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Introduction: setting the scene

Although the original concerns of work in and around CDA were with ‘verbal’ or ‘textual’ forms of expression, calls for the inclusion of other communicative forms are now common. In their introduction to their extensive survey of CDA research, for example, Wodak and Meyer (2015: 2) explicitly signpost ‘non-verbal (semiotic, multimodal, visual) aspects of interaction and communication: gesture, images, film, the internet and multimedia’ as appropriate targets. In this chapter, we pursue this with respect to film, setting out some of the issues that such an extension involves. These issues concern not only the object and practice of CDA but also raise interesting questions of where (and if!) ‘boundaries’ between CDA and other forms of analysis can usefully be drawn.

The reasons for engaging with film from a CDA perspective are many, largely overlapping with the equally diverse reasons for engaging with text and verbal language shown in other chapters of this handbook. Moreover, since both written and spoken language are commonplace in film, techniques or hypotheses derived for language are also relevant for film analysis. Even apparently spontaneous spoken language, with all its ‘paraverbal’ dimensions of performance and social, regional and ethnic variation, becomes in the context of film just another representational resource. Such language choices can then naturally be seen as targets of CDA. The attribution of regional or ethnic dialects to certain characters rather than others (particularly where this choice is relatively free, as in animation), the employment of code-switching in films depicting ethnically diverse situations and several similar phenomena have all received critical consideration; Androutsopoulos (2012) offers useful discussion and examples.

Going beyond the strictly language-related components of film, many of the concerns raised for language also have natural correlates among other areas of a film’s complete multimodal ensemble. For example, where certain topics or groups may in verbal texts be rendered invisible by suppression, in film certain kinds of characters, actions or locations may similarly be effaced by not showing them or by showing them in a particular light. Equally, indications of social and ethnic positions can be given visually in terms of depicted attributes, gestures and actions rather than in language behaviour. Indeed, many communicative strategies appear shared across verbal discourse and audiovisual discourses more generally and have already
received attention in critical media studies (e.g., Mack and Ott 2014; Holtzman, Sharpe and Gardner 2014). The ‘filmic’ construction of a broad range of social groups has been addressed, for example, extending significantly beyond the more traditional sociological variables of race, class and gender. Thus, depictions of mental instability (Fleming and Manvell 1986), of alcoholism (Denzin 2004), of terrorists (Vanhala 2010), of school teachers (Paietta 2007), of politicians (Gianos 1998), of old age (Cohen-Shavev and Marcus 2007) and countless others already constitute staples of film research (cf. Helsby 2005). Very few of these adopt methods from CDA, however, although Gatling, Mills and Lindsay’s (2014) joint consideration of aspects of language, action and depicted objects in order to address the multimodal construction of ‘middle age’ in comedy films is one exception.

Most critical analyses of film have origins located in media studies and visual communication. The ideological and sociocultural import of images, even static images, has a considerable tradition of study of its own pre-dating CDA. For film, the potentially misleading or misdirecting role of (audio-)visual representations has received particularly close attention in work on documentaries, since in documentaries there are always (by definition) ‘truth claims’ of various kinds being made – even though the precise scope of such claims may not always be clear (cf. Rosenthal 1999; Nichols 2001; Kahana 2015). Issues of ideological construction are by no means limited to the documentary, however. Canonised in the literature, for example, is the extreme controversy that arose around David Wark Griffith’s Birth of a Nation (1915). This film is widely considered an aesthetic and production landmark in the development of cinema tout court, while simultaneously being condemned for what have been equally broadly considered as blatantly racist and white supremacist depictions (cf. Taylor 1996).

In important respects, the link drawn here to media studies exhibits many parallels to the development of CDA. Concerns with potential distortions in journalism and the mass media became a significant area of study in the 1940s and 1950s as questions of the political and ideological effect of media messages came under increasing scrutiny. Important techniques of qualitative and quantitative analysis were established, subsequently drawing on theoretical positions on the interrelationships between power, ideology and media founded on Foucault and Frankfurt School criticism, equally well known in the context of CDA. Moreover, just as concern with the analysis of verbal media messages subsequently combined with emerging linguistic techniques for textual analysis to give rise to traditional CDA, similar developments occurred with respect to visual analysis in media studies. It is therefore now not uncommon to hear of the need for critical visual analysis (e.g., Rose 2012). Nevertheless, although there is some work within CDA overlapping with these concerns – as in Richardson and Wodak’s (2009) study of political argumentation and ideologically oriented visual representation – research in critical visual studies and CDA show few interactions. Texts promoting critical visual studies traditionally make no reference to CDA approaches and methods.

It is then broadly accepted both that films and their depictions of society are appropriate targets of critical analysis and that, sometimes, films may attempt to be actively critical themselves. This raises many opportunities for beneficial combinations of CDA questions and methods and the sociocultural analysis of film, even though this potential has hardly been tapped to date. To take this further, it is important that the long and varied traditions of critical analysis within film studies be sufficiently respected. We begin the discussion of the present chapter, therefore, by setting out in more detail something of this diversity of approaches within film studies that may usefully be considered in relation to the issues raised by CDA. We then address the question of whether CDA has its own distinctive contributions to make to critical film analysis and to what extent it is possible to differentiate a CDA of film from other critical stances that have been adopted. This in turn prepares the ground for a brief case study...
suggesting how discourse methods might be applied when critically analysing film. Finally, we conclude the chapter with a brief outlook for future potential directions for a film-orientated CDA and raise in particular the question of whether film offers a further medium in which CDA analyses can be undertaken.

Critical film analysis within film studies

Approaching film from a CDA orientation needs to be seen within the context of ‘multimodal CDA’, in which methods explicitly targeting ensembles of diverse semiotic expressive resources are developed. CDA work of this kind is now becoming a major research direction in its own right; Ledin and Machin (this volume) provide more details. The extent to which this extension has been made for film is, however, still very limited. Moreover, a potential weak spot for such a development can be identified in Machin and Mayr’s (2012: 209) observation that much of the work on multimodality emerging from linguistics over the past 10 years has tended to act as if it emerged independently both of other semiotic approaches and of work in other fields. This would be a disastrous strategy to pursue when attempting to establish a CDA of film, however. In many respects film studies became ‘politicised’ as a field far earlier than was the case with linguistics and CDA. Appropriate awareness of this long established tradition is therefore a prerequisite for any explicitly film-orientated CDA. Consequently, in this section, we briefly characterise some of the more important or influential of these film studies approaches from the perspective of their potential relevance for CDA.

Apparatus theory

Apparatus theory (Baudry 1974) is probably the most far reaching of associations between film and ideology to have been drawn and, as a consequence, is nowadays considered by the majority of researchers to have seriously overshot its target: we raise it here, therefore, both for completeness and as a point of comparison with other approaches we describe below. The essential idea of apparatus theory is that the very facts of the technological production and manner of consumption of film are already inescapably ideologically inscribed. The manner of technological production of showing images produced by a camera places the viewer in the position of that camera and so constructs the spectator as an ‘all knowing’ subject of a very particular ‘externally controlled’ kind. Moreover, since the production of film aims to create a seamless experience very different from the fragments from which films are actually built, the apparatus obscures its manner of construction, further positioning spectators in ways that hide film’s ideologically conditioned, socioeconomic (i.e., generally capitalist) and gendered (i.e., generally male) conditions of production. The situation of consumption of films whereby subjects are placed unmoving in dark spaces is also seen in apparatus theory as a form of subjugation: spectators are then doubly bound, delivered over to the ideological workings of the apparatus itself.

Critiques made of this approach generally involve its disregard of the agentive role of spectators. As now well known from many forms of media research, films do not act ‘automatically’ on spectators as passive consumers; individual spectators are active interpreters, making sense of what they see and hear and bringing their own experiences and socio-cultural positions to bear. In addition, it would appear from apparatus theory that the use of film for diverse ideological purposes would be ruled out: simply using film as such would already have positioned recipients adversely, which again seems overly strong. Nevertheless, concern with an ideologically pre-structured production industry is in many respects quite justified. Studies focusing on
the appearance and roles of certain groups in both film production and the resulting films show considerable bias. Eschholz, Bufkin and Long (2002) document both the depiction and participation of women and racial/ethnic groups in film and TV, for example, revealing a state of affairs in considerable need of critique and action. Despite occasional claims that the situation has improved, current statistics on the number of woman directors, screenplay writers and major female characters in films paint a very different picture. The consequences of this continuing bias on film production should not therefore be underestimated.

**Gender**

More nuanced characterisations of intrinsic ideological placements of spectators are explored in feminist film theory, where it is the portrayal of women and gender relations that receives central attention. Here it is argued that certain decisions regularly taken in film production systematically construct restricted or imbalanced gender roles and, moreover, impose these on spectators. This aspect of film therefore needs to be problematized in order to perform much needed social critique. In this respect, much feminist film analysis may be characterised as pursuing aims entirely consonant with similar concerns voiced within CDA.

The starting point for feminist film theory is the seminal work of Mulvey (1975) and her application of certain aspects of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. The basic dimensions of Mulvey’s model are the following. First, film is seen as essentially voyeuristic, inducing scopophilia. Second, that view is gendered in that gender distinctions are constructed as integral components of film design at all levels. Thus, in the traditional films on which Mulvey largely based her original analyses, it is the male characters who act and who drive the narrative forward. The function of female characters is ‘to be looked at’ – i.e., they support scopophilia and hold the action up rather than letting it unfold. This can be constructed employing the full gamut of technical devices available to film, including camera angles, camera distances, movement, durations of shots, lighting effects and many more. Well-known gendered motifs of technical device deployment include different lighting schemes for male and female characters, different degrees of focus (e.g., soft-focus for women characters) and so on.

Thus, following Mulvey’s line of argument, it is far more likely that the introduction of a female character will be managed in a relatively passive fashion, allowing the camera to dwell on her, often from what might be assumed to be the perspective of others (in all likelihood male) in the film rather than in her own right. The camera is thereby seen to perform the ‘male gaze’: that is, the camera looks as a male figure in the narrative would be expected to look. Then, in a manner reminiscent of apparatus theory, this construction is taken to be imposed on all spectators, not just men. The camera and its positioning of spectators is consequently taken as intrinsically gendered.

Mulvey also draws conclusions for the larger narrative sweep of films drawing on the psychoanalytic model. Freudian notions of women constituting ‘threats’ for men – particularly as a source of ‘castration anxiety’ (in Freud’s technical psychoanalytic sense) – are seen as leading to the emergence of particular kinds of roles for women, such as that of the femme fatale common in film noir. Such anxieties are also considered to be operative in both ‘fetishism’, in the form of star worship and, via voyeurism and control, narrative arcs involving punishment – as when, for example, the femme fatale is captured, imprisoned or reformed. A further case of a reoccurring narrative arc is that of the ‘Oedipal trajectory’, several illustrations of which are discussed in Mulvey’s (1989) ‘Afterthoughts’ on her original proposals. The ease with which many films allow such descriptions may well speak to the fundamental nature of these narrative structures regardless of any claimed psychoanalytic foundations.
The films of Alfred Hitchcock have been found to be particularly rich in providing material for analyses of this kind (cf. Doane 1988; Modleski 1988), although he was probably himself equally familiar with these patterns and so may have deployed them deliberately. Regardless of this, however, the analyses offered remain highly illuminating and present valuable interpretative hypotheses, again regardless of whether one subscribes to the psychoanalytic model or not.

Although it is often straightforward to find examples where gender appears to be constructed in the manner feminist film analysts suggest, it is considerably more difficult to assess such cases’ generality and actual effect. For example, one of Mulvey’s earlier discussions involves the filmic depiction of women using close-ups and camera angles to construct the ‘fragmented body’ taken as typical for the male gaze; this is assumed to work against the development or depiction of full characters and to objectify the person shown. However, the extent to which such phenomena are present in films more broadly or are actually attended to by spectators as differentiating genders is not yet known. This might then be an area where a more explicit CDA-style treatment could be of benefit.

**Genres**

Although not an unproblematic construct in film theory (cf. Altman 1999), ‘genres’ often appear to be readily recognisable for film audiences and also contribute significantly to viewing choices. Consequently, Tudor (1974: 180) argues that it would be ‘almost perverse’ not to consider the sociocultural consequences of the prevalence and organisation of genres. The potential for ideological construction and misconstrual within particular genres has therefore also received critical attention, offering further opportunities for contributions from a CDA perspective.

In film studies, the genres most frequently addressed are the usual suspects of Westerns, gangster films and horror films, all of which combine highly conventionalised story arcs and stylistic choices. Common readings of these genres include statements expressed in terms of oppositions: Westerns raise issues of civilisation/wilderness, of freedom/law. Gangster films often involve mystification and the mechanistic operation of unseen forces, reducing individual choice and the possibility of morality; and horror films involve oppositions such as natural/supernatural and employ cumulative shock as a narrative strategy. Tudor suggests further that all three genres in fact exhibit a deeper, reoccurring pattern in which the use of violence is constructed as the ultimate and necessary solution to any problems raised (Tudor 1974: 213). Such genres may then both reflect and constitute social configurations that may be considered coercive, male-dominated and exploitative.

Other ‘genres’ have also been explored with respect to their ideological import. Particularly well known in this regard are science fiction films and war films. Science fiction, especially in the 1950s and early 1960s, has often been read as commenting on social issues as well as drawing more or less explicit connections to the Cold War then holding between the Soviet Union and the US. War films have also been picked out as offering sensitive indicators of broader social movements and attitudes. Kellner (2010), for example, draws out detailed resonances between the approach to war films taken in Hollywood and political positions in the ‘Bush-Cheney Era’.

There are also genres that adopt ideological and political themes and criticism quite explicitly – indeed, social problems have always belonged to the repertoire of films, either in their own right or as part of the background web of presuppositions that a film constructs. The usual dimensions around which selections of problematic issues are organised include social problems, gender, race, nation, class and politics (cf., e.g., Benshoff and Griffin 2009;
Holtzman, Sharpe and Gardner (2014) – although any theme can be employed for probing social issues as these overviews provide ample examples for.

**The documentary/fiction cline and social commentary**

Broadly cross-cutting genres, issues concerning the ‘authenticity’ of filmic representations also raise significant challenges. Although one of the potential functions of film has always been to convey information about the real world rather than operating as a medium of storytelling, both the nature of truth in filmic depictions and the nature of fiction conspire to make such distinctions less than clear-cut. As Kuehl (1999) sets out, ‘dramatized’ documentaries are as old as cinema itself. In 1907, the Paris film company Films D’Art produced *L’Assassinat du Duc de Guise*, which was meant to portray a ‘real event’ from French history, complete with musical accompaniment and the theatrical style performances then conventional for the medium. Similarly, Georges Méliès’ *Le Couronnement du roi Édouard VII* (1902) filmed not the coronation itself (due to technological production constraints such as lighting) but a ‘construction’ or ‘re-creation’ of the supposedly real events. Subsequently, classic documentaries have regularly blurred the distinction between ‘simply’ documenting and re-creating – probably the most well-known case being Robert J. Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922), which quite explicitly took the position that ‘real events’ need to be appropriately ‘arranged’ in order to function effectively as documentary. Also relevant here are Nichols’s (2001: 99, 138) distinct documentary *modes of representation*.

Since there is then no clear divide between fiction and documentary films with respect to their expressive forms, it is generally more productive to see films as situated within a diversified space of possibilities for the filmic construction of the ‘real’. Films then relate to situations and circumstances outside of film in various ways. For example, even completely fictional, narrative films may place their story against ‘realistic’ portrayals of the societal contexts for those stories, readily including (depictions of) real characters and historical events. Conversely, even presentations of ‘factual’ material can adopt more or less of the standard machinery of storytelling. Well-known cases exist between the extreme points on this spectrum. Oliver Stone’s *JFK* (1991), for example, explicitly sets out to problematize certain aspects of the treatment of the assassination of President Kennedy, taking issue with the ‘official’ record (Burgoyne 1996). Some criticise this film for its mixing of documentary and fictional material; others consider it more positively for its critical stance on government and the questions it raises concerning “possibilities and standards of history when it is represented in the visual media” (Rosenstone 1999: 334). Rather different, but still very much playing with notions of history and its relationship with the individual, is Robert Zemeckis’s *Forrest Gump* (1994). In this purely fictional narrative, the main character is placed seamlessly within media depictions of a variety of actual historical events, thereby inviting viewers to address the boundary between the individual and history anew (cf. Sobchack 1996). Even straightforwardly fictional films can then include, or be considered from the perspective of, social critique.

Social situations are always being construed in films regardless of those films’ intent and this makes them potentially relevant for critical readings. A particularly insightful treatment of the interlinking and mutual conditioning of aesthetics, politics and realism can be found in Kappelhoff (2015).

**Thematic configurations**

Analyses within film studies have also considered quite explicitly the points in the ‘life’ of a film where there are opportunities for incorporating ‘messages’ of a socio-political or other
ideological nature. For example, drawing extensively on Gianos (1998) and analogous to discussions in CDA concerning the contexts relevant for analysis, Haas, Christensen and Haas (2015) delineate a range of such points: beginning with the original conception, where particular perspectives or themes might be selected; passing through the often economically driven (and hence ideologically shaped) processes of production, where the generally conservative nature of (increasingly large) investment necessary for film-making can exert a range of forces on what gets shown and how; and moving on to design decisions during the making of the film itself – music, sound and dialogue, editing and montage, composition, lighting, camera angles and special effects. Moreover, issues such as the casting of particular actors, the choice of locations and settings, as well as ‘product placements’, all constitute opportunities where meanings of various kinds can be included or excluded. There are even issues of distribution to be explicitly considered – as in who gets to see a film in what distribution formats. At each point, it may be possible to identify structural distortions or misrepresentations worthy of critical analysis.

This makes it important also to read thematic configurations and the approaches taken to these in film for their socio-historical and ideological import. Particularly impressive readings of this kind are offered by Ryan and Kellner (1988) and Haas, Christensen and Haas (2015), both of which address chronologically selected clusters of US films in order to map out the social issues being ‘worked through’ at the times of the considered films’ production. Thus, the 1950s produced many films as responses to the Cold War and anti-communism, often, as remarked above, recoded as science fiction. The 1960s then see manifestations of both counterculture (Bonnie and Clyde, Medium Cool, Easy Rider) and reassertions of right-wing values of authority (Dirty Harry, The French Connection), while the 1970s show several highly conservative constructions (Rocky, Star Wars, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Superman), as well as moving on to a more ‘paranoid’ construction of power relations depicting government and business as sources of evil, as in liberal conspiracy films (The Parallax View, All the President’s Men). Since the 2000s and post-9/11, themes of security have understandably become particularly common (White House Down, London Has Fallen and many more).

Analyses of these kinds take the form of showing how a collection of films from some period reflect some constellation of social configurations by evaluating the role of individuals, of politics, of organisations and so on in ways differing from previous periods. This often allows broad changes in societal circumstances to be tracked with striking clarity. The links that Kellner, Haas and colleagues draw reveal films to be very sensitive barometers of the socio-political issues of their times. Their analyses also go well beyond critical discussions of individual films, showing how particular configurations of themes and their style of presentation reoccur. In all respects, therefore, this constitutes an important source of information for any further CDA-inflected film analysis.

What makes an analysis of film a CDA analysis?

The rapid growth and acceptance of the study of visual material – sometimes characterised as the ‘visual’ or ‘iconic’ turn (cf., e.g., Moxey 2008) – make it difficult for any field – including CDA – to continue marginalising the meaning contributions of the non-verbal. However, since film has already long been an object of critical analysis within film and media studies, the question arises as to whether CDA has anything distinctive of its own to add to this. The discussions by Kellner, Haas and others of quite broad and varied collections of films drawn from different historical periods certainly constitute detailed critical appraisals building on fine-grained descriptions. One might then also ask whether the broad range of critical analyses undertaken in film studies might already be considered a CDA of film.
We can take this issue further by considering more explicitly some of the advances that distinguish CDA from ‘informed’ commentaries or other kinds of critical discussions. Methodologically, issues of reliability and reproducibility have been addressed by drawing on results from linguistics, cognition, ethnography and other areas described in this handbook that together provide powerful techniques for textual analysis. Patterns revealed in this way go beyond what might be straightforwardly ‘read off’ of any document or performance analysed. Linguistic examples are well substantiated. This provides tools for textual analysis that construct compelling bridges between instantial texts and those texts’ (sociocultural) interpretations. We need then to ask whether a similar development might be possible for film.

Ledin and Machin (this volume) begin setting out how this might look for multimodal analyses in general, and so it may be hoped that similar analytic and methodological refinements might be made for film. But in many respects these descriptive moves remain in their infancy and studies are generally limited to small-scale case studies. As a consequence, many multimodal CDA analyses presented still overlap with the kinds of details offered by critiques found in cultural studies. To talk of a genuine CDA of film, filmic discourse analysis will need to become substantially more robust. Few proposals capable of unravelling in detail the fine-grained interaction of ‘filmic text’ – seen as the distinctions and patterns drawn in the material artefact – and the take-up and use of those patterns by recipients in processes of guided interpretation are available.

Approaches that consider film as discourse by importing analytic techniques from discourse linguistics are now beginning to emerge, however; examples include van Leeuwen (1991), Iedema (2001), Bateman and Schmidt (2012), Tseng (2013) and Wildfeuer (2014). Analyses of this kind need to be seen as engaging with the artefacts analysed prior to any particular discussion of recipient interpretations since they characterise the patterns and regularities that a film makes available for interpretations as such. A further aim of much of this work is to support the application of corpus methods in order to improve the reliability and representativeness of analyses. As mentioned for verbal texts in the context of CDA by, for example, Subtirelu and Baker (this volume) and Mautner (2015), corpus linguistic methods can provide a useful check on proposed CDA interpretations. Corpus linguistic methods are now also being suggested for multimodal analyses and so it is logical to consider this for the purposes of multimodal CDA, including the analysis of film; Bateman (2014) offers an overview of approaches of this kind.

Until such frameworks are in place, multimodal interpretations of film and work drawing more on the analytic tools of film studies will necessarily overlap in reach. Both may serve as starting points for critical filmic discourse analyses. On the one hand, multimodal descriptions may be able to reveal mechanisms of meaning-construction employed in film in more detail, both with respect to potentially more quantitative investigations and in terms of more reliable statements of effects and take-up by viewers. On the other hand, film studies, particularly when connected with the detailed historical, political and social knowledge of the situations of production and reception exhibited in work such as that of Kellner, Haas and others, will continue to provide essential contextual information. Contributions from film studies will therefore remain crucial for any discourse analyses pursued.

An example analysis

In this section, we illustrate how some of the multimodal extensions to discourse analysis just mentioned may provide for an increased connection between film analysis and the concerns and methods of CDA. Verbal aspects will be included but will not play any central role, since
these already fall within established CDA methods. The focus will instead be on specifically filmic mechanisms that call equally for critical analysis. The case study will of necessity be very brief, picking out only a selection of relevant phenomena; more extensive examples of how to perform such analyses can be found in, for example, Bateman and Schmidt (2012). Analysis is generally fine-grained and proceeds shot-by-shot (in the technical film sense), pulling out particular properties of the shot that have been found to contribute to filmic discourse organisation. These properties – including repetitions of audiovisual motifs constructing cohesion and spatio-temporal relationships signalled verbally, audially or visually – are placed in an unfolding multilayer filmic discourse structure. This is entirely analogous to the process of verbal text discourse analysis, but draws on a broadened repertoire of ‘text’-building devices.

The specific analyses discussed build on such discourse descriptions for two extracts from Ron Howard’s *Frost/Nixon* (2008). This offers a convenient illustration of filmic critical analysis because of the existence of two readily accessible media products: first, the original TV interviews conducted between David Frost and former US president Richard Nixon in 1977, post-Watergate and Nixon’s resignation from office, and second, Howard’s filming of Peter Morgan’s play based around those same interviews. Depicting as it does a particularly troublesome series of events in US politics, it is natural that the film has already come under critical scrutiny within film studies (cf., e.g., Denham 2010). The principal question has been the extent to which the film’s construction of issues of ‘blame’ and ‘legality’ can be seen as trustworthy.

The film opens with what is commonly described as a ‘montage sequence’ drawing on authentic TV footage from 1972 and beginning with the arrests within the Watergate Hotel. Although it is often suggested that such material lends authenticity, close analysis takes this further. The seven-minute opening sequence has three structural segments. The first segment (2’39”, 48 shots) sets up the theme of the film: here the old TV material is intercut visually (but not audially) with fragmentary, often blurred but nevertheless high visual production value shots of Nixon preparing to give his televised resignation speech. The depiction of Nixon preparing for and opening his resignation speech is thereby placed within the authentic historical context of the news stories. The second structural segment (1’10”, 11 shots) takes this mixing of worlds further, intercutting Nixon giving his speech with several first-person interviews with people reminiscing about the resignation. These interviews are shot with an ‘in-between’ visual quality of slightly washed out, side-lit daylight colours and reduced tonal variation and could, at first glance, also have been authentic. The third structural segment (2’48”, 29 shots) then introduces Frost, showing him as a TV personality who gets the idea of interviewing Nixon while watching the ‘live’ TV broadcast of the resignation speech. The mixture between actual events and the film’s depictions continues here. A further ‘authentically staged’ interview with Jack Brennan, the former Nixon Chief of Staff (played by Kevin Bacon) is intercut among the shots showing Frost, where we find usual high film production values apart from those images from the TV programme that he is watching. These exhibit the same degraded visual effects seen earlier in the opening sequence for genuine footage but show Frank Langella, the actor playing Nixon.

The fact-fiction line is thus placed in doubt during this opening sequence at multiple levels, and the consequences of such positioning for viewers remain seriously under-researched. Regardless of whether a viewer can ‘rationally’ work out what is original footage and what is re-enactment, the constant blurring of status between authentic material and narrative depictions may offer a powerful mechanism for weakening critical distance. This possibility needs to be considered in more detail when we address particular points made within the film – i.e., the hypothesis needs to be entertained that any position taken within the film will gain
weight due, at least in part, to the weakening of the boundaries between documentary and fiction achieved in the opening.

Our second segment is the portion of the interview where Frost has the opportunity, portrayed as unforeseen in both the film and TV interviews, to ask Nixon directly whether there were more 'mistakes' and whether he was ready to apologise to the people of the United States. In the original TV interview Nixon provides lengthy responses, is generally calm and collected, and often smiles. While it is usual that such 'text-heavy' material be reconfigured for film, this can be done in many ways, and the particular choices made in Howard's version use filmic techniques that significantly repoint meanings. Several broad differences between the two versions concerning the length and number of shots, and more diverse camera angles and shot scales can naturally be found. There are, however, in addition to this, particular differences that provide very different constructions of the interview. One prominent case that will have to suffice for illustrative purposes here is the use of ‘silence’, or unfilled pauses.

In the segment of the TV interview under discussion here, there is only one such pause (4s) as Frost gathers his thoughts to ask what many considered the central question of the interviews as a whole, that concerning Nixon's culpability. During this pause we see an over-the-shoulder shot of Nixon followed by a short (2.7s) medium shot of Frost (looking down, hand-on-face, thinking). The film version lingers on this moment, with 7 seconds of silence showing Frost in a closer medium shot while several expressions cross his face prior to him resolutely asking his pointed question in close-up. During this long question, Nixon is intercut, also in close-up, looking ill at ease. The contrast between TV and film versions can be seen well in Figure 41.1, both over-the-shoulder shots taken as Frost is posing his question. Nixon's evident strain, and perhaps even remorse, in the film version is taken considerably further in a second period of silence later in the sequence. Frost asks as a prompt ‘... and the American people?’, to which the response is a full 19 seconds of silence showing a deeply affected, almost distraught looking Nixon in close-up, who then provides statements that are not only considerably nearer to an ‘apology’ than any statements in the original TV sequence but also far more likely to exert an emotional appeal on viewers.

A close, analytic approach of this kind may, therefore, pinpoint areas and combinations of techniques in need of critical consideration. Nevertheless, as emphasised above with respect

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**Figure 41.1** Screenshots contrasting two over-the-shoulder views of Richard Nixon taken from corresponding points of the interview (left: original TV interview from *David Frost Interviews Richard Nixon*, directed by Jorn H. Winther, ©David Paradine Productions, 1977; right: Frank Langella from Ron Howard’s *Frost/Nixon*, ©Universal Pictures, 2008). In the TV interview, Nixon begins answering the question immediately; in the film version, the character hesitates for 19 seconds.
to the necessary connections to be drawn between any potential CDA of film and established film scholarship, we also need to see such analyses against the background of what is regularly achieved within film studies.

Heller-Nicholas (2011), for example, comes to many similar conclusions using traditional film analysis methods. Where the closer, more analytic approach differs and possibly contributes more, however, is in the targeted reliability of the results: the points of difference between the TV and film versions of the interviews used structural properties of the artefacts themselves to identify where divergent meanings were being constructed. Moreover, the close connection drawn between the filmic mechanisms set out and postulated effect provides the basis necessary for empirical work – concretely, for example, the suggestion that the particular style of linking documentary material with fictional material loosens viewers’ critical distinctions can then be subjected to detailed analysis by varying material (either in the original or by finding other film examples that can be cleanly differentiated along this dimension of description) and evaluating experimentally whether differing degrees of belief are exhibited. This kind of exploration cannot be done without first setting out in the kind of detail suggested here just what filmic devices are assumed to be responsible.

Conclusion and discussion: film as CDA?

As a final point, we return to the question briefly raised above concerning whether film itself can serve as CDA. The question is somewhat easier to address with regard to documentary films since these often in any case have the intention of pursuing argument. If the object of analysis of some documentary film was then to reveal systematic misconstruals in some other representations, then that might be considered CDA as much as any textual performance of CDA. In certain respects, however, such cases can be considered akin to ‘illustrated’ analysis texts. Rather more challenging is the question of whether more intrinsically ‘filmic’ examples of CDA might be produced – for example, the extent to which film essays, such as Chris Marker’s Sans Soleil (1962), Godfrey Reggio’s Koyaanisqatsi (1982) or Jean-Luc Godard’s Adieu au Langage (2014), might carry arguments of a kind compatible with CDA is an interesting issue. Relations need to be drawn here with ongoing debates on the relation between film and philosophy (Wartenberg 2006): can a film ‘do’ philosophy, or can it only depict themes or situations that invite subsequent philosophical considerations among spectators so inclined? This overlaps with considerations within argumentation theory, where the issue of whether or not ‘visual argument’ is even possible has been hotly debated (cf., e.g., Alcolea-Banegas 2009; Groarke 2015). These are relevant concerns for any visual CDA.

Films performing social critique potentially relevant as pieces of CDA would need to draw attention to problematic discourse practices just as is the case with textual CDA. Well attested and popular areas of this kind for narrative film include journalism and the use of corporate or political power to suppress information. Such films, although fictional, nevertheless seek more or less explicitly to raise awareness so that the problematic practices may be challenged. Haas, Christensen and Haas (2015: 176–180) describe as examples of this both Alan J. Pakula’s All the President’s Men (1976), which led to changes in how campaign funds can be managed in the US, and James Bridges’s The China Syndrome (1979), which similarly raised considerable discussion and awareness concerning nuclear power and safety issues. Films explicitly addressing media practices and the legal process also range from Oliver Stone’s JFK (1991), mentioned above, to Tom McCarthy’s Spotlight (2015).

In addition to these films of explicitly political intent, more veiled critiques can be found embedded in many otherwise ‘purely’ fictional films. Anthony and Joe Russo’s Captain America:
the Winter Soldier (2014) and Captain America: Civil War (2016), for example, can both be read as at least problematising the much criticised trade-off between security and surveillance that arose in the wake of the US Patriot Act. Films of this kind are perhaps less likely candidates for being considered as explicitly performed CDA-as-film, although their messages are far from hidden. Nevertheless, to accept them as performing CDA would bring further repercussions for demarcation: if such fictional films are accepted as examples of CDA, then perhaps pieces of literature exhibiting social critique need to be accepted as well? Is political satire then also CDA – particularly perhaps when it considers the use of discourse as a political weapon as in George Orwell’s 1984?

One final difference that this raises between traditional CDA and potential cases of filmic CDA involves media literacy. Again largely due to the long history of socio-political critiques of film we have seen summarised above, there is considerable awareness of the strategies that films can deploy for expressing criticism of social practices. This extends beyond subject matter and plot to include stylistic choices and the technical construction of film. To an extent that may well exceed the current situation in verbal literacy, there is considerable awareness of when films make ideologically slanted choices. It is increasingly difficult, for example, for explicit uses of Mulvey’s hypothesised ‘male gaze’ to pass unnoticed in film, regardless of whether any particular viewer sees this as politically anachronistic or just another strategy of film style. Overly overt cases of ‘Freudian’ symbolism in films are similarly more likely nowadays to be met with amusement than to exhibit control. An increased literacy of this kind extends across all aspects of film. For example, returning once more to Stone’s JFK, White (1996) suggests (as a historian) that the film employs novel techniques that deconstruct notions of historical fact with its mixture of documentary and fictional footage. But, as Staiger (1996) argues in opposition to White’s claims, these techniques were by no means novel and, moreover, were well known to film audiences. Any deconstruction the film achieves needs then to be anchored with respect to audiences’ reception practices as well as in the ways the film is constructed, as also pointed out in our example analysis above.

This actually offers considerable potential for film as a form of CDA. Films may reconstrue and misrepresent and, moreover, show that they are reconstruing and misrepresenting in ways that modern film viewers are well able to read. Thus, whereas many may still need to be convinced that linguistic patterns submerged beneath the surface of verbal texts have potential ideological import, this style of active reading and construal is already very much a part of how we engage with audiovisual media. Films depict, make visual and remake realities and, moreover, often rely crucially on the awareness of the audience that this is being done for their effect. It may then be that, in a certain sense, today’s ‘average film viewer’ is already performing practical CDA on what they see to a far greater extent than that generally found in their interactions with verbal texts.

Note

1 Note that only abbreviated film references will be given throughout this chapter; for full production details, readers are referred to the invaluable IMDB website.

Further reading


This chapter introduces approaches to the empirical analysis of film and the use of discourse analysis for the audiovisual medium.

This book provides a broad introduction suitable for those beginning with film of the depiction of social issues and of how such depictions can be analysed from a cultural perspective.


These two books together provide a deeper, more politically-oriented discussion of films, drawing together the state of the art and previous literature into a detailed overview of the relationship of film and politics over several decades in the US.

**References**


