media

HEINEMANN

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THIRD EDITION

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Contents

How to use this book

Chapter content

Chapters 1–5 correspond to Units 1 and 2 of the newly accredited VCE Media Design Study. Chapters 6–8 correspond to Units 3 and 4 of the newly accredited VCE Media Design Study.

Case study

Case studies invite in-depth investigation and extend students' knowledge and understanding of media texts, topics, concepts and ideas.

Cut away

Highlights and explains in more detail important points in the text

Focus in

Defines terms and concepts, expresses another viewpoint, or elaborates on main text with an example

Zines – an anti-style

A zine is a small, self-published print publication that is often produced simply with a typewriter, photocopier and a stapler. Zines are usually in black and white. When colour is applied it is simple and for a specific impact. The colour is often hand-applied and then colour-photocopied. The typeface is usually one we would associate with a typewriter or it is hand-lettered. A zine can contain writing, images, cartoons, graphic stories or a combination of these, which are usually created by the author themselves. This classic zine is A5 size, which is usually achieved by folding A4 paper in half.

ZINE RULES

The main rule that can be applied to zines is that there are no rules—although, that is not strictly true as, like all media products, there are codes and conventions that have grown up around their publication of zines and there are general principles like the above which can be used to define them. One of these general principles is that a zine is not a mass publication and it does not have mass distribution.

FIGURE 3.4.7 A zine by Year 11 media student Ashleigh H examining her feelings towards the media

FIGURES 3.4.8 AND 3.4.9 Sticky Institute, Melbourne

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Examples of student work

Samples from former VCE Media students' production design plans serve as a guide for current students as they work to produce their media product.

FIGURES 3.1.4 AND 3.1.5 *Hail Caesar* (2016) right and *Fargo* (1996) left show how the Coen brothers have explored different genres.

Another way is to consider a song by one artist that is covered by another artist—the words and tune will be the same, but how they are arranged is a result of creative decisions by the covering artist—that is, their style.

Genre is a French word meaning 'type' or 'kind' and when used in English it is typically used to categorise media products. Genre can be seen as part of an industrial or institutional type of production. Filmmakers, photographers and other artists can, and usually do, have a distinctive style, but they can also work within a genre. Genre can feel quite restrictive sometimes to a writer but those constraints can be very satisfying to an audience. Genre can also be played with, referenced and used out of context to surprise and engage an audience on a number of different levels.

The Coen brothers' films are a good example of filmmakers playing with genre and they bring their own distinctive style to a number of different genres, as illustrated in Figures 3.1.4 and 3.1.5.

Both style and genre also play a large part in the expectations an audience has when they approach a film, a print product or other media texts. Filmgoers often talk of seeing the new Wes Anderson film or that latest action film. Both style and genre codes and conventions shape the story and the way it unfolds and is read by an audience.

Learning activities

1. What are the three essentials to telling a story?
2. Explain the importance of an audience.
3. Look at Figure 3.1.3. Using no more than five sentences, create a story centring on the photo. What medium would you use and what genre might it fall under?
4. Look at the following scenario for the beginning of a film. Using your knowledge of genre convention, add two or three lines describing what happens next and how it ends.
   - The 'unattractive' nerdy girl is always being left out and being picked on by the 'cool' group.
   - A 'mad' bomber holds the city to ransom. There are only two detectives available to deal with the crisis. One is just about to retire and one is just about to be suspended.
   - It is one week before the wedding and an old boyfriend comes back to visit the bride.
   - A prisoner is released from prison. He decides to get a team together for one last robbery before he skips the country forever.

CHAPTER 3 | INVESTIGATING NARRATIVE 63
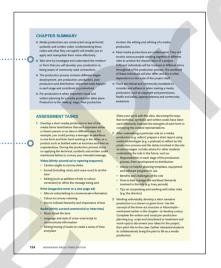
Learning activities

Can be used as homework tasks or to facilitate classroom discussion

Chapter summary

Provides an overview of the chapter in clear, succinct dot points

Assessment tasks

Present opportunities for further research and skills development

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Media productions are constructed using technical, symbolic and written codes. Understanding these codes and what they can signify will enable you to apply and manipulate them more effectively.
- Take time to investigate and understand the medium or form that you will develop your production in, being aware of commonly used conventions.
- The production process contains different stages: development, pre-production, production, post-production and distribution. Important tasks happen in each stage and contribute to production.
- Pre-production is when important visual and written planning for a media production takes place. Production is the 'making' stage. Post-production

involves the editing and refining of a media production.

- Most media productions are collaborative. They will involve various people working together in different roles to achieve the shared vision of a project. Different individuals will be involved at different times throughout the production process. The workload of these individuals will also differ and this is often dependent on the scale of the project itself.
- There are ethical and community standards to consider and adhere to when making a media production, such as copyright and permissions, health and safety, appropriateness and community awareness.

ASSESSMENT TASKS

1. Develop a short media production in two of the media forms listed below. Each represent either a chosen person or an idea in different ways. For example, you could portray a teenager as rebellious in one form and then hard-working in the other, or a product such as bottled water as luxurious and then as unpretentious. During the production process, focus on applying the technical, symbolic and written codes mentioned below to convey your intended message.
   Video (thirty-second ad or opening sequence)
   - Camera angles to convey status
   - Sound (including music and voice-over) to set the tone
   - Editing (such as addition of text or colour correction) to refine the message being sent
   Print (magazine cover or a one-page ad)
   - *Mise en scène*/setting to communicate information
   - Colour to convey meaning
   - Size to indicate hierarchy and importance of text
   Audio (thirty-second commercial or interview)
   - Music to set the tone
   - Language and style of voice-over/script to communicate information
   - Editing/mixing of audio to create a sense of time and place

Share your work with the class, discussing the ways that technical, symbolic and written codes have been used effectively. Evaluate the strengths of each form in conveying the created representations.

2. After undertaking a particular role on a media production (e.g. editor), prepare a short report using media technologies (e.g. a podcast) to reflect on the production process and the duties involved in the role at various stages. Include advice for other students undertaking the role in the future, such as:
   - Responsibilities in each stage of the production process, from development to distribution
   - Advice on helpful planning templates, equipment and software programs to use
   - Benefits and challenges of the role
   - How to best manage the workload demands involved in the role (e.g. busy periods)
   - Tips on cooperating and working with other roles (e.g. the director)

3. Working individually, develop a short narrative production in a chosen or given form. Use the concept of the three-act structure or Monomyth—mentioned earlier in this chapter—to develop a story. Complete the written and visual pre-production planning (e.g. script and storyboard or treatment and mock-ups) to document your ideas for the project, then pitch this to the class. Gather interested students to collaboratively bring the plan to life as a media production.
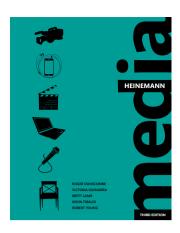
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Glossary

A comprehensive list of media words and terms. Each explanation is written in easy-to-understand language.

Digital

Each student book comes with Reader+

Reader+ works both online and offline

Reader+ has access to:
- podcasts and video interviews
- samples of student work, including films and production design plans
- production design plan templates
- worksheets
- additional assessment tasks
- exam preparation ideas, tips and suggestions.

Heinemann Media Third Edition is written for the VCE Media Study Design 2018-2022 and incorporates the requirements of Units 1–4 in one convenient student book.

Student book

- Full-colour text with a highly visual and engaging design
- Dynamic and relevant pictorial and textual media examples, including former VCE Media students' work
- Topic-based units written in accessible language with clear and concise explanations of key terms and concepts
- A variety of learning activities for regular revision and consolidation
- Case studies that describe and encourage in-depth investigation of media texts and topics
- End-of-chapter summaries, assessment tasks and exam preparation
- A glossary and an index for ready reference
- Written by an experienced author team, who are all practising teachers:
  - Roger Dunscombe (lead author), Chair of Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM)
  - Victoria Giummarra, Board member, ATOM
  - Kevin Tibaldi, Board member, ATOM
  - Brett Lamb, experienced Media teacher, blogger and presenter
  - Robert Young Education Officer, ATOM

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- Available for use online and offline
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1 Representation

The idea that reality is constructed and represented is one of the core concepts in media. All media practitioners work to portray or 're-present' a particular version of a reality—for instance, filmmakers begin by consciously thinking about ways they can represent events, characters and ideas on film. Similarly, photographers deliberately decide what to represent and what techniques they will use to do so. Even media texts that claim to show reality, such as documentaries and news, begin with a process of selection and construction and finish with a process of construction.

This chapter discusses the ways in which media products, messages and meanings are constructed and created through this process of selection, omission, construction and representation. The chapter also explores how meaning and media products are received and understood by audiences through the processes of selection, interpretation and interaction.

The Treachery of Images by René Magritte, oil on canvas, 1928–29. Magritte is saying that in the arts in general and in the media in particular, what is presented as reality is not reality itself.

1.1 Representing reality

Media practitioners work to portray or 're-present' a particular version of a reality. The idea that reality is constructed and represented is one of the core concepts in media.

FIGURE 1.1.1 The media constructs and creates images. An Iraqi POW and marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit in Iraq in 2003. Note how the original Associated Press image [far left] can be cropped so how we read the image changes.

MEDIA AND REALITY

The media attempts to create a believable version of reality—if it was not believable you would not accept it. The media relies on what has been termed your 'willing suspension of disbelief'. You know it is a film or a television show but you 'go along' with the illusion—if you did not you would not get any enjoyment from it. This seems obvious when you are talking about fictional texts, but the creation and construction of a reality happens just as much in non-fiction texts such as news and documentaries. It is just that in these latter cases the construction is concealed more by both the creator and the viewer/reader, as illustrated in Figure 1.1.1.

Figure 1.1.1 from the Iraq War in 2003 illustrates how reality can be constructed through selection and omission. In the first and original image, marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit are seen offering an Iraqi POW a canteen. The next image is cropped to show the gun only. The last image is cropped to show the canteen only.

Learning activities

1 Look at René Magritte's painting on page 1.
   a Describe what you see.
   b The text in the image, 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' means 'This is not a pipe'. If this is not a pipe, then what is it?

2 Look at the images contained in Figure 1.1.1.
   a Describe what you think is happening.
   b By covering different parts of the image (selection and omission) can you create different ways of reading this image?
   c What implications can you see when images are manipulated like this?

CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY AND SELF

One of the ways the media (and you) can construct a reality is via the process of representation. That is, the media (and you) represent a construction as though it was the original and authentic. These representations can be a variety of different things. They can depict:

- individuals (these can be human or animated characters in narratives, or political and historical figures or celebrities)
- social groupings (such as families, genders, age or ethnic groups)
- institutions (such as the law)
- ideas (such as freedom or equality)
- events (such as wars)
- issues (such as climate change and the environment, or terrorism).

IDENTITY AND CONTEXT

The construction of identity can change with context. If you were constructing an identity for yourself the way you went about it would be influenced by both:

- the medium, the form it would take; for example, a typed resume or a social media profile
- the audience; for example, a parent, an employer, friends or social peers.

Learning activities

1 Write down in a few sentences what 'identity' means to you. In this case, look at identity as: you as an individual; you as part of a group such as a your family, school or class; or how you identify yourself in the broadest sense, such as with respect to gender, ethnicity or something else entirely.

2 Using your work from Question 1, choose or create a series of images illustrating your ideas about identity. You can create the images yourself, through drawing or photography, or collect them from existing sources.

3 Why did you choose these images? What were you trying to communicate?

4 Show your images to the class.

5 Create a series of brief identities for yourself for each of the following and include an image:
   - a video game
   - a social media site
   - a job application
   - a dating site
   - a fan-based webpage
   - a school newsletter.

6 How has the context changed the identities you have created?

7 Read out an identity to the class and see if they can pick which context you have based the identity on.

FIGURE 1.1.2 No-photo icons

CONSTRUCTING REPRESENTATIONS

The images from the films *Australian Rules* (2002) and *Mean Girls* (2004) shown in Figures 1.1.3 and 1.1.4 have been constructed. This construction takes place through camera framing, location, choice of actors, costume, lighting, location and other tools. The constructions or representations in *Mean Girls* and *Australian Rules* are of specific groups in society—teenagers, or two specific groups of teenage boys and teenage girls. These representations are not random, but carefully selected and constructed by the filmmakers. These constructions give the audience clues and cues on interpreting the images. At its most obvious, in the case of *Mean Girls*, the dominant colour in the image is pink, which, in Western culture is generally seen as a girls' colour. Therefore, you can see that these constructions are mediated (influenced) by a number of things including the maker, the viewer and the society or culture that the work was produced in.

FIGURES 1.1.3 AND 1.1.4 *Australian Rules* (2002) [above] and *Mean Girls* (2004) [below]. These images show representations of teenagers from different times and places.

Learning activities

1 Look at Figures 1.1.3 and 1.1.4.
   a What effect does the choice of actors, costumes, camera framing, composition and lighting have on the representations?
   b Do you think gender has been constructed in different ways in these images?
   c Why do you think this? Provide examples from the images that support your case.

2 Compare your answers with others in your class.
   a Are there any differences in interpretation? Explain.
   b How do you account for these differences?

CONSTRUCTING MEANING

To understand the construction of media realities you need to look at how the viewer/reader or participant makes sense of, reads, understands or constructs the meaning and 'reality' of the text.

> The term 'text' in media and cultural studies has a wider meaning. It is best described as the artefact or 'thing' being examined. It can be a film, magazine, video game, photograph or any media product.

An image does not have a meaning in and of itself—there is no inherent meaning that lies within it waiting to be uncovered.

The audience plays an essential role in the creation of meaning in a text. Audiences interpret or read a representation based on a variety of factors, such as their previous experiences with similar images, how their society or culture generally reads these images, and even the language they use to describe or interact with the images.

It is generally acknowledged that people read and interpret images and, in fact, media products in general via the language of their culture. People give meaning to things with words. If an object could not be named or described in words, then it would be very difficult to communicate it to someone else. Communication is one of the core elements of representation in the media, which exists to communicate ideas. Ideas are coded within representations and the decoding starts to occur at one of the most basic levels of language—words. If this is the case, then an examination of how words work to create meaning and how this meaning becomes attached to representations is needed.

> Roland Barthes was a leading French literary theorist and philosopher in the twentieth century. He questioned how much one could understand the written word in relation to speech.

DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION

Roland Barthes, among other influential thinkers, argued that meaning was attached to a representation via the process of language and that the meaning of words is derived from a process of denotation and connotation. At its simplest, this process starts with denotation—attaching a name and a definition to an object. For example, a simple metal object that is triangular in shape with a sharp edge and wooden handle is given the name 'knife' (denotation).

However, the word 'knife' is not neutral. By the process of connotation, a number of meanings can be attached to the word 'knife', which may be as varied as cooking, food and adventure, or murder, blood and violence.
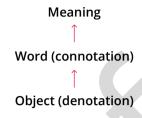
Meaning

↑

Word (connotation)

↑

Object (denotation)

FIGURE 1.1.5 How meaning is created

MEANING: CULTURE AND CONTEXT

Meaning attaches to a representation in a number of ways. Two of the most significant are through the cultures the meaning has been created and viewed in, and the context in which it is read. The role of context can completely change the way an image is read. Take the example of the knife. A knife lying on the floor with blood and broken glass around it will be given a different meaning to a knife placed next to a plate and cake with candles on it. These readings, however, are also culturally based. The knife and candle would be read very differently in a culture that did not bake cakes nor celebrate birthdays like Western cultures do.
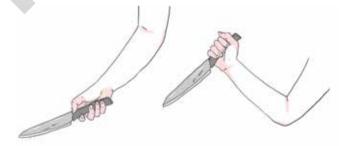

FIGURE 1.1.6 These illustrations reveal how meanings attached to a 'knife' can be altered in subtle ways.

SYMBOLIC AND CULTURAL CODES

Meaning is also attached to images through references to, and within, culture or society. Barthes also talks of a third level of meaning: when the object can function as a 'myth maker'. By this he meant that the meaning could be an abstract idea that might be difficult or lengthy to explain, but is clear in the society in which it is viewed. In the case of the knife, an abstract idea may be happiness (for a birthday cake) or fear (for a murder). In this way, connotation and denotation can create emotion through meaning (see Figure 1.1.6).

COLOUR CODES

The important thing to remember is that these meanings are specific to the society or culture in which they are viewed. Colours, for instance, hold different meanings in different countries. In Australia, gold is generally associated with wealth and green is related to jealousy. In Western society, red is seen as the colour of love and sexuality. In China, Thailand and many Buddhist countries, red is considered a lucky colour and is worn at weddings. In Western countries, black is the colour of death, but in China the colour of mourning is white. Cultural meanings can also change within a society over time. In Australia, green is now connected to the environment and the environmental protection movement—a meaning that did not exist twenty-five years ago.

CULTURAL CODES

Meaning is attached via what Barthes called a 'cultural code'—that is, knowledge drawn and gained from living in, absorbing and consuming other products of a culture. Imagine this scene: it is the end of the film and the young couple have finally overcome all obstacles placed in their way and are together. The camera lingers on them as they embrace on the deck of the ship that is going to take them away to their new life. They move offscreen as the camera reveals a life buoy with the ship's name on it: *SS Titanic*. Whether this is a happy ending or not depends on your cultural code knowledge. If it tells you that Figure 1.1.7 comes from the film *Titanic* (1997) and that the *Titanic* was a ship that sank, killing most on board, you read this image as tragic and know that there is a tragic ending. If you do not know that the *Titanic* sank, then this is simply a classic ending to a romance.

FIGURE 1.1.7 *Titanic* (1997). Cultural code knowledge means audiences can read this image differently.

Learning activities

1 Write down three things that come to your mind when you see the word 'knife'.

2 Compare your answers with others in the class.

3 What connotations could you apply to each image of a knife in Figure 1.1.6? Draw one more frame for each image that could once again change the meaning.

4 You see a knife rack on a kitchen wall. All the knives are there, except the biggest carving knife. Write the meaning you attach to the face of the missing knife if:

   a it is daytime and sunlight is flooding into the kitchen where food is bubbling in a pot

   b it is night-time and the kitchen is enveloped in darkness. You can only see the knife rack by a flash of lightning, and the only sound is a door banging in the wind.

5 Now think of two other objects and show how the meaning attached to them can also change with the context they are viewed in.

	NAME OF OBJECT	CONTEXT 1	CONTEXT 2
1			
2			

6 Write the meanings you generally associate with the following colours: red, pink, brown, yellow, blue, gold, black, white, grey and cream. (There may be more than one meaning.)

7 Share your colour meanings with the class. Does everyone agree on the same meanings?

CODES AND CONVENTIONS

Codes and conventions are some of the building blocks of media language and are very important in the construction of representations. Like language they involve elements that create an organised system of order and construction.

Codes and conventions work, in large part, due to audience familiarity and expectations and, as we have seen, can be culturally based. Many of the visual codes people are familiar with from film and television have become a kind of universal language.

SILENT FILMS

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (1919) and *The Idle Class* (1924) shown in Figures 1.1.8 and 1.1.9 illustrate the codes within early silent movies that became a kind of universal language that could be read in similar ways by diverse audiences around the world, no matter which language they spoke.

There is not a great deal of difference between a code and a convention when talking about representation. Generally, a code is considered to be more like a rule, similar to grammar, whereas a convention is usually an established practice. A code is often the process by which people have learnt the language of the medium. For example, audiences have learnt that when a film cuts from one scene to another, time has passed. A convention may be a symbolic or a story element, such as that the bad guys lose or that a television news broadcast starts with a major story, and is then followed by national news, state news, sport, the weather and then perhaps a good news story. Similarly, a convention in print might be that a magazine begins with a front cover, some advertisements and a title page and ends with a short article or column before the last page, which is often an advertisement.

FIGURE 1.1.8 *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919)

FIGURE 1.1.9 *The Idle Class* (1924)

Learning activity

1 Look at Figures 1.1.8 and 1.1.9.
   a What do you think is happening in each image?
   b What do you think happened just before and what will happen just after?
   c Compare your answers with other class members. Was there a generally agreed reading?

VISUAL CODES IN ACTION

From the example of shots shown in Figure 1.1.10, the viewer can see how images are coded. The images/codes are made up of a combination of elements that, when combined, have meanings attached to them.

- Shot 1: The frame is little more than a shot of a person with a minimal amount of information attached to it.

- Shot 2: If the camera angle is changed to show the shot at a low angle, not only is the image a bit more interesting, but the viewer can begin to develop some assumptions about the person in the shot. Consider what a low-angled shot might mean in this context.

- Shot 3: In this shot, the lighting has been altered. The lighting has been directed from behind the person so that now he has been silhouetted. Consider what you think this combination of back lighting and camera angle might mean.

- Shot 4: In this shot, the person now has an object in his hand; that is, he now has a prop. The inclusion of the prop can alter and/or enhance the image's meaning.

- Shot 5: The person has raised the arm holding the object above shoulder height. There is now an element of performance included in this shot.

READING REALITY

Images like the 'axeman' in Shots 4 and 5 in Figure 1.1.10 can usually be quite simply read, but different audiences can read other images in very different ways. This idea of audiences and their role in reading codes, conventions and cultural references is vital to understanding how codes and conventions operate within media texts and within the cultures that produce the texts. For codes and conventions to convey meaning there has to be a general agreement among the audience about their meaning—just as there is general agreement about the meaning of words among speakers of a language.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall developed a theory about audiences and their understanding of a text. Hall's 'reception theory' is broken into three reading types:

1. dominant or preferred reading where the reader/viewer shares the coded meaning with the author and reads it in ways that the author may have intended or that is consistent with the dominant cultural and social values

2. negotiated reading where the reader/viewer generally shares the dominant reading, but brings to bear their own interests and influences

3. oppositional reading where the reader/viewer understands the dominant reading and codes but rejects them and views the text from a different position. An example of this might be a feminist watching a Miss Universe pageant or a Green voter watching a Liberal Party advertisement.

The Italian writer and philosopher Umberto Eco also talked of an 'aberrant' reading, where a totally idiosyncratic reading is made that often has little grounding in a shared reality.
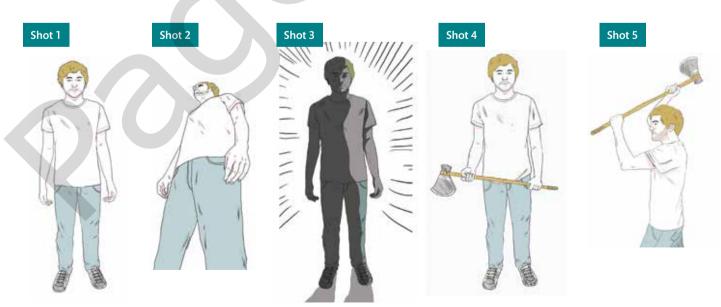

FIGURE 1.1.10 A storyboard showing how images are coded

For example, the song 'Helter Skelter' by The Beatles can be 'read' by an audience in different ways:

- dominant reading: could be, as the songwriter Paul McCartney said, just a wild rock song about a children's ride in an amusement park

- negotiated reading: could accept the dominant reading but also see the song as being about love and its wild ride

- oppositional reading: could be asking how rock stars know what love and life is about when they live in an artificial and isolated world

- aberrant reading: could be the way cult leader Charles Manson read the song—as a call to murder people and to start a racial war through random killings.

CODES AND CONVENTIONS IN ACTION

While audiences may interpret codes differently, they also tend to read them in similar ways. Some people's reading of codes is so ingrained that it just seems the 'natural' way to do it. For example, at a basic level, audiences most often read a film's fade in as a cue that time has passed or, when an object is zoomed in on, they know to attach importance to it.

VISUAL AND AUDIO CODES

Broadly speaking, codes can be divided into two main groups, visual and audio—these are in addition to the symbolic and cultural codes mentioned earlier.

These are the codes associated with production elements or technical devices such as camera work, sound effects, lighting and so on. Some of the visual and audio codes audiences are familiar with are:

CODE	EFFECT OR MEANING
Low-angle camera, looking up	Character appears powerful
High-angle camera, looking down	Character appears vulnerable
Lighting is low with many shadows	Mystery
Fade to black	Time has passed
Cut to and cut back	There is simultaneous action that is the audience is seeing two things that are happening at the same time
Music builds	Tension is increasing

Learning activity

Create your own story around Shot 5 and include four other shots.

| SHOT 1 | SHOT 2 | SHOT 3 | SHOT 4 | SHOT 5 |

You can carry out this exercise in a variety of ways:

- Use a digital camera to capture the images.
- Sketch the images by hand.
- Select someone in the class to perform to your directions, using the boundaries of the whiteboard as your frame.

GRAPHIC NOVELS

Codes and conventions from one medium can be seen or used in other forms. For example, film codes have become part of the visual language of graphic novels, as seen in Figures 1.1.11 and 1.1.12.

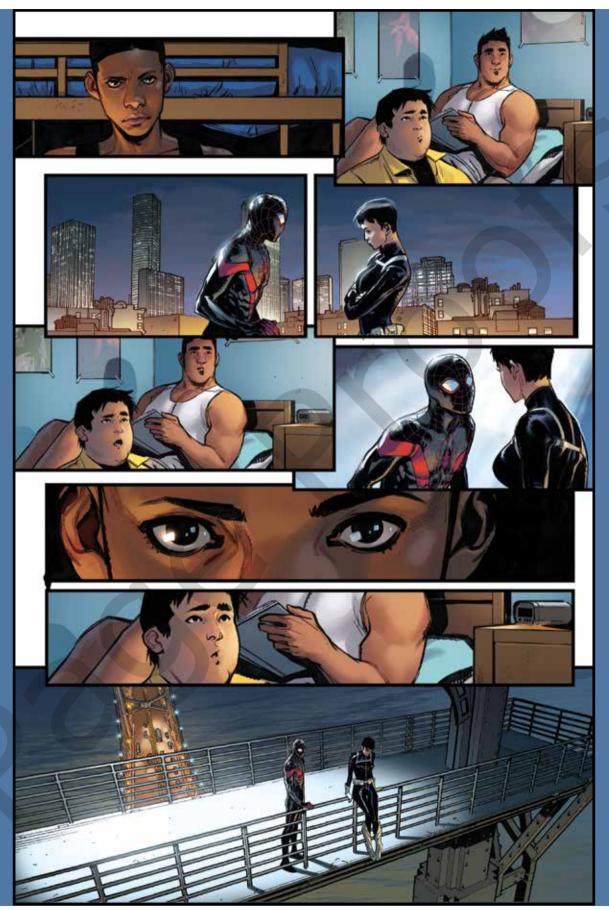FIGURE 1.1.11 *Runaways: Pride and Joy*, Vol. 1, Marvel Comics, 2004

FIGURE 1.1.12 *Spider-Man*, No. 12, Marvel Comics, 2017

Learning activities

1 Look at Figure 1.1.11.
   a Write down all the visual codes that you can see.
   b What effect might these have on an audience?
   c What might you expect to happen next?

2 Write down at least three audio codes such as music, voice or sound effects that you think would fit the image. Explain why you have chosen each one and the intended effect on the audience.

3 Look at Figure 1.1.12.
   a What are some of the codes and conventions from graphic novels that you can see? For example, what direction/order are the frames being read in?
   b What are some of the codes and conventions from film and television that you can see?
   c What effect do you think the combining of these codes and conventions has?

NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS

Narrative conventions are some of the ways a story is organised and portrayed. Audience expectations when approaching a story are, to some extent, shaped by familiarity with the codes and conventions of storytelling. Genre expectations also shape the way an audience approaches a media product, how the story will unfold and how it will end.

The codes and conventions of television news is a good example. During a broadcast, the audience expects to be approached by a newsreader (an authoritative figure) who will introduce the items and reporters 'on the scene'. Viewers also expect the stories to be presented in a certain order (e.g. important, national, local, international, sport, weather, novelty) and that they will contain interviews and opposing viewpoints. These conventions are so familiar that, to the audience, they define a news bulletin, and seem to be the 'natural' or 'normal' way of delivering the news. The viewer does not tend to see news bulletins as a particular construction that may have other values at play.

Learning activities

1 Watch the news on television tonight. The conventions are so strong that it does not matter which one. Write down all the codes and conventions you can see. They may be technical as well narrative. Compare your responses with others in your class.

2 Fill in the following table using your knowledge of genre narrative codes.

GENRE	MAIN CHARACTERS	SETTING	STORY	ENDING
War				
Romantic comedy				
Teen comedy				
Space				

Representations and values

The media is not neutral—its values influence the representations that are constructed.

REPRESENTATIONS

The representations that are a vital part of the media's construction of reality are not neutral—there are a variety of values that are embedded in them. Some of these are obvious and others are deep-seated and concealed by what we consider to be 'normal' or 'natural'. An image, a film, an advertisement or other media artefact is a product of the society and so it will contain the values of that society. These values can range from what the society considers proper, such as all children should go to school, to values that a society holds to be important or essential, such as killing is wrong.

The values that the viewer or audience brings to the interpretation of the representation are important, but a reading can be directed by a variety of influences that can include:

- prior knowledge
- cultural understandings
- personal opinions or biases
- the text itself and the context that surrounds the representation or construction.

MEDIA INFLUENCE AND REPRESENTATION

Figures 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 show how the captions that may accompany news images can and do influence the reading of an image. The captions that accompanied the news images from Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans tell a great deal about values in America, particularly regarding race relations and how media outlets commonly represent African Americans and Americans of European heritage. The captions also reference values regarding youth and maleness, particularly when attached to race.

> Hurricane Katrina was one of the worst storms to hit the USA. It devastated the city of New Orleans—a city with a population that was more than 60 per cent African American. The 280 kilometre per hour winds caused massive destruction, a storm surge caused the levees and floodwalls protecting low-lying areas to fail and 80 per cent of the city was flooded. The areas where the majority of African Americans lived were the hardest hit. Nearly 2000 people died as a result of the hurricane and tens of thousands of people became homeless. Many people blamed the government for taking too long to send aid to the city and argued that the overreaction of the authorities, such as the police, sparked claims of racism.

FIGURE 1.2.1 Caption from US media source: 'A young man walks through chest-deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans'

FIGURE 1.2.2 Caption from US media source: 'Residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina'

FIGURE 1.2.3 A man waves a US flag among other Hurricane Katrina victims as the clean-up effort continues in the wake of the devastation created by the hurricane that swept through New Orleans on 29 August 2005.

VALUES AND CONSTRUCTION

Figures 1.2.3 and 1.2.4 show two views after hurricane Katrina, and how the same event can be seen differently. The images show how construction can have different values attached to it.

FIGURE 1.2.4 *A.D. New Orleans after the Deluge*, Pantheon Books, 2009

Learning activities

1 Describe the ways in which your reading of a representation may be influenced or directed.

2 Look at Figures 1.2.3 and 1.2.4. What attitude or values to hurricane Katrina and the authorities do you think each image is portraying?

3 Find an image from a newspaper, news magazine or news website.
   a Keep the original caption, but write another believable caption.
   b Share your image with your class and see who can pick the original caption.

ANALYSING REPRESENTATIONS IN THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

As a media student, there are some key questions you need to ask yourself when you look at how media representations operate in a social context:

- What is being represented?

- How is it being represented?

- Who made or produced the representation?

- When was it made? How does it fit with other images of the time? How did events of the time shape the representation?

- Why is this being represented and why is it being represented in this way?

- What is being emphasised and what is being left out?

- What do you understand by the representation? Would others have the same understanding?

- What alternative representations have you seen? What is the difference between the two?

REPRESENTING 'OTHER' AND POSTCOLONIALISM

Representations can reveal a great deal of information about the attitudes and values of the society that produced them:

- what a society values

- what it respects

- what it fears.

This is particularly the case when examining representations of other cultures and ethnicities. Representations of ethnicity include racial, ethnic and linguistic groups.

Colonialism in this study is taken to mean the expansion of Europe and European nations into other continents to extend their power and authority. The sophisticated technologies of weapons, transport and communications enabled Europe to conquer peoples in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas and the Pacific. Colonialism reached its peak in the late nineteenth century and began to decline after the Second World War when, after fighting for freedom in Europe, many of the European colonies began demanding freedom and independence.

Part of this struggle for freedom and independence was an increased recognition of how colonisation had worked on a cultural level and an examination of the role played by representations created by the colonising powers. These myths included the idea that Europeans were superior in all fields including the cultural and were coupled with a consistent portrayal of the colonised as the outsiders or as 'other'.

POSTCOLONIALISM

Postcolonialism, the study of the cultural aftermath of colonial rule, explores the effects on a society after it has experienced a period of foreign control. It became a prominent area of study in the latter half of the twentieth century, when previously colonised countries and peoples had gained or were fighting for independence. Postcolonialism contributed to an increased recognition of how colonisation worked on a cultural level and the role played by representations in creating the myths Barthes talked about.

Palestinian American literary theorist Edward Said argued that, almost from its earliest beginnings, Europe had culturally defined itself at the centre. This then placed all others as outsiders—even terms such as 'The East' defined other cultures by their relationship to Europe as the central point.

> The geographical region known as the Middle East was named as such because it is situated between Europe and what was known as the Far East, now known more commonly as Asia.

Said argued that Europe defined:

- itself as rational, forward moving, progressive, free, safe, scientific, educated and civilised

- outsiders, the East, as the opposite: dangerous, backward, irrational, ignorant and inferior.

Said pointed out that these attitudes and values could be seen in the images Europeans used to represent both themselves and the colonised.

COLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS

Figure 1.2.5, an 1896 advertisement for Camp Tea, is a representation of European settlers' opinions of themselves as part of a European colonising power and reflects their attitudes towards Australia's Indigenous inhabitants. Meanwhile, in a typical colonial representation from *Tintin in the Congo*, shown in Figure 1.2.6, Europeans (and even their animals) are portrayed as educated and powerful figures who deserve total respect, if not adoration.

Learning activities

1 Look carefully at Figure 1.2.5, the ad for Camp Tea.
   a Describe:
   - who is in the image
   - what they are doing (What positions do they hold in the frame of the image?)
   - what they are wearing
   - what their possessions are
   - the relationship they may have to each other and to the country.

   b Do you see any evidence of some of Said's arguments in this representation? What conclusions can you draw?

2 Look at Figure 1.2.6, the image from *Tintin in the Congo*.
   a What evidence can you find of European superiority?
   b Do you think there are any exaggerated physical features? Explain.
   c What might the effect of these be?
   d Do you see any evidence of some of Said's arguments in this representation?
   e The Tintin books are aimed at children. How may illustrations such as this influence the way children see Africa?
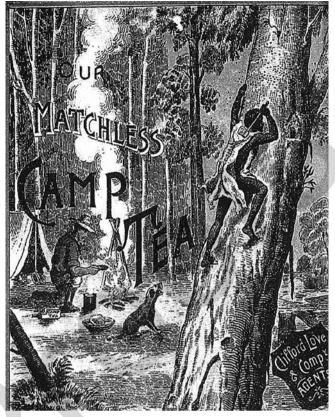   **f** What conclusions can you draw?

FIGURE 1.2.5 Camp Tea, Australian advertisement, 1896

FIGURE 1.2.6 *Tintin in the Congo*, 1931, revised 1946

Representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

In Australia, representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have changed over time. These changes can be seen in an advertisement from the 1920s (Figures 1.2.7); *Dead Heart* (1996), a film that looks at the divide between non–Indigenous Australian values and Indigenous culture (Figure 1.2.8); and *The Sapphires* (2012), a film about four Indigenous women who form a band and travel to Vietnam to sing for the Australian troops during the Vietnam war (Figure 1.2.9).

FIGURE 1.2.8 *Dead Heart* (1996)

FIGURE 1.2.7 A 1920s Australian advertisement for soap

Learning activity

Look at Figures 1.2.7, 1.2.8 and 1.2.9. How do you think representations of Indigenous Australians have changed over the years? Include any other representations of Indigenous Australians that you like.

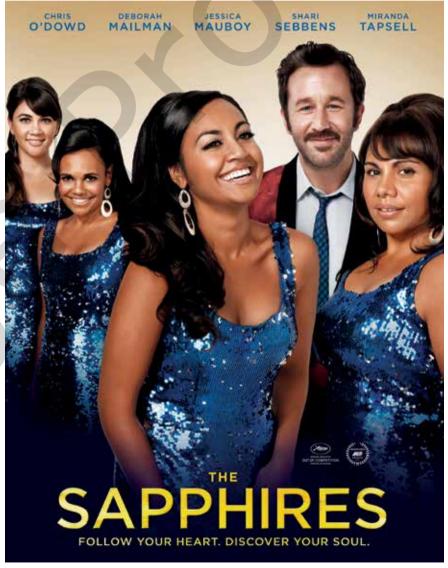Note: Use the analysing representations focus questions to help you form a response.

FIGURE 1.2.9 *The Sapphires* (2012)

THE EXOTIC, THE DANGEROUS, THE HUMOROUS AND THE PITIED

Many media theorists argue that while the representations of ethnicity may change over time, they usually still function in the same way in order to perpetuate the stereotypes, myths and values societies hold towards the 'other'.

Alverado *et al*. in *Learning the Media* (1987) have grouped representations of ethnicity into four categories: 'the exotic', 'the dangerous', 'the humorous' and 'the pitied'. Some of these groupings serve to remove what may be seen as a 'threat', while other groupings emphasise it. Remember, the composition of these groups is not fixed and will change over time. It is also important to remember that that these representations come from the dominant culture—not all groups in society see the representations in the same way.

The exotic is a representation that the dominant society uses to group people who are seen as different, exciting, mysterious, strange or glamorous, but still as outsiders or 'other'. This representation can often be used about a place or time, as well as a group of people.

FIGURE 1.2.10 'Exotic' Greek culture in the USA in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002)

The dangerous is a representation that tends to be prominent in news, current affairs or narrative texts. They are generally represented as a threat to the dominant culture or 'way of life' that needs to be dealt with. The types of people who are considered dangerous often changes over time, from place to place and culture to culture.

The humorous is a representation often found in situation comedies and advertising. It generally relies on stereotyping, or characterising an individual or a group according to a conventional idea or concept. Often, it is hard to criticise representations that claim to be humorous when someone argues that they are 'just a bit of harmless fun'. This representation often functions to mock and humiliate those that the dominant society sees as a minor threat. It also serves to keep the group in their position as 'outsiders', who are to be laughed at, not with. The humorous representation may change with time and place.

The pitied is a representation often used by Western nations atoning for the damage they have caused through colonisation, economic exploitation or war. The pitied may be represented as the victims of famine and war. Usually, the causes of these famines or wars are not examined so as to avoid directly engaging with the actions of the Western nations. Representations of the pitied often go hand in hand with connotations of primitiveness, backwardness or underdevelopment, where again, the causes are not explored. There can be a fine line between the pitied and the dangerous.

Learning activities

1 Provide an example that you have seen in the media of a representation from each of the exotic, the dangerous, the humorous and the pitied categories. You may choose from any media form such as television, advertising, film, print and online media.

2 Can you think of representations of people that have changed over time? What category did the group(s) belong to before and after the dominant culture's change in perception?

3 Find an example of one of these representations and write a short presentation for your class discussing it in light of your reading.

1.3 Representing gender

There have long been concerns about the way the media portrays gender, particularly with regard to gender roles and how the media portrays women.

REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN

Social and cultural theorists argue that the role and status of women in society has been continually evolving, yet this is not always accurately reflected in many media representations of them.

The media in general (and advertising in particular) has often been accused of perpetuating stereotypical gender roles. There is a general agreement that many media representations of woman fall into two categories—women as defined by their relationship with the home, their family and males, or women as defined by their bodies and sexuality.

Figures 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 illustrate the media representation of women in the traditional roles of home and body. The *Stepford Wives* films represent women as domestic housewives who are also physically attractive. Although the 2004 remake was supposed to be a parody (satire) of

the original film, all parodies must, by definition, reference actual representations to be recognised as humorous—the remake shows how representations of women in film have changed little.

FIGURES 1.3.1 AND 1.3.2 In the 2004 *Stepford Wives* remake [above] and in the 1975 [below] original, women are identified in their traditional role as homemakers.

GENDER AND THE MEDIA

Men tend to be defined by their jobs, occupations, sports and hobbies, as independent or as authority figures. They are usually portrayed as active. On the other hand, women tend to be defined by their relationships to men, they are portrayed as wife, girlfriend, lover, or they are defined by their relationship to their family as mother, daughter or carer. The women are usually seen as passive. The male domain is the outside world and work while the female domain is the home and the domestic.

Gender representations are not confined to advertising. Films and television dramas also often contain these representations of women. It is difficult (but not impossible, for there are always differing representations and readings) to think of many examples in film or television productions where the ultimate authority or person in power is not male. Leading politicians and business managers have traditionally tended to be male, although if the business leader is female it is usually because the industry is seen as a feminine one, such as fashion.

The representation of a woman as a 'body', defined by her sexuality, is criticised on a number of levels for ignoring women's intellect, abilities and achievements, and reducing her to a bundle of physical attributes. This view of women has also been criticised for creating an idealised notion of beauty that is unrealistic or not attainable.

GENDER: POINT OF VIEW

An audience's reading of gender and roles can be influenced by the use of technical codes used to construct a representation. Point of view plays a large role in the way people read a text. Viewers tend to see women in media products from the male point of view. In a narrative, this occurs because the main character is usually male. The audience is being told the story through his eyes and it is through them that the audience assesses the other characters.

Audiences' reading of gender roles is also reinforced by the technical composition of the camera's point of view. Visually, this is achieved by directing the audience to look where the male is looking, then cutting to what he sees—the woman as a sexual object. Seeing from the male's point of view in this way is known as the 'male gaze'.

FIGURE 1.3.3 Honey Ryder (Ursula Andress) in *Dr No* (1962)

Learning activities

1 Look at the table of stereotypical gender characteristics below. Copy it and write at least six extra gender characteristics you have seen in the media.

'TYPICALLY' MALE	'TYPICALLY' FEMALE
Independent	Family
Hard	Nurturing
Lounge room	Kitchen

2 Identify which gender you think advertisers target to market the following products:

beer   small cars   large cars
shampoo   sports watches   computers.
department stores   investment advice

3 Give examples of the gender-targeted marketing that you have seen for these products and services. How do you think these advertisements work to perpetuate gender stereotypes?

The audience sees what he sees and identifies with him. This technical composition combined with the story element of point of view stitches the viewer into seeing the text from and identifying with the male character, and generally seeing the woman in one of the traditional roles of a body and/or subordinate. Figure 1.3.3 illustrates the idea of the male gaze. The camera shot before this image is of James Bond looking. The film then cuts to the shot of Honey Ryder, shown through his eyes. She is thus being defined by her body and sexuality.

WOMEN IN ADVERTISING

In advertising, women are typically represented in their traditional role of homemaker, and in relation to their body as in the ad shown in Figure 1.3.4.

> It is estimated that women make up around 80–85 per cent of all purchasing decisions—including technology, cars, houses, pharmaceuticals, yet only around 14 per cent of creative directors of advertising agencies are women. This would explain research that shows 91 per cent of women saying that advertisers don't understand them, as well as nearly 60 per cent of women being unsatisfied by adds in the food sector. A sector where most of the purchasing decisions are made by women.

FIGURE 1.3.4 This magazine ad shows how women are often objectified in advertising.

4 What do you think is the 'ideal' physical representation of a woman in the media?

5 Look at a number of advertisements on television. Can you find any examples of the male gaze?
Do you see any validity in the criticism of the male gaze in the media?

ADVERTISEMENT	MALE	FEMALE
RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS	LOOKS	OCCUPATIONS

6 Examine ten television advertisements and ten print advertisements and draw the results up as a table. Comment on your findings. What do you think are the implications for both men and women?

7 Focus on one print advertisement and one television advertisement that contain representations of both males and females. How would these advertisements work if the gender roles were reversed?

Rewrite one of the television scripts with the gender roles reversed and read it to the class.

8 Look at Figure 1.3.4 and answer the following:
  a Describe the people in the image.
  b Describe the setting.
  c What else can you see? Remember that a lack of something may be as significant as its presence.
  d Who is doing what? What are the relationships between the people or objects?
  e List the main colours in the image. What connotations are attached to them?
  f Is there any text? What are the key words? What connotations are attached to the words?
  g What seems to be the meaning? (What does the ad seem to be saying? What is implied if you buy this product?)
  h What values seem to be being expressed in the message? (How could this ad be read in terms of representations of women and celebrity, for example?)
  i What is your reading of this ad? Can you think of an alternate or oppositional reading of this ad?

1.4 Constructing reality

When audiences are viewing a media product such as a film or a television show, they are watching a construction of reality—not reality itself.

REALISM AND NATURALISM

When talking about media products, particularly film, television and video, many people use the terms 'realism' and 'naturalism' interchangeably, but there is a very real difference. Naturalism is when a narrative/media product complies with the laws of nature. At its most obvious, gravity operates and the people in the text cannot fly. Texts where people can fly or superheroes operate are called non-naturalistic. Realism, on the other hand, refers to when characters and the film's world appears 'real' and logical; that is, police can arrest people, sheriffs wear badges and the characters and plot stay true to the film's internal logic. So, it might be naturalistic for the detective to let the serial killer go free, but it wouldn't be realistic; that is, it does not make logical sense in the story unless we know there is a reason for her to let the killer go.

FIGURE 1.4.1 *Pierrot le Fou* (1965). The use of unconventional framing draws the viewers' attention to the construction of the representation

FILM AND TELEVISION

> Cinema is not the reflection of reality, but the reality of that reflection.
>
> Jean-Luc Godard

When viewing a media product such as a film or a television show, the audience knows that what they are watching is not reality but a construction of a reality. Classical Hollywood filmmaking tries to conceal this construction and present itself as a window to what viewers see as filmic reality. The codes and conventions of the classical Hollywood mode of production reinforce this reality. The camera is generally set at about a viewer's eye line and the most common shot is the 'plain americain' or mid shot, from the knees up. This shot tends to mimic how the human eyes work and gaze. The editing is generally seamless and shots are not jarring. The shots flow in a conventional way that is referred to as 'continuity editing', which viewers have become accustomed to as a reflection of reality.

However, this is not the way all films and television narratives operate. Filmmakers in the 1960s such as Jean-Luc Godard would use unconventional framing and other stylistic devices that continually drew the viewers' attention to the construction of the representation (as seen in Figure 1.4.1). Filmmakers would also jar viewers with actors addressing the camera, perhaps commenting on the film they were in. This particular technique is referred to as 'breaking the fourth wall' and is often seen now in television comedy.

> 'Breaking the fourth wall' is the term used to describe how a character breaks from the action in the scene and directly addresses the audience. The fourth wall is the imaginary barrier that separates the fictional onscreen world from the actual world of the audience. The phrase originated in the theatre.

FIGURE 1.4.2 *Django Unchained* (2012) is a mix of genres, history and fiction that construct a believable reality.

FORMS: FILM AND TELEVISION

There is a long tradition of directors and writers playing with the forms of film and television. Quentin Tarantino is a filmmaker who plays with the form of cinema by mixing genres, history and fiction together to construct a believable reality, as shown in *Django Unchained* (2012) (see Figure 1.4.2).

FACT AND FICTION

Fiction film relies on a sort of contract between the viewer and the film. Viewers willingly suspend their disbelief as part of their engagement with a film text. The audience knows the film is fictional and that it is constructed to appear as reality, but goes along with this in order to enjoy themselves and take pleasure in viewing the work.

Knowing that a film is a construction is all very well when looking at fiction—it is a constructed reality of a fictional event. It is interesting to think about what happens when an audience views a representation of a real event or what happens when representation and reality meet in documentaries or the news.

The representation of reality has been an area of interest and concern since artists first started depicting the world around them. This discussion was fuelled by the invention of the camera, which could create a facsimile of the world.

Some say the invention of the camera was one of the forbears of modern art. Some art historians say that because the camera captured reality, artists were no longer obliged to do so. This meant artists were free to interpret reality rather than reproduce it. This lead to art movements such as impressionism, cubism, surrealism and abstract expressionism, all of which were concerned with the artists' relationship to reality rather than their reproduction of it.

R. Dunscombe, *Focus on Folio*, page 88

The earliest films were documentaries. The Lumière brothers set up the camera and filmed workers leaving their factory. Similarly, one of the earliest films in Australia is of workers leaving a biscuit factory in Hawthorn, Victoria. The answer to the question, 'Did these early films capture reality?' is both 'Yes' and 'No'. Of course, they were actual workers and they were leaving an actual factory at the end of their working day. However, many film theoreticians argue that the films were not an accurate representation of the events because they did not accurately reflect the events—or more particularly, the behaviour of the workers.

PRO-FILMIC EVENT

A pro-filmic event means that the act of filming changes the reality and that people behave differently when they know they are being filmed. This was certainly the case in the biscuit factory film. The workers are seen smiling and waving. It seems unlikely that they did that every day when they left work. They also cleaned themselves up and dressed in their best clothes because they knew they were going to be filmed.

Think about your behaviour and that of your classmates in front of a camera. Consider how you think your behaviour would change if you knew you were being filmed. This is amplified when considering the role of audience. Consider how you think you and your classmates' behaviour would differ if you knew the audience was to be your parents as opposed to if it was to consist of your peers in another state or country.

So, in representing reality, two constraints have been identified so far, the camera and the audience.

REALITY: POINT OF VIEW

In the construction of media realities, you also have to take into account the idea of point of view. All media products are constructed with and from a particular point of view. The creator, the society and the context influence this point. It is important to remember when viewing/interacting with media texts that there is no 'neutral' position. As you have seen, you need to take into account the society that produced the text as well as the people who made it.

The US comedian Jerry Seinfeld illustrated the importance of the point of view of the maker in a sketch about nature documentaries. He pointed out that when the antelope is the 'star' you are on its side when the lion is chasing it and the next week when the lion is the 'star' you want the lion to catch the antelope.

Learning activities

PART A

1 Re-read the Seinfeld example of the lion and the antelope.
   a How do you think the filmmaker achieves this identification?
   b How do you think each of these episodes ends?
   c What is the reality in this situation? Do you think the camera influences the outcome?

2 Look at news broadcasts of an event on a commercial station, the ABC and SBS.
   a Compare how they have represented the event. What are the similarities and differences?
   b Write out an alternative version of the news report from the point of view of one of the parties involved. Present this to the class.

3 Plan two brief documentaries of your school: one is for parents of prospective students and one is to apply for more funds for buildings and facilities. The reality is the same—the school is still the school—but how will you represent it?

PART B

4 Look at Figure 1.4.3. How does it differ from other media representations you have seen of conflicts?

5 Do you think it is possible for a graphic artist like Joe Sacco to report accurately? What do you think the advantages and disadvantages are of the medium he uses to create his representations?

6 Look at a newspaper image or television footage of a conflict that has happened recently and answer these questions:
   a What is being represented?
   b How is it being represented?
   c Who made or produced the representation?
   d When was it made? How does it fit with other images of the time? How did events of the time shape the representation?
   e Why is this being represented and why is it being represented in this way?
   f What is being emphasised and what is being left out?
   g What do you understand by the representation? Would others have the same understanding?
   h What alternative representations have you seen? What is the difference between them?

ALTERNATE REALITIES

Joe Sacco is a reporter who specialises in reporting wars and conflicts; however, he does not reproduce the reality he sees in a mechanical or digital way. Sacco is a graphic novelist. He is also a reporter who inserts himself into the story and one who is aware that he is constructing a reality that is not objective (see Figure 1.4.3).

FIGURE 1.4.3 Joe Sacco is author/artist and reporter and the character with the glasses.

1.5 Reality and reality television

Reality television is a classic example of the way the media can construct a reality and the way that the audience of that reality can willingly suspend its disbelief. We know it is not reality we are watching but we usually choose to ignore that—otherwise, it wouldn't be any fun!

REALITY TELEVISION

Reality television shows cover a broad spectrum, ranging from the survival/adventure/endurance shows to dating and romance, to the workplace. No matter what the format is, they all share the basic elements of a constructed reality. The final product is created via a process of selection, omission and construction.

SELECTION

The process of selection begins when the writers or producers create the idea or vision for the show. Obviously, the show does not come out of nowhere. In most cases, it begins with an idea or a pitch, which is then developed. Ideas are selected (and often omitted) and potential episodes or scenarios are written up. Each of these scenarios is created around a central idea which may be a task, event, audition, challenge or similar. These then develop into shooting scripts so the technical crew can film it.

The course of a reality television show tends to follow the lines of a classical narrative/story structure. There is the introduction where the viewer is introduced to the players and the goals are set; the playout where the players encounter obstacles that they need to overcome; and the resolution, where the show is wrapped up, the goals achieved and the winners have attained money, perhaps a relationship or a successful commercial deal, together, of course, with a certain degree of fame. This structure follows a character or characters' journey to a resolution. This journey may be over the course of the series, which is usually the case with survival/endurance, cooking or dating/relationship shows, or it may be over the course of an episode, which is usually the case with employment-type reality shows.

In general, the viewer concludes that the situations in reality television shows are constructed. The people in reality television are real people and, generally, they are not paid actors. Nevertheless, it is debatable as to whether they would act this way if they did not know they were being filmed.

FIGURE 1.5.1 The creator of *Survivor*, Mark Burnett, refers to it not as a reality television show, but as an unscripted drama.

The process of selection is most obvious when we look at the contestants. They are not chosen at random and, most likely, the writers have given the producers a 'cast' of character types, or character traits that they would like the contestants to have (see Figure 1.5.2). The selection of contestants also depends on the demographic or type of audience the producers want to attract. The audience for a dating reality television show will differ in a number of ways from the audience of a cooking or building reality television show.

OMISSION AND CONSTRUCTION

The creation of a television reality show is not an easy task. In addition to the cast, there is a massive number of support crew working behind the scenes to create sets, props and challenges. There is at least one (usually more) camera per contestant. One camera operator who worked on American *Survivor* said that during the challenges there were often more than eighty crew members working behind the scenes.

Selection and omission can occur in the actual production in terms of what to shoot and what not to shoot. Omission and construction largely occurs in the construction or post-production of the show, which involves what shots to leave in and what shots to leave out. Generally, the main construction takes place in the editing suite—this is where the story and characters are created from the existing footage. In reality television, the amount of footage that is shot is staggering. For a show with twelve contestants with two cameras on them filming ten-plus hours a day, the footage can run into hundreds of hours. In some cases, the producers and editors create thirteen–hour episodes from more than 2000 hours of camera footage!

> In the reality television industry, the result of editing together different sound bites to create a new conversation is called a 'frankenbite'. It is named after Dr Frankenstein, the fictional character who created a monster out of different body parts.

The editing shapes the story and constructs characters, both heroes and villains. Participants on reality television shows are selected/cast according to the types in the pitch, treatment or scenario. Their character traits are reinforced in the editing so that each show will generally have the:

- strong one
- annoying one
- conceited one
- one with the compelling backstory
- struggler.

FIGURE 1.5.2 The contestants of *The Bachelor*

One of the tricks used to create a character is to edit together bits of separate conversations to create a new dialogue. This is usually done to create intrigue or to reinforce a character trait. One way to spot this is the use of cutaways or voice-overs. When a player is seen talking, then a shot is presented of something else before cutting back to the player, or when the player is talking over other footage this is often a sign that the audio has been manipulated.

Learning activities

1 Write a list of reality television shows you have watched or that you know about.
   a What categories would you put them in (cooking, dating and so on)?
   b Name two character/contestant types you would expect to see for each category.

2 Create the outline for a new reality television show. You will need to:
   - outline the basic idea of the show including what it is about, what the goals of the contestants are and some obstacles or challenges they may face
   - identify your target audience and why you have chosen it
   - create a profile of the type of characters you would want to be among the contestants
   - work out how you will cast it
   - outline the first three episodes.

3 Create a pitch for your show to sell to the television company.

4 Create promotional material for your show. You may choose to make a:
   - poster or print ad
   - short radio promotion
   - short video trailer, a 'coming soon'.

1.6 Media reality and hyper-reality

The media has great power when it constructs realities because it does not construct a reality but rather a representation of a reality.

SIMULACRA

Cultural theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco theorise that the media has great power when it constructs realities.

Baudrillard argues that the media does not build a reality but a representation of a reality, which he calls simulacra or hyperreality (see Figure 1.6.1). The audience enters into what Baudrillard calls a false reality that is made up of representations so convincing that they have replaced what was once real. The power of these simulacra of reality lie in the way audiences relate to them as though they were an actual reality rather than a representation of a reality. When audiences see this, combined with the ideas of myth making in society and its cultural products that Roland Barthes wrote about, they tend to read the myths and media representations of reality as reality itself.

This is a very complicated process but it can become clearer when looking at some examples. Both Baudrillard and Eco use Disneyland as one of their examples. They argue that an attraction like 'Main Street, USA' is a replica of an original street that never existed in the first place. They further argue that the replica (or simulacra) cannot be a direct copy but one that has been influenced by the myths and myth building of the society that created it.

In terms of the media constructing reality, Baudrillard and Eco argue that audiences no longer refer to real, experienced worlds, but to this copied simulacra of reality—that is, when people think of the main street in a small town in the USA they think of the Disney version. The audience sees a media-constructed reality overtaking their experienced reality, so that the media creation has escaped or moved beyond the confines of media texts and products.

FIGURE 1.6.1 In *Café Society* (2016), Woody Allen created a hyperrealised version of the 1930s—an idealised version that did not exist.

There are also examples of simulacra in Australia. Victoria's popular tourist attraction Sovereign Hill is a simulated representation of what the Victorian goldfields in the late 1800s may have looked like. Visitors walk down the main street, look in typical shops and houses of the era and even talk to people in period costume who 'live' there. However, Sovereign Hill, as it looks today, never existed and was not a Gold Rush town at all. Up until the late 1960s, it was a deserted gold diggings that had turned back into bush. The town was created from this bushland and Sovereign Hill opened as a town in 1970.

Taking this further, and seeing that much of what people know has been experienced via media constructions, theorists like Barthes, Baudrillard and Eco ask people to question how they attain their knowledge and to be careful when they enter a branded reality. Not everyone agrees with these and other postmodern theorists, but their work provides much to think about when looking at media texts and the role the media plays in society.

Writers such as Barthes, Baudrillard and Eco suggest that the media and media texts construct a reality and that maybe that constructed reality has broader implications for our society.

FIGURE 1.6.2 Main Street, USA®, Walt Disney World® Resort, Florida

FIGURE 1.6.3 Sovereign Hill, Ballarat, is a fictional construction of an Australian mining town.

Learning activities

1 What other examples of hyperreality/simulacra can you think of or have you experienced?

2 Discuss: if media constructions are not reality, then what is? Can reality be reproduced at all?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Media products are not reality; they are representations of a constructed reality. This reality may be a fictional construction or it may refer to aspects of 'the real world', such as a documentary or the news.

- Representations in a media product may be fictional characters or modelled on actual people, but they can also be ideas, social groups, events or issues.

- Representations rely on codes and conventions, which are culturally based and differ among cultures. They are also constantly changing and differ within the same culture over time.

- When looking at particular constructed representations, it is important also to look at who created the representation, where and why it was created and what the purpose of the representation was or is.

- The reality that is constructed in media texts is not neutral but contains ideologies and values. Therefore, the readings of these texts have broader implications for the society.

ASSESSMENT TASKS

1 Produce two full-page magazine advertisements: one showing women in a traditional role (e.g. as a housewife or sexual object) and one in a non-stereotypical representation. The advertisements can be for any product and magazine you wish.

Before you produce your advertisements, write an intention explaining what you will portray, why you have chosen these representations, how you will communicate them to an audience, and who the target audience is.

Upon completing the task, evaluate your advertisements by assessing how well you met your intended aims and considering what you did well and where you could improve in the future.

2 Trace the history of a representation as portrayed in the Australian media. It could be a representation of gender, ethnicity, age or any other that you identify. You will need to research early and recent examples and chart the progression and changes of the representation over a period of time. Analyse at least two representations from your research using these questions as a focus for each:
   - What is represented?
   - How is it represented?
   - Who made or produced the representation?
   - When was the representation made? How does it fit in with other representations of the time? How did events of the time shape the representation?

   - Why is this being represented? Why is it being represented in this way?
   - What is emphasised and what is left out?
   - What do you understand by the representation? Would others have the same understanding?
   - What alternative representations have you seen? What is the difference between them?

   Present your work as an illustrated essay, or a written report with an accompanying slideshow presentation.

3 Write a television advertisement aimed at breaking down stereotypes in modern society. Storyboard your advertisement shot by shot with annotations describing the technical and symbolic codes you will use to create your representation. If time permits, film your advertisement or create a mock-up using Microsoft® PowerPoint®.

   You will have to write a statement of what you intend to do, why, how and what the intention is, and who the audience is, and then you will need to evaluate the finished product.

   Evaluation involves looking at what you did, how you did it, whether it achieved what you set out to do, what you think went well and not so well, and what you would do differently next time.