

Intertextuality and the media

From genre to everyday life

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Creator Spiritus: virtual texts in everyday life

BEN BACHMAIR

Media reception as poiesis

A 10-year-old German boy was asked about his favourite film, and recounted the story of Eddie Murphy's comedy *The Distinguished Gentleman*. He kept close to the general outline of this story of an honourable little crook, and mentioned key episodes in the film. However, his main focus was on themes that were of special importance to him, namely those of illness and of the alarming degradation of a child. The image of the child in danger seemed to him to represent his own immediate emotional state, because he had recently had to move house and reorientate himself in unfamiliar and difficult social surroundings.

A glance around the same boy's bedroom revealed posters of pop stars, a TV listings magazine, several videos, clothes in the 'rocker' style then fashionable among German children, and a Nintendo Gameboy. Media texts, from favourite films to TV advertisements for clothes, are a fundamental part of the world which a child assembles for itself into an integrated whole. However simple it may appear, this unifying process now forms a historically and culturally specific relation between individuals and the media, in which meanings are established by individuals' incorporating diverse symbolic resources into 'texts' personal to them.

In the sense that they are not available for inspection in material form, these texts are virtual in nature, but they can be read off through such symbolic performances as conversations, a quotation chosen from a film, or a choice of furniture. Their unity is a stylistic one based on the symbolic resources found in everyday life and incorporated into them, including products such as clothes and

furniture as well as those transmitted by the media (films, videos, computer games and books). Thus in summarizing *The Distinguished Gentleman*, the boy was showing the ability to do two distinct things: because he had incorporated his experience of the film into the stylistically unified pattern of his life, he was able to use his summary as a means of expressing something about himself.

This process can be understood by reference to a pair of theoretical concepts: mimesis and poesis. With the help of these concepts we can classify the various possible relationships between individuals and the media according to the historical and cultural contexts in which they have actually existed (see Gebauer and Wulff 1992). In present-day consumer-orientated industrial societies, the relationship between individuals and the media is not primarily one where the audience responds to media texts in a manner prescribed by the texts themselves. This type of reproduction and repetition of textual meaning is what is meant here by the term mimesis. Today, however, individuals mould the symbolic material of their cultural environment into the virtual texts of their own everyday lives (Schütz 1962). These virtual texts then find objective expression in symbolic performances such as fitting out a child's bedroom (Gerlach 1993: 30–4). This type of functional displacement, involving the active production of meaning, is what is meant here by the term poesis.

Reception as mimesis and as poesis: from Goethe's *Werther* to the virtual text

It is superficially true that media texts reflect something else, but this is no longer their primary function, which is rather to provide symbolic resources for incorporation into the virtual texts of everyday life. The decisive process of producing meanings does not therefore take place in the studio, but when individuals select and incorporate into these virtual texts those elements provided by the media which they find most useful. The relationship between the media and their audiences is therefore now a hermeneutic one. What this means is that the part played by the audience in the production of meaning is no less important than that played by the reports, stories and so forth transmitted by the media themselves.

In Germany, the origins of this hermeneutic relationship between the media and their audiences can be found in the eigh-

teenth-century *Sturm und Drang* movement, and certain passages of Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* are particularly important in this respect. The *Sturm und Drang* reacted subversively against the social constraints and traditional literary models of the feudal state and society, stressing instead the creative power of individual imagination, and the value of subjective experience (Schmidt 1988: 35 and 47; Jorgensen *et al.* 1990: 425). Rather than attempting to reiterate mimetically some set of supposedly objective events in the external world, these writers viewed themselves as casting an inner world of emotion and imagination in a literary form that made it communicable. Thus the meditations of Goethe's character Werther link mimesis *vis-à-vis* the external world with social constraint, and contrast both with creative poiesis.

Yet because reading, unlike writing, was not considered to be an autonomous creative process, the audience mimetically repeated the experiences and viewpoints expressed by the author in the text, to the point of experiencing similar emotions. This is, for example, the reason why contemporary critics thought it inevitable that readers of Goethe's *Werther* would follow the novel's hero in committing suicide. More generally, mimetic realization of the supposed individuality of the writers of the *Sturm und Drang* played a part in shaping the development of new and specifically bourgeois (post-feudal) ways of life, for example among those of their readers who were brought together of their own free will in circles animated by these interests. Thus the *Sturm und Drang* articulated a conception of human nature according to which subjectivity was formed by individuals shaping their own lives in reaction to their experiences. This conception of poiesis gained ground at the time of the French Revolution (Schütz 1962), before becoming a general model for modern societies.

As the model suggests, human beings in the industrial and consumer societies of the present day are the unique creators of the virtual texts of their own everyday lives. This has been made increasingly clear by the development of the media away from public-service broadcasting modelled on the BBC's policy of balanced and responsible programming. By implication at least, this type of broadcasting required of its audience a mimetic response. It has now been largely superseded, and popular demand has played a part in this: it is no longer widely considered to provide the virtual texts of individuals' everyday lives with adequate symbolic

resources. It has therefore everywhere been more or less completely replaced by the market model, where individual viewers compile their own schedules on a self-service basis from a 'buffet' of symbolic resources. Viewing figures regulate what the buffet puts on offer. Selection from the buffet and integration of what has been selected into the virtual text of everyday life is an individualized process, and it is here that meanings are produced. There is already a body of literature on the functional rules of such processes (see Charlton and Bachmair (eds) 1990, Fiske 1993, Silverstone 1994, Bachmair 1996).

The production of meanings in this manner is characteristic of societies dominated by the media and by consumption. Such societies' individualized social and cultural activities presuppose that people bestow personal meanings on media texts and other symbolic resources, shaping the virtual texts of their own everyday lives on the basis of all such resources as they choose to pursue at any given time. Of course, people living in industrial societies before the development of television were also engaged in similar processes, but these were much more restricted in their range and variety because the symbolic resources available were less varied. In recent times the media have progressively penetrated more and more areas of existence, and, through advertising, have become very closely associated with the provision of goods and services as well. When they are considered in all their variants from films to MTV, television pictures may be seen to have become interwoven with so many areas of experience as themselves to be the basic building blocks of the virtual texts of individuals' everyday lives in today's 'reflexive risk society' (Beck 1986). The uses to which people put this symbolic material need to be understood from at least three different perspectives all at the same time: (1) in the context of their own lives and personal interests; (2) relative to their existing or desired social environment; (3) within the framework of the media in general.

The following case studies illustrate this phenomenon.

The film *E.T.* told backwards

Some boys in the same primary-school class were heard talking about the difficulties one of them was having with his swimming, and with his swimming equipment. Initially, the exchange between

Sven and Markus in particular seemed limited, undeveloped, and chaotic.

Teacher: So that you have everything you need, I want you to bring your swimming things tomorrow, your soap, and your money.

Boy: Yes, yes.

Teacher: Remember your goggles as well.

Sven: No, I'm not bringing goggles. I've had enough. I've hurt myself enough. I've hurt myself enough. I'm not doing it any more. I've done it once and I'm not doing it any more.

Sven reacted strongly against the usually unproblematic suggestion that the children bring their swimming gear with them to school. What did he mean by 'hurting' himself? Clearly he was making a connection between his swimming equipment and unpleasant experiences, but what did he mean by this?

Sven was a child who had had severe and repeated illnesses, and had been to hospital many times. This had meant that he was often unable to do his homework. He also came from a home where he received no help with his homework, and where there was no money for swimming equipment. This was the old hurt that Sven did not want to face again.

Dieter did not understand this, so Sven had to rationalize and clarify his argument about hurting himself by claiming to have an allergy.

Dieter: Really? Why not?

Sven: It's so bad ... I'm allergic to goggles ...

Markus: Yeah! And I bet the teacher'll buy that!

Sven: I do get an allergy! Everything gets sore and it really hurts ...

Dieter: Hmm ... he's telling the truth about that ...

The topic of the children's conversation was by this stage the question whether the teacher would believe in Sven's 'allergy'. Now that Sven's references to his illness had to some degree persuaded Dieter of the gravity of his difficulties with swimming, he changed tack somewhat, showing himself as he did so to be somewhat insecure in his image of himself.

Sven: Of course, I know I'm not a human being.

Teacher: So what are you then?

The teacher was too busy with more commonplace matters to give

her full attention to a claim so potentially disruptive as Sven's second one, that he was not human. In an attempt to make himself understood, Sven himself now introduced a new term, Autorifon, whose significance in fact appeared to be grasped only by Markus.

Sven: I'm an Autorifon ... oh yes, I've been to hospital ...

Markus: Like E.T. ... is that his right name?...

Sven: E.T.

(Reassuring Markus that he was right.)

Markus: ... when he gets ill ...

Sven, and now Markus too, were referring to an episode from the film *E.T.*, about a clever, sensitive being from outer space, roughly the same size as a child and with a body and features similar to human ones, but also liable to be taken for an animal. They went on to develop their shared understanding of the episode's relevance, and of the life-threatening dangers faced by E.T. in the film.

Sven: Yes. He's all white. It's because he's homesick, that's why ... and when he lay in the water ...

Markus: *(squeal)*

Sven was stressing how close E.T. comes in the film to death, which is the meaning of his turning 'all white', and linking this both to homesickness and to another episode where E.T., 'in the water', is again in life-threatening danger. But he soon changed tack again, referring to a third episode: to their mutual terror the alien E.T. is discovered by the young boy Elliot, and in the absence of any common language they begin to communicate by sharing sweets. This is the beginning of their friendship.

Sven: E.T., but ... when he sat in the grass and then he said ... and then him there ... he did that ... *(following by squeals)*

Markus: I think it's good ... at the beginning ... when he sort of ... with the Smarties ... ha! ha! *(followed by laughter, and smacking of the lips as though he were eating).*

Comparison with the film shows that the children's quotations from it did not follow the order in which they appear in the story, but were selected on thematic grounds. Their association of E.T. with the idea of hospital brings into the foreground a central episode of the film where adults' lack of understanding endangers the life of the extraterrestrial E.T., who must therefore die. Only the little boy Elliot's love brings E.T. back to life. In the film, the children

and E.T. together escape from the rigid, inflexible adults' world on mountain bikes, but rather than recall this, Sven and Markus worked backwards towards the beginning of the story, where E.T. and Elliot overcome their initial fear and horror by sharing Smarties.

By focusing their conversation on this part of the story, Sven and Markus were able to thematize something that they were themselves doing: tentatively and gradually forming a friendship in an otherwise hostile or indifferent world. Neither Dieter nor the teacher was able to relate the film fragments to this thematic context, and they were therefore unable to follow the conversation beyond a certain point: Sven and Markus had formed or discovered a social bond from which Dieter and the teacher were excluded. They had done this by sharing in a process of poiesis which, because they shared in it in this way, could be observed.

TV genre in social space

A group of children were observed in a school playground, taking turns to perform a dance to their favourite song. The basic framework for these performances was copied from the format of the German RTL television series *Mini Playback Show*, a very popular programme sometimes watched by over 60 per cent of German children aged 6–13. As in the television programme, individual children or groups of two to three followed each other in standing on a small staircase in front of the peer group and dancing to a song by their favourite group or star, whose clothes and choreography they also copied to the degree that they were able. Where the children's performances in the playground differed from those seen on television was in being based on the current hit parade rather than on a repertoire of golden oldies.

The popularity of the television programme meant that shared knowledge of its format provided the group with a common point of reference despite the children's preferences for various different styles of music. Thus the children were able to use a shared activity and common knowledge of the media as a means of mapping out the differences between their preferred styles without becoming involved in heated discussion or argument. The result was a tacit understanding, based on complex combinations of sounds and images and held in common by the whole group, of differences within it.

Listed below are five examples of the children's performances in the playground:

Guns 'n' Roses – 'Don't damn me'

Guns 'n' Roses play hard rock. Their image evokes that of the Rolling Stones, and themes of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll are prominent.

One boy wore a T-shirt with a picture of the group's leader Axl Rose, and all of the boys imitated the band in wearing headbands which also evoke the character of the lone fighter Rambo. The song they performed had at that time been released on CD only; in the absence of a video they had had to devise and agree their own choreography.

Nicki – 'Ich bin a bayrisches Cowgirl' ('I'm a Bavarian cowgirl')

In complete contrast to Guns 'n' Roses, Nicki mixes elements of country, pop and traditional German folk styles. Her image is that of a friendly, conformist girl from a nice family, who left her business apprenticeship at the age of 16 to become a successful singer.

The girl imitating her in the school playground likewise presented an appearance of wholesomeness, honesty and proper upbringing. She performed silently, miming the words of the German song in time with the recording.

Boyz II Men – 'All 4 love'

Boyz II Men are four black youths who perform a 'soft' rap.

This song, which had been released on video, was performed by two girls wearing black shoes and trousers, T-shirts under colourful shirts, and baseball caps. Their performance was sufficiently coordinated to show that they had rehearsed with care.

Die Prinzen (The Princes) – 'Ich war so gerne Millionär' ('I wish I were a millionaire')

The Princes were an East German band who moved to the West after the reunification of Germany. The five members of the band wear jeans, denim jackets and striking T-shirts. They cultivate a laid-back image and favour casual chat when interviewed.

In the school playground, a single girl danced to the song, performing alone but in careful imitation of the group's style. She had not agreed with other children beforehand on a favourite group and choreography, but the group and the song are well known from a video as well as a CD, and her performance was well received.

Michael Jackson – 'Why you wanna trip me

Michael Jackson is not easy to imitate as he has his own distinctive style of performance which requires advanced dancing skills. The difficulty was increased in this case because no video of this song had been released.

A girl dressed in Michael Jackson-style clothes followed his complicated example in every detail of her performance. She must have developed a generic Jackson dance routine, and had probably practised very hard. Her perfect rendition of a well-known song filled the children watching with enthusiasm.

However commonplace these accounts may appear, the performances in the playground involved a complex social interaction between the children. Their own presentations enabled them to distinguish themselves from the peer group and integrate themselves into it at the same time. The high degree of co-operation between them enabled them to fit very diverse styles and preferences into a common framework, thus combining individuality with mutuality: each child's musical preferences and favoured lifestyle were compared with the different ones of other children before then being accepted as part of the general pattern of the programme as it was re-enacted by the group. What made this possible was the format of the popular television programme, which the children had integrated into the virtual text of their shared social space.

Fred's world

During his early twenties, Fred attended a youth centre where he spent several days painting a picture of several nuclear power stations with lava flowing from them. When his picture was finished, he discussed it with a social worker, explaining it partly by reference to details from two films, *The China Syndrome* and *Solent Green*.

The China Syndrome is a political thriller in which a journalist uncovers the corruption that has led to an accident in a nuclear reactor. As a result, the head engineer loses his faith in technology and wages a war against deception for which he is shot as a psychopath by power-station employees. The science-fiction film *Solent Green* is concerned with the inhumanity of life in the aftermath of a nuclear disaster. A policeman discovers that an old friend of his who died in a euthanasia clinic was in fact killed to be used for food: society as a whole has turned or been turned cannibalistic. In the central character Thorn's words, 'They're making our food from human flesh. It won't be long before they start breeding people for food, like cattle'.

In explaining his picture to the social worker, Fred also referred to alarming events from which he seemed to feel insufficiently distanced. These included the nuclear accident at Chernobyl, which had happened the year before, and traumatic scenes from his own childhood, including violent arguments between his parents. While devising the theme of his picture and then painting it, Fred had had time to think about these events, and to set them in a perspective that then enabled him to talk about them. At several different stages in the discussion, it was apparent that Fred was drawing the symbolic resources necessary for this purpose from the films. For instance, he combined quotations and references to *The China Syndrome* with details of the Chernobyl accident. Together these enabled him to construct an explanation of nuclear catastrophe that included elements both of technical error and of the kind of moral and political irresponsibility he believed liable to cause such errors. Fred outlined the normal functioning and the catastrophic technical disfunctioning of the nuclear reactor: 'If the rods are really hot ... there's water all around them and then they'll be cooled down at any rate ... and exactly what happened at Chernobyl happened here ... there was no more cooling ... the whole reactor normally explodes'. He then followed in minute detail the film's account of the course of events leading to disaster, moving from technical matters to the broader context of irresponsible profit-seeking, manipulation and complicity. He highlighted this by contrasting it with the dangerous struggle of a few brave men and women against it.

Fred also inserted central episodes from the science-fiction film *Solent Green* into his account of nuclear catastrophe. These included

one where people at a hunger demonstration are crushed beneath a steamroller, and one where an old man about to die in a euthanasia clinic is allowed to watch a film about nature in an intact and harmonious state. Reference to these episodes enabled Fred to develop his interest in depicting inhuman oppression following in the wake of catastrophe and in the salvaging of hope from memories of a harmonious past that preceded it:

Then I just wanted to show what it was like before. What the world was like before. There are a lot of films where it shows ... uh ... destroyed ... nuclear war ... the people live on, but none of them show what it was like before. Oh, except in one single film. There's no more oxygen, no life, there's only these ... these cells. And the people ... there's only green bread to eat. And that's human flesh. And ... one guy says, right at the end, 'I want to go to sleep and never wake up'. At the end, they can choose exactly what they want to see. And this guy, he'd never seen the world, not like we see it now - a buzzard in the sky, an eagle, and the fields all normal in the spring and summer. But they only know this background ... only grey. Grey on grey. Big dredgers ... they flattened everything. ... demonstration ... with the police ... rubber truncheons and then real steamrollers, that just advanced on the people, over them, shovelled them away and dumped them behind. Then took them to be exterminated or something. And then there's this guy ... it's shown ... he said, 'I can't live in this world any more, I can't stand it any longer', because he knew what the bread was, you see! ... Nobody knew what it was, and he went into it, and he still had a young friend, and he said, 'I can't tell you, if it comes out I'll be killed'. Then at the end his friend is shot in the tent and says, 'Say it now, tell me what it is'. With the last of his strength he shouted it out in the tent, really shouted it out: 'Green bread is human flesh'.

Faced with the horror of the end of humanity, both Fred's films rely on the hope of salvation through the efforts of courageous individuals. This is in keeping with the genre of the political thriller, where heroes bravely oppose the threat posed by unscrupulous exploiters and gangsters. Again in both films, investigations and the discovery of important information play an integral part in the struggle against large-scale deception (and this is what differentiates political thrillers from action movies). In *The China Syndrome* there are two characters responsible for the discovery of this type of information: a courageous young female reporter who is committed to truth and social responsibility, and the head engineer, who

exposes corruption but pays for it with his life. In *Solent Green* it is the detective who does not allow himself to be pacified or bought with modest privileges, but instead reveals the truth of society's having fallen into cannibalism.

In addition to these feats of resistance and dedication to the truth on the part of heroic individuals, both films also feature a father-figure who sacrifices himself. Fred, however, made no reference to the misunderstood head engineer of *The China Syndrome*, but tended instead to stick to technical details in his references to that film. On the other hand, and as we have seen above, his references to *Solent Green* placed the scene of the old man's death in the foreground. In this scene, the good old days of the past are shown in a utopian light. This effect is created by the film that the old man is allowed to watch shortly before his death, which shows an unviolated nature, including animals in beautiful countryside, and is accompanied by a soundtrack of classical music taken from symphonies by Beethoven and Tchaikovsky.

The associated images of utopia and of the father-figure who sacrifices himself are in direct contrast to Fred's own past and present experience: his upbringing had been marked by his father's threatening and aggressive behaviour towards his mother, and he still appeared to view himself as living in a fragile and endangered world. By using symbolic resources drawn from the films he had seen, he was able to express these feelings and experiences, and talk to the social worker about them.

Poiesis today: lifestyle as the new form of social distinction

When Fred wanted to explain the meaning of his painting, he made reference to sequences from different films, which he combined with each other in a complex pattern. This showed the complexity of the imaginative process which was going on even before Fred began to verbalize it. However, the capacity of individuals to create meanings is ultimately circumscribed by the limited range of symbolic resources available to them. In this instance, the creative process depended on Fred's being familiar with specific cinematic genres, which also set limits to the range of associative links he was able to make. In this sense, his creativity was still in some degree controlled or restricted by an element of mimesis (in the sense of the term given on pp. 116–18 above). Yet in contemporary society

restrictions on this kind appear to be becoming less and less rigid: there is an increasing tendency towards poiesis.

Multimedia computer applications, together with the linkage of these and television to the 'information superhighway', have brought into being communication or information networks which tend to eliminate the distinctions between familiar genres. This makes it possible to combine elements from texts of different genres in an unprecedentedly flexible way. At the same time, other changes in society are encouraging this. As a broader range of media and information becomes available to more and more people, increasingly individualized patterns of symbolic behaviour are a typical result, and indeed an inevitable one. In this way, lifestyles (and individual choices between them) are becoming ever more important as a form of social differentiation or distinction.

For the sake of comparison, we can look back a generation or so, to the early days of television broadcasting. In the 1950s and 1960s television developed in the context of a hierarchically structured society, stratified according to levels of income, occupational categories and educational qualifications. Culture, of which television was a part, reflected this hierarchical structure, and served as a means of distinguishing between its component strata – high, middle and low. Television audiences could be categorized as belonging to one of these social strata and targeted accordingly with the appropriate types of programme and schedule.

Currently, however, this older type of vertical, hierarchical structure is giving way to a newer, horizontal one that cuts across it and groups together people of different levels of income, occupations and formal educational backgrounds. This is based on stylistic differentiation and on the range of cultural practices (such as leisure pursuits, patterns of media consumption and fashion choices) from which such differentiation emerges. Thus children, young people and even adults differentiate themselves from each other and assert their individuality by means of the types of clothes and fashion accessories which they either buy or reject. These items are just a few among an abundance of other consumer goods, media products and leisure activities that serve similar purposes.

An illustration of what is meant here can be found in the photograph used in a recent advertisement in the regional press for the southern German fashion-clothing chain Nikeshop. In an empty corner of an urban landscape dominated by violet clouds, a

black basketball player in sportswear plays against a young white boy in street clothes including a sweatshirt and a baseball cap worn back-to-front. The combination of basketball with the atmosphere and some of the features of an open-air disco (hip-hop, oversized clothing worn with baseball caps and expensive training shoes, consumption of Coke) immediately tells those in the know that what they are doing is playing streetball. However, streetball is not simply a new sport: it is the focus of a youth scene whose image is one of emergence from the ghetto. The process of communication organized around players' bodies is therefore more than just a series of moves in a game: activities, music, clothes and other consumer items are gathered together and labelled as the means of identification with the relevant group. The potential market for these products is therefore clear, and it is correspondingly easy to plan the marketing of clothing, sporting equipment, CDs, and radio and TV stations. In addition to playing its part in this marketing process, advertising provides youth culture with elements of the symbolic framework that organizes it.

A second illustration of the development of a new structure of subcultural styles and social milieux is to be found in an audience survey published in 1994 by the private German television station Pro7 (SINUS 1994). According to this survey, Pro7 viewers cannot be classified in terms of a simple vertical model of social and cultural stratification, since variations in viewing preferences and in their significance in the context of viewers' everyday lifestyles depend on viewers' values as well as their social status. Social status is charted on a five-point scale (lower, lower-middle, middle, upper-middle and upper class), while values are categorized in such a way as to take into account a continuing process of change in society. The 'traditional' aim of maintaining one's social status is ranged with the 'materialistic' aim of maximizing ownership of possessions, the 'hedonistic' aim of pursuing enjoyment, and the 'post-materialist' aim of achieving personal fulfilment. Finally, a fifth 'post-modernist' pattern of aspiration combines the aims of materialism and post-materialism with that of hedonism. Viewers are located on a grid constructed on the basis of these two intersecting classifications, in groups identified by such labels as 'relaxation seekers', 'media surfers', 'emotional viewers' and 'action fans' (SINUS 1994: 13, 30, 47, 64).

'Relaxation seekers' include both men and women. They tend

to have demanding careers and to favour leisure activities that they consider active and eventful means of broadening personal experience while also relieving stress. They aspire to have an influential voice in society, and to be well informed; they are correspondingly disposed to be highly critical and preoccupied with their own image. But there are some sharp contradictions between their pretensions and their behaviour. They do use TV as a source of information, but more often it is a means of relaxation: their stated preference is for feature films, but they also favour, as stress relievers, programmes which they class as 'easy stuff'.

'Media surfers' are relatively young people, for whom television has been a feature of their upbringing. They tend to have a wide circle of friends and enjoy a very wide variety of leisure activities. They adopt an alert and critical stance, but it tends to be one that they defend as being flexible rather than academic or 'blinkered'. They watch TV irregularly but frequently, switching freely and easily between media, TV channels and different types of programme: they will watch anything they find entertaining, favouring feature films and series in particular.

'Emotional viewers' are housewives and mothers whose lives typically revolve around their families. Even their leisure time tends to be spent at home, and they express a need to overcome boredom through emotion and a sense of participation in the life of a broader community. They watch television frequently and regularly, using it almost exclusively as a source of entertainment and regarding it as an essential part of their everyday lives. They favour shows, 'soft' films and family series that satisfy their need to identify emotionally.

'Action fans' tend to be male craftsmen and manual workers who desire a sense of freedom and independence that they pursue in their free time, and cultivate the image of the strong man. They regularly turn to the media for the excitement of strong stimuli and variation, favouring fast-moving programmes of information and entertainment, including in particular action movies and televised sport. They reject programmes that they think are soppy or encourage passivity.

The consumerism of contemporary society clearly plays a major part in the establishment and differentiation of such lifestyles as those listed above. Sport, for example, offers a framework within which a variety of styles and themes are differentiated and dramatized. For instance, wrestling and streetball offer their devotees two

contrasting styles. Wrestling is a grotesque and entirely non-verbal bodily enactment of a ritual fight, whereas streetball players negotiate among themselves who plays with whom, where, when and how. The important difference is between the ritual on the one hand and the negotiation on the other: it is a difference between lifestyle preferences rather than between levels in a social or cultural hierarchy.

Besides sport, lifestyle choices available to young people include various types of popular musical and street styles, techno or hip-hop, punk or skinhead (Polhemus 1994). Other comparable but less visible groupings are those of computer hackers or video fans (Eckert *et al.* 1991, Vogelgesang 1991). Thus individuals construct lifestyles for themselves in an independent and creative fashion, using for this purpose a broad range of other consumer goods as well as their preferred patterns of media consumption. These then cease to be independent and isolated elements, beginning instead to act as intertextual, interrelating components of complex thematic arrangements, and crystallizing around nuclei such as those from the German audience survey listed above. In this way, the everyday lifeworlds of such a society become aesthetically and stylistically differentiated as individuals construct their coherent personal lifeworlds from whatever type and variety of symbolic material may be available to them.

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