

# POST AV



Redactioneel

Een trein van schaduwen

Bewegende beelden

De zwijgende film in het  
onderwijs

Putting film in perspective

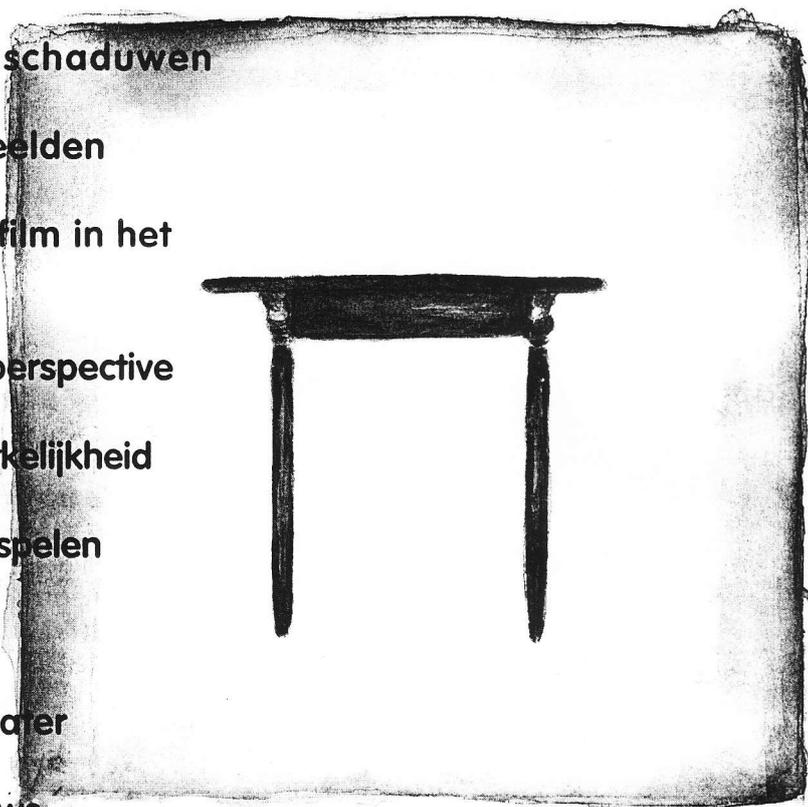
Een andere werkelijkheid

Met schimmen spelen

Boeken

Schaduwentheater

Agenda & Nieuws



## BEELDEN BEWEGEN

door William Uricchio

The students facing us in the classroom constitute the most media-active sector of our population. As a statistical aggregate, they see more films and watch more television than any other group, excepting - perhaps - media professionals. Moreover, they are the group most systematically involved in testing the new media through interactive video and computer games. Yet this openness to media experiences seems largely limited to mass-market entertainment media in which Hollywood and Nintendo are overrepresented. The European film, independent or art films, and certain innovative types of television programming instead find their audiences among the 30+ generation, and even there, among the better-educated sector. The potentially consequences for the future of national media production, and cultural self-representation, are easy to predict, and in themselves a compelling reason to do more in the area of media education. But in an ever-more intensive media-age, the need for informed viewers, for critical viewers, is a cultural imperative. And this, more than anything else, seems to me the most important challenge facing media educators.

### goals of media education

Studies in film and television, whether on the basis school level or the university level, can help to develop critical viewers in three main ways:

- » They can offer an understanding of the history of the media: How they developed; why they took certain forms; what patterns of dominance have appeared; how society has reacted.
- » They can create an awareness of specific possibilities for expression and communication: How are stories structured; what are the potentials of the moving image; what are the alternatives to narrative films.
- » And, perhaps most importantly, they can encourage sensitivity to the implications of media products: What are the cultural consequences of media representation; how

do audiences make sense of media products; where are we headed with our current media policy.

How to achieve these goals? Many different approaches are of course possible, but fundamental to all of them is the proviso that we not underestimate the relatively sophisticated media experiences of our students - rather, we should appeal to them. One approach that I have found particularly useful in meeting the just mentioned goals involves considering a particular film from the three perspectives of text-intertext-context. But before describing these three perspectives, it is important to point out that they

not only to some extent overlap but that the viewing experience necessarily draws them together.

### text-intertext-context

By *text* I mean the film itself. This includes

- » the audiovisual components of the film: techniques such as sound engineering, cinematography, art direction, editing;
- » the performative aspects of the film: voice and gestures of the actors;
- » and the structure of the film event: narrative, non-narrative.

Knowledge about techniques and patterns of production of mainstream (Hollywood and European) films are important; but so too is an appreciation for the possibilities of the film medium. One of the best ways to 'see' these possibilities is to look at documentary films, and at abstract and experimental films, and films from other cul-

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tures and other times. Such material can be used to discuss the role of technique, the limits of seeing the medium only as a story-telling form, and at the same time it can open students' eyes to the techniques (the success and failure) of the films they normally see.

By *intertext* I mean the relations of film to other cultural expressions, to other texts (and to context). For example, the tendency of Hollywood films to use a popular song on the soundtrack permits the circulation (and thus advertising) of film related material on the radio and on television (MTV). Any of the Batman films can be approached intertextually by having



the students list the many places the Batman figure appears: comics, T-shirts, music videos, et cetera. This permits the discussion both of what characteristics are unique to film, but also of the ways in

By *context* I mean the world within which films are produced and seen. Political issues, economic expectations, and social debates often find a place on the screen. Of course, it's rarely as simple as film

to see in a new and more critical way.

### the two strongest elements

Those issues all help to inform and shape the viewing experience - from what we think of cinema as a cultural form, to why we decide to go to certain films and not others, to how we or others actually see film. The experiences of our students together with their curiosity are the two strongest elements we have to construct media pedagogy. What remains is for us to share our experiences in the classroom and work towards more effective techniques of media education.

## LM IN PERSPECTIVE

which desire to see the film and information about it is created in society. It's no wonder that the film had one of the best office openings of all time, when we consider that *Batman* was made by Warner Bros., the same company that makes the comics, that markets Prince's soundtrack, that is part owner of MTV.

Intertextuality also permits students to see that films are deeply related to other cultural forms, and other textual issues. The relation to music and fashion may be obvious, but the issue extends to ideas of masculinity or femininity, to the depiction of political authority of the role of other media in society.

simply 'reflecting' society. But context is crucial to understanding how and why certain patterns of film production exist - and as we have seen by the example of considering that *Batman* was made by Warner Bros., the relation of corporate context to the discussion of intertext is clear. Moreover, films can offer valuable historical evidence of the time in which they were produced, but the key to this understanding is sensitivity to the historical context in which the film was made and seen. Most importantly, context offers the frame through which the films of the present are seen, and discussion of this point alone helps students

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