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Media Education: Rethinking the Role of Photographic Representation in Public Education

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M.A. Major Research Paper

Media Education:

Rethinking the Role of Photographic Representation in Public Education

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Supervised by Murray Pomerance

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Master of Arts

Abstract

This essay investigates both the pedagogical and communicational roles of photography and education in contemporary society. Assuming that photography and education not only show people their world, but that they also offer them the means to help create it, this essay explores the various ways that social forces have kept people from the democratic possibilities such institutions offer. Indeed, since they are typically controlled by state and corporate interests, photographic institutions and public education systems, as well as their specific representations and practices, typically reinforce a hegemonic order rather than challenge it. Through these institutions such forces have shown and taught us only a limited version of what constitutes our lives by structuring and ordering the material conditions and symbolic spaces of our world, including many of our own thoughts, actions, and experiences. This essay suggests that the critical tendencies of the few alternative photographic and popular educational practices that challenge this order continue to collaborate and develop systematic practices designed to challenge depoliticizing forces, particularly by investigating the spaces most immediately accessible to a large portion of the population: the public school classroom.

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I dedicate this work to my wife and friend, Hien Quach, whose support has been unflagging, whose enthusiasm has kept me going, and whose humour has kept me laughing.

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Introduction

The idea driving this essay is that photography is an important pedagogical tool which, along with formal schooling, helps teach every member of every modern, industrial culture what it is to be in such a culture. How we come to think of ourselves and how we come to understand our world is invariably linked to how we think about photographic representations, how they enable us to see ourselves and our world. Our visions and our thoughts have been fundamentally shaped by the technologies and practices involved in making images. Thus photography, and later television, cinema, and the Internet are profoundly educational in the way they reveal the world in which we live. Photography informs and forms us.

One photograph in particular condenses many of the ideas I hope to speak about in this essay. It is a picture from Dave Heath's <u>A Dialogue with Solitude</u> (1965) of a young boy in a museum standing beside and beneath several dinosaur skeletons. Already small, the boy is further dwarfed by the sheer enormity of the fossils towering over him, the look on his face suggesting awe at their enormity and improbability. Apparently alone, he seems forced to assimilate these ancient structures without any assistance or validation of his experiences. The bones do not appear symbolic of anything specific, such as the archaic organization of a system of liberal education (certainly a possible interpretation), but instead suggest the looming social structures of our contemporary world, those which are only vaguely comprehensible and barely discernable to a youth with few experiences. It seems that for the boy the museum has become the world, professing to be both pedagogical and communicational, both school and image. For us, he is simultaneously audience and pupil, engaged by and caught up in a series of enormous machinations which ultimately leave him in the dark through no fault or innate incapacity of his own. Heath's image, by so carefully documenting this young child's experience, represents a challenge to the aims of such fixed ways of teaching and communicating, offering a reflection upon what can be and what in fact is taught and shown in this world, and a consideration of the subjectivity that is so frequently overlooked in educational experiences: the boy's and the photographer's. In many ways the boy seems to be Heath himself: despite the dimness and the enormity, the isolation and incomprehensibility, he continues to look and learn—eagerly, in fact. Indeed, caught in mid-turn, perhaps he is not alone after all, but is wheeling to respond to a friend, a

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teacher, or a parent—maybe even appealing to us as viewers. Perhaps not at all alone, he is about to share what he has learned, what he is in the process of learning and experiencing.

Modern contemporary systems of public education go a long way in dulling the impact of what we can learn from photographs, since such images are examined and

Through this photograph, Heath is both suggesting to us and teaching us that much more is possible with photography and education than typically meets the eye. In doing so, he reminds us of the pedagogical power of images, of the communicational power of schools, of the practical ability we have to make and remake both educational and photographic spaces, and of the democratic possibilities we create when we are able to do so.

created in so few directly educational settings by so few formally trained individuals. But many photographs, artistic and commercial, can be informative in a fully engaging way, just as this one is. The historical development and organization of various photographic industries has undermined the power of the medium, since such developments have typically advanced private rather than public interests. Photographic institutions and educational institutions have, for the most part, contributed to the hegemony of state and corporate powers in modern capitalist societies far more than they have challenged them. Further, most people who look at photographs do so cursorily, paying them scant attention, and our educational system actively encourages and supports such shallow reading.

With photography, only so much can be shown; with education, only so much can be taught—both practices invariably omit vast realms of cultural knowledge and the experiences of significant subcultures. All too often what has been omitted and what has been included are decisions made by elite political, economic, and social groups exerting enormous power over public resources, not by those who constitute the largest portion of that public. In most modern societies what one can say or see—what one can come to know and understand—is directly related to the control one can exert over her material and ideological conditions from her social position in the hegemonic order. If knowledge is indeed power,

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little of it resides in the hands of the average individual or the various social groups of which she is a part. That one of the most ubiquitous of contemporary communicational forms, photography, is nearly entirely excluded from one of the most widespread of social institutions, public education, hints at the dangerous lack of agency the average individual has over her public, social, and political life. For if visual representations define and describe much about our contemporary world, the lack of a fundamental, large-scale public instruction in the techniques of image production and reception signifies for many an enormous loss, a loss, indeed, hardly experienced by those who suffer it. We have been systematically denied access to a broad realm of communicational and social possibilities, a realm to which we should be properly entitled.

I begin this essay by discussing some features of formal education that render it a powerful force in the perpetuation and maintenance of the dominant social order. In particular, I try to show that state-sponsored education is predominantly a bodily instruction, a series of lessons and formations that educators encourage students to rehearse so that their future actions and expressions will become conducive to the preexisting physical and symbolic cultural spaces of their world. In the second chapter I suggest that photography, also a powerful force for perpetuating a cultural hegemony, has been used by corporate and political elites to take this state instruction further. The success of dominant photographic institutions in industrializing all mainstream photographic production has contributed to broader cultural standardizations that encompass many of the practices, actions, and appearances of contemporary individuals, regardless of how much or how little each creates or views photographs. In some ways this is inevitable, and happens with most widely used technologies: Vivian Sobchack (2004), following Fredric Jameson (1991), suggests that we all now exist in a predominantly electronic culture, regardless of whether or not we know how to use, for example, computers or cellular phones. Yet photographic technologies are uniquely employed by state and corporate powers not only in order that such powers may shape public and private cultural spaces but so that they may restrict and alter the ways by which people can communicate in and about these spaces as well.

Finally, I conclude by suggesting that any broader social change, although necessary, is unlikely to be supported by existing hegemonic structures and organizations since, for those in charge, the status quo better serves their interests and is in fact crucial for their existence. I suggest that what is needed is the continued creation of alternative cultural spaces—

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physical, symbolic, and ethical—in which standard photographic representation and normalized practices of education can be critically explored, reconstructed, challenged, and recreated in order to give voice and agency to those disempowered and disenfranchised by the effects these institutions have had on their lives, and so that people can work to create their own standards and values to rebuild a democracy of which they, and we, are all necessarily a part.

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[1] Education

Shaping Learning: Order and the Body in Educational Practice

Education purports to teach students and to introduce them to the world in which they exist. It currently does this, however, in paradoxical ways. On the one hand, it serves as a preparation for participation in an existing social order by training students to act, think, and believe according to the dominant values and institutions of their culture. North American public education, for example, teaches different values such as individualism, consumerism, and liberalism, preparing students for particular roles in worlds of work, leisure, or politics. Education then is a form of socialization that has both cultural and economic (i.e. vocational) dimensions. In some versions it is even a form of politicization, designed to produce citizens active in their nation's civic processes. In this sense education is not merely an invitation to participate in the existing social order but an opportunity to help shape it. It is a means to gain access to what Pierre Bourdieu has called "cultural capital" (1986).

At the same time, education can act to limit, regulate, and ultimately render inaccessible the positions of power by which some students can make such participation meaningful. Particularly for those in the middle and working classes, those in visible minority groups, and those not part of the gendered or sexual mainstream, education can become symbolic of the

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functions as a closed system, strictly hierarchical or even caste-like, based on ascription rather than merit. This type of education typically channels students into preordained stations of subservience and subordination, or of leadership and success, hierarchical positions to be occupied both during school and in subsequent social relations. This is directly in line with those who suggest that academic streaming is never based on academic achievement or intelligence but instead on social class or other determinants such as gender or ethnicity (see Curtis,

What do we make of this opportunity for visual understanding? A hunter dragging home his kill. If we identify his kill as two baby seals, and the nature of his dress as traditional, do we still seek in this minimal image a moral justification for his actions? But also: note how a causality is immediately implied. Did this person in fact produce these corpses, and do they belong to him? Is he, perhaps, a policeman or government inspector bringing in evidence of illegal activity?

et al. 1992; Cicourel and Kitsuse 1963). While democratic arrangements seem founded on equality and authoritarian ones on perpetuating inequality—that is, in short, upon merit or upon ascription—both are nevertheless part of larger social and cultural formations that structure the practices of all kinds of public institutions. Both are part of a liberal, or neoliberal, ideology.

In other words, the democratic and the authoritarian are part of the <u>same</u> order: a hegemonic order based largely on liberalism, which offers opportunity to many while simultaneously denying equality to most. Public education, which plays a large part in maintaining and perpetuating this ideology, particularly in terms of forming our relations to the state, can never be considered exempt; its role, in fact, is crucial to ideology (see Sears 2003). How can this contradiction exist? How can education both teach and deny fundamental rights and opportunities? If it is a basic condition of liberal education to discriminate between its students, why has this institution been allowed to persist? In part, public education serves the interests of the Canadian ruling class. Yet as hegemony, it also appears to serve the interests of the general public: what appears to be freedom of choice and freedom of speech is largely in fact a depoliticized, "consumer" choice; what seem to be our democratic rights rarely get exercised at times other than during elections (see Miller

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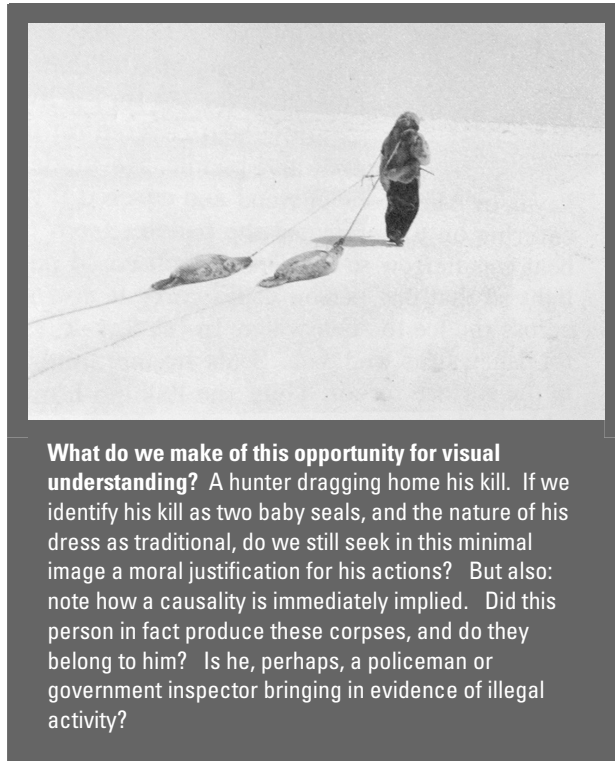
dimension to educational activity. Teachers become a model of conduct for students who are required, educationally speaking, to learn to write, speak, and ultimately think like them. This is rarely a practice toward which teachers aspire; they may even actively resist what they believe to be mechanical indoctrination. Yet by keeping their defiance from students, by offering to students only official state practice and not their own subjective struggles (teachers being for students the most immediate state representatives), or by leaving these thoughts and acts diffuse and unarticulated, teachers may unwittingly perpetuate precisely
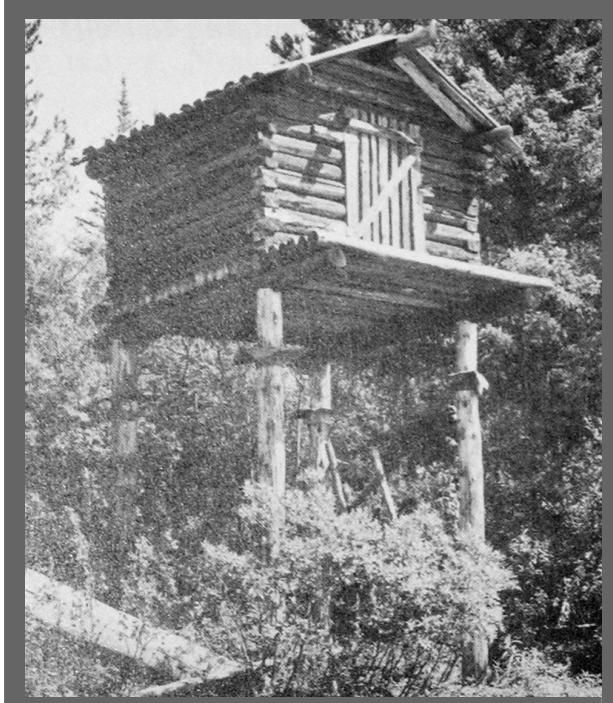
the ideology they oppose. Despite all human efforts, in other words, students might see only the state in the end (see Berlak and Moyendi 2001).

There are clear power differentials between teachers and state, students and state, and students and teachers. Several aspects of these relations might be addressed. The first is that students are fundamentally considered distinct from the state; the educational process will serve to draw them into it. Along with giving education the character of an extensive initiation—in some cases, a taming of wildness[1]—the process can also serve to exacerbate the difference in power between teacher and student, making the classroom more

Not discussed in school . . . Child of a coal-miner playing at home. The child appears clean and healthy. By labeling him "poor," we may be turning a subjective photograph taken by a subjective photographer (say, a mother) into evidence for an argument. We may be pinning our values onto the child's conditions rather than reflecting on what might have been the photographer's intentions. Who determined that this child is "playing" at home in the first place? The word "playing" leads us to see a toy gun.

authoritarian than democratic in practice. For example, discipline imposed on a student for her improper modeling of (state-sanctioned) teacher activity may unintentionally reinforce her subordinate status even when intended as a corrective. Likewise, the fixed relationship

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[1] Richard Brooks's <u>Blackboard Jungle</u> (1955) presents an interesting example: the taming is not simply of the students by the teachers but, since the students skilfully and intelligently resist, of the teachers at the hands (and fists) of the students; as well as of the teachers by the system that so greatly devalues their work.

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between teachers and students, one which paints teachers always as experts and students always as novices, negates preexisting student experience and knowledge and emphasizes the relation of dominance and subordination they are to have with one another (see Freire 1970). Though this differentiation of expertise may be accomplished for practical purposes—for example in the questionable practice of ensuring that students reach new grade levels on equal footing with their peers from across the state (or province; see Levin 1997)—it nevertheless ignores the role that local school boards and teachers themselves might play in determining whether, or how, it should be accomplished at all. In fact, in such a hierarchical structure, there is little functional difference between the subordinate-dominant relations of students with teachers, those of teachers with their employers (school boards), or those of local boards with state ministries of education. That teachers, in particular, have been increasingly subject to authoritarian administrative controls over their labour practices has become evident at nearly all levels of publicly funded education.[2]

A distal or a proximal form? . . . A structure employed by fur traders. Do we imagine the raw physical labour this structure would have necessitated or, having perhaps witnessed the seeming effortlessness of modern construction, do we remark ahistorically upon its quaintness compared to contemporary structures? Who would have <u>needed</u> a structure like this and why? What are the aspects of this structure that this photograph of it emphasizes and reveals, and what aspects does it conceal or marginalize? (What is it that faces this structure from off-camera right?)

Another problematic aspect of the relation between students and their state-representative teachers is the relation between students and their knowledge. The embrace of the state is based upon a model of education that presumes the near-complete ignorance

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[2] Recent public sector teachers' strikes include the Ontario Teachers Federation strike in 1997, the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) wildcat strike of 2005, and the OPSEU strike of Ontario college teachers in 2006. For an interesting discussion of the 1997 OTF strike in response to the Harris government's policy changes, see Greenberg, Joshua. 2004. "Tories, Teachers, and the Media Politics of Education Reform," <u>Journalism Studies</u> 5, no. 3: 353-71.

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of the student coupled with the authority of the teacher in any practical educational exchange. While this creates a separation between student experience and state-approved knowledge, it can serve to reinforce a more fundamental separation of a student's bodily knowledge from her mindful knowledge. By deprecating both prior experience and subjective knowledge, and by mandating an agenda to displace and replace this unwanted knowledge, state agents perpetuate the positivist notion that body and mind are in fact separable, and that such a separation is indeed desirable. To dichotomize bodily experience and mindful thought is to commit a powerful act of abstraction. For if it is a certain set of state practices that a student is expected to embody, it becomes a very particular body that a student is expected to have: one inexperienced yet knowledgeable; cerebral and objective rather than erotic and subjective. It would appear that this abstracting tendency is an attempt to discard the subjective body, or at least to displace it with a standardized, objective one founded upon principle and steeped in discipline. A series of photographs of classrooms and school hallways (Grosvenor, et al., 2004) by Paulo Catrica seems to address this issue. In these images his large format camera is precisely placed and oriented, as if in an ideal or standard position from which to survey the various spaces he photographs and record in detail their distinctive yet similar geographies. From such positions, Catrica uses the space before the camera to mediate between the lens and the presumed position of the teacher at the front of the class (e.g. near a blackboard or a pad of chart paper). His images depict both a room unobstructed by student bodies, and a view of instruction free of a teacher's body. Devoid of human actors, Catrica's photos suggest a series of spaces that need no bodies in particular: spaces that appear capable of operating with (and upon) any bodies whatever.

Student Bodies

While the embrace of the state represents a "bringing into line" of disparate student practices with ideal state practices, it also represents an ideal (and dominant) way of thinking. If there is indeed a transplantation of an idealized body politic onto or into a student's body, this implies a literal embodiment of state-approved behaviour, physiology, manners, and the like. A significant project of education, then, is instructing students in comportment: a rehearsal of bodily positioning within educational contexts. In fact, it seems that the process is not so much about learning within a given context, although this is important, but rather

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Technological and Ideological Alignment … Because he has positioned his camera with such geometric precision, Paulo Catrica's images seem less about visibility and sight than about sighting, as if both his camera and the school classrooms here represented are survey equipment, or even weapons, projecting ideas, authority, or social values into or upon people (turning people, perhaps, "into objects that can be symbolically possessed" [Sontag 1977, 14]). More likely, Catrica's images represent an alignment of idealized positions, one from which to imagine education and the other from which to observe it, camera technology superimposed upon educational technology. Such a position is not ultimately Catrica's, nor a given teacher's or student's, nor any socially connected, individual human body for that matter. Indeed, such a position seems only to be occupied by that powerful, equalizing, democratic idealization: the body politic.

neglected. It is this latter type of relationship that may most strongly inflect consumerist practices typical of a capitalist social order.

Nevertheless, students' physical bodies get caught up in the machinery of education and the pedagogical ideology of forming and informing. Examples include the rows and ranks of desks in a classroom, which are little different from the queues of students waiting to reenter the school following recess or from the rules structuring sports activities. There is also the "period," that indivisible temporal unit of a single course, which is typically 50 or 70 minutes in length at the public school level, and which artificially circumscribes student experience and focuses it in a precise dimension. Both of these examples unite in the standardized test, which combines the spatial ordering of student bodies and the temporal ordering of their actions with the mental ordering of their thoughts and experiences. That they are considered to be in a process of formation (learning) as well as in a series of different formational spaces (classrooms) highlights the lack of agency that they are granted. A student has little say, after all, in the structure of relations with her teachers: if she does not like one in particular, there is very often no official "way out" by which that student can escape; if she finds her teacher utterly compelling, there are numerous obstacles in place, both bureaucratic and social, that serve to limit the time she can spend with him or her. She

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Learning and Social Spaces

Whether for benign or for malevolent ends, education is inescapable in most industrialized societies, since children as young as four and adolescents as old as sixteen are legally mandated to be in some form of schooling, public or otherwise. Even so, youth pursue such a varied and diverse range of interests, both within school and without, that for many, school presents neither a sense of containment nor any apparent limitations to be overcome. Nicholas Nixon's images (Coles and Nixon 1998) capture some of this "liberation," for the most part suppressing a representation of educational spaces in favour of the irreverence and irrepressibility of the children he photographed there.

While for most people such oppression seems surmountable, or at least tolerable, horrific incidents like those in high schools in Littleton, Colorado (CNN.com 2000), in Taber, Alberta (CBC 2004), or in Red Lake, Minnesota (CNN.com 2005), or at universities like the École Polytechnique in Montréal (CBC 2003) suggest that for some it is not. All too frequent to be considered simply anomalous and isolated crimes, or as the work of fascists or crazed individuals, these occurrences are extreme and unfortunate reactions to concrete and routinized conditions of modern life, especially in a culture of fear and violence, that oppressively structure our existence into relations and spaces that are seemingly inescapable.


Room 306, Tobin School by Nicholas Nixon. In an era of high capitalism, where the tenets of liberalism dominate both a nation's markets and its politics, an educational structuring and organization of bodies demanding efficient and effective participation in the prevailing social order is inevitable, regardless of which institutions one is most closely aligned with. Other social institutions apart from schools contribute to this ideological and material domination, but schooling seems a perpetual force in the lives of adolescents and youth, particularly as it gets prolonged past adolescence and into early adulthood with continually increasing enrolment in post-secondary schooling.

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That we are taught to negate our own bodies in preference to an idealized state-body is one thing; that our experiences of real, embodied spaces come to possess a lack of dimensionality in the process is another. Although we are taught to exclude our bodies from our learning situations, we are never fully able do so; nor does a flattening of our experiences, imposed on us from above, make our bodily experiences any less recoverable. The acquisition of objective information can never supplant the accumulation of subjective memory.

Still, even if institutionalized learning cannot entirely shape and configure how we learn, even if it cannot totally erase our minds, we might forget our memories and experiences as we move through spaces in which they are increasingly devalued or in which other of our actions and behaviours are privileged; further, without a language with which to express and share such experiences, we may have extreme difficulties communicating about what has preceded us biographically, historically, or both. The exploration of "generative themes," what Paulo Freire has labeled the common codes, myths, or metaphors a culture creates for itself (1970; for a fascinating expansion on this concept see Barndt 1998), seems to offer a way to connect our biographies and histories, our subjective with our objective experiences, in a critically challenging and potentially transformative way. Part of Freire's ideas about problem-posing education, a generative theme—or cultural code—can be located in specific materials or practices, revealing realities that are generalizable and non-specific. A photograph can offer this to students, allowing them a concrete representation of their educational surroundings in which such generative themes can be isolated, examined, and reintegrated into their learning.

The importance of being able to express and to value our own stories, expressions, and experiences on our own terms as compared with the "official" ones in official terms is a fundamental issue—indeed, the photographs we view and make in everyday life constitute a significant portion of these experiences and of such expressions. It may be that the key ways we can experience or fail to experience learning are fundamentally determined by the spaces of education we are allowed to create and inhabit or that we create for ourselves, and by the imagined spaces we have the ability to reconstitute and reconstruct after the fact.

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The liberal ideal of formalized education more closely resembles the structure of the actual school than it does the reconfigured building of my dreams. A school building itself—spare, minimal, functional—is a concrete manifestation of a hierarchically structured and idealized system of spaces. Such a system is only ever viewed internally, schematically, because it is designed to be precisely functional. The spaces have some semblance of contiguity with each other, but only because in them it must be possible to recognize the basic needs of their inhabitants: providing space for traffic; offering an even, shadowless illumination through functionally adequate public lighting; making available seating which is designed to aid janitorial duties, facilitating classroom uniformity, and ensuring teacher authority more than enabling student comfort or subjective learning. It may be that offices for administration are proportionately smaller than classrooms; requiring, for example, precisely two half-banks of lighting rather than four full banks. Bookshelves are lower in public schools than they are in high schools, because younger children are shorter; the same can be said of toilets, sinks, and water fountains in the two different spaces. Perhaps some averaging calculation can account for the precise dimensions of these fixtures. In short, relationships are treated geometrically; fractionally. Looked at schematically, these spaces are formulaic, precise, fixed, and measurably unmemorable. Students as well as teachers and other educators do much to fill in these spaces with some quantity of meaning; yet if we are

to strip this agency and community away, we are left with industrial fluorescent lighting and low-pile carpeting, typically unimpressive terrazzo or perhaps even vinyl tile flooring, and walls of cinderblock, primed and painted only a sterile off-white—possibly taupe. Most schools are designed to activate education only temporarily, to manufacture a situation of teaching and learning, and then to discharge it, as with the ringing of a bell at a specified time of day; or better still to erase it like chalk from a blackboard:
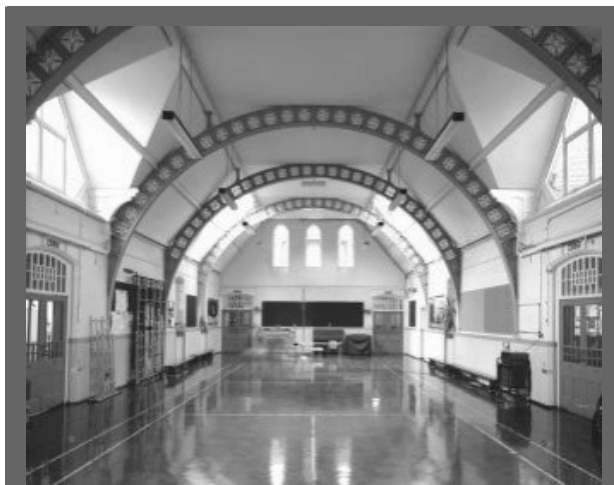
Measurably unmemorable, yet unforgettable . . . My own primary school, much like this space photographed by Paulo Catrica, was notably vacuous: identical rooms at continuous intervals sprung off a single, perfectly straight hallway. Learning, in such an uninspired layout, was to occur in each discrete space.

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providing a clean slate upon which to trace and draw out the next day's lessons. Education is not meant to be a dwelling space, a space of comfort, but an industrial space.

The level of spatial organization in this example reveals the level of idealization to which processes of education are often subject. Yet in spite of this, it is the real, material substance of schools that, in spite of larger ideological intents, comes to dominate our experiences: the sights, sounds, smells, and experiences of objects and persons. We learn curriculum, but we learn it from some actual person with a biography and a cultural background; we learn curriculum as English composition or Algebra; indeed, as cursive English; even as Mrs. Rogers's English, typified by her writing lowercase "el"s on the black (not green) chalkboard, some time quite before lunch, yet just following recess, when with energy spent and attention flagging we must battle between the tedium of such an exercise and our growing hunger for food and greater engagement.

An official system privileges moments of educational significance which can be officially defined, implying moments that are concrete or quantifiable rather than transient or subjectively significant. In the Ontario system, as in others, assessment occurs when these moments are compared to standardized measurements; what are called "exemplars." This kind of system is decidedly not holistic, as it devalues certain sensory experiences and divorces them from the official content of objective learning. Indeed, it strives to be informative in a strictly unmemorable sense. Nevertheless, it is imposed upon a young person who may learn holistically and for whom memory is seldom so precise and methodical as a standardized curriculum and impartial system implies (see Hall 1976, 11).

The school as a whole, as with education itself, eludes its participants: students are constantly outside of it, even though they are also paradoxically within its spheres of control and influence. That they might consider school space to be something that is produced, or that they might consider themselves a factor in such production, is denied them in current hegemonic systems. In one sense, classroom space seems to precede students since it comes before them, temporally speaking. Yet it is also continually before them (present to them), and before <u>only</u> them. It is a space, in short, that is invariably created by them—in part unwittingly, in part with their full and conscious awareness. Classroom space <u>is</u> in fact the students it contains; it is only ever their differences and subjectivities coupled with the subjectivity of their teacher. There is no void, no empty class, or no transparent container

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into which students and teacher enter; rather, the classroom is only ever constituted by the collectivity itself.

Thus in a practice that encourages the pursuit of objective information in lieu of subjective space, a classroom is much like the railway compartment of Gunning's (and Schivelbusch's [1986], and Benjamin's [1968]) intérieur: "with its attempt to provide all the comforts of home while traveling, [it] in effect constitutes … another of the contradictory spatial figures of modernity, an unmoored intérieur, rolling through space at great speed" (Gunning 2003, 126). Indeed it is this in the inverse: classrooms are the spaces through which students, as objects of a system to be intérieur-ized, move at breakneck speed, with direction and distance already predetermined. "The comforts of home" in Gunning's bourgeois familial spaces become for a learning student both the objects of knowledge that she gains through her education and also the interiorized "fortifications" of bourgeois ideologies that shape and pattern her experiences to resemble dominant formations, her actions akin to certain routines, her opinions cleaving to certain values. The classroom is an exteriorized intérieur; an arcade, an ambiguous space that is neither inside nor outside, rehearsing for students situations between them and society and preparing them for the positions they are to unquestioningly take within it. Yet at the same time it is a space that can always be overrun, railroaded, and commandeered by the students themselves. Like an arcade, like a railway compartment with a picture window, education in its dominant form offers students much to see but little to grasp. The result is an objective world that is entirely ungraspable, and a subjective experience that is entirely denigrated. It is to its detriment, and to the detriment of those who are channeled through its doors, that contemporary schooling is more a mode of social transportation than of a continuous community space.

Conclusions

Gus van Sant's curious film Elephant (2003) depicts the kind of structuring of space I am suggesting that schooling typically imposes upon students. It presents a series of interior passageways: some terminal, ending as an exit to an external world, or leading further inward to a classroom, laboratory, or darkroom. Some of these spaces are physically wide, publicly available, and are built particularly for circulation and for nothing else; still others are hidden and transitory, as when Michelle (Kristen Hicks) traverses an unused gymnasium

inhabitable, they should forever be pushing passengers along, pushing them out, yet they are still spaces and remain in individual and collective memory long after departure. So too with education: medium and mode of transportation both, it is not something that students are supposed to dwell in, yet they do. That they do—by passively expressing boredom, by manifesting learning or attention-deficit "disabilities," or by lashing out in violent and possibly deadly outbursts—indicates not a simple disobedience but a more profound bodily necessity to tarry, to literally dwell in the spaces they inhabit, to stare at the frames and the elements that make education material. These are actions which education, in its ideological organization and physical architecture, forbids. In short, whether or not these spaces are socially temporary is no matter for a subject who seeks fixity and permanence; or who, at least, wants a say in the conditions and duration of her inhabitance in a society of which she is a part. Perhaps it is only by looking at these spaces, only by labeling and categorizing, critiquing and questioning, that these spaces and their characteristics, the objects and the bodies within them, can be challenged. In other words, perhaps by codifying the conditions of education—much as if one were labeling and describing the characteristics of an image—one might begin to understand and seek to challenge the themes that structure such conditions. Perhaps photography, more than any other medium, can serve to assist in the generation of such information, providing both a tool for analysis and a means of subjective expression.

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Chapter 2: Photography

Reproducing Appearances

The reproduction of visible appearances—inaugurated by photography, elaborated by
motion pictures and television, and transformed by digital networking and imaging
technology—enables the creation of mimetic views of the world with a level of accuracy far
superior to any technology or technique previously known (Sobchack 2004; Jameson 1991).
Yet it does this by ignoring or eliding the clearly reductive way in which this happens: that
is, through a neutralization or stylization of colour, an obliteration of alternative spaces and
temporalities, a denigration of human subjectivity, a transposition of size and scale, a
condensation of space, a flattening of depth, and a privileging of sight above other senses.
The historical development of the reproduction of mechanically produced images has been
guided by both a desire to see what is not immediately accessible to human experience and a
desire to elide understandings of the ways in which this is done. In other words, as
photographic technology has become more complex, the nature of this complexity has
become transparent as we perceive images only as more realistic (see Flusser 1984). We fail

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preexisting corporate technological infrastructure driven by private rather than public interest, and upon a preexisting set of ideological assumptions about what photographs and collections of photographs should be. The potential for democracy is perhaps only illusory, as we must purchase the materials and learn the skills required to participate in the system. In short, as genres of images form and as materials become standard, middle-class viewers— those to whom photography is typically tailored and sold—become disciplined by these changes, having little choice but to adopt new practices and new viewing habits without resistance.

Simplifying Photographs

Historically, the standardization of photographic images and practices has been geared toward the middle classes, who are an ever important, ever growing population of consumers to whom images can be sold (see Bourdieu 1990; Chalfen 1987). Cameras and photographs were not just found by this group of people, but were systematically sold to the middle classes materially and ideologically since the medium's inception, and continue to be. Unlike mass public schooling, which is a legal requirement particularly for youth, photography has never been mandatory. It has, however, been ubiquitous, which amounts to the same thing: in order for people to participate in most of modern society's new practices and changing discourses they have had to literally "buy into" the medium and its rhetoric. Numerous innovations in the photographic industry have been geared toward amateur consumer audiences, both through products designed specifically for them (like automatic cameras and digital photo printers)

Major daily papers began printing images ... "The front page of the New York Evening Graphic, 17 March 1927, a composograph featuring Rudolph Valentino and Enrico Caruso apparently rising and speaking from the grave." From "An Early Denial of Ekphrasis," Douglas Bicket and Lori A. Packer, 2004: 372.

and products which might indirectly target them (such as equipment and materials from the film or publishing industries whose products they might eventually consume). (In a typical 100-minute narrative film, the student/filmgoer habitually consumes 144,000 images in quick succession.) The quintessential ethic of this simplification is encapsulated in Kodak's slogan "You press the button, we do the rest." By the turn of the twentieth century, the Kodak Brownie had been introduced, putting the motto into practice for countless consumers in American and around the world. Reproductions of photographs that were being mass-reproduced through the halftone printing process developed in the 1880s had become so popular that by the early 1920s major daily papers around the world followed the lead of tabloid journals and began printing images in their pages as well (Bicket and Packer 2004). Shortly afterward, during the rise of photojournalism as a major field of intellectual and economic endeavour, photographic objectivity became for entire populations what the work of Alphonse Bertillon in the field of criminal identification was for state and political powers before: a romance of optical certainty in a world becoming increasingly strange and unfamiliar with new techniques and technologies of circulation (see Sekula 1989; Gunning 1995). The work of Bertillon first suggested that photographs could fix the objective world and its transient subjects into immediately recognizable and understandable images. That
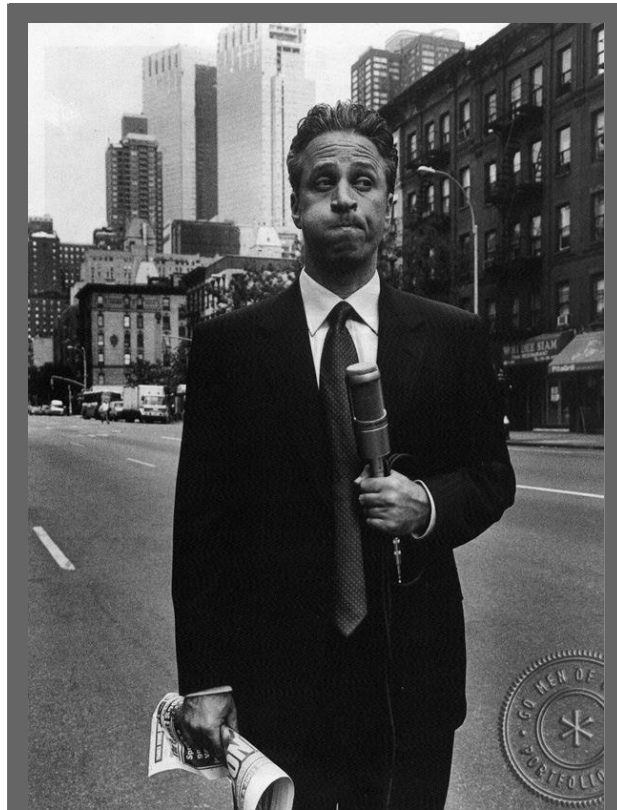

"A. Bertillon, Album D.K.V., c. 1910." From L'image accusatrice, Christian Phéline, 1985: 133.

such images could be systematically compared with each other to arrive at various evidentiary "truths" (social, economic, or political) led to the belief in photography's innate objectivity. For the masses, it was photojournalism that provided the visible evidence of large-scale social, political, and economic change: fleeting events from daily life captured and preserved in an incontrovertible epic drama—history. That this historical "certainty" took dramatically different shape in Weimar Germany, for example, as compared with America or Britain during the mid-

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twentieth century, indicates the vastly different romantic myths underlying each culture's façades of objectivity. One country's propaganda was another's truth; often, it was unclear which was which.

Most importantly, however, this industrialized standardization of technology coupled with a simultaneous "cultural standardization" of photographic representation (i.e. the emergence of cultural forms designed for a homogeneous, mass, or popular culture) contributed to a general depoliticization of the middle classes through the practices and experiences people had with standard photographic and pictorial communications. Photographs seemed to be appearing more and more frequently without the efforts of the people who would most often look at them. The most culturally significant photos, part of a journalistic discourse of world events and general "news," rarely included average citizens except in exceptional or sensational circumstances. Average people were simply not depicted in public communications; when they were, it was because they were no longer to be considered average (for example, when they had become criminals, politicians, or stars or celebrities of any kind). Thus

A "better" picture … Jon Stewart shown in GQ Magazine. Does this photograph operate as a portrait of the man depicted, or as a caricature of the already stylized "Jon Stewart" of The Daily Show? Do we learn of this *man* or of his *persona* from this photograph? If the latter, don't we manage in looking at this to conflate what we believe to be candidly, really Jon with what is in fact public or the machinations of "Jon's" publicity?

anyone could make a photograph, and this was a potentially democratic characteristic of the medium. But then again, so could anyone else, especially in a culture convinced of the medium's innate objectivity. The democratic quality of the medium was diminished as long as it was believed that someone else could make the picture, or could make it better. The

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nature of the medium created the illusion that the photographer was no longer necessary in this realm of communication.

The audience for photographic images and the mechanisms for producing photos had long since become privatized. Where communication via the printing press often had a public audience, photographic messages did not necessarily have the same outlet, particularly with photographs made directly by individual consumers and directly or indirectly for them (such as by professional portrait photographers and the mass media, respectively). This may be a consequence of the apparent indexicality or deictic quality of most photographic images: unlike a piece of writing, photographs have never needed to say anything but an implicit "look at this" in order to communicate a message to an audience. For many people a photograph need not be a statement, encoded in a language and rhetoric that must be formally learned. In fact, it is often enough for a photo simply to depict someone or something so that one's audience can intuitively recognize the similarity between depictions and things depicted. For the average person, such recognizability is usually only based on private or intimate knowledge, and need not rely upon understanding of a formal language of photography nor enter into a public discourse of photographs in any direct way. In this sense, photographs easily become private property for their owners, representing and objectifying the persons and things depicted as if to create a permanent connection between the image-object and the person or scene represented. As long as such images are seen only as, for example, "grandmother" or "summer in Muskoka," and not also as a means of reproduction in an economic, political, and aesthetic system—values by which one can represent a grandmother or a summer vacation capable of evoking broader cultural or "historical" remembrance—the photographic industry acts largely to depoliticize the processes of independent making and independent viewing by rendering such images publicly incommunicable and

A schematic for an airbrush artist. This image shows how a flawed image becomes more saleable. Of the three images (i.e. the original, this, and the final one), we only ever see the final.

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such embodied reactions and resistive actions may form important dimensions to the syntax of school-mode communication.

In this light, applying to the school mode ideas about home-mode communication may offer interesting insights. For example Chalfen, who coined the term "home mode," presents a descriptive framework by which to address and categorize the content of images from the processes involved in constructing them as forms of pictorial communication (1998). His framework for doing so has on one axis of a grid "communication events," or the social activities which constitute pictorial communication practices, and on the other axis "components," which together indicate a range of possible ways that content and practice can be considered (217). Thus a photographer might at any time be involved in: planning events which precede any image being made; making images that include herself within the frame (on-camera shooting); making images by overtly directing those being framed (behind camera shooting); editing or processing events in which images are prepared for some form of presentation or exhibition; and exhibition events, where images are shown to some form of audience and are possibly elaborated upon. Each category of event can then be further considered in terms of five distinct components: who are its participants and in what ways do they participate? Are they simply depicted, or have they contributed to shaping the image in some way? (In other words, what degree of agency is involved?) What settings are presented? What topics are addressed? What form does the message take or, in other words, what technologies are utilized to create this image? Finally, what codes are articulated? How does one use the technology to create images? Or, if one is not behind the camera, how does one respond to the technology when being photographed? What codes are at work when editing? Are different codes involved in exhibition?

Clearly Chalfen's categories of "communication events" (planning, on-camera and behind camera shooting, editing, and exhibition) are not readily applicable to the activity found in educational settings. Yet his framework is intriguing: if other event categories are substituted which suggest the variety of preparation, rehearsal, performance, and evaluation that goes on before, during, and after any educational activity, and that takes into account the various actors found in educational settings, then the communicability of such activity to and between its participants can be profoundly informative about the way education becomes structured as a widespread cultural activity. Indeed, if education is communicational as well as pedagogical, if it does in fact create meaningful exchanges

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of these experiences, when recorded and analyzed by the very people existing in these physical and symbolic spaces, can serve to alert students to the profoundly intricate but powerfully integrated systems that constitute their world and the various ways they, in turn, constitute these systems—this world.

Photography and Alternative Spaces

I have tried to show that public education systems and photographic industries have contributed enormously to organizing our actions and structuring the terms by which we communicate. In shaping our physical spaces and by standardizing the ways we can come to know the world, these institutions have diminished our opportunities to organize and to imagine viable political, social, or cultural alternatives. Their ideological agenda is to enter us into a world already made for us and with which we have no means of engaging. Yet as I have also tried to suggest, it would be wrong to consider them simply totalizing forces— parts of a so-called "culture industry" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972) that are inescapable and interminable. As Chalfen's framework suggests, there is much that can be thought and said about the activities that occur in spaces that fall outside the scope of dominant educational and image-based discourses.

"Big Sur Mineral Baths," 1967, by Edmund Teske. With eyes closed and head inclined, Teske's subject seems between death and sleep, capitulation and rejuvenation. The wall connotes a fixed form in decay while the body in the water suggests an indefiniteness suspended temporarily without form. The head above water appears burdened and weighed down, while the rest of the body appears weightless and unencumbered. By eliminating colour and reducing the frame to only the most essential visual elements, Teske can shape the nature of his image, creating a visual form that is less a photographic observation and more a visual statement. By alluding to Jacques-Louis David's painting "Marat assassiné" (1793), Teske can also invoke in an audience familiar with this work a relation between his image and a history of political and philosophical thought preceding him.
P.S. Even given that we may read this as a straightforward picture of a man enjoying a mineral bath, what is added to the picture and our experience of it by the photograph's specific titling of it? How does our knowledge that this was taken at Big Sur, California affect any aspect of our understanding?

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In one sense, a meaningful and transformative program of photographic education (media education in general) is impossible through official channels of educational organization and policy-making. As long as educational organization happens <u>to</u> students, teachers, and support staff instead of with them or because of their autonomous efforts at controlling and determining learning, photography will exist in public school curriculum simply to facilitate a limited and highly individual form of self-expression—what Nick Stanley has called "artistic phototherapy" (1996, 95)—never to address contemporary issues of representation and communication that are an inherent and unavoidable part of our modern lives.

A curriculum of photography can never be a magic bullet to solve this depoliticization of student lives. Yet by pointing cameras into and at educational settings spaces alternative to dominant educational practice can be noted, created, and remarked upon. Even the most seemingly trivial of images can offer incredible insights into educational practice, since they offer alternative viewpoints that differ in distinct ways from those imposed upon education from dominant positions in educational organization.

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Conclusions

> Objectivity is a myth, but it is a myth with consequences. All mediated events incorporate values and are therefore in large part subjective. This is hardly a novel statement; the point has been articulated from a variety of theoretical and research perspectives. I am concerned with a somewhat different question: if we reject "objectivity" and "balance" because they are insufficient as solutions to the ethical dilemma facing the media, can we find a better basis for making normative judgments in media practice? If truth and fairness can't be found by looking for the middle, where can they be sought?
>
> Larry Gross 1988, 189.

Throughout my essay I have stressed the need for change in dominant educational and photographic institutions and practices. Implicit in this is the belief that such practices as they currently exist are largely misleading, disempowering, disengaging, and destructive to the populations who have little choice but to consume them and occupy their spaces. I am afraid that this has an accusatory ring to it, as if to say that all those involved in education or media, at all levels, and in all fields, are somehow failing us at teaching, instructing, telling, and showing. Even if this has a grain of truth to it, even if educators, media-makers, celebrities, politicians, consumers, and students are limiting and destroying the possibilities these institutions hold for us all, it must be a collective failure, since each of us is only ever one or another of these things. In other words, we are all in some way responsible for the state of these systems; which means, by the same token, that we must all be responsible for trying to fix things.

It may be more accurate, however, to say that some of us hold more responsibility than others. Despite best intentions, this can create situations where one's view of one's own responsibilities seems arbitrary and biased, even reckless and dangerous, especially as that view becomes more publicly prominent and self-justified by the power and status one attains. One can become blinded: seeing one's faith, beliefs, and values as just, fair, and

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true, rather than subjective, biased, and opinionated. In a culture that predominantly favours the individual over the group, self-determination over equality, truth over relativity, and stability over change, one individual can achieve extraordinary levels of power and privilege. Those who hold such power can very easily act out of self-interest and fail to see the consequences such actions might have on thousands, if not millions, of others.

If, as Larry Gross suggests, objectivity is indeed a myth, it is one which is widely held. Indeed, a large number of individuals put their faith in this myth, convinced not only of objectivity in principle, but in their own objectivity, or lack thereof, as fact. If, in other words, people believe themselves to be objective, they may share this belief widely and loudly; others, believing themselves to be neither objective nor in a position to become this way, may remain silent and inconsequential. Objectivity, in short, is a difficult principle upon which to found a democracy, for it gives a soapbox to a few, and dupes the rest of us into listening and accepting.

Yet, things need not be this way. If the spaces of education and the media are contestable, then those most intimately involved in such spaces, those also with the most to gain by taking such spaces back and challenging what goes on in them, have an ethical obligation to do so. For if the media and public education and the institutions they represent affect nearly every aspect of our modern lives, then a failure to see these spaces as contiguous, or even in many ways identical, is a profound failure indeed.

In answer to Gross's question, then, perhaps a challenge to dominant media practices must begin with a definition of one's ethics. Using Kenneth Keniston's (1965) useful differentiation of ethics from morals, perhaps we can define ethics along similar lines as one's "thought-out, reflective and generalized sense of good and evil, the desirable and the undesirable, as integrated into himself and his view of the world…general and universal, seeking to provide guidelines for conduct in all possible situations" (628). Doing so might bring us to the realization that whatever else it might include such an ethic must recognize a profound collectivity to which we all belong. Any challenge to dominant media practice, any search for "truth or fairness" must be sought responsibly, and with the collaboration and concern of others. If ours is a world in which a person "need not be immoral…in order to be the effective instrument of [people's] wanton destruction," or in which it becomes increasingly obvious that "men no longer need confront each other as men" (631), the development of such a collective ethical sense is not merely a luxury but an imperative.

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