CINDY_SHERMAN_THE_RHETORIC_OF_WRITING

Barry J Mauer, University of Central Florida

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/barry-mauer/13/
CINDY SHERMAN: THE RHETORIC OF WRITING WITH THE STAR

By

BARRY JASON MAUER

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

1999
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Robert Ray introduced me to Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* in his Introduction to Theory class and encouraged me to use them in my teaching. Susan Hegeman revised sections of Chapter 6. Gregory Ulmer encouraged me and guided this work. I am extremely grateful for their contributions, without which this work would not exist. My deepest gratitude goes to Claire, whose dialogue with me these many months has contributed immeasurably to this work.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | ........................................................................ | ii |
| ABSTRACT | ........................................................................ | iv |
| CHAPTERS | ........................................................................ |
| 1 INTRODUCTION | ........................................................................ | 1 |
| Toward an Electronic Rhetoric | ........................................................................ | 1 |
| Dissertation Overview | ........................................................................ | 10 |
| 2 INFERENTIAL REASONING AND THE AVANT-GARDE | ........................................................................ | 14 |
| Baxandall | ........................................................................ | 16 |
| Charge and Brief | ........................................................................ | 21 |
| Troc, Markets, Tradition | ........................................................................ | 33 |
| 3 THE UNCERTAIN STATUS OF THE OBJECT | ........................................................................ | 38 |
| The Prospects for an Inferential Treatment of the Postmodern Avant-Garde | ........................................................................ | 38 |
| James Peterson's Inferential Treatment of the Avant-Garde | ........................................................................ | 40 |
| Film Stills as Writing | ........................................................................ | 59 |
| The Photographic Message | ........................................................................ | 63 |
| Image and (Missing) Text: The Publicity Still | ........................................................................ | 70 |
| Sherman's Charge and Brief | ........................................................................ | 77 |
| Sherman's Resources | ........................................................................ | 80 |
| Warhol and the Aesthetics of Appropriation | ........................................................................ | 83 |
Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

CINDY SHERMAN: THE RHETORIC OF WRITING WITH THE STAR

By

Barry Jason Mauer

May 1999

Chairman: Gregory Ulmer
Major Department: English

My dissertation proposes an arts model of humanities learning for a computerized networked writing environment. Through case studies of Picasso's cubist paintings, Cindy Sherman's Untitled Film Stills, and the Hollywood star system, I discuss the invention of a new rhetoric for media practices within the institutional frames of art and entertainment. My goal is to develop a rhetoric for hypermedia practices within education. As a work of heuristics, which uses the logic of invention rather than interpretation, my dissertation explores art, theory and criticism as resources for a hybrid genre of writing within electronic media. In this genre, students produce their own film stills and criticism. The context for this project is Hollywood's use of "the star." Hollywood and its stars produce a way
of communicating information bodily, through looks and poses which have spread through the culture. Sherman appropriates these behaviors for works of high art, showing that the products of Hollywood can be remotivated for other purposes. My appropriation of Sherman's work for a pedagogical project follows the example set by Sherman herself. The dissertation uses the inferential criticism of Michael Baxandall and James Peterson to construct a poetics from Sherman's work. This poetics, in turn, becomes the basis for humanities writing in electronic media.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Toward An Electronic Rhetoric

In the rhetoric of literacy, *ethos* is known as the problem of "voice," an acknowledgment of the writer's simulated performance of a spoken "role" for a particular occasion. The elements of *ethos* change as we move from self-representation within alphabetic writing to self-representation within images; the self is no longer understood as a "voice" but as a "look." In hypertext, a computer-based writing program, we can represent ourselves using both text and images. Therefore, we need to explore what it means to write with images. My dissertation presents an electronic rhetoric for use within a computerized learning environment. I developed this rhetoric, in part, from a case study of Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, small black-and-white images of Sherman impersonating various character types from old movies. Sherman's series is directly relevant to the problem of self-representation in this new media environment. By showing us how we can represent ourselves with images "on screen," Sherman's work helps us do humanities research, writing, and teaching using electronic media.

Is the humanities responsible for teaching people how to use multimedia? Perhaps we should ask whether we are in the literacy business or in the communications business. An analogy can be
made between the humanities in the age of the computer and the railroad companies in the age of the commercial jet; the railroad companies had to ask whether they were in the railroad business or the transportation business. If they didn't embrace changes in transportation, they risked becoming irrelevant. Since ordinary people now use photography, film, video, and hypertext, with or without humanities training, humanities educators have an opportunity, and perhaps even an obligation, to teach "communication" in these new media. Whichever direction society takes in its use of communications technologies, the humanities' role is to help teach reading and writing. If we refuse this role, we abdicate our responsibilities to other institutions, such as trade schools, commercial institutions, and the military, that don't necessarily share humanist values.

Currently, the humanities addresses new media by means of critique; critique by itself, however, does little to affect the ways in which people communicate and produce work in these media (with some exceptions—see Chapter 4). The humanities' commitment to the written essay as its only acceptable form means that little experimentation has been done to develop humanities writing practices for new media.

As humanities educators, we know a lot about argument, narrative, and metaphor, and can teach students how to use these forms to their advantage in their writing, but what do we know about rhetoric in electronic media such as hypertext? A rhetoric of hypertext should provide instructions for using all the features of
the medium. HyperCard, the first mass-marketed hypertext system, came with the following description:

The model for HyperCard is the 3-by-5 card. A card is represented by a Macintosh screen. As you flip through screens (cards) you read them one after another, as if they were a stack. Cards can hold any kind of information you want, in any format you want, including pictures. Rather than resting inertly, as on a Rolodex, information can be actively linked to any other point on any other card. Another way to imagine it would be to think of a book that had footnotes that appear only when you clicked on a passage you wanted to know more about. It would carry you to interesting details, which might themselves have footnotes which are footnoted and so on. (HyperCard Software," 102; quoted in Ulmer, 29)

Although Apple describes HyperCard in metaphors from alphabetic literacy (the card and the book), we need to understand how electronic media differs from alphabet literacy. Grammatology, the study of the history of writing, posits that different technologies of communication, the means by which people store, retrieve, and process information, occasion different kinds of thinking. Grammatology suggests that human history has seen only two major revolutions in communication technology: the first involved the shift from oral to alphabetic cultures; the second, the transformation to "electronic" or "cinematic" culture, which we are living through now. Grammatologists investigate the consequences, characteristics, and modes of an age of film and computers. In this dissertation, I examine the way humanities educators currently conduct writing and research; my goal is to find ways of adapting these practices to electronic media.
Because communication in electronic media differs in fundamental ways from communication in alphabetic media, we must invent new ways of "writing" in order to adapt. Seen from the perspective of grammatology, the electronic revolution parallels the alphabetic revolution of some 2,500 years ago. Eric Havelock, a grammatologist who studies classic Greek literature, argues that the introduction of alphabetic literacy into human culture brought about new forms of communication. For example, he argues that pre-Socratic philosophers invented "a conceptual language in which all future systems of philosophic thought could be expressed; this same language, however, [was] extracted from Homer and Hesiod and given a new non-oralist syntax" (2-3). Among these invented concepts was "justice" (4). It is worth remembering that many of the concepts and reasoning procedures we use every day in our spoken and written thoughts are not natural or eternal; they were invented in relation to a specific technology (alphabetic writing) and a specific institution (education). In other words, they are historically and institutionally bound. The lesson of grammatology is that as technologies change, we must adapt our concepts and reasoning procedures for use within the new technologies.

The context for our problem, the invention of humanities writing practices, is the apparatus shift from an alphabetic culture to an electronic culture. Gregory Ulmer writes: "For grammatology, hypermedia is the technological aspect of an electronic apparatus (referring to an interactive matrix of technology, institutional practices, and ideological subject formation)" (17). Changes in information technology precipitate changes in institutional practices,
and ideological subject formation. As educators, we have little direct control over the design of new technologies (such as computer hardware), but we can influence the use of these technologies, especially within our own institutions. We can design the writing practices for these media just as Plato did for alphabetic writing.

Plato did not invent the alphabet, but he did design a literate pedagogy in contrast to the established oral pedagogy of his time. Havelock, in *The Muse Learns to Write*, explains:

[Plato] was attacking the poets less for their poetry . . . than for the instruction which it had been their accepted role to provide. They had been the teachers of Greece. . . . Greek literature had been poetic because the poetry had performed a social function, that of preserving the tradition in which the Greeks lived and instructing them in it. This could only mean a tradition which was orally taught and memorized. It was precisely this didactic function and the authority that went with it to which Plato objected. What could have been his motive, unless he intended that his own teachings should supplant it? What was the difference? The obvious one . . . was that his own teaching was formally nonpoetic. It was composed in prose. Was this a superficial accident? Or, since it represented a replacement for poetry, was it also meant to replace orality? Was the arrival of Platonism, meaning the appearance of a large body of discourse written in prose, a signal announcing that Greek orality was giving way to Greek literacy and that an oral state of mind was to be replaced by a literate state of mind? (8)

Havelock answers these questions affirmatively. Just as Plato invented literate practices for education, we can invent the practices of "electracy" (a term coined by Ulmer meaning the electronic version of literacy) for education. Our practices of electracy will be defined in contrast to those of literacy, just as Plato defined his
literate practices in contrast to those of orality. Electracy, however, is not intended to "replace" literacy; rather, it supplements it. A humanities education set in a computerized networked writing environment still requires the practices of literacy, including analysis and critique; these are crucial components of electracy, as I will argue in the chapters ahead. Electracy supplements literate practices by the addition of "aesthetics." Aesthetics, for my purposes, means the ability to reason with images. The ways in which we synthesize aesthetics and critique need to be invented.

Ulmer calls the logic of invention "heuretics," which he contrasts to hermeneutics, or the logic of interpretation. A heuretics for the humanities, writes Ulmer, is charged with inventing "forms appropriate for conducting cultural studies research" (xi) in new media. Heuretics has a history; thinkers from Plato to Roland Barthes have invented genres of "writing" appropriate to their disciplines and to new information technologies. Plato invented the dialectic to take advantage of the critical distance made possible by alphabetic writing. Roland Barthes, in S/Z, A Lover's Discourse, and Barthes by Barthes, invented genres of writing that employ associative networks or reasoning, thus simulating electronic effects (like those of hypertext) in book form. My goal for the past several years has been to invent a rhetoric for hypermedia.

In 1995, my colleagues and I in the English Department at the University of Florida taught in a computerized networked writing environment for the first time; we began experimenting with humanities writing practices for new media. We saw ourselves as a pedagogical avant-garde, inventing assignments, teaching strategies,
and writing methods for the computer labs. The computer labs presented an opportunity to do something we had never dreamed possible; previously we had studied works of art (literature, film, music, photography) as cases of invention but now we were inventing. Cases of invention in the arts became examples for us to emulate in education; for instance, we asked how Eisenstein's development of a language for the cinema in the 1920s could be used as an analogy for our development of a language of hypertext and multimedia in the classroom. We tried methods that would have seemed highly idiosyncratic in a traditional classroom setting.

I present a hypertextual writing method for the humanities by means of an analogy to the work of Cindy Sherman. Sherman's work demonstrates a variety of ways to represent the self visually. I want to learn how educators and students can represent our identities within hypertext by reformulating the rhetorical function of *ethos*. The theory I use to support my reasoning-by-analogy (between art and electracy) is cognitive psychology.

Cognitive psychology, represented in Cultural Studies by Michael Baxandall, James Peterson, and David Bordwell, uses inferential reasoning to reconstruct the poetics of works of art. A poetics, according to Bordwell, is "the study of how, in determinate circumstances, films [or texts in any media] are put together, serve specific functions, and achieve specific effects" (266-7). Baxandall and Peterson provide a historical reconstruction of a problem that the artist's work addressed and the means by which the artist addressed that problem; thus they provide the points of my analogy between invention in the arts and my invention of a pedagogical
genre within electracy. The common theme in both cases is "a person facing a problem." When a solution to a problem (in the arts or in the humanities) does not yet exist, the person facing the problem invents a solution. Three concepts from Baxandall's inferential criticism, Charge, Brief, and troc, become points of analogy linking invention in the arts to my invention of electronic "writing" in the humanities. In Baxandall's method, the Charge is the problem itself, the Brief is the specific nature of the problem (its "local conditions") as well as the resources available for addressing that problem, and the troc is the broader marketplace in which the problem-solver finds resources and rewards for his or her work.

We can think of Baxandall's Charge, Brief, and troc as a series of slots into which we plug the elements of a particular case. Baxandall fills in these slots with the elements of Picasso's invention of cubism. In Chapter 3, I fill in these same slots with the elements of Sherman's invention of the Untitled Film Still genre. Finally, in Chapters 4 and 5, I plug the elements of my problem-complex ("how do we do humanities writing in hypermedia?") into these slots in order to invent a solution.

Baxandall uses inferential criticism in order to interpret works of art. In Chapter 2 I examine his case study of Picasso's invention of cubism, represented by the Portrait of Kahnweiler. As an interpretive method, Baxandall's inferential criticism is enormously powerful. As a strategy of invention, however, it is just as powerful. Baxandall's method enables me to conceptualize my own Problem, and the method I use to address it. For instance, my Charge is "to learn to do humanities research and writing in hypertext using text
and images." My Brief includes the local conditions (all the specific details of teaching English classes in the computer labs at the University of Florida) and the resources I use to address the problem stated in the Charge. These resources include media, models, and "aesthetic." I will discuss these types of resources at length in the next chapter, but I should mention that "aesthetic" includes a critical account of the maker's process and the function of his or her work: in other words, traditional academic criticism. Traditional academic criticism is part my troc; in academic culture, traditional academic criticism provides the context in which my inventions in humanities writing will be used (or not) and will be judged.

My method takes cognitive psychology and inferential criticism to the next step. Cognitive psychology and inferential criticism are currently employed as "reading strategies," but I turn them into a poetics for generating new inventions. A poetics is a guide to problem-solving; it explains how artists create certain effects in their works and how viewers solve perceptual and conceptual problems posed by those works. Poetics is often, but not always, concerned with meaning; it is more generally concerned with effects, of which meaning is but one type. The prototype for all poetics is Aristotle's Poetics, which described the specific properties of epic and tragedy, but then became a prescriptive set of instructions for writers of works in these genres.

A poetics functions either as a description or as a set of instructions; it describes particular genres, but can also be used to produce works in a particular genre. To produce a new genre, one can alter an existing poetics or construct an original poetics. I
propose a new hybrid text/image genre for hypertextual media that combines art practices with literate practices: the *Untitled Films Stills* and critique about the *Untitled Films Stills*. This hybrid might be compared to a synthesis of Aristotle's *Poetics* (about the structure of poetry and drama) and his *Rhetoric* (about the structure of argument). My hybrid poetics provides instructions for an arts-oriented approach to the humanities. This arts approach does not separate the artist from the critic; rather, it is a holistic approach to learning, drawing on interdisciplinary skills to produce a synthesis of aesthetic and critical modes of writing. I provide an example of an arts-oriented class project in Chapter 6: Teaching with Film Stills.

**Dissertation Overview**

**Chapter 2: Inferential Reasoning and the Avant-Garde**

In this chapter, I draw upon cognitive models of inferential reasoning to reconstruct Sherman's invention process. I introduce Michael Baxandall's *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, which explains how Picasso invented cubism, which in turn sets up my inferential study of Sherman. Baxandall treats Picasso's work as a solution to a problem we do not yet know. Baxandall's method is oriented towards the discovery of the problem the "maker" (in this case, the artist) solved and the means by which he or she solved it. This method is based on a triangulation of elements--"a simplified reconstruction of the maker's reflection and rationality applying an individual selection from collective resources to a task." Baxandall introduces three key terms in his cognitivist method: Charge (the major problem a maker tried to solve), Brief
(the local conditions, including the available resources, in which the maker addressed the problem posed by the Charge), and *troc* (the cultural marketplace in which the maker's work makes sense). Baxandall's reconstruction process produces a poetics of Picasso's work. Any principles of inferential problem solving discovered by cognitivist methods can be turned into a poetics for generating new work but cognitive authors do not show us how to do that. My project is to take Baxandall a step further and show how his inferential method can become a method of invention, using my classroom project based on Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* as the test case.

**Chapter 3: The Uncertain Status of the Object**

I use James Peterson's *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order* to distinguish between ordinary interpretation and inferential criticism. I then present an inferential reading of Sherman's work by drawing upon Henry Sayre's *The Object of Performance* to discuss the context of Sherman's work (the postmodern avant-garde) and Roland Barthes' "The Photographic Message" to study the connotation procedures of Sherman's work. I consider Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* as a kind of writing that takes advantage of cinematic and electronic modes. I then apply Baxandall's methodology to Sherman's work in order to extract a poetics for the film still, which includes a strategy of appropriation.
Chapter 4: The Rhetoric of Writing with the Star

I introduce my rhetoric and poetics of this new writing. The institutional context for this writing is electronic pedagogy in the age of the star. This chapter thus deals with the invention of the Hollywood star, Sherman's appropriation of the star's poses and looks for a work of high art, and my appropriation of Sherman's work into a pedagogical project.

Chapter 5: The Rhetoric of Interpretation

Recent criticism of Sherman's Untitled Film Stills by Laura Mulvey (Fetishism and Curiosity) and Kaja Silverman (The Threshold of the Visible World) indicate that Sherman's photographs have become increasingly important to the disciplines of cultural studies and film studies. Both critics approach the stills from the perspective of psychoanalytic theory, Mulvey employing Freud's concept of fetishism and Silverman employing Lacan's concept of the screen, to explain how Sherman's work challenges patriarchal aesthetics and identity construction. David Bordwell (Making Meaning) has written a rhetoric of modern interpretive criticism, which I employ as part of my Brief. Although Bordwell attacks interpretation, that is not my intention. Rather, my purpose is to design a poetics for generating student writing in a networked writing environment that includes an aesthetic component and a critical component. The critical component in my rhetoric is derived from Bordwell's account of psychoanalytic criticism.
Chapter 6: Teaching with Film Stills

This chapter presents my "Film Stills Project," adapted from Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, and discusses some of the results of this approach in the classroom. In my conclusion I discuss how the lessons of this dissertation can be generalized to aid invention in any field. Finally, I point to problems raised by computerized writing which need more research.
CHAPTER 2
INFERENTIAL REASONING AND THE AVANT-GARDE

This dissertation explores a research and writing strategy that adapts high art and entertainment (Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* and Hollywood movies) for use within education. My goal is to create a genre of humanities writing, employing images and text, for an electronic environment. Sherman and the filmmakers within the Hollywood studio system have solved numerous problems posed by the electronic/cinematic apparatus including the problem of how to use new information technologies (photography and film) in order to communicate, and the problem of how to adapt new discourse practices for use within particular institutions (art and entertainment). These artists' works can be considered solutions to problems similar to those educators face as we shift to electronic modes of literacy.

This chapter contains the structural frame of my dissertation: Michael Baxandall's "inferential criticism." Baxandall uses the inferential method to reconstruct Picasso's invention of cubism. I adapt Baxandall's method to produce an inferential reading of Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (which can be found in Chapter 3). This reading of Sherman's work, in turn, lays the groundwork for my invention of a hypertextual genre of humanities writing.
Baxandall's account of Picasso's cubist paintings focuses not on Picasso's "genius," but on the historical context in which Picasso developed his work and in which it was received. Baxandall represents the invention of cubism as a series of choices Picasso made within a complex set of historical circumstances. By showing us how Picasso identified problems within his historical frame and discovered ways of addressing those problems (through his choice of resources and markets), Baxandall provides us with a description of invention. In Chapter 3, I demonstrate how Baxandall's method, which he uses to untangle the complicated strands of Picasso's invention, works equally well when adapted for the purpose of analyzing Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*. In Chapters 4 and 5, I demonstrate how Baxandall's method, which he uses as a reading method, can be converted into instructions for generating our own inventions.

Sherman's situation within the art-world of the late 1970s is analogous to my situation within education in the late 1990s. We both find ways to represent the self using photography. Sherman adapted the discourse practices of entertainment for use within art while I adapt the discourse practices of avant-garde for use within education. This chapter and the next present avant-garde problem-solving strategies. The methods that avant-garde artists used to solve problems in the arts becomes, by analogy, a method we can use to solve our own problems in the humanities. But in order for this analogy to be productive, we must first explore some of the strategies that avant-garde artists used to solve their problems. I
present historical and theoretical accounts of artists' problem-solving in the chapters that follow, and draw attention to those strategies used by artists which offer the most promise for the humanities.

Baxandall

I chose Michael Baxandall's inferential criticism as the basis for my study of Cindy Sherman because Baxandall examines how creative peoples' intentions guided their choices and led to their 'finished work.' My interest lies in aiding creativity; inferential criticism, in aiming to uncover the process of invention in historical cases, provides the "slots" we need to compose our own recipes for invention. In adapting Baxandall's methodology for a heuristic project within education, we fill in the "slots" provided by Baxandall's inferential model with our own materials appropriate for addressing problems within our discipline.

In the first two chapters of Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures, Baxandall applies inferential criticism to two cases, Benjamin Baker's Forth Bridge and Picasso's Portrait of Kahnweiler. I present a discussion of these chapters here in order to explain Baxandall's theory of historical explanation and to present some of his terms and concepts.

Baxandall characterizes theories of historical explanation as belonging to one of two camps, either the nomological or the teleological; nomological people argue that it is possible, at least in principle, to explain historical human actions within quite strict causal terms as examples covered by general laws, on the same logical pattern as a physical scientist explaining the fall of an
apple. On the other side are the teleological folk, who decline the model of the physical sciences and argue that the explanation of human actions demands that we attend formally to the actor's purposes: we identify the ends of actions and reconstruct purpose on the basis of particular rather than general facts, even while clearly if implicitly using generalizations, soft rather than hard ones, about human nature and so on. (12)

Baxandall studies human-made creations and not phenomena in nature; therefore he works in the teleological mode because he seeks "to understand a finished piece of behavior [represented by a painting] by reconstructing a purposiveness or intention in it" (14). He sums up his method of historical reconstruction as follows:

For the moment . . . let us say: The maker of a picture or other historical artifact is a man addressing a problem of which his product is a finished and concrete solution. To understand it we try to reconstruct both the specific problem it was designed to solve and the specific circumstances out of which he was addressing it. The reconstruction is not identical with what he internally experienced: it will be simplified and limited to the conceptualizable, though it will also be operating in a reciprocal relation with the picture itself, which contributes, among other things, modes of perceiving and feeling. What we are going to be dealing in are relations—relations of problems to solutions, of both to circumstances, of our conceptualized constructs to a picture covered by a description, and of a description to a picture. (10-11)

Baxandall's method is a historical constructionist approach; he focuses not on the maker's feelings, but on the society in which the maker produced. Baxandall begins his case studies by examining the art work, which he calls "the deposit of activity" (14). He reasons inferentially from the deposit of activity to the "purposiveness or intention" (14) that shaped it. Baxandall notes that in seeking the
"intention" behind the "causal field behind a picture" (41), he is not aiming to discover "an actual, particular psychological state or even a historical set of mental events inside the heads" of the artists and other makers he studies; "Rather," he writes, "it is primarily a general condition of rational human action which I posit in the course of arranging my circumstantial facts" (42).

This can be referred to as 'intentionality' no doubt. One assumes purposefulness—or intent, as it were, 'intentiveness'—in the historical actor but even more in the historical objects themselves. Intentionality in this sense is taken to be characteristic of both. Intention is the forward-leaning look of things. (42)

The historical actor may have provided some clues about this intentiveness, but he or she may also have been unaware of his or her intentions. Baxandall explains that intentions "may have been implicit in institutions to which the actor unreflectively acquiesced," or that intentions implicit in a work "may have been dispositions acquired through a history of behavior in which reflection once but no longer had a part. Genres are often a case of the first and skills are often a case of the second" (42). Thus in order to surmise the intentions behind an object, one might "take in the rationality of the institution or of the behavior that led to the disposition" (42). We seek signs of intentionality, therefore, in objects and institutions as well as in the behaviors and explanations of individual historical actors.

Baxandall's method requires us to reconstruct "the process of thought" (14) that led to the production of the historical object. (This "thought," as I mentioned above, is not necessarily the conscious
intent of an individual historical actor.) Reconstructing the process of thought means reasoning backwards from the historical artifact under investigation, or the "effects," to the processes that led to its production, or the "causes." This reasoning, from effects to causes, Baxandall calls "inferential criticism," though other theorists call it "abductive reasoning" (see Eco and Sebeok, *The Sign of Three*). It involves reasoning from the known to the unknown: for example, from a painting, which we may observe, to the motives, materials, and techniques motivating the work, which may be partly or wholly obscured.

Baxandall cautions that we should consider a work as neither finished nor unfinished; we should assume rather that the maker stopped work on it for whatever reason. He also cautions that when we write about pictures, "we are describing our thoughts about a picture--not the picture, nor mental events in the painter's mind" (58). In other words, in order to do an inferential reading, it is necessary for us to reconstruct a "model picture" in language; the ways in which we describe a picture in writing determine and limit which types of inquiries and speculations we pursue. Therefore, when we write about a historical object, we are dealing not with the object itself, but with descriptive concepts which we check against the object. When Baxandall describes a picture, he is concerned primarily with finding signs of problems addressed by the maker and the resources the maker used to address those problems.

Baxandall's discussion of Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler* demonstrates this "problems-resources" approach. Baxandall indicates three "problem-complexes" Picasso dealt with--"tension
between two and three dimensions; tensions between priorities of form and colour; the contradiction between sustained experience and the fictive instant . . . " (64). Baxandall calls these the "primary problems" that occupied Picasso during this period of his career.

Picasso also encountered "secondary problems" as he worked on the paintings themselves. "It is, no doubt, these [secondary problems] that the painter himself is most immediately aware of, and this is the reason why painters' statements about their art often seem at odds with what the observer sees" (64). The observer perceives Picasso struggling both with the primary problems and an evolving set of secondary problems as his work developed over time.

Here are a few of the derivative problems we apprehend in the Portrait of Kahnweiler. There is a problem, newly heightened by the leaving open of the plane edge of the figure, of distinction between figure and ground, between the man and what lies around and behind him. The immediate solution has been to establish the distinction tonally and by hue; the man is darker than the ground next to him, and also less yellowish. But this sets another problem. Given our experience of looking at nature and more especially at pictures, it is hard not to apprehend this differentiation as representational of some sort of difference of illumination. This is basically a duochrome picture. The problem was to increase for a year or so yet, to the point of almost monochromy, before being partly solved and partly evaded -- Braque leading on this occasion and Picasso rather hesitantly following -- by detaching hue from the hued object itself and redisposing the sum of hues in a more independent arrangement. And this was in turn a solution that was to always be in tension, as a cognitive compact between painter and beholder, with the Cubist ambition about volume and masses. (64-5)

Baxandall enumerates several other secondary problems Picasso addresses in the Portrait of Kahnweiler, including
-- "the residual problem of tonal relief modeling on the basis of directional lighting"
-- "the problem of the recomposition of faces"
-- "the relation of scale, whether absolute or perceived, to the registration of objects"
-- "a problem about local texture"
-- "a problem . . . in the still life" (64)

Furthermore, Baxandall enumerates several resources Picasso employed in order to address these problems, including
-- "African mask"
-- "thick impasto"
-- "collage and papier collé" (64)

Baxandall supports his analyses with abundant evidence he observes in the canvases. It should be clear from Baxandall's description of the *Portrait of Kahnweiler* that we are dealing here with works of art as examples of problem-stating and problem-solving.

**Charge and Brief**

Baxandall uses the term *Charge* to mean the primary problems that the historical agent was responding to, and the term *Brief* to mean the specific local conditions, the situation, that the historical agent found himself or herself in. Baxandall contends "that historical objects may be explained by treating them as solutions to problems in situations, and by reconstructing a rational relationship between these three" (35).
By examining heterogeneous objects—bridges and paintings—Baxandall tests the limits of his method. In the case of Benjamin Baker's Forth Bridge, the Charge did not originate with Baker, the architect who designed the bridge, but rather with the North British Railway Company. Here, the Charge preceded the Brief; in other words, the company gave Baker an objective ("Bridge!") and Baker then set himself the task of examining the local conditions. Baker divided his task into two separate processes, conception and execution. Baker carried out the conceptual part himself by designing the bridge and hired another man, William Arrol, to oversee its construction. Baker's solution (embodied in the bridge itself) required an accounting of local conditions, or Brief, which meant, for example, dealing with a construction site that included a silted river bottom and strong side winds. "Together Charge and Brief seemed to constitute a problem to which we might see the bridge as a solution" (35).

The Brief includes the resources available for solving the problem indicated in the Charge. Baxandall classifies these as "resources of medium, of models (both positive and negative), and of 'aesthetic'" (35). To grossly oversimplify, Baker's medium was structurally-deployed metal, his positive model was the Oriental cantilever system, his negative model (an example of what not to do) was the Tay Bridge, which was blown down by side winds, and his aesthetic was 'functional expressionism.' These resources were available in the culture when Baker began his work on the Forth Bridge; he didn't need to invent them, although he put some of them to new uses. Baker chose from his resources of medium, models, and
aesthetics those which would best serve his needs. In order to solve the problems posed to him by the North British Railway Company and the local conditions of the Forth River, Baker had to select some resources and reject others.

In order to reconstruct the intentionality that shaped a particular work, we need to examine three kinds of elements: the terms of the problem, which includes the Charge and Brief, the resources of the maker’s culture, and the concepts pertaining to the finished product. Baxandall’s method involves reasoning among these three elements, which he calls the triangle of re-enactment: "What we do if we want to know about Baker is to play a conceptual game on the triangle, a simplified reconstruction of the maker's reflection and rationality applying an individual selection from collective resources to a task" (34).

An individual, Benjamin Baker or X, made a selection from these resources and alloyed his selection into a form, one solution. X is elusive; very little worth saying can be said about him directly, though some broad things can be inferred from his other behavior and his statements. The way we are proceeding seems to entail that we are thinking of him as a compound of rationality and culture and quiddity. This means, among other things, that we could not work through our sequence from the problem to his solution if the solution were not visible, because he is an insufficiently known quantity in the schedule; instead the solution is the given and we continually refer to it. What we do about X then is to play a conceptual game on what I have just called the triangle of re-enactment. This is a very simplified diagram of quite a high level of consciousness: it is not a narrative. It is a representation of reflection or rationality purposefully at work on circumstances—and I shall insist again that this representation takes life and meaning from its ostensible relation to the Bridge itself—and we derive a sense of the agent’s quiddity by relating to these circumstances the solution
he actually arrived at. If we 'explain' the form of the Bridge at all, it is only by expounding it as one rational way of attaining an inferred end. (36)

Baxandall's inferential method, used in this way to explain the making of the Forth Bridge, seems relatively obvious, given that making the bridge: (a) solved a set of practical problems, (b) developed sequentially from conception to execution, and (c) employed a set of easily identifiable resources.

When Baxandall examines Picasso's invention of cubist painting, he admits that he is putting his explanatory system under a huge strain. He finds two weaknesses with the attempt to explain Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler* on the Forth Bridge pattern. In the case of the bridge, it seemed plausible to distinguish between two phases, conception and execution... But in a picture like the *Portrait of Kahnweiler* it is not quite a matter of the painter first working out a finished design and then picking up his brushes in an executive role and just carrying it out. The phases interpenetrate and one would surely wish at least to accommodate this sense of process. (39)

Secondly, something quite preliminary that is missing is the problem that Picasso was addressing, both general Charge and specific Brief. In 'bridge' and in 'silt', 'side winds' and the rest we had sharply focused demands on Baker. Moreover, it seems clear who had issued the Charge to design the Bridge: the Forth Bridge Company. But what were Picasso's Charge and Brief--setting a problem in response to which he painted like this--and who on earth issued it, for that matter? If we are to exercise on the triangle of re-enactment, we cannot start with one of the three bases missing. Until we know what Picasso had been set to do, we cannot think constructively about his relation to the resources of the culture. (39)
If we cannot address the problems posed by the invention of cubism (Picasso) in terms of inferential criticism, then it seems unlikely that we can do the same with postmodern art (Cindy Sherman) or entertainment (Hollywood). But these problems are not intractable, as we shall see. If we can find common use of resources between Baker and Picasso, we can posit a model of invention that cuts across a wide range of domains, extending from engineering to the arts. Indeed, Baxandall does find common use of resources in the cases of Baker and Picasso. First, Picasso selected elements of his medium just as Baker selected elements of his medium. Baker's medium, 'metal structurally deployed', is the equivalent not to Picasso's paints and canvases but to 'forms and colours perceived' (38). A second area of congruence between Baker and Picasso seems apparent as well; Picasso had positive and negative models just as Baker had. The positive models were of two types, determined by the domain from which they were drawn. Picasso found his positive models within the world of European high art when he looked to Cézanne, and in exotic models outside the domain of European high art when he looked to African sculpture. Picasso then adapted these models for his own ends.

Let us examine more closely how Picasso adopted these models as part of his resources. Picasso described *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* as an unfinished work, but it pointed the direction for his future painting. The year that Picasso began working on *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Cézanne died and there were numerous exhibitions of his work on display in Paris. Many painters were drawn to aspects of Cézanne's work. Matisse, for instance, found in Cézanne "a reductive
registration of the human figure" and "a means to a form both energetically decorative on the picture-plane and suggestive of a toughly colossal sort of object of representation" (60). Picasso found a whole range of ideas in Cézanne's work that he chose to appropriate for his own purposes.

... Cézanne was for him part of the history of interesting painting he chose to be aware of and which constituted his Charge. But then, by attending to him, he made him more than that. There were various rather general Cézannian things Picasso accepted en troc from the culture, as part of his Brief; one would be Cézanne as an epic model of determined individual who saw his own sense of the problem of painting as larger than any immediate formulation urged on him by the market; another might be some of Cézanne's verbalizations about painting -- 'deal with nature in terms of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone ... ' But again, and very obviously, Picasso also went to Cézanne's pictures as an actual resource, somewhere he could find means to an end, varied tools for solving problems. The matter of Cézanne's passage--of representing a relation between two separate planes by registering them as one continuous superplane--I have already mentioned. ... To Picasso different aspects of Cézanne were what 'Span!' and side winds and the cantilever principle and Siemens steel were to Benjamin Baker ... (60-1)

Baxandall argues, however, that it would be a mistake to think "Cézanne influenced Picasso." Rather, Baxandall argues that the historical agent is active; the artist uses the works of other artists as resources in his or her own work.

[Picasso's] angle on Cézanne ... was a particular one, affected among other things by his having referred also to such other art as African sculpture. He saw and extracted this rather than that in Cézanne and modified it, towards his own intention and into his own universe of representation. And then again, by doing this he changed for ever the way we can see Cézanne (and African sculpture), whom we must see partly diffracted
through Picasso's idiosyncratic reading: we will never see Cézanne undistorted by what, in Cézanne, painting after Cézanne has made productive in our tradition.

'Tradition,' by the way, I take to be not some aesthetical sort of cultural gene but a specifically discriminating view of the past in an active and reciprocal relation with a developing set of dispositions and skills acquirable in the culture that possesses this view. But influence I do not want to talk about. (61-2)

In addition to Picasso's use of Cézanne as a positive model, Picasso also used an exotic positive model (African sculpture) and a negative model, which consisted of art he reacted against in his work. These resources were not independent of one another. Picasso adapted each in relation to the others; he found a way to piece these three types of models into a coherent aesthetic. Baxandall compares Picasso's use of artistic models to Baker's use of models in his design of the Forth Bridge:

The exotic positive model corresponding to the oriental cantilever might be the schematization of form Picasso saw in African sculpture... As for Thomas Bouch and the Tay Bridge, negative examples to react away from, Picasso had many of these: the most immediate in 1910, perhaps, were offered by Matisse and also his earlier self, but the underlying case would be the painting and even more the rationale of Impressionism. The Impressionists' fiction that one registered in a picture a momentary sensation and their frivolity in attending to hues more than volumes were things Picasso is sometimes seen as working almost programmatically against. (38)

The models discussed here are instances of Picasso's intentionality remotivating his resources. African sculptors may have had any number of intentions for their works, but Picasso disregarded these and instead found his own purposes for their
work. Picasso's intentional "misreading" of African sculpture, seeing it in structural terms rather than in ritual terms, was a key component of his creativity.

The third resource Baxandall examines, 'aesthetic,' can be traced very clearly in the case of Baker's Bridge, since Baker presented a very cogent defense of his aesthetic ("a sort of expressive functionalism") in an address to the Edinburgh Literary Institute. We have no such clearly verbalized account of aesthetic from Picasso at the time of his cubist period, but we do from his dealer, Kahnweiler, who presents an account of formalist problems addressed in Picasso's work.

Kahnweiler writes:

The beginning of Cubism! The first onslaught. Desperate, Titanic, wrestling with all problems at once. With what problems? With the fundamental problems of painting: the representation of the three-dimensional and the coloured on the plane surface, and their comprehension within the unity of this plane surface. But 'representation' and 'comprehension' in the strictest, highest sense. Not ['representation'] as counterfeiting of form by means of light and shade, but rather a demonstration of the three-dimensional by means of design on the plane. Not ['comprehension' as] pleasing 'composition', but rather an inexorable articulated construction. And then the problem of colour as well, and lastly the most central and difficult point, the alloyance and reconciliation of the whole. (68)

Picasso, in contrast to Kahnweiler, claims (in 1923, years after his cubist period) that he had had no interest in solving the problems of painting. He writes:
I can hardly understand the importance given to the word *research* in connection with modern painting. In my opinion to search means nothing. To *find* is the thing . . .

Among the several sins that I have been accused of, none is more false than that I have, as the principle objective of my work, the spirit of research. When I paint, my object is to show what I have found and not what I am looking for. In art intentions are not sufficient and, as we way in Spanish, love must be proved by deeds and not by reason. What one does is what counts and not what one had the intention of doing . . .

The several manners I have used in my art must not be considered as an evolution, or as steps towards an unknown ideal of painting. All I have ever made is for the present . . . (69)

How do we explain these different points of view? Baxandall explains that they are the result of different orientations: "'problem solving' is a construction [the observer] puts on other peoples' purposeful activity. The intentional behavior he is watching does not always involve an awareness in the actor of solving problems" (69). The observer attends to 'problems' as a means of analyzing ends and means, while the actor may be solving problems he or she does not know exist, or else may be solving problems by means of habit, in which case the 'problem' seems to be less of a 'problem' than it does to the observer. The historical actor is often unreflective, whereas the observer sees the actor's behavior as problem-solving. Baxandall argues that although Picasso claimed he was not problem-solving, his behavior indicates otherwise.

For Picasso the Brief and the grand problems might largely be embodied in his likes and dislikes about pictures, particularly his own: he need not formulate them out as problems. His active relation to each of his pictures was indeed always in the
present moment, and at the level of process and emerging derivative problems on which he spent his time. In a sense, since it was his pictorial dispositions that were evolving between 1906 and 1912, his painting was at any moment almost habitual. But even to 'find' presupposes criteria of what is a find: that he was not always reflectively aware of his criteria does not mean he did not have them. And to have criteria by which one assesses one's performance is to act intentionally. (70)

Kahnweiler, we might say, had his own process of problem-solving. As Picasso's exclusive dealer, starting in 1912, Kahnweiler was "invested" in his interpretation of Picasso's work. His description of Picasso's work as "Desperate, Titanic, wrestling with all problems at once" would likely have had a receptive audience amongst modernists who valued the notion of art as a titanic struggle. To say that Kahnweiler found favorable things to say about Picasso is not to say that his interpretations were wrong. It is to say, rather, that the critic performs a rhetorical act within an institution to achieve specific goals. The critic, like the artist, produces work in relationship to a problem; this relationship shapes the critic's choices of materials and methods, or the critic's rhetoric. In other words, the interpreter has his or her own Charge, Brief, and _troc_. Thus I argue in chapter 5 that Baxandall's method of inferential criticism, when converted into a heuretic method, allows us to fuse the roles of artist and critic.

I include a critical component in my poetics to create a 'PicWeiler,' a combination of artist (Picasso) and critic (Kahnweiler). I want students to be able to write in either an aesthetic or a critical mode, or a combination of both, to become reflective observers of
their own work, explaining and articulating their purposes to themselves and other, and to become advocates for their own projects, just as Kahnweiler became an advocate for Picasso's paintings. I want them to learn which rhetorical and aesthetic strategies produce the most powerful effects within institutions, just as, together, Picasso and Kahnweiler produced powerful effects within the art world. Baxandall refers to Kahnweiler's criticism about Picasso as evidence of aesthetic resources within Picasso's Brief; thus I shall consider Sherman's critics' statements as evidence of aesthetic resources within Sherman's Brief. Furthermore, I will posit ways in which we can combine the roles of artist and critic into our teaching, writing, and research.

I return here to the question of whether Baxandall's inferential model can explain Picasso's invention of cubism as effectively as it explains Baker's design of the Forth Bridge. Picasso and Baker selected their resources; these were materials, positive and negative models, and 'aesthetic.' Baker, however, was issued his Charge by the Forth Bridge Railway Company while Picasso appears to have had no external entity issue his Charge. Baxandall points out, however, that Baker did not work solely for the company; "in the matter of who issued Charge and Brief, one suspects that Baker would not have considered himself as working solely to the directors of the Forth Bridge Railway Company: he was working also to his professional colleagues and rivals, and to a society" (40). Picasso, like Baker, would have considered himself working for his professional colleagues and for a society. Baxandall concludes that, "The Forth Bridge and the Portrait of Kahnweiler, both purposeful objects, are
not necessarily in principle different. The differences seem more of degree and of balance . . . " (40)

Can we equate the bridge-builder's Charge with that of the painter? The bridge-builder's Charge is pretty clear--"to span"--but the painter's Charge seems much more elusive; Baxandall posits a very general definition of the painter's Charge: "the painter's role has been to make marks on a plane surface in such a way that their visual interest is directed to an end" which he shortens to "intentional visual interest" (43). This definition is vague enough for Baxandall to claim that the painter's Charge is "featureless" while "Character begins with the Brief" (44). The painter's Brief is, "largely . . . a critical relation to previous painting" (72). Baxandall cites Kahnweiler's account of Picasso and Braque in Der Weg zum Kubismus to propose three elements of Picasso's Brief: (a) the representation of a three-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional surface, (b) the relative importance of form and color, and (c) the fictive instantaneousness of painting versus the factual process of perceptual and intellectual engagement that painting required (44-5).

The terms of Picasso's Brief can be inferred "from the character of his pictures in relation to other pictures and . . . from the developing character of his own pictures during these years" (46). Picasso's Brief, in other words, can be inferred only from historical context, from the way in which his paintings embody his likes and dislikes about other paintings, his own as well as those of other painters;
The painter's formulation of a Brief is a very personal form indeed. Benjamin Baker's problem had been made up of elements--silt and side winds and so on--that were objectively pressing. He did not himself select them as the matter of his problem-solving, even though he . . . was free to put a personal emphasis, relatively, on this or on that. But the elements of Picasso's problem were rather more freely selected by Picasso out of an array, and arranged by Picasso into a problem constituting the immediate Brief. (47)

The terms of Picasso's Brief shaped the look of his paintings. But who shaped this Brief? Picasso did not have a Forth Bridge Company setting his tasks. We might be tempted to say that the artist acts alone in setting a Brief, but Baxandall argues that the artist acts "as a social being in cultural circumstances" (47). The Brief develops from a relationship between the artist and a set of changing historical conditions, which Baxandall calls the *troc*.

*Troc, Markets, Tradition*

Baxandall defines the *troc* as "no more than the form of relation in which two classes of people, both within the same culture, are free to make choices in the course of an exchange, any choice affecting the universe of the exchange and so the other participants" (48). The *troc* is a market model, "a coming into contact of producers and consumers for the purpose of exchange" (47). Within a market, there is "a degree of competition among both producers and consumers" and "parties on either side can make statements with their feet, as it were, by participating or abstaining" (47). Furthermore, "Any one market can be defined through the kind of commodity exchanged in it, and also geographically: within it there is likely to be a pattern of specialized sub-markets" (47). A *troc*
includes the cultural resources available to the artist (which, when selected, become elements of the artist's Brief), as well as the rewards an artist may find for his or her work.

In purely economic terms, a market is the exchange of goods and services for money, but in Baxandall's description of the relation between painter and culture, the exchange includes such things as approval, intellectual nurture and, later, reassurance, provocation and irritation of stimulating kinds, the articulation of ideas, vernacular visual skills, friendship and--very important indeed--a history of one's activity and a heredity, as well as sometimes money acting both as a token of some of these and a means to continuing performance. (48)

The troc sets the range of expectations for producers and consumers. Each party, producer and consumer, uses their recollections of past experiences to establish their expectations in present situations. These expectations develop in reciprocal relation to a market. An artist's intervention in the troc can change cultural expectations as he or she produces and exhibits new work.

The troc of the artist's historical period provides choices of production ("what do I make?") and of distribution ("how do I get it out there?"). Picasso changed the nature of his Brief when he found new ways to distribute his work. In his choice of distribution, Picasso set himself apart from other cubists, such as Gleizes, Metzinger, and Delauney, who had organized themselves into a "movement" (one of Picasso's "negative models"). The minor Cubists who exhibited together were playing to the expectations of a marketplace for generic coherence, what Baxandall calls "a discussible class" (56). Being part of such a discussible class was
meant to help those who exhibited in the salons. But being an individual talent better served Picasso with his chosen exhibitors: the dealers. The dealers offered Picasso a context in which certain expectations about art, such as "the good Artist has a new and individual voice" (57), shaped the production and the reception of his work.

The art market of 1909-10 offered many choices to Picasso. The new element in this market was the rise of the dealers. By opting for the dealers instead of the salons, Picasso selected parts of his Brief from within the larger troc. Baxandall explains why Picasso and the minor Cubists went in different directions:

... it is not that the minor Cubists formed a group and Picasso acted an individualist role because these were the clever lines to take in the sub-market, Salons or dealers', they happened to find themselves in. Rather, it is that they went to those sub-markets because they were the appropriate sectors for people with a certain view both of the good artist and of themselves: that is where one would fit. They accepted structural elements in Briefs which, however, then surely confirmed their view. Reciprocity rules. (56)

Artists, in other words, tend to look for segments of the marketplace where others share their assumptions about what constitutes good art, assumptions about the role of the artist, and so on. Prior to the dealer's emergence within the art-world, the dominant institutional route open to painters was the salon. The dealers provided the institutional context in which Picasso's work made sense.

Let us begin to examine Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* in terms of Baxandall's inferential criticism, comparing our account of
Sherman to Baxandall's account of Picasso. Amongst her various series of photographs, the *Untitled Film Stills* stand apart. Like many of her later works, Sherman's third series, *Centerfolds* or *Horizontals*, was commissioned by an institutional entity, in this case the magazine *Artforum*. The Charge thus came from the magazine, but was intentionally vague—we might reconstruct it as "Make interesting images for our magazine!" For the *Centerfolds* or *Horizontals* series, Sherman developed her Brief from the physical constraints imposed upon her by the magazine's format; the magazine was horizontal and the editors had asked for a two-page layout. Inspired by these conditions, Sherman "produced a series of works that refer to the photo spreads in pornographic magazines" (Cruz, 6).

Large enough to be life-size, each image is in color, with Sherman as a different young woman or teenage girl looking off to the side with a vacant or pensive look. The figure fills the frame, cropped and in close-up, in a technique that she has continued to use often. . . . The vantage point of the viewer, who looks down on these women, reinforces their vulnerability, as does their mostly disheveled look. (6)

The magazine's editor was not happy with Sherman's work. She rejected Sherman's images, criticizing them for reaffirming sexist stereotypes. *Artforum*‘s editor, Ingrid Sischy, said that the images Sherman submitted, "might be misunderstood" (Krauss, 89). Cruz writes, "The controversy underscores the power of the frameworks created by the media and the risks of appropriating those strategies for purposes of critique" (6). The images in this series have become famous nonetheless, and are iconic of Sherman's work as a whole.
One of them graces the cover of the book in which Cruz's article appears. The negative criticism of the Centerfolds or Horizontals series prompted Sherman to follow it with a different series, Pink Robes. In this series, Sherman avoids the horizontal format that implied vulnerability in the previous series. She continued to work with pornography as her theme, but this time her images were vertical, the perspective was straight-on rather than from above, and her appearance was less sexy (she exaggerates a bleary, disheveled look); "Sherman thinks of these images as depictions of the porno models during breaks between posing for nude shots" (7). Sherman found both positive and negative models for her Pink Robes series in her earlier work; the terms of her Brief shifted in response to her experience with Artforum. Despite Sherman's reworking of her ideas in the Pink Robes series, Artforum rejected this series also (Krauss, 89). Critic Amelia Jones suggests another reason why Artforum rejected these series; Sherman's images suggest that "Artforum [is] a 'pimp' prostituting art (here the female body) as commodity" (41).

Sherman's first series, the Untitled Film Stills, was not commissioned by an institution and was only exhibited as an entire series well after its completion. Sherman formulated her own Charge for this series. Therefore, Sherman's Untitled Film Stills are closer, in terms of the Charge, to Picasso's cubist paintings (Picasso formulated his own Charge), and less like Baker's Forth Bridge (the Charge was formulated by the North British Railway Company). The examination of Sherman's Charge and Brief for the Untitled Film Stills requires much more discussion, which I provide in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3
THE UNCERTAIN STATUS OF THE OBJECT

The Prospects for an Inferential Treatment of the Postmodern Avant-Garde

The strategy explored in this chapter and the next is to turn a reading practice derived from hermeneutics--Baxandall's inferential criticism--into a writing practice guided by heuretics. The test case for this strategy is Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*. Sherman herself adapted a reading practice, a feminist reading of Hollywood and the French New Wave, into a writing practice, (writing with the star image), represented by the *Untitled Film Stills*. Sherman's writing practice fulfilled two objectives; first, it established new strategies of representation within avant-garde art, drawing upon strands of conceptual art, performance art, and pop art. Second, Sherman's work established new possibilities for a "vernacular" visual language; ordinary people can use Sherman's strategies to write cinematic images for their own purposes.

Can we apply Baxandall's inferential method to Cindy Sherman, a postmodern avant-garde artist? Baxandall's inferential criticism worked well with modernist avant-garde art, represented by Picasso's invention of Cubism. But several indicators suggest that inferential criticism will not work as well with postmodern avant-
garde art. Baxandall insists on a "problem-statement/problem-solution" model for understanding Picasso's invention of Cubism. This approach assumes that Picasso's paintings are, in some way, "solutions" to problems that Picasso was addressing. Does postmodern art pose solutions to problems? According to Henry M. Sayre's *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970*, postmodern art is characterized by "undecidability," which he defines as "the condition of conflict or contradiction which presents no possible 'solution' or resolution" (xiii). It seems unlikely that we can understand Sherman's work in terms of "problem-solution" if we characterize it as lacking any "possible solution or resolution."

The lack of a clearly defined "object" in much postmodern art poses another difficulty for inferential criticism. Postmodern art, according to Sayre, "self-consciously denies its own intrinsic unity and autonomy"(xiii), and some manifestations of it, particularly conceptual and performance art, are "antiformalist, experience-oriented forms" (2). Baxandall began his study of Picasso with an examination of a particular formalist object, the *Portrait of Kahnweiler*; but what is the "object" in Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*? Is it individual photographs? The entire series of photographs? Particular relations between photographs? Sherman's performance (her poses and gestures) which the photographs document? The audience's experience of the photographs? Each of these possible "objects" of study seems worthy to me. Yet if we don't choose one of these objects, we will not be able to ground our discussions. In other words, we need evidence, but where do we begin to look and where do we set limits?
We need to adapt the kind of inferential criticism Baxandall used to examine Picasso to allow us to examine postmodern art. This adaptation of inferential criticism is found in the work of James Peterson, a cognitivist film critic who examines the history of avant-garde cinema in terms of problem-solving.

James Peterson's Inferential Treatment of the Avant-Garde

Peterson solves the problem (how do we make sense of the postmodern avant-garde by inferential criticism?) by showing postmodern art's relevance to a community of art-viewers. In other words, while Baxandall emphasizes the role of the artist, Peterson emphasizes the role of the audience. By examining art at this level of generality (the level of the community), we can address some of the problems I listed above. In his discussion of Andy Warhol's films such as Empire, a continuous eight hour shot of the Empire State Building, Peterson asks, "how can one meaningfully relate such films to the concerns of the community that views them?" (D, 72) Relevance links the audience to the film. Peterson, like Baxandall, seeks to understand a work of art neither as an autonomous object nor as the personal expression of a particular genius, but as a series of relationships: of viewer to object, of maker to culture, of object to problem, and so on. These relationships exist in reciprocal relation to one another; in other words, we cannot understand any one element without placing it into a contextual relationship with the others. Each pair of elements can be understood in terms of problem-solving; for instance, in the relation of viewer to object, Peterson
treats the viewer's activities, such as perception and cognition, as problem-solving activities.

In "Is a Cognitive Approach to the Avant-Garde Cinema Perverse?" Peterson writes that we can "usefully consider avant-garde film viewing as a kind of problem solving, which cognitive theories can help explain" (109). According to Peterson,

... one main strain of cognitive work on perception suggests that all perception may properly be seen as a kind of problem solving. For example, Irwin Rock's *The Logic of Perception* argues that thought-like, cognitive processes underlie virtually all visual perception, though most often we're not consciously aware of it. Rock's conclusion... is that visual perception is a series of thought-like steps through which the perceptual system "explains" the array of light and color before it as a comprehensible scene. (110)

How is it, Peterson asks, that viewers initially face difficulty comprehending avant-garde films but learn to make sense of them as they gain perceptual experience? He theorizes that viewers acquire knowledge when solving the perceptual problems posed by the film: "Specifically, experienced viewers have acquired both procedural knowledge, what we might call knowing how, and declarative knowledge, what we might call knowing that." (110) Procedural knowledge is a set of heuristics, or rules of thumb, that allow viewers to make meaningful patterns from what they see. Declarative knowledge is the awareness a viewer has of the context in which the artist worked. Peterson lists three heuristic strategies for understanding avant-garde films:
1. "look for bits of narrative, but be prepared for digressions in which graphic patterns in the images become more prominent than the activities of the characters" (111).

2. "pay more attention to the elements over which the filmmaker has most control" (111).

3. "try to relate the images and sounds of a given film to the distinctive concerns of the filmmaker" (111).

In Peterson's model, declarative knowledge overlaps with procedural knowledge. Put another way, knowing the filmmaker's concerns helps the viewer understand how and why the film was put together and thus how to perceive and comprehend the film. For example, Peterson argues that a viewer watching Stan Brakhage's *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular*, a scratched and painted film about the birth of Brakhage's child, would benefit from knowing that "Brakhage believes that the naïve vision of the infant is a worthy model for the artist, who ought to escape conventional ways of seeing" (111). In this instance, the viewer uses the third strategy listed above, relating the images and sounds of the film to the distinctive concerns of the filmmaker, to understand how and why Brakhage made the film. Peterson's model makes the viewer's activities overlap with the maker's. The viewer understands the maker's concerns by reconstructing a purpose or intention in the work. In this sense, our use of Peterson's model can profit from Baxandall's insights about how to reconstruct intentionality.

Can Peterson's strategies for understanding avant-garde films help us understand how to perceive Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*? I believe these strategies can bring us toward our goal if we alter
them somewhat to account for Sherman's use of photographic media (and its references to cinema). Here then are my variations on Peterson's strategies:

1. Where Peterson suggests we "look for bits of narrative, but be prepared for digressions in which graphic patterns in the images become more prominent than the activities of the characters," I propose: Match Sherman's images to film images with which you are familiar, but be prepared for differences. In *Untitled Film Still #43*, Sherman poses in front of a landscape in Monument Valley, the setting for many of John Ford's westerns. But this image, like many others in Sherman's series, seems more like an amateur's reconstruction of a film style rather than an instance of direct citation from a particular film.

2. Where Peterson suggests we "pay more attention to the elements over which the filmmaker has most control," I suggest: Look for elements over which Sherman (as photographer and performer) has control: acting, sets, poses, props, costume, lighting, and framing. The setting for *Untitled Film Still #43* is so famous that it looks like a backdrop; Sherman is barefoot, wearing a wig that's obviously a wig and a white slip (similar to those worn by barroom women in Westerns); her slip reveals tan lines over her shoulder; the pose is highly stylized; Sherman sits on a tree branch, one leg propped up on a branch, one touching the ground, one hand propping her against the tree branch, the other holding her slip down between her legs, her right shoulder thrust forward, her chin thrust upwards. She looks toward a place beyond the frame of the image, as though she's noticed something or someone and is preparing to leap from the tree.
This pose, suggesting the woman's vulnerability, draws upon clichés of women in Westerns, in particular the cliché that women are threatened (by Indian abduction).

3. Where Peterson suggests we "try to relate the images and sounds of a given film to the distinctive concerns of the filmmaker," I propose: Look at the historical context in which Sherman was working in order to speculate about her concerns, then relate the features of her images to those concerns. Sherman has left no comprehensive account of her purpose for producing the *Untitled Film Stills* (they are, after all, untitled). But we can infer her purposes from her work, her historical context, and the critical commentary of others. Laura Mulvey, in *Fetishism and Curiosity*, places Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* within the historical context of feminism in the 1970s. During this period, feminist artists and theorists explored how representations of femininity in the mass media contributed to the oppression of women. Some feminist artists, including Cindy Sherman, began to see new strategies of representation in mass media images of women. Amelia Jones, in her essay "Tracing the Subject with Cindy Sherman," describes a shift in feminist artists' approaches: "... as the 1970s and 1980s progressed, artists began to explore femininity as not only the sign of oppression but as an indication of the performativity of sexuality and gender..." (38). Sherman's decision to perform femininity in multiple guises and highlight their artifice addressed her concerns about the inscription of the female body in popular representation and provided a strategy for working with and against clichés of femininity. Mulvey regards Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* in
Brechtian terms, calling the works, "a re-representation, a making strange" (67). Sherman's audience would have understood this "re-representation" strategy as a novel idea for an evolving feminist aesthetics.

Peterson's strategies (and my variations on them) belong to an inferential method. An inferential method differs from an interpretive method over questions of procedural knowledge. In the interpretive model, procedural knowledge means knowing how to read codes. Roland Barthes' *S/Z* is a classic case of the interpretive method. In *S/Z*, Barthes treats Balzac's novella *Sarrazine* as a network of codes, including the Hermeneutic, Proairetic, Semic, Referential and Symbolic codes. Barthes shows how each 'lexia,' a minimal signifying unit, in Balzac's novella functions as bearer of one or more of these codes; the Hermeneutic code conveys information about enigma or mystery, the Proairetic code covers the generic action sequence (the "seduction," the "murder"), the Semic code conveys stereotypes ("femininity," "foreignness"), the Referential code indicates other bodies of knowledge ("biology," "history"), while the Symbolic code "uses the structure of myth to organize the other codes . . . " (Ulmer, 107). The code-based interpretive approach is particularly useful, Peterson argues, when the work under consideration is highly conventional, or rule-based, such as Hollywood films or realist novels. The trouble with the interpretive approach for comprehending avant-garde films is that, "signification is possible only to the extent that the 'readers' have already learned those codes . . . . The avant-garde cinema puts a high premium on
novelty, and viewers can't always count on interpreting a novel element of a film by using a code they already know." (112)

Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, at first glance, seem quite conventional. They portray highly coded feminine character types within highly coded cinematic compositions. In *Untitled Film Still #43*, the Monument Valley setting belongs (perhaps exclusively) to the Western genre, one of the most heavily-coded of film genres. If we imagine that this still belongs to a narrative drawn from John Ford Westerns, we can make sense of the image by reference to our stock codes of John Ford films; we know that the narrative universe of Ford films contains threats and violence. In *The Searchers*, for example, a Comanche tribe led by Chief Scar murders Ethan Edwards's (John Wayne's) family, leaving alive his niece Debbie (Natalie Wood), whom they abduct. In Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #43*, there is no visible threat, yet the woman appears to perceive one. She is vulnerable because she is in a wide open space, in broad daylight, sitting on a lonely tree, wearing a white dress that can be seen from a distance.

In *The Searchers*, lone females are highly vulnerable; Debbie escapes from the house where her parents and siblings are under attack and she hides in the graveyard alone. She crouches behind a tombstone and then a man's shadow passes over her; the shadow indicates the presence of Scar, the Comanche chief. Later, when she escapes Scar's encampment to meet Martin Pauley (Jeffrey Hunter) and Ethan, Ethan tries to kill her because she's "become" Comanche. If Martin hadn't blocked her with his body, Ethan would have shot her. Like Debbie in *The Searchers*, Sherman is alone and threatened.
Why then isn't an interpretive approach satisfactory for understanding *Untitled Film Still #43*? The trouble begins when we examine the inconsistencies of the character's dress and pose and the unusual angle and composition of the photograph. What do we make of Sherman's masquerade (the wig, the visible tan lines), the fact that we know she's dressed up for the part? What do we make of the impression that the character's look of apprehension is "staged," "posed," "put on"?

Let us also consider the issue of the photograph's composition. Whose perspective does the photo represent? It could belong to either another character or to an "idealized" (non-character identified) point of view. If it belongs to another character, is this character friendly (like Martin Pauley in *The Searchers*) or threatening (like Scar or Ethan Edwards)? Does the perspective represent a masculine point of view or a feminine or neither? What does point of view tell us about the woman's situation? Can it tell us what happened before this photo was taken? How did the woman end up in Monument Valley on a tree branch in her underwear? Did she make a hasty escape from her home when she was half-dressed (or half-undressed)? What happens next? Do Indians swoop down and abduct her? Does her lover return to rescue her? Does the viewer (if the point of view here represents a character's viewpoint) help her or threaten her or simply watch? I think these types of questions are limiting insofar as they only address the image within a filmic context. If Peterson is correct in believing that knowing the artist's concerns helps us understand a particular work, then we have to place Sherman's work not in a film context but in an art
context. Sherman appropriated filmic tropes for her images but she was more immediately concerned about art than about entertainment. Knowing the codes of Hollywood Westerns will not help us understand how Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, and *Untitled Film Still #43* in particular, function within an art context.

Rather than limit ourselves to a code-based interpretive model, let us test the inferential model Peterson offers. Whereas the code-based interpretive model begins with the assumption that "communication is possible because messages are encoded and decoded according to a system of conventions shared by the users of the code," the inferential model "suggests that communication can take place *without codes* when, rather than encoding a message, the 'speaker' provides evidence that allows the 'listener' to infer the speaker's intended message" (112). Peterson provides the following example; imagine a situation where "you are visiting Lyndon Johnson in his hospital room after his gall bladder surgery--

You ask him how he is feeling. A good code-based response would be if he said "I feel great." You and he share the code (English), and you decode his meaning from his words. Imagine now an inference-based response to your question; instead of saying anything, he hikes up his hospital gown to reveal an enormous, coarsely-stitched incision. Again, you get the idea, although rather than decoding his meaning from his words, you infer it from the evidence presented." (113)

The strength of the inferential model presented by Peterson is its flexibility; the meaning of a particular piece of evidence depends upon its context, rather than upon an arbitrary, rule-based system of
codes. Furthermore, the inferential model presented here "doesn't preclude the operation of a coded communication.

The code model may be able to explain how we get from the physical manifestation of a sentence--the sounds in the air or the on the page--to the linguistically encoded meaning of that sentence. But any given sentence might mean a potentially infinite number of things, depending on the context in which it is uttered. Imagine that Lyndon Johnson had said "I feel great" while he was lifting his hospital gown. In that context, we would have to infer that the sentence was meant ironically, and that its full explanation would be more aptly paraphrased as "I feel rotten and that's a stupid question." Thus, the inferential model considers decoding the linguistic meaning of the sentence only the first step in comprehension. That encoded meaning is just one piece of the evidence from which we must infer the full meaning of the utterance. (113)

Peterson is careful not to define inferential reasoning as an algorithmic operation. When watching a film, for instance, viewers employ different types of heuristics. Since the perceptual and conceptual problems viewers face in making sense of films are typically "ill-formed" (they rarely have clear-cut "solutions"), viewers employ at-hand strategies, rather than formal rules of logic, for establishing coherence.

Let us examine one of Peterson's case studies in order to get a sense of what his method implies. Peterson examines Ernie Gehr's film *Eureka* (1979) in order to posit Gehr's intentions as evinced by the film. Peterson's description of *Eureka* follows:

Gehr made his film from a turn-of-the-century film shot from the front of a trolley as it traversed San Francisco's Market Street. Gehr has step-printed the original so that the original 3 1/2-minute film is now 30 minutes long. In optically printing
the film, Gehr has also increased the contrast of the images and accentuated subtle variations in exposure among the frames. The final product is apparently simple: an old film, in slow motion and slightly flickering. *Eureka* is *not* a film that obviously calls for a cognitive analysis. It doesn't demand a great deal of problem-solving effort in order to understand its overall structure. (113)

Peterson argues that if we were to restrict our search for messages to the content of this film—the people, vehicles, and buildings of Eureka, California in 1903—it might bear meaning to a very small audience, probably the Eureka Historical Society. The slowed-down action would help this audience identify details of turn of the century clothing and architecture. Gehr did not, however, present his film to the Eureka Historical Society. Instead, he presented it to the Collective for Living Cinema in New York City on January 13, 1979. Peterson reconstructs Gehr's intentions by hypothesizing how *Eureka* might be relevant to the concerns of the avant-garde film community in New York in the late 1970s. He points out that structuralism and minimalism were losing influence within this community as well as within the art world in general.

How would this avant-garde film audience have understood Gehr's intended message? Peterson cites a review of *Eureka*'s premier by critic Jim Hoberman to support his contention that the avant-garde film audience used two art-world strategies to interpret Gehr's intended message. The first of these strategies, derived from John Cage, is what Peterson calls an "art process" strategy:

According to this strategy as applied to film, the viewer attends to the projected images only provisionally; the viewer
uses these images to reconstruct the steps the filmmaker took to produce them, and these procedures are the point of the film. Thus, *Eureka*'s internal structure is exceedingly simple, and we shift our attention to Gehr's intervention: the optical printing. We interpret Gehr's willingness to leave the original film substantially intact as a gesture that demonstrates his willingness to accept chance and coincidence in his work. And this openness to the aleatory stands in sharp contrast to other, overly controlled and contrived acts of film creation. From this perspective, it is precisely his willingness *not* to interfere with the original footage that is his most important gesture. In this way, Gehr's presentation of apparently irrelevant footage is ultimately made relevant to the concerns of the avant-garde film community. (114)

The second strategy, derived from Clement Greenberg's modernism, requires seeing a work like *Eureka* "as a kind of self-analysis, in which . . . [the] medium is pared down to its essence" (114). By paring down cinema, Gehr brings the basic features of the medium into consciousness. Hobermans argues, therefore, that *Eureka* is about "how the flatness of the screen undercuts the apparent depth in the image" (115). The filmmaker creates a tension between two basic elements of cinema, surface and depth, by making the viewer conscious of "every scratch, scar, or defect on the original emulsion," and "the parallel trolley-tracks converging towards infinity" (115), which draws the eye into the frame. The avant-garde film audience would understand the relevance of this tension between surface and depth as being related to their own commitment to the modernist project.

I do not want to imply that the inferential readings of Gehr's film presented here are the best ones or only ones that can be made. I cite them here because they demonstrate a strategy by which we
can reconstruct a sense of a film's relevance to a particular community. Although it is not a common method of reading, I much prefer Darryl Palmer's approach to *Eureka*. Palmer's research into *Eureka* can be found in a chapter by Robert Ray entitled "Fetishism as Research Strategy" from *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy*. In this chapter, Ray argues that we might begin an alternative research strategy by isolating an apparently insignificant detail from a film. This strategy is derived from the Surrealists' insights into photography. Surrealists believed that photography, by featuring fragments taken out of context, supported a form of reasoning based on "drift" or "association." Following this insight, Palmer produces an experimental text based on fragmentary details taken from *Eureka*:

"a pair of long, very thin legs walking across a street crowded with trolleys, automobiles, horses, and pedestrians" (118). The filmmaker has not done anything to draw attention to these details, but Palmer selects them (perversely) and invests them with significance. Palmer writes that the resulting K shape of the man's body in this image reminds him of the body of Ignatz Mouse, a character from *Krazy Kat*, a once popular comic strip. Here is the remainder of Palmer's text:

A personal favorite of William Randolf Hearst, *Krazy Kat* began appearing in Hearst Syndicate newspapers around 1910. While the strip was never a popular success, Hearst, taking a personal interest, enlarged it in 1913 to a full-page Sunday feature. Certain potentially ominous parallels exist between this ordered format change and Citizen Kane's promotion of Susan Alexander. Interestingly, in both "Kane" and "Krazy Kat," a "k" has been substituted for the more correct or familiar "c." Further, *Citizen Kane*'s opening, in which the letter "K" on Xanadu's gate figures prominently, involves a series of tracking
shots moving in on the lighted window of Kane's bedroom. In terms of camera movement, *Eureka*, (again the appearance of the percussive "k") consists of one long tracking shot into the trolley station, where the bright light of the clock provides a possible goal -- one resembling the light in Kane's bedroom window, whose extinction signals his death. In *Eureka*, the clock face disappears as the trolley enters the station's dark archway: light gives way to darkness as the movie reaches the *terminal*, the *end of the line*, the film's death.

In my notes, I notice that I accidentally refer to my shadowy pedestrian as "Legs Diamond," thereby triggering another set of associations:

-- Kane's diamond stickpin, in the shape of the letter "K."
-- Diamonds, a precious stone, are mined like the gold at the origin of both Kane's fortune and California's settlement (*Eureka* was a mining town).
-- The discovery of gold provided the 18k "carrot" for Manifest Destiny, a persistent movement in one direction imitated by *Eureka*'s sustained, unvarying tracking shot.
-- We now associate Manifest Destiny with the genocide committed against the Native Americans who sought to impede it. I discover that Eureka, California, was the site of several Indian uprisings between 1853 and 1865. (118-9)

This peculiar text is equal parts inference and invention. As mentioned earlier, Palmer isolated details from the film and treated those details as significant, whether or not the original filmmaker, or the "actor" (the walking man), or Gehr intended them to be understood as significant. Furthermore, Palmer invested that detail with significance by inferring additional information from the evidence: the legs resemble the letter *K*. Palmer employed associative strategies, such as a pun on the word "carrot," as opportunities for further research, leading him to the discovery that Eureka, California was both a mining town and the scene of Indian uprisings. By using these methods, Palmer found a history at once
obscured and suggested by details he isolated in the film. Additionally, and very importantly for my purposes, Palmer made use of *Eureka* as an opportunity for his own invention, his own heuretic practices. These practices simulate properties of photography (fragmentation and association) in writing.

Let us examine Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #43* again with Peterson's inferential model in mind. If we place the photograph beside some of the other *Untitled Film Stills*, we perceive many roles Sherman plays throughout the series of images. What links them is their artifice. Each image shows Sherman posed and made up to be a character. Sherman draws attention to the artificiality of these character constructions; her wigs don't fit right, her poses seem affected. As Peter Schjeldahl puts it, "... she is acting an actress acting a part." (11)

If we think of Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* as representing parts of a fictive narrative, we imagine Sherman's women as characters, and we imagine their actions before and after the moment represented by the still. Kaja Silverman takes a different approach. In her analysis of *Untitled Film Still #43*, Silverman does not see a moment in a narrative drawn from a Western, but rather she sees an image of a character in reverie, imagining herself in a Western, a "white woman kidnapped by Indians" fantasy, a la John Ford. Sherman's character's look points "to the origin of the pose in a prior textual instance" (219). For Silverman, *Untitled Film Still #4* is a representation of a representation.

While I agree with Silverman that the still may be read as a fantasy of a Western rather than as a Western, I take a much
different approach to reading this image. If we think of Sherman's stills as objects of performance, the pictures are not about narratives (or even fantasies of narratives) but about making a picture. We think not of the character's action but of Sherman's; the images become evidence of Sherman's performance. We can thus think of Sherman's performance in terms of two related processes, the physical and conceptual processes of making these images. The physical process includes Sherman getting dressed, setting up the camera, posing, and taking the picture. After she takes the picture, Sherman changes clothes again and breaks down the camera setup, develops the negatives, makes the prints and mounts them, and so on. Sherman's conceptual processes include her decisions to choose particular costumes, props, and poses. We could extend our line of thinking to infer the conceptual processes Sherman went through to plan the whole series. From the information we gather from the Untitled Film Stills themselves and from Sherman's historical context, we can imagine the "before" as Sherman's decision to make a series called Untitled Film Stills with herself playing the various characters and the "after" as the effect these images had on the art world and beyond. By understanding the stills in this manner, we can begin to read the intentiveness of this series as the ways in which Sherman's work became relevant (and we know that it did) to the avant-garde art community.

Henry Sayre provides another clue about how Sherman's work functions within the avant-garde art community. In his discussion of the photographs of Nicholas Nixon, a photographer whose complex
appropriations of the family snapshot mirrors Sherman's complex appropriations of Hollywood, Sayre writes:

In many ways the first question his work raises is just what these pictures are doing in the Museum of Modern Art and Artforum at all. Part of the answer, of course, is that in the context of the museum and the art magazine (as opposed to the mantelpiece) we are forced to approach them differently. The ploy is as old as Duchamp's urinal, and Nixon is by no means the only contemporary photographer to exploit it. These works of art immediately call into question what we might call the official "taste apparatus" at work in our culture. Nixon's Brown sisters and Duchamp's urinal equally undermine the canons of "high" art by revealing the aesthetic power of the vernacular. At the same time they reveal just how powerful our taste-making institutions have become by revealing that it is quite possibly their appearance in the art context alone that makes them art. (38)

Sayre's discussion illustrates the ways in which avant-garde performance-oriented art forms explore the uncertainty of the object. The switch from the vernacular to the museum context puts our expectations about the status of objects on display. The work of the avant-garde challenges our concepts of what things are "supposed" to look like and what they're "supposed" to mean.

Baxandall argued that we find evidence of intentiveness in the rationality of the institution. My investigation of Sherman's Untitled Film Stills, therefore, examines Sherman's work within the avant-garde art world context of the late 1970s. This context provided a set of problems and resources for Sherman that were substantially different from those found in the entertainment world. Sherman selected many of her problems and resources from the world of art, in particular the world of avant-garde art, though she redefined
many of them. Let us examine briefly the resources the avant-garde art world made available to Sherman. In the avant-garde mode, according to Henry M. Sayre's *The Object of Performance*, the artist

1. opposes assumptions about what counts as art.
2. orients his or her work towards performance art forms.
3. works with "contingency, multiplicity, and polyvocality" (xii).
4. uses mediums that are undecidable and interdisciplinary.
5. makes art that "denies its own autonomy, it implicates the audience in its workings" (xiv).

The 1960s and 1970s saw the development of conceptual and performance art, which Sayre calls "contemporary art's most antiformalist, experience-oriented forms" (2). Conceptual and performance artists relied upon photography as one of their key modes of presentation. The art "object" became more or less dispensable, while the photograph took the place of the missing object (in museums and art books) as a "document" of the performance. By the 1970s, the emphasis of avant-garde art had shifted "from the textual or plastic to the experiential" (5).

Sherman's art was part of the conceptualist art of this period. It is important to clear up some common misunderstandings about conceptual art. Sayre writes:

Harold Szeeman, one of Europe's most sensitive critics of conceptual art, understood as early as in his 1969 survey at the Berne Kunsthalle, entitled *When Attitudes Become Form*, that the term "conceptualism" was a misnomer that tended to render the very material products of conceptual practice insignificant, when in fact the concept's apparently inevitable material manifestation was part of its interest. (15)
In her essay on Cindy Sherman, Amada Cruz notes that Sherman became acquainted with conceptual art while she attended the State University College at Buffalo, New York. She writes, "[Sherman] credits her . . . photography teacher with introducing her to conceptual art, which had a liberating effect on her" (1). Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* are, in part, conceptual art "performances" about the experience of being dislocated from one's "image." [For more discussion of this sense of dislocation from one's image, see chapter four.] The audience experienced this dislocation as it identified her characters' various "types" throughout the complete series. Since each type is played by Sherman, none of them is essentially Sherman. As Judith Williamson wrote soon after Sherman's work became famous, the audience confronts its own stereotypes when viewing these photographs:

I find the recognition of this process, that the 'woman' is constructed in the image, very liberating . . . the viewer is forced into complicity with the way these 'women' are constructed: you recognise the styles, the 'films', the 'stars', and at that moment when you recognise the picture, your reading is the picture. In a way, 'it' is innocent: you are guilty, you supply the femininity simply through social and cultural knowledge. As one reviewer says, 'she shows us that, in a sense, we've bought the goods.' The stereotypes and assumptions necessary to 'get' each picture are found in our own heads. Yet, at the risk of being attacked as 'essentialist', I really do think the complicity of viewing is different for women and men. For women, I feel it shows us that we needn't buy the goods, or at least, we needn't buy them as being our 'true selves'. (103)

According to Williamson, viewers recognize in Sherman's performance of various identities that their own performances of
identity dislocates self from image; viewers are thus free to apply the lessons of this experience as desired.

Although I have argued that it is impossible to understand Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* without placing them in the context of the avant-garde art world, it is also impossible to make sense of them without noting how Sherman borrows elements of Hollywood, advertising and a vernacular (i.e., popular) form of "acting out" the movies.

**Film Stills as Writing**

In the previous chapter I argued that there were two applications for a cognitivist inferential method; hermeneutics and heuristics. The hermeneutic approach to Sherman requires that we *reconstruct* intentiveness in her work by looking for signs of its relevance to her community. In other words, Sherman's work had particular effects because it mattered (and still does) in particular ways to the avant-garde art community. The heuretic approach to Sherman, by contrast, requires that we *construct* intentiveness in Sherman's work by finding relevance to our concerns as humanities educators. Sherman's work matters to me because it shows me how to write in the "electronic." My concern is writing, broadly defined; I'm interested in teaching students how to become "literate" in all modes of communication (oral, alphabetic, and electronic) and therefore I construct intentiveness in Sherman's work that is relevant to my interests.
Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* are most relevant to me as a type of "writing." Sherman's key move in this direction is her understanding of the star system as a rhetoric; she tries out the "look" of Hollywood star images for herself in order to produce effects within the art world. She simulates Hollywood, but not for entertainment purposes. We normally think of "writing" as a form of alphabetic discourse, but to understand how Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* function as "writing," we need to understand how the *Untitled Film Stills* series functions as an interface that mediates between users and an information technology. Gregory Ulmer writes, "Writing as a technology is a memory machine, with each apparatus finding different means to collect, store, and retrieve information outside of any one individual mind (in rituals, habits, libraries, or databases)" (16). Literate forms of "interface design," such as the treatise, textbook, and novel, are appropriate for print technology but not necessarily for electronic media. For example, does knowing how to make a syllogism help us construct a persuasive case using photographs?

Our invention process for electronic media benefits from the history of alphabetic practices; "... all the devices of the book apparatus, which are codified in the treatise (and enforced in practice from the five-part essay through the doctoral dissertation to the book that secures tenure), were themselves invented as the 'interface' for print technology" (Ulmer, 18). Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* represent the invention of new interface design practices for an electronic apparatus. My goal is to place Sherman's invention in context, as part of the history of the invention of writing practices.
Ulmer reminds us that interface design is as important as the technology itself:

Another name for "rhetoric"... is "interface"; the whole problem of interface design--giving an ordinary user access to the power of the machine (communication between a user and the tool)--is a fundamental difficulty for the new apparatus. (28)

My goal is to learn how Sherman learned to write with the rhetoric of images so I can do the same within education. Sherman's development of her writing was largely intuitive. In other words, she wasn't necessarily aware that what she doing was inventing a form of writing; we have no statements from Sherman indicating that she believed she was inventing a type of writing. Her invention of a photographic writing probably followed from some very simple instructions--"Simulate cinema in a photograph"--which became more elaborate in the performance process: what does this simulation entail? For our purposes, research and writing within the humanities, we might ask: how is a look different from a book?

Sherman's photographs can be called "writing" because they take a fundamental feature of the new recording apparatus, the recording of bodies, and uses it to convey information. What kind of information do recorded bodies communicate? Gender, race, nationality, age, class, "type" and the array of behaviors associated with each. The details of clothing, facial features, poses and gestures convey the information necessary for identifying the various identity categories. The Hollywood star system represents a catalog of cultural identity categories. It presents an array of human behaviors
and looks, each guaranteed "authenticity" by the materiality of the bodies they record.

Alphabetic literacy communicates without bodies; it has a variety of rhetorics for achieving different effects, including praise, condemnation, persuasion, etc. What are the rhetorics for writing with bodies and what effects are possible with these rhetorics? The humanities has not led the way in this investigation. Rather, this investigation has been led by entertainment and art. Artists (both avant-garde and popular) use recorded bodies as the *memes* of this new rhetoric. [For a discussion of *memes*, see chapter five.]

When we treat Sherman's work as a demonstration of rhetoric or poetics, our situation is analogous to that of students in Plato's academy studying a speech by Socrates. Their questions would have been: How did he embarrass his opponents like that? or persuade that crowd? or praise a speech? These are some of the things we expect rhetoric to do and yet they were new in Socrates' time. Socrates was the only person capable of doing these things, at first. We know now, from the work of theorists such as Eric Havelock (*see The Muse Learns to Write*, page 5), that Socrates was really "writing" even though he never wrote anything down; he was exploring the modes of an alphabetic culture. What are the modes of an electronic culture and how do we train students to be both literate in it and critical of it?
The Photographic Message

If it is still hard to imagine Sherman's photographs as a type of writing, consider Barthes' essays on photography in *Image--Music--Text*. In "The Photographic Message," Barthes describes photography as a paradox involving a message without a code and a message with a code;

The photographic paradox can . . . be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the 'art', or the treatment, or the 'writing', or the rhetoric, of the photograph); structurally, the paradox is clearly not the collusion of a denoted message and a connoted message . . . , it is that here the connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message *without a code*. This structural paradox coincides with an ethical paradox: when one wants to be 'neutral', 'objective', one strives to copy reality meticulously, as though the analogical were a factor of resistance against the investment of values (such at least is the definition of aesthetic 'realism'); how then can the photograph be at once 'objective' and 'invested', natural and cultural? (19-20)

We shall focus on photography's coded messages for the moment, since we need to understand how Sherman produced certain connotative effects in her work. Barthes' strategy for reading the connotative procedures of the photographic message is to separate them into types. These types are: trick effects, poses, objects, photogenia, aestheticism and syntax. Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* avoid the first connotation procedure, trick effects, but partake of all of the others. Trick effects is the manipulation of the image after the shot is taken, which includes adding or subtracting
figures from an image, moving figures closer together or farther apart, and so on.

Sherman's photographs are a type of writing which explores the potential of the photograph for transmitting complex messages. The "message" we find in the *Untitled Film Stills* is a conflict between denotation and connotation that undermines the power of the denotative (the thing before us) to naturalize and authenticate the connotations. In the next chapter, I explain more fully how Sherman's images can be understood as rhetoric, but here I merely indicate how Sherman employs photographic procedures to achieve particular connotative effects.

In his writing on the "pose," Barthes discusses a photograph of President Kennedy: "a half-length profile shot, eyes looking upward, hands joined together." Barthes reads the message of this photograph as "youthfulness, spirituality, purity." He writes:

> The photograph clearly only signifies because of the existence of a store of stereotyped attitudes which form ready-made elements of signification (eyes raised heavenwards, hands clasped). A 'historical grammar' of iconographic connotation ought thus to look for its material in painting, theater, associations of ideas, stock metaphors, etc., that is to say, precisely in 'culture'. (22)

The connotative messages of the Kennedy image are "naturalized" because the photographic denotation "guarantees the authenticity" of the scene. Sherman's work, by contrast, illustrates the artificiality of the pose's signifying structure. Her poses draw on the familiar store of connotations, but in such a way that we become aware of them as codes. In still #37, we see Sherman leaning against
a mantel with a cigarette in her right hand. Above the mantel is a landscape painting depicting water, boulders, trees and mountains. Kaja Silverman calls this image "Nature Girl." She writes, "the painting depicts the landscape of the woman's desire--the frame into which she seeks to project herself through the studied 'naturalness' of her pose and costume" (218). Sherman's pose, according to Silverman, connotes reverie and we associate this reverie with the character's dream of being someplace else, the most immediate elsewhere being the "natural place" depicted in the painting. But it is not really nature being signified in this image; the character's pose and the mise-en-scène are reminiscent of a Douglas Sirk film. In other words, Sherman has stylized the scene by making it conform to very visible filmic codes.

Let us examine another photographic connotation procedure. In Barthes' discussion of "objects," he writes,

The interest lies in the fact that the objects are accepted inducers of associations of ideas (book-case = intellectual) or, in a more obscure way, are veritable symbols. . . . Such objects constitute excellent elements of signification: on the one hand they are discontinuous and complete in themselves, a physical qualification for a sign, while on the other they refer to clear, familiar signifieds. They are thus the elements of a veritable lexicon, stable to a degree which allows them to be readily constituted into syntax. Here, for example, is a 'composition' of objects: a window opening onto vineyards and tiled roofs; in front of the window a photographic album, a magnifying glass, a vase of flowers. Consequently, we are in the country, south of the Loire (vines and tiles), in a bourgeois house (flowers on the table) whose owner, advanced in years (the magnifying glass), is reliving his memories (the photograph album)--François Mauriac in Malager (photo in Paris-Match). The connotation somehow 'emerges' from all these signifying units which are nevertheless 'captured' as though the scene were
immediate and spontaneous, that is to say, without signification. (23)

Let us examine how Sherman employs a "lexicon" of objects to produce particular connotative effects. In Sherman's Untitled Film Still #3, the various props in the image counteract the character's "wished-for photographic exchange" (209). "In this image," Silverman writes,

a woman stands to the right, facing a sink with a dishrack, a bottle of ivory dishwashing liquid, an almost empty juice bottle, and an opened Morton's salt container. She wears a frilly apron and a sexy T-shirt. She looks seductively, with moistened lips, over her left shoulder at an unseen figure, presumably male. Because she leans with her left hand on the counter, her shoulder is provocatively elevated, and her breasts sharply defined. Here, the woman offers herself to be "photographed" as "vamp," as sexual tease, but the mundane objects in her immediate vicinity contradict this self-definition, and proclaim her instead to be a "Hausfrau." (209-10)

The cropping, which includes the "Hausfrau" props as well as the vamping woman, reminds us that "the camera/gaze does not always apprehend us from the vantage point to which we direct our self-imaging" (210). Here, the connotations associated with the props (Hausfrau) undercut the connotations offered by the woman's pose (vamp).

In his section on photogenia, Barthes writes, "In photogenia the connoted message is the image itself, 'embellished' (which is to say in general sublimated) by techniques of lighting, exposure and printing" (24). Sherman employs techniques of lighting and exposure to
signify different film styles, subjugating the image to the style of this or that director. In *Untitled Film Still #2*, for instance, Sherman adopts the direct lighting and grainy black and white style of Hitchcock's *Psycho*. We see a woman in the bathroom, framed by the doorway. She is wearing a towel and gazing at her face in the mirror. The connotations produced by the photogenia correlate to those in the horror film. It is not just the pose and "costume" and framing, but also the lighting and the graininess that tell us the woman may be threatened by some evil force. Here the denotation is utterly domestic while the style belongs to a different realm—the horror film.

Aestheticism, according to Barthes, occurs when photography employs "painting, composition or visual substance . . . so as to signify itself as 'art' . . . or to impose a generally more subtle and complex signified than would be possible with other connotation procedures" (24). In Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, aestheticism overlaps with photogenia. Sherman frequently employs both strategies to create connotations of a particular directors' style. In *Untitled Film Still #37*, which I discussed above, the framing and composition of the scene and Sherman's pose connote the style of Douglas Sirk.

In Barthes' description of the last connotative effect, "syntax," he writes:

> several photographs come together to form a sequence (this is commonly the case in illustrated magazines); the signifier of connotation is then no longer to be found at the level of any one of the fragments of the sequence but at that--what the
linguists would call the suprasegmental level--of the concatenation. (24)

Barthes provides an example of syntax in a sequence depicting a hunter pointing his rifle in different directions "to the great peril of the keepers who run away or fling themselves to the ground" (25). The effect of this series is comedy, which is to be found not in any one image but in all of them together. We know that Sherman produced her photographs as a series rather than as individual works, and furthermore, that many of the images depict the same "character," as some critics have pointed out. Rosalind Krauss identifies a group of three images, Untitled Film Stills #21, #22 and #23, that show Sherman wearing the "same costume, a dark, tailored suit with a white collar and a small, straw cloche pulled over a mop of short blond curls. But everything else changes from one still to the next" (28).

... in the first, #21, the register is close-up taken at a low angle; in the second, #22, a long-shot posits the character amidst a complication of architectural detail and the cross-fire of sun and shadow; in the last, #23, the figure is framed in a medium-shot at the far right side of the image against the darkened emptiness of an undefined city street and flattened by the use of a wide angle lens. And with each reframing and each new depth-of-field and each new condition of luminosity, "the character" transmogrifies, moving from type to type and from movie to movie. From #21 and the Hitchcock heroine to #23 and the hardened, film noir dame, there is no "acting" involved. Almost every single bit of the character, which is to say of the three different characters, is a function only of work on the signifier; the various things that make up a photographic style. (28)
Sherman's sequence reminds us of the famous experiments in cinematic language conducted by Lev Kuleshov. Ronald Levaco, in his introduction to Kuleshov on Film, describes these experiments as follows:

Having found a long take in close-up of Mozhukhin's expressionlessly neutral face, Kuleshov intercut it with various shots, the exact content of which he himself forgot in later years--shots, according to Pudovkin, of a bowl of steaming soup, a woman in a coffin, and a child playing with a toy bear--and projected these to an audience which marveled at the sensitivities of the actor's range. (8)

The audience for the Kuleshov experiment believed Mazhukhin was expressing hunger, sadness, and joy respectively in these three sequences, although the actor had the same (expressionless) expression in each one. Kuleshov's experiment demonstrates the power of context, in this case the sequence, to shape connotations. Sherman's experiment with sequence is more radical indeed, since it is not just the emotion which shifts from one image to the next depending upon the character's surroundings and the framing of the shot, but the character herself shifts. Sherman employs the sequence to explore identity and its contingent status.

Judith Willamson, an early champion of Sherman's Untitled Film Stills, writes

We are constantly forced to recognize a visual style (often you could name the director) simultaneously with type of femininity. The two cannot be pulled apart. The image suggests there is a particular kind of femininity in the woman we see, whereas in fact the femininity is in the image itself, it is the image. (102)
Williamson argues that Sherman's sequence, in which she portrays multiple characters all played by the same person, shows how a character's identity depends upon visual style for meaning. The sequence effectively undermines the "authenticity" of the character in each shot; it thus robs each photographic image of its power to "naturalize" and "authenticate" its connotations of femininity.

Image and (Missing) Text: The Publicity Still

Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* create connotations through absence as well as through presence; the individual stills imply a missing narrative, the photographs document and then substitute for an absent "performance," and the title, *Untitled Film Stills*, suggests titles that are not there. We can make sense of these absences if we remember that Sherman's art provokes viewers to fill in the missing information with their knowledge of institutional sources. Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* exist at the intersection of photography, cinema, high art, pop culture, advertising and feminism. Critics have often noted the relationship of the *Untitled Film Stills* to the movies, but few have talked about their relationship to advertising and publicity. If we think of Sherman's photographs as untitled promotional stills from films that do not exist (rather than as film *frames*), we can see her work as an appropriation from and comment on Hollywood's publicity machine.
Although more study of publicity images needs to be done, we can hypothesize that publicity shots are designed to be evocative. They establish a mystery (and big mysteries in our society are femininity and sex) that the film supposedly solves. You pay your money for the movie and you get an answer/meaning for the questions posed by the publicity still. What if, instead of being film frames (a single image from the strip of film) from non-existent films, which is how most critics have treated these works, they simulate publicity stills sans text (hence *Untitled Film Stills*) from non-existent films?

Why did Sherman title her series *Untitled Film Stills*? The title suggests that we should imagine titles for the individual stills, just as the stills themselves suggest that we should imagine the missing narratives from which each image "originated." What is the difference between film stills and film frames? A film frame is a single image isolated from within a film while a film still is typically produced by a photographer with a still camera who works independently of the director of photographer, who is in charge of the movie camera. There are two kinds of film stills: production stills and publicity stills. A production still is made while the film is in production; a still photographer photographs the action much as the movie camera does, but necessarily from a different angle. The purposes of production stills are multifold; they are used

1) to keep a record of the production,

2) to help maintain continuity during the production by capturing details of costume, lighting, blocking, and so on,

3) and they are sometimes used for the purposes of publicity.
Publicity stills may be taken during a production or they may be taken at a separate photo shoot, sometimes utilizing a different mise-en-scène. The purpose of a publicity still is to provide the film with an identity as a "consumable commodity" that appeals to a range of people.

The Hollywood movie industry creates publicity for films in order to appeal to the largest possible audience. Like the films themselves, publicity images for the films present a paradox; they are at once "legible" (restricted to a definable set of meanings) and "open." Publicity stills must be legible at a denotative level; audiences must be able to answer questions about the film by reference to the still, such as: who is the actor? Certain connotative questions must also be answerable by reference to the still; what character type is the actor portraying? What genre or genres is the film? What is the visual "style" of the film? What is the "mood" of the film? But other connotative questions are much more open. What Richard Maltby says about Hollywood narratives can also apply to its publicity as well:

Edward Branigan has offered a general explanation of Hollywood's "excessive obviousness": rather than appearing ambiguous or encouraging multiple interpretations, Hollywood narrative is chameleonlike, "adaptable, resilient, and accommodating. It will try to be what the spectator believes it to be." (438)

Hollywood's' legibility results from a congruence of recognizable stars, familiar genres, character stereotypes and so on. Hollywood's "openness" is a result of what Parker Tyler calls its "will
to make indiscriminate numbers of people indiscriminately happy" (436).

Successful publicity does not always depend upon the promise of an attractive story. As Maltby writes,

A movie's "consumable identity," the promotional values by which it is identified as a commodity, may distract the viewer into selecting some aspect of the movie other than its story to entertain us: performance, mise-en-scène, star biography, or the conspicuous display of budget and technical wizardry. In the process the movie's producers must surrender a significant amount of control over the meaning of a text. (436)

Publicity stills may offer a variety of attractions in order to entice the viewer. The publicity still is a topic that needs much research; in order to study publicity, we could, as a research project, make a publicity still for a film that does not exist. We could make one without text and one with text (using computers and scanners to add text to their images) in order to understand the function of the text accompanying publicity images. The purpose of this research project would be to study Hollywood's publicity machine, the intersection of cinema and advertising. Sherman's stills seem congruent with such a project. The focus of this project would be the broader apparatus of entertainment as commodity system rather than simply a study of Hollywood cinema as a collection of film artifacts. We could study questions such as; does the text imposed on publicity stills/ads pin meaning down or add further mystery?
Publicity Stills Project:

Step One: Select one of Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* and construct an ad for a nonexistent film based upon that image. The film needs a title, at least, and possibly a "hook line." Other information, including director, co-stars, etc., may be superimposed on the image as well.

The goal is to make use of cues provided by the still, reference an existing style or form of filmmaking (one that audiences might recognize) and one that entices without telling too much (you want to get people in the theater by promising more information in the film).

Step two: construct your own publicity image from scratch, making an original photograph and adding text.

Variation:

Cindy Sherman is not mimicking Hollywood exactly; her work is not purely public, but exists at the intersection of the private (constructing and deconstructing identity), entertainment (using pop tropes) and art. With this in mind, try the following project:

Using Kaja Silverman's essay as a "poetics," make a film still that establishes a "productive distance from the mirror." (For an account of Silverman's essay, see chapter 5.)

What effect does writing, superimposed on the image, have upon the decipherment of the publicity still? Barthes' essay, "The Photographic Message," describes the effects of writing (captions, headlines, etc.) upon the press photograph. The text accompanying the photograph, he argues, "loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination" (26). Barthes finds that the accompanying text has three possible relationships to the image. In
the first, the text has the function of making the image's connotations explicit, "the text most often simply amplifying a set of connotations already given in the photograph" (27). In the second, "the text produces (invents) an entirely new signified which is retroactively projected into the image, so much so as to appear denoted there" (27). In the third, "the text can even contradict the image so as to produce a compensatory connotation."

An analysis by Gerbner (The Social Anatomy of the Romance True Confession Cover-girl) demonstrated that in certain romance magazines the verbal message of the headlines, gloomy and anguished, on the cover always accompanied the image of a radiant cover-girl; here the two messages enter into a compromise, the connotation having a regulatory function, preserving the irrational movement of projection-identification. (27)

The text accompanying press photos commonly has an "anchoring" effect which prevents the meaning of the images from "drifting." What happens to the meaning of a press photograph when we take away the text and the photograph stands alone? We would likely face uncertainty about the meaning of the image. This experiment was in fact tested in 1973 by John Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art in an exhibit entitled "From the Picture Press" in which press photographs were displayed without their accompanying texts. As Sayre writes, "The point was to demonstrate what Szarkowski called the essential 'narrative poverty' of the image" (44). Sherman's Untitled Film Stills play with the status of photography's "uncertainty." We could imagine, for example, a text which would identify the genre, the style, the narrative, and the
character in each of Sherman's images. Such a text would select from a number of connotative possibilities made available by the image and by so doing would limit the possible meanings of the image. Sherman, however, does not use language to limit the possible meanings of the image; she preserves a sense of uncertainty about the photographic object. This uncertainty is not total, since Sherman's images, like many press photographs, also employ an alternative form of "anchoring." This alternative form of anchoring Barthes has called "'cognitive' connotation," (29) a form of cultural knowledge which depends upon stereotypes such as "Arabness" and "Italianicity." Barthes writes:

Faced with such and such a township, I know that this is a North African country because on the left I can see a sign in Arabic script, in the center a man wearing a gandoura, and so on. Here the reading closely depends on my culture, on my knowledge of the world, and it is probable that a good press photograph (and they are all good, being selected) makes ready play with the supposed knowledge of its readers, those prints being chosen which comprise the greatest possible quantity of information of this kind in such a way as to render the reading fully satisfying. If one photographs Agadir in ruins, it is better to have a few signs of 'Arabness' at one's disposal, even though 'Arabness' has nothing to do with the disaster itself; connotation drawn from knowledge is always a reassuring force--man likes signs and likes them clear. (29)

Sherman's images are, in many ways, like ads and press photos. Her characters represent different types of '-icity': Italianicity, Hitchcockicity, etc. One productive game to play on these images, based on the projects I outlined above, would be to design an ad for an imaginary film, of which Sherman's image is a publicity
shot. The ad would present the image along with an accompanying text. How would you anchor the meaning of each photograph? One way to begin would be to refer to the cognitive connotation, or the "-icity," present in the image. The audience needs a selling point and familiarity (with a set of codes) provides one form of access into the world of the ad and the movie. But also in advertising (particularly movie advertising) it is rare to give the whole game away. The ad works through suggestion and the audience does part of the work.

**Sherman's Charge and Brief**

What was Sherman's Charge? In other words, what problem or problems was Sherman trying to address? In the last chapter, I discussed how Baxandall characterized Picasso's Charge: "the painter's role has been to make marks on a plane surface in such a way that their visual interest is directed to an end" which he shortens to "intentional visual interest" (43). This definition is vague enough for Baxandall to claim that the painter's Charge is "featureless" while "Character begins with the Brief" (44). The painter's Brief, he writes, is "largely . . . a critical relation to previous painting" (72). Was Sherman's Charge something like "intentional visual interest"? Was her Charge "featureless"?

Sherman's Charge was not primarily to make visually interesting images, though they are certainly that. The "visual interest" Charge may apply to most formalist artists' work, but less so to Sherman's antiformalist work. We can even characterize Sherman's negative model (the slot filled by Impressionism in
Picasso's Brief) as the history of formalist art. Sayre regards formalism as but one of modernism's two sides. The other side, in which Sherman works, Sayre calls "an opening to the world at large" (8). Sayre writes

Modernism has always had an "other" side. One can read cubism, for instance, as a formalist project--an attempt to establish the autonomy of the painterly surface, to free it from a slavish relation to the world--or, in collage, as something altogether antagonistic to the formalist project, as an opening to the world of things, an admission into the heretofore "pure" world of painting of local and topical "events" (the symbolic force, after all, of the newspaper headline in a cubist canvas). For Clement Greenberg, the "excitement" in the painting of Picasso, Bracque, Mondrian, and so on "seems to lie most of all in its pure preoccupation with the invention and arrangement of spaces, surfaces, shapes, colors, etc., to the exclusion of whatever else is not implicated in these factors." On the other hand, as William Seitz put it in the catalogue to his ground-breaking and visionary exhibition of 1961 The Art of Assemblage, the introduction of collage materials into the canvas "violated the separateness of the work of art and threatened to obliterate the aesthetic distance between it and the spectator. . . . It must be conceded that by the introduction of a bit of oil cloth and a length of rope [in Picasso's Still Life With Chair Caning], the sacrosanctness of the oil medium suffered a blow that was as deadly as it was deft." These two versions of cubism--the "pure preoccupation" with form and an opening to the world at large--are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They represent, in fact, the dialectical poles between which cubism, as a style, always moved. . . .

. . . the second, antiformalist modernism has always found itself in an oppositional position. It has stood against the purist modernism championed by the likes of Greenberg, Fried, and Rose, and it has, over the last several decades, become associated with postmodernism proper. . . [it] is essentially theatrical . . . In his catalogue for an exhibition of contemporary sculpture . . . Howard Fox has put it this way: "Theatricality may be considered that propensity in the visual
arts for a work to reveal itself within the mind of the beholder as something other than what it is known empirically to be. This is precisely antithetical to the Modern ideal of the wholly manifest, self-sufficient object; and theatricality may be the single most pervasive property of post-Modern art." (8-9)

Sayre's description of "second modernism" indicates that the concern of artists working in this mode is not limited to the object itself, but opens "to the world at large." Much of this "second modernist" art, including Sherman's art, addresses the emerging electronic apparatus, the system of relations between technologies, institutions (such as entertainment), and social subjects in which our understanding of the world takes shape. Sherman's critics rightly interpret political concerns in her work. In Sherman's Brief, we find numerous materials that indicate a set of problems relating to writing with media images. We could state Sherman's Charge as something like "to write with media representations in such a way that we become aware of the effects of this apparatus upon our understanding of the world." We find evidence for this view not in any explicit statements made by Sherman but in an examination of her materials (part of her Brief) and of her culture (her *troc*).

In Baxandall's terminology, the Brief indicates the specific local conditions, the situation, that the historical agent found herself in. This includes a set of primary and secondary problems (see chapter 2), as well as the material and conceptual resources for addressing those problems. Let us turn now to the resources of Sherman's Brief.
Sherman's Resources

The following is a simplified list of Sherman's resources.

1. Medium: Photography and performance art, but more particularly the clichés of femininity and their corresponding embodiments in images, which includes the use of poses, costumes, and settings from within entertainment.

2. Positive and negative models:
   positive models: Duchamp's readymades, Warhol's pop art, conceptual art
   exotic positive model: entertainment
   negative models: formalist art.

3. Aesthetic: amateur, pop, promotion, Brecht.

   In Baxandall's case study of Picasso, he argues that Picasso's medium is not so much paints and canvas as it is forms and colors. In other words, the artist's medium is not merely a set of physical materials, but is also a set of practices and ideas. Sherman's resources of medium are therefore not so much photographs as they are elements of a photographic and cinematic "language": genre codes, poses, costumes, star identities and the like. Baxandall's point is a valuable one. Humanities educators sometimes mis-identify the focus for an electronic pedagogy; they teach the technology (such as HTML) as the medium instead of the principles by which people can learn to write in electronic media (or any media). But technologies change while principles of composition may be transferable to any number of media. Mastery over a particular medium is not a prerequisite for successful communication in that medium. Cindy
Sherman is a case in point. She failed her first course in photography "because of her difficulties with the technological aspects of making a print . . . " (Cruz, 1). Sherman's studies of the principles of conceptual art, however, allowed her to conceive of the series which would make her famous, the Untitled Film Stills. Technical knowledge was something she could learn as she "developed" her work, or she could have asked for technical help if she had needed it. The principles of conceptual art were general enough to permit Sherman to compose work in any media.

Sherman's invention of the "film still" genre within avant-garde art, like Picasso's invention of cubism, was not a spontaneous event. Sherman developed the idea over time by posing and solving practical problems (of the "second order" sort that Baxandall mentions). In 1975, while Sherman was still in school, she produced a project that presaged her Untitled Film Stills, which she produced in 1977. In the 1975 series, composed of five photographs, Sherman experimented with many of the elements she would continue to use in the 1977 series. Cruz describes the first series of photographs:

Sherman attempted to alter her face with makeup and hats, taking on different personas such as a clown in Untitled A and a little girl in Untitled D. Her fascination with self-transformation extended to her frequent trips to thrift stores, where she purchased vintage clothes and accessories, which suggested particular characters to her: "So it just grew and grew until I was buying and collecting more and more of these things, and suddenly the characters came together just because I had so much of the detritus from them." (2)
Sherman's collection of "detritus" and her recognition of the performative potential implicit in this material was part of the "problem set" that Sherman chose in her work. Like Duchamp's readymades, the power of Sherman's work lies in her exploration of the vernacular for use within a poetics of the avant-garde. Both Duchamp and Sherman make use of the "found object": in Duchamp's case, these were the products of industrialism, such as the urinal, the shovel, and the bicycle wheel. In Sherman's case, these were not only the artifacts she found in thrift stores, but the "found personas" made by popular culture, the "detritus" of an industrial production system within entertainment.

Let us examine Sherman's positive and negative models more closely. Baxandall points out that Picasso had positive and negative models. His negative models (what he reacted against) were Matisse and the Impressionists whose paintings addressed problems posed by the fleeting qualities of perception. Picasso, by contrast, chose to work on problems related to form and thus he turned to Cézanne as his primary positive model. In addition, he had an exotic positive model, African sculpture, which he remotivated according to his needs. Sherman's positive model is avant-pop art in general and Andy Warhol's art in particular. Her negative model is the history of formalist art. Her exotic positive model (exotic since it is outside the art world) is entertainment, particularly Hollywood and advertising. Entertainment had been the negative model for the avant-garde until Warhol. Warhol and Sherman, adopting entertainment as an exotic positive model, remotivated entertainment practices for their own purposes.
Sherman, like Warhol, identified entertainment as a site of the new apparatus, where an integrated system of technology, institutional practices, and new subject formations had emerged. Warhol and Sherman, unlike most of the avant-garde artists of the first half of the century, did not oppose entertainment. They used it in order to explore its features and implications. This does not mean that their work exists unproblematically within entertainment. In fact, their work is quite different from the products of entertainment. Whereas Hollywood seeks to exploit the star system for its mediation between the new electronic technologies and everyday practices of ordinary people, Warhol and Sherman ask, "how can you use the star system as an element of a poetics?" and "What does it mean to live in a society that uses the star system as a means of organizing subject formation?"

Sherman's aesthetic, which Baxandall defines as a statement articulating the problems to which her work is a solution, would be analogous to Kahnweiler's statement about Picasso. The aesthetic of her work is outlined by her many critics, including Mulvey and Silverman, whom I discuss in chapters 4 and 5. But many elements of Sherman's aesthetic, however, were established by Andy Warhol.

Warhol and the Aesthetics of Appropriation

... despite Warhol's reputation and his "star quality," he was more a scripteur than he was a creator, conducting a "vast and uninterrupted dialogue" with the texts of mass culture. Part of the difficulty of Warhol's work, in fact, has always been the degree to which, in his "pop" idiom, the vernacular and the mediated are undecidably confused. (Sayre, 30)
Warhol's creations were never entirely his own. By borrowing images from entertainment and mass media, he made his art a reflection of the society around him. "Throughout his career, he consistently undermined the 'authenticity' of all events, all images... His Campbell's Soup Cans not only suggested the commodity status of art but also denied Warhol's prestige as creator--they remained as much Campbell's as Warhol's" (31). Sherman's work shares two important qualities with Warhol's work. Sherman's uses her choice of medium, photography (one of Warhol's favorite media), to undermine the "authenticity" of events, since a photograph can be mechanically reproduced indefinitely and can mean different things in different contexts. Sherman's context, the entire Untitled Film Stills series, undermines the authenticity of "femininity" in each image by showing so many versions of it, all dramatized by her. And Sherman's Untitled Film Stills, like much of Warhol's work, seem co-authored; they are as much the product of Hollywood and the collective imagination as they are Sherman's creations.

Warhol, according to Sandra Stitch, treated images as "flattened façades, surface-oriented images that give no hint of what is inside or even that there is an inside" (Sayre, 31). This use of surface made Warhol unpopular among leftist critics, who, according to Sayre, "act as if it were possible, today, to disengage social life from commodity society" (33).

... taken as a deconstruction of the art object's commodity status, Warhol's work willingly submits to the danger all deconstructive discourse must face. If deconstruction means to
expose the weaknesses of whatever "system" or discourse one engages, to point out its strategic ellipses, and to undermine its authority, then there is also a certain methodological necessity for preserving—even in abeyance, sous rature, in Derrida's phrase--what is denounced, so that sometimes deconstruction seems to affirm what it sets out to deny. It could even be argued, as Paul de Man points out, that it is this undecidability, this "logical tension that prevents . . . [the] closure" of postmodern art. (33)

Sherman, like Warhol, was frequently criticized for employing the modes of mass culture without creating sufficient distance for the production of a critique (see my discussion of Mulvey's critique in the chapter 4). I face the same risks in appropriating Sherman's strategies for use within the humanities. My response to critics who would argue that Sherman's approach does not establish sufficient critical engagement is that while there is a risk of such work affirming the stereotypes inherent within popular culture, there is also the hope that students and educators employing these methods will learn to become literate within these modes and that this literacy will support critical thinking. By employing writing strategies analogous to Sherman's, we not only learn the means by which Hollywood and other entertainment and marketing institutions create the stereotypes around us, we can learn too the means by which these stereotypes are written "in" us and the means by which they define us to others. Rhetoric in the new media, like rhetoric in alphabetic literacy, is a defense against manipulation and propaganda; if we understand how media images "pull our strings" by referencing codes of character types, style, and so on, we will be able to resist them more effectively.
One strategy Sherman employs for the apparent purpose of introducing distance into her work, thus permitting room for critique, is to perform identity as a masquerade. The masquerade tradition, like the "appropriation of the vernacular" tradition, has been active in art from Duchamp, through Warhol, to the feminist artists of the 1960s and 70s. Masquerade is a means of "doubling" the codes of identity by exaggerating them, making them seem "fake." Amelia Jones writes:

Masquerade becomes increasingly common and then, toward the end of this century, a nearly dominant mode of self-production (since the 1960s, this explodes into popular culture as well). From the aesthetic (Oscar Wilde at the turn of the century), to the cross-gendered characters of the surrealists' extended drama (with "Barbette", a transvestite acrobat, the better known Duchampian Rose Sélavy, and Claude Cahun as interesting examples of how cabaret met avant-garde through eroticized and simulated feminine/masculine bodies), to--in the post 1960 period--the explosion of flamboyant self-displays with Yayoi Kusama's obsessive self-imaging as exotic (Japanese/female) pinup, Urs Lüthi's bizarre self-performances as both self and other, Andy Warhol's perversely swish self-performance as the antithesis of Jackson Pollock's virile but veiled modernist body: the performance of the intersection of gender and sexual orientation has played a major, if suppressed, role in transforming modernism (with its fantasy of a coherent Cartesian subject) into a postmodernism enacted by dissolved, nonnormative subjects marked in their particularities. Sherman, like Barbette, dissolves herself into exaggerated and so apparently fake femininity. (37)

Sherman's creative process, the combination of Charge, Brief and *troc* in her development of the *Untitled Film Stills* series, demonstrates institutional creativity; she drew resources and feedback from the avant-garde culture of which she was a part. This
institutional creativity provided Sherman with a framework in which her work made sense to a selective audience. It also enabled her to make her own original contributions to avant-garde art; she added "problems" that avant-garde art was willing to address. For example, one could say that her work asks: what is "glamour?" In her *Untitled Film Stills*, her characters play at glamour without ever fully achieving it. She creates a disparity between the "ideal" (the attainment of glamour) and the actuality of her characters (their imperfections, their falseness, the seams of their disguises, their "cheapness"). Is glamour related to conspicuous consumption? Does cinema put consumption on display? Is Sherman demonstrating the impossibility of achieving glamour? Are her characters unable to consume enough or consume properly? Is feminine vulnerability an element of glamour? I discuss particular examples from the *Untitled Film Stills* in the next chapter that address these questions.

By using Sherman as a model for academic "writing," I am not calling for the replacement of alphabetic literacy in school. Rather, I am arguing that the practices of alphabetic literacy need to be supplemented with those of electronic literacy. My appropriation of Sherman's "writing" for education brings cultural studies together with composition and rhetoric, asking what it means to "write" within the modes we commonly keep apart in our cultural studies work.
CHAPTER 4
THE RHETORIC OF WRITING WITH THE STAR

This dissertation addresses a problem: How do we design computerized writing practices for the humanities? As I argued in the introduction, this problem involves more than simply adapting to a shift in technology; we are undergoing an apparatus shift from an alphabetic culture to an electronic culture. Apparatus theory posits that changes in the technologies of representation and in the structure of institutions produce changes in the representation and understanding of ourselves as "selves." Different portrayals of self produce different persuasive effects; in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the portrayal of self is one's *ethos*. In the tradition of alphabetic literacy, *ethos* is known as the problem of "voice," an acknowledgment of the writer's simulated performance of a spoken "role" for a particular occasion. The elements of *ethos* change as we move from alphabetic writing to hypertextual writing with images; in the latter, the self is no longer understood solely as a "voice" but is understood also as a "look."

88
Charisma

The movie star is on the cutting edge of changing portrayals of the self. A relatively recent phenomenon, stars combine a variety of representational strategies in order to produce charisma. Hollywood has capitalized on the charisma of stars in order to persuade, using stars' charisma to stimulate consumption, define and promote particular gender roles (such as moving women into the factories during WWII and then back into the domestic sphere after the war), and promote "hardness" during times of conflict (the images of "fitness" during the cold war). Which strategies of representation produce charisma?

Richard Dyer, in his book *Stars*, draws on Weber's theory of 'charisma' to discuss ways in which movie stars function ideologically. Weber theorized that persuasion, when not achieved by force, functions through three different types of appeals: to "tradition (doing what we've always done), bureaucracy (doing things according to agreed but alterable, supposedly rational rules), and charisma (doing things because the leader suggests it)." (30) Stars, as charismatic figures, do not have the same persuasive abilities as charismatic political leaders--Dyer argues that the expressed political beliefs of John Wayne and Jane Fonda were irrelevant or insignificant in the field of politics--but their influence over the representations of people, their "privileged position in the definition of social roles and types" (8), has influenced how people expect themselves and others to behave in day-to-day situations.
Thus stars can be studied for the ways in which they persuade through their representations of identity, of social roles and of types.

Charismatic figures, according to Weber's theory, embody a relatively stable constellation of opposing binary terms. Dyer discusses Marilyn Monroe as a notable charismatic figure.

[Monroe's] image has to be situated in the flux of ideas about morality and sexuality that characterized the 50s in America and can here be indicated by such instances as the spread of Freudian ideas in post-war America (registered particularly in the Hollywood melodrama), the Kinsey report, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, rebel stars such as Marlon Brando, James Dean and Elvis Presley, the relaxation of cinema censorship in the face of competition from television, etc. (In turn, these instances need to be situated in relation to other levels of the social formation, e.g. actual social and sexual relations, the relative economic situations of men and women, etc.) Monroe's combination of sexuality and innocence is part of that flux, but one can also see her 'charisma' as being apparent condensation of all that within her. Thus she seemed to 'be' the very tensions that ran through the ideological life of 50s America. You could see this as heroically living out the tensions or painfully exposing them. (31)

Marilyn Monroe's stardom can be considered representative of changing notions of the self, of the ways in which we understand selfhood to be constructed in terms of conflicting identity and roles.

Movie stars represent a unique opportunity to study changing notions of the "self." But we should not confuse stars with ordinary actors or "picture personalities." Paul McDonald, in his supplemental chapter to *Stars*, presents Richard DeCordova's distinction between the "Star" and the "Picture Personality." McDonald explains this difference as follows:
The picture personality was named as someone who worked in film and was only known for that work. A 'star' discourse emerged as commentary extended to the off-screen life of film performers. If the discourse on acting and the picture personality constructed knowledge about the professional life of screen actors, from 1913 the star discourse made known the private lives of film actors. As a general point about star studies, overuse of the term 'star' to describe any well-known film actor obscures how with most popular film performers, knowledge is limited to the on-screen 'personality'. (178)

Dyer argues that, in many cases, stars' "offscreen personalities" were at least as important as their on-screen personalities in shaping our perceptions of their meanings. Offscreen personalities must be understood as constructed personalities, just as we understand the characters stars play in films to be constructed. "What was only sometimes glimpsed and seldom brought out by Hollywood or the stars was that . . . personality was itself a construction known and expressed through films, stories, publicity, etc." (20). How have stars changed our notions of personality? According to Elizabeth Burns, people have long understood personality by means of the metaphor "life is theater." But the notion of "life-as-theater" has changed from "a view of life directed by God, Providence or some less anthropomorphic spiritual force," to:

a growing awareness of the way in which people compose their own characters, contribute to situations, and design settings... the commonplace analogy is of the world itself as a place where people, like actors, play parts, in an action which is felt obscurely to be designed by "social forces" or the natural drives of individual men. (11)
The result of this more recent notion, according to Dyer, is that we have developed two distinct concepts of "self."

On the one hand, we can believe in the 'existence of a knowable and constant self', which is theoretically distinct from the social roles we have to play and the ways we have of presenting our 'personality' to others. On the other hand, as Burns stresses, there is increasing anxiety about the validity of this autonomous, separate identity—we may only be our 'performance', the way in which we take on the various socially defined modes of behavior that our culture makes available. (21)

The phenomenon of stars playing characters in Hollywood cinema dramatizes the tensions between notions of self and performance. This tension becomes embodied through the elision of the star image with the role. Dyer argues that there are three possible relations between the two: selective use, perfect fit and problematic fit. These relations between star image and role reflect varying degrees of tension between them. Selective use occurs when films "bring out certain features of the star's image and ignore others" (127). Dyer cites Robert Redford as an example of a star whose image has been selectively fitted to various films. In Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, he is glamorously lit in order to bring out the romantic/erotic elements of his star image for his role as the Sundance Kid. In All the President's Men, he is lit in standard 'high-key' lighting in order to bring out the serious/political elements of his star image for his role as Bob Woodward. Each filmmaker tries to suppress the supplemental elements of Redford's star image,
elements which the audience may choose to privilege over those articulated through the role.

The perfect fit occurs when "all the aspects of a star's image fit with all the traits of a character" (129). Dyer cites John Wayne's roles in Westerns where "his relaxed, masculine, Westerner/leader qualities" perfectly fit the roles he's given. The problematic fit occurs when "there is a clash between two complex sign-clusters, the star as image and the character as otherwise constructed" (130). The common term for this occurrence is *miscasting*. Dyer's example of a problematic fit is Marilyn Monroe as Lorelei in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.

Everywhere about Anita Loos' character . . . constructs Lorelei as a cynical gold-digger, who fully understands how to use her sex to trap rich men and is motivated above all by cupidity. Her dialogue as written is self-aware and witty, signaling (to us and to herself) amusement at what she is doing even while she is playing the *fausse-naive*. The weight of the Monroe image on the other hand is innocence. She is certainly aware of her sexuality, but she is guiltless about it and it is moreover presented primarily in terms of narcissism--i.e. sexuality for herself rather than for men. At this stage in her image's development, her motivations were taken to be 'spiritual', either in the magic, 'little-girl' aspirations to be a movie star or in the 'pretentious' interests in Acting and Art.

There is thus quite a massive disjunction between Monroe-as-image and Lorelei-as-character. They only touch at three points: the extraordinary impact of their physicality, a certain infantile manner and a habit of uttering witticisms. Yet even these points need to be qualified. Lorelei is quite definitely in control of her physicality whereas Monroe (at this stage in her image) was equally clearly not; Lorelei pretended to be infantile, Monroe was by and large taken to be so; Lorelei's wit expresses an intelligent but cynical appraisal of the situation, whereas Monroe's remarks to the press (known as
Monroeisms) were regarded far more, at this point, as wisdom on a par with that of 'out of the mouths of babes and sucklings' (i.e. wise by chance rather than by design). As a result of this disjunction . . . , the character of Monroe-as-Lorelei becomes contradictory to the point of incoherence. This is not a question of Lorelei/Monroe being one thing one moment and another the next, but of her simultaneously being polar opposites. (130)

Hollywood generally employs the perfect fit ("typecasting") or selective use (adapting the star to fit the part). In Hollywood, "miscasting" is generally considered a mistake. Since I am arguing that we can use images to produce rhetorical effects, it suits my purposes to interpret Cindy Sherman's Untitled Film Stills as exploring the potential of miscasting as a form of self-representation. Sherman's use of miscasting produces rhetorical effects, to persuade people that social roles for women, as defined by the movies, are undesirable. Kaja Silverman (I discuss her work on Sherman in the chapter 5) notes how Sherman's characters look uncomfortable in their roles. These images of characters uncomfortable in their roles dramatize the tensions between "identity" and "role" that Dyer and deCordova theorize in their discussion of movie stars.

Sherman's solution to the identity/role problem as articulated by Dyer and others is to *dramatize* the problem. Sherman, through her Untitled Film Stills, exposes the function of star charisma by performing it; her strategy of miscasting heightens the ideological contradictions already inside the identity/role binary. I am interested in how Sherman's performance of the problem, as articulated by Dyer, contrasts with the critic's explication of the problem. In the next chapter, I examine critical works by Judith
Williamson and Kaja Silverman in order to see how they explicate the problem. In the following pages, I examine how Sherman performs the problem.

Dyer, in his discussion of the star phenomenon, notes that stars play roles even when they're offscreen, but that their offscreen performances are generally taken as "authentic" reflections of their true identities, unless a scandal proves otherwise. Sherman, in her performances for the stills, demonstrates that the identity/role binary is active in stars' offscreen roles. Sherman plays the offscreen personalities of stars as roles, thus undermining the notion that identity is fixed, stable, or natural. This strategy makes her work not only of central importance for critics of popular media, but also for those (like me) who hope to construct a rhetoric of the image. Sherman's use of performance codes to portray particular identity categories (represented by star types) indicates that the signifiers of these codes--elements of costume, pose, dress, setting, gesture, and so on—are iterable and that anyone can use them, if we can learn the rhetoric for writing with star images.

Sherman's Untitled Film Stills portray a variety of star images, some obviously suggesting images taken from films, others suggesting pin-up poses (Untitled Film Still #6 and #34) or paparazzi shots for glamour magazines (Untitled Film Stills #7, #8, #9, #47, #54 and #55). Sherman thus deploys not only the star image as it appears in films, but also the star image as it is constructed in ancillary texts—the star's "offscreen" identities—in her pin-up shots, glamour shots, and paparazzi shots. Sherman's work helps to dramatize star identities as constructed through and against their
roles, ultimately blurring the line between identity and role. The characters in these stills play at glamour, but their apparent alienation detracts from their attempts.

Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills #6* and *#34* depict Sherman, in different guises, posing in variations of classic pin-up poses. These images, like many other types of images in the series, depict the characters' discomfort with their roles, and yet they also depict the characters' desire to more successfully *be* their roles. What is the role of a "pin-up girl"? Dyer cites Thomas B. Hess' description of pin-up conventions:

By the 1940s, the pin-up image was defined with canonical strictness. First of all, there was the 'pin-up girl' herself. She had to be the healthy, American, cheerleader type--button-nosed, wide-eyed, long-legged, ample hips and breasts, and above all with the open, friendly smile that discloses perfect, even, white teeth. Then there is her costume and pose. These must be inviting but not seducing; affectionate but not passionate, revealing by suggestion while concealing by fact. The legs are carefully posed so that not too much of the inner thigh is shown; the navel is covered and so are most of the breasts except for the famous millimeters of 'cleavage.' The body is evident beneath the costume, but not its details--the bulges of nipples or of the *mons veneris* are scrupulously hidden. . . . The pin-up girl . . . [is an] instantly legible visible image of the comforting and commonplace which is also ideal, and thus unattainable. (51)

In *Untitled Film Still #6*, Sherman's character, in a failed attempt to match herself to the pin-up ideals, ends up looking doll-like; heavy make-up and a frozen expression make her look lifeless. Her figure, with small breasts and hips, doesn't approximate the ideal type for the pin-up girl. Her undergarments, a solid black bra
with large white stretch lace panties, don't match. Her pose is awkward. She holds a mirror in her right hand; the mirror is facing down against the bedspread, as if she is repeatedly checking her pose in the mirror and then moving it away.

Sherman's character also has a frozen, doll-like expression in Untitled Film Still #34, another 'pin-up' style picture. In this image she uses a well-worn paperback novel, A Prologue to Love, as a prop. The character lies next to the novel, which is opened face down against the bed, without looking at it or touching it. The paperback novel functions like the mirror did in the previous image; the character, we can assume, is repeatedly checking her pose against an ideal image described in the novel. These images depict the characters' desire to more successfully \textit{be} their roles.

In the "paparazzi" shots, Untitled Film Stills #7, #8, #9, #47, #54 and #55, Sherman depicts the off-screen life of a "star" photographed in a (supposedly) unguarded moment. These six images, (plus one more, #27, which I will discuss below), depict a variety of stereotypes about stars' private lives, ranging from the star as "gluttonous" and "glamorous," to "protected by stardom" and "destroyed by stardom."

\textit{Untitled Film Still} #7 depicts a glamorous Italian movie star type (Sophia Loren?) appearing from behind curtains and sliding glass doors (a hotel room?) into the sunlight, wearing a white slip, white stockings, slippers, a dark wig and sunglasses. She holds a full martini glass (with olive) in her left hand, and with her right hand she lifts the hem of her slip and pulls on the garter holding up her stocking. She looks directly at the camera, as if she's just noticed her
picture being taken; her expression seems a bit angry. In front of her, to her right, is a woman sunning herself, wearing a large straw hat that obscures her head and face. This image produces connotations of consumption and luxury common to many advertisements, suggesting "envy" for the star's lifestyle.

*Untitled Film Stills* #8 and #9 are similar in theme to #7. In these stills, the characters appear at the beach. In #9, the character, a 1950s Hollywood "starlet" type wearing a one-piece bathing suit, a bathing cap, and sunglasses, is lounging on a deck chair in the sunlight. To her left is an umbrella (should she want some shade), and to her right is a can of beer. While less glamorous than #7 (because of the substitution of a can of beer for the martini), this still also suggests consumption and luxury. In #8, the character's outfit is less than ideal--a bikini top and hip hugger cut-off bell-bottoms, sunglasses, and large gaudy earrings--but she is in even less ideal surroundings; the beach is visible far off in the distance, and the character, her blanket dangling from her hand, is surrounded by scrubby weeds. The surroundings detract from any glamour she might have, making her appear somewhat silly for her attempt at glamour.

*Untitled Film Still* #47 depicts a different kind of scene; the star is caught at home, watering her garden with a hose. The high fence and dense leaves suggest a kind of fortress designed to protect her privacy. Her costume, a hat and dark glasses, can be read as additional safeguards of her privacy, while her unbuttoned blouse, bare legs, and sandals indicate her belief in the security of her
privacy. But her privacy has been violated because the paparazzi have managed to steal this shot.

In *Untitled Film Stills #54 and #55*, Sherman presents two looks at one star. In these images, the character is a glamorous blond, dressed in a long coat and carrying a purse, alone at night on the city streets. In both images she is flooded with light from a direct flash. In #54, she looks startled, as though she's been caught sneaking to her lover's house. Her hands have risen defensively towards her face, as though to shield it from the photographer. In #55, her expression reads defeat. In #54, she had been walking on a paved road, but in #55 she stands on a small cobblestone street that appears to be a dead end. On the wall above her to the right is a fallout shelter sign. *Untitled Film Stills #54 and #55* depict the star as trapped by stardom.

*Untitled Film Still #27* is different in kind from the other images I've been describing. We see a medium shot of a character at a table, with a cigarette and a mostly empty glass of champagne. She wears a glamorous outfit with leopard fur lining on the collar and cuffs. Tears stream down her face and her mascara has run badly. What makes this image different from the others is its undecidability; is it a star image (a paparazzi shot) or an image of a character in a film? This image is the best example of Sherman's blurring the lines between identity and role. It could be a frame from a biopic about the life of a tragic star, someone like Judy Garland or Marilyn Monroe, or it could be a paparazzi shot of a star on her way down.
These images suggest that even the most intimate moments in life, those that we usually think of as being the most "real," are to a great degree constructed as a set of codes (an argument supported by Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*). The tremendous variety of these offscreen "identities," which Sherman plays as roles, indicates that we can teach our students to "write" various identities in the computer. This practice fits within the goals of traditional rhetorical pedagogy; it teaches students not to be deceived (by the use of persona within popular culture) and it teaches them to use self-representation for their own purposes, just as Sherman has for condemning the roles Hollywood uses in order to portray women.

**The Star as Rhetoric**

How does Sherman deploy the star system as a rhetoric? How does her work change our conception of rhetoric itself as our culture shifts to electronic forms of communicating and storing information? As Gregory Ulmer reminds us, "the five parts of traditional rhetoric--invention, arrangement, style, delivery and memory--have operated differently in different historical periods, depending on which of the liberal arts was in ascendancy." (34) What are the functions of these "parts of rhetoric" and how have they changed over time? Cicero defines the five parts of rhetoric as follows:

Invention is the excogitation of true things (*res*), or things similar to truth to render one's cause plausible; disposition is the arrangement in order of the things thus discovered; elocution is the accommodation of suitable words to the invented (things); memory is the firm perception in the soul of
things and words; pronunciation is the moderating in the voice and body to suit the dignity of the things and words. (Yates, 9)

In the classical tradition, the student orator was trained in all five parts of rhetoric, but in the early period of print education, delivery and memory were stripped away from rhetoric because they were not relevant to print composition. In the period following Peter Ramus' restructuring of education, invention and arrangement were subsumed under logic and all that remained of rhetoric was style (Ulmer, 34). Until very recently, students learned the "five paragraph theme" (35), which dispensed with rhetoric almost completely, relying instead on a few structuring concepts from logic. The emergence of the electronic apparatus marks a shift to a new mode of thinking, one that demands the renewal of rhetoric in composition.

Sherman's "writing" with images refigures the rhetorical functions of memory within electronic writing, preparing the way for a mode of writing using image/text combinations. Image/text writing has a history; it formed the basis of classical rhetoric. In classical rhetoric, memory was enormously important, since orators were expected to deliver long speeches with total accuracy. In fact, memory was of such value that there developed an "art of memory" designed to strengthen the natural memory. Frances Yates explains that this artificial memory depended upon the recollection of images:

The artificial memory is established from places and images . . . A locus is a place easily grasped by the memory, such as a house, an intercolumnar space, a corner, an arch, or the like. Images are forms, marks or simulacra of what we wish to
remember. For instance if we wish to recall the genus of a horse, of a lion, of an eagle, we must place their images on definite loci. (6)

Artificial memory was a kind of "inner writing" the orator reviewed while presenting a speech, observing the places and their contents, the images, and recovering the memories for things (the subject matter) that those images represented. The orator used a series of places (the topoi of classical rhetoric in which one "found" arguments, known as inventio) in which he placed one of many sets of images, depending upon the speech he was to remember." . . . the loci remain in the memory and can be used again by placing another set of images for another set of material" (7). These images were to be easily memorized. The anonymous author of the Ad Herennium, a classical rhetoric, discusses which types of images the orator should use in order to best remember them.

. . . ordinary things easily slip from the memory while the striking and the novel stay longer in the mind. . . . We ought, then, to set up images that are not many or vague but active; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we ornament some of them, as with crowns or purple cloaks, so that the similitude may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects to our images, for that, too, will ensure our remembrance of them more readily. The things we easily remember when they are real we likewise remember without difficulty when they are figments. (9-10)

Yates adds: "Our author has clearly got hold of the idea of helping memory by arousing emotional affects through these striking
and unusual images, of human figures wearing crowns or purple cloaks, bloodstained or smeared with paint, of human figures dramatically engaged in some activity—"doing something" (10). The classical rhetoric instructor did not dictate these images to the students; rather the student was encouraged to form his own images so as to find those that most resonated with his own emotions. The student accompanied the images of human figures with accessories in order to remind him of the topic of his speech. The author of *ad Herennium* provides an example of one such memory image, used by a defense lawyer to remember the details of a poisoning case.

We shall imagine the man in question as lying ill in bed, if we know him personally. If we do not know him, we shall yet take some one to be our invalid, but not a man of the lowest class, so that he may come to mind at once. And we shall place the defendant at the bedside, holding in his right hand a cup, in his left, tablets, on the fourth finger, a ram's testicles. In this way we can have the memory of the man who was poisoned, the witnesses, and the inheritance.

Yates adds:

The cup would remind of the poisoning, the tablets, of the will or inheritance, and the testicles of the ram through verbal similarity with *testes*—of the witnesses. (11)

This image activates the memory of the orator through metonymy (the tablets for the will) and association (the ram's testicles for the *testes*, or witnesses). As a method for remembering information, the artificial memory of classical rhetoric prefigures a method of writing in hypertext. In hypertext, we have the capacity
to externalize our memory in a machine; striking images which guide the reader through a web of interconnected links open onto pages of written text. The text is related to the images through metonymy and association. Imagine the memory image described above as a hypertextually "mapped" image. When you click on the tablets you go to the text of the will; when you click on the ram’s testicles, you go to the text of the witnesses' stories. This model of hypertext design could serve to demonstrate humanities learning. Sherman's images, for example, could be hypertextually "mapped" and linked to information about avant-garde art, feminist theories of popular media representations of women, even "third meaning" haikus (see Chapter 6).

What do the *Untitled Film Stills* have to do with memory images from the history of rhetoric? First, Sherman's images have the power of the "striking images" described in the *Ad Herennium*, serving the purpose of remembering complex discourses, some of them personal. We should not imagine that all of the intended meanings of a work of art are meant for an audience; some of the meanings may only be known to the artist. Thus, for my purposes, the *Untitled Film Stills* can be considered Sherman's personal "memory images." Second, the *Untitled Film Stills* serve as a database of shared cultural memory (the star images and the types they evoke), from which we make judgments based on our biases and prejudices; in other words, Sherman's images become our memory images also, to which we attach our own information. Third, Sherman's images represent an augmented form of memory; they embody the stereotypes lurking behind our judgments, externalized
from our minds where we can examine them. Finally, Sherman's images suggest a style of hypertextual writing to be composed of striking images and their associated "topics."

Let us consider how students could compose their own "striking images" that serve the functions I listed above. One way to understand Sherman's images is to think of them as composites; she conjoins her own image with that of a star and a character or role. Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* thus employ condensation, the compression of several thoughts into a single image. Recall Freud's description of the composite figure in his discussion of "dream images."

There are many sorts of ways in which [composite] figures ... can be put together. I may build up a figure by giving it the features of two people; or I may give it the form of one person but think of it in the dream as having the name of another person; or I may have a visual picture of one person, but put it in a situation which is appropriate to another. In all these cases the combination of different persons into a single representative in the content of the dream has a meaning; it is intended to indicate an "and" or "just as," or to compare the original persons with each other in some particular respect, which may even be specified in the dream itself. As a rule, however, this common element between the combined persons can only be discovered by analysis, and is only indicated in the contents of the dream by the formation of the collective figure. (30)

Freud adds:

The dream work is particularly fond of representing two *contrary* ideas by the same composite structure. (31)
Condensation, together with the transformation of thoughts into situations ("dramatization"), is the most important and peculiar characteristic of the dream work. (32)

In all three cases (the Ad Herennium, Freud's dream image, and Sherman), dramatic images must be translated into verbal formulations. [I argued in the previous chapter that Sherman's use of the word "untitled" in her title invites just such a translation]. Note the similarity between Yates's description of the art of memory--a series of thoughts condensed into a visual analog "arousing emotional affects through . . . striking and unusual images"--with Freud's description of the dream work; "I am led to regard the dream as a sort of substitute for the thought process, full of meaning and emotion, at which I arrived after the completion of analysis" (15) (emphasis Freud's). The theory of condensation explains how this translation process, from thoughts to dramatic images and back to thoughts, works.

I am not arguing that Sherman is carrying out some explicit program of artistic production based upon Freud's theory of the dream or upon the Art of Memory. Rather, I am arguing that Freud's theory of the dream provides guidelines for translating Sherman's images into text. Furthermore, Freud's theories allow us to use condensation and dramatization as part of a rhetoric for writing electronic text/image combinations. In On Dreams, Freud explains how the dreamer transforms dream thoughts into dream images. The goal of Freud's analysis is to translate these dream images into verbal articulations of the original dream thoughts. Film theorists have long used Freud's techniques of dream analysis to read the
"true" (yet disguised) meanings of a film, its "repressed meanings."
Yet few, if any, have thought of Freud's dream theory as a rhetoric for writing with images and text. I propose that Freud's theory of dream interpretation, including the operations of condensation, are a rhetoric for forming verbal/visual text constructions. These rules for constructing verbal/visual texts enable us to write with contradictions. While the goal of analysis (a hermeneutic method) is to expose the contradictions which have been partially hidden in a film, one goal of electracy (a heuretic method) is to learn to write with contradictions, as Sherman does in her composite images.

Writing with the Fetish

Freud theorizes that another process that transforms dream thoughts into images is displacement. Freud describes displacement as the shift of psychic intensity from the "most prominent among the dream thoughts" to "some obscure region" (33-4) in the dream. He writes:

... in the course of the dream work the psychic intensity passes over from the thoughts and ideas to which it properly belongs on to others which in our judgment have no claim to any such emphasis. No other process contributes so much to concealing the meaning of a dream and to making the connection between the dream content and the dream thoughts unrecognizable. In the course of this process, which I shall describe as "dream displacement," the psychical intensity, significance or affective potentiality of the thoughts is, as we further find, transformed into sensory vividness. We assume as a matter of course that the most distinct element in the manifest content of a dream is the most important one; but in fact [owing to the displacement that has occurred] it is often an
indistinct element which turns out to be the most direct derivative of the essential dream thought. (34)

In Freudian theory, the fetish is a subcategory of displacement; the fetishist displaces anxiety about castration onto some "insignificant" detail. Laura Mulvey, in her essay about Cindy Sherman entitled "Cosmetics and Abjection: Cindy Sherman 1977-87," posits that Freud's theory of the fetish is crucial to understanding Sherman's work. In Mulvey's recounting of Freud, she explains that "castration anxiety" arises when the male psyche perceives the sexual difference of women as a wound or void. The male, fearing his own castration, imaginatively constructs an artificial phallus (or "fetish") from some surface detail on the woman's body (which may be a body part, an item of clothing, or item of jewelry) in order to deny the void of castration. The male constructs his notions of femininity around this artificial phallus.

Fetishism, Mulvey writes, has a dual structure; it simultaneously disavows castration and "constructs a substitute to deny it and replace the missing object" (73). The male's representation of the female body is thus a symptom of the initial castration trauma; fetishism becomes a screen against a traumatic memory (castration fear), as well as a memento of loss and substitution. The fetish is thus a model for the "splitting of the ego," an oscillation between the avowal and disavowal of loss. The fetish, in Mulvey's terms, produces "a willing suspension of disbelief followed by a wave of disillusion, 'I know . . . but all the same'" (73). Freud believed that the fetish could either hide history by creating a
phantasmatic topography, or screen, or could point to history when it's symptoms have been deciphered through analysis. Fetishism, Mulvey argues, has harmful effects for women. The female, reacting to male revulsion toward her body, either creates a "cosmetic body" in order to hide the signs that mark her as feminine, or she turns the male's revulsion toward her body against herself more dramatically through anorexia and bulimia.

Recent Cultural Studies theories have argued that Hollywood stars perform gender as a masquerade by employing the fetish to create a cosmetic body. Marjorie Garber, in Vested Interests, tracks the fetish across a variety of cultural forms and periods, including its use by Hollywood stars. In her study, Garber calls a person who has learned to write with the fetish the "transvestite," whom she defines as somebody performing gender, race, or any identity category, as an appearance. She writes,

In . . . "The Signification of the Phallus" Lacan had talked about the relations of the sexes as governed by three terms, not two: "to have" the phallus, which is what, in fantasy, men do; "to be" the phallus, the object of desire, which is what, in fantasy, women do; and the intervening term, "to seem." This intervention, of "seeming" (or "appearing"), substituted for "having," and protecting against the threat of loss, is, precisely, the place of the transvestite. (356)

Transvestitism, in Garber's theory, includes not only obvious cases of men passing as women, but also includes performers who employ the fetish, another term for which is the "detachable part," to represent any identity category, including their "own." According to Garber, female performers in the movies employ the fetish, enacting
femininity as a display through the use of costume, props, make-up, gestures, and so on. The fetish, or detachable part, allows for impersonation. The point of the transvestite's impersonation, in Lacan's theory, is to "protect against the threat of loss," but in order to make of the fetish a writing strategy, we should theorize about how the fetish allows us to represent different identities. Elvis is the archetypal case of writing with the fetish because he is so easily impersonated.

Why is "Elvis," like "woman," that which can be impersonated? From the beginning Elvis is produced and exhibited as parts of a body--detachable (and imitable) parts that have an uncanny life and movement of their own, seemingly independent of their "owner": the curling lip, the pompadour, the hips, the pelvis. (372)

Like another avant-garde artist, Marcel Duchamp, Sherman "cross-dresses" by appropriating fetishes from mass culture, in this case the "detachable parts" (costumes, gestures, and poses) of Hollywood stars, in order to explore their effects as writing. Sherman's images are much like Duchamp's ready-mades. In fact, Duchamp's own "dressing up" as the woman of fashion Rrose Sélavy is an obvious precursor to her work. "It was a sort of readymadeish action," Duchamp said of his performance as Rrose (quoted in Anecdotes of Modern Art). Duchamp, as Rrose, employed "readymade" fetishes, the articles of fashion he used in his performance. Similarly, Sherman employs readymade fetishes of stars in her Untitled Film Stills. Sherman makes even more dramatic use of the fetish in her later work, such as the History, Old Masters
and Sex series. In these images, Sherman uses false breasts and genitalia, as well as various doll parts, to present a grotesque assemblage of femininity.

In the Untitled Film Stills, Sherman does not usually impersonate specific women from Hollywood and New Wave films; rather she impersonates "readymade" types of women through her use of the fetish. The readymade, an idea invented by Duchamp and explored by Sherman in her performances as readymade star types, serves a function similar to that of the ancient memory image. In a defense of one of his readymades, the upside-down urinal he titled Fountain, Duchamp argued that whether the artist actually made a particular object is of no importance. Rather, what matters is that, "He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view--created a new thought for that object" (193) (emphasis mine). Duchamp indicates that objects can be recontextualized and invested with different thoughts. This insight is valuable for my efforts to construct a text/image rhetoric; by appropriating the readymade object (or fetish), one does not have to be faithful to the original purpose or meaning of that object. Like the inner writing of the ancient rhetors who placed images into their memory loci and attached thoughts to those images, Duchamp and Sherman "wrote" by putting an object into a new context and creating "a new thought for that object."
Laura Mulvey and the Political Aesthetics of the Fetish

Reading the fetish and writing with the fetish appear to be quite different activities. The critic approaches the fetish as a symptom that must be deciphered, identifying the fetish as a screen against traumatic loss and then finding the secret trauma which the fetish hides. The artist, on the other hand, detaches the fetish from its context within a trauma-complex and recontextualizes it, using the fetish as detachable, iterable part.

Sherman's use of the fetish has raised confusion and doubt among some critics. The issues raised by Sherman's use of the fetish become clearer if we situate her work in the context of evolving debates within feminism during the 1970s. Laura Mulvey identifies key elements of Sherman's "aesthetics" in feminist political discourse.

In the early 70s, the Women's Movement claimed the female body as a site of political struggle, mobilising around abortion rights above all, but . . . spiraling out into agitation over . . . sexuality itself as a source of women's oppression. A politics of the body led logically to questions of the representation of the body. It was only a small step to include the question of images of women in the debates and campaigns around the body, but it was a step that also moved feminism out of familiar terrains of political action into a terrain of political aesthetics. And this small step, from one terrain to another, called for a new conceptual vocabulary, and opened the way for the influence that semiotics and psychoanalysis have had on feminist theory. The initial idea that images contributed to women's alienation from their bodies and from their sexuality, with the attendant hope of a liberation and recuperation, gave way to theories of representation as symptom and signifier of the way that problems posed by sexual difference under patriarchy could be displaced onto the feminine.
Not surprisingly, this kind of theoretical/political aesthetics also affected artists working in the climate of 70s feminism, and the representability of the female body underwent a crisis. 

Women artists and film-makers . . . were extremely wary about the investment of 'dominant meanings' in images of women and while feminist theorists turned to popular culture to analyse these meanings, artists turned to theory, juxtaposing images and ideas to negate dominant meanings and, slowly and polemically, to invent new ones. Although in this climate, Cindy Sherman's concentration on the female body seemed almost shocking, her representations of femininity were not a sign of regression, but a re-representation, a making strange. (66-7)

The remainder of Mulvey's essay argues Sherman's case, defending her work against the charge of "regression" (76). In Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, as in Hollywood and advertising, the fetish presents appealing surfaces; thus Sherman's characters might be understood as inviting voyeurism. In fact, Sherman's images *have* been seen voyeuristically by some critics (Peter Schjeldahl), who have constructed fantasies about Sherman herself somehow *being* the femininity she represents.

In "'Images of 'Woman': Judith Williamson Introduces the Photography of Cindy Sherman," Williamson writes,

so tenacious is the wish for this set of psychic garments to turn out to be actual skin, that almost every time Sherman's work is written about the issue of Cindy Sherman herself comes into it. She has often been thought of as *indulging* in self-images, wishing secretly to be like Marilyn Monroe, posing as a sexual heroine. From the notion that her work springs from a desire to be more glamorous follows the idea that she is not 'really' as
attractive as her heroines, the glamour is not allowed to be hers. (105)

Sherman's case is tough to defend, Mulvey argues, because

in refusing the word/image juxtaposition, so prevalent in the art of the 70s and 80s, Sherman may draw the accusation that she is, herself, stuck in the topographic doublebind of the fetish and its collapse. She would thus be unable to inscribe the means of decipherment into the work itself. Her use of 'Untitled' to describe her works turns inability into refusal. (76)

Sherman's refusal to translate or interpret her own images makes the critic's task necessary, according to Mulvey. Mulvey understands Sherman's lack of titles, or accompanying language, as a sign that Sherman's work is about the fetish rather than a mere replication of it. "The complete lack of verbal clues and signifiers in Cindy Sherman's work draws attention to the semiotic that precedes a successful translation of the symptom into language, the semiotic of displacement and fetishism, desperately attempting to disguise unconscious ideas from the mind" (76).

Mulvey insists that the lack of titles in the Untitled Film Stills does not prevent Sherman's work from being a critique of fetishism and voyeurism. Although Mulvey admits that Sherman herself has taken an "expressly non-theoretical, even anti-theoretical stance" (65) towards her own work, it is necessary, according to Mulvey, to provide a theoretical explanation; the critic must supply titles (explanatory text) to Sherman's work in order to make the critical function of her work intelligible.
To summarize Mulvey's argument, Sherman's photographs attempt to break the spell of voyeurism without using text. Each still suggests a story but also denies one; the women characters are always posed as if frozen and their "frozen-ness" denies a narrative unfolding that a viewer might imagine in order to "naturalize" the fetish. Furthermore, since Sherman's women are not exhibitionists (they don't look at the camera and invite the viewer to look), viewers are meant to become aware of their own voyeurism. Additionally, Sherman performs femininity as an appearance. The female characters are similar to each other, in their "fifties-ness" for example, yet each is different. The result is that there is no stable position from which to imagine the characters as "real."

In the Untitled Film Stills, Sherman presented a collection of images exploring the exteriority of women's bodies as constructed through feminine appearances in popular media. Sherman's work shows that, "The accoutrements of the feminine struggle to conform to the façade of desirability..." (68), but she also reveals her characters' façades as artifice. Because of the obvious artifice of these images, the nostalgia they evoke for the 1950s, idealized within the culture as a period of uncomplicated gender identity, dissolves into unease. The apparent vulnerability of Sherman's characters (their isolation, their awkwardness) heightens the sense of unease about the gender stereotypes we've inherited from that era.

Mulvey takes an auteurist approach to Sherman. "Auteurist critics," in order to understand the artist's use of the media, "had to search across the whole range of a director's work..." (21). In
Mulvey's essay, she argues that Sherman's work over a ten year period, beginning with the *Untitled Film Stills*, must be understood as a single project, and that Sherman's goal all along has been to unmask the fetish. According to Mulvey, Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* present appealing surfaces, but in her later work she replaces the visually appealing surface of the early works with the fragmented body in decay. Mulvey writes of Sherman's later work,

> Sometimes body bits are replaced by prostheses, such as false breasts or buttocks, but, in the last resort, nothing is left but disgust; the disgust of sexual detritus, decaying food, vomit, slime, menstrual blood, hair. These traces represent the end of the road, the secret stuff of bodily fluids that the cosmetics is designed to conceal. The topography of exterior/interior is exhausted. . . . the figures themselves . . . gradually became more and more grotesque. (71)

Mulvey applies the "trajectory schema" (in which the critic postulates that the text will reveal a progression) to Sherman's work, seeing it as a chronological progression over the ten year period, and also as a progression through space: "Sherman dissects the phantasmagoric space conjured up by the female body, from its exteriority to its interiority" (67). Sherman's trajectory from 1977 to 1987, according to Mulvey,

> has slowly stripped the symptom away from the disavowal mechanisms [of fetishism], at the same time revealing the mechanisms for what they are. . . . [Sherman] returns . . . to the bodily fluids and wastes that become inseparable from the castrated body in the iconography of misogyny. . . . When Sherman depicts femininity as a masquerade in her succession of 'dressings-up', the female body asserts itself as a site of anxiety that it must, at all times, conceal. . . . (73)
The 'vulnerability' that so many critics perceive in Sherman's women characters is, according to Mulvey, a result of the "tension between an exterior appearance and its interiority" (73). Mulvey finds that Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* enact the fetish before decipherment; there is no accompanying language that explains how this fetish functions. Rather, Sherman's trajectory, beginning with the *Untitled Film Stills* and continuing through the 1987 *Untitled* series, gradually exposes the mechanism of the fetish, without the use of language, by stripping the fetish away. These later works, according to Mulvey, invite a retroactive reading of the earlier works, re-reading them as critical of the surface-as-disguise. Sherman's *Fashion* series combines elements of the fashion layout with the grotesque, suggesting that there's a monster behind the cosmetic façade of femininity. These later works produce the "abject," which Mulvey identifies as pathos for the "monster" that lurks beneath the feminine façade represented in the *Untitled Film Stills*.

Mulvey's goals are to create a critical context for Sherman's work and to translate her wordless images into text. Mulvey writes, "In the last resort, decipherment is dependent on language and the analysand's exegesis, which transforms the symptom into language and traces its displacement" (76). Sherman's work, were it be stripped of critical commentary, would present us with the objects, but not an account of a problem those objects were meant to address. Mulvey's interpretive strategy, examining the context or *troc* in which Sherman's art appeared, shares similarities with Baxandall's
and Peterson's approaches. All three critics discuss how artists find problems, resources, and markets. In her discussion of feminist politics and art in the 1970s, Mulvey demonstrates how artists like Sherman addressed problems raised by feminist theory.

Mulvey argues that when we re-read the *Untitled Film Stills* from the perspective of Sherman's later work, we see that Sherman has been using the fetish while being aware of it, critical of it, and revealing its mechanisms. Mulvey can thus distance both Sherman and herself from the dangers associated with the fetish. Can we articulate a dialectics of this relationship between artist and critic? can we train students to synthesize it in their own work, particularly in their approaches to computerized writing?

We need not accept the psychoanalytic presuppositions in Mulvey's theories in order to make use of the fetish for our own purposes. Dyer is critical of psychoanalytic theories (Mulvey's in particular) about the fetish:

Laura Mulvey's analysis in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' [emphasizes that] the pin-up as woman represents the possibility of castration for the male viewer (as do all women for him); to avoid this, a substitute phallus is provided in the form of sexual symbols (including various obviously phallic kinds) or fetishes. Unless one chooses to accept that all fetishism is to be explained in terms of phallic substitution, I am not sure how far I would go along with this. Sexual imagery may be fetishistic simply in the sense of being a heightening of erotic/sensual surfaces (fur, leather, satin, etc. being 'more like skin than skin'); at the same time it also links the woman to other images of power and wealth (e.g. fur, etc. as expensive fabrics; frequent linkage to Art, *haute couture*, leisure, etc.). She may thus be seen as an example of wealth (which the viewer in his fantasy possesses), or as being something that can be obtained through wealth. (51)
My discussion of Mulvey's criticism in this chapter is a precursor of my discussion, in the next chapter, of how to combine art practices with critique practices. My goal is to adapt practices of alphabetic literacy toward a computerized humanities. I want to teach people that they can use the fetish as a way of writing their identities; I also want to teach people to think critically about the fetish. The computer allows students to write their identities on screen, using images and text, and to explore the persuasive effects of identity construction. Sherman made the star discourse manipulatable (by using the discourse of the star). In turn, education can extract a general education discourse from Sherman's work and combine it with critique practices for a text/graphics medium.
CHAPTER 5
THE RHETORIC OF INTERPRETATION

The goal of this dissertation is to describe a pedagogy that combines an art practice, represented by Cindy Sherman, with a critique practice, represented by Sherman's critics Laura Mulvey, Judith Williamson, and Kaja Silverman. Inferential criticism provides a means of combining these two practices into a coherent whole. Inferential criticism, as the name suggests, produces inferences about the unknown based on the known. Baxandall, an inferential critic, provides a synthesis of Picasso's cubism and Kahnweiler's critique, providing the model for our own hybrid of art and criticism. David Bordwell, another inferential critic, provides a poetics of filmmaker and film critic. My purpose is to extrapolate the poetics of Sherman's making and her critics' writing and synthesize it into a practice we can use for our invention strategy. I suggest ways of generalizing this recipe for invention so that anyone can compose his or her own poetics from any combination of art and critical materials.

In this chapter, I present a case study of interpretive criticism about Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*. I draw upon
David Bordwell's *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, deriving a rhetoric from this interpretive criticism that I then adapt and integrate into my pedagogical poetics.

Recent criticism of Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* by Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, and others indicates that these photographs have become increasingly important within the disciplines of textual studies and film studies in particular. These critics approach the stills from the perspective of feminist-psychoanalytic theory; Mulvey employs Freud's concept of the fetish while Silverman employs Lacan's concepts of the gaze, screen, and mirror, to explain how Sherman's work challenges patriarchal aesthetics and dominant means of identity construction. David Bordwell, in *Making Meaning*, analyzes the inferential and rhetorical patterns that these critics employ. I present Bordwell's description of film criticism as a rhetoric that will help explain the work of Sherman's critics and allow students to write their own criticism to accompany their film stills.

My goals in this chapter are to:

1. explain certain practices of writing within our institution, represented by Sherman's critics, in terms of Bordwell's "rhetoric" of interpretive criticism.

2. discuss some of the implications of contemporary interpretive criticism.

3. suggest ways in which these interpretive practices can be conjoined with art practices into a holistic pedagogy that permits research and writing within electracy.
We can explain this third goal, the conjoining of interpretive practices with art practices, as the creation of a pedagogy that makes students aware of popular culture in disciplinary ways. The idea is to make "natives" (our students) into "anthropologists" of their own culture. What is the "native culture" of our students? Most students have spent years absorbing popular culture as consumers. But does this mean that they are "native speakers" of pop culture? Hardly. Frank Tomasulo writes:

Despite the optimistic assumption that "Generation X" students are thoroughly media-literate, ample evidence indicates otherwise. The quotidian reality (even banality) of many students' first papers is enough to call into question the repeated bromide that today's students "bring to film a strong visual orientation and at least a rudimentary visual literacy." Students may have been widely exposed to media imagery, but they may not understand film "language." (75)

Media producers, media consumers, and media critics behave very differently in relation to popular culture. These differences reflect institutional structures and practices as well as personal dispositions. When students "speak" pop culture, they typically do so in the vernacular of consumers; they have "fan" knowledge and they "gossip about entertainment." Television shows like "Entertainment Tonight" promote this practice; they present characters and performers as if they were discussing the behavior of "real" people they knew personally. Sherman's Untitled Film Stills offer a different mode of "speaking" pop culture, one in which media consumers can use the tactics of media producers and critics. Sherman presents a vernacular, yet critical, "language" of Hollywood
that ordinary people can use to communicate. My project is designed to bring students' discourses about pop culture into circulation with other discourses about pop culture, those of media producers and media critics.

In this chapter, I examine critical writing drawn from Film Studies and Cultural Studies. These works are Judith Williamson's essay "Images of 'Woman'--The Photographs of Cindy Sherman" and Kaja Silverman's "The Screen" from The Threshold of the Visible World. Bordwell treats critical works such as these as "creative" projects; he sees them as "solutions" to problems posed by a discipline or field. By treating critical works as creative solutions to problems posed by a field, Bordwell allows us to discuss the work of critics in terms of Charge, Brief, and troc. We can thus find ways to integrate criticism with aesthetics, using inferential criticism as a heuretic strategy.

Bordwell's Rhetoric of Criticism

Bordwell argues that film studies, in demanding "ordinary criticism" from its members, presents a set of routine problems: "Ordinary criticism, like Kuhn's 'normal science,' can be considered a process of puzzle-solving" (29). Bordwell draws upon cognitive psychology to explain how critics use problem-solving heuristics. Ordinary criticism, according to Bordwell, is practical and institutionally bound (rather than being a free-standing "search for truth"), since "interpreters seek out strategies for correctly performing the tasks set by their institutions" (29). Bordwell
identifies four practical problems the institution places before the critic:

1. *Appropriateness.* "How is the critic to make the chosen film a proper specimen for critical interpretation?" (30).

2. *Recalcitrant data.* "How is the critic to adjust her critical concepts and methods to specific features of the film? Does the film 'fit the approach'? How will aspects of the film, not at first interpretable in an acceptable way, be rendered interpretable?" (31).

3. *Novelty.* "The interpreter is expected either to (a) initiate a new critical theory or method; (b) revise or refine an existing theory or method; (c) 'apply' an existing theory or method to a fresh instance; or (d) if the film is familiar, point out significant aspects which previous commentators have ignored or minimized" (31).

4. *Plausibility.* "How is the critic to make the interpretation sufficiently persuasive?" (31).

These problems represent the Charge that the institution poses to the critic. Bordwell points out that these indefinite problems cannot be solved by following a strict set of rules; "the institution does not specify exactly how the interpretation should be novel or persuasive" (30). Rather, Bordwell argues, the critic learns interpretation as one would learn a craft, much as an electrician or potter learns a craft within a school or guild (40).

The interpreter's craft consists centrally of ascribing implicit and symptomatic meanings to films. *Ascribing* here captures several important senses: inferred meanings are *imputed* to a film, but they are also (and principally) "scribed," written up, articulated in language. The ascriptive acts take place within an institutional frame of reference, which defines, usually tacitly, how the writer is to proceed. The goal assigned to the
interpreter is to produce a persuasive and novel interpretation, in a process that is at once psychological, social, and discursive. (41)

The craft of criticism allows the individual critic to choose the elements of his or her Brief. Bordwell defines four types of meaning that the critic ascribes to a film. The critic's selections from among these types of meaning constitute the critic's Brief.

1. *Referential Meaning.* The construction of a concrete "world," including the diegesis, and an ongoing story (*fabula*), or "nonnarative forms, such as rhetorical or taxonomic ones, as proposing a world that manifests structures of an argumentative or categorical nature" (8).

2. *Explicit Meaning.* The construction of "a conceptual meaning or 'point' to the fabula and diegesis," taken to come from within the film and, "assumed to 'speak directly.' A verbal indication such as the line 'There's no place like home' at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, or a stereotyped visual image such as the Scales of Justice, could be said to furnish such cues" (8). When the critic understands the film to be "'stating' abstract meanings, he is constructing . . . *explicit* meaning" (8). These first two types of meaning, referential and explicit, Bordwell calls "literal" meanings.

3. *Implicit Meaning.* "The film is now assumed to 'speak indirectly.' . . . Units of implicit meanings are commonly called 'themes,' though they may be identified as 'problems,' 'issues,' or 'questions'" (8).

4. *Repressed* or *Symptomatic Meaning.* The critic or viewer constructs meanings that the film "divulges 'involuntarily.' Moreover, such meanings are assumed to be at odds with referential,
explicit, and implicit ones. . . . Taken as individual expression, symptomatic meaning may be treated as the consequences of the artist's obsessions . . . Taken as part of a social dynamic, it may be traced to economic, political, or ideological processes . . . " (8-9).

Although the latter two types of meaning depend upon competence in the two former types, interpretation within film studies draws more from implicit and symptomatic types of meanings while ordinary comprehension (spectatorship) draws more from referential and explicit meanings. All of these categories of meaning Bordwell calls "functional and heuristic, not substantive. . . . they constitute distinctions with which perceivers approach film; they are assumptions which can generate hypotheses about films" (10).

Critics arrive at interpretations, I suggest, by using certain conventions of reasoning and language. Criticism is conventional in that broad sense identified by David Lewis: it creates regularities of behavior by coordinating the actions of agents who have expectations that common goals will be met. But critics do not obey stringent rules, like the ones that direct drivers to stop for a red light. Critical interpretation, it seems to me, chiefly consists of a "covert" or tacit conventionality. In such cases people are largely unaware of the conventions they obey. Imitation and habit lead agents to expect coordinated action from others but without any particular awareness of an underlying rule. (7)

Bordwell's rhetoric of interpretation raises our awareness of the terms by which we, as critics, compose our Briefs. Criticism, Bordwell argues, is built upon common inductive skills. What distinguishes critics from other spectators is their activity within an
institution, which follows a set of largely unacknowledged conventions.

From a social perspective, conventions can be seen as coordinating agents' patterns of action for the benefit of the goals of a group. To perform the role of film interpreter is to accept certain aims of the interpretive institution and to act in accordance with norms that enable those aims to be reached. Here again, goal-achieving strategies need not consist of theories in any rigorous sense. Indeed, if the critic is like an artisan, she will tend to "dwell within" the standard practices: abstract theoretical knowledge will fade into the background, tacit procedures will govern her inferences, and attention will focus on the minutiae of the task at hand. (7)

The critic's immediate "task at hand" is the equivalent of Baxandall's source of "secondary problems," the type of problems which Picasso faced as he painted each canvas. Bordwell describes the critic's secondary problems of ascribing meanings to a film, as involving four activities (once the film has been selected):

1. **Assume the most pertinent meanings to be either implicit or symptomatic or both** (41).

2. **Make salient one or more semantic fields.** "... (for example, thematic clusters, binary oppositions)" (41).

3. **Map the semantic fields onto the film at several levels by correlating textual units with semantic features.** "The cognitive skills of interpretation--building analogies, mental modeling, the hypothesizing of unity and pattern, picking out relevant passages--all come into play here" (41).

4. **Articulate an argument that demonstrates the novelty and validity of the interpretation** (41).
Bordwell calls these conventional patterns "schemata" and the rules of thumb by which these schemata are applied "heuristics." Critics use schemata differently but each critic's use of inference-making patterns is "governed by normalized traditions" (132). The critic's task is to select cues from a particular film, organize these cues into what Bordwell calls a "model film," and map a semantic field onto that model film. Each step in the process is governed by schemata and heuristics made available to the critic by the institution. For example, when selecting cues, the interpreter employs the following schemata: "The critical institution steers the interpreter away from trivia toward those zones which are taken to be (a) presumably effective in spectators' responses (either potential or actual), and (b) traditionally capable of bearing meaning" (132).

The institution trains the critics about which cues to select for interpretation: "the interpreter relies upon her or his training, study of exemplars, disputes with other critics, and other prior experiences to determine what cues should be selected" (133).

Two of the schemata Bordwell claims are basic to the repertoire of the interpretive film critic are the personification schema and the trajectory schema. In the personification schema, the critic assumes a "common-sense prototype of the person (as being a) putatively sane, mentally active and uncoerced adult" (152). The critic then maps these prototypical human traits onto aspects of the film. "The critic uses the schema to build up more or less 'personified' agents in, around, underneath, or behind the text. Such agents, once endowed with thoughts, feelings, actions, traits, and bodies, become capable of carrying semantic fields" (152).
Critics first of all personify the characters, who "talk, think, feel, and act" (155), and then they personify the filmmaker: "A personlike agent is posited, and external cues--here, aspects of the film--are taken to reveal perceptions, thoughts, feelings, decisions, communicative goals, and so on" (158). But critics also treat such non-human entities as style and narration as persons, by personifying a point-of-view or a narrator or the camera. The spectator can also be personified, as one who identifies with characters or the narrator or the "camera."

The other basic schema, the trajectory schema, Bordwell defines as follows:

This is Johnson and Lakoff's "source-path-goal" pattern, which presumes a starting point, a series of intermediate points, and a direction. The critic postulates the text will reveal a progression, one that not only organizes time and space but also mobilizes semantic fields in a sequential interplay. . . . The schema's prototype is the journey, a spatio-temporal progression that is easily grasped. It can be represented as a quest, an investigation, a maturation, and so on. (188)

The interpreter maps a semantic field, such as the trajectory schema and the personification schema, onto a model film, using it to select and organize cues found within the film. Bordwell argues that critics' use of these schemata make most film interpretation too predictable. Once the reader knows the semantic fields, the heuristics for selecting cues, and the heuristics for mapping the semantic fields onto the model film, any particular interpretation using these moves will likely yield very little new information.
Bordwell shifts between praise and blame for the interpreter's craft and for the institution that enables it. His praise: "The skilled critic finds a fresh analogy, produces an exemplar, or pulls off a powerful rhetorical effect. In all such cases, we see how creativity is enabled, not constrained, by institutional practices of language and reasoning" (40). His blame: "Even when a critic purports to produce an 'unconstrained' interpretation, he or she will not only use standard strategies but will very likely generate a highly routinized reading, rather as the improvising pianist will often fall back into the most banal tunes and chord progressions" (41). Bordwell's ambivalence is directed towards a fundamental condition inherent within all institutions: the need to ensure "sameness" as well as the need to produce novelty. We might call this condition the institution's need for continuity. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Invention, writes:

In order to survive, cultures must eliminate most of the new ideas their members produce. Cultures are conservative, and for good reason. No culture could assimilate all the novelty people produce without dissolving into chaos. . . . a culture could not survive long unless all of its members paid attention to at least a few of the same things. (41-2)

How, then, do cultures (film studies, for example) accept novelty while ensuring "sameness?" Csikszentmihalyi explains that a field, a group of "experts" responsible for recognizing and adopting valuable innovations into a domain, can affect the rate of novelty:

Fields can affect the rate of creativity in at least three ways. The first way is by being either reactive or proactive. A
reactive field does not solicit or stimulate novelty, while a proactive field does. . . . The second way for the field to influence the rate of novelty is by choosing either a narrow or a broad filter in the selection of novelty. Some fields are conservative and allow only a few new items to enter the domain at any given time. They reject most novelty and select only what they consider best. Others are more liberal in allowing new ideas into their domains, and as a result these change most rapidly. At the extremes, both strategies can be dangerous: It is possible to wreck a domain either by starving it of novelty or by admitting too much unassimilated novelty into it. Finally, fields can encourage novelty if they are well connected to the rest of the social system and are able to channel support into their own domain. (43-4)

Bordwell's point, that the institution charged with training film critics produces sameness, is inevitable within any institution, to some extent. Certainly, Csikszentmihalyi would argue, film studies can do more to encourage innovation, but some degree of redundancy is necessary to the survival of film studies. What seems redundant to Bordwell (the schemata and heuristics of interpretation) is bafflingly difficult to comprehend for the beginning film studies student. Until that student becomes familiar with semiotics, psychoanalytic theory, and the like, he or she will not be capable of bringing innovation to the domain. The "sameness" of film studies is what gives it coherence. Jazz musicians, like film studies students, likewise need to go through the process of learning the "banal tunes and chord progressions" before being able to innovate, and very few ever produce innovation at the level of Art Tatum or Thelonius Monk. "Sameness" is a sign that a domain has found a set of memes, or repeating elements, that allow it to function. Csikszentmihalyi writes, "The analogy to genes in the evolution of
culture are *memes*, or units of information that we must learn if culture is to continue. Languages, numbers, theories, songs, recipes, laws and values are all memes that we pass on to our children" (7). Perhaps Bordwell intends for us to ask whether our institutional practices are sufficient or insufficient for training critics in their craft. For Bordwell, "sufficiency" is defined as a method for testing truth claims. Criticism, by this standard, is insufficient since it is "probabilistic":

Critical logic is predominantly inductive because it is probabilistic. Interpreters work with pragmatic reasoning strategies that "characterize relations over general classes of object kinds, event relationships, and problem goals." These lie between the ultragenerality of deductive logic and the comparatively atomistic features of this or that content domain. Such reasoning procedures are not rules in the strict sense; they are rather probabilities arranged in default hierarchies, in which expectations hold good only if not disconfirmed by data. As with any inductive system, the perceiver is "set" for data that confirm rather than falsify the initial hypothesis (Hence critics' assiduity in seeking out evidence for an interpretive claim and their reluctance to find evidence that would disconfirm it.) (32-3)

Bordwell argues that any evidence cited by the film critic tends to support an existing hypothesis, rather than leading to the production of a new one. Most film criticism, he argues, produces little new information because of its sloppiness: "since interpretation is generally unconstrained by rules of formal demonstration, its inductive processes rely upon 'quick and dirty' corner-cutting rules of thumb . . . " (33). In *Post-Theory*, Bordwell argues for a more rigorous program which he calls "middle-level research:" "Closer to
traditional academic scholarship, this tendency has concentrated on in-depth research. This "middle-level" research asks questions that have both empirical and theoretical import" (Bordwell, *Post-Theory*, 27).

Middle-level research, according to Bordwell, is concerned with questions that are presumed to have verifiable answers, such as, "How . . . did economic forces and principles of management affect the institutions of film production, distribution, and exhibition?" (28). Bordwell contrasts middle-level research with what he calls "Grand Theory." Grand Theory is concerned with broader questions:

Subject-position theory and culturalism constitute Grand Theory. Each rests upon several substantive premises about the nature of society, history, mind, and meaning. Each of these premises can be traced back to nineteenth-century intellectual traditions. Concrete interpretations of films and filmic contexts are thought to flow from these Theories, instantiating the processes already provided for in the abstract doctrines. (27)

Bordwell complains that Grand Theory overreaches; it tries to answer questions for which there are no empirically verifiable answers and it relies on untested premises in "applying" theory to particular cases. Bordwell argues for greater rigor, which means limiting the scope and methods of investigations, but increasing the likelihood of producing verifiable information.

While Bordwell, in *Making Meaning*, claims he is producing a rhetoric of ordinary interpretive criticism in order to dismiss it as virtually useless, he manages to produce the most useful rhetoric for writing film criticism ever written. His failure to recognize that he
has in fact produced such a rhetoric is a significant blind spot in his work. I am not arguing that Bordwell's complaints about film criticism are without merit. Some of them, I think, have some merit. But his preciseness in describing the operations of criticism within film studies make his work enormously practical for my purposes.

**Explicatory and Symptomatic Criticism**

One of Bordwell's arguments, in particular, has relevance for my study of Sherman's critics: his analysis of the work critics perform on "oppositional" texts. Bordwell argues that critics who practice symptomatic kinds of interpretation tend to find only explicatory meanings (and not symptomatic meanings) in "oppositional" texts. Implicit readings give the "author" of a film the benefit of the doubt by seeking only to reveal the author's (presumably noble) intentions. An explicatory reading by a critic who normally does a symptomatic reading assumes that there are no involuntary messages to be found within the text. All three of the critical works about Sherman I have examined, the essays by Mulvey, Silverman, and Williamson, conform to Bordwell's description of how normally symptomatic critics treat "oppositional" texts; they argue in essence, "Here is the cure for society's ills . . . Here is my explanation of how it works." In other words, when critics who normally do symptomatic readings do an explicatory reading of a text, the critic becomes an *advocate* for the text. When interpreting "dominant" media, such as Hollywood films or advertising, these critics take the symptomatic approach: "Here are
the symptoms of the social disease and here is what these symptoms reveal about the dominant system of social relations and representations."

All three critics whose work I examine, Mulvey, Silverman, and Williamson, praise Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* and perform implicit readings (but not symptomatic readings) of the series. All three describe the series as performing healing procedures, seeing it as an "arts therapy" for a diseased society. Of this critical tendency, Bordwell writes:

... most interpretive schools have tacitly agreed to treat mainstream films symptomatically while assuming that some form of alternative cinema harbors only implicit meanings. ... The tendency of the symptomatic critic to switch into the explicatory mode is especially evident in the interpretation of avant-garde cinema since the mid-1970s. As the contradictory-text model gained supporters, critics could look to oppositional films as exemplifying that "other scene" repressed in classical cinema. ... This development suggested that the oppositional film, in laying bare the contradictions of dominant cinema, would not itself be conceived as harboring repressed meaning. ... Critics lauding alternative cinema have tended to impute to the filmmaker or the film a considerable awareness of textual operations. (101-2)

If there is a general disinclination to interpret the works of the avant-garde (or at least the avant-garde that the critic prefers) in symptomatic terms, that may be because the critic can treat these films as aspiring to the status of written theory or criticism. Like the critic's hermeneutics of suspicion, political modernist cinema is held to lay bare the repressed material hidden by dominant ideology. (102-3)

Mulvey sees Sherman's work enacting and then collapsing the fetish, which she believes is good since the fetish attempts to hide
trauma and thus history. Silverman sees Sherman's work exposing the impossibility of anyone ever becoming the "ideal imago;" her work permits an alternative to dominant ideology--"a productive distance from the mirror"--which enables a critique and reconstruction of identity away from patriarchal norms. Williamson argues that Sherman's work liberates women from an essentialist and imprisoning femininity. All of these readings are of the explication type. Bordwell presents the following example of explicatory criticism:

On a summer day, a suburban father looks out at the family lawn and says to his teen-aged son: "The grass is so tall I can hardly see the cat walking through it." The son construes this to mean: "Mow the lawn." This is an implicit meaning. In a similar way, the interpreter of a film may take referential or explicit meaning as only the point of departure for inferences about implicit meanings. That is, she or he explicates the film, just as the son might turn to his pal and explain, "That means Dad wants me to mow the lawn."

Explicatory criticism rests upon the belief that the principal goal of critical activity is to ascribe implicit meanings to films. (43)

Bordwell attributes the rise of explicatory criticism in film studies to two factors, the appearance of art films after World War II that required interpretation similar to that already being done in literary studies, and the "growing power of the idea of individual authorship" (44). "The art cinema and the 16mm 'personal' cinema celebrated the director as the creative source of meaning; it became natural of think of the director's output as an oeuvre, a repetition and enrichment of characteristic themes and stylistic choices" (44).
These factors led critics to take a sympathetic approach to films that they liked (when the films conformed to their ideas of "art" or of "critique"). In contrast, critics tended to perform symptomatic criticisms on films they didn't like, films that were considered ideologically or aesthetically suspect.

Bordwell explains symptomatic criticism with this metaphor:

On a summer day, a father looks out at the family lawn and says to his teen-aged son: "The grass is so tall I can hardly see the cat walking through it." The son slopes off to mow the lawn, but the interchange has been witnessed by a team of live-in social scientists, and they interpret the father's remarks in various ways. One sees it as typical of an American household's rituals of power and negotiation. Another observer construes the remark as revealing a characteristic bourgeois concern for appearances and a pride in private property. Yet another, perhaps having had some training in the humanities, insists that the father envies the son's sexual proficiency and that the feline image constitutes a fantasy that unwittingly symbolizes (a) the father's identification with a predator; (b) his desire for liberation from his stifling life; (c) his fears of castration (the cat in question has been neutered): or (d) all of the above. (71)

Now if these observers were to propose their interpretations to the father, he might deny them with great vehemence, but this would not persuade the social scientists to repudiate their conclusions. They would reply that the meanings they ascribed to the remark were involuntary, concealed by a referential meaning (a report on the height of the grass) and an implicit meaning (the order to mow the lawn). The social scientists have constructed a set of symptomatic meanings, and these cannot be demolished by the father's protest. Whether the sources of meaning are intrapsychic or broadly cultural, they lie outside the conscious control of the individual who produces the utterance. We are now practicing a "hermeneutics of suspicion," a scholarly debunking, a strategy that sees apparently innocent interactions as masking unflattering impulses. (71-2)
Critics employing the symptomatic approach look for "incompatibility between the film's explicit moral and what emerges as a cultural symptom" (75). In other words, the symptomatic approach is oriented towards finding signs of ideological abuse, or instances that prove a particular film's ideological "message" is not what it appears to be. Bordwell cites an example of this approach in Wolfenstein and Leites' article on No Way Out (1950), "a liberal social-problem film" (74). In this film, a racist wrongly accuses a black doctor of malpractice in the death of a white patient. The film's explicit message, that blacks are innocent victims of white hatred, is contradicted by certain scenes. Bordwell writes:

The authors [Wolfenstein and Leites] emphasize the doctor's lack of confidence, the extent to which he imposes on the whites who come to his defense, and the sacrilege associated with the autopsy of a white man. In addition, a pattern of iconography associates blacks with comedy, and a climactic scene of violence includes the image of a screaming woman confronted by a band of black men. Wolfenstein and Leites conclude:

There is of course no doubt of the good intentions of the makers of this film. But in order to show how wrong race hatred is, the filmmakers had to create a plot and characters, and elaborate them in detailed images; here their fantasies from a less conscious level come to the surface: the Negro becomes a terrible burden that we must carry on our backs; a sacrifice of white corpses is required for his preservation; the image of the violated white woman forces its way to the screen; and so on. There is an effort to deny these unacknowledged nightmares about the Negro by locating them in an exceptional, pathological character, but this attempt at denial remains, at bottom, ineffectual. The very title of the film, extremely puzzling in terms of the plot, expresses the basic ambiguity; though the Negro-hater
is supposed to be defeated and the falsely accused Negro saved and vindicated, the title seems to state a deeper belief and draw a contrary "moral"; there is no way out. (74-5)

The critic who performs a symptomatic reading is, in essence, warning people not to be fooled by appearances; the true (yet disguised) intentions of a text, its "repressed meanings," are, according to these critics, apparent if you know how to look for them. Bordwell describes how Lacanian criticism, such as Silverman's, functions within feminist criticism when applied to an example of dominant media:

By combining the psychoanalytic story with Laura Mulvey's discussion of the woman as source of visual pleasure and castration anxiety, symptomatic critics have produced a comprehensive and flexible pattern. The heuristic goes roughly like this: Take male characters to be functioning as father figures or undergoing the Oedipal trajectory. Take female characters to be playing the role of mother or as posing a castration threat. Then trace the ways in which (1) the male either (a) succeeds his father or (b) loses his identity; and (2) the woman is either (a) transformed into a fetish for male desire, (b) eliminated from the text, or (c) transported into a realm beyond patriarchal definition. (198)

Symptomatic criticism is guided by Freudian psychoanalysis; thus the guiding metaphor for symptomatic criticism is the dream.

[Barbara] Deming, in a 1944 article, posits that "a film is multivocal" and urges that the analyst treat films as both syndromes--that is, significant constellations of symptoms--and dreams "censored" by the overt morality of the producers and their public. In Running Away From Myself, she asserts that the Hollywood film presents, in veiled form, what the audience wants to escape from, in the manner of a dream. (76)
Symptomatic critics focus on messages produced by the unconscious of the filmmaker or the culture in which the filmmaker works. By contrast, critics who perform explicatory readings alert people to a message that originates from intentional purposes of the filmmaker or the culture. They urge the audience not to miss the key message the audience was intended to "get." Mulvey, Silverman, and Williamson, in praising Sherman, assume Sherman's work critiques dominant media. In other words, they believe Sherman's work reveals the "truth" about dominant media. It's symptomatic of these writers that they impose a "truth" model on Sherman's work; "Truth" is the goal of a hermeneutic project--"the Hermeneutic code [is] drive[n] to reduce enigmas to truth" (Ulmer, 106)--not of Sherman's heuretic project. The critics' need to treat Sherman's work as a critique of dominant media reveals an apparatus bias; critique is part of the apparatus of alphabetic literacy (the culture of the critics) and not necessarily part of the apparatus of the visual artist. Critique functions, presumably, outside of its object of study (in this case, pop culture) and tries to counter its damaging effects. In contrast to these critics I argue that Sherman's work, while it may pose a critical challenge to dominant media, is also a type of "electronic writing;" it is "inside" media and therefore cannot be understood solely as critique in its literate sense.

I will present a historical account of the "literacy bias" within contemporary criticism, but first I will present Bordwell's history of critical interpretation. His explanation of the origin and development of interpretation illustrates how symptomatic readings split from the
established practices of explicatory readings. Pre-Socratic writers found implicit meanings, mainly allegorical meanings (or *hyponoia*—"under-meanings") in the texts of Homer and others. Plato, however, opposed allegory, favoring texts that offered explicit meanings.

For Plato, . . . implicit meanings could not redeem poetry: "A child is not able to judge which [works] have hidden meanings and which do not." Therefore, Plato argued, only those works with accurate and morally correct meanings (specifically, of referential and explicit sorts) ought to be produced in the Republic. (13)

In more recent times, interpretation found its home in the humanities, but it was adapted to fit. Modern hermeneutics as it is practiced within the academy has its roots in Schliermacher:

F.D.E. Schliermacher revised the philological tradition by shifting the emphasis from textual features to the psychological process of comprehension conceived as an identification with the author. In founding hermeneutics as "the art of understanding," Schliermacher took it out of the provinces of law, linguistics, and religion and made it a central domain of the human sciences. . . (15)

Later, Freud proposed a more radical method of interpretation "by demonstrating the force of repressed meaning. Explicit or implicit meaning could be a decoy" (16).

Freudian psychoanalysis posits not discreet layers to be peeled away but a dynamic struggle between "rational" pressures and the upswelling of more primal forces. Worked on by the unconscious, repressed wishes and memories return in cryptic and highly mediated forms, drawing on all the resources of
figurative language and visual symbolism in order to find a compromised, and compromising, expression. (16)

Freud's method has become central to the humanities: "Now more than ever, scholars take the construction of implicit and symptomatic meanings to be central to understanding the arts and the human sciences" (17).

When film studies became an academic discipline, it entered the humanities, rather than journalism or sociology.

... the growth of film studies attests to the powerful role of literature departments in transmitting interpretive values and skills. Academic humanism's omnivorous appetite for interpretation rendered cinema a plausible "text." ... Film could be studied from all the critical perspectives that could be mobilized around a poem. The liberal pluralism that absorbed film studies (admittedly not without friction) would also eventually accommodated black and ethnic studies, women's studies, and literary theory by adding departmental units--areas, programs, courses--that brought in new interpretation-based subjects and methodologies. (17-8)

Interpretation within film studies, however, is not "an assortment of diverse practices." Rather, Bordwell argues, "social factors shape not only the interpretive outcome but the very notion of what shall count as an illuminating essay or a powerful theoretical demonstration. The institution sets the goals" (18).
A Grammatology of Critique

Bordwell's analysis of film criticism and its relation to cinema mirrors Baxandall's analysis of Kahnweiler's criticism and its relation to Picasso's cubist paintings. In both cases, we are faced with a relation between alphabetic text and visual images—different media, different goals, different institutions. The visual artist "performs" a particular problem; its elements become embodied in pictorial details. The critic reflects, drawing abstract principles from the details present in the images. In the case of Sherman and her critics, we can see this division at work. Sherman performs fetishism, embodying it in her images. Sherman's critics, such as Laura Mulvey, explicate fetishism (and warn of its effects).

With hypertext, we face a hybrid medium, one that combines the features of alphabetic writing and visual art. The challenge of combining these two traditions into a coherent pedagogy requires that we locate criticism within a grammatological framework, in other words, within the history of writing. Modern criticism's fundamental components could not have developed without the invention of alphabetic writing. The critics' Charge comes from a literate culture; a non-literate culture does not say to its members, "do critique!" Critique depends upon a sense of "distance" between the observer and the object, a distance made possible by the technology of alphabetic writing. Eric Havelock described how the invention of alphabetic writing and its adoption within ancient Greece marked a break from the oral world:
The acoustic medium, being incapable of visualization, did not achieve recognition as a phenomenon wholly separable from the person who used it. But in the alphabetized document the medium became objectified. There it was, reproduced perfectly in the alphabet, not a partial image but the whole of it, no longer just a function of "me" the speaker but a document with an independent existence.

This existence, as it began to attract attention, invited examination of itself. So emerged, in the speculations of the sophists and Plato, as they wrote about what they were writing, conceptions of how this written thing behaved, of its "parts of speech," its "grammar" (itself a word which defines language as it is written). The term logos, richly ambivalent, referring to discourse as spoken and as written (argument versus treatise) and also to the mental operation (the reasoning power) required to produce it, came into its own, symbolizing the new prosaic and literate discourse (albeit still enjoying a necessary partnership with spoken dialectic). A distinction slowly formed which identified the uttered epos of orally preserved speech as something different from logos and (to the philosophers) inferior to it. Concomitantly, the feeling for spoken tongue as a stream flowing (as in Hesiod) was replaced by a vision of a fixed row of letters, and the single word as written, separated from the flow of the utterance that contained it, gained recognition as a separate "thing." (112-3)

No such thing as critique (at least in our sense of the term) exists in purely oral cultures. Once people in classical Greece accepted the notion of writing as a separate "thing," knowledge took a revolutionary step; not only writing but any subject could be commented upon, categorized, and analyzed with enormous precision and power. Another consequence of writing (and a key component of critique) was the discovery of contradiction and hypocrisy in others' words and deeds. Oral cultures did not recognize these ideas. In Havelock's description of Greek classic literature, which he calls
"oral literature" (since, as he argues, the works of "Homer" were versions of oral performances, transcribed prior to the moment when alphabetic writing permanently altered human consciousness), he describes a lack of "abstract principles" which are necessary to critique:

The absence of any linguistic framework for the statement of abstract principle confers on the high classic tongue a curious and enviable directness, an absence of hypocrisy. The articulation of orally remembered speech has the continual effect of calling a spade a spade rather than an implement designed for excavation. The speech will praise or blame but not in terms of moral approval and moral disapproval based on abstract and manufactured principles. A character in Greek drama does not theorize himself out of an unpleasant situation. He walks into it with motives that are specific and, if he has to, later accepts it when he recognizes what has actually happened. (94-5)

Abstract principles are essential to critique. We could not construct a syllogism without them, since major premises are in fact abstractions which propose a quality for a class of things. Many necessary conditions for critique, therefore—distance, abstraction, and the finding of contradiction—owe their existence to the changes in human consciousness wrought by alphabetic writing. Bordwell's brief history of interpretation demonstrates the increasing power of critique as the techniques of writing were refined since the time of the pre-Socratics.

We now turn to the works of Sherman's critics, works which represent powerful abstract thinking. I will compare and contrast
two examples of critical writing about Sherman's work; Judith Williamson's "Images of 'Woman'--The Photographs of Cindy Sherman" and Kaja Silverman's "The Screen" from The Threshold of the Visible World. Williamson's essay addresses Sherman's work with minimal reference to theory. Silverman's chapter is, by contrast, highly theoretical.

Case Study: Judith Williamson

In 1983, Judith Williamson published "Images of 'Woman'--The Photographs of Cindy Sherman." In this essay, Williamson argues that when we choose our clothing in the morning, we choose from a variety of identities. Anyone who assumes that clothing equals identity, however, is mistaken; appearance does not guarantee identity nor does it guarantee how a person might behave in a given situation. A woman who dresses as a vamp is not necessarily a vamp. Cindy Sherman's work demonstrates this gap between appearance and identity; by showing herself as a variety of appearances, she presents multiple surfaces of 'woman' at once. Since Sherman cannot be all of the identities she portrays, she reflects the stereotypes of identity back to the beholder who is responsible for them; Sherman leads the viewer to construct the elision of image and identity and then she undermines this elision by presenting a kaleidoscope of fragmentary identities. Williamson notes that the characters in Sherman's photographs happen to be played by Sherman, but anyone could play a similar game of dress-up. The fact that all the women are played by one person, Sherman
herself, indicates that the types they represent are non-essential; they exist in the culture and in our heads as organizing schema but they do not define actual people.

Williamson points out that the photographic image is both a recording of a material thing, a body, and a representation of an idea. Sherman's images suggest that the woman embodies a femininity type, when in fact the image embodies the feminine type. Williamson writes, "at that moment when you recognize the picture, your reading is the picture" (103). Since the stereotypes of femininity necessary to "get" the picture are in viewers' heads, women need not buy these images as their true selves.

Femininity is multiple, fractured, and yet each of its infinite surfaces gives the illusion of depth and wholeness. Realising this means that we as women don't have to get trapped trying to 'be' the depth behind a surface, and men just might bang their heads against it and stop believing in that reflected space. (106)

For Williamson, Sherman's work investigates the relation "between women and meaningfulness" (104). It illuminates the process of reading pop culture images, the way we construct a story, identity, and film styles from props, and the other signifiers in film images.

Sherman's work, according to Williamson, acts as a corrective to dominant cinema, which treats women as passive "thermometers" of emotion. By showing reaction shots of women's emotional expressions, dominant cinema cues the viewer to read the intended emotional response. When we see the imprint of emotion on the
woman, it "seems to constitute femininity" (104). Since women in Hollywood films react instead of act, Williamson argues, they are read as passive instead of active. Williamson points out, however, that Sherman's characters react to an unseen event; therefore the meaning of their reactions is cut loose from a narrative. Sherman activates our desire to see women as emotional thermometers but then refuses to let us see what they're reacting to. Sherman's women also display emotions of fear, vulnerability, suspicion, anxiety, and uncertainty: emotions that we typically read as "feminine." The stills demonstrate how feminine vulnerability becomes eroticized, as in Hitchcock's blondes or Godard's Anna Karina or women in horror films.

Some critics, Williamson complains, try to find the 'true' Sherman, indulging in fantasies and wishing to be like ideal types. But Williamson asks how anyone can really know her from the photographs. Sherman is an artist, in control of her work, and is thus different from the characters she portrays. The characters are frightened, vulnerable, uncertain, while "Sherman is sharp, controlled, intelligent, witty." There's a dialectic between the work itself and the femininity Sherman exposes through the work: the work is a biting comment on that femininity. You cannot find the 'real' Sherman in her work, but the drive to find her identity fascinates Williamson.

Williamson's refusal to see the film stills as exhibiting symptoms of "Sherman" (other than her intelligence and wit) marks her insistence on the explicatory approach to Sherman's work. Bordwell mentions that each critic must select from a set of
The immediate task Williamson faces in interpreting Sherman's work presents her with "secondary problems." Of the four activities the critic may use to address these problems, Williamson uses the following strategies (as described by Bordwell):

1. **Assume the most pertinent meanings to be either implicit or symptomatic or both.**

As mentioned above, Williamson does an explicatory reading of Sherman's work, but a symptomatic reading of critics with whom she disagrees, arguing that they try to essentialize Sherman and thus essentialize women in general. Bordwell argues that the critic does not need to defend the choice of an implicit or symptomatic interpretation, nor does he or she have to defend either approach "at a philosophical level:" "What counts is that they help produce an interpretation. The skilled interpreter knows that those notions, inconsistent or approximate as they may be, work" (105).

2. **Make salient one or more semantic fields.** "... (for example, thematic clusters, binary oppositions)" (41).

Williamson employs binary oppositions in her interpretation of Sherman's work. Some of the binary oppositions she invokes are male/female, active/passive, appearance/identity, surface/depth, the 'real'/disguise. Williamson does not agree that all of these oppositions underlie reality, but she does mobilize them in one way or another in her interpretation of Sherman's work.

3. **Map the semantic fields onto the film at several levels by correlating textual units with semantic features.** "The cognitive skills of interpretation--building analogies, mental modeling, the
hypothesizing of unity and pattern, picking out relevant passages—all come into play here" (41).

We can think of mapping semantic fields as finding a "theme" or thematic cluster which reasonably fits the work under consideration. One of the semantic field Williamson maps onto Sherman's work is the theme of reflexivity. Bordwell calls reflexivity "the most currently powerful semantic field shared by all schools of criticism . . . " (111). A critic who maps reflexivity onto a film argues that the film is somehow about film. "On can go further," Bordwell writes, "to suggest that, say, the film is implicitly or symptomatically reflexive" (112). Bordwell lists some of the arguments critics can make about a film using the reflexivity theme. A critic can argue that a film is about:

Attributes of the film industry
Attributes of film technology
Attributes of film history
Attributes of the role of the filmmaker
Attributes of the film screening situation
Attributes of the film spectator
Attributes of doctrines or theories concerning cinema (113-4)

Williamson argues that Sherman's work is about the film industry (Sherman's work shows how the film industry uses women as passive thermometers of emotion), film technology (Sherman's work is about the photographic image as surface), the role of the filmmaker (Sherman's work is about the difference between herself
as artist [active], and the characters she plays [passive]), and the role of the spectator (Sherman's work reflects the stereotypes of femininity back to the viewer, where they belong).

4. **Articulate an argument that demonstrates the novelty and validity of the interpretation** (41).

Williamson addresses the Charge of producing novelty by arguing that other critics have missed the point of Sherman's work. Other critics try to read Sherman's work as being a reflection of her 'real' fantasies, rather than as being about the things I listed above in number 3. Williamson argues for the validity of her case by pointing to our experiences in daily life--Sherman's dressing-up and role playing is not essentially different from what we do every day when we choose our clothes in the morning.

Bordwell points out that some critics, such as R.S. Crane and Richard Levin, have argued against the use of semantic fields within interpretation. Their point is that anyone can map any semantic field onto any work; semantic fields tend to be so general that they are useless. But Bordwell disagrees. Semantic fields are useful abstractions, he argues, because we need them in order to build meaning beyond "the concreteness of referential meanings" (127). Additionally, the same fields we use in interpreting a text may be part of the explicit message of the text. Finally, Bordwell argues that some semantic fields may be ingrained in the culture and are therefore the grounds on which anyone within that culture makes meaning. I would add that a critic can address the Charge posed to him or her within Film Studies by mapping semantic fields. Bordwell
only objects to the use of semantic fields when they're used indiscriminately and in banal ways (128).

**Case Study: Kaja Silverman**

Kaja Silverman argues that Sherman's characters (though not Sherman herself), through their poses, exhibit an "unfulfilled aspiration to be 'photographed' in a particular way." (205) The characters try to exert control over their representations by emulating ideal types, but photographic elements beyond their control prevent them from being seen in the way they desire to be seen.

Silverman's essay, perhaps the most difficult of the two under consideration, draws upon Lacan's theory of the mirror, the screen and the gaze to interpret Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*. The difficulty of Silverman's writing, I believe, arises because of her refusal to stick to any one definition of a particular term. She uses the term "mirror" to mean sometimes a literal mirror, sometimes a metaphorical mirror (like society "reflecting" an image of the self back to an individual), sometimes something like "dominant ideology," and sometimes Lacan's and/or Wallon's "mirror stage."

In Lacan's and Wallon's account of the mirror stage, the child projects an imaginary sense of "wholeness" out of disparate "parts" when first apprehending his or her reflection in the mirror; "the mirror reflection resembles the child, and attests to the child's simultaneous spatial contiguity" (19). Yet the child relies additionally upon "an external representation" or "screen" in order to
yield "his or her visual identity" (18). What is at first the mother's look of approval ("Yes, that's you!"), becomes "an 'unapprehensible' and unlocalizable gaze, which for over 150 years now has found its most influential metaphor in the camera" (18).

Silverman asks, " . . . what does it mean for a subject to invite the camera/gaze to apprehend him or her in a pregiven form? Through what mechanisms or strategies does the subject offer him- or herself as a 'photograph'?'" (202). Her answer focuses on the "pose" as a form pregiven to photography. The pose, she argues, is a type of freezing in anticipation of the photograph's frozen inscription; the pose therefore assimilates "corporeality to the image." According to Silverman, the pose is photographic in nature; "in addition to being imitative of a preexisting image or visual trope, it is imitative of photography itself" (202). Roland Barthes would disagree with Silverman on this point. In "The Photographic Message," Barthes writes:

A 'historical grammar' of iconographic connotation ought . . . to look for its material in painting, theater, associations of ideas, stock metaphors, etc., that is to say, precisely in 'culture.' As has been said, pose is not a specifically photographic procedure but it is difficult not to mention it insofar as it derives its effect from the analogical principle at the basis of the photograph. (22)

For Barthes, a grammar of the pose pre-dates photography; it was a necessary precondition for painting, theater, and so on. Whether or not the pose is strictly photographic, it is, according to Silverman, the most important connotation procedure in photography; its effects can be felt in everyday situations. The
influence of the pose, Silverman argues, radiates outwards, transforming everything around the body into an imaginary photograph; the pose is in effect a type of "costume" because it is "worn" by the body. While the pose is more resonant in photography than framing, mise-en-scene, costume, or lighting, these elements can either exist in congruity with the pose or help to create a different picture. Like Barthes, Silverman argues that the pose transforms the self but does not control apprehension by others. Like Bourdieu, Silverman argues that the pose unconsciously complies with photographic stereotypes. Since posing represents an attempt to be looked at in a flattering way, the subject posing is obliged to make some reference to the image-repertoire. The subject who poses wants to be ratified as being an ideal type from within the image-repertoire. Like Lacan, Silverman argues that the subject is not in control of the photographic transaction.

Lacan sharply differentiates the gaze from the subject's look, conferring visual authority not on the look but on the gaze. He thereby suggests that what is determined for each of us is not how we see or would like to see ourselves, but how we are perceived by the cultural gaze. In the diagrams he uses to illustrate the field of vision, Lacan also places the screen at a distinct remove from the subject, thereby indicating that the screen exceeds the body "photographed" through it. All of this suggests that we cannot simply "choose" how we are seen. Nor can we in any simple way conjure a new screen into place. We can struggle at a collective level to transform the existing one. Alternatively, we can try at an individual level to substitute another image for the one through which we are conventionally seen, or, to deform or resemanticize the normative image. All three of these options imply a preliminary acknowledgment of both the exteriority and the cultural constructedness of the images through which the subject assumes a visual identity. (19)
Most subjects understand the ways in which photographic elements can conspire against them and thus they attempt some control over these elements, but economic restraints (among others) limit the effectiveness of their attempts. I would add that, by contrast to the ordinary individual, the Hollywood film industry has almost none of these restraints; a studio spends as much money as is necessary to realize the desired photographic elements.

Through the pose, the subject attempts to mimic familiar types; the pose is "the photographic imprinting of the body" (205), which is "not always apparent to the subject in question. . . . Perhaps most problematically, the pose may testify to a blind aspiration to approximate an image which represents a cultural ideal, without any thought as to what that ideal implies" (205). Silverman argues that although subjects seek to be apprehended through these visual ideals and thereby reaffirm them, subjects do not control apprehension even in the rare cases where compatibility with the photographic ideal is successful. Sherman's photographs, by demonstrating the character's unsuccessful attempts to be seen in flattering ways, raise questions about the functions of the pose.

Like Mulvey, Silverman is doing critique, warning people about the harmful effects of succumbing "blindly" to the dominant ideology. Silverman, unlike Mulvey, presents an explicit plan for political action by encouraging people to resist the power of photographic ideals. To facilitate this goal, she distinguishes between two types of activity the subject can exhibit before the camera: active (which takes the form of resistance to photographic ideals),
and passive (which succumbs to preexisting ideals about how to be photographed).

The subject adopts an active role vis-a-vis the camera/gaze only insofar as he or she resists imaginary capture by the images through which he or she is involuntarily "photographed," and is consequently in a position to work transformatively with and upon them. However, remaining at a productive distance from the mirror is almost impossible when one simultaneously offers oneself to the camera/gaze in the guise of an ideal image, and has that self-identification "photographically" ratified. (206)

Silverman's political program encourages active resistance, both at the personal and the collective level, to the "conventional images" which define our identities. Such resistance is difficult to mobilize because the rewards for identifying with conventional images is so great.

I have suggested that the jubilation about which Lacan writes in "The Mirror Stage" occurs when the sensational body is imaginarily conflated with an idealizing image, a conflation which requires the support of the cultural gaze. Although this jubilation is always fleeting, since no one can in fact approximate the ideal, the struggle to attain it can be sustained over a lifetime. The aspiration to wholeness and unity not only has tragic personal consequences, but also calamitous social effects, since it represents one of the most important psychic manifestations of "difference." (26-7)

Additionally, Silverman argues, idealizing images disenfranchise some members of society; some "subjects have cultural access to an idealizing imago" while others are subjected to "a deidealizing identification" (16-7). Certain groups [Silverman
suggests blacks and the homeless] are foreclosed from "specular ideality." The idealization of one group, she claims, always implies the deidealization of another group because attempts to match self-identity with ideality requires "the murderous repudiation of alterity" (206). In order to thwart the operations of ideality, we must, according to Silverman, adopt "an active role vis-à-vis the camera/gaze" (206), which will, according to Silverman, disrupt ideality. An active role that would disrupt ideality requires "identification at a distance" (206). This "identification at a distance" may be difficult to achieve because, in the beginning of the book, Silverman's describes the term "distance" as being many things.

"Distance" . . . would seem to necessitate a foregrounding of the frame separating an image from the world of objects, and the marking of it as a representation. It would seem to require, in other words, the hyperbolization of the fourth wall. "Distance" would also seem to entail the preservation or reconstitution of the context specific to an image. Finally, "distance" would seem to be part of the viewing experience of an aesthetic text when that text focuses on what falls outside the purview of both the "mirror" and the dominant coordinates of the cultural screen--on what is "strange" or "unfamiliar." The function of all of these discursive strategies is to mark the otherness or alterity of the image with respect not only to normative representation, but also to the viewer, and to thwart the drive toward possession. Through them, the viewer apprehends the image precisely in the guise of the "not me." (99)

Distance seems to be an attribute of a reading practice, a type of research, and an effect of a particular type of text. The viewer, it seems, is responsible for establishing this distance. But there's more we must do, Silverman argues, in order to attain "an active role vis-à-vis the camera/gaze." (206)
Adopting an active position in the field of vision entails, as well, a constant disruptive and transformative labor at the site of ideality. Such an effort requires the disjunction of the operations of idealization from both the self and the cultural ideal, as well as the subsequent identification at a distance with the newly and provisionally irradiated bodies . . . However, it requires, as well, the exposure of our passionate and limitless desire to be the ideal, and, since that desire can never be definitely abolished, its continual deconstruction, and displacement. Once again, I would maintain that this is an ethical imperative (and as such is a necessary impossibility) at the level of individual conscious subjectivity, and as a political imperative at the level of representational practice. (206)

Everyone, Silverman argues, is responsible for the gaze because: " . . . the screen or cultural image-repertoire inhabits each of us, much as language does" (221). In order to reverse the ill effects of the unflattering camera/gaze, Silverman recommends that the viewing eye find an alternative to accepting the "given-to-be-seen" by "occupying a viewing position other than that assigned in advance, and, so, of apprehending its object under radically different terms" (223). Silverman urges people to assume responsibility for the gaze; " . . . although the look is not the gaze, we must collectively assume at least partial responsibility for the terms under which the latter 'photographs' the world" (221).

Silverman believes that Cindy Sherman's work is carrying out the political program she advocates. Sherman's stills show "that we conventionally offer ourselves to the gaze in the form of an imaginary photograph" (206). They also show that despite our aspirations to conform to cultural ideals, "the camera/gaze is not often complicit with that aspiration" (206-7). Silverman agrees with
critic Peter Schjeldahl that there is "an absence of any reassuring, campy wink or nudge' in these images" (224). We are not invited to make fun of the characters for their aspirations or their failures, Silverman posits. Instead, Silverman argues, we're encouraged to identify with the protagonists. We are not encouraged to identify with their "ideal imagos," but "rather with the women themselves, in all their manifest distance from the mirror . . . " (224). This argument puts Silverman's argument in opposition to Williamson's. Williamson argues that there is no essential 'woman' there. Silverman says we can see the 'real' woman through the stereotypes; " . . . it is because the protagonists of the Untitled Film Stills are shown to fall so far short of approximating their ideal imagos that we identify with them" (224). By viewing Sherman's images, Silverman argues, we recognize in ourselves "something we would normally abject as 'other'" (224). And we therefore recognize "the abyss that separates us and will always separate us from ideality" (224).

In her discussion of the pose, Silverman argues that, as a part of the profilmic event, it draws on the language of the still. "The pose indicates her [Sherman's character's] desire to be seen in a particular, generally flattering way, by a real or imaginary look . . . symbolic of the camera/gaze" (208). Silverman makes her case through an analysis of film still #2. In her analysis, Silverman divides the character's body into separate zones, each of which she maps according to the schemata she's established. In still #2, we see a woman wearing a towel, her face reflected in a bathroom mirror. The face in the mirror, according to Silverman, is "clearly" the look that the character wants to be seen. But the camera position does
not cooperate with this desire because it shows her body from the other side. The "frame" of the face, a "self-portrait," is in "striking contrast" to the rest of her body. "A bit chubby and undefined, the woman's body most definitely does not offer itself to be seen" (208). The body lacks "poised self-consciousness." She "attempts to cover it with a terry cloth towel" [actually, she DOES cover it!] because, according to Silverman, Sherman's character wants to keep it out of the picture; "There is good reason for this, since its parameters are incommensurate with the specular reflection" (208).

In each still she analyzes, Silverman finds a theoretical lesson. Still #3 isolates environmental factors as counterindicative of the wished-for photographic exchange. Sherman's character is a "vamp" in housewife surroundings looking presumably at a male. The cropping reminds us that "the camera/gaze does not always apprehend us from the vantage point to which we direct our self-imaging" (210). Still #34 shows that the pose isn't necessarily conscious or "active." The pose can "all too often" be "a passive compliance to a normative ideal" (210). In this still, Sherman's character strikes a "cheesecake" pose and holds a pulp novel. According to Silverman, the woman is dreaming herself into the mise-en-scene of the novel. "It is as if she would be immediately transported there if she could only succeed in being 'photographed' according to the logic of the pose" (211). Silverman adds that the woman is "unflatteringly" distended because of the camera angle; "her head is so small that it seems to belong to a completely other body. .. " (211).
Silverman also argues that Sherman's images demonstrate that the profilmic event (the scene before the camera) "solicits the camera/gaze" (207); it offers itself as a would-be photograph. Settings can apparently suffer the same fate as people, according to Silverman, if they are exposed to the unflattering gaze. In her analysis of still #50, Silverman argues that Sherman's character doesn't "fit" in the room. "The room seems almost to solicit the camera/gaze--to say, much like Callois' caprella: 'This is how I want to be seen'" (213). Here, Silverman personifies the setting as much as she has done the various characters. According to Silverman, the woman yearns for the sophistication indicated by the room, but the posing of her body interferes with this desire. "To state the matter rather more precisely, certain anxieties and half-conscious desires manifest themselves corporeally in a way which disrupts the intended effect" (213). Silverman points out that the lower half of Sherman's body is casually posed while the upper half is alert. Therefore, the character contradicts herself; "her aspiration to be photographed as the embodiment of sophistication" is frustrated (213). Silverman adds, "the room suffers the same fate as the woman. It also tries too hard to be 'modern' and 'cosmopolitan.' Indeed, its three ashtrays might be said to be the nonhuman equivalent of the woman's rigid torso . . . " (213).

Silverman employs several rhetorical strategies to support her reading of Sherman's work. She draws heavily on the authority of theorists such as Lacan and Wallon. She also claims Sherman's work illustrates the theories she proposes about the pose. Bordwell denounces this rhetorical strategy in his discussion of Lacan's
"Purloined Letter." "To make an interpretation a parable of a theory is not to undertake to establish the truth of the theory. Any doctrine, be it psychoanalysis or Scientology, can be illustrated by artworks" (6). I would argue that, for the purposes of teaching students how to write critically about images, establishing the "truth" about a particular theory is less important than producing powerful rhetorical effects. Whether the strategies of appealing to authority or claiming that a work "illustrates" a theory work or not depends upon the situation faced by the student-critic.

Silverman also argues for the universality of her interpretations of Sherman's work. She argues that her readings of the stills "have involved isolation of details in those photographs that activate certain, almost impossible to avoid meanings, meanings which often collide with a character's desire to be 'photographed' in a particular way . . . " (220). She admits, however, that "There are unquestionable ways in which my look has intervened here in idiosyncratic and transformative ways" (220), but she still maintains that " . . . the pictorial elements to which I have ascribed the opening up of an unflattering distance between the actual stills and the photographs Sherman's women solicit would generate the same meaning within any reader from the same culture" (220). By insisting that anyone from the same culture would be able to read Sherman's images the way she does, Silverman makes the case that her reading conforms to one of the guidelines of critical work. According to Bordwell, "the critical institution steers the interpreter away from trivia toward those zones which are taken to be
presumably effective in spectators' responses (either potential or actual)” (132).

Silverman discounts the notion that recognizing our distance from ideality implies aligning our values with lack and insufficiency, or with feelings of unpleasure and self-loathing. Although many of Sherman's later projects evoke unpleasure, the *Untitled Film Stills* have a different aesthetic according to Silverman; these photos "induct us into a new kind of pleasure" (225). This pleasure, Silverman posits, follows from an "improvisatory relation to the ideal--'improvisatory' in the sense that one grasps the latter as a series of finally unrealizable tropes, tropes which can only ever be provisionally activated through pose, costume, make-up, mise-en-scene, lighting and other fundamentally extrinsic 'props' (225). Silverman names this new relation to the ideal "the good enough." She writes that the stills "propose something like the principle of the 'good enough' over and against the binarisms 'sufficiency/insufficiency' or 'ideal/failure'" (225). Silverman borrows the "good enough" from D.W. Winnicott, who posits that the mother need not be ideal, only 'good enough.' The 'good enough' is all that is available to us, and "through it," we can "shak[e] a little stardust onto the otherwise quotidian expanse of human existence" (225). The woman in the kitchen in *Untitled Film Still #2* is a 'good enough' vamp. "... we impute value to her pose over and against those [quotidian] objects" (225) around her, such as the Ivory detergent and Morton's salt container.

Silverman argues that Sherman's images, as performances in the 'good enough' mode, are models for the ways in which the human
subject attempts "to control the terms under which he or she is apprehended by the gaze" (226). Silverman argues that in order to counter the negative effects of the gaze, we must perform the ideal in the 'good enough' mode and be apprehended in it as well.

In Silverman's conclusion, she recommends that we take action against the harmful effects of the gaze by projecting a "loving look" onto others. Silverman argues that those who have an unflattering look projected on them "depend for their psychic survival upon the loving look of their intimates . . . " (223). If the loving look of one person acts in concert with enough other loving looks, it can, according to Silverman, "reterritorialize the screen, bringing new elements into cultural prominence, and casting into darkness those which presently constitute normative representations" (223). Sherman's images, Silverman argues, "are so hyperbolically 'about' the gaze as camera, their solicitation of us to look again, differently, can perhaps best be understood as an invitation to 'rephotograph' the women in them through a different representational frame" (223). Sherman's work is, in Silverman's view, about photography and cinema--Silverman conforms to Bordwell's typology of reflexive criticism. Furthermore, Silverman argues that Sherman's photographs are "oppositional" in that they work to counter the effects of dominant cinema by soliciting a different type of look. Thus her reading of Sherman's Untitled Film Stills is of the explicationatory type. She ends with a plea that we endeavor to "see differently." (227)

The main difference, as I see it, between Silverman's rhetoric and Williamson's rhetoric is the critics' choice of arguments from
within the *inventio*. Williamson tends to make arguments by inference while Silverman tends to make arguments by appeals to authorities (such as Lacan). Williamson very rarely invokes authority as warrant for her claims. Bordwell explains these two types of rhetorical arguments as follows.

All the problem-solving processes I have brought out in previous chapters can operate enthymematically. When the critic personifies the camera or claims that a character's surroundings reveal a psychological condition, she is using an inferential procedure as a warrant for the conclusion. The rhetor typically makes certain interpretive moves seem logically inevitable by turning semantic fields into hidden meanings, schemata and heuristics into tacit premises, inferences into argumentative points and conclusions, and the model film into the film itself.

There are, however, widely used enthymemes that do not derive from cognitive discovery procedures. Chief among these is an appeal to authority. The rhetor can count on his audience to trust knowledgeable individuals, and the appeals to respected names and writings is basic to an institution's coherence and continuity. Thus the critic can drop names (Leavis, Lévi-Strauss, Laplanche) or metonymically invoke the massive authority of vast realms of knowledge ("according to Marxism" or "semiotics"). In self-consciously theoretical criticism, the authorities cited often stand outside the institution, and the credibility arises from a belief that they possess knowledge about matter larger and more weighty than cinema. That is, claims about cinema now depend upon truth-claims about wider realms--social power, the nature of language, the dynamics of the unconscious. (209)

Bordwell opposes the tendency among contemporary film critics to use appeals to authority rather than inferential arguments. He argues that this tendency has led to a type of "new scholasticism" within Film Studies (262). Instead of producing "lively, skeptical
debate," the strategies that once animated Film Studies "have
devolved into a practical criticism that claims theoretical terrain it
has never staked out, squeezes film after film into the same half-
dozen molds, and refuses to question its own procedures" (262).
Bordwell suggests that interpretation itself has become a dead end.

Bordwell suggests an alternative to interpretation within film
studies: poetics. He states that the poetician, like the interpreter,
also uses schemata, but differently.

... instead of treating schemata as devices for marking out
cues that can support abstract semantic fields, the poetician
can study them in their own right: to examine how the
personification schema allows the spectator to construct
character, how the grasping of setting relies upon special
routines, how the trajectory schema yields inferences about
causality, temporality, and parallel agents or actions. (271-2)

Bordwell uses the term "poetics" to describe the analysis of
both composition and comprehension. In composition, this means
discussing the ways in which films are structured, their effects, their
form and their style. A poetics of comprehension is one in which we
"can study the principles whereby viewers construct . . . meanings"
(271). "What are the inferential strategies that allow spectators to
identify a protagonist, grasp a camera movement as subjective, or
understand that one cut denotes an ellipse while another does not?"
(271).

A poetics, Bordwell argues, not only offers insight into the
procedures of film production and of spectatorship, it also offers a
way to understand the production and effects of criticism. [Properly
speaking, this would be called a "rhetoric," rhetoric being for
argument what poetics is for aesthetics. Bordwell tends to use the terms "rhetoric" and "poetics" interchangeably.} Bordwell's strategy is to argue that poetics is more useful than interpretation, though it is not clear where interpretation ends and poetics begin. An interpretation can be used to generate a poetics; also, it can be descriptive and it can describe the operations by which a text was constructed. An interpretation that helps us establish a set of instructions or guidelines for producing work in a particular genre can practically be called a "poetics." Furthermore, any poetics can be adapted to fit a new problem, such as the creation of an image/text genre for computerized writing. As students learn to become critical readers, they will gain the freedom to take what they want from interpretive criticism; to take what is useful for them.
CHAPTER 6
TEACHING WITH FILM STILLS

An Arts-Oriented Program of Research and Pedagogy

This chapter proposes a practical way to address three challenges facing the humanities: the shift to new media, a renewed interest in poetics within the academy, and a desire on the part of many teachers to involve students in research projects.

The humanities needs a program charged with inventing pedagogical genres in hypertext. I propose an arts-oriented program of research to meet this challenge. One way to begin such a program is to have students design new genres for these media. Student participation in the design of new genres has several pedagogical advantages: students do humanities research into the arts (by doing the arts); their motivation increases because the stakes of their work are higher; and projects of invention produce practical applications for the discipline.

An arts-oriented pedagogy requires a poetics, which according to Bordwell is "the study of how, in determinate circumstances, films [or texts in any media] are put together, serve specific functions, and achieve specific effects" (266-7). A poetics looks to the past and to the future; it helps us understand existing
works and also provides a framework for generating new works. A poetics functions either as a description of a genre or a set of guidelines for producing new works in a genre. I designed the poetics that follow for the purpose of conducting humanities research into photography and cinema. To produce my poetics, I adapted the poetics of Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* and Hollywood filmmaking.

In an arts-oriented project, we begin with an object of study. That object can be a narrative, poem, argument, film, photograph, hypertext, video, or work in other media. The class constructs a poetics from the work under consideration and adapts it to fit the problem and materials of the course. The students then generate new works from that poetics. The arts approach to research does not separate the object of study from commentary, nor does it separate the artist from the critic; it is a holistic approach to learning, drawing on interdisciplinary skills. In a class about Hollywood film, students do not produce a Hollywood film, but they do make a sample--a film still.

In the following Film Stills assignment, I present an example of arts-oriented pedagogy which I conducted in my undergraduate film studies class at the University of Florida in 1997, well before I began writing this dissertation. Therefore, this project can be understood as an initial step towards a more fully realized project, one that incorporates the critical strategies of Williamson, Mulvey, and Silverman as part of a work of hypertext.
A New Approach

An arts-oriented assignment produces the effects of argumentality and critique in an aesthetic and tactile way. Walter Benjamin encouraged such procedures, as a means of understanding, when contemplation alone fails: "The tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation" (240).

Let us put Benjamin's approach to the test by selecting a problem that occupies contemporary film theorists. We will then determine whether students can understand this problem by making art forms instead of writing treatises. The problem I've selected for this test concerns the legibility of photography. According to Dana Brand, "modern urban life provoked a crisis of legibility" (220) and photography and film played a complex role in this crisis. If we were to teach this topic in a traditional way, we would have students examine various photographs and films, read theory about them, and write a paper employing historical and textual analysis. The arts method, by contrast, would have students produce works in photography or film, making the media both the object of study and the means of the study. In my film studies class, I presented the following condensed history of photography and film from Robert Ray's chapter, "Snapshots: The Beginnings of Photography," in The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy, for the purpose of introducing
Ray explains how a crisis of legibility arose in the 19th century when newcomers arrived in major European cities, producing dense neighborhoods where people could not identify others' languages, origins, and professions. Anonymity (illegibility) was connected to the rise of crime, since people who felt anonymous in a crowd were less likely to be on their best behavior. Additionally, the inability to "read" the man in the street was itself threatening, since the criminal, whose identity was unknown, could easily escape discovery. New systems of classification (the physiognomies--a set of caricatures) appeared which promised to make legible the strange people inhabiting the crowded urban centers. These classification systems relied heavily on stereotypes; for example, a laborer has rough hands. Because of its ability to render detail precisely, photography, invented soon after the appearance of the physiognomies, promised to make the man in the crowd even more legible. Instead, photography, with perfect clarity, produced seemingly irrelevant, idiosyncratic, and accidental details that refused legibility in terms of the familiar (i.e. linguistic) codes.

Photographic studios enabled photographers to control many types of environmental problems. Among these were problems of lighting, climate and movement. Another benefit of the studio was that it allowed photographers to more easily codify their subject matter; photographers could eliminate "irrelevant" details from photographs for the sake of the coded message. When cinema arrived, the dispassionate qualities of the photographic image (the
equal clarity of the "irrelevant" and the "relevant") again proved troubling. Within a few years, cinema production moved to studios. Although cinematic conventions differed from those of portrait photography, cinema too adopted regular codes. Filmic characters matched the stereotyped figures of the stage, the circus, and vaudeville; villains wore black, had mustaches, and squinted, while damsels in distress had ribbons, petticoats, and long eyelashes. Familiar types of events--train robberies, chase scenes, seduction scenes--repeated from film to film. The arrival of sound in cinema meant that strict visual codes could be somewhat loosened, since information that was purely visual before could now be carried by sound; the villain now had an Italian accent and used gangster's slang.

The Hollywood film industry's tremendous growth was due largely to its success in achieving legibility. Hollywood aimed to attract the largest possible group of viewers by presenting film images that could be easily translated into the "master code" of classification--language. Boris Eikenbaum, an experimental filmmaker during the first phase of Soviet cinema, theorized that audiences accompany the images in cinema with a linguistic "inner speech" that connects the separate shots. Paul Willeman writes, "Without its (inner speech's) function of binding subject and text in sociality (some system of shared meaning produced by shared codes), no signification would be possible other than delirium" (64). For the Soviet propagandist filmmakers, the image and its linguistic formulation were to be as unambiguous as possible.
Roland Barthes proposed a way of perceiving photography that did not depend upon linguistic codes. In his essay, "The Third Meaning," Barthes describes this experience of perceiving photographs as being more like touching and apprehending texture than like translating images into a master code.

**Materials and Methods**

After presenting the overview above, I posed a question to the class--"What are the limits and capacities of photography to communicate a message unambiguously?" We did not answer this problem in the abstract; instead we addressed this problem by designing an arts-oriented project. The assignment took the form of a puzzle, "Create a film still and translate it into a written version of inner speech," which the students formulated into a set of instructions, or poetics, before they began work. The formulation of the poetics took the bulk of our time. The first revelation for students was that the assignment called for them to turn in a photograph as well as a piece of writing. The materials I assembled for this project include readings drawn from various discourses; knowledge in one realm gets applied to problems in another. These materials, listed below, are organized by the discourse from which they were drawn:

*theory:*

1. Barthes' three essays on photography from *Image, Music, Text*
2. Robert Ray's chapter "The Beginnings of Photography"

*art:*

1. Cindy Sherman's "Untitled Film Stills"

criticism:
1. "Images of 'Woman': Judith Williamson Introduces the Photography of Cindy Sherman"

entertainment:
1. John Ford's The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance
2. George Romero's Night of the Living Dead
3. Michael Curtiz' Casablanca
4. Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo

school:
1. Schatz's textbook Hollywood Genres
2. Bordwell and Thompson's chapters "Five/The Shot: Mise-en-scene" and "Six/The Shot: Cinematographic Properties" in Film Art: An Introduction

The design problems could not be solved by any one piece of these materials, but had to be extrapolated from all of them. The students worked in groups, each responsible for using a set of readings to add to our collective understanding of the assignment. The films listed above and Cindy Sherman's Untitled Film Stills constituted, to greater and lesser degrees, models for our own designs. Frame analysis highlighted the ways in which genre films, such as The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, Night of the Living Dead, and Casablanca organize visual information to convey elements of character, setting, and narrative. Hitchcock's Vertigo represented a counter-example; in that film, visual information is oblique, and
mystery about the status of characters and narrative pervades many of the individual frames. (Try making sense of the characters and action as Scottie [Jimmy Stewart] follows Madeleine [Kim Novak] around San Francisco. Who is she? What is her purpose in visiting these sites? The images do not reveal clear answers.)

In order to test photography's capacity and limits to transmit a message unambiguously, I added a stipulation to the assignment: "Your film stills are to be as legible as possible." Legibility, in this case, meant the ability of a viewer to infer a sequence or an entire narrative from a single photograph. We therefore looked to films in which visual codes consistently overdetermine meaning. Genre films were an obvious choice, since we could expect repetition of visual elements among films of a particular genre. Of course not all genres are visually coded; most comedy, for instance, is not identifiable by visual codes alone. But other genres, such as western, gangster, detective, musical, sci-fi, martial arts, horror and film noir, have repeating patterns of visual codes. We sought to identify these visual codes.

Additionally, we wanted to understand the degree to which these genres' visual codes govern viewers' readings of setting, character, situation, action, and mood. To help us understand the effect of these codes on viewers, we sought to use the most visually-coded genres and those visual elements that most consistently repeated within those genres. For this assignment, Cindy Sherman's Untitled Film Stills were not our best models, since many of her situations and actions seemed ambiguous. Some of her stills show a woman in close up, reacting to something outside the frame. These
"reaction shots" produce a vague sense of foreboding; we sense something threatening the woman but we don't know what it is. Sherman's audience can therefore produce too many inferences about the situation and action. Our assignment, producing unambiguous communication photographically, demanded that we try to limit viewers' tendency to produce inferences from our photographs; the ideal photograph for this assignment is one in which any number of viewers would produce the same inferences about it.

In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, character types conform to highly predictable patterns, established by earlier Westerns: the 'frontier anarchist' (Valance), the 'civilized outsider' (Stoddard), the 'progressive frontiersman' (Doniphon), and the virtuous woman, (Hallie), torn by her love for Stoddard and Doniphon. Each of these character types is represented by familiar visual codes typical of the character type (with the possible exception of the scenes in which Stoddard wears an apron)--Valance (black hat and vest, armband, gunbelt); Stoddard (a suit and a law book); Doniphon (white hat and scarf); Hallie (high-collar dress). These codes include the type of actor playing the role--Valance (Lee Marvin); Stoddard (Jimmy Stewart); Doniphon (John Wayne); and Hallie (Vera Miles)--each of whom plays similar types of characters in other films. The actions--stage coach robbery, showdown in a saloon, duel in the street--also conform to recognizable patterns drawn from other westerns. Many stills, if isolated from this film as a whole, would provide a great deal of information on which to base inferences about the other parts of the film. We could feel relatively
secure about our inferences knowing some general information about Westerns and the ways visual codes structure both the images and our understanding of them.

*Night of the Living Dead* is perhaps even more visually legible than *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. The film was made outside of Hollywood by a group of independent filmmakers, and despite the use of hand-held camera and grainy black-and-white untypical of Hollywood productions of the time, the film is hyper-legible by Hollywood standards. The genre, plot, and situations revolve around a single repeating conflict which is easy to represent visually--humans struggle to survive by barricading themselves against ghouls who try to eat them. Virtually any still from the film will supply this basic information.

Perhaps the most legible image from *Night of the Living Dead* is the shot of the humans trying to board up the windows in an abandoned house as the ghouls shove their arms through the cracks. This image is composed of the simplest elements and it works through metonymy. Metonymy has three forms: synecdoche is the substitution of a part for the whole (the "crown of England" refers to the monarch); an effect for a cause (smoke indicates fire); and adjacency (a character who glances offscreen implies the presence of a person or object beyond the frame). Filmmakers employ metonymy routinely, implying more than they show; the reasons for using metonymy are not merely economic--in many cases, audiences prefer it. In *Night of the Living Dead*, the army of ghouls is implied through a few ghoulish arms; the barricading of the house is implied by a few boards and nails. We don't need to *see* a whole army of
ghouls in order to read "army of ghouls"—in fact, the audience's understanding of the message is greater precisely because the audience supplies the missing information.

Night of the Living Dead's extraordinary commercial success (grossing over a hundred million dollars on a budget of about a hundred thousand dollars) can be attributed, in part, to its extreme legibility and also to its openness; since the story of humans besieged by ghouls could be read a number of ways, debates flourish about what the film means. Are the ghouls consumers? Nixonites? victims of the mass media? Indeterminacy, a certain degree of which is necessary to prevent total predictability and thus boredom, appears in Night of the Living Dead as allegory.

Most Hollywood filmmaking relies on a highly-structured, economical ratio of image to information; visual information is limited to the smallest number of signifiers necessary to convey the desired information to the widest possible audience. Most audiences will agree that a camel on a sand dune signifies "desert." Additional visual information can confuse things. Character introductions and shifts to new settings therefore represent challenges to filmmakers; the filmmaker (at least in most Hollywood productions) must "explain" the new character and setting as quickly and unambiguously as possible with a few well-chosen details. Such introductions are good places to search for strategies useful to our assignment.

In Casablanca, the film's protagonist, Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart), is introduced indirectly; we don't see his face, only Rick's midsection and a table with props. These props, a
champagne glass, a cigarette, a solo chess game, and his white dinner jacket, all suggest aspects of his personality and social position. We can play a game of substitution derived from Saussure's semiotics to test the signifying properties of these objects. My students practiced this game on the *Casablanca* still and then used it to help compose their film stills. Our *Casablanca* reading made use of a grid, with a set of choices running vertically and a set of combinations running horizontally. Those elements that appear in the film run across the top, with substitutions appearing underneath. These substitutions function along the paradigmatic axis; they are the lexical equivalent of word choices. The other axis, the syntagmatic, functions horizontally to link the props together, much like a sentence links groups of words together to make meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>champagne</th>
<th>cigarette</th>
<th>chess</th>
<th>white dinner jacket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beer</td>
<td>cigar</td>
<td>checkers</td>
<td>tuxedo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>milk</td>
<td>pipe</td>
<td>cards</td>
<td>uniform</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By imagining substitutions for the props, we can make inferences through negation. In other words, the meaning of the used choices is delimited by those choices that weren't used. For example, if Rick drank beer instead of champagne, we could infer that he was working class; if he drank milk, that he was a teetotaler. If he smoked a cigar, we might infer he was a boss or gangster; if he smoked a pipe, that he was an intellectual. If he played checkers, we might infer that he was childish; if cards, that he was a gambler. If he wore a tuxedo, we could infer he was a servant or waiter; if a
uniform, that he was a soldier. We can infer from the substitution game that he is not these things. The syntagmatic meaning of these props becomes clearer when we use the context of the film to help us infer their significance. To a greater or lesser degree, they all point to his intelligence and his independence; in a world where everyone has taken sides, fights or works for others, or leads others, Rick is neutral by choice.

The chapters from Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art* serve as practical guides for students to help them with the technical aspects of producing visually coded images. Any number of books and articles about producing photography and/or film could be used to supplement this material.

**The Assignment**

Movies are a world of fragments. -- Jean Luc Godard

The film stills produced by this assignment, like Sherman's film stills, are fragments from imaginary films, fragments of a whole that doesn't exist. The missing information connecting the fragment to this absent "whole" is supplied by viewers from a set of stock codes. Susan Sontag says of photographs that they are "anecdotal (except that the anecdote has been effaced)." Viewers' constructions of this "whole" from the fragments of a film indicates how categories pervade our thinking. To the degree that viewers' translations of film stills into inner speech resemble one another, we can posit the degree to which our conceptual maps are shared with others.
Assigning film stills can help film studies teachers address a whole range of problems occupying the discipline, such as identity, the relation of language to images, the shift from alphabetic literacy to the electronic, and Hollywood's system of codes. This assignment produces the effects of critique, yet it draws as much from aesthetic modes of working as from critique. Cindy Sherman's work, itself an appropriation of filmic stereotypes and codes, provides a model of how to address issues of identity and spectatorship in the photographic medium.

Over a four-week period, students, organized into groups, presented their proposals for solving the problems posed by the assignment, using the materials (essays, films and photographs) I assigned to them; they answered practical questions, such as "What is a 'film still'? What is 'inner speech'? How do I make a film still? How do I translate it into inner speech? what does this translation look like? what kind of writing is it?" The answers to these and other design-oriented questions are not known in advance. Since the assignment requires students to posit and design new aesthetic forms, their only requirement is to use the information in the class texts to address the terms of the assignment. In a design-oriented assignment such as this one, the arts texts--films and photographs--are just as important as the critical and theoretical texts. The pages below come from a hand-out I wrote for the class, drawing upon the ideas students had developed in their presentations.
Planning Your Film Still

Construct your film still the way a Hollywood filmmaker would; script it, using the following questions to guide you, before you start shooting film. For each number below, choose the signifieds (the message you intend the viewer to get) and the signifiers (the visual elements conveying the messages) you intend to produce from your film still. Stills work on the principles of suggestion and metonymy. You don't need to go to the Sahara to signify 'desert.' Sand and a palm tree will suffice. In other words, indicate which messages you want your audience to "get" and then how you intend to make that message 'legible:'

1. Select a Genre: Genre is a loosely-defined "master-code." Determining the genre will help you select the setting, character types, situation, and action. Genres include western, gangster, detective, musical, sci-fi, martial arts, horror and film noir.
   - signified: e.g. Western
   - signifiers: e.g. man in chaps and a cowboy hat, holding a Colt 45, pushing open a set of saloon doors

2. Setting: choose a setting from those made available by the genre. The more you control your location and keep the 'unreadable' parts of the world out, the better.
   - signified: e.g. saloon
   - signifiers: e.g. saloon doors, bar, tables, upright piano

3. Character types: Choose actors who fit the desired 'type.' What costumes will your actors wear? what props will they have?
what will they do (in terms of gestures and poses)? What position will they have in relation to each other and their surroundings?

- signifieds:
- signifiers:

4. **Situation:** Hollywood narratives center on a person struggling with a problem; the protagonist wants something and has to struggle against an antagonist to get it. Antagonists can be other people (villains), natural forces (tornadoes), or supernatural forces (monsters). Portraying tension and conflict visually will help people reconstruct a larger sequence from your film still.

- signified:
- signifiers:

5. **Action** *(proairetic):* chase, duel, seduction, robbery, departure, funeral, election, rendezvous.

- signified:
- signifiers:

6. **Style:** your picture has to look like it came from a *film*, which means that the visual style should be familiar and appropriate to whichever film style you've chosen; *Night of the Living Dead* is shot in grainy black and white with crazy camera angles and bizarre lighting to capture the 'horror film' aesthetic. Will your shot be a close up? medium shot? long shot? a high angle or low angle shot? high key or low key lighting? balanced or unbalanced composition? Remember that each choice you make affects the *connotations* and the *function* of the image. Which connotations do you wish to create? danger? hope? terror? Visual elements, when organized, will create a mood. Are you going to make the character large? small?
enclosed? Which function do you wish the still to play in the larger imaginary filmic sequence? Is it an establishing shot? reaction shot? will we look over a character's shoulder, identifying with that character's gaze? or look at the character(s)?

- signifieds:
- signifiers:

Sketch the composition you will use in the photo, including notes about lighting and any other technical details you need to work out. Most Hollywood directors have such sketches made before they shoot. The drawings don't have to be great art, just useful for blocking, etc. If you're unsure about your compositional abilities, you can work from an existing film still or drawing.

When you make your film still, remember to check your equipment: do you have film in the camera? is your light o.k.? Take several shots; you will have more to choose from and you may find that some worked far better than others.

When you plan your film still in writing, you will be operating at the level of general codes available in language (the word 'genre' is etymologically linked to the word 'general'). Find or create the specific particular details that will trigger those general codes in a viewer's mind. The process of making a film still looks like this:

general -------------------> specific
(codes/language) (details/images)

'Inner speech' is the process of making the film still in reverse. You will need to reconstruct the codes that you used to plan
your film still by moving *from* the particular details in the image *to* the language that makes sense of it. If you've prepared adequately to make your still, this process should be easy. The only problem is how best to represent this 'inner speech.' I leave it to you; it can be a narrative that includes a reading of the details in your still, or it can be an expository essay about the deciphering of your film still, or it can be a point-by-point explanation. You should in any case explain clearly how the details of the photograph figure into inner speech. The process of making inner speech looks like this:

```
general  <------------------- specific
(codes/language)      (details/images)
```

**Excerpts from Robert Ray's chapter directly related to our assignment:**

Significantly, the concept of inner speech arises with silent film and in a genre (propaganda) where unambiguous communication is the goal. In that context, what is most feared [by the propagandist] is images' capacity to produce not meaning, but . . . "delirium." Without a verbal soundtrack to anchor the images and constrain their potential drift . . . inner speech had to rely on other visual elements for the verbal formulations that would bind the unrolling pictures into a coherent statement.

Recognizing their images' potential for ambiguity and imprecision, silent-era filmmakers structured their shots around formulaic characters, sequences, and even verbal expressions . . . every character type has its own unwavering physical embodiment: villains look villainous (with mustaches and squinty eyes), heroines look virtuous (with petticoats and blond hair) and businessmen look business-like (with suits and starched shirt fronts) . . .

Narrative . . . subordinates its images to the linguistic formulations they serve. "The sequence exists," Barthes writes . . . , "when and because it can be given a name" (*S/Z*, p. 19). Thus, encountering a picture offering itself as "a still," we will immediately begin to imagine the missing story. Doing so typically involves a summoning of the received categories stored in inner speech, the "already-done,"
the "already read" (p. 19). To the extent that any of these constructions would immediately limit the image's possibilities, we can make this proposition: in late-twentieth-century civilization, every image lies surrounded by invisible formulae whose inevitable activation reasserts our stubborn allegiance to language as the only means of making sense.

Artists have begun to play with this situation, implying the traps into which our preference for language leads us. Cindy Sherman's "Film Stills" have become the most famous case, a complex use of photography, disguise, and the word "still" to imply movies which do not in fact exist -- and to snare the viewer into "explaining" the photographs in terms of the cinematic conventions (e.g., film noir, Antonioni-esque angst, Southern gothic) already available to inner speech. (33-7)

**Evaluations**

Once students completed the project outlined above, I evaluated both the film stills and the written 'inner speech' elicited by the film stills. It is preferable to reveal and discuss evaluative criteria with students well before the assignment is due. These were some of mine:

*Film Still:*

1. Does the film still look like it came from a film?

2. Is it legible at the denotative level? (Is it in focus? Are all the props and characters visible enough for viewers to identify them?)

3. Do the props, sets and characters make a coherent set? Do they belong together?

4. Is the action apparent from the still? Can a viewer infer a before and after (and possibly even a whole story) from the still?
5. How good is the "direction?" Are the actors appropriate for the parts? Is the set design well done? Is the composition organized in such a way as to make the story coherent? Is the lighting appropriate for the scene?

*Inner Speech:*

1. Does the written version of inner speech take account of the significant visual elements in the film still?

2. Does it present a plausible account of the setting, characters, props, and actions within a narrative? By *plausible*, I mean that other viewers could infer the same things that you do.

3. Does it explain how the visual elements make sense metonymically? Does it show how inferences were made from parts to a whole?

---

**Film Stills, Part Two: The Third Meaning**

The first assignment, discussed above, addressed photography's capacity for *legibility*. In order to understand the problems of *illegibility* and viewers' capacity for "drift" when presented with photographic images, I assigned a second project building upon the work students had already done with their film stills and written accounts of inner speech; this assignment called for students to invent an aesthetic way of using Barthes' theory of the "third meaning" for understanding their photographs. This assignment was, "translate your film still into a written version of third meaning."
In his "Third Meaning" essay, Barthes examines frame grabs from Sergei Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible. Eisenstein, Barthes points out, was a propagandist and therefore wanted his images to be as unambiguous as possible. Barthes reads three sets of codes in these images. First, there is an informational level, "which gathers together everything I can learn from the setting, the costumes, the characters, their relations, their insertion in an anecdote with which I am (even if vaguely) familiar" (52). This level is denotative and connotative, since it presents discreet, legible visual elements and communicates a message drawn from stock categories; in other words, we can read the setting, situation, and characters from the selection and arrangement of visual elements in the frame. The second level is that of signification, or the symbolic; Barthes sees an image of two courtiers pouring gold over Ivan's head. He writes:

There is the referential symbolism: the imperial ritual of baptism by gold. Then there is the diegetic symbolism: the theme of gold, of wealth, in Ivan the Terrible (supposing such a theme to exist), which makes a significant intervention in this scene. Then again there is the Eisensteinian symbolism -- if by chance a critic should decide to demonstrate that the gold or the raining down or the curtain or the disfiguration can be seen as held in a network of displacements and substitutions peculiar to S.M. Eisenstein. Finally, there is an historical symbolism, if, in a manner even more widely embracing than the previous ones, it can be shown that the gold brings in a (theatrical) playing, a scenography of exchange, locatable both psychoanalytically and economically, that is to say semiologically. (52)

When Barthes has exhausted the possibilities of reading (at the levels of communication and signification), he finds a remainder;
there are visual elements of the photograph for which he has no codes, no means of translating them into language. This remainder Barthes calls the third meaning or the obtuse meaning (in contrast to the other two levels, which he calls the obvious meanings). In the Eisenstein still, Barthes notices that the two courtiers have different facial features and differently applied make-up. These signifiers cannot be reduced to character; "something in the two faces exceeds psychology, anecdote, function, exceeds meaning . . . " (54).

The assignment, "translate your film still into a written version of third meaning," posed significant difficulties at first, since Barthes writes that, "The obtuse meaning is not in the language-system (even that of symbols)" (60). He continues:

The obtuse meaning is a signifier without a signified, hence the difficulty in naming it. My reading remains suspended between the image and approximation. If the obtuse meaning cannot be described, that is because, in contrast to the obvious meaning, it does not copy anything -- how do you describe something that does not represent anything? The pictorial 'rendering' of words here is impossible, with the consequence that if, in front of these images, we remain, you and I, at the level of articulated language -- at that level, that is, of my own text -- the obtuse meaning will not succeed in existing, in entering the critic's metalanguage. Which means that the obtuse meaning is outside (articulated) language while nevertheless within interlocution. (61)

The first part of the assignment called for students to eliminate all details from their photographs that were not part of the obvious meaning; the second part of the assignment called for them to find precisely those places in the photograph where they had been unable to make the details carry the desired message. Some
students demonstrated extraordinary skills as photographers. Their images could easily have been read as film stills from Hollywood movies. Since most students, however, were not trained photographers, they had inevitably produced photographs that did not perfectly match the fully realized ideality of Hollywood's images. These students, perhaps unwittingly, produced images that shared similarities with Sherman's; they showed imperfectly-played characters, settings that were obviously sets, and grainy images. Their works occupy an area between the roughness of the snapshot and the slickness of Hollywood.

How do you locate a third meaning site in a photograph? what form of writing is appropriate to translating third meaning? One group of students, presenting Barthes' "Third Meaning" to the class, brilliantly translated Barthes' essay into a set of instructions for this assignment. They located the key passage in Barthes' essay where he discusses another frame grab from Ivan the Terrible, one in which an old woman mourns the death of a sailor killed by Tzarist officers. In his efforts to locate the obtuse meaning in this photograph, Barthes writes:

If it could be described (a contradiction in terms), it would have exactly the nature of a Japanese haiku--anaphoric gesture without significant content, a sort of gash rased of meaning (of desire for meaning). Thus in image V:
  Mouth drawn, eyes shut squinting,
  Headscarf low over forehead,
  She weeps. (62)
The student panel posited a structure for Barthes' *haiku* that was very practical in terms of a design for our project. The structure was as follows:

1st line: signifier (with corresponding signified in line 3)
2nd line: signifier without signified
3rd line: signified (with corresponding signifier in line 1)

Whether or not this structure corresponds to actual haiku is irrelevant. Barthes' haiku probably does not correspond to traditional Japanese haiku, and why should it? Barthes borrowed the form to suit his own purposes. The point is that Barthes found a way to situate obtuse meaning within a signifying structure.

The first line of Barthes' *haiku* approximates the denotative level of the photograph; "mouth drawn, eyes shut squinting" is at the level of perception, specifying what's there. In line three, "She weeps," we get an approximation of cognition, an idea about the meaning of the details in line one. What are some visual signs for a person weeping? "Mouth drawn, eyes shut squinting." Line two, however, standing between denotation and connotation, poses "signifier without a signified," for what is the meaning of, "Headscarf low over forehead?" It is a detail that does not correspond directly to a reading of character, situation, or action. Barthes calls his interest in this detail an "erotics" because it approximates more the perceptual apparatus of touch than it does the visual apparatus necessary to reading; he is drawn, he writes elsewhere, towards the roundness of the woman's forehead and the low line created by the edge of the scarf because of their *texture* rather than their
significance. The students were able to extract a form and a structure for their design.

Many students confessed that they understood neither Barthes' "third meaning," nor the haiku, nor the purpose of the assignment. In a normal assignment--"write an essay about Barthes' third meaning and discuss a sample photograph using Barthes' theory"--students' lack of understanding would be fatal. In this assignment, lack of understanding posed little problem. This assignment called for them to simulate a property of photography in writing. They only needed to learn how to affect this simulation; the desired effect, understanding, followed the exercise rather than preceded it. Students wrote three-line haikus, wondering how they got off so easy--isn't a piece of writing for school supposed to be several pages long? Isn't haiku like poetry? What are we doing writing poetry in a film class? Don't we have to be able to "spit back" Barthes' theory of the third meaning? This assignment didn't demonstrate the traditional proof of knowledge, an explanation or argument, but rather it demonstrated a performance of knowledge. When students wrote "third meaning" captions for their film stills, they felt this peculiar way of knowing. No analytic approach can give them this experience.

Reflections

I presented a discussion about this project in a seminar entitled "Reading the Literary Academy" at the University of Florida. The graduate students wanted to know whether this assignment
merely reproduced the dominant ideology in the classroom. My answer was that it did reproduce the dominant ideology, that it has to in order to work, but that it reproduces it in special ways. In this regard, the students' work was similar to Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*. Judith Williamson writes

In the early work, particularly, there always seems to be a sense of menace, the woman is under threat. And her vulnerability is always erotic, rather in the way that many horror movies which involve no explicit sex at all give an erotic spin-off just through having a terrified woman constantly in vulnerable positions. So strongly is femininity evoked in these situations that they have to be sexual--is there any definition of femininity that isn't? . . . in linking the erotic and the vulnerable (Sherman) has hit a raw nerve of 'femininity'. I don't by this mean women (though we do experience it) but the image of women, an imaginary, fragmentary identity found not only in photos and films but the social fabric of our thoughts and feelings. (104-5)

Like Sherman, the students reproduced the dominant ideology by the very means which it has always been made for them (by Hollywood and advertising,); they were able to move from a relatively passive to a more active position, controlling the "means of production." When students create film stills, they manipulate emotionally powerful symbols of collective identity for both personal and social purposes. Also, like Sherman, students went through the steps of constructing this material from the knowledge they'd gained about film codes and how they work; they saw and experienced the construction of media messages as constructions. In fact, many students saw the artificiality of cinematic codes as an opportunity for humor.
Interruption is one of the fundamental methods of all form-giving. It reaches far beyond the domain of art. It is, to mention just one of its aspects, the origin of the quotation. Quoting a text implies interrupting its context.

-- Walter Benjamin (19)

Third, by "quoting" examples of entertainment images within a different institution, in this case school, students interrupted the contexts in which these types of images went unexamined; students analyzed them and brought the critical power of discipline materials to bear upon them in new ways.

The film stills project I have described has an electronic component; I scanned the stills into a computer and put them on my web page as an exhibit representing the collective work of the class. This exhibit can be accessed on the web at http://web.nwe.ufl.edu/~bmauer/film_stills1.html. Students used the web as a "polling area" to test whether their film stills elicited the inner speech they intended and thus determined the capacity of a photograph to communicate a message unambiguously.

Electronic information technologies make new pedagogy not only desirable but necessary. The technology by itself does not change the direction of our pedagogy; rather, the technology indicates that the assumptions governing undergraduate writing need changing. Humanities teachers and students will invent the practices which bring our discipline into the electronic age.
CONCLUSION
THE INVENTION METHOD

This dissertation has examined Sherman and her critics as "relays" (examples rather than exact models) for an invention of a hypertextual genre. My method has been to transform inferential criticism into a recipe for invention. Inferential criticism explains artists' and critics' activities as problem-solving, and presents their activities as a poetics; Baxandall's hermeneutic method turns out to be an extremely powerful heuretic method, allowing me to extrapolate my own poetics for a hypertextual "film still" genre from the poetics of artists and critics.

Artists have solved both conceptual and material problems related to writing with images. Just as poets and theorists make linguistic elements manipulable, artists make pictorial elements manipulable; Picasso used planes and volumes as iterable "memes" of cubism while Sherman used movie stars as memes of the film still. Sherman, by appropriating and disassembling star images, showed how anyone can construct identities for themselves in a photographic and/or electronic medium.

The film stills project described in chapter 6 teaches students how to use their creative capabilities; they solve problems that require conceptual and aesthetic reasoning. Students learn to
construct and reconstruct identities by means of props, gestures, and poses—the elements of a pictorial language for communicating one's ethos in a graphic environment. The film stills project also teaches students to use their critical capabilities; they become more aware of how media images function within their environments. When students become "literate" in visual media, they learn how to "write" with identity codes to suit their purposes, adapting these codes when they see fit. Making film stills reveals to students the fragmentary and manipulable qualities of textuality and of identity itself.

Although my demonstration of this method is specific to my field and my interests, the method itself can be generalized for invention in other fields. The concept is simple: reason by analogy from a case of invention in a related field to a problem in your own field. Examine the pattern of Charge, Brief, and troc of your case study. Use the pattern as a template for articulating the elements of your own Charge, Brief, and troc. In other words, articulate the primary problems, identify the local conditions, and select the resources (medium, methods, and aesthetics) available to you within your troc.
REFERENCES


Tomasulo, Frank P. "Resources for Teaching Film and Video Courses." *Cinema Journal* 34, no. 4 (Summer 1995)


Williamson, Judith. "Images of 'Woman'--The Photographs of Cindy Sherman." *Screen* 24, no. 6 (1983)


BIographiesKetch

Barry Jason Mauer received his Bachelor of Arts in film theory and cultural politics, an individualized interdepartmental major, from the University of Minnesota in the spring of 1990. As an undergraduate, he did coursework in darkroom photography and began producing his own film stills, one of which is available for viewing at http://web.nwe.ufl.edu/~bmauer/film_stills25.html. In 1995, he received his Master of Arts from the department of English at the University of Florida. His first year of graduate studies included a course with Robert Ray in which he examined the grammatological shift marked by the invention of photography and studied Cindy Sherman as an artist who experimented with photography's capacity for fragmentation. He also studied theory with Gregory Ulmer, who showed him how Michael Baxandall's *Patterns of Intention* could be used as a model for heuretics. While teaching an undergraduate class entitled "Writing Through Media," Mauer designed the film stills project discussed in Chapter 6. The project became the seed for this dissertation. Mauer's doctorate is expected in May 1999 from the University of Florida.
I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Gregory L. Ulmer, Chair
Professor of English

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Robert B. Ray
Professor of English

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Donald D. Ault
Professor of English

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Susan E. Hegeman
Assistant Professor of English

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

William L. Tilson
Professor of Architecture
This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May, 1999

Dean, Graduate School