

CRITICAL DE-CONSTRUCTION OF MEDIA MESSAGES ¹

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The aim of media literacy is “critical autonomy” or the ability to analyze the media and maximize the benefits of the media experience outside the classroom, in the students’ private use of media. Media literacy has five domains: media arts education (whose aim is to impart production skills), media education (understanding the media using the media itself e.g. TV, Internet, radio, film, etc.), media criticism (analyzing media messages), media activism (developing and implementing strategies to change harmful elements of the media system), and media advocacy (using media to promote socio-political and religious causes). Media education and criticism require a pedagogy that is democratic, participatory and dialogic. The analysis of media messages needs to come from the students themselves and not from the educator posing as a storehouse of information. This paper provides a sample of how-to-do media education and criticism using cases and insights from the Philippine media scene. It offers a guide for parents, educators and community leaders for analyzing media messages.

The terms “media education” and “media literacy” need to be clarified.

Media education is defined as “the process of teaching and learning about media; media *literacy* is the outcome – the knowledge and skills learner acquire.” ² Media scholar Buckingham says the resulting literacy from media education *necessarily* involves the ability to interpret and produce media. “Media education (therefore) aims to develop *both* critical understanding *and* active participation. It enables young people to interpret and make informed judgments as consumers of media; but it also enables them to become producers of media in their own right. Media education is about developing young people’s critical *and* creative abilities.” ³

The Center for Media Literacy – Canada shares this view of media literacy:

“Media literacy is the process of accessing, critically analyzing media messages and creating messages using media tools. The goal of media literacy is to promote autonomy through the development of analysis, reasoning, communication and self-expression skills.” ⁴

But at the same time, CML identifies five *domains* of media literacy, not simply media education leading to media literacy. The steps Buckingham describes as media education, CML distinguishes between (1) media arts education, (2) media education, and (3) media criticism. The center also refers to (4) media activism, and (5) media advocacy as integral components of media literacy. CML explains:

“Media arts education is the process of building media literacy skills through a focused and hands-on exploration of the media creation process. The goal of media arts education is to promote media literacy skills by emphasizing the process of creative self-expression.

Media education is the process of using media messages and media technologies in the context of formal education, including the process of educating teachers, parents and citizens about media literacy. The goal of media education is to understand more about how to create effective instructional environments, techniques and educational practices in order to improve people’s media literacy skills.

¹ This paper was presented at the Media Educators’ Training workshop organized by the Carmelites’ Titus Brandsma Media & Spirituality Center: Manila, July 6; Agusan del Sur, July 22; and Cebu City, August 30 (2008).

² David Buckingham, “Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture.” Cambridge: Polity (2003). p. 4.

³ Ibid. p. 4.

⁴ Renee Hobbs, “Media Literacy and the ‘Big Tent.’” Center for Media Literacy (2002-2007). Available: http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article394.html

Media criticism is the process of evaluating media messages using a variety of analytic tools, including historical, political, economic or socio-cultural perspectives. The goal of media criticism is to generate theories and models of how media shape cultural processes, social and political institutions, and individuals' beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

Media activism is the process of developing, communicating and implementing strategies to change elements of the mass media system that are most harmful to individuals, communities, institutions and cultural values. The goal of media activism is to effect change in media messages and/or media organizations, processes or systems through individual, social and political action.

Media advocacy is the process of effectively using the creation and distribution of media products or the public relations interface with existing media organizations towards a specific political, social or policy goal. The goal of media advocacy is to accomplish social, political or policy changes by influencing the media's agenda and working to communicate effectively.”⁵

In this understanding, “media arts education” engages students in the creative process of media production. Educators guide students in digital camera operations, scriptwriting for radio and television, and so on. It differs from “media education,” which uses technology and media content to gain literacy skills. Both concepts actually aim at media literacy. But, while media arts education involves production, media education uses broadcasting studios, TV programs, Internet and the like.

Both domains, however, are not mutually exclusive. They complement each other in a typical classroom setting. The same holds for the other media literacy domains. A teacher would not be able to facilitate media criticism, for example, without having a working knowledge of media, acquired either through savvy use, engagement in production, or through classroom learning, possibly coupled with visits to media outfits.

“Media activism” seeks to stem the ill-effects of media e.g., on youth. To effectively engage in this type of action requires a thorough understanding of the way media messages are produced in which case, media criticism, media arts education and media education are necessary pre-requisite activities.

“Media advocacy” seeks to re-align media's priorities towards a certain political, social or religious cause. This can be done by first engaging in “media criticism” where a group of social advocates, for example, decides to do something about media's pro-elite, pro-rich stance. The group may then seek coverage of its activities in order to reach a wider public, or engage in small- to medium-scale productions using traditional (or indigenous) media.

Let's take the example of fisher-folks in the Calariz – the provinces Cavite, Laguna and Rizal surrounding the banks of Laguna lake.

Their concern for (1) businessmen usurping their source of livelihood by building fish pens in the once free-for-all Laguna lake, (2) the use of illegal fishing methods by large businesses owning the lake, (3) the threat to their lives by the indiscriminate gun shooting of security personnel guarding the fish pens, (4) contaminated water flowing in from nearby industrial plants, and (5) the seeming lack of interest by government and mainstream media on their plight, resulted in a slide-presentation titled *Ang Dagat Ba'y Amin Pa?* (Is the sea still ours?).

The 20-minute slide-show drew the attention of both local and international stakeholders, but most especially, the big media enterprises under then President Marcos. The media became the voice of the otherwise “voiceless” fisher-folks.

Even though reclaiming the lake from business interests was not fully realized, the whole exercise empowered the fisher-folks through organization, dialogue, collective analysis, reflection as well as creative self-expression.

⁵ Renee Hobbs, “Media Literacy and the ‘Big Tent.’” Center for Media Literacy (2002-2007). Available: http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article394.html

Their concern does not directly relate to the workings of media, but what they have gone through gave them the opportunity to develop media literacy skills.

Media literacy, therefore, is a spectrum of activities treading beyond the simple building of media awareness. One may consider literacy as the end goal of a process involving media criticism, media arts education and media education. The resulting “literacy,” translated into action, could in turn manifest through media activism and/or media advocacy as in the Laguna lake example.

In formal instructional environments a comprehensive media literacy program ideally covers all these domains. And depending on available resources, a full media literacy curriculum might culminate with hands-on media production (media arts education).

Media Education in School

Author Paulo Freire’s approach to education diverts from mere storage of information, and retrieving it during examination. What he calls “problem-posing education,” opposed to “banking education,” engages students and teachers in dialogue, creative expression and meaningful discussion. This approach, Freire says, develops critical thinking, self-expression skills and active participation in solving many life issues.⁶

Freire’s problem-posing approach applies to a range of academic disciplines and to different levels of learning. Media scholar Len Masterman says it applies to media education whose goal is “critical autonomy”⁷ where students are able to analyze media on their own, outside the classroom, when the teacher is gone. Media education prepares students for their personal use of media and for whatever they encounter along the way, the unexpected and those missed inside the classroom. More than “protecting” children from the alleged ill-effects of media, media education “empowers” and maximizes the benefits of the media experience.⁸

The media teacher, in Freire’s approach, does not pose as a storehouse of information, simply imparting skills of critical inquiry to students. Criticizing and evaluating media should necessarily come from the student’s own experience of the media, her/his personal preference for media technology as well as content.

Thus, Masterman proposes teaching media education (1) in a non-hierarchical setting,⁹ where students are active analyzers and not passive listeners of the teacher’s own biases on media and media systems. Ideally, students should be able to “make their own judgments, develop the ability to analyze those judgments, and take on responsibility for their own learning” on the basis of *reference* skills the teacher imparts.¹⁰

⁶ “The two educational concepts and practices under analysis come into conflict. Banking education attempts, by mythicizing reality, to conceal certain facts which explain the way human beings exist in the world; problem-posing education sets itself the task of demythologizing. Banking education resists dialogue; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality. Banking education treats students as objects of assistance; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers. Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation.” Paulo Freire, “Pedagogy of the Oppressed.” First published in Portuguese in 1968 as “Pedagogia di Oprimido,” in English in 1970 the Continuum Publishing Company, NY. Available:

<http://marxists.anu.edu.au/subject/education/freire/pedagogy/ch02.htm>

⁷ Len Masterman, “Teaching the Media.” London: Routledge (1990). pp. 24-26.

⁸ cf. Lucina Sarmiento, “Media Education: An Overview.” In People in Communication (PIC) and Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC), “Media Education: A Training Manual.” Manila: AMIC-Philippines (1995). p. 2.

⁹ Ibid. pp. 28-31.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 28.

He also proposes the process of dialogue, reflection and action within media education. “Dialogue is the basis of both reflection and action, and the site to which they return for continuing regeneration.”¹¹ These three component parts of Freire’s formula when brought to the media classroom, Masterman says, will allow problems to surface (problem-posing approach), as opposed to “dissolving contradictions into consensus” which itself masks as *banking educational system*.¹²

Approaches to Media Literacy

My topic “Critical Deconstruction of Media Messages” falls under the media criticism domain of media literacy. We shall discuss a sample of how to analyze media messages. Examples of TV commercials and other material from the Internet will be used, so the discussion will overlap with the media education domain. Hopefully, this session moves later into media activism and advocacy.

I will anchor my presentation on the prescribed methodology for media criticism by the Center for Media Literacy in Canada. We shall tackle five areas of concern and corresponding questions, upon which media criticism can be made. I will also insert where I see fit, the five approaches to media literacy forwarded in Art Silverblatt and colleagues’ 1999 release “Approaches to Media Literacy, A Handbook.” These two thinking combined provides a tool for better understanding and appreciation of media.¹³

The areas of concern described in later sections and the corresponding questions for each area can relate to films, TV and radio programs, and to printed materials like news and posters. The examples in the following sections revolve around the widely-recognized mainstream media, including advertisements, advertorials and info-mercials. But the approaches also apply to new media forms and content e.g. blogs, websites, online games, and even cellphone messages.

Other approaches by known authors and agencies advocating media literacy are not discounted here. Readers are, in fact, urged to read “Media Education: A Teaching Manual” (1995) jointly authored by PIC (People in Communication, Manila) and AMIC (Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre, Singapore). This resource manual is directed to teachers, parents and community leaders, and describes the *how-to’s* of media education using illustrations, learning activities, exercises and supplementary reading material.

Len Masterman’s “Teaching the Media” (1990), the *gospel* for media teachers, should also be a major read for parents and media educators. This book comprehensively describes the *why’s*, *how’s* and *how-to’s* of media education prescribed by someone considered in the West to be the “father of media education.” David Buckingham’s “Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture” (2003) is a worthy read for those seriously pursuing advocacy in media literacy. While examples from the Philippines are mostly cited in this paper, it remains a simple supplement to great works by these and other known authors in the field.

Media’s Influence

After all that has been said about manipulation (or deception) by media, there are still genuine public service messages in today’s electronic (and digital) information exchange. One could think of religious

¹¹ Ibid. p. 32.

¹² Ibid. p. 33.

¹³ This paper does not seek to provide a final word on analyzing media messages. It neither prescribes a definitive approach to media criticism. Doing so will restrict creativity which should otherwise be free-flowing in instructional settings given that learners have different levels of media exposure, preference and use. The media continue to evolve in terms of content and distribution. In the same way, media pedagogy should adopt, wherever appropriate, newer approaches forwarded by advancing thought in media studies and the related sciences.

The goal of this paper is to expound, however in brief a manner, the two approaches which commonly apply to the range of operative media, and to different texts, images and narratives mediated in the present communication landscape.

programming as example, which seeks moral formation, and as they remain true to the origins of their faith, they could hardly qualify as manipulative or deceptive. The coverage of political exercises as well as crisis situations may also be cited as an example in so far as it is conducted in a fair, accurate and objective manner.

As to the matter of “influence,” it can be said, however, that *all* media messages exert influence on audiences notwithstanding demographics, education or personal background. Degrees of influence could vary considering factors like exposure, media used, social environment, and psychological makeup. The actual influence (behavior or worldview resulting from exposure) may also not contribute to social, moral or cultural growth. But the fact remains: In a media-saturated environment, media means influence! Stuart Hall:

*As social groups and classes live... increasingly fragmented and sectionally differentiated lives, the mass media are more and more responsible (a) for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an ‘image of the lives, meanings, practices and values of other groups and classes; (b) for providing the images, representations and ideas around which the social totality, composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces can be coherently grasped as a whole. This is the first of the great cultural functions of the modern media: the provision and the selective construction of social knowledge.*¹⁴

Media has the ability to shape world-views by reinforcing them, maintaining them *or* negating them altogether. No individual is able to revert to his/her original state of mind (or psychology) after engaging in communication whether face-to-face, group, (mass) mediated communications or via electronic/digital means.

De-constructing Media Messages

The process of “de-constructing” involves breaking down a complete whole into its component parts. Applied to media criticism, deconstruction means analyzing a mediated text, image or narrative to understand its two levels of meaning – denotative meaning and connotative meaning.¹⁵ “Denotative meaning” is simply the message itself conveyed through the obvious elements of a given text, image or narrative e.g., the words and pictures. This is the meaning derived from what was perceived by the senses e.g. read or heard. “Connotative meaning” has something to do with symbols and the association of symbols with either or both past experience and knowledge shared by members of a social group or the society at large.

Deconstructing media starts with selecting a media text, image or narrative and subjecting it to analysis. To aid the analysis, the following five concepts of CML-Canada and Silverblatt’s five approaches to media literacy are given:

1. **All media messages are constructed.** A team of experts delivers what people see and hear on the media. Someone or some people are responsible for wording, sequencing and packaging media messages for intended audiences. Even if it may seem that they are simply conveying age-old information, people behind the production become “creators” of what eventually passes for broadcasting, or released as film.

In this first step of media criticism, we need to answer the question: *Who created this message?* Knowing the million-Pesos-corporation behind a production brings its credibility to the fore. This facilitates validating its claim e.g. in an ad campaigns, and subjecting those claims to reality check.

In the Philippines, ABS-CBN heads the list of media giants – owning an impressive range of media from broadcasting stations, cable TV network, a film production company, newspaper, and Internet portal not to mention its stake in the largest utility production and distribution companies in the country. The PCIJ’s

¹⁴ Quoted in Len Masterman, “Teaching the Media.” London: Routledge (1990). p. 4.

¹⁵ Franz-Josef Eilers, “Communicating in Community, Introduction to Social Communication.” Manila: Logos (1994). p. 26.

(Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism) 25 most influential personalities for 2002 include five executives and celebrities affiliated with ABS-CBN, with Gabby Lopes, Charo Santos-Concio and Sharon Cuneta topping the list.¹⁶

Often, however, business outfits guise themselves behind media personalities to make claims or campaign on their behalf. The next question to answer is then: *Who is communicating to me?* Who is on my TV screen urging me to buy this product?

The so-called “stars” of the entertainment industry have been labeled “stars” (not artists) not only because they can act out roles in TV or film. They have also become “public relation machines” of their own telenovelas, teleseryes, films and, yes, even consumer products. One of the things entertainment personalities learn as they rise from obscurity to fame is “marketing” and the art of “public relations,” so it is observed. Fresh from the *discovery mill* that gave them star status, young personalities learn sounding like the most experienced anchors and spin doctors in the business to woo audiences to watch, buy, patronize.

The most bankable stars today have become endorsers of consumer products (and services) that flood the market. Because of the “personality cult”¹⁷ built for them by managers, talent centers and the entertainment press, the celebrity's power to elevate product status from unknown to saleable, ready for the public's take, is made.

However, one could question whether the media communicator is credible and true. Are celebrity endorsers really qualified to endorse medical products or goods promising eternal health and beauty; and what about celebrities dabbling in politics? Are they sufficiently aware of societal issues, of the cause they are espousing? Are they in a position to make categorical choices outside the field of entertainment?

Politics used to be the exclusive domain of lawyers, political science experts and spin-doctors. But it began encroaching the entertainment scene (or vice-versa) when actor-turned-politician Joseph Estrada became president in 1998. Politicians have realized that showbiz press has the ability to raise public awareness of them and ultimately, push their chance to head the election race.

In 2004, the degree of involvement by the entertainment press, celebrities and news anchors in the then political race has been questioned heavily by critics and analysts alike. Because “media is influence,” political candidates scrambled for so-called “media mileage” by enlisting celebrity endorsers, and paying huge sums of cash in exchange for interviews, press conferences, and even cameo appearances in sitcoms (situational comedies on television).

It became common-place in 2004 for political candidates to associate their name with known celebrities who in turn offer their services to politicians with a price tag. A complete package of celebrity endorsement includes appearance in TV ads, posters, joining rallies and provincial sorties. A report from the PCIJ:¹⁸

Movie scribe Lolit Solis says the entertainment press is the best way for a politician to create mass awareness. She cites the case of Senator Manuel Villar, whom she helped win in the 2001 senatorial elections through the "Sipag at Tiyaga" TV ads that featured one of her wards, sexy star Rosanna Roces. From somewhere in the 15th to 20th place in pre-election surveys, Villar eventually rose to the No. 7 slot.

¹⁶ Public Eye: “The Power 25.” Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (July-Oct 2002 vol. VIII, no. 3).

Available: <http://www.pcij.org/imag/PublicEye/power252.html>

¹⁷ “Personality cult” means extreme following by a large number of people to a celebrity (or public figure), not simply patronizing his/her movies and TV shows, but having a keen interest in the celebrity’s private life, emulating his/her looks, mannerism, and lifestyle (including which vitamins to take, milk to drink, shampoo to use, etc).

¹⁸ Chay Hofilena & Aries Rufo, “The Showbiz Press Gets Into Politics.” Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (May 2004). Available: <http://www.pcij.org/stories/2004/media.html>

If the 2001 elections' winner via celebrity endorsement was Villar, this year (2004) it is senatorial opposition candidate Maria Ana Consuelo "Jamby" Madrigal, who has a celebrity campaigner in popular young star Judy Ann "Juday" Santos.

From No. 19 in February surveys, Madrigal is now at No. 8, a showing that many political analysts credit to Juday's endorsement of Jamby's "Kontra Pulitika" campaign.

Whenever possible, a healthy investigation of the track record and present concern of the media communicator (business outfits and celebrity endorsers) will help scrutiny for accuracy, validity and truthfulness. Adherence to moral standards and consistency to this cause extended over a period of time may also constitute the criteria for believing what the communicator says or does on screen.

Silverblatt and colleagues' (1999) "nonverbal communication analysis"¹⁹ may be evoked in this part of media criticism. Nonverbal communication analysis, the scholars say, "provides insight into the ways in which nonverbal communication behaviors reinforce (or contradict) verbal messages in the media." By doing this, audiences will gain further insight into the character and disposition of the media communicator.

A significant part of communication is conveyed nonverbally. By engaging in nonverbal analysis, audiences will be able to identify signs inserted to project a certain image or impression. These signs give clues about the "attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, and myths that define a culture." Certain types of nonverbal behaviors to look out for include: facial expressions, eye behaviors, posture, gestures, proxemic communication (the role of distance in communication), tactile communication, physical appearance, accessories, and vocalic communication (the quality of voice). This is important to understand better what the media communicate.

In the Philippines, we are all too familiar with President Arroyo's televised apology for her participation in the Hello Garci scandal. Even government employees think the whole exercise was contrived and carefully managed e.g. close-up shot focusing the "sincere" eye, controlled movements of the cheekbone and eye brows, etc. to ensure that the message is conveyed.

2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules. Media messages go through cycles of design-and-redesign before the final "go" for airing is given. They are carried by a choice of media whose appeal to intended audiences is backed by solid market research. After story boards²⁰ have been drawn, image models are chosen and sample shots taken. Then follow image enhancement and re-enhancement until the final product is ripe for the viewers' taking.

Each medium of communication has possibilities and limitations, which producers (scriptwriters, art directors, etc) take to heart when encoding messages. "Time," for example, is an issue in broadcasting. The *why-should-I-buy* this product should be delivered in 60 seconds, sometimes less. Brand names need emphasis within a similar span of time. So listening to radio commercials, owing to the fact that radio is an aural medium with no visual reinforcement, sometimes reaches a point of exasperation with the numerous repetitions of brand names.

Video streaming is possible on the Internet and extremely large files of graphics can be accommodated. But online communication, many observe, is still largely governed by text. Email is a huge staple in the workplace compared to audio-visual communication forms so much so that emoticons are used to simulate face-to-face, personal communication. In schools, the Internet finds most of its usefulness by aiding research of largely text-based information.

¹⁹ Art Silverblatt, et.al., "Approaches to Media Literacy, A Handbook." New York: M.E. Sharpe (1999). pp. 102-128

²⁰ Story boards are planning tools for advertisers, TV and film producers, theater directors and playwrights. They contain sequence of illustrations, images and graphics to layout scenes, as well as visualize movement and sequencing of events from where viewers will derive the content and information.

Outside school, online gaming is a clear exception but on a general scale, text still rules Internet communications. And for this, certain conventions guide how messages are encoded.

One example is the diversion from the linear form of reading texts, owing to the existence of *hyperlinks* in Internet communications. When clicked, hyperlinks²¹ lead users to related Internet sites or sections within the same site (or portal) allowing cross-reference during research. It's like reading sections of different books, all at the same time. Hyperlinking has been utilized by web designers to produce the kind of websites we find today.

Some TV commercials are now a product of digital artistry; showing crisper images, vivid colors and CD-quality sound. *A shiny head of jet-black hair falls back combed and perfect after swishing high up in the air. This is the promise of shampoos in the market today. Strangely though, this is never seen happening on the streets of Manila. Hair is unkempt without complimentary gels and spray.* Digital artistry, even if it's downright deception, is used to sell and raise profit.

What (other) creative techniques are used to attract (audience) attention? Is it the emotion-driven story-line that attracts me? Or is it the glitzy lifestyle of the young actors on screen? Do I find amusing the outrageously funny catch-on phrases uttered by the actors? Students must provide answers and subject media to "reality check" with reference to their own lives and those around them.

Creative writing in the media reach workplaces (and classrooms) spawning humor and feel-good moments among peers. This is "memory recall" at work. A known positive response to advertising, memory recall extends the media experience outside the little screen. Advertisers hope that that experience ultimately reaches retail outlets where advertising's end-goal is finally realized.

Silverblatt and colleagues (1999) describes an approach to media literacy called "production analysis"²² which can be evoked at this point in our media criticism. Here, stylistic elements of media presentations are identified and scrutinized to deeper understand content and information. Elements such as editing, composition, point of view, angle, connotation, graphics, color, lightning, shape, movement, scale, sound and special effects are put together to elicit response be it intellectual, affective of psycho-motor. Identifying these elements will help towards increased appreciation of media content and how they affect audiences.

The blockbuster movie "The Exorcist" (1971) is said to have employed a number of audiovisual techniques to heighten audience response of fear, agitation and shock. In his seminal work "Media Sexploitation" Wilson Brian Key (1974) identifies the following:²³ (1) full-screen "tachistoscopic displays" (sudden flashes of light which are actually death mask apparitions). The use of tachistoschopes in medicine, back then, is know to treat psychoneurosis and hypertension. (2) Sexually provocative postures and gestures by the victim, Regan, who is supposed to be 12 years old. There are scenes of genital exposure and masturbation, etc. (3) Perceptual overload or the "McLuhan Effect" (quick cut transitions in and out of seemingly unrelated scenes forming a mosaic of visual impression). (4) Auditory archetypes. Director Friedkin admits to using natural sound effects e.g. the sound of agitated bees, and terrified squealing of pigs recorded, re-recorded at different frequencies and then engineered into the movie's soundtrack.

Production analysis looks closely at editing techniques (the selection and arrangement of information), point of view (who tells the story, and how was it conveyed), angling (camera orientations and how they affect audiences), connotation (what meanings are evoked by media texts – written, visual and aural – "beyond their literal, dictionary definition"), graphics (the sign system used to communicate via the eye), color (what emotional responses are evoked from the communicators' color choice), lighting (what emotional responses are derived from a media presentation's use of light?), shape (and lines, and the meanings they evoke),

²¹ John Pavlik & Shawn McIntosh, "Converging Media, An Introduction to Mass Communication." Boston: Pearson Education (2004). p. 21.

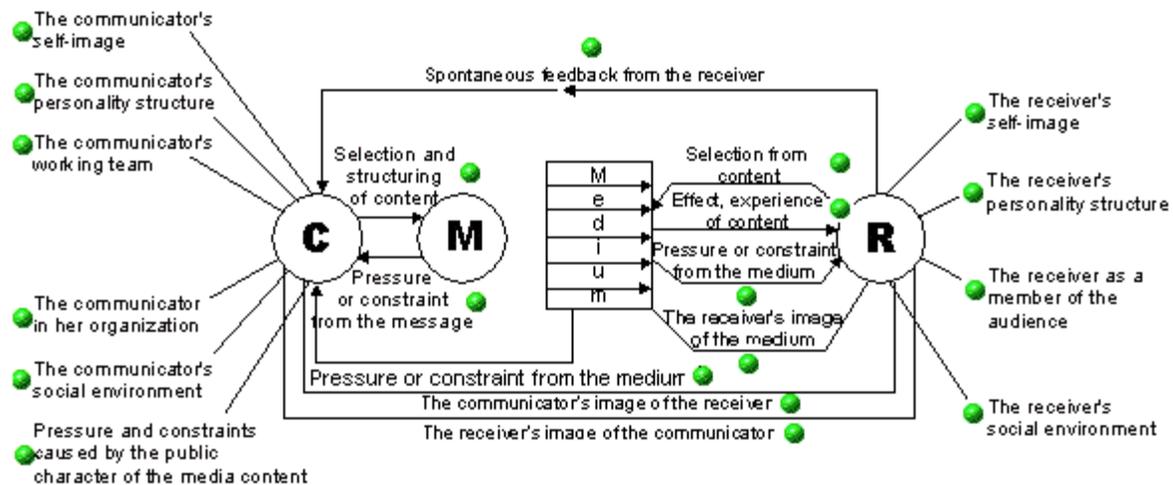
²² Art Siverblatt, et.al., "Approaches to Media Literacy, A Handbook." New York: M.E. Sharpe (1999). pp. 196-240.

²³ Wilson Brian Key, "Media Sexploitation." New Jersey: Prentice-Hall (1976). pp. 98-111.

movement (and its “dramatic impact on viewers”), scale (relative sizes of objects that “influences audiences’ perception of the events portrayed”), sound (including the dialogue, background sound and music), special effects (and how they “create whatever can be conjured up in the imagination”).

3. **Different people experience the same media message differently.** The third question is: *How might different people understand this message differently?* People have different reactions to media messages. They interpret messages differently. They perceive meaning differently (**Selective Perception Theory**).

The reason can be taken from the **Model of Mass Media** by theorist G. Maletzke (1963). He says, individuals each have “psychological” and “social filters” affecting how they communicate as well as how they receive, perceive and interpret meaning.²⁴



G. Maletzke: **Model of Mass Communication**²⁵

We already hinted on how media communicators communicate to target audiences, using results of market research to back their claims and package the information. They also communicate on the basis of their personality, disposition and self-image (psychological filters) as well as their social environment, e.g. the media outfit or advertising office where they work, membership in social group/s, Church, peers and clients (social filters).

Audiences receive media messages on the same bases. As a result, they may opt not to watch or listen, if the act does not gratify any need, wish or desire (**Uses and Gratifications Theory**). If they do, they carefully choose which programs to watch (**Selective Exposure Theory**) and select the input/s worth remembering (**Selective Retention Theory**). These dynamics are often internal and unconscious. *But they are happening in every individual!* These dynamics are dictated by the person’s psychological and social filters. But what factors make up these filters?

The Center for Applied Christian Ethics (CACE) of Wheaton College, Illinois has identified 10 factors shaping moral growth.²⁶ These factors help create what Maletzke calls social and psychological filters:

- **Family Role Models** – parents or other family members
- **Other Role Models** – educators, coaches, friends, leaders

²⁴ William Thorn, “Models of Church and Communication.” In Paul Soukup (ed.), *Communication, Culture and Theology: Media, Culture and Catholicism*. Kansas: Sheed & Ward (1996). pp. 87-88.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 87; Refer also to Mick Underwood, “Mass Media: Maletzke’s Model.” UK: Communication, Cultural & Media Studies (2008). Available: <http://www.cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/MUHome/cshtml/media/mc.html>

²⁶ “Barriers to Moral Development, Part II: Shaping Moral Growth.” Center for Applied Christian Ethics of Wheaton College, Illinois (2001). Available: <http://www.wheaton.edu/CACE/resources/onlinearticles/barriermoraldevelop2.htm>

- **Community** – faith community, neighborhood, or any other community
- **Commitment to Personal Accountability** – mutual close friendships in which accountability is a key factor
- **Experiences interacting with acknowledged moral leaders**
- **Learning from moral failures** – of self (this requires honesty with self), and of others
- **Practicing moral judgment and action** – by facing tough challenges, and meeting the expectations of others
- **Cultivation of moral insight through direct instruction in ethical theory**
- **Heightening of moral awareness** – through film, literature, or experiences such as mission trips in the developing world (or other interaction with the impoverished)
- **Commitment to Biblical standards** – leading to a “moral compass”

A known author, whose work was cited in “Communication Research Trends” (California, US), has identified eight similar factors, namely: (1) the family, (2) friends and social network, (3) past experiences, (4) the media, (5) the environment, including nature, (6) the Church, (7) school, and (8) workplace. CACE’s listing can relate to one or the other in this list.

When faced with a communication input, we tend to evaluate that input according to our repository of moral guidelines and worldviews shaped by these moral factors. Either we confirm those guidelines (worldviews), maintain them, or negate them altogether based on the acquired input. Keeping these concepts in mind brings forth three realizations:

(1) In this age where media is ubiquitous and often blamed for eroding values, disintegration of families, etc., particular emphasis should be given to personal, face-to-face communication.²⁷ Dialogue in the family, in school, in Church, and generally in communities – in as much as they shape moral guidelines and worldviews – should be promoted. Jesuit Paul Soukup calls such grassroots communication the realm of “Catholic common sense living.” Soukup says moral development takes place in this realm, not so much through mass-mediated preaching and teaching. This is where people “see how they (Christians) love one another.”²⁸

(2) I wish re-draw attention to Maletzke’s “social/ psychological filters” and the factors that shape them. Some communication inputs pass through (or blocked by) these filters, meaning, they are agreed upon, given consideration or accepted immediately by the recipient. Some inputs are rejected all at once because they do not conform to the recipients’ moral benchmark or worldview.

Again, these are internal dynamics which happen and continues to happen in every individual. *We question people, ideas and things on the basis of what we know, and compare them with what other people have said or how past experiences have shaped the kind of persons we are now.*

What if what we already know come from our family steeped in love and concern for one another? What if our school learning has impacted us so positively, it helped our integral personal development? What if the Church has taught us and continues to teach us the way of good? What if our basis for questioning is the Word of God, or what our parish priest has said, or what our spiritual director has said? The media will struggle penetrating filters formed by factors like these.

(3) A third realization is that media education, which Pope Benedict XVI says *forms the conscience* for effective media use, can be gained *secondarily* in learning institutions but should start *first and foremost* in

²⁷ “We are not to lose sight of the truth that it is the person and not the technology that is the best means of communication especially in Asian cultures. Despite the new communication technologies, we should not forget that it is people which matter most. NCTs must help, not enslave them. Personal relationships, a warm smile, time for one another are still important. The advent of NCTs should not undermine or diminish *human* and traditional means of communication.” ^{2nd} Bishops’ Institute for Social Communication, *BISCOM II* (1999), Orientations no. 2.

²⁸ Paul Soukup, “The Church as Moral Communicator.” In Philip Rossi and Paul Soukup (eds.): “Mass Media and the Moral Imagination.” Kansas, MO: Sheed & Ward (1994). pp. 200-203.

the home.²⁹ The home is after all where the media is first used with TV being branded as “surrogate parents” to pre-school children. As children grow up, the home is also where the media is mostly used in a private capacity – in the children’s room or when simply *chilling out*.³⁰ Therefore, the family should be the *haven* where children learn and develop basic media literacy skills.³¹ The more sophisticated media reading (and production) skills can be gained in Church and school.

Silverblatt and colleagues’ (1999) “autobiographical analysis”³² can be used at this stage of media criticism. Autobiographical analysis “analyz(es) media presentations within the context of one’s own experiences, giving insight into media content, including characterization, plot conventions, worldview and messages regarding success and violence.” Autobiographical analysis is audience-driven, and factors like psychological make-up, social involvement, education, and those mentioned above come into play.

In this approach, students will engage in narrative reconstruction (“recounting stories they have seen, heard or read in order to gain perspective of their understanding of media content”), affective response analysis (the formation of self-concept through analysis of emotional reactions to media programs taking into consideration personal belief systems, and coping strategies), media production (or “media arts education,” applying media literacy concepts in a practical, hands-on setting), and media chronicling (study of the personal significance of different media to different people, e.g. sentimental value of a genre of music to members of a particular generation).

Students will then draw empowerment strategies (“media activism”) e.g. discussing media content with friends, exercising critical choices in personal use of media, writing letters to editors, boycotting particular programs, promoting media literacy in schools, and joining media literacy organizations. They may even engage in “emancipatory media programming,” or the production of “programs that challenge the institutions and values of the dominant culture.”

4. Media have embedded values and points of view. The media cannot present the full reality of a situation, only parts of it. The TV screen cannot display the full splendor of a famous landscape, only a fraction of it. *We can only get a glimpse of reality through the media but nothing compares with first-hand experience, an actual visit and surveying the site with the naked eye.* Students will learn this fully once they get into media arts education. They will know that what they see on TV is only a piece of reality offered to them by someone else.

The concept of reality in media is often skewed in favor of the bias and preference of media owners, producers, anchors, those grinding the reel, and dictating camera angles. What these people wish to show is what audiences get. PCIJ reports:³³

²⁹ “Educating children to be discriminating in their use of the media is a responsibility of parents, Church, and school. The role of parents is of primary importance. They have a right and duty to ensure the prudent use of the media by training the conscience of their children to express sound and objective judgments which will then guide them in choosing or rejecting programmes available (cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 76). In doing so, parents should have the encouragement and assistance of schools and parishes in ensuring that this difficult, though satisfying, aspect of parenting is supported by the wider community.” Pope Benedict XVI, “Message for 41st World Communications Day 2007.” Available: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20070124_41st-world-communications-day_en.html

³⁰ *Chill out* is a loose term for relaxation used by young people today.

³¹ Nos. 2 & 3 Recommendations of the 8th annual Bishops’ Meet, “Family and Communication, Communication in the Family.” FABC-Office of Social Communication: Negombo, Sri Lanka (2003). Available: <http://www.fabc.org/offices/osc/docs/pdf/bm2003.pdf> Read also **FABC Paper No. 110** (2004) which contains the papers and final statement of the 8th annual Bishops’ Meet

³² Art Silverblatt, et.al., “Approaches to Media Literacy, A Handbook.” New York: M.E. Sharpe (1999). pp. 66-94

³³ Public Eye – “Lords of the Press.” Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (April-June 1999 vol. IV no. 2). Available: <http://www.pcij.org/imag/PublicEye/lords4.html>

Manila Bulletin owner Emilio Yap is said to be running his businesses with an iron hand. He approves everyday the lineup of stories for the next day's paper. He also instructs editors on which stories cannot come out and which stories should be prominently displayed. "No dissension is allowed. It's always a monologue when he talks in board meetings, no one dares disagree with him."

Yap's daily interventions at the paper seem to have two objectives: to use the Bulletin as a jump-off point to social prominence and as a springboard for protecting and advancing his business interests. Yap owns: Philippine Trust Co., US Automotive Co. Inc., Bataan Shipyard and Engineering Co., Manila Prince Hotel Inc., Philippine Dockyard Corp., Philippine President Lines Inc., Manila International Port Terminal, and Liwayway Publishing Inc.

In this part of media criticism, we need to ask: *What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted, from this message?* Our analysis relates to the first question posed earlier: who devised the message and who communicates to me? Often, what we see and hear on media reflect the ideologies, lifestyles and worldviews of people behind the production and those who own the media outfit. Civil critics have then turned also into media advocates to ensure objectivity and fairness in media coverage. Particularly when conflict of interests may arise, e.g. *the recent battle over ownership of electric company Meralco*, critics are wary audiences might be swayed towards what the media simply says rather than have both sides of the story.

Media cannot fully explore social issues and narratives of public interests considering the technical limitations and broadcasting rules by which they operate. A 60-second TV news clip could not present all sides of a story. Audiences are then left simply with sound bites and the briefest video clips to understand a particular story. Many elements of the story are truncated, making it difficult for audiences to otherwise, draw an objective opinion about the news.

Silverblatt and colleagues (1999) suggest "ideological analysis"³⁴ in this part of media criticism. This type of analysis aims at "understanding media content as a vehicle which shapes, reflects and reinforces ideology³⁵ within a culture."

To this end, students shall engage in organizational analysis (the study of ownership patterns in media industries), worldview analysis (the kind of world media communicators wish to project through the message), point of view analysis (what point of view, and by whom, was expressed through the message?), narrative analysis (what is the story in the message, which audiences are supposed to believe in?), genre analysis (study of the "type, class or category of the artistic work" e.g. horror, romance, sci-fi, etc.), and production analysis (study of the "style, and attributes of a media production, which shape the interpretation of the message"). A report from the PCIJ:³⁶

The founder of the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Eugenia Apostol, laments that after People Power I the media have not fully taken advantage of the freedom they had gained. Today's media has too much fluff, sensationalism and mediocre reporting. She thinks that media ownership is an important factor.

"Ownership is not just about who controls the finances," she says. "Media is really owned by advertising people because every paper has to have three-fourths of its papers devoted to ads in order to survive."

She rues how advertising has dominated television and complains especially about the proliferation of shampoo ads. Apostol asks, "Don't Filipinos do anything else besides washing their hair?" She grumbles

³⁴ Art Silverblatt, et.al., "Approaches to Media Literacy, A Handbook." New York: M.E. Sharpe (1999). pp. 5-47

³⁵ "Ideology," Silverblatt says, "has political implications" but it also "contain(s) assumptions about how the world should operate, who should oversee this world, and the proper and appropriate relationships among its inhabitants." "The media have emerged as a principal means by which ideology is introduced and reinforced within contemporary culture." Ibid. pp. 3-4.

³⁶ EDSA 20th Anniversary Edition of the "Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism" (Jan-Feb 2006). Available: <http://www.pcij.org/i-report/edsa20/eggie-apostol2.html>

about the race for ratings, which has pushed news programs to the very late hours to make way for soap operas.

We can also evoke Silverblatt and colleagues' (1999) "mythic analysis"³⁷ in this part of media criticism. Myth is "any real or fictitious story, recurring theme, or character type that gives expression to deep, commonly felt emotions. Myths can be nature myths (explanations for natural events), historical myths ("chronicle significant events and rulers of civilizations), or metaphysical myths (which furnish insight into creation, birth, death, divine presence, good and evil, and afterlife). Myths "deal with the deep truth of human experience" and media often elaborate or challenge them in media productions.

William Fore contrasts some valued Christian myths with those communicated by television:³⁸

Christian Myth	What is it about?	TV's contrasting myths/ views
The Genesis Story	Goodness of God God's providence Value of human life Harmony in nature Equality of human beings Man's interrelatedness with nature	"The Technique" (There is a solution to every problem e.g. gadgets, way of life, etc) Consumption and waste Young, white, unmarried individuals are given preference "over" old, married, colored or minorities
The Story of the Fall	Evil comes from man's self-centeredness and pride	Narcissism Self-glorification Self-gratification
The Covenant Story	Reconciliation after "the fall" God blesses His people and asks that they worship Him and no other less-than-God gods	Look highly at beauty, richness, power and success [Be envious, be very envious.] ³⁰
The Kingdom of God	Man is the temple of the Spirit The Kingdom of God is within us, not something out there Hope in the promises of God	Consumption is inherently good Everything in the world can be bought God is absent
Jesus, servant and savior	Jesus is the key image which guides both the Christian's personal life and the life of the Church	[Avenge any wrong doing by anybody; the sooner the better. Bad karma follows any wrong doing.] ³⁹ Consumption is the guide to both personal and corporate life.

Because myths exist to "provide meaning to man's existence" ("inspire awe, facilitate self-actualization, provide order, instruct, and promote social solidarity"), they are bound to be accepted without question. Myths in certain media productions, however, do not necessarily conform with established and traditional myth sources. This type of inquiry would identify mythic elements in media programs, help uncover the meaning of media presentations, and determine how they (can) influence contemporary life.

5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power. The question here is: *why is this message being sent?* There are many examples of how media get audiences glued to their programs and rake

³⁷ Art Silverblatt, et.al., "Approaches to Media Literacy, A Handbook." New York: M.E. Sharpe (1999). pp. 143-194

³⁸ William Fore, "Television and Religion, The Shaping of Faith, Values and Culture." Augsburg: SBS Press (1987).

Available: <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=2236&C=2054>

³⁹ Fore did not mention these points but were added here by the author. In 2002, a TV ad of a facial lotion showed a girl in her teens telling viewers: "Be envious, be very envious." It did not stay long in the airwaves. In telenovelas/ seryes and films, stories involve protagonists suffering from the machination of evil antagonists. The plot thickens, building excitement upon viewers and towards the end, by sudden but predictable twist of fate "sweet revenge" befalls the antagonists either by natural means (believed to be "bad karma") or retribution, physical or otherwise, exacted by the protagonists themselves.

in revenues from advertisers and sponsors. Audiences fall prey to the hands of media enterprises and are actually “sold” by them in exchange for profit. Another report from the PCIJ: ⁴⁰

A 2003 study by advertising giant McCann-Erickson found that media have become "surrogate parents" to the country's youth. The media act as arbitrators of right and wrong, hip and cool, what's in and what's as passe as last year's ponchos. TV viewership especially rates high among the youth who spend about eight to 14 hours a week watching TV.

Teens are a fickle market with no brand loyalty, says Art Ilano, assistant marketing professor at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. They switch products easier, unlike older markets that tend to settle for certain brands. Because of this, companies have no choice but to bombard the youth market with constant reminders to "Buy me! Buy me!" And boy, do they bombard.

According to market research company AC Nielsen, the personal-care industry poured P23.4 billion in advertisements in 2004, a quarter higher than in 2003. In comparison, telecommunications is a distant second at P13 billion, and we already know how ubiquitous mobile-phone ads are. At P6 billion a year, skincare is second to haircare in ad expenditures, which stand at P10 billion (oral care is third at P3 billion).

Programs are conceived with a target audience in mind. A media program gets released or aired with a feasibility study (a cost and benefit comparative study) to support it. Members of the audience are already known for specific programs and by “being known” means that their preferences are known, their lifestyle and media habits are documented in surveys and market researches. Some support agency, if not the media enterprise itself, gathers this information in favor of media outfits who acquire their services for a fee. A market research study which found Filipinos’ preference for “tingi” (by-the-piece) buying: ⁴¹

The preponderance of the tingi system is borne out by a consumer preferences survey of Synovate, the market research arm of global communications specialist Aegis Group PLC. Sixty-three percent of the respondents bought items in tingi, with the D and E segments making up the majority. Of those who live by tingi, 17 percent said they bought nonfood items while 94 percent said they bought food, primarily cooking oil, soy sauce, vinegar, salt, and sugar.

Reasons Consumers Buy Sachet/Mini Size and Tingi

REASON	MINI (%)	TINGI (%)
Price (e.g. cheap, affordable, can buy with just P1)	42	32
Economy (e.g. fits the budget, able to save, just the right amount)	39	29
Contents (e.g. many contents, small size, little content)	1	1
Usage (e.g. easy to carry, can control usage, good for 2 persons)	31	17
Purchase (e.g. readily available, to save time in buying)	32	46

Source: Asiabus April 2004, Synovate Philippines

The unique retail structure of the Philippines has also fueled the move toward smallness. Sari-sari stores — often little, wooden huts carrying 50 items or less — account for nearly 90 percent of the country's total retail outlets. TNS's Asiapanel division notes that in 2003 the traditional trade continued to gain share in the market, particularly in poorer rural areas. According to AC Nielsen, these small neighborhood stores have grown to nearly 560,000, making them the top retail outlets in the Philippines. That number is expected to rise to over 900,000 in five years.

⁴⁰ Cheryl Chan, “The Business of Beauty.” Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (Sept 2005, no. 3). Available: <http://www.pcij.org/i-report/3/beauty.html>

⁴¹ Feast and Famine – “Mini-size Me.” Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (Jan-Mar 2005, no. 1). Available: <http://www.pcij.org/i-report/1/mini-size2.html>

These bits of information are offered to product manufacturers which turn to media networks for their ad campaigns. *This explains the peppering of our viewing time with commercials of shampoos in sachets, condiments in refill packs, tipid packs of detergents and others.* Audiences, therefore, are not really *kapamilya* (family-member) nor *kapuso* (one with the heart).⁴² They are “demographics,” statistics sold to advertisers, multinational companies, and politicians up for the run in the coming elections. The larger the audiences are in terms of numbers (expressed in viewership or ratings), the more saleable the programs. In effect, audiences help media enterprises (and media communicators) rake in profit for themselves. As Australian critic Humphrey McQueen has said:⁴³

To make sense of ... media... it is essential to get the relationship between the media and advertising the right way around: commercial mass media are not news and features backed up by advertising; on the contrary, the commercial mass media are advertisements which carry news, features and entertainment in order to capture audiences for the advertisers... It is a complete mistake to analyze the relationship between media and advertising by supposing that the media's prime function is to sell advertised products to audiences. On the contrary, the media's job is to sell audiences to advertisers.

Conclusion

Media criticism and media education entail the analysis of structures of media ownership, production elements, as well as nonverbal communication. The aim is to bring about deeper understanding of media content and information. (See appendix A – “Approaches to Media Criticism”) Some parts of the inquiry are audience-driven; meaning, answers to particular questions are drawn from the learner’s own media and real-world experiences.

Overall, the process empowers individuals and helps shun any negative influence of media. It is needed now that media become more ubiquitous, with newer technologies widening their reach, and media communicators employing more sophisticated communication techniques.

Media literacy and all its domains focus on skills – media reading and production skills – which need to be harnessed for effective media use. However, these skills in no way can alter an individual’s penchant towards questionable content, say, pornography. Skills alone cannot help stem the proliferation of hardcore *sex videos* if there remain buyers of this and other similarly questionable content.

Missiologist and communication scholar Franz-Josef Eilers proposes *communication formation*, a process that goes beyond reading (and writing) skills gained from media education. Communication formation forms the learners’ “communication disposition”⁴⁴ after God – the source of all good and true communication. Franz-Josef Eilers:

*Pastoral communication formation has to start on the personal and interpersonal level and is based more on inner dispositions than on techniques or thinking only. It is really formation, a process which forms the inner person and not just training with mainly skill orientation.*⁴⁵

Communication formation begins in the family and extends as involvement in school and Church develops. It forms the conscience in the way Pope Benedict XVI urges for today’s media environment. That kind of formation secures the learners’ psychological and social filters for sending and receiving communication.

⁴² Media giant-competitors ABS-CBN and GMA-7 call their respective executives, staff, talents and audiences *kapamilya* and *kapuso*; mainly for the ratings game.

⁴³ Quoted in Len Masterman, “Teaching the Media.” London: Routledge (1990). p. 4.

⁴⁴ Eilers (2004) distinguishes five *inner* communication dispositions: (1) emotional, (2) intellectual, (3) archetypal, (4) existential dimension, and (5) pneumatic or spiritual dimension. cf. Franz-Josef Eilers, “Communicating in Ministry and Mission – An Introduction to Pastoral and Evangelizing Communication.” Manila: Logos (2004). pp. 157-158.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 68. Read also from the same author the section on “Communication Formation” and “Media Education,” pp. 67-78.

Appendix A – Approaches to Media Criticism/ Education

Key Concepts	Key Questions	Types of Analysis	Sub-questions/ Items for consideration
All media messages are constructed	Who created this message? Who is communicating to me?	Nonverbal communication analysis	Facial expressions Eye behaviors Posture Gestures Proxemic communication Tactile communication Physical appearance Accessories Vocalic communication
Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules	What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?	Production analysis	Editing Composition Point of view Angle Connotation Graphics Color Lighting Shape Movement Scale Sound Special effects
Different people experience the same media message differently	How might different people understand this message differently?	Autobiographical analysis	Narrative reconstruction Affective response analysis Media production Media chronicling Media activism Media arts education
Media have embedded values and points of view	What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted, from this message?	Ideological analysis Mythic analysis	Organizational analysis Worldview analysis Point of view analysis Narrative analysis Genre analysis Production analysis Comparison between media myths and established – Nature myths, Historical myths, and Metaphysical myths
Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power	Why is this message being sent?		What product or service is being sold? What marketing techniques are employed? How am I treated as a possible buyer?