

## Theoretische Arbeit

### The Orchestration of Project Films and the Engineering of Consent

#### 1. Visuality and Visual Literacy

Images from multiple digital media sources compete to seduce, convince and persuade us. Subconscious “stereotyping” by the consumer takes place naturally and without thinking. Looking at images from a neutral perspective is a necessary first step to understanding their significance: What do they represent? How are they produced? What are the social practices related to them? How “authentic” are they? Is “seeing believing?” It is important to penetrate the hidden contexts of the dominant “discourses of society”, thus raising the visual literacy levels.

#### 2. Large-scale Infrastructure Projects and Their Acceptance

Large-scale infrastructure projects transform the world we inhabit. Sometimes in a mainly positive way (faster train travel between northern and southern Europe for example) and sometimes in a way that is perceived as less positive (the creation of a nuclear end-waste deep-storage facility in the Swiss countryside). Between the transparent communication of a large-scale infrastructure project and “engineering consent” for it lay a vast expanse in which inconsistencies, misunderstandings and manipulations can flourish.

#### 3. Project Films and Their Elements

Often structured similarly to an “expository documentary”, project films are intrinsically rhetorical by nature. Project films can be broken down into various elements: voiceover commentary, expert interviews, aerial footage, 3D-computer visualizations, time-lapse sequences and music, among others. 3D-computer animations are evidence of the allure technology holds over us, and can be used to de-emphasize some aspects of a project while magnifying others. Together with aerial footage and time-lapse sequences, these images contain the danger of visual seduction. Voiceover commentary and expert interviews are often transporters of the kind of “common sense” information that builds on the available and accepted knowledge systems within a certain society at a given moment. Fictionalized plots or plot elements can be a useful way to convey information, if presented in a responsible way.

#### 4. A Negotiated Reception of Project Films

Project films are often used as “trouble shooters” to mediate between industry and society. It is as important to question what is not said in the film as what is said since it is in the margins of such films that the battles of discourse are waged. “Orchestration” in project films pertains to the subtle ways power finds its expression in the physical world.

It is one example of how hegemonies exert their influence and can be seen as a way to either speed up, spotlight or mask political processes by strategically designing the way reality is perceived. Project films connect the interests of those responsible for the project with those of the consumers by illustrating the benefits a project will have on the stakeholders. Within this process, patterns of national and local identity building are set in motion that record for future generations the discourses of power that surround the project and lead to the engineering of consent. Using acquired visual literacy skills, it would be a valuable objective for consumers to achieve a “negotiated” reception of project films: a combination of grasping the “big picture” and relating the real-life consequences to themselves on a local and personal level.

Hall, Stuart, “Encoding, Decoding”, 1980, in “The Cultural Studies Reader” edited by Simon During, Routledge, London and New York, 2007 (first published 1993) (pages 478 – 487); Zimmermann, Yvonne: “Negotiating Landscape: Engineering Consent on the Exploitation of Water Power in Swiss Corporate Films” in “Cultural Heritage and Landscapes in Europe”, Bochum, 2008 (pages 180-191)