Eric Fode

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Summary of “On Reading a Video Text”

“On Reading a Video Text” by Robert Scholes reviews an example of an analysis of the textual information conveyed a Budweiser commercial to show the significance of current mass media in relation to our cultural identities. “On Reading a Video Text” begin by reviewing the textual advantages that video has over other forms of textuality, chiefly the ability to convey meaning in the style of the visuals. The purpose of video is also established as being “a change from the normal, a defense against the ever-present threat of boredom”. The concept of “cultural reinforcement” (the process through which texts reinforces the belief that the viewer is part of the culture and their ideas are correct) and its importance in any culture’s is then explored. Building on the basic purpose and the utility of video that was previously established and the idea of “cultural reinforcement” the observation is made that in our (America’s) world mass media takes on the role of performing “cultural reinforcement”. The example of a Budweiser commercial about a black man climbs up through the ranks to be an umpire and is finally accepted is then analyzed to show the nuances that reinforce the culture of the viewer and, further, may not make sense to someone who has no experience in the culture. The process of “cultural enforcement” through video is then quickly reviewed with an emphasis on the idea that “getting it” is the pivotal point. Now that the basic ideas are established the specifics of the commercial (the man being black, the area he is working in being mental, how the umpire walks off the field after a hard call) are then reviewed to show that this example in particular is interesting and pertinent to American culture. Also, the question of whether the commercial is actually effective at selling anything but American culture is discussed. After some analysis the discovery is made that by selling American culture and associating Budweiser with it Budweiser has effectively sold. The end of the analysis of the video is followed by an analysis of why our culture seems to be unable to recover the surrender of the video text. It follows that it is because of a lack of critical analysis ability on the viewer’s part exists; the importance of this changing so that Americans can have a more coherent identity quickly follows. The conclusion of the paper is that the most powerful icons of a people are the ones that the power to move us by understanding the ideologies that drive our culture.