.
 Television Technology and Cultural Form.
 Fontana.