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Expository Writing

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Media Over Mind

When communicating to the masses, there are many different opinions as to which is the best way to influence the general public. In persuading one's audience, there are multiple factors to take into consideration. Issues such as culture, education, and the media are influential in forming information for the general society. In Mary Louise Pratt's "Arts of the Contact Zone", the author describes how a cultural collision potentially creates a powerful learning process for both societies. As defined by Pratt a contact zone is:

Social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today (Pratt 607).

Another interpretation as to the most important way of mass communication has been heard through the works of Paulo Freire. Freire believes that "the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (Freire 260). He terms this form of education as "banking". In banking, Freire assumes that students are forced to comprehend only what their teacher tells them and that all other information is wrong. He states "the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the

pupils are mere objects” (Freire 261). Freire sees the teacher as an over powering force that the students have no choice but to acknowledge. In his argument, Freire tries to have the reader acknowledge their own victimizations of banking, and conform them into an alternative mind-state over education. Through his essay, Freire contradicts his own point. While trying to tell the reader they have been banked, he is, ultimately, banking the reader to his own viewpoint. The other form of how knowledge and information is transferred and presented to the world is through heavy use of the media. In Robert Coles’s essay “The Tradition: Fact and Fiction”, the author makes his case by stating that, no matter what, there will always be a “filter” in the media to persuade the general audience. A filter is a way of slanting an opinion so the masses will agree with the intended understanding. Of all the forms of persuasion, I believe Coles view to be the most significant and influential in swaying the general public.

No matter what form of persuasion, it is important to be mindful of how and why the author, filmmaker, newscaster, etc. is doing so. Today, in a society where news and information are so highly regarded, it is necessary to be able to grasp and comprehend only what is essential to your own view point. Being able to make useful judgments, instead of relying on the rhetoric of others can be helpful in searching for the truth. Through filtering and persuasion the truth can be hindered or ignored, and that is why it is imperative to everyone in America, a member of the *free* world, to accept there is a biased opinion in any form of mass communication and decipher what can and cannot be accepted as fact.

In Coles’s essay, the author makes the statement:

The heart of the matter for someone doing documentary work is the pursuit of what James Agee called ‘human actuality’—rendering and representing for others what has been witnessed, heard, overheard, or sensed. Fact is ‘the quality of being actual,’ hence Agee’s concern with actuality (Coles, 176).

The author is cognizant of how the media persuades the general public. Coles sees how it is literally impossible to be factual all the time. In media, it is not actually being factual but the closest representation of the fact. Through severe images and harsh words, the media has the power to alter and convince the public into ideas and notions that they, themselves, might not truly believe. Just like any photograph, book, magazine article or any other item of non-fiction media, there will always be a bias. Many influences make it impossible to accurately depict reality including perception and a persona.

“In shaping an article or a book, the writer can add factors and variables in two directions: social and cultural and historical on the one hand, individual or idiosyncratic on the other” (Coles, 177).

In one film in particular, Bowling for Columbine, director Michael Moore uses a “long” filter to make a powerful statement about gun control with a grand social standpoint. A long filter uses persuasion through a large social scope. Considering that the film is classified as a “documentary,” it is actually less of a document and more of a visual essay. Throughout the film, Moore doesn’t want the viewer to think about anything pro-gun; he wants the audience only to see and hear what he feels will support his point of view. Therefore, he edits his film

accordingly. In many scenes, Moore uses controlling footage scored with emotional, tear-jerking music in order to trick his audience into believing how Moore, himself, truly feels about gun control. In one scene in particular, Moore uses actual footage from the Columbine massacre mixed with a sad guitar solo in the background. The information in the scene is factual, but the way of presentation creates a melodramatic mood. Moore is aware that by using thematic music and disturbing images, the general public will feel the emotions that they might not truly believe.

It has been scientifically proven that moving images has a profound impact on the human brain. In conjunction with sound, a film can have quite an effect on the human's mind. Throughout history many societies have accepted this fact, and used the media as a way of brainwashing their society. In Nazi Germany, Hitler requested propaganda films like Triumph of the Will and Jud Süß to be made to show the power of the Nazi party. Many Germans under the Nazi regime were oblivious to the slighted information given by the government, and who is to say the American government isn't doing the same right now? Is there really anyway of knowing if our own society is brainwashing our thoughts as we speak?

In Stanley Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange, the protagonist (Alex) experiences the full effect of brainwashing by society. The main character commits a series of crimes and is thrown in jail. Upon release he is sent to a special scientific laboratory where they try to cure him of his evils. The scientists' theory is that if they forcefully subject Alex to hours of excruciating

images scored to a commanding piece of music (Beethoven's 9th Symphony) than the patient will eventually be so persuaded by what he is witnessing that he will believe whatever the scientists tell him. In the film, the protagonist accounts how the experiment is progressing:

“Alex:

So far the first film, was a very good professional piece of cine.... The sounds were real horroshow, you could slooshie the screams and moans very realistic.... It was beautiful. It's funny how the colors of the real world only seem really real when you viddy them on the screen. Now all the time I was watching this, I was beginning to get very aware of like not feeling all that well. But I tried to forget this concentrating on the next film which jumped right away on a young devotchka who was being given the old in-out, in-out. First by one malchick, then another, then another. When it came to the sixth or seventh malchick leering and smecking and going into it, I began to feel really sick. But I could not shut my glassies and even if I tried to move my glassballs about, I still not get out of the line of fire of the picture.

Dr.Brodsky:

Very soon now the drug will cause the subject to experience a deathlike paralysis together with deep feelings of terror and helplessness. One of our earlier test subjects described it as being like death. A sense of stifling and drowning. And it is during this period that we have found the subject will

make his most rewarding associations between his catastrophic experience and involvement with the violence he sees” (Kubrick).

What Alex is experiencing is similar to how society controls the media in America; obviously not to the same extreme, but there is a connection. The information in society is guided through a couple mediums including film, radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and literature. Through film and television, the media tries to forcefully convert and subject the American public to striking images. It can be seen on the nightly news or through a film like Bowling for Columbine. The people who possess this power of mass communication are aware of their ability to brainwash the public and do so in a way that distorts the truth.

Whatever form of persuasion, whether it be through banking, cultural collision or mass media, the truth will always be altered to best suit the author or filmmaker’s purpose. As throughout history and in the film A Clockwork Orange it can be seen that heavy use of visuals combined with audio can have a profound impact on the psyche of a human being. It is our responsibility as a citizen to be aware of the false and slanted information that is fed to us daily. If there is no recognition of subliminal messages and/or filtering in the media than our perception of truth and reality has solely been the product of what others tell us. Using the banking concept or cultural collision as ways to impact society are undeniably influential, but overall, the use of media to persuade the masses is the most powerful.

