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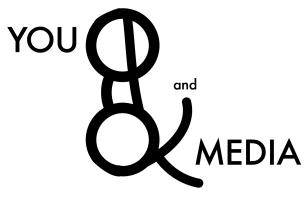
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a vlog.

Noah M. Mintz Vassar College, Class of 2016

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Program of Media Studies

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April 22, 2016

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You and Media: A Project of Accessibility

Whom is media theory for? Everyone is implicated. The "Spectacle" of Guy Debord, Michel Foucault's "panopticon," Roland Barthes's "rhetoric of the image," Laura Mulvey's critique of the "male gaze," the "culture industry" conceived of by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer: these are all structures that affect any "being-in-the-world" today. No individual is beyond the complicating effects of an increasingly mediated world, one in which people communicate in six-second image bursts and where college courses are taught online. And yet, the theorization of these experiences remains beyond the grasp of the average person.

Media theory is by and large available only to the educated, and only those who actively seek it out. And what becomes of these privileged individuals? They go on to become academics and college professors themselves, or else they join up with the "culture industry" and guard their knowledge as a trade secret. Contemporary media theory and cultural studies takes as a given the revolution of social thought begun in the late 19th century and carried out through the 20th century to the present day. Systems of power, matrices of oppression, dialectical thought: these are the foundations of the discourse. There is an irony that needs addressing in the fact that a field of study with its roots so firmly planted in Marxist thought makes itself beyond the grasp of the common person. Media theory is a powerful conceptual tool that could do more cultural work, if that is its aim, in the hands of the many than in the hands of the few. The elitism of Media Studies is untenable, and yet quite feasibly surmountable.

You and Media, then, aims to extend the accessibility of the field of media theory, one that has been developing for nearly one hundred years. Perhaps no one is more invested in the mediated world than high school students. The days of passing notes have given way to an era of

covert classroom selfies and surreptitious text messages. High schoolers need no longer sneak out at night when they can Skype and Snapchat each other from their homes. The public sphere of the hallway has migrated to digital platforms. Even their homework has been digitized. They are also among the first "digital natives," the vanguard of a generation raised on the Internet and weaned on smart phones. More than most, they spend the majority of their lives plugged into the virtual world.

Without a doubt, young adults are already thinking critically about the effects of technology on their lives. But without a toolkit to work with, a foundation to build from, they are starting from scratch. There is no need for them to reinvent the wheel when a whole canon of critical theory already exists. All that remains is to translate it, to render it both accessible and relevant to a contemporary, young public.

Teaching Media Studies

The "What?"

The field of Media Studies is still an emergent one. As such, the bounds of the discourse remain somewhat undefined. Where does it start, and what is left out? Vassar College's Media Studies Program, for one, presents one definition of the field: "media' includes all forms of representational media (oral/aural, written, visual), mass media (print, television, radio, film), new media (digital multimedia, the Internet, networked media), their associated technologies, and the social and cultural institutions that enable them and are defined by them." There is hardly anything outside of this list. What do we leave for the other disciplines? When dealing with something as broad as "media," how do we narrow the scope of study — or should we?

This has always been, and still is, the work of every program or department of Media Studies (or whatever other name it takes) in colleges and universities around the world. The New School, which boasts a longer history of education in the field than nearly any other institution, notes on its Web site that its School of Media Studies curricula "balance theory and practice, so that our students are fully engaged with current media scholarship as well as the latest tools of media production and management." This says little as to what falls under the umbrella of "media scholarship," only that it includes "media theory."

Part of the work of defining Media Studies, then, is to define media theory and its limits.

While an academic program or school can leave itself more open to flux and interdisciplinary

¹ "About - Media Studies." Online: mediastudies.vassar.edu/about/. Accessed November 13, 2015.

² "About the School of Media Studies | The New School." Online: www.newschool.edu/public-engagement/school-of-media-studies-about/. Accessed November 13, 2015.

variation, a book's content is much more limited and much less of a moving target. In Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks³, for example, "Media Studies" becomes a way of understanding how culture is created and perpetuated through diverse media (such as those listed by the Vassar College Media Studies site). "The narratives of media culture offer patterns of proper and improper behavior, moral messages, and ideological conditioning. . . Likewise, media and consumer culture . . . engage people in practices which integrate them into the established society, while offering pleasures, meanings, and identities." More simply put, it asks "How is culture mediated?"

David Croteau and William Hoynes⁵, on the other hand, limit their study to the realm of "mass media" and the industries thereof: what they call, "a sociologically informed analysis of the media process." 6 Media/Society touches upon many of the themes and ideas present in KeyWorks, but only as they apply to the specific topic at hand. The Cultural Studies framework is left aside for one of sociology, and a historical mindset is adopted primarily to provide context for contemporary media and their industries.

"We do not believe," announce Durham and Kellner, "that any one theory or method is adequate to engage the richness, complexity, variety, and novelty displayed in contemporary constellations of rapidly proliferating cultural forms and new media." In order to be as flexible and dynamic as the objects of its inquiry, Media Studies must resist total definition. More than anything, it is a perspective or a lens — a lens to be employed within any or every other

³ Durham, Meenakshi Gigi & Kellner, Douglas M., ed. Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

⁴ ibid.. ix

⁵ William Hovnes is the primary advisor for this project.

⁶ Croteau, David & Hoynes, William. Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences. Second edition.

Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2000. p. xvi

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discipline. Its applications are endless. In order to present it in a manageable and concise fashion, however, one must narrow its focus and direction. For that reason, in *You and Media* we will concentrate on only a few topics that are of great import for young audiences.

Taking cues from Durham and Kellner's approach, the project presents these topics in a way that makes their influence on culture and individual lives clear and apparent. I do not ignore the sociological approach, however. Many of the episodes touch upon sociological issues of system and structure, communication and culture.

The "Why?"

Why should we care about Media Studies? Media themselves, it might seem, have nothing to say. It is the actors and receivers on either end of the medium, or the message which is contained within, that are the traditional focuses of inquiry and criticism. But (and you'll forgive the cliché), as Marshall McLuhan famously said, "the medium is the message." Technologies and channels of communication are not themselves neutral; they arise from choices made by individuals who are inevitably steeped in ideological systems. Barthes can tell us how the image distorts the truth. Walter Benjamin can explain the way mechanical reproduction changes the way we see art. Laura Mulvey exposes the way that the filmic eye shapes our own perceptions. And McLuhan himself speculates that the ubiquity of electricity will transform our world into a global village.

Media Studies lends us the tools necessary to understand our own mediated lives. The goal, according to Durham and Kellner, is to "enable media-involved readers to engage in the activity of analysis, interpretation, criticism, and making sense of their cultural and social worlds

and experiences. . . . helping to produce active creators of meaning and interpretation, rather than merely passive audiences." Everything we see and hear is mediated by something — be it technological or ideological. If we don't interrogate the medium, we can only take the content at face value.

The "Whom?" and the "How?"

A field so central to our quotidian interactions, one that concerns nearly every interaction we have and every communication we receive, should be available to everyone. It should be a foundational lens of inquiry from elementary school well through high school. We as a culture should value media literacy as highly as we do linguistic literacy. And yet, it remains far out of reach for most, locked in an ivory tower (to use perhaps too lofty a metaphor). Those who do not have the access to (or the interest in) a college course on the subject might never encounter the term at all, and the literature remains largely obscure and inaccessible for most people.

KeyWorks, for example, addresses itself to "cultural consumers," which ostensibly includes everyone. Who among us does not consume culture? The tone and the selection, however, belie a different audience, one who, we might venture to say, is much more highly educated in the traditional sense than the average consumer. Will the curious teenager comprehend Walter Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction?" What about Jürgen Habermas's "Public Sphere?" Even if they survive the German theorists, how will they fare in the face of Jean Baudrillard? Suppose they then put down KeyWorks in despair and

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hopefully turn to *Media/Society*. Having never studied sociology, will their "sociologically informed analysis" be of much use? This book, too, seems to take for granted a college-level audience. Even *The New Media Reader*, yet another Media Studies anthology, sets itself beyond the grasp of many. Despite claiming that it is a book for "Readers Seeking to Understand New Media" as well as "New Media Professionals" and "Students and Professors," there is still an implied elite level of readership in its selection of texts. Indeed, after some digging around, it appears that there are no Media Studies textbooks available for audiences below the college level.

That is not to say that no one has made the effort. There are resources available that aim to deliver certain topics or texts of Media Studies to a younger audience. The *For Beginners* series⁹ presents an array of difficult material in a graphic format, almost like a comic book. The titles span disciplines in the humanities and beyond, among them *Deconstruction For Beginners*, *Heidegger For Beginners*, and *Postmodernism For Beginners*. Even our friend McLuhan gets his own treatment. According to their web site, *For Beginners* "deconstructs complex ideas and makes them accessible to the everyday reader. Every book in the series serves one purpose: to present the works of great thinkers and subjects alike in a straightforward, accessible manner." The emphasis on access is frankly refreshing, and further supported by a section of the site devoted to helping high school teachers find creative ways to adhere to the new Common Core standards. The multimedia (text and image) approach to Media Studies pedagogy makes a lot of sense. If a picture really can say a thousand words, then there's a great economy of rhetoric to be

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⁹ <u>www.forbeginnersbooks.com</u>

¹⁰ www.forbeginnersbooks.com/aboutus.html

found in the comic book style we see here. The images help students to visualize what they are reading just as much as the writing informs the picture.

There is a large and ever-growing network of blogs and websites dedicated to addressing this irony of accessibility, in one way or another. Groups like the Chicago School of Media Theory¹¹ have summaries, glossaries, and reading lists available online. Many a college professor assigns blog posts, or videos, or some other response to media theory texts. But this is too much material for the interested reader to sift through, and spread all across the Web, and the majority of it is still written at the college level.

What is still missing is a project that begins to both define and to present the field of Media Studies to a young audience in particular. *You and Media* aims to begin the immense task of filling this gap, drawing inspiration from other pedagogical approaches.

¹¹ www.lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory

A Vlog

Media Studies is, of course, concerned with many media. In order to examine and critique the nuanced aspects of these communication channels and the texts they carry, You and Media adopts the form of a vlog, or video webseries. A vlog can employ visual and auditory as well as textual aids to render complex concepts more comprehensible and make media messages more immediate. In my demonstration of media literacy, for example, I am able to replay clips from television advertisements while I analyze them. Furthermore, the platform of vlogging presents an informal community on the Web, one in which vloggers can take on the informality and even intimacy of one-on-one communication. The reception environment is often a personal and private one. Receiving information in a bedroom rather than a classroom changes the way that a person engages with it. Hopefully, the vlog familiarizes Media Studies, chipping away at its intimidating edges and allowing me to adopt a more conversational tone in an effort to break down the elitist language of media studies as well as the teacher/student hierarchy that too often defines the learning process. In the words of scholar Henry A. Giroux, "[teachers] should be critically attentive to the operations of power as it is implicated in the production of knowledge and authority in particular and shifting contexts. This means learning how to be sensitive to considerations of power as it is inscribed on every facet of the schooling process." ¹² In that light, the goal of the project is not to simply instruct the viewer on what Media Studies is, but to provide them with a framework and a set of tools to think about their mediated lives critically.

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¹² Giroux, Henry A. "Doing Cultural Studies: Youth and the Challenge of Pedagogy." Online: www.henryagiroux.com/online_articles/doing_cultural.htm. Accessed November 16, 2015.

You and Media is not the first Media or Cultural Studies vlog. It takes as a springboard other projects such as John Green's Crash Course, a series of world history lessons which he co-writes with his high school history teacher. Green sits behind his desk and explains the history of the world with manic humor, anecdotal digressions, and flashy visuals. More relevantly, he often explains the history of ideas and ideologies (such as "Nationalism" or "Capitalism and Socialism"), linking him to the sphere of Cultural Studies. While his videos are entertaining and informative, You and Media attempts a tone that is less didactic, as detailed above, and that is less annoying: Green's shouted enthusiasm can be grating at times. Furthermore, I diverge from Green's model by focusing on concrete analytical examples, demonstrating on a small level the endless possibilities of the Media Studies approach.

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¹³ www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nosq94oCl M

¹⁴ www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3u4EFTwprM

Where to Begin?

Media Studies is vast. There is no way that *You and Media* can incorporate even the smallest fraction of its totality — or rather, perhaps, its infinity. I must unfortunately limit myself to only a few subjects of discussion within the field. Rather than attempt to re-present a select number of canonical texts (summaries of which are already widely available), the vlog explores broader topics in Media Studies. I present four episodes. The first is an introduction to Media Studies, followed by three more: "Media Literacy," "Representation & the Virtual World," and "Surveillance." Since Media Studies is an interconnected web — a rich interwoven tapestry of thoughts, ideas, critics, and phenomena — these episodes are to be watched in no particular order. The viewer is invited to view them as dictated by their own interest.

"Introduction"

This first episode serves the purpose of initiating the viewer into the field of Media Studies. What is this field of study? What is at stake? Whom is it for? Many of the questions that I raised and addressed above in this critical introduction appear in this episode as well.

Beyond introducing Media Studies in a brief fashion, the episode is an introduction to the project. I explain the project's goals — that is, assisting a wider audience to access and understand the realm of critical thought broadly known as Media Studies, and expanding the conversation beyond the setting of colleges and universities — and of course, introduce myself and my involvement with and approach to Media Studies.

The aim of the episode is to introduce, but also to engage. I employ the humor conviviality present in the other episodes in an effort to attract the attention of my viewers, encourage them to continue watching the series, and to stress the importance and relevance of Media Studies.

As do all episodes, this one contains a list for further reading. The video description afforded by YouTube's hosting platform will act as a sort of bibliography, with links to books, articles, videos, podcasts, and films. In this way, my project will promote exploration and self-motivated learning.

"Media Literacy"

The "Media Literacy" episode aims to expose the ways in which non-textual objects can be "read" critically. Encouraging the viewer to interrogate layers of meaning and processes of production, dissemination, and reception, I do a sample "reading" of a television advertisement. Medium specificity plays a role here, as do discourses of visual rhetoric.

To begin with, this episode defines "media literacy" as a skill that requires critical thought and cultivation; it is more than merely understanding the content of a mediated message.

Media Literacy is a tool to understand the way that information — and even people — are manipulated.

To that end, the episode briefly summarizes all of the steps between the "author," or communicator, of a mediated message and its "reader," viewer, or receiver. These are motivation, development, production, distribution, medium, and reception environment. To

illustrate this process and how to view a message in a "media literate" way, I do a close examination of a television advertisement, exploring it from all of the aforementioned avenues.

"Representation & the Virtual World"

"Representation & the Virtual World" ventures through the screen. It asks the viewer to examine the differences between the world represented in cultural media artifacts and the "real" world in which we live. In what ways do we take the virtual for granted and conflate it with our own experience? I take a look at the importance of representation of various identities in the virtual world, and will who it is that decides what is "important" or "normal" in society.

While the virtual world skews and misrepresents countless identities, this episode focuses primarily on the issue of race. Taking cues from Richard Dyer, I explore the ways in which whiteness is taken for granted or assumed (*unmarked*) in television, film, literature, and other media. Characters in popular novels such as *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* have been assumed white by their audiences, even when they are unmarked, or even coded as people of color. Their interpretations by actresses of color on the stage and screen have caused an uproar among fans.

Turning to television, I look at children's programs and how they represent race and cultural difference. Shows like *Dora the Explorer* emphasize these differences — ask anyone what *Dora* is about, and they will doubtless explain that she is a little hispanic girl who goes on adventures and teaches kids Spanish. While this representation is certainly not a negative one, it does seem to make a point of the fact that Dora is not a white character. Other programs such as *Dragon Tales*, on the other hand, take an unmarked approach to race. Its protagonists, Max and

Emmy, are hispanic, but this is not the main thrust of the show; mostly, they are off in a parallel universe galavanting with dragons. They just also have to be home for dinner with their *abuelita*. In this way, *Dragon Tales* represents people of color not as a spectacle, but simply as normal or *unmarked*.

Finally, I take the example of the 2016 Academy Awards boycott to demonstrate (potentially) effective resistance to a lack of representation. In response to a nominations list that was uniformly white, a number of actors of color spoke out against the Academy and vowed not to attend the Oscars. The Academy responded with a promise to increase diversity among its voting members over the course of the next few years. Several (predominantly white) commentators have argued against the boycott, claiming that it was "racist against whites" and that "maybe black actors didn't deserve to make the shortlist." In an astonishing show of patronizing racism, a celebrated white actor advised black actors to, "be patient." I discuss the untrue and harmful nature of these remarks, as well as the importance of diverse representation at ceremonies of distinction such as the Oscars.

(This episode appears in the project in the form of an unfinished script and a collection of notes, for reasons that are elucidated in the "Reflection" below.)

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¹⁵ Charlotte Rampling:

http://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jan/22/oscars-2016-charlotte-rampling-diversity-row-racist-to-white-people

¹⁶ Michael Caine:

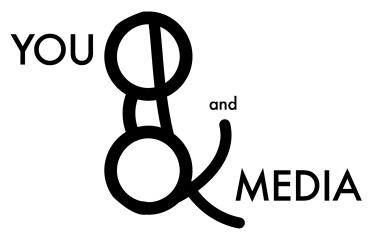
http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/2016/01/22/michael-caine-black-actors-should-be-patient-oscars-diversity/79169228/

"Surveillance"

Of particular import to young Internauts is the matter of surveillance. Who is watching them, and to what end? In this episode, I look into issues of privacy and security, as well as dynamics of power and control. If a Web site such as Facebook has all of your personal information, what's to keep them from selling it to an advertising agency? And once they have it, how can they affect your behavior and your habits? As long as we are being watched, we might as well turn an eye to the watchers, too.

This episode takes Jeremy Bentham, Michel Foucault, and the concept of the *Panopticon* as its theoretical foundation. The idea that one could always be under the eye of power, according to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, creates a society of self-censorship and total control, turning its people into *subjects* rather than truly free individuals. This is, perhaps, one of the guiding principles of the Patriot Act and the surveillance tactics of the National Security Agency.

This surveillance is not always unwitting and unwilling, however. Now more than ever, countless corporations have all kinds of information about us: who we are, who we know, where we go, what we do, what we like, and what we want. We knowingly let this happen every day when we agree to terms of use and when we browse the Web. This episode aims to inform the viewer about the power and prevalence of modern surveillance, and to prompt them to learn more and take control of their own information.



can be found online at http://bit.ly/1SyzQ5z.

Introducing: Media Studies. http://bit.ly/23MhO55.

Media Literacy. http://bit.ly/1NmQ2Ew. Surveillance. http://bit.ly/2459tX0.

Reflection

This has been a long and challenging process. *You & Media* has morphed and shifted quite a bit since I proposed the project almost a year ago, in May 2015. While the basic concept — a media theory vlog — and the driving desire to address the ironic elitism of Media Studies have remained constant, I found myself constantly tweaking the choice of content and the process. I had to make innumerable choices along the way, both small and large, and as with any choice each one left behind the specter of the alternative. Looking back at the past year, there are many things I could have done — and even wish I had done differently.

Most of these regrets come from the issue of time. Although I put eleven months of thought and work into this project, the deadlines approached more quickly than anticipated, and I came to realize that some of my plans were too ambitious. I wanted to collaborate with high schoolers, to further break down the structures of power that dominate the teaching of Media Studies by encouraging *learning* rather than *teaching*. The reason I did not was a combination of fear and time. I had plans to make four full-length episodes (in addition to the shorter introductory one). As the year progressed, it became more and more apparent that this was not feasible. Perhaps in the coming years, I will be able to revive the unfortunately sacrificed "Mediated Relationships." Part of me wishes that I had gone forward with that one rather than one of the other three. Maybe it should have taken the place of "Representation & the Virtual World," although that also would have felt wrong.

Which brings me to the confusing – even tormenting – case of that episode. I believe that it was the most important topic that I selected to present in my project. The representation of marginalized identities is a relevant, vital, and heated subject of discussion. I wanted to explore and familiarize some of the theory at its core, to bring the theoretical into the discussion that many people young and old are already having every day. Lack of representation, misrepresentation, and stereotyping are toxic and even violent aspects of the way that culture is mediated. It felt important to weigh in and do my part to counter the harmful narratives at play. With the stakes so high, though, I found myself paralyzed.

I began writing the script for "Representation & the Virtual World" with passion, delving into the history of the philosophy of representation, from Plato to Baudrillard. This was familiar and exciting territory, tracing the conversation about *mimesis* and *simulacrum* from ancient times to the present day. But as I started to apply this background to contemporary issues of race and representation, I began to grow uneasy. Of course, it was natural to be made uncomfortable by injustice. But I began to question my place in this, my approach, my positionality as a cisgender straight white man. It just did not feel right to make proclamations about racism into the vast ether of the Web. I do not believe that I was wrong in this. I ended up deleting six pages of my script wholesale, and putting it aside to work on later.

"Later" never came, of course. Rather than pushing myself to do more research, asking experts on the topic for advice and guidance, and finding a creative alternative solution, I did nothing with it until eventually the clock ran out. If I could go back and do any part of this entire process differently, I would have found a way to deal with this crisis and turn it into something even better.

Still, despite the regrets and disappointments, the anxieties, the crises, and the sleepless nights, I am proud of what I have created here. I think that I have made a valuable start in the long process of bringing media theory out of its ivory tower and into the mediated world that it theorizes. I genuinely believe that what I have produced can make a difference, on its own and by example.

Acknowledgements

Everything in life is a collaborative effort, and You & Media is no exception. So many voices and minds came together to make up mine in this project. While there is no way to name them all, I would like to thank a few people in particular.

I owe a tremendous amount to Bill Hoynes and Eva Woods Peiró, who were so generous with their expertise, encouragement, patience, and advice. This project would not have been the same without their guidance.

I am grateful to M Mark and my cohort in the Media Studies senior seminar, for having open ears and critical minds, for their commiseration and confidence.

The aesthetic genius of Alice Mintz and the musical intuition of Jeremy Katzenstein are to thank for this series' snazzy logo and catchy theme music (respectively).

For always being thoughtful listeners and good friends, I'd like to thank my coworkers at the Vassar College Writing Center, and Rob Leinheiser in particular, who took the time to watch these videos.

Much of the credit for this project should rightfully go to Ellie Marble, my primary means of emotional support. It is thanks to her that I survived all of this, and I am forever grateful.

I would also like to thank my mom, for everything.

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Logo design: Alice Mintz.

Theme Music: "October" by Jeremy Katzenstein (Vassar College, '15), used with permission.

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Appendix A: Episode Scripts

Introducing: Media Studies

Media Literacy

Surveillance

Representation & the Virtual World

Introducing: Media Studies

Hey, everyone! Welcome to *You & Media*. It's a webseries where we talk about Media Theory and Cultural Studies. If you want to know what the heck any of that means, you're in the right place, so stick around!

My name is Noah Mintz, and for the last four years, I've been in college learning about something called "Media Studies," which most people assume means that I'm learning how to be an advertiser or a journalist or something. But that's not it! I often tell people, mostly my parents, that Media Studies isn't as practical as all that, but that's not exactly true, either. The things I'm learning in college are actually really practical — I'd say I use my Media Studies skills every single day. They're just slightly less practical in the "grow up and get a job" sense of the word.

But who needs a job? (Just kidding, I really need a job.) Media Studies is about critical thinking, having a broad perspective, and keeping an open mind. It's less about knowledge and more about thought, a way of thinking that is useful in every single thing you do (so please, someone hire me).

That's all well and good, but we still don't have a good definition of Media Studies, do we? It turns out that it's pretty hard to define, but let's start with the word "media." First of all, that's a plural word. The singular is "medium," which is a Latin word that means "middle." So we're studying the middle here. The middle of what? That's open to interpretation. Essentially, it's the means through which any kind of message is communicated. Think of it this way, if it

helps: the substance that a sound wave travels through, like water or air, that's also called a medium.

That makes sense when you think about it. When you hear the word "Media," people are usually talking about radio, television, and film. Those are good examples of media, because they are the means of communication *between* people. They're the channel that the message is being carried by, thing in the middle of the person talking and you, the viewer or listener or whatever.

But radio, TV, and film aren't the only media. Newspapers, books, music recordings, the Internet, telephones, those are all media of communication. Language is a medium. Culture is a medium. But language and culture are also both *mediated* by all of those other things I just mentioned.

Yikes. That's a lot of stuff to cover. How can Media Studies be all of those things at once? How can we, as Media Studies students, be an expert on every single one of those media? Thankfully, no one expects us to: that's an impossible task. Media Studies isn't about knowing everything about every single medium, being a filmmaker and an audio engineer and a newspaper reporter all at once. It's a way of thinking critically about how all of the messages we receive every day are mediated. It's sort of a lens or a focus to study other things.

When you look at a movie, for example, it's important to think about more than just what's on the screen. Who made the movie, and why? Who paid for it? What are all of the steps between someone coming up with the idea for the movie and you watching it? How does it fit into the dominant culture or how does it contradict or subvert those ways of thinking?

That's a lot to think about. Always being critical can seem like a daunting task, but it's really important. Why should we care about Media Studies? It might seem like media on their own don't have anything to say. In the academic world, we usually focus on the message or on the people on either end of it: the makers/producers/communicators and the viewers/listeners/readers/receivers. Isn't that enough to look at? Why should we bother with the medium? This guy, Marshall McLuhan, once wrote that "the medium is the message." (He also wrote that the medium is the massage, but that's not important right now.) Anyway, what that means is that media – channels of communication – are not neutral. They have something to say, often something more important than what the message says. Media are systems that are closely tied to bigger ideas, ideologies, and cultural systems.

Another word that comes from *medium* is "mediate." It means to go between things or to bring about some kind of change. I think it's really cool that "mediate" is an active, transitive verb: media aren't just messengers, they *do* something to the messages they convey and to the people on either end of the equation. Images can distort the truth. Mechanical reproduction changes the way that we see and think about art. When we watch a film, it changes the way we see the world.

Media Studies gives us the tools we need to understand our own mediated lives. Everything we see and hear is mediated by something — whether it's technological or ideological. If we don't interrogate the medium, we can only take the content at face value. That's why Media Studies matters.

With so much ground to cover and such high stakes, undertaking the task of studying media can seem really daunting. Fortunately, a lot of people have written all kinds of things to lay the groundwork for us. Philosophers, writers, critics, and thinkers in general have been talking about this stuff for a long time. As people who want to understand media and how they work, we have a lot of really valuable resources. Philosophy, critical theory, film theory, cultural studies, political science, narrative theory, cognitive science, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and even conceptual physics all contribute to the big happy family we call "media theory."

Unfortunately, most of it is really dense and hard to read. Even my classmates in college and I struggle to make sense of this stuff. And we're the people who choose to read it! We're actively seeking it out, taking classes about it and talking to people with PhDs about it, and we still have a hard time. This is really frustrating to me. Media theory is about how all of our daily interactions and messages are mediated, about how we communicate with each other. It encompasses everything we do every day. Media theory should be for everyone.

And yet, very few people have access to it. If it's so hard for Media Studies majors in college to understand, that means it's all but inaccessible to most other people. And then what happens to those people who study it? Most of them either grow up to be college professors and so the whole thing goes around and around in an infinite loop, or they join "the culture industry" and keep what they learned about media theory a secret so that they can make more money.

I don't think that's okay. While it's important for college students to think critically about media, it's just as important for everyone else, too. It shouldn't just be for people who have the ability and desire to go to college and study it. It should be for young people, old people, high schoolers and everyone else. Media theory is for everyone who watches TV, uses the Web, reads books, speaks a language, and lives in a culture.

That's why I'm making this vlog. I want everyone to have access to media theory so that they can benefit from it and apply it to their own lives. I want to share what I've learned in college with people who can't go, don't want to go, or haven't gone yet. I want people to know that media theory is not just important, but that it can also be fun and entertaining.

I could have done this in a lot of different ways, but I felt like a series of online videos would be the most appropriate and effective way to do it. I was, of course, very careful about which medium I chose. Videos give me the ability to make use of visual aids, auditory aids, and textual aids so that people with many different learning styles can all understand more easily. It

also means that I can bring lots of other media messages – like TV clips and soundbites – into my videos so that we can analyze them together.

The other thing that I'm hoping will happen here is that we can kind of break down the structures of power that usually define how media theory is taught and learned. Media Studies tells us to be critical of all systems and structures, and traditional education is no exception. Teachers present themselves as unquestionable authorities, and students are supposed to just remember what they say and accept it as truth. I don't want you to think of me – or yourself – that way at all. If you think I'm wrong about something, leave a comment or email me! Don't take what I say for granted; go out and do your own research and explore all of the amazing thoughts that media theory has to offer. Basically, I'm hoping that the community aspect of this platform, the informal and familiar nature of it, will help us all explore Media Studies together. I'm not trying to tell you what media studies is. I'm trying to invite you to think critically about how your own life is mediated, and maybe to give you a framework and a set of tools to start doing that.

Because I can't do all of this on my own, you guys! Media Studies is *huge*. I could talk and talk and talk at you until I get old and die, and I still wouldn't have covered even a fraction of it all. So what I'm doing here is pretty much just giving you an introduction and some examples. I'm going to talk about "media literacy," "surveillance," and "representation and the virtual world." I'm going to point you toward some other stuff you might want to check out to

learn more, but then the rest is up to you. If Media Studies is for everyone, then it can't just be up to me to bring it out there. Let's do this together.

Thanks for tuning in and joining me! I'm really excited to be here, and I hope you are, too. Be sure to check out other episodes of *You & Media* as well as the links in the description below. Until next time, I'm Noah Mintz. See you!

Media Literacy

Hey, gang! Welcome back to *You and Media*, a series about ways to think about our mediated world. Today: puppies, football, horses, beer, and moms. That's what the U. S. of A. — and this episode! — are all about. [*You and Media* graphic, music] I'm Noah Mintz, and we're talking about "media literacy." It's a term people throw around a lot, but it's actually super important if you want to be an engaged and critical participant in your life. Because this stuff is all around you, so you might as well think about it.

The oldest meaning of the word *literacy* comes from one of "Western" [link to a PDF or summary of Edward Said's *Orientalism*] society's oldest *media* – the written word. It means understanding letters, being able to read. When writing was the only way to communicate with people who were not right there in front of you, being able to read and write was a powerful skill.

Before that, the important skill was being able to understand and reproduce the language of the land, and being fluent in the customs of a society – what we might call *cultural literacy*.

That's the difference between:

[Noah turns to the other camera, now wearing a beret and a striped shirt. Accordion music plays.] "Bonjour, madame, je voudrais une baguette s'il vous plaît."

[First camera] And:

[Second camera: Noah is wearing a Cubs baseball cap and is chewing gum. Chicago accent.] "Hey, how's it goin'? Gimme a hot dog, will ya?"

Anyway, then along came the incredible technological advances of the industrial era.

Printing presses and steam-powered machines basically created a whole new society. Being able

to read was no longer just a privileged skill, but a necessary tool for status and social mobility. In order to be an informed, active participant in the industrialized Western world, you needed to be able to read a newspaper, an instruction manual, a voting ballot.

Now, literacy is practically a given. In the United States today, an estimated 99% of the population over the age of 15 can read and write. Granted, that means that there are around 3 million people here that are illiterate, and that's a big problem. But the fact remains that we are a literate society. At least, when it comes to reading words. But there's so much more out there now, so many other *media* through which we communicate. Since the early 20th century, broadcast – or *mass* – media have been on the rise. Radio and film, then television, and now the Internet have complicated how we talk to each other.

Of course, "reading" TV and movies and radio isn't that hard. As long as you have the access (a TV in your house, money for the movies, some kind of radio), and the ability (language skills, the necessary vision and hearing abilities), you can just kind of sit there and let it all wash over you. You don't have to know how to spell to listen to the radio, and you don't have to read to watch TV. It's easy to let these images and sounds flood your mind and to take them for granted. We might call this *passive* consumption. But to be truly *media literate*, you have to be able to "read" these texts (by which I mean any set of signs that convey a message) more critically, between the lines, like you might read a book in your English class.

You have to look at what point the text is trying to make, and *how* it makes that point. What's the motivation? What are they saying, how are they saying it, and what do they mean by what they are not saying?

Being media literate means being an active and empowered member of the world. If you've ever tried to help your grandpa upload photos to Facebook, you've seen how technological illiteracy gets in the way of communicating with others. But if you can't also "read" media, and read it critically, then you're at risk of being duped and bamboozled, swindled and taken advantage of.

Beyond that, being media literate means that you have a wider array of lenses to examine the content that surrounds you every day. You can understand messages more deeply and maybe enjoy them more. Either way, you can take a step back and look at things a little more critically. Not that any of this is new to you: no one is a truly passive observer. Media literacy is something that everyone in our culture has some degree or another. What I'm trying to do here is just give you a vocabulary and a set of tools so you can do it a little more easily and skillfully.

So how do we go about a critical analysis of a media message? The first thing to do is to pick a "text." We're going to look at an advertisement, because ads tend to lend themselves really well to this sort of thing: they're short, they're everywhere, and they have a very clear motivation. [cheesy ad graphic with the words, "Buy our stuff!"] I personally try to avoid advertising as much as possible. My mom is a therapist, and she always says that an advertiser's job is pretty much the opposite of her job — they try to make people unhappy with what they have. I've got an ad blocker on my web browser and I don't watch live TV much anymore, so I don't always know what the advertisers are up to these days. Maybe this isn't a very media-literate way of doing things, huh? How can I be critical if I'm shutting all this stuff out?

Hm. Food for thought... Anyway, when I wanted to pick an advertisement to analyze, I just Googled "best ads 2015" and this was the first thing that came up:

[Play "Lost Dog" Budweiser ad in its entirety]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAsjRRMMg Q

[Noah is wiping tears from his eyes with a hankie]

THE DOG AND THE HORSE ARE FRIENDS. Is that not the most adorable thing? I need a minute here.

[Blows nose]

Okay, so what did we just see? We've got the cutest freaking puppy in the whole world, and he's friends with a big beautiful horse, but they get separated and the dude in the baseball cap is sad and the horse is sad and the puppy is running home, but then there's a scary wolf that almost eats the puppy except the horse breaks free with his horse squad and they save the puppy, and then the dude is happy and they're all hanging out in a barn. Cool.

But what's really going on? This is an advertisement, after all, so they're trying to sell us something. But what does this puppy have to do with beer? How's a horse going to get me to buy Budweiser? [Faces other camera] First of all, it's not. I'm not going to buy Budweiser because it's pretty gross. [Back to first camera] But if it's the ad's job to convince me, how is it doing that?

There's a lot of different angles we can attack this thing from. We have to look at the whole process of how the ad got from one place to another, from the Budweiser people saying,

[Faces other camera, wearing fancy hat and a mustache] "we need to get more people to buy stuff," [back to first camera] to when it reaches us as viewers, to how we interpret it when we

see it. A lot of money went into this ad, so we can only assume that a lot of thought went into it, too. Therefore, nobody can tell me I'm reading too much into things, so I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT. I'm looking at you, comment trolls.

Alright, so we've got the Anheuser-Busch InBev company, which owns Budweiser and wants to put out an ad. Their goal is to motivate people to buy their beer. It turns out that the best way to do this isn't always just to say, [Same cheesy ad graphic] "Buy our beer!" In fact, I think it's safe to assume that that doesn't really work very well at all. People figured out a long time ago that there are ways to convince people to buy products without telling them to do so. This is where the advertisers come in. They're the professionals who come up with this stuff, and they're very good at it. They create associations with the product or with the company, or they craft a sort of mythology about what that product is and what the people who buy it are like. This is called *branding*. It's selling a *brand* rather than a product. And it works. That's why a lot of ads you see today make little to no direct reference to the products their selling. [Rapid montage of Nike, Tommy Hilfiger, Apple, Adidas, etc. ads] In the case of the "Lost Dog" ad, no one tells you to drink Budweiser. In fact, there's barely any beer in the commercial at all. Right at the very end, if you can manage to tear your eyes away from that unbearably cute little dog, the dude in the baseball cap is holding a bottle. [Display still] But that's it. The ad isn't about beer, it's about... Animals? Friendship? [Display still from title screen at end of ad] Best Buds. See what they did there? They're associating the company, Bud, with the concept of platonic bonding. That's branding. And it works.

So we've got a brand, and we've got advertisers. That means we've got a message and we've got communicators. So let's look at how they transmit the message. The carrier of the

message, the thing that gets it from point *a* to point *b*, that's the *medium*. So in a media studies video series, we should probably take a look at that, huh?

In this case, the medium is actually a sort of hybrid between two media. First and foremost, it's a television advertisement. It aired for the first time on national TV during the [Display "Super Bowl XLIX" logo, with obnoxious sports music] Super Bowl in 2015. But these days, TV ads don't restrict themselves just to the airwaves. They also become online advertisements that get tacked on to the beginnings of YouTube videos or streaming services like Hulu or WatchESPN. They even become their own little entities, videos posted to YouTube, where they can be watched on their own or shared all over the Web.

In a lot of ways, the two separate media don't make much of a difference for the ad. They both activate the same senses in the viewer – sight and sound. They make use of visuals of cute animals [clip of the dog and the horse hanging out] and sentimental music to communicate with and affect us.

The content, of course, is the same, too. Whether we watch this ad on TV or online, we're still seeing the same ad: the same pup and the same horse. [Another clip of the animals being cute] If, for example, this were going to be turned into a print ad or a radio spot, they'd have to change some things, right? No modification had to be made to adapt the TV commercial to an online format, or vice versa.

But there *are* a lot of subtle differences between how the TV ad and the online video work. First of all, the *pace* of the ad is different. On TV, it's played only once, and the speed and timing is all controlled by the advertisers who created it and the networks that are broadcasting it. Online, though, you can replay it when it's done, and you can skip the scary parts if you want,

or stop when it gets to the red advertising screen with the logo at the end, or you can just replay it over and over and over and over (not that I did that, or anything). The pace of the ad is much more in your hands.

Both of these media have advantages for the advertisers. On TV, there's a lot more control over how and when the ad is viewed. They can play other Budweiser ads before it (which they did), to kind of prime the audience. On the other hand, the YouTube video gives the control to the viewer. If you can play around with the ad, replay the parts you like, pause it on stills of the puppy wagging his tail, [Display one such still] it might feel a lot more personal, and like it belongs to you. You also might spend more time watching it, which is good for Budweiser. Exposure is key for advertising.

Of course, the distinctions between TV ads and online video ads are kind of blurred by DVR programs like TiVo. You can pretty much do all the same stuff with your TV remote as you can on your computer. Plus the TiVo remote makes all the fun little booping sounds [Picks up a remote and boops it].

Okay, so what else is different? Think about the time and place, the physical context you're in when you see the ad. We'll call this the reception environment. This was a Super Bowl ad, so a lot of people saw this on TV while they were surrounded by their friends and family, or at a sports bar with a large group of other fans. If the Super Bowl is already about bonding (and maybe drinking), then this is a great environment for this ad. Friends drinking beer. Isn't that exactly what the ad portrays? It's also a narrative about an underdog, and about coming together as a team. I'm not much of a sports guy, but it seems like that's a lot of the same stuff people like about football.

Online, you can see it anywhere, at any time. The advertisers can't guarantee the same kind of conducive *physical* reception environment, but they can be pretty sure that the *virtual* environment will involve personal relationships. These videos end up getting shared on social networks – and that's a community of its own. If you're scrolling down your Facebook feed and you see this ad, isn't it also surrounded by your "friends?" [Display Facebook's "friend" icon and the Facebook thumbs-up] Even if you can't go to the bar and order a round for your buddies, you can still "share" Budweiser with your buds. ["Share" icon, clicking sound]

And who are the people doing the sharing, anyway? While beer usually markets primarily to men, it turns out that on Facebook and other online social networks, it's women who do a lot of the sharing. And not just any women: it's moms. There's been a lot of interesting writing online about this phenomenon lately – most of it from marketers. You can read a really clear and insightful look at it here: [Show link in YouTube annotation bubble] https://goo.gl/pzFs39.

Basically, the people who produce viral content have given up on cat memes [Display "I can haz cheezburger" site logo] and lolspeak or whatever else was floating around "back in my day." The reason? Moms don't care about that stuff, and moms are "the new tastemakers."

Moms like funny pictures of babies and heartwarming stories about overcoming incredible obstacles, and, well... [Clip of the Budweiser puppy barking] videos of puppies. Budweiser knows where this video is going to go [Display Facebook logo], and if they want to reach the widest audience possible, they have to make it appealing to a certain target audience. Moms.

Meanwhile, on TV, the content doesn't really dictate how many people will see it.

They're not relying on people sharing the ad, they're simply relying on people watching TV in the first place. The best way to reach a wide audience as an advertiser on television is to

advertise during a really popular event. [Logo and sports music] The Super Bowl, for example. In 2015, 114.4 million people watched the game. That makes it the most-watched television program *ever*. That's like a third of everyone in the United States. So if you're a big company like Budweiser that wants to advertise to a lot of people all at once, [Logo and sports music] the Super Bowl is a pretty good venue for it. That's why advertisers spend tons of money to get a spot on the air during the event. A thirty-second ad cost 4.5 million dollars in 2015. That's \$150,000 dollars per second, guys! [Face other camera in fancy hat and mustache, throw monopoly money in the air] That's why you don't see cheap ads from small businesses and local car dealerships during [Logo and sports music] the Super Bowl. This is the major leagues for commercials, the Super Bowl of advertising. In fact, some people watch *just* for the ads, and they mute their TVs during the game.

So they've pretty much got the audience already just by virtue of airing during the biggest television event of the year. The only effect that the content has on viewership here is making sure that people don't walk away, mute their TVs, or change the channel. And the puppy just about takes care of that. [Another clip of the puppy] Look how cute he is! They've even dealt with the competition from the Puppy Bowl, which airs on Animal Planet at the same time as the Super Bowl.

Seriously, a heartwarming narrative and interesting music is enough to keep people tuned in. But what does the audience do with the ad now that they're watching it? How does the viewer interpret and make meaning of the advertisement? Because as much as we might think that the company that makes the ad decides what it says and what that means, it's actually the viewer that makes the majority of the meaning. Have ever you had the experience that you watch a movie —

say *Mr. Nobody*, [Display poster for the film] which is super cool and you should totally watch it — and you think, [Face second camera, looking chipper] "wow, this is so empowering because it means there's an infinite number of parallel universes in which I'm living out all of the possibilities of my life! How inspiring!" [First camera] but then you talk to a friend about it and they say, [Second camera, depressed] "no, this is so depressing because it means that there's an infinite number of parallel universes in which I'm living out all of the possibilities of my life and here I am stuck in this one. How depressing." [First camera.] That's because, even though you both saw the same movie, you each constructed your own meaning from it.

So how do people draw meaning from the Budweiser ad? Since there's such a huge, wide viewership, there's no single viewer, no one audience, and so there's no single meaning. I might watch it and start crying in a coffeeshop, and you might see it and laugh at how outlandish it is.

As much appeal as this ad has for a large range of people, it's important to think about what it might mean to different audiences.

First off, let's look at who's in the ad. Aside from the puppy so cute he'll burn your eyes right out of their sockets, we've got a white male farmer in a rural area and his really fancy horses. [Display the man, smiling] This is a guy that not everyone can relate to. I, for one, don't wear baseball caps. I'm also from a city, so this farmer's rural life doesn't look like my own. On the other hand, he is a white, American male, and so am I. This aspect of representation, being able to see people like you on screens and in books, is super important. It's so important, in fact, that I'm going to devote another entire episode to it! So hang tight for that. In the meantime, just because someone can't relate to the guy in the ad doesn't mean that it isn't effective, or that the viewer can't make some kind of meaning from it.

Being a critical reader of a mediated message, like being a critical reader of words, means looking deeper than what's on the surface. Like analyzing a book in your English class — [Second camera, holding *The Great Gatsby*] the green light symbolizes the American dream! — [First camera] you have to look for symbols, hidden messages, encoded meanings. Fancy people like this French dude [display captioned image of Roland Barthes] talk about the difference between *denotation* and *connotation*. Denotation is what the literal meaning of something is. For example, the word "chicken" denotes [Display picture of a chicken] a flightless bird that some people like to eat. [Display a cooked chicken.] But if someone calls you "chicken," that means something else entirely, right? The *connotation* of the word is something negative: a coward. So when I say, "what're you, chicken?" I'm not literally asking if you are poultry, even if that's what the word denotes.

To put it another way, the denotation is the literal layer, the meaning of the images and words that are beyond our control. In the case of the Budweiser ad, the story and all of the images and sounds on the screen were crafted by the producers. They control the denotation. But the making of connoted meaning is sort of a group effort. Connotation comes from everything around us, the whole culture, as well as our own personal experiences. So while the people who made the advertisement were definitely aware of what the connotations might be, and used them to their own advantage, the meaning isn't fully formed until we see it and interpret it through our own set of connotations, which are all slightly different.

So the guy in the ad isn't just a white, male, rural, young farmer. [Picture of the man, smiling.] That's the denotation, but the connotation is something more. [Crescendo of patriotic music] He's the wholesome, all-American, salt-of-the-earth everyman. He's the boy next door,

and he's your dad. He's what this country stands for. [Display "Uncle Sam Wants You" poster.] He's me, and he's you. The horse, [Display the horse] of course, is only a barnyard animal. But it connotes an air of elegance, freedom, loyalty, conquering the great unknown. This isn't just a horse, either. It's a Clydesdale horse. These are fancy purebreds, and they've been associated with Budweiser for almost a hundred years. [Display the Budweiser Clydesdales and wagon.] In fact, the first time they were used for promoting Bud was in 1933, when Prohibition was repealed and alcohol was legal again. Budweiser hitched a bunch of these horses to a carriage and went around delivering legal beer to people. They even went to the White House to bring booze to Franklin Roosevelt! These Clydesdales aren't just horses. They're a celebration of the American way, and the American way is drinking Budweiser. And finally, there's the puppy. [Display a picture of the puppy.] That intolerably adorable puppy. The puppy denotes a lost juvenile canine who manages to find its back to the barn where it lives. But we all know that a puppy is more powerful than that! A puppy connotes purity, innocence, love, and friendship. "Puppy love," "puppy dog eyes," "man's best friend," these are the connotations of a puppy. When the rugged-yet-clean-cut farmer man loses his puppy, he isn't mourning simply a misplaced animal. He has lost his innocence and his humanity. It's one of the biggest fears about growing up. The puppy connotes youth, and now it's gone. And only one thing will bring it back — you guessed it! [Logo] Budweiser.

Do you see how ridiculous this is? You might think I'm crazy, or that I'm reading too much into this, but it really works! The company didn't shell out literally millions of dollars in airtime and who knows how much in production costs for nothing. Advertisers and marketers have got this down to a science, and they know what they're doing. They're trying to convince

you to spend money on their product, to buy into their brand. Basically, they're trying to control you. And if you take these images and messages at face value, it's probably going to work.

Being media literate means having the tools to question things. It means always interrogating motive, production, process, distribution, reception, connotation, denotation... It means looking deeper, probing further, and above all asking questions. Because practically everything we come in contact with, whether it's an advertisement, or a video game, or a magazine, or another person, is mediated somehow. Understanding that gives you the power to be in more control of yourself and less at the mercy of THIS AMAZING BEAST OF HEAVENLY CREATION [The dog, one last time].

Alright, gang, that's all we've got time for today. If you want to know more about anything we talked about today, be sure to check out the links in the description. I'll be back soon with another exciting episode of *You and Media*. Next time we're going to talk about representation and the virtual world, so tune in if you want to know what the heck that means. See ya! [Sign off music, credits.]

Surveillance

Do you ever feel like you're being watched? Are you always looking over your shoulder at security cameras? Do you get the feeling that you're just a puppet, and someone else is pulling the strings? Well, you just might be right.

Welcome back to *You and Media*, a web series where we think critically about our mediated lives. On this episode, we're talking about *surveillance*. And while this is going to get dangerously close to conspiracy theory territory, I guarantee that everything I'm going to tell you here is legit. You really are being watched. The government is watching you, Facebook is watching you, Google is watching you, your friends, your teachers, your doctors, they're all watching. And this surveillance, this *watching over*, it's really powerful. Because it doesn't just give the watchers information – it gives them control. If knowledge is power, then the more someone knows about you, the more power they have over you.

There's this idea that European philosophers have been talking about since the Enlightenment called the *panopticon*. Basically, it's a design for a prison, because people in the 18th Century were really worried about how to control people. So this guy Jeremy Bentham came up with a totally new way of treating people that they deemed a threat to society or whatever. See, before this, when someone did something bad, they pretty much just threw the person in a dungeon somewhere until they died or escaped. Or they just executed them in public. The idea there was to make a spectacle of punishment so that people would be scared into being good.

But Jeremy Bentham had another idea, which was to actually watch the people, keep an eye on them, and try to make them into better people. His prison was designed like a circle, with

cells around the outside. You know how when it's dark outside of a window but it's light on the inside you can see in from the outside, but you can't see out from the inside? That's pretty much how this whole thing worked.

See, there would be a guard in the center, in a tower which was pitch dark on the inside. The cells would be very brightly lit, so the guard could see in, but the inmates couldn't see the guard. That's why Bentham called it a *panopticon*: *pan* means everything, and *optic* has to do with seeing. "Everything see... *on*." I guess.

Anyway, a prisoner in the panopticon would be under constant surveillance. Or more accurately, they *could* always be under surveillance, being watched, but they'd never know for sure. Which is great for the prison guard, right, because they can't see into every cell all the time. But this way they don't have to! Because the prisoners don't know when they are or aren't being watched, and so they have to act like they always are. And so with very little effort on the part of the guards, the people behave like model prisoners at all times, just in case.

That's the idea anyway. No one has ever actually built a true panopticon. There have been some prisons that were really close, like this one in Cuba. But the idea stuck around. Fast forward from the late 18th Century to 1975 when a French guy named Michel Foucault released a book called *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. He talked a lot about how Enlightenment ideas about prisons, as typified by Bentham's panopticon, changed every facet of society and ourselves.

The panoptic prison, according to Foucault, became the pattern on which all other institutions in our society are based. He says that the prison, the military, hospitals, insane asylums and orphanages (which were both still a thing at the time), schools, and even families all

worked the same way and did the same thing. They all serve to monitor, regulate, socialize, and ultimately control people. Foucault calls this "normalizing," defining a *normal* way to think and behave and then making sure that you think and behave that way.

They do this, Foucault says, by *subjecting* you, making you into a subject. This is kind of a play on words. On the one hand, it means turning you into a subject, submissive to the authority of the prison guards and of the system in general. You are subjected to them. Think of it like "a king and his subjects." But on the other hand, a subject is also a person with an identity. In language, the subject of the sentence is the focal point, the person who does the thing. To be a subject pretty much means to be an individual, to be your own person. As paradoxical as this might seem, the panoptic system actually controls you by making you into an individual, a subject with an *identity*.

The idea that people were subjects, in the 18th Century, was pretty new. Now it seems really straightforward, but it used to be that if you did a bad thing, the government would just say, "you did a bad thing and now you need to be punished for it." But now, with the emphasis on the *subject*, they could say, "you did a bad thing. That means you *are* a criminal and you need to be reformed." This idea that you are what you do is incredibly powerful. Someone who commits a crime *is* a criminal, someone who does something deviant *is* insane, a child without parents *is* an orphan, a person who fights in a war *is* a soldier. So now they can categorize you. Categories are powerful. Once they put you in a box like "criminal," they have an idea of what a criminal should be like, and they can try to make you that way. They're going to try to make you "normal."

What's a normal person? What's a perfect child? What is a sane person? Is there such a thing as a perfect soldier, or a healthy person? These values get instilled in you at every level.

Teachers, doctors, prison guards, psychologists, parents, they're all watching – off and on – judging you to see if you're a "normal subject" or if you need disciplining. We spend our entire lives in these institutions, going from one to the other, subjected to their surveillance.

Foucault explains that even though many of these institutions, group homes or orphanages, schools, factories, are seemingly designed to keep you *out* of prison, you're actually much more likely to end up in the prison the more time you spend in the other institutions. This is often called the "school-to-prison pipeline," a system that takes students and crafts them into prisoners, and then sends them to prison. Because the second you mess up, what he calls the "teacher-judge" or the "doctor-judge" or the "social worker-judge" might see you, and they'll send you to prison. And you'll be ready for it, because you've been living in the Panopticon your whole life.

This sounds a little crazy, like science fiction, right? It totally is. It's the nightmare at the heart of the novel 1984 by George Orwell. "Big Brother is watching you." The plot indicates an intrusive government that can always see you, waiting for you to take one step out of line. The government in the novel wants to destroy personal freedom, to turn every person into a loyal *subject* of the regime, a perfectly normalized being.

Okay, so that's science fiction. But Orwell wrote it because he saw the potential for that to become reality. And it kind of is reality at this point. Our government kind of is always watching us. In 2013, Edward Snowden leaked some classified information about surveillance programs, and we found out that the NSA and some agency called Five Eyes have all kinds of

ways to listen to us and watch us. Can we take a second and acknowledge that Five Eyes sounds like some kind of spooky science fiction agency? Very Orwellian, very panoptic. Apparently it's an intelligence agency alliance between the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Anyway, it turns out that the NSA has access to emails, phone records, texts, mailing lists, your Internet traffic... They were working closely with private corporations like Verizon, Microsoft, and Google to spy on citizens going about their daily lives online.

Unfortunately, this wasn't really news to anyone. We had suspected for a long time that the government had that kind of surveillance in place. It's just that now we know the truth and scope of it.

So why is this a problem, really? The government is just trying to keep an eye out to make sure that nothing bad happens. They're trying to catch terrorists before they hurt anyone, stop criminals before they can commit crimes. "NSA" is short of National *Security*Administration, after all. What's wrong with security?

The problem with security is that it comes at a price: privacy and freedom. Sometimes, that's worth it. What good are privacy and freedom if you're not safe enough to enjoy them? But that's a really slippery slope. Where do we stop? How much do we really want Big Brother watching us? It's a tough balance to strike. The question has been back in the news and the public conversation lately because of the tragic mass shooting that occurred in San Bernardino, California last year. The investigators looking into the attack are trying to retrieve information from one of the shooters' iPhone, and asked Apple to unlock it. Apple's CEO, Tim Cook, refused, saying that giving in to the FBI and providing them their customer's private information would set "a dangerous precedent," and that it would create a "threat to data security."

There's a point to be made on both sides of the argument, really. On the one hand, if the FBI can find a way to stop something like the San Bernardino shooting from happening again, that would obviously be a very good thing. But then again, we should be really careful about how much of our freedoms we give up as citizens. Benjamin Franklin once said, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." Granted, he was talking about some boring tax stuff and preparing for getting attacked by the French. But still, our country was founded in revolution against an overbearing too-powerful government, so that we could have that freedom.

When we sacrifice privacy for security, we run the risk of willingly *subjecting* ourselves to the Panopticon. Thankfully, the United States is still a democracy (well, sort of). If we don't like how snoopy our government is, we can change it. Unfortunately, it's just really hard to do that, and it takes a long time. Waiting for the candidates that share our values on the matter to come along and run for office (or even running ourselves), and then electing them is a really inefficient way to do things, and technology, surveillance technology included, develops at a much quicker rate.

Thankfully, it still seems unlikely that our government is going to turn into an Orwellian dystopia any time soon. At least, I'd like to hope not. The American people are usually pretty hesitant to sacrifice their privacy, even as issues of national security become more and more pressing. Take, for example, what happened in Dayton, Ohio, a few years ago. A private company developed a surveillance service that they wanted the local police department to implement. Basically the way it worked was that an airplane would be in the air over Dayton,

taking one picture of the entire city each second. That way, when a crime happened, they could go back to the photos of the scene of the crime and see what happened, who went where, second by second. The day they tested the system, they caught a robber within a few minutes of his committing the crime. They used it in Juarez, Mexico, to bust a whole cartel by tracing various criminals back to one headquarters.

But when the city government of Dayton had a town hall meeting with its citizens about the program, it was met with a whole lot of criticism. People just did not like the idea of constantly being watched. How was the city going to use that power? What were the limits? The people were freaked out, and angry about it, and the city ended up not implementing the system. But they didn't scrap the idea entirely! Right now, they're just using it for traffic monitoring, but there's always the possibility they can bring it back for police work.

When it comes to government, which uses surveillance against your will and often without your knowledge, people are usually pretty quick to reject it. But we do willingly and happily sign up to be watched and monitored all the time. I'm talking about commercial surveillance.

You might not realize it, but you're being watched by companies and corporations all the time, especially on the Internet. Just think about how much of the Internet is free. Do you pay to use Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Tinder, or Google and all of its services? Do you have to pay to access Buzzfeed, Twitter, or whatever else the kids are doing these days? No, you don't. Well, not with money anyway. But everything has a cost.

It's not cheap to operate a popular website. Take Facebook for example: they have to store all of that data – photos and videos and text and all that, they pay coders and creatives to develop new features and fix the existing ones, keep lawyers on retainer in case they get sued, and have enough cash leftover to keep Mark Zuckerberg a multibillionaire. And if you're not paying to have an account, then where is all that money coming from?

Mostly, it's coming from advertising and marketing. See, Facebook is, beyond a mere social networking website, a finely tuned advertising supermachine. Advertisers can tell Facebook what kinds of people they want to reach, and Facebook will make sure it gets to them. They use what they know about you to target you for advertisers. And just think about how much information they have about you. They know where you live, where you go routinely, what you do, what you like... Have you ever had the experience that you've been shopping for something online and then you get a ton of Facebook ads for that thing? They know what you buy and what you want to buy.

Well, what's so bad about that? Don't I want targeted ads so that I know how to get what I want? I'd rather get ads for things I want than for things I don't want.

Not so fast! What's the price here? What's at stake? To answer that, we're going to get back to government for a minute: well, more accurately, we're going to turn to politics. Because, let's face it, electoral politics are basically one big business.

In the new season of Netflix's series *House of Cards*, the issue of big data surveillance in politics takes on a central role. The Republican candidate in this fictional presidential race has teamed up with a search engine company, using their resources to collect data on voters and what they want from a candidate, and then manipulating search results to manipulate people, subtly

convincing them to vote for him. In retaliation, the antihero of the series, sitting President Frank Underwood considers using the National Security Administration in the same way. Let's watch! [clip from *House of Cards* Season 4, episode 7]

That's some scary stuff, especially if you watch the show and know how evil that dude is. And what's scarier is that what he's saying is very real. While there's no reason to believe that the government or any presidential candidate is watching us right now, it's all totally possible. And we know it's possible because it's exactly what advertising and marketing companies do all the time. "He can tell what you think, what you want, where you are and who you are." Frank's talking about his opponent here, but he might as well be talking about Google, or Apple, or Facebook. If you put all of that information together, all of Facebook check-ins, your photos tagged with friends, the location of your iPhone and what you shop for on Amazon, what you search on Google when you lie awake at night... If you put all of that together, that creates a pretty complete and nuanced portrait of a human being. Anyone with all of that information pretty much knows "what you think, what you want, where you are and who you are." And instead of turning "those searches into votes," they could turn them into sales.

See, that's exactly the kind of information that an advertiser wants. They want to know everything about you so that they can market to you with the most precision possible. Imagine people are movies, and an advertiser is browsing Netflix. They're scrolling through the categories, trying to pick a choice demographic – people that want their product. If all they see are genres like "Young People," "Old People," "White People," "People of Color," "Men," and "Women," it's going to be really hard to narrow their choices down to which movie (or person) they want to pick. But the more information that Netflix has, they more they can break up those

categories, to the point where you get the crazy Netflix groups like "Understated Independent Workplace Movies," or in this case, "18- to 22-year-old White Male Vegetarian College Students Who Come from Chicago, Wear Round Glasses, and Make Obscure Academic Webseries." Marketers and advertisers really do have categories this precise (okay, well almost), and it helps them only spend the money advertising to people that want to buy their product. That's what they call a target market.

All that information, all that data, websites like Google and Amazon, not to mention marketing companies that exist just for this purpose, collect it from your web browser and sell it to advertisers and marketers, who then use it to advertise directly to you. They use cookies, computer files that they place on your computer, to track all kinds of information about you: how often you visit their site, what you do there, how long you stay, where you live... Marketing companies like DoubleClick use cookies to lurk on all kinds of websites, connecting the dots between what you do on each site, creating a really specific, nuanced profile of who you are and what you do. And who owns DoubleClick? Google. They bought DoubleClick in 2008 for 3.1 billion dollars. That's how much this kind of information is worth.

Because once they have the knowledge, they can use the power. Just like Foucault's panopticon, they can control you by watching you – instead of making you into the "ideal" prisoner, or the "ideal" citizen, anyone with this kind of wealth of surveillance can turn you into the "ideal" consumer. Think about how much you use Google and its affiliate sites and services alone. You use it to ask questions, to shop, to get directions, send and receive emails... All of that gives the marketers vital information about who you are as a consumer. Now they know exactly what kinds of ads will be appealing to you and where on the Internet they should put

them so you'll see them. They know when you're on the way to work or school and when you're leaving. Maybe they know who you're talking to, and about what. Hypothetically, Google could cooperate with these marketers to influence you into behaving certain ways. Imagine, for example, that you use Google Maps on your phone to take you to grandmother's house. Now imagine that a company like Starbucks has given Google or DoubleClick a ton of money to get them more customers. Google might know that people like you often like to get coffee at this time of day, and it could take you on a route to grandmother's house that conveniently brings you past a Starbucks, hoping that you'll stop and get that latte.

This is all totally within the realm of possibility, if it isn't happening already. There is a way out, though. DoubleClick has an opt-out feature (although it doesn't opt you out of all of its features). You can disable third-party cookies and clear your cookies from your browser, but they'll just keep coming back. Besides, if you get rid of all your cookies, it'll make your experience on the Web way less convenient. All of your preferences, your login information, it's tied up in cookies. See that's pretty much the central problem here: when it comes to the government, we give up privacy for security. On the Internet, we're giving up privacy for *convenience*. And somehow, we're all okay with that. We don't even bother reading privacy policies. Confronted with "Terms & Conditions" pages, we blindly click "agree." Because we want the convenience of the Internet, and the only alternative is just to walk away.

They've got us in a tight spot. The only way to keep Google from selling your information to marketing agencies is to not use Google. And there's no way to do that without seriously impairing your ability to function in today's world. No GMail, no Google Maps, no YouTube, no Google+ (does anyone use Google+, anyway?). And of course this kind of

surveillance isn't limited to Google. Facebook does it, Twitter does it, Instagram does it, pretty much every site on the web is collecting information on you. How can you just walk away from it all?

For now, all you can do is be aware. Be conscious of who has access to your information and what they're doing with it. When you can, read privacy policies and "terms & conditions" pages. Check out the privacy settings on your web browser, on your social networks, on your phone.

"Your phone, the phone of the person sitting next to you, your neighbor's phone, and everyone you know and the three hundred million Americans you don't know. I can see you, and I can use what I see to rig this election."

Or to control you as a consumer. Whether it's the government or it's corporations, you're being watched constantly. They're using information to control your behavior, just like Foucault said in the sixties. So when they look, look right back at them, learn what they're doing and how you can stop it. Vote for candidates at every level who agree with you on issues of privacy and security. If you like your free will, do what you can to close your blinds, figuratively speaking, and shut out the surveillers. Or just accept it. If you like the convenience of the Internet, if you don't mind seeing ads for things you might want, if you trust the government to keep you safe and the advertisers to act with your interests in mind, then that's fine. Have fun. I'll be over here clearing my cookies and disconnecting my phone lines....

Well, that's all we have time for today. If you want to learn more, be sure to check out the links in the description below, and to do your own research. I'm no expert, go seek out

people who are! And be sure to check out other episodes of *You and Media*! I'll see you there.

And the NSA probably will, too. And so will Google... Bye!

Representation & the Virtual World

What do I mean when I talk about "representation?" I mean the visibility of all kinds of people in all facets of culture.

People of color and varying racial identity, people on every part of the spectra of gender and sexuality, religious diversity, economic diversity, diversity of physical, emotional, and mental ability... In the mass media, in literature, in board rooms, in classrooms, on ballots...

These are the projects of feminism, of civil rights movements, of queer rights movements. It all amounts to one basic idea: Everyone deserves to be seen and heard.

What power does the virtual world have over the real world, the one which you and I inhabit? Actually! I'm in the virtual world right now! I'm not in the real, actual world, I only exist virtually, on this screen. You can't see anything in terms of context – what's around me, outside the frame. You don't even know when I recorded this, other than it was in the past, relative to you.

That's actually a great example of one of the powers of the virtual world. We can think of what divides the *actual* – where you are – and the *virtual* – where I am – as a sort of window. A wall of a building is there to keep everything *out*: other people, the wind and the rain... But a window is there to let certain things *in*, too, like light or a cool breeze on a summer day. In your case, you've got a window open into my virtual world, letting in my image and my voice, as well as my time. You're letting me in through the virtual window of your screen.

You might think it's weird to refer to a recorded video of a real person talking as "virtual." Isn't "virtual" something to do with headsets and video games or something? Yes, that

is one kind of virtuality. But "the 'virtual' is a substitute – 'acting without agency of matter' – an immaterial proxy for the material." (Friedberg) Essentially, it is about *representation*.

If you go to a museum and see a painting of something, like a pipe, you know that that is not a *real* pipe... It's only a representation of a pipe. You can't use it, you can't touch it or smell it, and yet you know that it stands for a pipe. So it would be fair to call that a *virtual* pipe.

(So put that in your pipe and smoke it!)

That kind of representation, something that stands in for a real thing that exists or could exist in the actual world, that's called *mimetic* representation, or simply *mimesis*. That's an ancient Greek word that also gives us the English words "mimic" and "mime."

And it's actually been a big topic of debate in Media Studies and philosophy all the way back to Plato. Plato was really against all things mimetic – like the theater, especially, but also art and poetry – because he thought that they got in the way of *truth*.

That is a principle that has been adopted in some religions, too. Judaism and Islam have prohibitions against "false idols" and "graven images." Even in Christianity, actors portraying Judas in Passion plays have been murdered by angry mobs that could apparently not distinguish between truth and representation, actual and virtual.

There is something very powerful in representation that can influence the way we think, feel, and behave, and there have always been people who are afraid of that. Why is this so scary? You'd think people could tell the difference between what they see represented on a screen or in a book or on a stage and what's real.

See, as well as *mimetic* representation, which stands for a real thing in the actual world, there is also *simulacral* representation, which has no relationship to reality. This is maybe a little

closer to what you typically think of when someone says "virtual." A *simulacrum* is a "bad copy," or something that exists only virtually. If I draw a picture of a unicorn, for example, that's a simulacrum, a purely virtual form. Nowadays, we're so used to seeing simulacra that we barely notice them. Video games are often simulacral. We know that the world we play in has no equivalent in the actual world.

The movie *The Matrix* constructs a simulacral world for its characters, one which is *simulated* (see the connection between the words?) to appear normal to Keanu Reeves and the rest of the human drones. The weird thing about that movie is that within the fictional world, the simulacral world looks like a mimetic one to us...

This is confusing, and that confusion says a lot. Probably one of the most powerful things about representation is that it can be really hard to tell the difference between mimesis and simulacrum. It's easy to see something simulacral, something that does not exist in the actual world, as standing in for something that does exist.

One time in elementary school, a friend of mine and I saw a special on Animal Planet about dragons. The whole thing looked like a documentary and it followed these scientists who had found remnants of giant fire-breathing flying lizards in a cave somewhere, and they had all these digital renderings and graphs and charts and there was a chemist explaining how the whole breathing fire thing worked... My friend and I were super into dragons at the time, and we were thrilled. At the very end of the show, though, there was some disclaimer or whatever that clued us in to the fact that the whole thing was staged. That felt pretty bad – because I really liked dragons and wanted them to be real – but also because it made me feel like I was deceived. Since I was used to seeing truth or reality on Animal Planet, and this was presented in a way usually

associated with truth and reporting and science, I confused something totally fictional with reality.

Stuff like that happens more often than you'd think. That sort of rhetoric is pretty much how the show *Ancient Aliens* works. They move so quickly between basic science presented by experts and crazy theories presented by people who look like this (display the host of *Ancient Aliens*), that you can barely tell which is which, and the crazy nonsense about aliens building pyramids out of gold from Atlantis or whatever actually starts to seem legitimate.

But sometimes, maybe more often, we don't quite realize the reality of things. Since we're so used to the flood of fiction that we see on television, the barrage of "reality" shows and sitcoms and cartoons and Lifetime dramas, it can be hard to really accept and understand the truth when we do see it. We see war and disease and famine on the news, and then we walk away and forget about it. Maybe we feel a little sad and say, "oh, how terrible," but usually we don't internalize what we're seeing and what it means. I know that when I scroll through Twitter and I see all of the bad news just stacked up there, I pretty much stop noticing it: I just scroll right past it.

Some of that is because of the quantity of it, but I think it's also because mimetic representations of truth online often feel – we assume that anything *virtual* isn't *real*.

So what do we do with all of this? The idea here was to show you how tricky the virtual world is. It can have a huge effect on the actual world because sometimes, it can be hard to tell the difference. So what we see – and more crucially whom we do not see – can be a very real matter of concern. Because the "virtual window" lets certain things in, but it also acts as a frame, leaving things out. This is typically the center of any discussion of "representation." It's about all

the meanings of that word. Who is represented, meaning which people and which kinds of people do we see in the mass media? Who is representing them, meaning which individuals, if any, are standing in for the group? And how are they represented, meaning how are they portrayed? All of these sort of bleed together, and they're all connected, but we're going to try to pick it apart a little.

(Notes for the episode)

The Virtual Window, Anne Friedberg

"The window is an opening, an aperture for light and ventilation. It opens, it closes; it separates the spaces of here and there, inside and outside, in front of and behind. The window opens onto a three-dimensional world beyond: it is a membrane where surface meets depth, where transparency meets its barriers. The window is also a frame, a proscenium: its edges hold a view in place. The window reduces the outside to a two-dimensional surface; the window becomes a screen. Like the window, the screen is at once a surface and a frame — a reflective plane onto which an image is cast and a frame that limits its view. The screen is a component piece of architecture, rendering a wall permeable to ventilation in new ways: a "virtual window" that changes the materiality of built space, adding new apertures that dramatically alter our conception of space and (even more radically) of time."

Windows and screens alter our perceptions in the ways that they can introduce things into our space and time. The power of the "virtual window" is to bring us into awareness of things we don't otherwise encounter. The trouble is that the window itself is invisible, and it's easy to forget it is there at all. The danger is that in the way that it frames things, it inevitably leaves some things out. And if something isn't visible, we might forget it exists. We can forget that what we see on the screen is not the same as what exists in real life.

"We know the world by what we see: through a window, in a frame, on a screen. As we spend more of our time staring into the frames of movies, television, computers, hand-held displays — 'windows' full of moving images, text, icons, and 3-D graphics — how the world is framed may be as important as what is contained within the frame."

Beyond that, what *isn't* contained within the frame is important, as well.

"The virtual is a substitute — 'acting without agency of matter' — an immaterial proxy for the material. The term becomes a key marker of a secondary order in the relationship between the real and its copy, the original and its reproduction, the image and its likeness. ... 'Virtual' refers to the register of representation itself — but representation that can be either simulacral or directly mimetic."

The virtual can either refer to something that does indeed exist in real life (mimetic), or it can be a representation without basis in reality (simulacral). Plato hated the mimetic, because he believed that it masked the truth. A projection on a screen (or a cave wall) is only a small part of the truth behind it. This continued on through the middle ages, even today, manifesting in the outcry against violent video games, films, and television programs. For more on the simulacral, see Jean Baudrillard. The challenge, perhaps, comes from determining when a virtual image is mimetic or simulacral...

"Computer terminology invokes 'virtual' to refer to a digital object or experience without physical existence. Hence, computer discourse more exactly links the virtual with the effects of a constructed simulacrum, unhinged from a referent in the real."

In the digital age, we think of the "virtual" as being strictly simulacral — while in fact, it exists mimetically, too (in paintings, in film, etc.). So we can think of virtuality beyond just the digital. It even exists in newspapers, in books, on the stage, in photographs.

"Perhaps a polemic is needed: before the digital age, there was virtuality — painterly, photographic, cinematic, and televisual — and its aesthetics and visual systems cannot be reduced simply to information."

"The condition of the window implies a *boundary* between the perceiver and the perceived. It establishes as a condition for perception a formal *separation* between a subject who sees the world and the world that is seen, and in so doing it sets the stage, as it were, for that retreat or withdrawal of the self from the world which characterizes the dawn of the modern age. Ensconced behind the window the self becomes an observing *subject*, a *spectator*, as against a world which becomes a *spectacle*, an *object* of vision." (Robert D. Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, 1989)

The lack of distinction between mimesis and simulacrum in the virtual is that we might *also* assume that the mimetic (i.e., that which is a representation of the actual) is rather simulacral (i.e., bearing no relation to reality). This results in a passive and jaded view of the world through screens/windows/representations.

We assume that which is false to be real, and that which is real to be false.

White, Richard Dyer

"The sense that how such groups are represented is part of the process of their oppression, marginalisation or subordination. The range and fertility of such work has put those groups themselves centre-stage in both analytical and campaigning activity, and highlighted the issue of representation as politics. It has, however, had one serious drawback, long recognised in debates about women's studies. Looking, with such passion and single-mindedness, at non-dominant groups has had the effect of reproducing the same oddness, differentness, exceptionality of these groups, the feeling that they are departures from the norm. Meanwhile the norm has carried on as if it is the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human."

"It is the way that black people are marked as black (are not just 'people') in representation that has made it relatively easy to analyse their representation, whereas white people — not there as a category and everywhere everything as a fact — are difficult, if not impossible, to analyse *qua* white"

While shows like *Dora the Explorer* and *Ni-Hao Kai Lan* aim to represent cultural difference, they end up emphasizing the difference and perpetuating the "normality" of whiteness. *Dragon Tales*, on the other hand, normalizes the culture and ethnicity of its protagonists by not calling attention to the matter

"Stereotype, Realism, and the Struggle over Representation" from *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Ella Shohat & Robert Stam

"Spectators (and critics) are invested in realism because they are invested in the idea of truth, and reserve the right to confront a film with their own personal and cultural knowledge."

"That films are only representations does not prevent them from having real effects in the world; racist films can mobilize for the Ku Klux Klan, or prepare the ground for retrograde social policy."

The virtual window is permeable, and each side can have its effect on the other. What we see represented in the virtual world, on the screen, often becomes reality, or at least influences it.

"A full understanding of media representation therefore requires a comprehensive analysis of the institutions that generate and distribute mass-mediated texts as well as of the audience that receives them. Whose stories are told? By whom? How are they manufactured, disseminated, received? What are the structural mechanisms of the film and media industry?"

"The Fact of Blackness," from Black Skin White Masks, Frantz Fanon

Being looked at (represented) can be just as negative as being ignored.

"Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye."

"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey

"Cinema, for Mulvey, constitutes a representational system through which a range of pleasures may be derived, particularly 'scopophilic' pleasure, that is, the pleasure of looking. In narrative film, this takes the dominant form of men looking at women as erotic objects; men are ascribed the role of active spectator, the 'bearer of the look,' whereas women occupy the role of passive spectacle. Mulvey asserts that classical narrative systematizes these roles through camera techniques, reproducing a binary structure that mirrors gendered power relations in the social world." (from the introduction in *Critical Visions*)

Sexism/patriarchy/misogyny in the actual world translates to a visual/narrative structuring of the virtual that reproduces gendered power roles. Mulvey proposes a cinema that deconstructs those relationships, creating a critical gaze rather than a male one. This would ideally translate back to the actual world, creating critical individuals.

"[Freud] associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze."

The look is erotic and objectifying. The male gaze strips women of their subjectivity, reduces them to objects of desire.

"The mass of mainstream film, and the conventions within which it has consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy."

Mulvey suggests that the "window" or "screen" that stands between the virtual and the actual is indeed more of a one-way window (or mirror, perhaps, seeing as Lacan is about to come into play). The actual gazes into the virtual, but the virtual is oblivious to the presence of the actual...

"The cinema has structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego. The sense of forgetting the world as the ego has subsequently come to perceive it ... is nostalgically reminiscent of that pre-subjective moment of image recognition. At the same time the cinema has distinguished itself in the production of ego ideals as expressed in particular in the star system, the stars centering both their screen presence and screen story as they act out a complex process of likeness and difference (the glamorous impersonates the ordinary)."

One of the joys (and sorrows) of the cinema is that it allows for "joyful self-recognition." Seeing oneself reflected in the glamor and beauty of movie stars is a validating experience, an ego boost. If, however, one cannot see oneself reflected in the mirror of the screen (window), then one is deprived of that joy.

When it comes to the Oscars, people of color are told that excellence is a quality only attributable to white people.

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