

FILM 20B Television Culture and Society
Spring Quarter 2011
Professor L.S.KIM
FIRST PAPER TOPIC

Image Analysis: This is a short writing assignment (3 pages) asking you to critically engage with an image, going through the overlapping stages in the critical process (as laid out in Chapter 1 of *Media Essentials*): descriptive, analytical, interpretive, and evaluative. Your goal in this paper is to demonstrate and practice your critical analytical skills by starting with a single, still image.

Semiotician Roland Barthes once stated that, "the press photograph is a message." Although it might seem obvious, readers sometimes take for granted this statement. Images which convey social messages often seem "direct" and "true" yet carry, embedded within them, ideologies, philosophies, and opinions which favor certain views while opposing and even effacing others. One way to determine an image's meanings is to treat the image as a **code** that simultaneously possesses multiple meanings; an image **encoded** by a series of senders to be later **decoded** by many receivers. Understanding this "encoding/decoding" process can help you to intercept attitudes and beliefs carried along in the apparent concreteness of information and "facts." Semiotics is the study of how meaning is constructed; it focuses on the way in which **signifiers** (concrete images) relate to **signifieds** (the meaning attached to images) and how this relation is influenced by specific social, mythic, and cultural contexts when photographic images are used in news stories. Your task is to demystify – to deconstruct – how knowledge is stored in the form of endowed images, and to state why it is important to do so.

Choose an image from a newspaper or news magazine and carefully study it, taking into consideration its denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and most importantly, its context both visual and ideological. Look for an image that relates to a social, cultural, political, or mythic idea and which appears to pose an interesting contradiction or ambiguity. Does the image support political policies, philosophies, or national myths while ignoring or erasing problematic relations of gender, race, ethnicity, and/or social-economic class position? Analyze and describe how seemingly "natural" or "common sense" information affects judgments. In other words, how does an image function as ideology? You must include a copy of the image when you submit your assignment. Important note: select an image that is not an advertisement.

You can refer to John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* to set up your analysis. I suggest that you include and articulate a definition of ideology within your paper, to help support your argument and to give you a stronger sense of focus as you write.

Ideas from Class to remember:

- *To look is an act of choice.*
- *Ideology is a term used to describe the social production of meaning.*
- *Myth naturalizes, and serves to make ideologies into “common sense.”*
- *Myths and ideologies are facilitated by and embodied in . . . images.*

Paper Policy:

Papers must be typed, double-spaced, with formal one-inch margins, and follow a consistent editorial style (i.e., MLA or Chicago). If you use quotations or ideas from sources other than your own thinking, you must cite properly. Papers will be graded on conceptual rigor and fluency of writing style. Your Teaching Assistant will give you her/his specific grading guidelines.

YOUR PAPER IS DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS on Thursday, April 14th.