

THE AD AND THE EGO

CURRICULUM GUIDE

The Ad and the Ego explores provocative questions about advertising and our consumer society in 19 short segments of between two and seven minutes each. This guide divides the film into four thematic parts, or episodes, and provides key concepts, questions and activities for each segment. It also includes pre-screening and follow-up exercises.

The Ad and the Ego contains many theoretical ideas. There are more questions and activities here than you can possibly use. We encourage you to select, modify and build on these activities, adapting them to your own objectives and time.

■ Introduction , including suggested classroom uses	1
■ Pre-Screening Activities and Questions to highlight central themes	2
■ After Viewing: Key Concepts, Questions and Exercises	3
Episode I: Advertising and Our World	3
Episode II: Symbolic Meaning-Making	6
Episode III: The Economy and Ecology of Advertising	9
Episode IV: Advertising and Democracy	11
■ Follow-up Activities	13
■ Bibliography	14
■ List of Media Literacy Education Organizations	14
■ Production Credits and Cast of Characters	back cover
■ Reproducible Handouts:	
Key Concepts in Media Literacy	insert
Close Reading of Ads: A How-to Guide	insert

You can download a transcript of *The Ad and the Ego* from California Newsreel's web-site (<http://www.newsreel.org>) or send \$5 to California Newsreel for a printed version.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a consumer culture, saturated with mass media images. Much of our physical and informational space is for sale - billboards, TV, magazines, newspapers, even the area behind home plate - all of these spaces pitch products promising to improve our lives. We are all, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, affected by this advertising, often in very subtle ways.

The Ad and the Ego explores what critic Leslie Savan calls our "ad ad ad world." Balancing commentary from social critics with fast-moving and often provocative images from ads and contemporary life, *The Ad and the Ego* examines the power of modern advertising. It goes beyond an analysis of individual ads to ask how living in an advertising-saturated environment influences the way we see the world - and ourselves. One might say it provides a "cultural psychoanalysis" of our nation's principal inhabitants, Consumer Man and Consumer Woman.

FITTING THE AD AND THE EGO INTO YOUR CLASSROOM

The Ad and the Ego is a core text for any media and society, mass communications, or media literacy course. The film can also easily be integrated into other disciplines.

Social Studies, History, and American Studies instructors can use the film to:

- explore the implications of our modern consumer culture on social relations, our democracy, and our physical environment.
- examine the relationship between advertising and our economy.
- distinguish differences between individual and social solutions to life's problems.
- engage students in conversation about the media's role in politics through study of television news and prime time programming, newspaper reporting, weekly political magazines, and ads themselves.
- offer insights into larger issues of socialization, power, control, and ideology in society.
- illuminate the economic interdependence and cultural interplay between different forms of mass media.

English and Language Arts faculty can use the film to:

- investigate questions of bias, fact-and-opinion, truth, rhetoric - the language of persuasion. British media educator Jenny Grahame observes, "Of all nonliterary texts, advertising most readily gets students to discuss, debate, and analyze language."
- foster important lifelong learning skills for close, critical reading of "texts."
- interrogate symbolic images and explore how "readers" negotiate meanings in texts.
- encourage debate and writing about questions and issues that impact students' lives.

Sociology instructors, health and growth education teachers and youth group leaders and others concerned with the psychosocial development of youth can use the film to:

- stimulate conversation about mass media and modern advertising and their influence on students' values and behaviors.
- identify factors contributing to one's identity and self-worth.
- inquire how ads influence our views of different groups of people (e.g. men, women, people of color, senior citizens...).
- explore issues of democracy and personal responsibility.
- offer insights into larger issues of socialization, power, control, and ideology in society.

3. What does Kilbourne mean that advertising "sells more than products; advertising sells values...and concepts...perhaps above all, of normalcy"? How do you know what is normal? What does advertising tell you "you should be"? How is this different for males and females? Use examples.

4. Do you believe you are personally affected by advertising? If not you, then who is influenced? Why do companies pay millions of dollars to advertise?

Segments 2 & 3 - In the Beginning & Manufacturing Consumers (6'13" - 13'25")

Before 1900, advertising was mostly informational. Ads described products and appealed to consumers' logic and judgement. World War I and the 1920s saw advertising shift from text to more emotional and image-centered modes. Advertising became less about products and more about the emotional and social lives of the people buying the products. The growing industrial economy dictated that not only goods but markets for goods (i.e. consumers) needed to be mass produced. Soon, advertisements began to promote anxiety, discomfort, and inadequacy among the population. "You're not OK the way you are," McGrane summarizes. "You need help. You need salvation...Ads generate anxiety and doubts," making us feel "uncomfortable in our skins." He calls this "the production of discontent."

1. How does advertising maintain demand for goods and services? Could people learn to live without being hungry for goods? What would be the effect on the economy and employment if consumer demand fell? What does Ewen mean when he says that twentieth century businessmen had to "mass produce markets that are hungry for goods?"

2. Philosopher and social critic Karl Marx once described capitalism as "production for production's sake; consumption for consumption's sake." What did he mean? Has consumption become an end in itself rather than a means to an end?

3. Define "salvation." What does McGrane mean when he says: "The purpose of modern advertising is to generate anxiety and doubt...and then offer the entire world of consumer goods as salvation"? Do you agree that advertising's chief strategy is the "production of discontent"? Why does McGrane say, "One message you'll never hear is, 'You're OK'"?

Segments 4 & 5 - Becoming What We Behold & False Idols (13'25" - 17'03")

One repeated advertising message, contends Ewen, is: "You are continually competing with everyone around you to be noticed, to be seen, to be admired, to be successful." Ads urge us to "become what we behold." This section emphasizes that it is advertising which defines physical beauty for women. Modern advertising conditions women to strive for an unattainable standard of beauty - all in the service of selling products. For those women who don't measure up to this standard, Kilbourne concludes, "there are tremendous penalties."

1. Define : ■ competition ■ invidious comparison ■ status

How do you compete with others in your daily life for admiration and success? Do you agree with Ewen that ads ceaselessly encourage us to compare ourselves to others and foster feelings of competition and inadequacy? How do you measure up? Do you see a connection between advertising-driven messages of competition and profits?

2. Examine ads in a fashion or youth magazine. Make a checklist of the traits of the desirable female body; the desirable male body. How many of your friends really look like this? What does Kilbourne mean when she says that while all cultures have ideals of beauty, never before have these mass-produced images been "thrust in our faces everywhere you go?"

3. What does Kilbourne mean when she says "there are tremendous penalties for women" who don't conform to culturally accepted standards of beauty? How true is it:

- that ads for women's products "make women feel incomplete, anxious, and insecure"?
- that "women have been conditioned to feel like failures" if they don't meet advertising's definition of "normal" standards of beauty?
- that "men have been conditioned to feel like failures" if they don't have a beautiful-looking woman on their arm?

EPISODE I - Extension Activities

1. **Mirror Activity.** Look at yourself in a mirror for a steady five minutes or more, like the students McGrane describes in Segment 3. Write down your thoughts and reactions in a journal. Then reflect upon a time when you made an "invidious comparison" between yourself and a friend.

2. **Close Reading.** Select some ads from a fashion or youth magazine (*Rolling Stone*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Spin*, *Vibe*, *Seventeen*). In one column list the problems or anxieties each ad identifies, and in the other, how the product being sold will address or solve the problem. What do you notice? Remember McGrane's assertion about ads playing on anxiety, doubt and fear.

3. **Essay.** Read the article titles from the table of contents of a teen magazine like *Sassy*, *Seventeen* or *YM*. How do these stories provide a "productive" advertising environment for the ads within?

4. **Debate.** Invite someone from the ad or fashion industry to debate with you some of the ideas raised by the film. Keep detailed notes and write a report for a student newspaper.

5. **The Consumer Society.** "Advertising," Jean Kilbourne says, "teaches us that happiness can be bought...and that products can fulfill us." Keep a logbook for a week which compares the amount of your free time spent watching TV and shopping vs. the time spent on other personal interests such as playing sports, art, reading, making music, hiking, etc. Which activities give you the greatest personal satisfaction?

PRE-SCREENING

ACTIVITIES

1. Define, and perhaps draw a picture of each of the central concepts. Use encyclopedias and dictionaries to establish definitions you can all agree on and understand and agree to:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| ■ medium/media | ■ consumer |
| ■ advertise/advertising | ■ ego |
| ■ citizen | ■ democracy |

2. Discuss the meaning of the observation by writer Umberto Eco which opens the film:
"A democratic civilization will save itself only if it makes the language of the image into a stimulus for critical reflection - not an invitation for hypnosis."

What does Eco mean by "the language of the image?" Write your interpretations of Eco's observation. Repeat this activity after watching the film. Did your ideas change after viewing the film?

3. Carry a notebook for one day. Log each and every ad you notice and where you see (or hear) it. Is any place free of advertising?

4. Clip and display favorite magazine ads around the classroom. Focus on collecting ads aimed at young people from magazines such as *Teen*, *Seventeen*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vibe*, *Sassy*, *YM*, *Bop*, and *Spin*. Explain which ads you find particularly compelling, and why.

5. Slogan for a new soft-drink: "Cocapep gives you what you want!" Your task as the ad agency creative director: Create three ads which communicate your message in three different media (e.g. TV commercial, billboard, magazine ad, T-shirt, or radio spot). Design each ad according to the strengths and weaknesses of each medium.

6. Read and discuss the "Key Concepts of Media Literacy" handout at the back of this guide.

QUESTIONS

1. Refer to your definition of 'ego' above. What factors shape your decision-making? How do you know you are making your own decision? What do you base your opinions on?

2. Where do you currently get your information about public issues?

3. List what goods and services you need to live a fulfilling life. Which are unnecessary or irrelevant to living a fulfilling life?

4. What is an ad? Give examples. How many ads do you see each day? How much are you personally affected by ads? Briefly describe some ads that have stuck in your memory.

5. What is a medium? How many different media can you list?

AFTER VIEWING:

Concepts, Questions and Exercises

We've grouped the 19 segments of *The Ad and the Ego* into four distinct episodes. For each segment you'll find below a brief summary of its key concepts and then some discussion questions. Summary questions and extension exercises can be found at the end of each of the four episodes. Follow-up activities for the entire program are given their own section in the guide.

The numbers next to segment titles indicate the times segments begin and end on the video so you can use your VCR's timer to locate segments easily. Please note that 00'00" refers to the first frame of the opening title: "A film from California Newsreel".

EPISODE I: ADVERTISING AND OUR WORLD

SEGMENT 1 - OPENING & TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES (00'00" - 6'13")

SEGMENT 2 - IN THE BEGINNING (6'13" - 9'14")

SEGMENT 3 - MANUFACTURING CONSUMERS (9'14" - 13'25")

SEGMENT 4 - BECOMING WHAT WE BEHOLD (13'25" - 15'11")

SEGMENT 5 - FALSE IDOLS (15'11" - 17'03")

Segment 1 - Truth and Consequences (00'00" - 6'13")

After *The Ad and Ego's* introduction, Jean Kilbourne points out that "advertising sells more than products, it sells values, images, concepts, and above all, normalcy...it tells us who we are and who we should be. ... Advertising teaches us above all to be consumers. It teaches us that happiness can be bought, that there are instant solutions to life's complex problems, and that products can fulfill us and meet our deepest human needs."

Stuart Ewen contends that what's important is not our experience of any one ad but that of living in an advertising "environment" which "repeats certain messages again and again." "We don't see it very well," he explains, "because we're surrounded by it all the time." The average viewer sees over 1,500 ads a day and their effects are "cumulative and mostly unconscious" reports Kilbourne.

Richard Pollay explains that just as a fish doesn't think about the sea, we don't think much about ads because we are surrounded by this ad environment from birth to death. Sut Jhally argues that one of education's goals ought to be "to get the fish to think about the water. In order to understand modern society," he concludes, "advertising is the best place to look."

1. Explain how this section helps you understand expressions like:

■ environment

■ metaphor

■ ambient

■ naturalize

■ socialization

■ normatize

What does Jhally's metaphor mean: "We need to get the fish to think about the water"?

2. Do you agree with Kilbourne that "advertising is a system of education that is powerful precisely because it is not considered education?" What is the difference between the effect of one ad and living in an "advertising infused environment?" Where can we still go where there's no advertising?

EPISODE II: SYMBOLIC MEANING-MAKING AND ADVERTISING

SEGMENT 6 - MOVING MASSES (17'03" - 21'16")
SEGMENT 7 - SEEING IS BELIEVING (21'16" - 22'58")
SEGMENT 8 - SYMBOLISM AND POWER (22'58" - 26'18")
SEGMENT 9 - LESS THAN HUMAN (26'18" - 29'50")
SEGMENT 10 - THE DREAM LIFE (29'50" - 31'35")
SEGMENT 11 - THE MAGIC SYSTEM (31'35" - 33'44")

Segment 6 - Moving Masses (17'03" - 21'16")

World War I became the laboratory for moving masses as the propaganda trades - government, advertisers, newspapers, and illustrators - turned their attention to selling the war. According to Jhally, two important questions they asked were: "What is human nature?" and "What motivates people?" This period marked a shift from rational, text-based advertising to emotional (non-rational) image-based forms as advertisers realized the power in appealing to people on a subconscious level. A Marlboro Man TV ad exemplifies the points made.

1. Why do you think advertisers find that ads which appeal to emotions rather than reason tend to be more effective? Make a list of others who appeal to emotion rather than reason (e.g. parents, demagogues, politicians...).
2. Define "myth/mythology." Pollay says that advertisers associate products with cultural mythologies rather than make true or false claims about the tangible properties of a product. Does this hold true for the Marlboro Man ad? Does the ad make arguments for the benefits of smoking? What does it not say about smoking? What is its "angle" on smoking? Is Pollay's assertion true for other ads?

3. Define: ■ **subliminal** ■ **unconscious**

Do you agree with Kilbourne's assertion that "people are extremely influenced [by advertising] when they're more zoned out"?

Segment 7 - Seeing is Believing (21'16" - 22'58")

What are the cognitive implications of using images rather than words to advertise products? As McGrane points out, "We have a cultural disposition to believe what we see." The human brain processes images and words differently. Pollay explains that we reflect on, consider, and even argue with logical appeals built on words, but we don't "talk back" to images. Advertisers realize that people are more easily influenced by images than words.

1. Define: ■ **paradigm**

Discuss in small groups the meaning of the following two statements:
"Seeing is believing." "A picture is worth a thousand words."

How do these two statements relate to the points made in this section?

2. How might political ads be different if all images except the candidates were banned and only the candidates themselves were allowed to speak?

Segment 8 - Symbolism and Power (22'58" - 26'18")

Jhally explains that humans are "meaning-making" creatures, always wondering "Who am I?" and "Why do things work the way they do?" After a century of experience, advertisers understand the power of symbolism and strive to discover symbols that make people react in predictable ways. One always has to ask: who decides and is in control of the symbolism being used? Ewen connects advertising with Pavlovian psychology. Advertisers try to create stimuli to make individuals "salivate." As Ewen says, "If you can grab people by their emotions, you can get them to follow."

1. Define:

■ **symbol**

■ **decontextualize**

■ **conditioning**

Explain what does Jhally mean when he says:

"Symbolism is never natural - it is tied up with power."

"Symbols are often separated from ideas [rationality] in advertising."

2. Look at the ads posted around the room. What are some of the symbols employed? What values are these ads "injecting" into the products? Summarize the importance of Pavlov and his famous experiment. What techniques do advertisers use to get consumers to "salivate" (see the *Close Reading of Ads Guide*)?

3. Consider George Orwell's famous statement: "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." Why must a thoughtful person ask the question: "Who decides and controls symbolism?" How does symbolism relate to power?

Segment 9 - Less Than Human (26'18" - 29'50")

Kilbourne argues that advertising images affect us at subtle and complex levels. "The first step in justifying violence against humans," she explains, "is turning them into less than humans." Advertising, she concludes, "turns people into objects."

1. Define:

■ **objectification**

Comment on Kilbourne's statement: "Inevitably, we value humans less if we are surrounded by objectified representations of them."

2. Is advertising violent? Does advertising promote male violence towards women in our culture? If so, how? Kilbourne asserts: "Advertising turns people into objects." What do you think?

3. Consider the arguments about bodies in advertising made by Helen Christiansen or Calvin Klein. Both say the naked human body is beautiful and that we should not be ashamed of our bodies or of using bodies to sell products. Role-play a debate between Kilbourne and Klein.

Segment 10 - The Dream Life (29'-50" - 31'35")

Jhally argues that advertising is the dream life of our culture, reflecting "the things we really want" out of life - healthy social, family, and romantic relationships, individual autonomy in our work and leisure activities, and personal freedom. In Contrast to other critics, Jhally claims advertisers don't "create" false needs and wants. Instead, they take our real desires and link them with merchandise. The problem is that what advertising offers--material products--ultimately cannot satisfy our deeply felt needs. That can only be achieved through society. Yet, advertising's "messages about commodities now permeate all of our cultural spaces."

1. Define: ■ **self-actualization**

Explain what Jhally means when he declares:

"Advertising is the dream life of a culture"

"Material goods cannot ultimately provide for our deep social needs"

Discuss these observations as a class. Why does it seem easier to seek satisfaction through products than in society, in the private than the public sphere? Use examples such as physical health, being a good parent, etc.

2. What is the story of 'happiness' ads tell?

3. Former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher once said, "There is no society. There are just individuals and their families." Would advertisers agree? Would you? Compare her statement to Jhally's contention that the marketplace cannot provide what people really want.

Segment 11 - The Magic System (31'35" - 33'44")

Advertising "is all about injecting value into objects whose utility isn't enough to get people to buy them," explains Ewen. Our faith in science and technology allows us to accept advertisers' claims that their products have supernatural or magical properties. McGrane says ads often make us feel that we are "purchasing entrance into a magical world."

1. Why do you suppose we don't often criticize the far-out or magical properties of ads? Why do advertisers pitch products this way when they know consumers don't really believe the magical claims (consider Pollay's earlier point about product association)?

2. Deconstruct the mattress ad or the schoolroom jeans ad in the show, and discuss how each ad links scientific progress with the supernatural, and then links both to the product. How realistic is each ad? What is appealing about each ad?

EPISODE II - Extension Activities

1. **Power of Text vs. Image.** Form two class groups. One group selects a photograph of a historical moment and the other a written description of the same moment. Spend a few minutes writing down what you "see" and what you can learn about the moment from the evidence. Which form of media is more powerful? Which form is more informative?

2. **Symbolism and Patriotism.** Most Americans have been trained to treat the American flag as an important cultural symbol. Debate the merits and dangers of flag worship and the proposed "flag burning" amendment to the Constitution.

3. **Objectification.** Deconstruct magazine, billboard, or TV ads that use body parts to sell products. What are the implications of body part advertising? How might the message change if a person's whole body were used? If a "normal" body were used? Research the extent to which computers are used in ads to touch-up and synthesize human bodies in magazine ads.

4. **Checklist and Essay: Meeting Human Needs.** Make a checklist of what you really want out of life. Begin with Jhally's examples:

■ **strong friendships**

■ **a satisfying romantic life**

■ **time for leisure**

In a second column make a list of products advertisements tend to link or associate with each desire. Then choose one desire and use it to anchor a brief essay distinguishing between material and approaches to satisfying human needs.

EPISODE III: THE ECONOMY AND ECOLOGY OF ADVERTISING

SEGMENT 12 - CONSUMING CULTURE (33'44" - 35'08")

SEGMENT 13 - INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION (35'08" - 37'23")

SEGMENT 14 - PREMEDITATED WASTE (37'23" - 39'47")

SEGMENT 15 - PASSION FOR THE ROAD (39'47" - 41'58")

SEGMENT 16 - AMERICAN EXCESS (41'58" - 44'55")

Segment 12 - Consuming Culture (33'44" - 35'08")

Advertising, claims Jhally, has become "the most powerful socializing force in our society." It has occupied more and more of our cultural space until now ads confront us almost everywhere we go. As Ewen explains, when anyone is awake and looking, there is potential to sell.

1. Define: **■ discourse** **■ socialization**

Refer to your log of ads compiled in Pre-Screening Activity 3. What spaces, if any, should remain free from advertising? What can be done to reclaim advertising-free spaces?

2. Besides advertising, list other institutions which help to socialize our behavior?
3. Do you agree with Jhally that ads are our most important socializing force? How has the "discourse of advertising" affected the power of these other socializing influences?

Segment 13 - Integrated Communications (35'08" - 37'23")

Today's communications technology allows advertisers to engage in "an almost frantic attempt" to reach people in as many ways as possible, often eliminating alternative visions. When a creative effort to promote intense messages is combined with the monopolization of cultural space, the result can only be what Jhally calls "cultural power of the first order," a rather chilling conclusion in light of today's integrated global communication companies.

1. Define: ■ integrated communications mix ■ monopoly

Explain the connections between monopoly, integrated communications, and cultural power.

2. Make a list of all the media that remain commercial- or advertising-free. What are the social implications of a commercially-driven communications system?

Segments 14 & 15 - Premeditated Waste & Passion for the Road (37'23" - 41'58")

Advertising, claims Ewen, "translates the process of consumption into erotic spectacle...making beautiful and desirable the using up of resources." But the other side of mass consumption is waste, pollution and environmental destruction. Look at America's experience with the automobile, for example, where "there are as many cars as people." What happens when China, a country with 1.2 billion people and now only 4-5 million cars, achieves the same rate of "development"?

1. Define: ■ self-alienation ■ ecology ■ development

Look up the connection between economy and ecology and the Greek word, *oikos*.

EPISODE IV - Extension Activities

1. **Alternative Voices.** Watch and make a list of the programs on local cable access channels and other forms of "alternative" media. Assess the programs for their usefulness and value.
2. **Comparing Magazines.** Compare articles in advertising-free women's publications such as *Ms.* magazine with articles in advertising-driven publications such as *Seventeen*. List the topics and titles of the articles in each publication, and write a critical comparison of the two kinds of magazines.
3. **What Do We Do About Advertising?** Pollay says we need to "protect information and the access and distribution of information." Kilbourne says we need to "circumvent the mass media by creating alternative voices - censorship is not the answer." Jhally argues that we need to "challenge the monopoly" of corporate power. Ewen argues for "visionary thinking." McGrane advocates "taking the advertising out of oneself ... to disengage from it." Discuss each point of view. Which of these critics' suggestions do you find most compelling, useful or difficult, and why? What are your own ideas?
4. **Television and Advertising.** In 1961 Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chairman Newton Minnow lectured television executives: "It is not enough to cater to the nation's whims; you must also serve the nation's needs." Do you agree with Minnow's assertion? Do you think an advertising-supported medium can "serve the nation's needs"?
5. **Research Project.** Choose another country and research how it finances and regulates television. Write a brief report.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss in small groups what you learned from viewing the film. Revisit Umberto Eco's opening observation. Write down the most vivid ad, the most indelible quotation, and the most important idea from the film, and then share them as a class. Summarize the film's message.
2. Write a letter to a local or national politician explaining what you have learned from watching the film, and inquiring about his or her position on an advertising-related issue.
3. Write a letter to a company whose advertisements you find deceitful, sexist or otherwise harmful, or to the editorial staff of a magazine supported by objectionable ads. Choose several letters for the class to sign and send.
4. Debate media and public policy issues. Afterwards, write a newspaper, local news program, your congressperson, or the FCC to encourage more public debate.

Possible topics for debate:

- A federal bill to end tax deductions for advertising.
- A federal bill proposing that all commercial use of public space pay a rental fee to the government, the proceeds to support education and the arts.
- Should TV beer advertising be banned?
- Should your school subscribe to Channel One?
- Should advertising be banned from television programs aimed at preschoolers.

Your school, town, or city has been offered the following. Should it accept:

- commercial sponsorship of an annual community event?
- money for your football team in return for the company's name on the jersey?
- a proposal to rent ad space in school hallways?
- Needed money for your school in return for the company's logo on the building?
- Needed park money in return for trail name rights (e.g. the Coca-Cola trail)?
- a multi-million dollar offer for your town or city's name, e.g. "Microsoft City"?

5. Write an essay addressing the conflict between First Amendment rights to free speech and demands to restrict advertising.
6. Present a monthly award (such as "The Golden Plunger") to an objectionable ad. The award should include a critique of the ad. Publish the story in the school newspaper.
7. Raise funds to buy 30 seconds of time on a local station and air one of Adbusters' "uncommercials" (adbusters@adbusters.org)
8. Produce your own video or print "uncommercial" (like Adbusters).
9. Produce a skit about Barbie and Ken or other famous consumers.
10. Organize TV Turn Off Week (TV-Free America tvfa@essential.org) and Buy Nothing Day (Media Foundation: adbusters@adbusters.org) activities in your community.
11. Investigate and assess "Kid Sites" on the internet.
12. Present *The Ad and the Ego* to another class or youth group as a student-teaching project.

2. Consider the following statistics:

- Los Angeles consumes as many resources as Nigeria, a poor country of 100 million
- One quarter of the planet uses three quarters of the world's resources

What do these statistics mean? How should we approach the question of China and the rest of the Third World becoming a North American-style consumer economy?

3. What do you think of Ewen's assertion that advertising "translates the process of consumption into erotic spectacle"? Or his conclusion that advertising promotes "the very principle of consumption, making beautiful and desirable the using up of resources"?

Segment 16 - American Excess (41'58" - 44'55)

The twin issues of scarcity and consumption are closely connected. In America, "where things come from and where they go is, to a large extent, invisible to people," contends Ewen. Instead, advertising paints a glorified picture of consumption as something to be desired, ignoring the fact that consumption requires energy and resources, much of which is taken from other, poorer parts of the world.

1. Define:
 - **scarcity**
 - **interdependence**
2. Explain Ewen's comment that "in America, where things come from and where they go is, to a large extent, invisible to people." Why do ads not portray the labor or the resources used to manufacture a commodity?
3. What does Jhally mean when he says "there is a connection between a way of life predicated on consumption and a way of life predicated on scarcity?" Define "interdependence" again.

EPISODE III - Extension Activities

1. **Research and creative writing.** Choose a communications conglomerate (e.g. Time/Warner, Disney, GE) and research all the media it controls. Write a short story or play to explore the implications of integrated communication and information control.
2. **Content Analysis.** Compare the depictions of consumption with those of work, parenting, education, and science during one evening of prime-time TV. Include ads and programs.
3. **Garage Sale.** Make a list of all the products in your attics, closets, and garages that you no longer use. Compare lists together in class.
4. **Auto Ads.** Deconstruct car and truck ads. Where are they filmed? How do they portray cars and the people who use them? Why don't they emphasize practical characteristics (e.g. reliability, fuel efficiency, etc.)?
5. **Place Quiz.** Use your answers to the following as the basis for a broad ranging class discussion:
 - How do your immediate neighbors make a living?
 - Name as many TV characters as you can. How does each TV character make a living?
 - What TV programs or films depict people at work? Working?
 - List and describe as many native (to your community or region) trees, plants, birds, and wild animals as you can. Where are the vegetables grown that you eat every day?
 - Where are the clothes made that you wear every day?
 - Where does the tap water in your home and school come from?
 - Where does the energy you consume come from?

EPISODE IV: ADVERTISING AND DEMOCRACY

SEGMENT 17 - PROTECTING OUR WAY OF LIFE (44'55" - 47'49")

SEGMENT 18 - MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY (47'49" - 50'47")

SEGMENT 19 - ALTERNATIVE VOICES (50'47" - END)

Segment 17 - Protecting Our Way of Life (44'55" - 47'49")

This section re-examines the American motives behind the 1991 Gulf War. The government and media censored many facts about the war while framing the conflict in the language of "national interest" (i.e. protecting our consumer life-style based on cheap oil). We turned a blind eye to Iraqi casualties, including women and children, referred to as "collateral damage."

1. Define:

■ **euphemism**

■ **newspeak** (Perhaps read an excerpt from George Orwell's 1984).

Discuss the statement "language is a tool of empire." What does the expression "collateral damage" say about those who use it? List any other euphemistic words or phrases you know.

2. Why does Kilbourne conclude that it would have been "intolerable" for Americans to see uncensored photographs of the Iraqi War? Should disturbing or traumatic images (of war or poverty, for example) be censored against public scrutiny? What happened when images of the Vietnam war were freely shown on network TV?

3. What does Ewen mean by the phrase "systems of unequal development"? Explain your reaction to Jhally's statement that America "needs" the energy and resources of the world.

Segment 18 & 19 - Media and Democracy & Alternative Voices (47'49" - END)

Segment 18 explores the impact of media mergers on our political process, suggesting that democracy requires an "engaged public," and that corporations' immense power to ignore alternative voices restricts the freedoms of the populace. What, then, can we do when confronted with a world shaped by commercialism?

Segment 19 suggests some answers - personal and political. Through the creation of more avenues of free speech and expression, by challenging the commercial culture, and through a personal reappraisal of our relationships to advertising, we can begin to make changes in ourselves, our communities, and our world.

1. Define "censorship." Can there be kinds of censorship other than those imposed by a government?

2. Assess the film's assertion that our current advertising system is a threat to democracy. Consider Jhally's remark that "Americans seem to have a strange notion of freedom. They believe that if you're free from government, you're free, which overlooks the fact that there can be other opponents of freedom, like corporations."

3. How might news and information be paid for if not by advertising?

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PRODUCER/DIRECTOR/EDITOR HAROLD BOIHEM is an independent filmmaker and visual anthropologist who has worked as an assistant director, production coordinator, editor and post-production supervisor on a wide range of feature and documentary films, network television and commercial programs. *The Ad and the Ego* is his first full-length documentary production.

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS EMMANOULIDES is a film and videomaker who teaches at the University of the Arts and the Scribe Video Center. He is executive producer of the *Travelers* series for the Discovery Channel.

NEGATIVLAND: ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK / SOUND DESIGN. Negativland has been recording music/audio/collage works since 1979, producing a weekly 3-hour radio show, "Over the Edge," and hosting a Web site. After being sued by Island Records and then their own record company, Negativland now operates its own label, Seeland Records.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

DR. STUART EWEN is Chair of the Department of Communications at Hunter College. He is the author of *All Consuming Images*; *Captains of Consciousness*; *Channels of Desire*, and most recently, *PRI A Social History of Spin*.

HERB CHAO GUNTHER is President and Executive Director of the Public Media Center, the nation's largest nonprofit, public interest advertising agency.

DR. SUT JHALLY is Professor of Communications at the University of Massachusetts - Amherst and founder and Executive Director of the Media Education Foundation. His books include *Social Communication in Advertising*; *The Codes of Advertising*; and *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show*. His video productions include *Dreamworlds: Gender/Sex/Power in Rock Video*; *Pack of Lies*; and *Deconstructing Advertising*.

DR. JEAN KILBOURNE's work on media imagery and young people is the subject of five films: *Killing Us Softly*; *Calling the Shots*; *Pack of Lies*; *Slim Hopes*; and *Still Killing Us Softly*. Dr. Kilbourne has been an advisor to two U.S. Surgeons General, sits on the National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, and has testified before Congress.

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GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF MEDIA LITERACY

by Patricia Aufderheide

We know about the world primarily from the media. But the media don't simply give us the world. They interpret reality, tailor it, perform it. In order to be responsible citizens, we need to be media literate. To help you engage in that process, here are eight "key concepts" of media literacy.

1. All media are constructions.

Media do not simply reflect reality. They present productions, which have specific purposes. The success of these productions lies in their apparent naturalness. They don't look like constructions. But they are, and many different constraints and decisions have gone into why they look the way they do.

2. The media construct reality.

While they themselves are constructions, media productions also construct within each of our heads a notion of the real. We each carry within us a model of reality, based on our observations and experiences. Using that model, we believe that we're capable of distinguishing truth from lies, and are confident that we won't let "them" pull the wool over our eyes. But much of our model of reality comes from the media we've seen, or that other people whom we take as models (our parents, our teachers) have seen. So it's not as easy as it might seem to draw the line between personal lived experience and the world of "the media." In fact, the media are constructing our sense of reality each day.

3. Audiences negotiate meaning in media.

Even though media carry messages, they aren't received by everybody the same way. When you like a movie your friend hated, that's pretty clear. Each of us 'filters' meaning through our different experiences: our socio-economic status, cultural background, gender, whether we're tired, whether we know somebody involved in the story. But some meanings end up being more widely accepted than others, a fact that reflects the relative clout, or social power, of the filters which affect our different readings.

4. Media have commercial implications.

Most media production in this country is a business, and must make a profit. Even the so-called "public" media - public television, public radio - have to raise money to survive. When you decode the media, you need to ask yourself: Who paid for this? What's the economic structure underpinning this piece of work? When the producer or writer or director chose the subject and began production, how did financial pressures affect his or her choices?

Mass media do not speak to individuals, but to groups of people - in fact, to demographic markets. You are part of several demographic markets - young people, men or women, people of your region, people with your particular hobby, etc. The more money you have to spend within any particular demographic, the more valuable you are to mass media's marketers.

Mass media's commercial implications also involve ownership in another way. If the same company owns a record company, a movie studio, a cable service, network television, videocassette recording and book and magazine publications (as does Time Warner), it has a powerful ability to control what is produced, distributed and therefore, seen.

5. Media contain ideological and value messages.

A media literate person is always aware that media texts carry values and have ideological implications. (Ideology in this sense means the set of assumptions for what we think is normal.) A media literate person does not complain that something is biased; he or she searches out the bias, the assumptions, the values in everything that's made. It's all made by people after all, who interpret the world according to their own values and assumptions. Most often, the media affirm the world as it is, the status quo, the received wisdom, whatever is thought of by the media makers as the consensus. And they become reinforcers of that status quo as a result.

Because media mostly reinforce the status quo, the fact that they carry values may seem almost invisible, or ordinary, or not worth noting. It becomes clearer that they carry those values when you disagree with them.

6. Media have social and political implications.

Because media construct reality, under economic terms that shape their messages, and powerfully transmit values, they have important social and political effects on our lives together in society and as members of the public.

7. Form and content are closely related in media.

Each medium has its own distinctive characteristics. You will get a very different experience of a major event by reading the newspapers, watching TV, listening to the radio, going to a movie or reading a book about it. A media literate person asks: What about the form of this medium influences the content? Is that formal capacity being exploited well, or is it being wasted? What about the form limits the content?

8. Each medium has a unique aesthetic form.

Understanding how to "read" the media also means understanding that they are each art forms as well as information transmitters. We pay attention, in writing, to the well-crafted phrase, the vivid quote, the tightly structured argument. We appreciate editing that sharpens contrasts and makes our heart skip a beat in audio, video and film. We understand the power of a camera to shape our own point of view on entering a scene. When we see how media are constructed, we are able to judge their aesthetic value. We ask two sets of related questions: Did it entertain me, keep my attention, involve me - and how did it do that? Did it tell me more about the world, human affairs, and my part in it - and how did it do that?

(Patricia Aufderheide is a professor in the School of Communication at American University in Washington, D.C.; concepts drawn from Media Literacy: Resource Guide, Ontario Ministry of Education, 1989, and the work of many teachers)

CLOSE READING OF ADS: A HOW-TO GUIDE

Remember three central ideas about advertising:

- Emotions are the key advertisers use to persuade even the most "educated" audiences to consume products. Advertising by necessity is anti-intellectual, simplifying all subject matter. The advertiser's motto must be: "Why Ask Why? (Drink Bud Dry)." Reasonable, logical, and reflective thinking hinder the emotional and, by extension, the consumptive process.
- The neurophysiology of the brain determines the power of text, sound, and image-based media messages. Images and music are immediately stored in more ancient parts of the brain which are most directly connected to the central nervous system. Images arouse the strongest emotions, and are more persuasive than sound ("Seeing is believing.") Together, images and music are more powerful than text.
- Third, advertisers spend millions of dollars to research, write, shoot, test on focus groups, rewrite, reshoot, test market, produce and distribute every scene in an ad. Most individuals cannot spend as much time and energy in deconstruction as an advertising company spend in construction.

With these three principles in mind, follow the steps below to deconstruct the ad.

1. Real Time Images: Identify and describe "real time" visual images, symbols, and simple techniques of persuasion (flattery, humor, fear, hyperbole, the use of power words, distortions of fact and/or lies, repetition, testimonialism, name calling, simplification, appeals to scientific "evidence," nostalgia, or "bandwagonism - "everyone's doing it.")

2. Techno-Effects and Subliminal Images: Identify the techno-events of the ad. Ask: How is the scene framed? What camera angles are used? Where is the viewer positioned? What computerized effects are used? What kind of music is used? How do all of these techniques contribute to the ad's power? Use a VCR or computer's "stop-frame" process to identify subliminal or near subliminal images.

3. Emotions and the Story: Identify the story the ad is trying to tell. What "problems" will the product solve? What are the associations the ad makes with the product? What are the advertisers trying to get you to believe? What messages is the ad trying to send? What emotions does the ad appeal to? What is the "logic" behind the ad?

4. Intended and Unintended Effects: Identify the intended effects of the ad. What are the producers trying to do? What is the target audience for the ad? How do you know? Identify the unintended effects of the ad. Imagine a wide spectrum of responses to the ad (See general principles, #3 above). What other meanings could audiences construct from the ad?

5. Marketing Strategy: Identify the strategy of the ad. Why is this ad running? How long has it been running? What does the corporation running the ad hope it will do for their public relations or product "image?"

(Prepared with help from the New Mexico Media Literacy Project.)

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SAN FRANCISCO - Advertising is everywhere. From television to the area behind home plate, it sometimes appears our entire cultural space is up for sale. Channel One has opened the door to ads in schools - in lunchrooms, school buses, even hallways. Yet for all its ubiquity, advertising has remained curiously unexamined until now.

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The Ad and the Ego offers the first comprehensive examination of advertising and our culture of consumption. It artfully intercuts clips from hundreds of familiar television ads with insights by Jean Kilbourne, Stuart Ewen, Sut Jhally and other noted cultural critics.

Neil Postman, author of *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, contends, "**The Ad and the Ego** should be required viewing for every consumer - which means all of us!"

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With the video and guide teachers can explore numerous themes, including:

- ❖ how living in an advertising infused environment may affect our personal values and behaviors - including identity and self-worth
- ❖ the implications of our consumer culture for social relations, democracy, and the environment
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Teachers may order **The Ad and the Ego** and Curriculum Guide from California Newsreel at a specially reduced price of \$49 plus \$10 shipping (the standard university price is \$195). Contact California Newsreel at 415-621-6196 (tel); 415-621-6522 (fax); newsreel@ix.netcom.com or at <http://www.newsreel.org>.

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