ELECTRONIC LITERACY AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

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ELECTRONIC LITERACY AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

by

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Abstract

"Communication" is the primary concern of the writers of curriculum guides. English courses are said to contain a dimension of media-awareness: it is claimed that English education helps students examine the media critically as conveyors of information and help develop standards for judging and responding. This statement assumes that the present English curriculum enables a literate person to respond to the electronic media and print with equal understanding.

Current text books for English teachers call for a "new focus on literacy" which would enable students to respond critically to the mass media. Unfortunately, the only methodology suggested seems to include no more than vague references to talking about television programs in class.

The educational community must take television more seriously. It is the most profoundly important advance in communications and a primary source of ideas and information for students. Young people should be taught "how" to analyze what they see and hear on television. Teachers ought to help passive, indiscriminate, purposeless viewers become active, discriminating, purposeful viewers. Teaching the ability to discriminate among the messages produced by television in a manner that parallels those of

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print is no trivial matter. An effective methodology has
to be implemented if students are to achieve electronic
literacy as an educational objective.

Besides a knowledge of the nature of the medium,
electronic literacy involves correct reading of the
picture on the screen, evaluation of the technical methods
by which the pictures were obtained, knowledge of the
organization for which the author is working, knowledge of
the personalities which express themselves, and aesthetic
appraisal of the value of the broadcast. In order to teach
this, some definite guidelines are required.

If the concept of literacy is not modernized,
distinctive features of popular media may cause the viewer
to misinterpret the intended message. The communication
system of reading and writing should be integrated into a
more comprehensive verbal-pictorial-sound-language system.
Electronic communication has made cultural knowledge
available publicly, instantaneously, and pervasively.

A review of the material written concerning the
nature of the television medium and methodological approaches
to television criticism indicates that the present English
curriculum lacks the means of achieving the goals which it
sets for itself. A new focus on literacy which attends to
the distinctive features of the television medium is
required; 'electronic literacy' should be taught in our
schools.

Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The latest curriculum guide available for English
teachers in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (1982)
states that communication is the comprehensive and organizing
center for the English program and as a subject area, English
courses include a dimension of media awareness.

> Since the communication of ideas is a
> major instructional concern, teachers
> of English cannot ignore the impact of
> the mass media of television, films,
> radio, magazines and newspapers. English
> helps students examine critically the
> media as conveyors of information, and it
> helps them to develop standards for
> judging and responding. (The Dimensions
> and Objectives of English, 1982, p. 1)

Three factors must be examined in connection with
this statement as an educational objective. First, the
"impact of the mass media" has to be measured in some way.
English teachers ought to be aware of the aspects of modern
electronic media which are relevant to the English curriculum.
Secondly, the statement claims that "English" (whatever that
is) enables the student to respond critically to mass media.
An obvious question would be "What is meant by 'English'?"
Some mechanism of critical response is assumed to be taught,
and once learned, the student can apply this skill to any
network of modern communications. The third factor concerns
the development of "standards for judging and responding",

i.e. to "information". Here the assumption is that the mass media should be recognized primarily "as conveyors of information" and that the English curriculum as it exists presently enables a literate person to examine critically the printed page and the television screen with equal understanding.

Since we "cannot ignore the impact of the mass media", there is no doubt that the influence has been significant enough to deserve consideration in English classes. A perusal of two recent textbooks for prospective English teachers supports this notion. Hook and Evans warn us that

> Knowing only what one sees and hears via
> the electronic media can be no more enlightening
> than knowing only what one reads from newspaper
> headlines, ads for commercial products, sports
> pages, and comic strips ... The situation calls
> for a new focus on literacy... (1982, p. 463)

Judy adds that "with their horizons expanded, young people need to be able to respond to the media creatively and critically and to use them to communicate with others successfully" (1981, p. 281).

According to these textbooks, the means of achieving such aims is rather simple and unworthy of serious planning. The teacher need only walk into the classroom, survey the amount of time students spend watching television, discuss the inferiority of the literary quality of most programs, and the students write an assignment with this in mind, thereby learning "to develop standards for judging and responding".

The lofty objectives of this "new focus on literacy" indicate a powerful medium in need of critical scrutiny within the English curriculum, yet the methods suggested assumes the impact of television to be easily measured and the teaching of critical response to be a simple task. It is imperative that recent research into this area be reviewed in order to determine the impact of television and identify the role of television education in the English curriculum.

There has been an increase in the number of articles dealing with television in educational journals of the past few years. The January/February, 1977 edition of The National Elementary Principal was devoted to "The Ecology of Education: Television". In the editorial, Houts claims that "the educational community has all but ignored television" (January/February, 1977, p. 6). He states that "educators must understand the dynamics of television - how both the commercial and noncommercial networks operate, how programs are produced, and what the various influences and effects of television can be on children and adults", and urges us "to take television seriously". Ferris has said that without any doubt, "the most dramatic and profoundly important advance in communications has been the invention and improvement of television", (1979, p. 4) while Pulliam refers to television as "an invincible force in creating attitudes and a major means of transmitting the culture to the young" (1979, p. 4).

In an article from the English Journal, entitled
"Popular Culture, the Media, and Teaching English", Barth
points out that the popular media — film, radio, television,
records, and newspapers — are a primary source of ideas and
information for students. Young people should have the
opportunity to acquire a working knowledge of these media.
"The responsibility for teaching students about the popular
media and the culture created by them lies with the teachers
of English" (1976, p. 84). Rankin and Roberts — in an
article from The Reading Teacher entitled "Television and
Teaching", share this view: "The time has come for teachers
to stop criticizing television and start using it effectively;
we can teach students how to learn from it" (1981, p. 30).

This notion of teaching students "how" to learn from
television is crucial, especially in consideration of certain
information about the influence of television in contemporary
life. Ellul considered the medium to be the technical
instrument most destructive of personality and human relations
"because of its power of fascination and its capacity of
visual and auditory penetration" (1964, p. 380). In The
Technological Society, humanity is perceived as seeking "the
simultaneous fusion of his consciousness with an omnipresent
technical diversion" (1964, p. 380). Mander agrees when he
argues that television has disconnected us from direct
experience with reality, that the medium has links with
physical and mental illness, (1978, p. 46) and that "the most

effective telecommunications are the gross, simplified linear messages and programs which conveniently fit the purposes of the medium's commercial controllers" (1978, p. 261).

The impact of television on contemporary political consciousness is the subject of *Electronic Democracy*. In this book Anne Rawley Saldich declares: "Tyranny is the arbitrary use of power in the absence of accountability. This describes television" (1979, p. 63). Several formidable forces interact to give the medium such power, including "a vast, simultaneous audience, instant access, high credibility, nationwide scope, its ephemeral nature ... and negligible accountability" (1979, p. 63). If any educational system professes to be concerned with producing an informed citizenry, then "schools must teach electronic literacy as an antidote to passive viewing" (1979, p. 79).

What is "electronic literacy"? Saldich hints at a definition when she suggests that "People must learn how to analyze what they see and hear on television" (1979, p. 111). David A. England, in his resource column "Television and the English Teacher", has stated that English teachers must acknowledge the fact that television is the most pervasive culture, information, and entertainment bearing medium and consider how to help passive, indiscriminate, and purpose-less viewers become active, discriminating, and purposeful viewers (1978, p. 84). If we therefore define "electronic

literacy" as "the ability to discriminate among the messages produced by television in a manner that parallels those produced by print", then a methodology must be implemented in order to help students of English achieve electronic literacy as an educational objective. The teacher must have a knowledge of the fundamental nature of the television medium and know how to identify the distinctive features of its content using literary criteria. While attempting to find answers to the question "What is electronic literacy?", we should keep in mind a statement made by Patrick Brantlinger in Media and Methods a few years ago:

> It is not the light that comes from the boxes in our livingrooms that will show us where the answers are to be found. Rather, the answers lie in the amount of light that we are willing to reflect back on the glowing images. (1978, p. 91)

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF THE MEDIUM

"No matter what medium we use, it is important that
we be able to communicate clearly and precisely, and we are
more likely to do so when we are explicitly aware of the
character of the medium" (Robinson and Petchenik, 1976,
p. vii). The English teacher, if he is "to communicate
clearly and precisely", should be aware of the reasons for
teaching about television, and it is imperative to
contemplate the influence of this medium on society in the
light of those who have written criticism on the topic. In
this way the English teacher can become "explicitly aware
of the character of the medium".

Electronic literacy may be viewed as an updating of
an evolving definition of 'literacy'. The research of
Daniel and Lauren Resnick suggests that "there has been a
sharp shift over time in expectations concerning literacy.
With changed standards come changed estimates of the adequacy
of a population's literacy" (1977, pp. 396-397). Having an
acceptable literacy level in contemporary society requires,
at a minimum, "the reading of new material and the gleaning
of new information from that material" (1977, p. 397).
Achieving such a level of literacy is the responsibility of
the English teacher.

Answers to the questions "What is English?" and "What is the English teacher's domain?" may never be complete. However, most course outlines do advocate attention to methods of communication. The English curriculum maintains certain traditions while allowing for changes in the language experience of students. Television education is long overdue; "Our subject matter must embrace television as surely as television has embraced our subject matter" (England, 1981, p. 18). Indeed, reading and writing skills can be assumed to develop the kind of skills requisite to decoding visual and oral information as presented on television (Stauffer, 1978, 5 (2) , pp. 221-231).

As England points out, there are reasons to believe that television and the teaching of English may be particularly compatible. Television has the potential to deal with great ideas, to appeal to our emotions, challenge our intellect and enhance a deeper awareness of ourselves and the world around us. As art, television can potentially move us in as many ways as the literature we read. It is even more clearly a medium which exposes the viewer to messages, many of which are hidden in the programs, which utilize themes, symbols, metaphors, ironies and climaxes in ways which are similar to those of literature.

The 'electronic' element of literacy should not be neglected in our statement of English objectives. If we teach students to read critically, it does not necessarily

follow that we are simultaneously teaching them to view
critically and that our attempts to educate language-users
is sufficient to meet the challenge of television literacy
(England, 1978, p. 85). This becomes more obvious when
one considers the differences between watching television
and reading. The viewer cannot control the pace of
presentation, he cannot elaborate the material through his
auditory or visual imagery (Singer, 1979, p. 33) nor can
he "readily transform the material ... into a form that might
suit his particular emotional needs" (Winn, 1977, p. 52).
Furthermore, the notion of a current level of linear
literacy being sufficient for understanding the popular
media undermines the significance of mass media to the
history of communications (Pimenoff, 1981, pp. 87-88).
Nordenstreng and Varis consider the appearance of electronic
communication to be the fourth major turning point, after
the acquisition of language, the development of the art of
writing and speech, and the invention of the printing press
(Cromer, 1979, p. 107). Cromer states that the

> invention of electronic communication
> media is creating mass communication
> within a world culture through language
> as imagist art. It forms a universal
> language in that concepts are open to
> multiple interpretations and multiple
> meaning which can be commonly understood
> and experienced by all people. (1979,
> p. 107)

Another difficulty with neglecting to modernize the concept of literacy is that the distinctive features of popular media may cause the viewer to misinterpret the intended message. The printed word may manipulate the reader's response, but the intent of the television message rarely has a humanistic motive. In fact, the intent of the television message is usually for the economic or political gain of the sender. Thompson points out that a semiotic study of media "would allow us to view the integrated language of the media in a systematic way, so that we might create a body of knowledge that would help us better teach literacy in this new cultural language" (1978, p. 96).

Far from being a break away from traditional aims for English education, electronic literacy must be seen as an extension of a modern definition of literacy (Pattison, 1982, pp. 116-117). In a sense, nothing has changed, "Our perennial concern as English teachers is language study" (Thompson, 1978, p. 104). The communication system of reading and writing should be integrated into a more comprehensive "verbal-pictorial-sound-language system" (Thompson, 1978, p. 104). By applying electricity to communication, the media has made cultural knowledge available publicly, instantaneously and pervasively. Literacy must contend with these factors since an important goal of language education is to understand that language has always been a creator of reality.

As language educators, we must move the
electronic technologies of sensory visual
and oral language into their rightful place
in the classroom alongside the study of
print language and make possible for our
youth a genuine participation in the
forging of a new civilization. (Cromer and
Thompson, 1980, p. 92)

The study of television involves a contemplation of

education and culture in its most pervasive and all-inclusive

form. We are dealing with how the medium can shape, change,

direct and influence members of a society whose lives are

reflected by the content of this form of communication.

People are "educated" and their culture exposed by stories

in literature and dramas on television, commentary on daily

occurrences and newscasts, thorough explorations of important

or unique events and film documentaries, and by the

personalities and celebrities who entertain (Newcomb, 1976,

p. xiv).

Television employs definite strategies to attract

viewers. Jerome L. Singer explains some methods in terms of

the senses which are appealed to when an individual partic-

ipates in the television experience (1980, p. 31). He says

that vision and audition are the most developed and critical

major senses of the human being. People tend to be drawn to

sights and sounds in the environment and are less responsive

to slight fluctuations in smell, taste or touch. Most people

are predominantly oriented toward watching and listening;

perhaps the single most effective form of stimulation is a

movement in the environment. One of the major powers of

television is the fact that it involves movement and thus
attracts attention. The attraction of visual activity is
magnified by a "voice-over" communicating a message and a
printed message.

Another mechanism for processing information is the
ability to focus attention on a specific and delimited area
of the environment. Human beings respond to any sudden, new,
and unexpected stimulation. This is called the "orienting
reflex" (Singer, 1980, p. 38). A key feature of television
is the introduction of sudden novelty by the use of quick
blackouts, or cuts, from one sequence to the next.
Adventure programs tend to introduce action sequences very
early because of a fear of losing the interest of the
audience when there is any kind of extended conversation or
plot development.

The "assimilability of information" theory suggests
that another attraction of television is the manner in which
it presents a significant amount of novel information,
particularly sudden changes, within a relatively small "box"
so the viewer responds not with startle or fear, but with
the positive affect of moderate interest (1980, p. 45). The
constant movement and pattern of change produces a continuous
series of orienting reflexes in the viewer. It is difficult
to habituate to the set because of the variations in degree
of movement and the appearance and reappearance of various
characters (1980, p. 46).

Television affects the learning process in its reliance on the visual-sensory system. The human brain is capable of storing a tremendous amount of visual material. Thus, material viewed just a few times on television can be recognized if it is re-presented at a later time without any significant effort. This passive quality of television viewing, through the constant representation of visual material, enables the viewer to store a large quantity of what is presented.

Another feature of the power of the television medium is that it is, in itself, a social world; it provides a kind of companionship for the solitary viewer. The material presented on television can elicit empathic reactions, identifications, and various emotional reactions. In a sense, television 'thinks' for the viewer in providing a series of packaged fantasies, an alternative that has immediacy (1980, p. 47). To quote Bill Morgan, CBC's recently appointed director of news and current affairs, "The more dazzling the technology, the more those in the business become capable of assembling a new reality" (Groen, 1982, p. 12).

The overall strategy television uses to attract viewers is summarized by Singer in this way:

> In effect, television is almost
> irresistible because it does meet essential
> affective criteria for motivation. It
> reduces negative effects and can, for long
> periods, substitute another's brain for
> one's own, thus minimizing painful private

rehearsals of one's own problems. It
enhances the positive affects of interest
and joy or laughter, it permits some
expression of emotions but also, by its
very box-like structure, allows for
control of effect. (1980, p. 50)

Inherent in the very power of the television medium
are its limitations. The television set holds the viewer's
attention by way of a constant sensory bombardment that
maximizes orienting responses. He is constantly drawn back
to the set and to processing each new sequence of information
as it is presented. This technique does not permit him to
process the information in a manner which is conducive to the
most efficient later use of what has been presented. The
rapid shifts of focus, the quick thirty-second commercial,
and the speedy dialogue hold his attention almost too
efficiently and often the brevity of presentation of complex
new material eliminates the possibility of effective
encoding for retrieval (1980, p. 51). Considering the
individual's need to replay mentally in one or another
modality a recently-experienced stimulus, television may be
an inefficient medium for communicating fairly complex
material. A basic problem with the television medium,
therefore, is that it constantly introduces new material
before the viewer has a chance to grasp either the printed
or verbal and auditory material presented. As a result, it
yields a high rate of information loss (1980, p. 53). When
the viewer's dominant visual mechanism and the escape from

his thoughts are exploited by the medium, the potential for more extended reflection, for retention of information, and for careful, critical evaluation of information are minimized (1980, p. 63).

Singer points out that the frenetic quality of the medium is largely attributable to its excessive commercialization.

> TV sells products and local station
> sales managers who live in a capitalistic
> society can scarcely be faulted for trying
> to put on as many ads as they can. Indeed
> it can be argued that most of the content
> of television, the attention-getting laughs,
> chases or shoot-outs are there to keep your
> eyes on the set so you will see the
> commercials which pop up just at those
> points. (1980, p. 53)

Television provides a definite sense of focus, engagement and intimacy. Gordon explains that in the early years of commercial television it was discovered that crowd scenes "tend to wash out into a sea of grey on the TV tube" (1971, p. 135). The medium therefore switched to a primary concentration on short segments and close-ups, which necessitated an emphasis on focus. Any event, idea or expression had to be scaled down and selected.

Although the medium possesses inherent defects which distort the versions of reality it provides, one type of distortion is essential for efficient communication. Efforts have to be made to offset the innate defects of the medium for the sake of approaching reality. It is a distortion to

vary the lighting, camera angles, and microphone placement
for different individuals, but when this is perceptively
used a more accurate version of each individual can be
presented than if any single system were used for all
individuals. The statement is consistent with any art:
"One must sometimes falsify an immediate dimension of
reality in order that the larger whole can approach reality"
(1971, p. 136).

Some contemporary media critics have written
extensively on their perceptions of the television experience.
Michael J. Arlen identifies two chief difficulties in writing
television criticism, the first being

> that the content of American television
> is for the most part so meretricious and
> second-rate that it is nearly impossible
> to deal with on any other basis than that
> of the bare-bone, informational review in
> the daily newspaper, (1976, p. 3)

and the second factor being that programs are "deliberately
fashioned so as to make it inevitable, even desirable, that
it should turn out that way" (1976, p. 5). He asks what a
critic can do to judge a work which has practically no
substance or dimension and whose creators and participants
have "no ambition for it beyond the simplest commerce" (1976,
p. 6). Yet Arlen expresses concern about the relationship
between television and the audience. He feels that television
has assumed an authoritarian position in our society in
delegating to itself the majority and minority expressions of

politics, culture and sensibility (1976, p. 13). It is
impossible for television to play a neutral role: "The fact
that we are all stuck with is that television is an authority,
and the evidence of this century is that there has been no
such thing as a neutral authority" (1976, p. 175).

Jerry Mander and Jerzy Kosinski agree with Arlen.
Mander states that television itself predetermines who shall
use it, how they will use it, what effects it will have on
individual lives and what kinds of political forms will
inevitably emerge (Mander, 1978, p. 45). The overriding
bias of television is that it offers preselected material
(1978, p. 264); since our experience has been selected for
us, we have neglected awareness, information and experience
that is not part of television (1978, p. 265). Even with a
reliance on close-ups, television is capable of conveying
only a reduced version of the possibilities of real life,
still photography or film. This has an effect on the human
relationships portrayed, which tend to "dwell on the grosser
end of the human emotional spectrum" (1978, p. 269). The
medium is better suited technically to expressing hatred,
fear, jealousy, winning, wanting and violence because these
emotions suffer little information loss when projected via
the coarse imagery of television. The facial expressions
and bodily movements of antisocial behavior are highly
visible and can therefore be conveyed by television with a
minimum of information loss. For these technical reasons
there is an emphasis on programming which involves sports,

violence, police action, quiz and game shows, soap opera,
situation comedy, and news about murder, conflict, war,
power politics and charismatic leaders (1978, p. 270).

Kosinski believes that the basic difference between
television and the novel as media is that television takes
the initiative; it does the involving (Sohn, 1976, p. 139).
The viewer, by the very process of watching, is assigned
the role of spectator. Every descriptive detail is given,
nothing is implied, and no blank spaces are left for the
viewer to fill in. Television does not demand any inner
reconstruction since everything is already there, to be
followed in its own terms, at the speed it dictates. No
opportunity is provided for the viewer to pause, recall or
integrate the bombardment of images into his own experience
(Sohn, 1976, p. 144). The result could only be a society
founded on the principle of passive entertainment (Sohn,
1976, p. 142).

The viewer acquires "a superficial glimpse of a
narrow slice of unreality" Sohn, 1976, p. 148), and risks
becoming a "videot". Television influences the way a person
views the world. He is more likely to watch televised
portrayals of human experiences than to seek the experience
for himself. Boredom is alleviated by changing channels in
a simplified, unambiguous world in which everyone exists to
amuse him. At any time he can step out of one fantasy into
another one. Such effortless control over an experience

that occupies a significant amount of one's time must have
a profound effect. "After all, such effortless freedom
doesn't exist in any other domain of our life" (Sohn, 1976,
p. 151).

Mander adds that watching television produces
confusion and submission to external imagery (1978, p. 155).
Television viewing tends to take place in darkened rooms
since the television, if it is to be seen well, ought to be
the brightest image in the environment (1978, p. 164).
Background sounds are decreased to further focus attention
on the television set. Awareness of the outer environment,
of other people, even of one's own body can detract from the
focus on the set, so the viewer chooses a position that
allows for maximum comfort and minimum movement. The body
is in a quieter condition over a longer period of time than
in any other of life's nonsleeping experiences (1978, p. 165)
and the eye remains at a fixed distance from the object
observed for a longer period of time than in any other human
experience (1978, p. 166). As a result all information is
narrowed into one dimension and the viewer's condition is
akin to unconscious staring. Sound is reduced to the narrow
ranges of television audio while smell, taste and touch are
eliminated. The images on television are not real; they are
not of events taking place where the person who views them
is sitting, but they take place in the television set which
projects them into the brain of the viewer (1978, p. 167).

> Sitting in darkened rooms, with the
> natural environment obscured, other
> humans dimmed out, only two senses
> operating, both within a very narrow
> range, the eyes and other body functions
> stilled, staring at light for hours and
> hours, the experience adds up to something
> nearer to sense deprivation than anything
> that has come before it. (1978, p. 168)

As Ellul pointed out in The Political Illusion, "an event

brought to consciousness by the mass media completely forces

out all other facts from the area of perception" Ellul, 1967,

p. 115).

When a person is watching television he believes that

he is looking at pictures, but in fact he is looking at the

phosphorescent glow of three hundred thousand tiny dots.

These dots flash thirty times per second, creating what is

called the flicker effect of television, and are lighted one

at a time according to a scanning system which originates

behind the screen. The perceived picture is actually an

image that never exists in any given moment, but is

constructed over time. A television image gains its

existence only when the viewer perceives a picture in his

mind (Mander, 1978, p. 168).

Television imagery derives this liquid quality from

the simple fact that it sets its own visual pace. One image

is constantly evolving into the next. This creates a passive

mental attitude because the viewer cannot stop the flow of

images; he merely clears all channels of reception to make

way for them. A further problem for the viewer is that

television information seems to be received more in the

unconscious than the conscious regions of the mind where it
would be possible to contemplate the effects of this
experience (Mander, 1978, p. 200). Indeed, the viewer is
in a very precarious situation:

> It is total involvement on the one
> hand — complete immersion in the image
> stream — and total unconscious
> detachment on the other hand — no
> recognition, no discernment, no
> notations upon the experience one is
> having. (Mander, 1978, p. 204)

Marie Winn also identifies certain perceptual factors
unique to the television experience which may play a role in
making the experience of viewing television seem more
fascinating than other vicarious experience. These factors
concern the nature of the electronic images and the ways the
eye takes them in (1977, p. 53).

While watching television, the viewer takes in the
entire frame of an image with his sharp focal vision. This
absence of periphery serves to heighten his attention to the
television image since in most daily occurrences the periphery
distracts and diffuses attention (Winn, 1977, p. 54).

Another unique feature of the television image is
the activity of all contours on the television screen. Since
the contours of objects and people in natural environments
are stationary, the activity of television contours is an
efficient mechanism for attracting attention, even though
the viewer may be only mildly aware of the movement. The
visual activity of contours also causes fixation difficulties
for the eye. Therefore, the eye may accommodate with a

somewhat defocused fixation (Winn, 1977, p. 54).

Winn draws the same conclusions from her observations
as Mander and Kosinski draw from theirs; she is fearful that
the television experience has blurred the distinctions
between the real and the unreal for steady viewers, and by
doing so it has diminished their sensitivities to real events.
When the reality of a situation is unclear, people may react
to it less emotionally, more as spectator (Winn, 1977, p. 71)
How could the situation be otherwise? In comparison with the
reader, who is familiar with the basics of the print medium,
the television viewer has little acquaintance with "electronic"
literacy (Winn, 1977, p. 56). Television perception involves
"little thinking or interpreting or remembering ... The mind
takes in the television images as they arrive and stores them
intact" (Winn, 1977, p. 56).

These criticisms are supported by Jacques Ellul's
version of The Technological Society. Film and television
have led contemporary man into an "artificial paradise"
(Ellul, 1964, p. 577). Echoing more recent media critics,
Ellul exclaims:

> Rather than face his own phantom, he
> seeks film phantoms into which he can
> project himself and which permit him to
> live as he might have willed. For an
> hour or two he can cease to be himself,
> as his personality dissolves and fades
> into the anonymous mass of spectators.
> (Ellul, 1964, p. 577)

These spectators are Kosinski's "videots".

In The Political Illusion, Ellul states that
perceptions gleaned from mass media led to confusion between
the individual fact experienced by the viewer and the
"massive fact" transmitted to him by the medium. The viewer
may be rendered incapable of differentiating between "what
is his own life and what is not" (Ellul, 1967, p. 115).
Mander and Kosinski reach the same conclusion.

There is no doubt that television has changed the
political system, as Lower points out in a recent issue of
Television Quarterly (Lower, 1980, p. 22). Ellul states that
the passive role of the citizen is detrimental to a working
democracy (Ellul, 1967, p. 161), especially since television
accentuates the spectacle and makes it seem all the more
special because it gives the viewer an impression of life
itself. He feels that he has directly seized reality because
an image plays its role seriously and speaks directly to the
individual in his own home.

> The real political mechanism — the
> state structure - remains completely
> hidden, outside of all control; all
> the more so as the flickering little
> screen fixes the individual's attention
> or the spectacle, and prevents him from
> searching deeper, and asking himself
> questions on the true nature of power.
> (Ellul, 1967, p. 162)

Saldich explains that all power ultimately rests on
belief, and since television is used and believed more than
any other information source, its impact on democracy is
enormous (Saldich, 1979, p. 23). It is not possible for
print to duplicate the power of television because print

lacks television's immense audience, high credibility, and
nationwide scope. The "two modes of communication are
distinctively, irrevocably different" (Saldich, 1979, p. 26).

The power of television is especially significant
for linear illiterates, who depend heavily on television
because the medium requires no formal schooling to be
superficially understood. "Radio and television have
introduced electronic literacy" (Saldich, 1979, p. 29). It
is no longer necessary to be able to read and write in order
to know, since dramatic visuals and simplified content give
viewers the impression of being informed. Two serious
disadvantages of television as a sole source of information
are: "(1) superficiality of day-to-day news, which makes it
an inadequate basis on which to act, and (2) sole-users are
unaware of this superficiality" (Saldich, 1979, p. 29).
Viewers who have problems with reading and writing compound
their linear illiteracy with inadequate electronic literacy
skills because they are ignorant of methods to analyze what
they see and hear. Literate viewers "are not necessarily
better off because most schools do not teach electronic —
literacy" (Saldich, 1979, p. 29).

There are many ways in which the medium of television
does not serve the best interests of democracy, particularly
in the dissemination of superficial and sometimes irrelevant
information which is an inappropriate basis for political
action (Saldich, 1979, p. 36). While an informed citizenry

and reasoned debate are hallmarks of democracy, television provides superficial information that favors visual imagery and immediacy of reporting over discussion. Democracy requires quality information, but television utilizes subliminal persuasion which relies heavily on repetition of simple images and concise concepts (Saldich, 1979, p. 42). Also, democracy as a concept has always been associated with some notion of "freedom" and "equality of opportunity". Television programs and commercials politicize linear illiterates by emphasizing "the politics of puriation" (Saldich, 1979, p. 55). How can they help but wonder why others have what they do not?

Television has exhibited definite qualities of tyranny. The networks, like tyrants, control the source and flow of information about public affairs, especially for linear illiterates. Other traits include high credibility and unassailable power (Saldich, 1979, p. 65). Television's high credibility as a source of information can be explained by the tendency of human beings to accept uncritically what they see (Saldich, 1979, p. 66).

> Furthermore, it is assumed that free flow of information guarantees democratic choice and only governments who are afraid of their citizens would consider restricting information flow. This is one of the most pervasive myths of our time.

> Information and ideas are not free: in the age of information, they are economic commodities; to those who control them, they are sources of power, monopoly, and exploitation. (MacDonald, 1981, p. 26)

David Olson also points out that the television message producer and the consumer exist in an inequitable relation; a minority elite selects and controls information consumed by a base public (Olson, 1981, pp. 53-60).

The medium itself is tyrannized by time, technology, and its own decision makers. Reporters who are employed as journalists in the electronic media "are forced to think pictures, write pictures, and talk pictures" (Saldich, 1979, p. 66). Minimal information and abundant superficiality is the net effect because regardless of the quality of the information, stories that are interpreted as "nonvisual" are inevitably discarded. This is a serious problem for democracy because of the quantity of viewers whose participation in political life depends primarily on what they have perceived from television broadcasts. In a recent newspaper article Bill Morgan admits that depth is not a strength of television news and "he concedes that the medium suffers from inherent limitations, built-in blinkers that partially blind anyone whose picture of the world comes exclusively from the small screen" (Groen, 1982, p. 12). To quote Saldich:

> When we leave the warm glow of our
> television screens we know that we know
> what those in the know are talking about.
> The next day we talk about the same
> things. In brief, we are programmed.
> (Saldich, 1979, p. 68)

Any attempt to treat television as if it were merely an extension of print journalism ignores the unique qualities

of the medium (Saldich, 1979, p. 69). The medium may seem to have no filters between the image and the viewer, but this is the result of technology. In fact, television excels at distorting reality. It is primarily an entertainment medium where the ability to create illusion is practiced and perfected (Saldich, 1979, p. 71). This point is particularly significant to the study of television "because the medium's you-are-there quality disarms critical viewing" (Saldich, 1979, p. 73) as it creates a unique atmosphere of intimacy: "it is watched in people's homes where they are relaxed, their minds at ease" (Saldich, 1979, p. 80). Ellul preceded Saldich with these concepts: in Propaganda he explains that although television creates

> feelings of friendship, a new intimacy,
> ... such satisfactions are purely illusory
> and fallacious because there is no true
> friendship of any kind between the TV
> personality and the viewer who feels that
> personality to be his friend. (Ellul,
> 1965, p. 175)

Furthermore, "TV permits political contact to extend beyond election campaigns and informs the voters directly on a daily basis" (Ellul, 1965, p. 253). It seems that Ellul predicted what Saldich was to observe later when he wrote

> that TV is destined to become a principal
> sum, (of democracy) for it can totally
> mobilize the individual without demanding
> the slightest effort from him. TV reaches
> him at home ... in his own setting, his
> private life. It asks no decision, no a priori
> participation, no move from him ... But it
> holds him completely and leaves him no
> possibility of engaging in other activities...
> Moreover, TV has the shock effect of the
> picture... (Ellul, 1965, p. 274)

The distinctive features, aesthetics as art of television, according to Tarroni, are based on "the immediate, spontaneous and topical nature of televised communication" (Tarroni, 1976, p. 291). Unlike other art forms, the light and shade, the vibrations of sound and light pass away as they come into existence. A convenient definition of art would be "a series of actions carried out by man with specific instruments ... and with different materials ... to make his inner visions perceptible to others, i.e., to arouse particular sensations in others ..." (Tarroni, 1976, p. 292). Once an instrument, a material and a technique become available, man potentially has a new art form at his disposal.

This definition can be applied to television, since the camera and other technical equipment constitute an instrument, sound and light waves can be interpreted as a material, and the series of operations carried out by directors and producers are, without any doubt, a technique. Hence television can legitimately be considered an art form, regardless of whether every television program is criticized as a work of art, or was intended to be. As other media critics have pointed out, the essential characteristic of the medium are "immediacy, spontaneity and topicality" (Tarroni, 1976, p. 301), since the art of television, expression and representation coincide. The time for creation and the time for showing the work is the same.

One of the most important tasks for educators is to make a connection between training provided by public schools and the influence of the mass media. It is imperative that electronic literacy be taught. This involves teaching television criticism, which has been outlined, and instilling "an active critical spirit towards the new techniques among young people" (Tarroni, 1976, p. 312).

To achieve this educational goal, Tarroni outlines the fundamental stages of education in television:

1. Correct reading of the picture ... every detail may be of great importance for the reception of televised information.

2. Evaluation of the technical methods by which the pictures were obtained. This leads to an understanding of the limitations and possibilities the author has to work with in making his communication.

3. Knowledge of the organization for which the author is working -- which influences what he can tell us or would like to tell us.

4. Knowledge of the personality or personalities which express themselves in the televised production. Viewers frequently do not know the authors of different broadcasts.

5. Finally, aesthetic appraisal of the value of the broadcast. (Tarroni, 1976, p. 313)

A broad, generalized concept of electronic literacy can be obtained by grappling with one's own responses to the television criticism of those who have written about the methods employed by the medium and the perceived effects. The teacher of electronic literacy must also have a strategy, a methodology for instruction. This is the next step in the unfolding definition of "electronic literacy".

CHAPTER III

A METHODOLOGY FOR INSTRUCTION

In order to teach electronic literacy, the English
teacher must identify the basic principles of television
grammar, or "visual literacy", and television literature,
as "genre", since "the beginning of all understanding is
classification" (White, 1978, p. 22). The perspective of
this approach is to proceed from the distinctive features
of the art of mass media, which Cambus has spoken about in
this way:

> From a professional lifetime of study
> and participation in the media, we may posit
> the following three conclusions:
>
> 1. If limited to one choice from among,
>   (a) information, (b) persuasion and
>   (c) entertainment, as the general
>   end or purpose of the mass media —
>   from any perspective - it must be
>   entertainment, irrespective of what
>   example or mode is suggested. Be it
>   hard news, advertising or general
>   information, it is presented in a
>   format of entertainment.
>
> 2. If given a choice between technology and
>   content, technology - the new advances
>   in the state of the art - predominates.
>   The fascination of equipment and the
>   infatuation with speed are all too often
>   at the expense of what is looked at or
>   reported. The heightened pace and
>   indiscriminate use of technology leave
>   little time for critical review of what
>   is covered...
>
> 3. When faced with the choice between
>   personality - the sender of the message -
>   and the message - the persona invariably

> wins over content ... in the mass media
> the concept is extended and produces the
> ego-centric predicament...
>
> The crucial point is that this
> entertainment is most often at the
> expense of knowledge which media should
> be providing the public - information
> needed and vital for the simple matter
> of coping with the world.   (Cambus, 1979,
> pp. 3-4)

The study of television technology is crucial to an understanding of the "grammar" of television production. Students need to be taught that television utilizes a distinct kind of language which suggests values, reinforces attitudes, and conveys information about society, the family, and male-female relationships. This language consists not only of words but gestures, the framing of a shot, the design of opening titles, the attire of an announcer, and the furnishing of a studio. Television is a conveyor of ideology, and the ideology is more effective if the viewer assumes that the medium is transparent and that the images are unmediated (Masterman, 1980, pp. xiii-xiv).

"The primary object of study in television studies is observable and circumscribed; it is the continual flow of information which is communicated to us by television" (Masterman, 1980, p. 8). The most important characteristic of this body of information is its non-transparency. A potent mediating process exists quite independent of the event being televised. Electronic literacy is a "demythologising process which will reveal the selective practices by which images reach the television screen,

emphasize the constructed nature of the representations projected, and make explicit their suppressed ideological function" (Masterman, 1980, p. 9). Literacy itself is a cultural phenomenon and must be studied with techniques and analyses appropriate to cultural processes (Cochran, 1978, pp. 243-266).

Masterman identifies three stages of a methodology which can be used to enhance media awareness. First, students should be encouraged to describe images at a denotative level of interpretation. In order to achieve this aim, the teacher can increase awareness of the methods employed by producers of television imagery to communicate meaning. Secondly, the teacher may encourage interpretation by emphasizing connotative levels of meaning inherent in cultural images and objects. "What does each denotative quality suggest? What associations do that color, that shape, that size, that material have?" (Masterman, 1980, p. 10). Discussion will become less open-ended as patterns and associations become evident and consideration is given to interpretations at the third level, that of ideology:

> What does this program say through its
> complex of signs and symbols? What values
> are embodied here, and what does it tell
> us of the society in which it finds a
> place? Who is producing this programme,
> for what audience and with what purpose?
> (Masterman, 1980, p. 10)

A primary aim of exercises concerning perception of the televised image is to develop an awareness that television messages are overloaded with meaning. Particular attention should be given to the apparent 'innocence' of non-verbal communication. A gesture or mode of dress is the result of human choice and decision rather than a spontaneous, inevitable expression of a particular attitude. Students should be taught to regard nonverbal communication "as inextricably connected with the political, economic and social systems which originally gave them life" (Masterman, 1980, pp. 43-44). Visual literacy can emerge from a general knowledge of the channels which produce meanings (Masterman, 1980, p. 46), and an awareness of kinesics, the study of communication through gesture, posture and body movement, should be taught not in complex psychological detail, but seriously enough to elucidate that "People can be regarded as quite complex communication networks, their clothes, hair style, posture ... all revealing something about them" (Masterman, 1980, p. 55).

Although the term "visual literacy" can be applied to any medium which utilizes the sense of sight, some of the differences between television and film ought to be considered. A brief analysis using Mast's three-part division of material, process, and form is very useful for explaining some of the elements of visual literacy, the "grammar" of electronic literacy (Mast, 1977, p. 100).

The material of cinema is film, in comparison with
a television screen bombarded by electrons. Since television
does not project light through anything, a major difference
in terms of "material" would be the clarity of the resulting
visual images. Light passing through celluloid has a greater
potential for sharpness and detail, as well as "much softer
and mellower visual effects than electrons shot against a
glass screen" (Mast, 1977, p. 100).

Another difference between the material bases of
television and cinema is that the material of television
reception is not the material of television recording,
unlike celluloid which photographs and is projected (Mast,
1977, p. 101). Television recording material can be one of
three kinds. A program can be televised "live", the action
transferred instantly from the camera into the electronic
process for viewing; a program can be videotaped and the
delayed event sent into the electronic process later; or a
program can be recorded on film, which also involves being
projected into the electronic process later. Although
television transmits these materials with instantaneity,
"its recording materials produce three different tenses:
the now, the a little while ago that looks like now, and the
some time ago" (Mast, 1977, p. 101). It is impossible to
distinguish visually between live and tape.

Television does not produce the same illusion of
movement as film does. Unlike film, television has no

frames. In its transmission process television receives
thirty pictures per second on its sensitized screen (Mast,
1977, p. 101).

In terms of "process", Mast points out, as Foster
will explain later, that "the dominant shots are facial
close-ups and human-centered medium shots; the primary
communicative devices are faces, dialogue, voices, and
music" (Mast, 1977, p. 103). Also all of television's
"forms" are built around interruptions. An hour of
television contains twelve minutes of commercials, so every
hour-long program is inevitably divided into six parts.
Each segment usually closes with a mini-climax before the
commercial. It is certainly questionable whether any
dramatic work can accommodate so many climaxes (Mast, 1977,
p. 104). However, when television presents one of its
forms that take advantage of its presentness and its
simultaneity of transmission and reception, it presents a
unique experience which overcomes the inherent weaknesses of
the medium (Mast, 1977, p. 105). "When television attempts
to compel us with a hypnotic illusion of human experience,
... it betrays the limitations of its material, process, and
forms" (Mast, 1977, p. 106).

Having outlined the basic differences between film
and television, it is appropriate to examine the grammar of
electronic literacy as it pertains to television and cinema.

Foster analyzes the structural elements unique to television and film and states that doing so can enable the viewer to understand the powerful, manipulative side of the media. Editing, movement, composition, color, sighting and sound comprise the language of this new literacy. These elements are used by television and filmmakers to produce an emotional response that is all the stronger when there is a lack of awareness on the part of those being manipulated (Foster, 1979, pp. 4-6).

The term "composition" refers to the objects, people and places that are seen within the camera shot. This term itself indicates a manipulative quality since it involves invention, arrangement and order. Images selected are rarely "neutral", if there exists such a thing as a neutral image. Like words in a sentence, most images evoke connotations in relation to other images.

A director can also manipulate audience reaction by the choice of camera distances (Foster, 1979, p. 6). The essence of television is the close-up (Foster, 1979, p. 20), which creates intensity, while the long shot, by its distance, implies detachment (Foster, 1979, p. 6). The long shot gives the viewer a sense of geography and a sense of physical relationship of the characters portrayed (Foster, 1979, p. 20). Long-shots are usually employed to identify a scene change, and close-ups frequently take place shortly after the entrance of a new character on the re-entrance

of a character who has not been seen for some time (Foster, 1979, pp. 20-21).

Camera angles and framing are equally important (Foster, 1979, p. 6). Three components of the camera angle include its distance, level and perspective (Mast, 1977, p. 168). The implication of rather vague terms such as close-up and far shot is not so much to define distance, but to define the photographic subject of a particular shot. When the distance of a shot defines its subject, the director determines the most efficient level for portraying that subject and conveying its "information". The level of a shot can range from directly overhead, 180 degrees high, to directly underneath, 180 degrees low, and such extremes tend "to convert the photographic subject into an almost abstract visual pattern, emphasizing formations of people as geometric shapes, not as thinking, feeling beings" (Mast, 1977, p. 168). Most shots that project human features, faces and feelings as the main photographic subjects therefore use narrower range of angles, usually between 45 degrees downward and 45 degrees upward.

The power of a camera angle to produce a manipulated response cannot be underestimated. For example, a high angle shot that slants downward at its photographic subject tends to reduce the importance, power and dominance of that subject. A human figure shot from above appears to have a relatively large head and a smaller body tapering away at the base.

The impression is subjective; the photographic subject appears
to be short, small or weak. He may feel humbled by a figure
observing him from the point of view of the camera, which
has a superior physical position and mental attitude (Mast,
1977, p. 170).

Conversely, a low angle shot that slants upward at
its photographic subject tends to increase the importance,
power and dominance of that subject. A human figure shot
from below appears to have a broad, strong base rising to the
top, "implying that the mental structure of a human being ...
is also a properly supported architectural edifice..."
(Foster, 1977, p. 170).

An effective narrator of film stories, the camera
can parallel the human condition. In order to view more than
one side of an object within a single shot, it must travel
around that object. To reveal more than one point of view
toward an event or being, the camera must cut to it later.
While the camera is potentially omniscient during the course
of a film because of structural and imagistic succession,
its vision is limited during the course of any particular
shot (Mast, 1977, p. 173). These devices should serve to
reiterate a fact of cinematic art, indeed of all art, that
no audience or critic can afford to take for granted:

> Every shot necessarily reveals some
> things and suppresses some other things.
> In order to discover what an angle truly
> reveals requires integrating the single
> shot into the film's imagistic and
> structural successions. (Mast, 1977, p. 175)

Three conventions of television production are the cut, the dissolve or mix; and the fade in and fade out. The cut is an instantaneous switch from one camera to another (Davis, 1978, p. 74) and may be used as a means of changing scenes (Davis, 1978, p. 12). It is used when the action is continuous in time (Davis, 1978, p. 74). The dissolve, or mix, is a gradual merging of one picture into another until the previous picture disappears (Davis, 1978, pp. 74-75). It may be used to indicate a lapse of time or as a means of changing scenes and is not usually utilized when the action is continuous (Davis, 1978, p. 12). The fade in and fade out imply a longer lapse of time than indicated by a dissolve or mix, and may be interpreted as a parallel to the ending of a chapter (Davis, 1978, p. 12).

Foster states that motion is the very essence of film and that it has a hypnotic attraction. Motion has different forms, such as the movement of people or objects within a shot, camera movement, movement created by the mechanism of the camera, or movement created by the process of editing (Foster, 1979, p. 8).

Each of these forms of movement has manipulative effects. Movement within a shot may be less cinematic than other forms of motion since the camera simply records the motion, but the advantage is that the motion appears to be very natural and the scene's mood can be changed without any external help such as camera movement. When camera

movement is used properly it "can contribute an external
cadence to a shot or scene that can convey many moods or
feelings and create a sense of participation in the audience"
(Foster, 1979, p. 9). This is called "subjective camera
technique" and the camera becomes a part of the action as
seen by a character.

The recording speeds of the camera can also create
motion. Fast motion is primarily used for a comedic effect
and slow motion has become a love scene cliche. More recent
uses of slow motion serve to disprove the notion of
invisible bonds between technique and mood, such as the use
of slow motion as a means of making dying and suffering even
more frightening and grotesque than one would imagine. While
a sudden movement of the camera is frequently used for shock
value, slow motion photography has been employed at moments
of extreme violence. In this situation

> the film literally retards its magic-
> lantern movement and calls attention to
> itself as a series of photographs. The
> freeze-frame is an even more violent
> assertion of the photographic nature of
> the motion-picture sequence. (McConnell,
> 1975, p. 39)

Editing may be the most improvisatory and experimental
stage in the process of assembling a movie (Mast, 1977, p. 124),
but it is also the filmmaker's most manipulative device
(Foster, 1979, p. 10). A strip of celluloid contains a
photographic image on every single frame and the illusion of
movement is created by the passing of photographic images

past a light at a velocity of twenty-four frames per second.
Editing may be defined as "the process of cutting the strip
of film and splicing it together with other strips of film
to achieve a desired effect" (Foster, 1979, p. 10).

An astute film editor can exert an enormous power
over the audience. Sequences can be edited in a pattern to
reveal an intricate thematic structure, which then conveys
a definite impression. A carefully placed series of
revealing incidents can be used to develop theme.
Consideration should also be given to "visual themes"
developed through sequences that highlight physical
appearances. The internal editing of filmed material may
be subtle and difficult to detect unless a viewer knows what
to look for and deliberately views in a critical fashion.
There may be no way to detect how much time actually existed
between consecutive cuts or which statements or shots had
been deleted, or 'edited'.

Although certain visual cliches have become obvious
and trite, such examples do manipulate an audience's
emotions (Foster, 1979, p. 11). Two types of cinema
music are background music which an audience may not specif-
ically notice and more distinctive music designed to attract
attention (Mast, 1977, p. 211). Producers may use "the
omnious rhythmic thrumming of basses to build suspense" or
"the bouncy, playful, bright movement of brass for the
comical and happy scenes. There is the washing sweep of the

full orchestra for violent storms and fights; there is the breathless gallop of the full orchestra for the climactic chase... (Mast, 1977, p. 212). These musical cliches are effective because of a film's system of succession and image which provide visual interest and emotional intensity (Mast, 1977, p. 213). Many films make use of more unusual, innovative sound tracks, but the only point to be made here is that even the most stereotyped methods of utilizing sound tend to be effective in manipulating the desired response in an audience.

On television production it is also suggested that sound and image should not conflict. While the 'picture' makes an immediate impression on the viewer, a spoken comment makes an impact only when it has been completed and understood in some way. An image may convey more meaning, or more of the intended meaning, if the viewer has been prepared.

> Thus it is sensible to make the sound
> lead up to a new image and then leave
> the picture to make its impact undisturbed.
> After that, cue the speaker to make his
> comment and to prepare us for the next
> visually important moment. (Davis, 1978,
> p. 58)

These elements which have been discussed, movement within a shot, camera movement, editing and sound create film rhythm, a feature which contributes to the manipulative quality of the experience. Any particular film may contain different rhythms or the film rhythm may create an increasing

sense of power. An understanding of these structural devices is a requirement of basic visual literacy. Films and television are not merely instruments of entertainment, artistic expression and information, they are powerful media possessing the potential for influencing the thoughts and actions of viewers. Therefore, students should be taught to analyze these structural devices and production techniques and their ability to affect the response of an audience.

Television and film convey a striking sense of reality which is misleading. The camera itself emphasizes nothing: it merely records. The operation interferes and places the camera so that it records a picture which gives the desired emphasis. The eye of the camera views only part of a scene at a time and lacks the depth of peripheral vision. It enlarges objects at close range and drastically reduces objects at a distance, but has an advantage in being faster and able to define things with greater accuracy.

There are many ways that filmmaking can alter reality. Film time can be shortened or extended and it rarely corresponds to actual time. This can be accomplished by editing. For example, a simple fade-out may represent an hour, a week, a year or a decade. Time may also be changed through using slow and fast motion; slow motion may intensify a moment or heighten impact and fast motion may yield the same results in other situations. Spatial reality may also

be manipulated by filming objects in varying degrees of
size and using close-ups or long shots (Foster, 1979,
pp. 16-17). Color also alters reality; dull colors would
obviously create a different mood than bright colors (Mast,
1977, p. 96) and contribute to the overall effect and theme
of a film or television program. Similarly, lighting that
is bright and glassy gives a feeling of glamour and excite-
ment, while dull lighting can be used to elicit a sense of
pain (Foster, 1981, p. 71).

"A visually literate public understands film's
relationship with reality and perceives film as a created
and controlled medium like print or music" (Foster, 1979,
p. 18). Just as schools have always accepted the respons-
ibility for teaching people to read and write, they must now
accept the responsibility for teaching people to be literate
and perceptive viewers. The ability to communicate is the
core of all literacy, so English teachers should be
responsible for instruction in a new type of literacy which
contains a visual, electronic element.

English teachers possess much of the knowledge
necessary for teaching electronic literacy. "The same
elements that make up a good literary discussion will make
for a good discussion of a TV program" (Foster, 1981, p. 70).
Foster includes an analysis of theme, character, plot and
style as some of these elements.

Another framework which Charles and Mariann Winick
have found useful concerns the dimensions of form, movement,
and content. Form involves the internal structure, flow
and cohesiveness of a program, movement is visual and
auditory, and content concerns theme, plot, character and
setting (1966, p. 155).

These factors must all be taken into consideration
in order to teach electronic literacy. Since the mechanics
of this recent extension of modern literacy have been
outlined in the "grammar" of television literacy, the
problem remains to identify some of the major "genre" of
television "literature". Since advertising is the true "art"
of television genre in its expert utilization of technique
and message, or "theme", it will be considered first.

"Modern advertising must be seen as a direct response
to the needs of mass industrial capitalism" (Ewen, 1976, p. 31).
The public had to be encouraged to consume, and in order to
create consumers the advertising industry had developed
universal notions of the most efficient stimuli for eliciting
a human response (p. 36). Advertising language tends to
concentrate on the viewer as a consumer, and in doing so
makes certain assumptions about the state of his psycho-
logical make-up:

The concept of man as robot was both an
expression of and a powerful motive
force in industrialized mass society. It
was the basis for behavioral engineering
in commercial, economic, political, and
other advertising and propaganda; the
expanding economy of the "affluent society"
could not subsist without such manipulation.
(Bertalanffy, 1966, p. 706)

A product's utilitarian value or mechanical quality
are insufficient inducements for the selling of items at
the rate and volume required by mass production (Ewen, 1976,
p. 34). Early in the history of national advertising it was
discovered that people will begin to consume and continue to
do so if they are endowed with a 'critical self-consciousness
in tune with the "solutions" of the marketplace' (pp. 38-39).
Consumption thereby took on a cultural dimension which drew
on nationalistic, democratic ideology. The business community
hoped to transpose the viewer into an individual whose needs
and frustrations relate to "the consumption of goods rather
than the quality and content of his life (work)" (p. 42).
This individual perceives himself as an object of continual
social scrutiny (p. 34) after being exposed to advertisements
which criticize human bodily functions and self-esteem, and
offer 'weapons by which even people with bad breath, enlarged
nose pores, corned feet and other such maladies could eclipse
themselves and "succeed"' (pp. 47-48). A selective version
of 'truth' was formed for the purpose of inducing a mass
social dependency on advertised products (p. 77).

Manipulation of the masses through the use of "robot psychology" (Bertalanffy, 1976, p. 706) required that people "assume the character of machinery – predictable and without any aspirations toward self-determination" (Ewen, 1976, p. 84). Consumption involved a decision about what to buy only in terms of a particular advertisement. In consideration of a rapidly expanding commercial culture, "the foremost political imperative was what to dream" (Ewen, 1976, p. 109). The desired effect may be described in this way:

> As we stroll through the world of
> advertising, the half-intelligibility
> of what we see and read and hear
> encourages us to hope that our
> extravagant expectations may be
> coming true. (Boorstin, 1961, p. 223)

Consumerism as a "world view" (Ewen, 1976, p. 108) stimulated consumption and also provided a conception of "the good life". For example, the symbolic role of youth has always been an important concept in advertising. One prime reason for this is the fact that childhood is a period of increasing consumption (p. 139), therefore advertising idealized youth (p. 143). In doing so innocence and malleability were also celebrated. Parents were encouraged to emulate certain qualities of their children,

> the elevation of youth, and the reality
> of youthful endurance, made youngness a
> salable commodity. People's anxiety over
> the turn in production were now focused
> toward a safe solution. Youth could be
> bought, or so the ads claimed. Once again,
> the loci of social unrest were being
> confronted in the marketplace. (p. 149)

In an industrialized society, work itself is characterized not by talent or prowess but by a person's ability to maintain a routine. A person can hardly feel indispensable performing a task which many others are capable of doing equally well. Thus, in the earliest advertisements directed at men, personal appearance or an image of dedication were portrayed as characteristics capable of distinguishing one person from another.

> Productive competition for jobs was
> integrated within the ideology of a
> consumer market which was offering
> men a means to success. By smoking
> a pipe, or by cooking a certain way,
> people could accumulate the social
> appearance necessary in a world which
> had placed a decreasing value on
> creative skills. (Ewen, 1976, p. 155)

Although the culture envisioned industry as a world of men, "the distribution of mass produced goods raised women to new significance in the mind of business. Their day-to-day activities were seen as integral to the sustenance of the productive system" (Ewen, 1976, pp. 167-168). Women were invested with a great deal of control and knowledge "circumscribed, however, by the ideology of the consumer market" (p. 169). The involvement of women in industry went beyond domestic limits: she became a kind of director of consumer activities. Her need to be educated in the field of mass consumption was reiterated constantly by the advertising industry; "Women were warned of dangers in their homes, to their children, and told of commodity solutions" (p. 169).

Women in early advertisements observed themselves frequently and were very self-critical. They were reminded that their appearance rather than their ability to organize would ensure fidelity and home security (Ewen, 1976, p. 177). A woman's social role "became increasingly defined in terms of consumption" (p. 179). Advertising adapted the notion of the social self from the field of social psychology whereby "people defined themselves in terms set by the approval or disapproval of others" (p. 179). Women were educated to observe themselves as creatures to be aided by the modern market to compete with other women (p. 180).

The early years of national advertising set the tone and conceptual framework for all that was to follow in the "art" of advertising. No individual can claim to be literate in today's society and be ignorant of the philosophy of advertising, which provides answers to questions about how to live. Advertising has always utilized and denied "the collective image of the family" (Ewen, 1976, p. 184) in its attempts to define meaningful existence.

> For each aspect of the family collective
> - the source of decision making, the
> locus of child rearing, the things which
> elicited affectionate response - all of
> those now pointed outward toward the
> world of commodities for their direction.
> (Ewen, 1976, p. 184)

The social mores, modes of communication, and culture generated by mass production were presented by advertisements "as beneficial correlaries to the less appealing aspects of

modernity: the monotony of work, the decay of traditional social arenas, the political repression..." (Ewen, 1976, p. 198). To this day the philosophy of advertising has maintained the same logic, which is "the sense that a product contains the negation of its own corporate origins" (p. 199). Advertised products are

> praised for their organic naturalness
> and their timeless quality. Modes of
> anticorporate resistence and sentiment
> reappear in the ads themselves,
> miraculously encased within the universal
> terms of the market. (p. 219)

The growth of television as a mass medium was financed by advertising, since "Television was the greatest delivery system for advertising that had ever been invented" (Mander, 1978, p. 134). Consumption was inherent to the life style of many television series of the 1950's, where "game shows and situation comedies provided a showcase for the new consumer-oriented America" (Ewen, 1976, p. 209). Programming and advertising both reinforced "corporately produced goods and services ... as the cohesive fiber of daily life and as objects of fantasy (Ewen, 1976, p. 210). The notions of "freedom" and "choice" were "being unified and firmly implanted in the conception of loyal commitment to the political, religious and social arenas encrusted by brand names and consumer credit" (Ewen, 1976, p. 211). Advertising presented a spectacle in which people were educated in the philosophy of consumerism where any attempt to look or act in

a manner which conflicts with these projections "became
the vague archetypes of subversion and godlessness" (Ewen,
1976, p. 213). Not only were there vivid portrayals of
how to participate "in the society of abundance, there were
clear messages as to what constituted violations of these
dicta" (p. 213). The electronic "language" of televised
advertising reinterprets and colonizes "the social realm of
resistance ... for corporate benefit" (p. 218), and until
the viewer understands how to "read" this language and
"confront the infiltration of the commodity system into the
interstices of our lives, social change itself will be but
a product of corporate propaganda" (p. 219).

The potential for manipulation of the viewer has
been compounded during the past decade by the use of
subliminal techniques in advertising. Sensory inputs that
bypass or are repressed from conscious awareness communicate
with the unconscious (Key, 1972, p. 18). "A conscious
association can ... trigger a subliminal precept buried
deeply in the unconscious weeks, months, or possibly years
after the subliminal precept occurred" (p. 21).

The mass media have effectively gained the confidence
and trust of the public, much to the desire of advertisers.
Once the viewer trusts, believes and identifies with the
content of the television medium, then subliminal suggestions
tend to be more readily accepted (Key, 1972, p. 26).

> Merchandisers, by embedding subliminal
> trigger devices in media, are able to
> evoke a strong emotional relationship
> between ... a product perceived in an
> advertisement ... and the strongest of
> all emotional stimuli — love (sex) and
> death. (Key, 1972, p. 29)

An example from the "genre" of advertising would be the use
of a theme of rejection to sell cigarettes, food and mouth-
wash as an oral gratification response (Key, 1972, pp. 34-35).

Advertisers make use of "consciously unperceived words
and picture symbols purposefully designed into media with the
motive of soliciting, manipulating, modifying, or managing
human behavior" (Key, 1976, p. 7). Included as manifestations
of this technique would be the sexualization of people,
drinks, food, money and mass produced commodities (p. 15).
"Advertising creates a massive subliminal environment where
men and women appear most frequently in fantasy relationships
designed to enhance or optimize the mass audience's consuming
orientation (pp. 20-21). Production techniques which use
mouths, noses and eyes as focal points (p. 88) and "quick-cut
transitions" (p. 108) which show as many as four scenes in a
single frame before focusing on an individual image overload
the senses in order to be projected more quickly into the
unconscious minds of viewers. The unconscious "easily
processes very large quantities of data, storing it for later
feedback into consciousness" (p. 108).

Television advertisements can be classified into three types of emotional experience to which the unconscious seems to be especially sensitive:

1. Experiences that conflict with cultural taboos of long standing. A large portion of any society's taboos directly or indirectly involve sex and death - the beginning and the end of life.

2. Experiences relative to personal or group nervosis or psychosis. These would include a wide range of psycho-pathology - from phobic responses to serious delusions of persecution or even paranoia.

3. Experiences acquired from recent painful or anxiety-producing situations. These might include responses to a wide range of recent difficulties in such areas as marriage, health, employment, etc. (Key, 1972, p. 35)

Since "contemporary culture is becoming a visual culture rather than a print culture" (Bell, 1976, p. 107), it could be argued that in a modern world dominated by mass media "anyone who cannot read and understand the subliminal languages of symbolic illusion is functionally illiterate" (Key, 1972, p. 18). Education which takes this into account is very important: "It appears that once the subliminal information becomes apparent to the conscious mind, the persuasive or manipulative potential in the data are destroyed" (Key, 1972, p. 27).

As we attempt to interpret the advertising language of the electronic media it must be understood that "the meanings of our popular culture are to be found in the

structural configurations and not in the isolated images and symbols" (Blechman, 1980, p. 38). Viewers have to be taught not to perceive a televised image as the object imagined, but as a referent and to

> take into account the fact that in the
> very act of reproducing the objective
> world on film or videotape, a
> transformation occurs. The images
> become symbols that can be charged with
> meanings above and beyond the concrete
> reality of the objects they mimic.
> (Blechman, 1980, p. 45)

A consequence of this process of symbolization "is that the meanings given to each object are effected by the meaning given to all the other objects in the system" (Blechman, 1980, p. 45).

There is an underlying structure in television advertising which operates within the context of all television content and determines the meanings and associations of advertisements. By becoming aware of the underlying structure of the most popular mass medium it is possible to gain some measure of the impact of television on contemporary culture (Blechman, 1980, p. 51). The following diagram portrays the structure of commercial advertisements in a simplified manner (Blechman, 1980, p. 50):

An adult	engaged in a "cultural" activity.
is afflicted in a manner that disrupts that activity	This is caused by (dirt, a child, arthritis).
that "negates" the original situation.	and use of the proper product rectifies the disruption.

As this diagram would indicate, the mass media depicts what is beyond the range of our senses but acceptable as an extension of them. "The form in which we perceive reality has been transformed by the evolution of communications technology" (Bogart, 1980, p. 209). It is becoming increasingly difficult to define the barrier between the real and the illusory. This is an important point relating to another 'genre' of television production - the newscast.

The size of a broadcast news audience is rarely related to the significance of a particular day's events. Viewers tend to watch news broadcasts in their entirety for the same reasons they watch other programs from beginning to end: time passes by and another program will follow. A substantial part of the audience is derived from viewers already tuned to the station, and a large part of this audience will be passed on to the program that follows. These programs are vital to the competitive struggle to capture a larger share of the audience (Bogart, 1980, p. 212).

"Format and substance cannot be dissociated" (Bogart, 1980, p. 213). Even if the same criteria of responsible news reporting is used in broadcast news and print, the viewer's impression of world events is shaped by show business principles which determine the length of reports, the use of film segments, and the selection of news items to meet dramatic criteria or to utilize existing film footage.

"Because shows are paced, balanced, orchestrated, and packaged according to the rules of show business, they fit smoothly into TV's fantasy world" (p. 213). Newscasts "have become increasingly dominated by young announcers with colorful, identical blazers going through their paces on expensive stage sets and sharing private jokes between news items" (p. 214). Commercial interruptions come to represent reality in that the viewer is reminded that he is "not adrift in that turbulent sea of disasters, rivalries, and hassles that constitutes the news" (p. 214). Indeed, a major structure of the television experience itself is "the juxtaposition between reality and unreality" (McCray, 1976, p. 158).

Each news broadcast opens with a ritual that establishes the theme of "excitement governed by order" (Menaker, 1976, p. 115). As the announcer projects intensity, the listing of events conveys control and structure. News items are covered in a pattern of decreasing importance;

> This thirty-minute diminuendo, especially
> when it ends on a cheerful note, promotes
> an illusion of hard work accomplished.
> It implies that simply watching a news
> program is a meaningful task and that if
> we see the whole thing through, we deserve
> a reward, a little fun. (pp. 115-116).

The methods used to capture the interest of the viewer are at once diverting and entertaining. Attempts to control/crisis by way of structural technique are evident in the settings, sounds, graphics, copy and film used (Menaker, 1976, p. 117). Teletype clatter may aid the

projection of a sense of urgency, while the supplementation

of the announcer's words with rear-scene graphics such as

maps, drawings, photographs, and organization logos

> are distractingly noninformational in
> themselves, but their most striking
> general aesthetic quality is the
> magical ease with which they are
> summoned forth... The newsmen never
> even take notice of these light shows;
> they conjure them up and coolly ignore
> them. The anchormen skip by map,
> satellite, telephone and film all over
> the world, dipping into one crisis after
> another, but always keeping their
> emotional distance, like master magicians
> who perform sensational feats in a
> detached, almost routine manner. (p. 118)

It is generally understood that the selection of

content for newscasts reflects not merely what is new and

pertinent, "but what arouses the attention of the audience"

(Bogart, 1980, p. 217). Preference is given to stories

which occur within a daily period of time and only the

climactic points of longer events are considered (Masterman,

1980, p. 94). Events tend to be focused upon rather than

processes, and "when two stories or pieces of film are

juxtaposed, new and independent meanings can often be

unexpectedly generated" (Masterman, 1980, p. 90). The

meaning of a news item or an image can be radically altered

by the content within which it is presented, technical

considerations such as framing, camera angles and editing,

and the presentation technique employed, such as a filmed

interview or an 'expert' correspondent.

Besides the "frequency" factor previously mentioned, "ethnocentricity" and "inheritance" are also important.

> Ethnocentric items - those having a
> 'cultural proximity' to the viewer -
> are favored in news broadcasts...
> The further away an event is from the
> experience of the viewer the more
> cataclysmic it must be to become news.
> (Masterman, 1980, pp. 94-95)

The inheritance factor refers to stories selected not for any intrinsic importance, but simply "because of their connection with a news story of the previous day. This can give rise to 'stories' in which literally nothing has happened" (Masterman, 1980, p. 95).

Television news is elite-centered and person-centered. Within any broadcast, the hierarchy of presentation "will tend to be determined by the relative social or political status of the actors in each item" (Masterman, 1980, p. 96). Those in powerful positions within legitimated political parties, for example, will rank very highly in this hierarchy. The emphasis upon film material makes the medium particularly "person-and-event-oriented" (p. 97). Events are portrayed as being the result of an individual's actions rather than deeper or more abstract social forces. Visual evidence focuses on an individual performing an action rather than dealing with the wider political implications of events. In this way "television presents us with an a-historical view of the world" (p. 97).

There are many other characteristics of television news which indicate the amount of manipulation which takes

place in any newscast. A very trite example is the number of 'negative' news items presented, but it is difficult to answer why this is the case (Masterman, 1980, p. 98). Perhaps the most accurate method of understanding the reason for such items is to select an example and determine how it satisfies the criteria for selection already outlined. This may explain why there could be a bias toward negative news values. Besides satisfying selection criteria, another reason for so much negativity is, quite simply, that news editors have speculated "that the audience might find the news more interesting if adversity were emphasized" (Saldich, 1979, p. 72).

The presentation of events necessarily involves the manipulation of material (Masterman, 1980, p. 98). A particular news item may be given an exaggerated sense of importance by being the lead or principal story and, conversely, the significance may be "diminished by being placed towards the end of the programme" (p. 100). This point is crucial to stories which deal with controversial issues whereby television can create, deny or inflate the importance of the news item. The myth of 'objectivity' must be tempered with knowledge of the nature of the medium of television and the genre of newscasts:

> The news event may be a real fact, existing
> objectively, or it may be only an item of
> information, the dissemination of a supposed
> fact. What makes it news is its dissemination,
> not its objective reality. (Ellul, 1965,
> pp. 47-48)

The newsreader or reporter may convey an attitude to a story or individual through the use of language and tone of voice (Masterman, 1980, p. 100). This is particularly significant in an interview situation:

> The three basic styles of neutral, gladiatorial and devil's advocate are applied to structure the content of an interview situation from an anterior conception of that situation and to make the situation conform to an anterior notion of what balance will look like. Thus, the gladiatorial style is characteristically used with deviants, 'extremists', students, workers engaged in industrial action, ...the deferential/neutral with consensus politicians; and the devil's advocate when it's necessary to cast doubt on the credentials and propositions of the interviewer in the interests of balance...
> (Masterman, 1980, p. 101)

In any situation where those who control the medium perceive a bias, they attempt to balance and utilize techniques involving "consensus, toleration and conflict" (Masterman, 1980, p. 101). The decision to use these techniques is itself manipulative and can potentially be used to distort an issue entirely. The impact of mass media bias on the viewer can thus serve the purposes of propaganda. The "mass" is in fact nothing more than assembled individuals, each who sits before a television set experiencing the illusion that he is being addressed personally (Ellul, 1965, p. 8); the viewer feels

> isolation in the mass, which is a natural product of present-day society and which is both used and deepened by the mass media. The most favorable moment to seize

a man and influence him is when he is
alone in the mass: it is at this point
propaganda can be most effective. (p. 9)

Consensual bias and institutional bias are also
evident in newscasts. A general media principle is that
the meaning and importance of an event is "preconstructed
for the audience by the interpretative framework within
which it is placed" (Masterman, 1980, p. 105). The
institutional bias is that sources "tend to be
permanent and reliable institutions" (p. 106) such as
governments, trade unions, courts of law, and sports and
entertainment organizations who employ public relations
people and give press releases.

Two general characteristics of television news are
"the news as show" and "the news as reassurance". The
entertainment principles of the newscast genre have already
been explained

television news is less concerned to
provide information as authentically
as possible than provide it as
attractively as possible without
jettisoning its reputation for
reliability, responsibility and
probability. (Masterman, 1980, p. 107)

Dull, factual, complex, undramatic information that is
pertinent must be packaged more attractively or ignored.
The result in terms of content is an emphasis on dramatic
conflicts and spectacular events, and the result in terms
of style makes the newscasts appear to be similar to other
programs motivated by the attraction of viewers (The British
Broadcasting Corporation, 1981).

The concept of "the news as reassurance" is summarized accurately in the following passage:

> The raw content of news programmes
> depicts a world of constant flux,
> crises, unexplained events, contra-
> dictions, conflicts and violence. The
> encapsulation of these diverse and
> disturbing events within the narrative
> structure of the news (with happy
> ending), the familiar personality of
> the newsreader, the rhetoric of
> reliability and expertise which as a
> continuing thread through each news
> story, 'the production of news at a
> regular time, of constant format,
> length, and dramatic structure', and
> ...the hygienic, rational, well-ordered
> realness of the television studio all
> contribute to what is perhaps the most
> pervasive of all of the messages
> conveyed by the news - that the world
> is ultimately a reassuring one of order,
> continuity and stability. (Masterman, 1980,
> p. 107).

The 'a-historical view of the world' mentioned earlier is an important characteristic of television news and represents a plateau in the unfolding history of communication: "The old technology took the person to the experience; the new technology brought the experience to the person" (Boorstin, 1975, p. 60). Constantaneous communication and the "intrusion of media into private and public vehicles ... reduce whatever chance there once might have been for the therapy of delay" (p. 77). While the mass media and electronic communications overcome obstacles that used to impede change, they also

> eliminate the cushion of time between
> when an event happens and when it is
> known worldwide. People have become

> ringside observers to dramatic news
> events, be they wars, moonlandings,
> hijackings, or riots; the public
> follow them hour-by-hour while they
> are taking place and while the outcome
> is still unknown. (de Sola Pool, 1979, p. 123)

The reaction time of the viewer has been drastically reduced
and

> there is the possibility that such a
> multiplicity of shocks and on-screen
> visualizations results in a
> distancing of oneself from the events
> and an anesthetizing of feeling ...
> Scenes of destruction on TV as a
> daily diet can dull the capacity for
> emotional response. (Bell, 1976,
> p. 107)

There is a need for education in electronic literacy
whereby individuals are taught the distinctive features of
modern communication systems. Events are reported to the
world with a velocity that has never existed in the history
of communication, and this lends a uniqueness to the
experience: "The more instantaneous the communication, the
wider the diffusion of news, the greater the need for
erasure" (Boorstin, 1975, p. 79). A modern concept of
literacy must help the "reader" distinguish among the
messages produced by the mass media and understand how
'meaning' is generated from the information we receive.

> In our age - an Age of the Enlarged
> Contemporary - those to whom we turn
> for meaning are the Newsmen. They
> tell us what to make of the current
> flood of information and sensations.
> The increase of unmediated reports
> increases our need for interpretation.
> (Boorstin, 1975, p. 79).

Without the means for gaining an informed interpretation of televised information, the viewer will participate in the communication experience in a non-reflective fashion. The danger is greater than a loss of any sense of history:

> The man who lives in the news ...
> is a man without memory... The news
> that excited his passion and agitated
> the deepest corners of his soul simply
> disappears. He is ready for some
> other agitation, and what excited him
> yesterday does not stay with him. This
> means that the man living in the news
> no longer has freedom, no longer has the
> capacity of foresight, no longer has any
> reference to truth. (Ellul, 1967, p. 61)

"Communicating is inherently a selective process" (Chesebro and Hamsher, 1976, p. 6). The source and the receiver inevitably make choices regarding what is said and heard, and these choices are "controlled by the needs and motives of those communicating" (p. 6). Popular television series are communicative acts in which producers, directors and writers convey identifiable messages "enacted through a plot played out by characters who ultimately cast certain behaviors as better than others" (p. 6). As a consequence, such plots and characters intentionally or accidentally convey certain values (p. 7): "The intentions of the producers, perspective of the viewers, size of the audience, and reinforcement process obligate us to view popular television series as persuasive acts... (p. 8).

In order for a person to view television critically, he must have some insight into what values are being conveyed by popular television series and how these values gain credibility. A discerning viewer would also question the desirability of these values (Chesebro and Hamsher, 1976, p. 9). Chesebro and Hamsher suggest

> a critical assessment of particular
> television series ... the form and
> content of television series are
> treated in this analysis as the
> factors which transform and convey
> the values into more subtle and
> thereby acceptable messages for the
> viewers. (p. 9)

Chesebro and Hamsher draw on the criticism of Northrop Frye and Kenneth Burke to form a "critical matrix" for an analysis of popular television series. Frye points out two variables which distinguish "the major persuasive forms: (1) the central agent's or hero's apparent relationship to the audience, and (2) the hero's ability to control circumstances" (p. 9). Five particular persuasive forms emerge, including irony, mime, leader-centered, romance and myth. In using Burke's dramatistic process to identify central principles of television series, four questions may function as a critical framework:

> (1) Pollution - what norms are violated
> and cast as disruptive to the social
> system involved? (2) Guilt - who or
> what is generally held responsible for
> the pollution? (3). Purification - what
> kinds of acts are generally initiated
> to eliminate the pollution and guilt?
> (4) Redemption - what social system or
> order is created as a result of passing
> through the pollution, guilt, and
> purification stages? (Chesebro and
> Hamsher, 1976, p. 9)

A concern for the form and content of popular television series produces a five by four critical matrix. The following diagram depicts this matrix which provides

> the foundation for a systematic and
> comprehensive identification of
> persuasive appeals in popular
> television series, [and] also offers
> a method for contrasting types of
> television series as well as for
> grouping those series which employ
> essentially the same persuasive
> appeals. (Chesebro and Hamsher,
> 1976, p. 10)

The Critical Matrix

Substantive Characteristics	Formal Characteristics				
	Irony	Mime	Leader	Romance	Myth
Pollution					
Guilt					
Purification					
Redemption					

The "formal characteristics" of popular television series are summarized by Chesebro and Hamsher as follows:

1. Irony.   The hero is inferior in intelligence
              and power to others and unable to
              control environmental factors. He
              causes the pollution in each program
              and thereby creates the irony.
              Purifying acts are initiated by
              others to minimize the hero's
              pollution and guilt.

2. Mime.   The hero is one of us and able to
              control circumstances with the same
              skill we possess. Mimetic drama
              employs the common, the familiar, as
              its central mode of action. As a
              result of the development of the
              pollution and guilt frames,
              purification is seldom a decisive
              moment; it results from someone's
              admitting or accepting the
              responsibility for wrongdoing or
              recognizing the force of external
              causation. Self-victimization or
              mortification strategies possess a
              genteel quality in the purifying
              stage of mimetic drama. No one is
              ever really "evil" and so the
              punishment itself is never severe.
              Redemption, consequently, requires
              only a return to the old social
              system with "greater wisdom" about
              the nature of this system.

Chesebro and Hamsher are particularly wary of the values imparted by this type of series:

The mimetic drama and the cluster of values
it casts as credible require a critical
response. The form assumes that conflicts
are really only "differences of opinion"
rather than profound confrontations. All
people are viewed as basically decent and
wholesome. The perspective is conservative,
offering a limited view of actual experience,
and it may thereby preclude a realistic
approach to the wide range of human relation-
ships. Also, the form presents the

"establishment" or "status quo" as the
most viable mode of organization. The
mimetic framework highlights means (hard
work, optimism, achievement, effort and
the like), seldom questioning the ends
toward which those means are directed.

3. Leader.   In leader centered forms, the hero
              is superior to others in degree
              but again able to manipulate the
              environment with the same degree of
              control possessed by others. The
              leader centered drama provides a
              context supportive of a strong, if
              not dominant, personality... Thus,
              we expect those cast as leaders to
              appear confident of their values,
              to use those values to interpret
              events and create issues, and to
              label forces as "right" and "wrong".
              Correspondingly, those cast as
              followers use the leader's values
              for perceptual and interpretative
              categories. Guilt ... may be
              assigned by victimization or self-
              mortification... [and] the leader
              generates purification.

4. Romance.   In romance, the hero is superior in
              degree to others and the environment.
              The romantic hero is part of a legend
              and possesses a chivalric love for
              others. There is a supernatural
              aura essential to romance, and
              correspondingly the romantic hero
              appears adventurous, mysterious, and
              all-knowing... the romantic hero
              assigns blame to those agents or
              circumstances generating the pollution.
              Blame is assigned so that the romantic
              hero can grapple with or purify the
              social system; the hero, employing the
              special skills he possesses, slowly
              but decisively corrects the problems
              of the mind, body, and environment.
              The redemption stage of the romantic
              drama is essentially a recognition of
              the skill and sensitivity of the
              romantic hero in recognizing and
              resolving the pollution and guilt
              through a particularly wise set of

purifying actions. The other
characters in the show overtly
acknowledge the constructive role
of the hero at this stage in the
drama as well as explicitly
admitting that the hero has
profoundly altered their lives.

Chesebro and Hamsher are also very critical of this

"genre":

These series provide confidence and
security for the viewers through the
concept that external agents will
resolve human dilemmas; however,
viewers are thereby encouraged to
perceive themselves as more passive,
less responsible for themselves, and
more dependent upon the efforts of
mystical figures for solutions to
extremely real problems.

5. Myth.   In myth, the hero is superior
to others and the environment
in kind. Mythical drama involves
universal struggles such as the
quest for absolute truth or
beauty, or for a permanent peace,
or the conflict between good and
evil. Both sacred and timeless
issues are at stake; the mythical
drama possesses, as a result,
ritualistic and dreamlike qualities.
In the mythical drama, pollution is
a product of a set of circumstances
beyond human control, unreasoned or
overwhelming human or supernatural
strength, or a profound ideological
or religious conflict which admits
of no compromise. The hero alone
controls the purification stage of
the drama. Redemption occurs when
the hero has accomplished the task
and others are able to speak of the
efforts employed to eliminate the
pollution.

Chesebro and Hamsher conclude that the dramatic forms

which control popular television series reinforce the

tendency to highlight value judgments, since illustrations

of what is "good" and "bad" are portrayed by the plots,
characters, settings and themes of these programs (pp. 24-25).
The messages conveyed and the values reinforced become
credible because of the form and content controlling each
series. Hence, form and content determine how values can
be conveyed to viewers subtly and effectively; "television
series function as persuasive acts of communication altering
or reinforcing value systems" (p. 25). As Chesebro and
Hamsher explain at the end of their article "communication,
values, and popular television series":

> One concluding methodological note
> regarding the interrelationship between
> content and form: early in our analysis,
> by way of our critical matrix, we
> suggested that content and form could be
> meaningfully related to reveal the
> persuasive styles of television series;
> in conclusion, we would offer an even
> more powerful hypothesis - content
> controls form and form controls content.
> As we considered series after series, we
> were ultimately able to predict the
> content of a show if we knew its form;
> if we had determined the form, we could
> make reasonable estimates about the kinds
> of principles that would be conveyed on
> the show. (p. 25)

While Chesebro and Hamsher's "Critical Matrix" provides
an efficient means of, as Masterman would say, "demythologizing"
the television medium, this paper will conclude with a more
comprehensive approach. Vicki Hamer's "A Methodology for
Criticism of Television", which relies heavily on Elder
Olson's Tragedy and the Theory of Drama, serves as an outline
of the basic concepts of 'electronic literacy' and as a guide
which teachers can adopt or adapt in order to teach students

how to become critical viewers. She points out that the
television experience is a combination of literature, drama
and film and the literary and rhetorical impact can be
observed in three stages: (1) The Descriptive Stage,
(2) The Analytic Stage, and (3) The Evaluative Stage.

1. The Descriptive Stage

Plot

- one plot
- main plot with sub-plots
- multiple plot lines (relationships to one
  another?) convergence, divergence

Unifying Principles

- of plots
- incidents

Consequential Principle of Unification

- initiating incident and terminating incident
- specific incidents that drive the causal
  sequence

Descriptive Principle of Unification

- presents a situation, interaction, or set of
  circumstances from different perspectives

Pattern Principle of Unification

- a certain form or pattern emerges early in
  the drama which is repeated again and again
- repetition can involve similar incidents,
  a repeated theme, similar causes

Didactic Principle of Unification

- all aspects serve to prove the messages of
  the drama
- thesis stated directly and the enactment,
  music, lighting, characters, and other
  features used to develop and reinforce
  that thesis

Probability or Plausibility of the Plot

Natural Probability

event – happens daily or usually or
frequently
action – if most people of a certain
kind have the power and
inclination to do it

Conditional Natural Probability

– rare and unusual occurrences probable
if adequate causes exist or adequate
indications that the occurrences
happened

Hyperbolical Probability

– things of a highly exaggerated probable
if we recognize that the exaggeration is
only figurative and contains an element
of truth, (e.g., farce)

Conventional or Formal Probability

– anything is probable if it corresponds to
something already accepted. A plot which
follows a familiar legend or a familiar
version of historical events will be
accepted as probable, even though these
latter contain improbabilities or
impossibilities. This holds, too, for
certain forms; we expect certain things
to happen in a Western, improbable as
they may be. This is the probability of
custom.

Emotional Probability

– may be completely irrational and in no
way connected with logical probability.
A given emotion predisposes us to believe
certain things, even though they may be
impossible.

Denouement

– how are the intricacies of the lot unraveled?
How are conflicts treated? Are conflicts
resolved, transcended, or left unresolved?

Characters

- What are the characters' values and
  qualities? Are the characters
  stereotypic, one-dimensional, simple,
  complex, unique, realistic, etc.?
  What are their virtues, vices, flaws?
  Do they manifest typical human
  inconsistencies, or is their behavior
  always predictable?

- What functions do the characters play
  in relationship to the purpose or themes
  of the drama? For example, which
  characters are essential to the story
  line? Which characters serve a narrative
  function?

- How probable or plausible are these
  characters, their relationships, and
  the situations they are in? Are the
  characters vivid and convincing?

- How are the interactions among characters
  reflected in their movements and in their
  physical positions with relation to one
  another? How is the movement and position
  of characters related to the setting? How
  does it establish the relative power and
  influence of characters?

Production

Acting

- Are the performances of the actors truthful
  or believable? Do they arouse sympathy and
  moral judgment? What do their physical
  features contribute to characterization?
  How well do these actors portray the human
  qualities of these characters?

- How much do these actors rely on body
  language to convey complex inner-thoughts
  and feelings?

Visuals

- An episode proceeds through time but does
  not have to be chronological. Visual
  representation of time can occur in
  flashbacks, simultaneous events, flashaheads,
  etc.

- How are different aspects of lighting,
  such as shadowing, direct light and
  lighting angles, used?

- How are such devices as camera angles,
  close ups, pans, scenes and fade-outs
  used? What do they emphasize? What
  is the point-of-view of the camera?
  Does the camera serve as a narrator?
  How is the camera used to serve
  strategies or techniques for supporting
  and enhancing the message or purpose?
  Examples would include character
  close-up, camera devices combined with
  lighting techniques, and camera focus
  on scenic detail.

- What kind of messages do the colors convey?
  Identify prevailing colors. What are
  typical associations with given colors,
  i.e., symbols, emotions, archetypes? Which
  characters wear what colors?

- Describe the settings. What are the
  predominant colors? What are the symbolic
  qualities? Are the settings clean, warm,
  artificial, etc.?

Sound Elements

Dialogue — the language, conversation,
           soliloquies and occasional
           dramatic narration.

- Is the dialogue indicative of complex
  thought or deep emotion? How is the
  dialogue related to body language? What
  literary devices are used, i.e., simile,
  metaphor, analogy, symbolism, alliteration?

- What kinds of images are created by the
  narration? Is the content of the narration
  dramatized during the drama? Under what
  conditions does such dramatization occur?

- Where does the narration occur in the drama?
  Who is the narrator? What purpose does the
  narration serve? Does it reinforce theme,
  summarize theme, project into the future,
  describe the past, reveal undramatized
  events or feelings and thoughts, etc.? Is
  the narrator an actual character or an
  extraneous voice-over?

- What forms of narration are used? Do other aspects of the drama such as scene or camera narrate? Who is actually "seeing" the events most of the time? Are there characters whose main function is to tell the audience something it needs to know? Is the narrator a participant affecting events or an observer? Is the narrator reliable?

Music

- How is music used? Does it emphasize theme, character or emotion? What reactions does the music arouse? What is the effect of arrangement and selection of instruments? Is the music used to enhance, support, contrast, or maintain continuity?

Tone

- an attitude or general orientation within the drama. It is created by several factors. For example, a tone is established when a writer chooses tragedy or comedy as his mode of expression. Other aspects which contribute tonal qualities include music, setting and color.

Purpose

- The purpose may consist of thesis, theme or message. It includes the response desired from the audience and the effect of the theme or message on the audience. Desired effects include confronting, shaming, alienating, pacifying, disturbing or appeasing. The purpose may be to clarify, interpret, divide, support, praise, see the implications of, or blame.

- The purpose may be directly stated or it may be inferred from dramatic material presented or omitted, relationships between the implied author and the audience, or from supporting materials such as dialogue or proofs.

Method of Development

- How does the drama develop from beginning
  to end? How do the developmental features
  of the principles of unification structure
  or limit the drama? Is there a steadily
  rising action or a reversal in direction?
  Where do pivotal events occur?

- How often is an episode interrupted by a
  commercial break? Is there a climactic
  event in each segment? Where do segments
  peak? What is the nature of these climaxes,
  emotional conflicts, revelations and
  reversals?

- What role does narration play? Is the
  order in which events are presented
  sequential, based on flashback, or synchronic?

Strategies

- What devices are used by the implied author
  to achieve his purposes? How are the
  purposes clarified, illustrated, explained
  and reinforced? Such strategies may include
  comparison, contrast, identification,
  emotional arousal, enactment of actions,
  enhancement of probability, archetypical,
  stereotypic or mythic associations,
  organization of the setting, music, camera
  angles and shots, lighting, narration,
  continuity and sentimentality.

- What devices and materials are used as proofs,
  evidence and support for the purposes? How
  do characters, plot and elements of production
  become supporting materials?

Implied Audience

- Who is being addressed and how is the audience
  selected? What is the relationship between
  the implied author and his audience? What is
  the attitude of the implied author toward his
  audience? What audience does the implied
  author state that he is addressing? Who will
  be eliminated from the audience and why?

Implied Author

- What is the function of the drama for its implied author? How does it serve to identify or create an identity for him? To what degree does the drama function as self-expression and self-persuasion? Considering all elements, what is the character, nature, or persona of the implied author as evidenced by drama examined?

- What is the relationship of the implied author to his audience? Is he didactic? Does he present his message with reasoned arguments and evidence? Does he play on the audience's sympathies? Does he present one side or multiple points of view?

2. Analytic Stage

Actual Audience

- Who in fact viewed the drama? How does this audience compare to the implied audience? Was there more than one audience? What was their attitude toward the issue, the historical situation? What cultural values did they hold? What influence did age, occupation, political affiliation, cultural experience, economic status and social status have on attitudes toward the issue?

- What empirical data on audience effects is available to enlighten the actual audience of this drama?

The Issue

- What is the fundamental question to which the drama gives an answer? How did this come to be an issue? What events have influenced discussion of this issue? What were popular beliefs about the issue? What responses did the author desire from his audience regarding the issue?

Historical Context

Series History

- What elements, events, situations, have
  occurred in the history of this series
  that help describe this episode, achieve
  series continuity, and develop character?
  What is repetitive, familiar? To what
  extent are the actors identified with the
  characters they play?

Social-Political-Economic Context

- What are the social, political and economic
  pressures on the author and the audience?
  What are the other persuasive forces
  operating in the historical scene? What
  related drama or oratory has the audience
  heard, read or seen? What information is
  being disseminated about the issue? What
  are the alternatives to the position of the
  author? What arguments must be reflected
  if the author is to be successful?

Historical Authenticity

- How well does period drama approximate actual
  period conditions? If the drama is based on
  other media representations, such as novels
  or biographies, how accurate is the treatment?

Supporting Material

- How does the symbolic reality created in the
  drama compare with what is known about the
  issue from psychological and sociological
  research and other resources?

3. Evaluative Stage

- What are the most distinctive characteristics
  of this drama which should be emphasized,
  highlighted and featured in criticism?

- Are there criteria suggested in the work
  which imply the bases on which the work
  should be judged?

- What critical method will allow the critic
  to focus on the criteria which seems to be
  the most significant in evaluating the
  merits of the act? (The critic seeks a
  perspective that will assist in stating,
  explaining, and demonstrating the most
  significant judgment that the critic
  thinks can be made about this work.)

- What critical approach would be most
  antagonistic, most condemnatory? What
  system would produce the most negative
  evaluation of this act? (The critic,
  ultimately, must make a choice between
  the values of antagonistic criticism and
  the values of revelatory criticism which
  focuses on the peculiarities of an act
  and explores its strengths. Obviously,
  the critic will often seek some integration
  of these two perspectives.)

(Hamer, 1981, pp. 1-15)

Conclusion

The curriculum guide for high school English teachers
neglects the distinctive features of electronic literacy.
Only through exposure to television criticism and an imple-
mentation of a well-organized methodology for the study of
the television medium can this problem be alleviated. It is
the purpose of this report to point out the error and provide
a sample of television criticism and some guidelines for
teaching electronic literacy. Indeed, this report is far
from being exhaustive, but it does contain information which
any English teacher in our society ought to consider if he
is to teach literacy in any modern sense of the concept.

Only then can he properly teach young people how to "read" a television screen with a skill that approaches their ability to respond to print. "Electronic literacy" should be taught in our schools.

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