Edited Identities and Geopolitics of Global Media

Dušan I. Bjelić
University of Southern Maine, USA
(dbjelic1@maine.rr.com)

In this paper, I will examine the practical logic of the production of identity as situated work of the global media, and I will invite you to look with me at various examples of this work.[1] I suggest that the global media is an industry that produces mass perception as a commodity--in contrast to conventional industries which produce tangible objects. As ethnomethodologists and as Marxists, we should focus on the *production* of mass perception rather than on its *consumption* in order to gain insight into the logic of production of those who manufacture the world as representation. I argue that the media's production of the world as representation has little to do with "objectivity" in the usual sense. Rather, the illusion of "objectivity" is created through the standard practices of producing the world as representation. Here are some actual instances of these practices and the representation they have produced.

In Portland, Maine, local television station WGME, an affiliate of the CBS network, was reporting on the News hour about the danger of adolescents' accessing pornography on the Internet. The TV crew went to a local middle school, ostensibly to report on students' knowledge of computers, and some students were filmed while using the internet in the school's computer lab. When the students watched themselves on TV that night, to their parents', their friends'--and their own--surprise, the news report concerned kids and pornography.

Images of the local students looking at computer screens were followed by images of Internet pornography; television viewers were deliberately led to believe that the students were actually looking at pornographic sites. Clearly, also, reporters had deliberately disguised their real intention in order to gain access to the school and permission to film the students. This fact was not mentioned in the station's disingenuous disclaimer, reported next day in the *Portland Press Herald*, a local newspaper:

> "Parents say WGME deceived students in "Cyber trap' series"
>
> (The children showed off their computer skills, and then saw their faces aired with smut. But the station says its intentions were clear.)
>
> "Sex sells, and our children's faces were used to help promote their series on smut on the Internet." Michael Sweatt, father of student taped by WGME-TV…
>
> A WGME-TV news crew had come to the Lyman Moore Middle School in Portland to tape the seventh-graders as they used computers… (The students) thought the station was producing a story about the computer club and the skills they had learned. They urged their parents and friends to watch the broadcast…
> When the series itself aired, it dealt with the sexual aspects of cyberspace, not with how students were learning with computers…
> The series has angered many students, parents and officials at Lyman Moore. They say the station misrepresented its intentions and acted unethically…
> WGME says it did nothing unethical in the report, which was aired during the February "sweeps"--a period when viewership is monitored and ratings calculated. The

[1] I would like to thank Doug Macbeth and Rosemary Miller for their generous help with this paper.

> station attributes the school's reaction to a "perception" problem… (*Portland Press Herald*).

The press report summarized the event as it had happened, leaving the reader to decide whether the actions of the TV station were ethical or not. The two factions involved are the producers of the show, who have 'deceived' the audience as to what they were actually viewing, and the consumers/viewers of the show, some of whom were the original student participants, whose assumptions about the intent of the TV reportage were betrayed. Without getting into the usual debate about the media 'manipulation of reality' we should, for ethnomethodological purposes, focus on the argument of the "bad guys"--the producers of the show--and on the question of precisely how public perception was produced in this case.

I happened to see the TV report and believed that the students were actually looking at porno websites. This seemed to me, at the time, to be a reasonable and realistic assumption, and I did not question the origin of the footage. Other viewers, like me, instructed by the temporal order of images--*this* face followed by *this* site--incorrectly imputed smut-watching to the students shown in the report. Just as Harvey Sacks has convincingly argued that there is nothing inherently dirty in an off-color joke,[2] we might argue that in this case the smut was not on the screen but a product of the viewers' *instructed* eyes. The production of a punchline, Sacks argues, is structurally tied to the narrative order of the joke itself--and, in our case, to words and images edited in a way that instructs the viewer how to interpret them. And, as Sacks points out, it is this order of speaking, or editing that leads language from the ordinary and decent assumptions to the obscene. It is the "instructed" eye of the naïve viewer that sees *edited* connections as connections in *real* time between the face of a child and the pornographic website.

It may seem to you that I am setting up an ethnomethodological *apologia* for the media here. This is not the case, and, in my defence, I turn to the practical logic of the ancient Greeks as evidenced by their treatment of a robbery victim. We would blame the robber for a criminal act; the Greeks blamed the robbed, the victim, for not being vigilant enough. To put it ethnomethodologically, the victims have allowed, so to say, a crack in their *Lebenswelt* structure that enables the robber to encroach their personal space. My point is that the victim/robber dyad is analogous to the consumer/global media dyad. And, by being vigilant of the conditions of the production of what is already constructed in media studies as "robbery of reality"[3] we can be prepared when the robber arrives.

How, in this culture (US) that appears to embrace the principles of objectivity enshrined in science and technology, can a demonstration of students' computer skills be transformed into an implied obscenity? Clearly, in the example of media chicanery from Portland, Maine, there is a discrepancy between what actually happened and what we see in the representation of it. And as long as theorists of media continue to hold that objective media is possible, such discrepancies will continue to puzzle them. Eric Livingston, referring to literary texts,

[2] Harvey Sacks, "Some technical considerations of a dirty joke," In: Schenkein, J.N., ed. (1978) *Studies in the organization of conversational interaction*. (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 249-70.

[3] See Dusan Bjelic, "'Frenching' the 'real' and praxeological therapy: an ethnomethodological clarification of the new French theory of the media "in *Media Studies: Ethnomethodological Approaches*, ed. Paul L. Jalbert, (Lanham, New York, Oxford: University Press of America, International Institute for Ethnomethodology & Conversation Analysis, 1999).

invokes Sacks.[4] Livingston posits that every text has embedded instructions on how to read it that habitually escape the eye of literary theorists and interpreters. Reading a text without accounting for these instructions is a habitual social practice. Similarly, in the case of the above TV report, the embedded, unaccounted-for instructions to see the news as *if* it were about these kids watching these sites are, in fact, themselves the news. And, we may postulate, these silent instructions to see something *as* "something" have become the referent of the reported event.

Now, with some theoretical background in place, let us again ask how a demonstration of students' computer skills can be transformed into an implied obscenity. This question begs another larger one: how is it possible to own--and view--a television (in other words, to be an "ordinary" media consumer) without being robbed of one's own vision and understanding? To answer both these questions, it is necessary to analyze the news taking into account how viewers accomplish seeing it in terms of a report.

The alignment between the content of news and how one is to see it has engendered much debate in social sciences and media studies, all of which, as Wes Sharrock and Wil Coleman astutely observe, focuses on the content of the news and ignores its actual viewing.[5] Analysis of content is certainly relevant to critical studies of global media, but is it sufficient? Edward Said's books, *Covering Islam and Orientalism*, critically analyze the content of the news corrupted by ideology. Briefly summarized, his argument is that ideology is a set of historically constituted rules governing media representation that ensure political domination of the representer over the represented. Representation itself, Said emphasizes, is a subtle form of power and colonization. The US media's "commitment" to "objectivity," he maintains, is a relative term when it comes to representing Muslim populations as a "lesser breed."[6] The Western media operates on a system of bias against the people of the Middle East, which he calls *orientalism*. Having adopted the anti-Muslim bias of Israel, an important ally of the US in the Middle East, the US media in particular exercises a colonial interest in dominating the Muslim population through representation. Yet despite the history of gross misrepresentation of the Islamic world, Said still does not give up on the possibility of media being objective. A shift in US global politics away from racist policies with regard to Muslims and the Middle East, would, Said expects, be accompanied by a similar shift away from anti-Muslim bias in the media. Said assumes that inclusive politics will produce objective representation of the "other". While sharing his political concerns and agreeing with his principles of inclusive politics, we question his assumption that the media as an industry of mass perception can ever embrace objectivity as its identifying professional drill.[7]

[4] Eric Livingston, *An Anthropology of Reading*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[5] Wes Sharrock and Wil Coleman, "Seeking and Finding Society in the Text, "in *Media Studies: Ethnomethodological Approaches*, ed. Paul L. Jalbert, (Lanham, New York, Oxford: University Press of America, International Institute for Ethnomethodology & Conversation Analysis, 1999).

[6] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York : Pantheon Books, 1978). See also, *Edward Said: On Orientalism*, documentary by Sut Jhally, MEF, 1998.

[7] I am not suggesting that journalism should be irresponsible, however, being responsible is still not a domain of objectivity as an exclusive domain of epistemology but individual and professional ethics and institutional moral codes. "Objective" journalism, that is responsible and fair, belongs to ethics and morality, not epistemology. Said seems to fuse the two as if fair journalism is the same as being objective. On the use of journalistic "objectivity" in covering Arab-Israeli conflict as

Producing history with stills

In order to produce a coherent report--whether documenting a family reunion or a battlefield, regardless of aesthetic or ideological motivation for the representation--the camera must find a single focus amid the emerging social order. There are praxeological fundamentals of natural perception that must be observed--such as a camera shot that precedes, and makes possible the ideology to be ascribed in it in the global media. In order for the camera shot to acquire an ideological reading, it must be selectively situated in the world it represents. And here is the first praxiom (practical axiom) that we must elucidate: *the camera can't miss the world*. Consider this, when I give my students an assignment to take a video-camera to the street and find *something* for the class in 5 minutes, they normally return with shots of people walking or crossing the street, cars passing or stopping at the red light, etc. In other words, they have recorded the *familiar* world. Without this co-produced familiarity between the people on the street and the student the representation becomes impossible. Now, let us say, in a news report, the way is carefully prepared for images to be interpreted in a certain way by the viewer as if recognizing familiarity. It is the role of stereotypes, clichés, standardized images, sound bites etc., all of which are technical devices, to make the unfamiliar world familiar.

Douglas Macbeth, in his essay, *Glances, Trances, and Their Relevance for a Visual Sociology*,[8] provides a striking example of this in his analysis of the production of *Ax Fight* (1975)[9], an ethnographic film that documents a fight in a Yanomamo village. "Following an introductory text laid over a map, and a strip of audio-only record to the effect of 'Bring your camera over here; it's gonna start,' the footage begins in the midst of a search,"[10] is how Macbeth describes the beginning of the film, thus providing an example of situated prophecy and its ushering of the camera into the field of social discovery. He proceeds to show how, in finding its focus, the camera gaze sails along the anticipatory structures of the event: "There is evidently 'something' going on… in the witnessable sense that Asch, as viewfinder, and we as viewers of his record, are in the midst of a motivated search, without knowing what could be promised for it, or where."[11] The camera finds and records what it is seeking: the fight. And, Macbeth writes, "Not only the fight, but the work of [the producer's] search is preserved in a record that shows his inquiry perhaps more clearly than the world it finds."[12]

Ax Fight is a path-breaking film in the annals of visual anthropology. It is also, Macbeth argues, a document about finding "something" in an order of social practice, that for ethnomethodology is a discoverable work of situated seeing-with-a-camera. Macbeth's analysis demonstrates how the 'camera work' produces and accounts for the production of its record of social order *in situ.* Events are recorded *as of* the camera's sustained audio-visual inquiry. Macbeth's analysis of praxeological fundamentals of visual representation is a description of the real time production of a visual document.

journalistic fairness see Paul Jalbert, "'News Speak' about the Lebanon War," in *Journal of Palestine Studies, A Quarterly on Palestinian Affairs and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, Fall 1984, Issue 53: 33.

[8] Douglas Macbeth, "Glances, Trances, and Their Relevance for a Visual Sociology," in *Media Studies: Ethnomethodological Approaches*, ed. Paul L. Jalbert, (Lanham, New York, Oxford: University Press of America, International Institute for Ethnomethodology & Conversation Analysis, 1999).

[9] The producers of this film are two anthropologists Tim Ash and Napoleon Chagnon.

[10] Macbeth, "Glances," 152-53.

[11] Ibid., 154.

[12] Ibid., 155.

In the course of his inquiry, Macbeth elucidates another visual praxiom: *one must look somewhere*. He suggests that in the unfamiliar world one has to choose *where* to look as if looking through the camera in order to find *something* as a familiar thing. Following this praxiom, the camera selects a shot in *Ax Fight*. Directed to the subject of the anthropological inquiry: 'Look for the fight!" as if saying, "This is why we came here!', the anthropologically trained camera is instrumental in resolving the practical dilemma of "Where to look?" In this way the camera shot is able to clearly document a world unfamiliar to the two anthropologists, who have in turn succeeded in making a film understandable to all of us who have never put a foot in that village. Although the fundamentals of natural perception must be satisfied, the camera allows for its further re-contextualization. Like Husserl's Galileo, the camera is a genius at discovering--and instantly concealing--the social world.

But when an image is stripped of its local context of production and re-contextualized in a studio and editing room, it then is subject to a quite different set of practices geared towards the re-production of the conditions of its production. Knowing when the fight will start is the situated anthropological theory of a skilled camera gaze, but its eventual meaning will be decided at the editing table according to rules external to this intuitive practice. Even *Ax Fight,* with its meticulous, situated camera work, has been criticized for the interpolation of "…a lineage chart and a formal analysis of kinship for 'explaining' the fight" in the finished work.[13] Inserted expert knowledge has put the final touch on the meaning of the shot. This is the moment when, figuratively, a Yanomamo villager enters the studio and becomes an educated signifier.

[13] Ibid., 169n.

With re-contextualization and de-temporalization of an image, the media setting begins its now-familiar practice of conforming context and time to the purpose of a report. In journalism a photo is paradoxically regarded as a document of the natural conditions of a subject and his or her settings. Yet the "natural conditions" of an image of a subject obtain *only* in the context of its local production, and media routinely must distort or completely disguise these natural conditions in order to assign the desired standardized meaning to the image.[14] For example, in the case of the report on teenagers and pornographic websites, the raw footage would have simply shown students exhibiting their computer skills. By re-processing the sequential order of (re)presentation, other exhibits are achieved. It seems that one picture is indeed "worth a thousand words," especially if it is recontextualized.

However, in the new reality of global-digital media, one picture does not *equal* the representational power of a thousand words, but is more likely to be reduced to the meaning assigned by the words

[14] That there can be many familiar meanings for an image has been decisively shown in an experiment performed by the Soviet film theorist Lev Kuleshov (*Kuleshov on Film: Writings of Lev Kuleshov*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). In the early 1920s, he devised a series of experiments around variously edited, disjointed shots aiming to demonstrate that the content of a single shot can be emotionally enriched, and the character and the intensity of the emotions modified by means of editing. Kuleshov's findings prompted another Soviet film theorist and filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein, to declare that editing "has become the indisputable axiom on which the worldwide culture of the cinema has been built." (Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form and Film Sense*, Cleveland: Merieian, 1957, 257.) Applied to our material, each meaning of kids using computers, once as a demonstration of their skills, another time as accessing forbidden websites, are equally real. For more about the sociological significance of the theory of montage, see Lena Jayyusi's seminal paper "Toward a socio-logic of the film text," in *Semiotica*, 68 (3/4): 271-296.

accompanying it. Due to its own technological potential to mean many things, photography may take quite a different semiotic trajectory in actual use, depending on the purpose of the message. "Pictures have no tenses," declared early film theorist Bela Balazs, explaining film as a new mechanical art based on techniques of montage, or editing. "A smile is a smile, even if seen in an isolated shot, but what this smile refers to, what invoked it, what is its effect and dramatic signification-all this can emerge only from the preceding and following shots."[15] What we perceive in everyday life, through the flow of inner time, as connected images of moving objects and people, is reconstructed in film through montage, a technique of ordering images and words in such a way as to create a desired meaning.[16] Although a tremendous resource for creative expression, Balazs warns that film "… montage can not only produce poetry-it can also fake and falsify things more completely than any other human means of expression."[17] Balazs did not anticipate that the entire industry of mass perception would soon leverage this very possibility in its own development. This successful use of studio editing logic to represent daily and distant events in the media owes much to the techniques of montage developed by the motion picture industry.

By definition, then, media image entails a re-conceptualization of its local production. And intrinsic to each image by virtue of its very lack of "tenses", is the ability to account for its own re-contextualization, or--so to speak--its falsification. To the extent that the use of an image accounts for the conditions of its production of falsification, falsification may *also* be the way to de-falsify, *if* it can be accounted for. Let us elucidate some rules of this "falsification" in considering a specific example of the use of photography in *Time* magazine as part of a report on mass rape in the war in Bosnia. I will show here how, through instructive editing, a particular photograph may be made to seem illustrative of more than one set of facts.

Photo # 1

(This photo was a part of an article [*Time*, Feb., 22. 1993])

Looking at this photo, I naturally assumed that this woman was "raped by Ukrainians in Lvov, Poland, in 1945," just as I assumed that the students in Portland, Maine, were actually looking at pornographic websites. But, in the next issue of *Time*, the photo was displayed again, now in the section "letters to the editor." Under the title "Wartime Atrocities" there was an editorial response to readers' letters about the photo:

More than 750 readers have written us so far about the photograph of the young

[15] Bela Balazs, *Theory of the Film. Character and Growth of a New Art*. Translated from Hungarian Edith Bone, (New York: Dover Publication Inc,. 1970), 118.
[16] See also Lena Jayyusi, "Toward a socio-logic of the film text," in *Semiotica*, 68 (3/4): 271-296.
[17] Balazs, Ibid., 119.

woman that accompanied our story on rape and the war in Bosnia. We used this picture to illustrate the longtime use of rape as a weapon in warfare. The picture's caption, which said it showed a "Jewish girl raped by Ukrainians in Lvov, Poland, in 1945," struck a nerve with readers of Ukrainian descent, who felt it unfairly, singled out Ukrainians for committing acts of rape during World War II. These readers also questioned how we knew the victim was Jewish. Except for the date, the information describing the photo was obtained from en employee of a Holocaust museum in Israel. Subsequent research into the picture's somewhat murky past has turned up the following:

> The photo was taken not in 1945 but in 1941 in Lvov (its Russian name), or Lviv (its name today), Ukraine, shortly after the Germans captured the city from the Soviets on June 30. Chaos in the form of pogroms, rapes and killings swept the town at that time. The picture is one of a series showing women being stripped, harassed and chased by civilians. One school of thought holds that the women were Jewish victims of the pogroms in Lvov. The Germans spread rumors that Jews were responsible for the murders of several thousand political prisoners found in the cellars of Soviet NKVD buildings, thus fueling the hatred and the acts of revenge against local Jews that followed. Other historians insist that the majority of the women pictured in the series of photographs were mistresses the Soviets abandoned when they fled Lvov to escape the German troops. The defenseless collaborators were then attacked by resentful residents for consorting with the Soviet enemy. Still another theory suggests the occupying Nazis orchestrated the public humiliation of the women in order to shoot an anti-Semitic propaganda film.
>
> Despite our best efforts, we have not been able to pin down exactly what situation the photograph portrays. But there is enough confusion about it for us to regret that our caption, in addition to misdating the picture, may well have conveyed a false impression. (April 19)

This case of editing is especially revealing. Bear in mind, *Time* is an elite publication within corporate media that should set a standard of professional reporting for the rest of the world. And yet, one would conclude from the editorial, *Time* is no better then the local WGME TV station. But there is a difference between them: *Time* acknowledges its error (a sign of professionalism, I suppose), while the Portland TV station disclaims any responsibility for its viewers' perception of reality. Under public pressure, mostly by Ukrainians, *Time* acknowledges that the photo's caption is not only misleading, it is incorrect, and this acknowledgment preserves the *possibility* of the photograph's referentiality. Now, all those who were not offended by the reference to Ukrainians presumably accepted the caption as written because they had no reason not to. But a single epistemological question by a commonsensical reader, "How do you know what this photo is?" shatters the veneer of historic "fact," revealing that for the editor, if not for the reader, this photo represents only a generic *illustration* of women being raped in war, not a particular woman being raped in a particular war but of "Jewish woman" as historical cliché. We learn from the editor that the subsequent investigation into the history of the photo has revealed the picture's "murky past" and that it is far from clear what the photo's actual subject is. "There is more than one school of thought," the editor informs us.

Confronted suddenly by the uncertain provenance of the photo, *Time* is forced to take, so to say, a "post-structuralist" position on its own data, acknowledging it as discursive and historically unstable. "Despite our best efforts" (and here come the professional ethics of corporate journalism), "we have not been able to pin down exactly what situation the photograph portrays. But there is enough confusion about it for us to regret that our caption, in addition to misdating the

picture, may well have conveyed a false impression." *Time* did not *intend* to give wrong information, but it *acknowledges* that readers may have been misled into interpreting the photo a certain way. In other words, the editor wants us to understand that s/he did not want the photo to be taken *literally* as portraying a "Jewish woman raped in Lvov," but only as a general illustration of rape in war, the subject matter of the accompanying text.

Time magazine is not the only publication that has used this photo as an illustration rather than as documentation of a specific event and an identity. Others are *WWII Time-Life Books History of the Second World War* (1989) on page 141 (photo # 2) and the other is *Life World War II* (1990) page 111 (photo # 3), but with different captions.

The photograph is used in the 1989 volume (photo #2) as the opening image of the book and is meant to convey the horror and violence of World War II. The caption reads: "A rape victim in the city of Lvov cries out in rage and anguish as an older woman comforts her. Anti-Semitic citizens rounded up 1,000 Jews and turned them over to the Germans." The caption purports to authenticate the photograph by invoking a specific historical event connected with Ukrainian anti-Semitism. But, as we know from the disclaimer issued by *Time* magazine in 1993, there is no proof that this is what the photo actually documents. Photo #3 is framed by a narrative about the German invasion of the USSR and another photo of hanging bodies--Russians hung by the SS. The title of the chapter is "1941 Rape of Russia." The woman in photo #3, in this incarnation, may have been a Russian or Ukrainian woman raped presumably by the occupiers, the Germans--but not necessarily; she may have been raped also by the locals. While *Time* magazine is a commercial publication, the two books in which the photo appears are history books;

Photo # 2

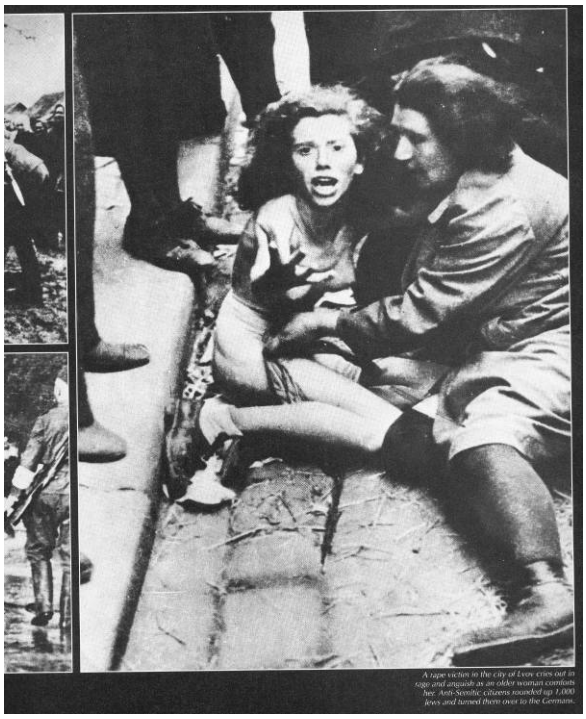


Photo # 3

bombers, the Stukas, the panzers
shed cities, villages, farms. Death
ds of the SS, well supplied with ri-
nd gibbets, roamed the countryside
g people suspected of being parti-
and, more important, showing citi-
what would happen to them if they

lifted a finger to help in their own de-
fense. In less than three weeks the Wehr-
macht was in Leningrad province, clos-
ing in on the city whose capture would
make it possible to supply its forces by
sea, and had captured Minsk, the key rail
junction for Moscow. But as hatred for

the invader mounted, the going got slow-
er and costlier. Leningrad settled in for a
siege that would last a year and a half.
And the brutalized citizenry of all the
rest of Russia torched their own towns,
scorched their earth, fled to fight else-
where, or died.

A Lvov rape victim screams as a woman tries to comfort her. Such rapes were routinely committed in the streets.

they claim authority over facts and yet the facts are contradictory. What is common to all three sources is the use of photography to create itself as a document of an actual event and an actual person. Photography is

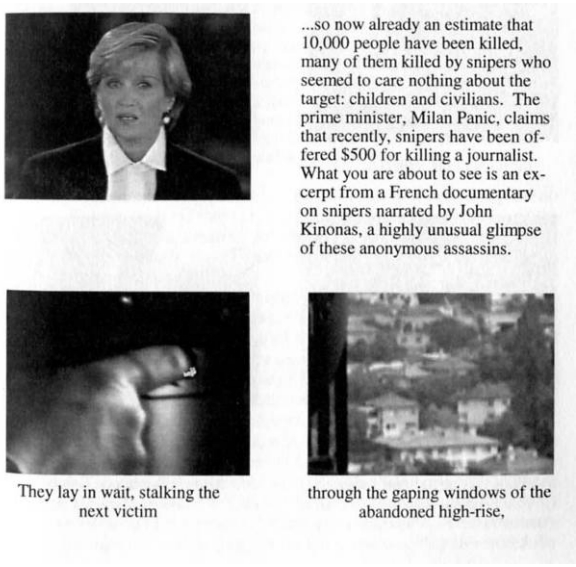
here more as a *performative* fact than a given fact.[18]

The editor's "best effort" to discover the true subject of the photo has resulted in the revelation of its "murky past." Thus the editor of *Time* accounts for the use of the photo to manufacture mass perception. The way it has been used, the editor acknowledges, may have created confusion and may have misled the reader about the identity of the woman and what happened to her. The subsequent apology immediately negates this self-account, somehow managing to suggest that this was an aberrational episode and not endemic to the system itself.

Producing **identities with edited images**

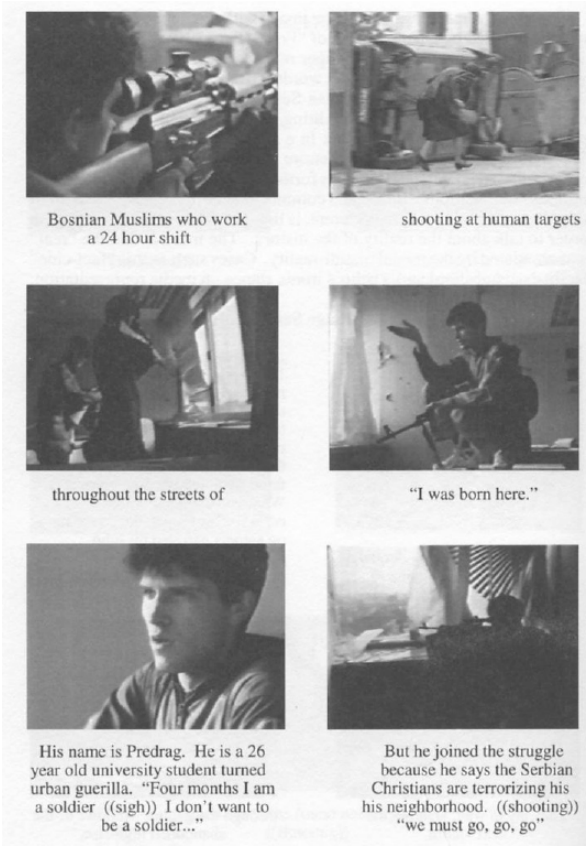
Let us now examine TV images and their re-contextualization as the basis for production of a report. ABC's "Prime Time Live" with Diane Sawyer--a show that combines studio and field coverage of the world's current events--ran a segment on snipers in Sarajevo during the city's siege. This topic was selected that evening in part because the ABC producer (for the same show), David Kaplan, was shot in Sarajevo on August 13, 1992, and became the subject of many news reports. "Kaplan, a producer for ABC News, was shot and killed by a sniper as he was riding in a car that was part of a convoy taking Serbian premier Milan Panic from Sarajevo airport to United Nations headquarters along a road known as 'Sniper Alley.' The bullet entered the car between the letters 'T' and 'V' taped on its side."[19]

Video # 1



[18] Recall here Michelangelo Antonioni's now-classic film from the 1960's, "Blow Up," and its story about a photographer discovering the image of a dead body in photos developed in his lab. He is at pains to find the truth by means of editing images. "What really happened" is the specific, or shall I say, the final arrangement of images, which reconstitute, via the lab work, the real time of the homicide. The film makes an existential drama out of this practical situation of a photo lab; a discrepancy between the visual proof of the body and the absence of the body outside the photo-story, is the result only of the lab work, of the production and interpretation of images. In that respect this film is not really about an existential crisis, but rather about the increasing significance of photo-labs in our lives. Even the highest levels of political authority and institutions such as the State Department and the CIA do not shy away from using photo-lab work. Colin Powell's presentation to the UN Security Council of, shall I remind you, the irrefutable "evidence" about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction is a dramatic case of the use of images to manipulate US foreign policy.

[19] http://www.radiobs.net/mediaslander/archives/001045print.php



Sawyer introduces the segment from the studio, stating that many of the 10.000 civilians already killed in the siege of Sarajevo have been shot by snipers. The president of Serbia, Milan Panic, whose visit to Sarajevo was to be covered by Kaplan, has told ABC that snipers are getting $ 500 for shooting a journalist. This information, added to the already existing horror of sniping in the midst of war, sets the framework for interpreting sniping in Sarajevo as a particularly horrendous practice--yet with a 'human face.' To illustrate this, Sawyer introduces a sequence from a French documentary about these "anonymous assassins," which will be narrated by John Kinonas.

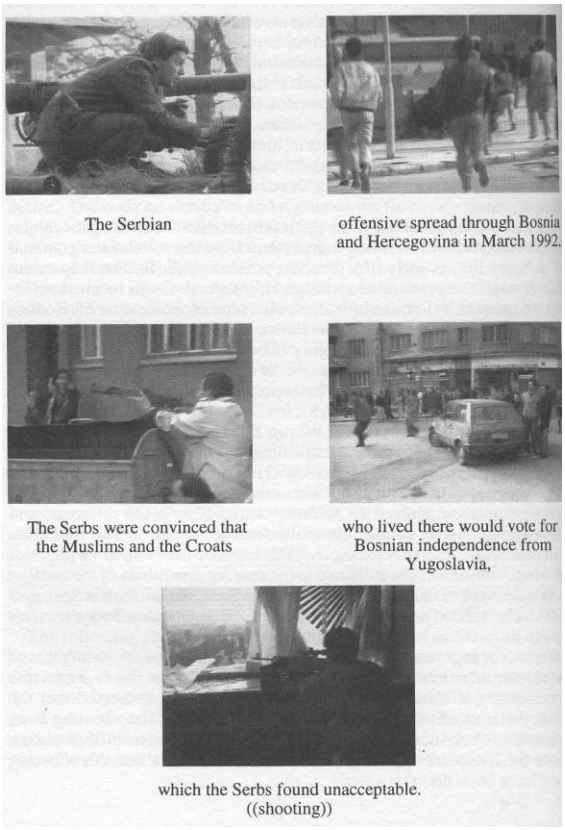
"They lie in wait, stalking the next victim"--John Kinonas' voice synchronizes with the close-up image of someone's finger on the trigger. The feeling is eerie. The next image shows the city as seen through the eye of a sniper, "… through the gaping windows of abandoned high-rise, …", within which the sniper selects civilian targets. After this short introduction into the unique perspective of sniping activity, the report immediately establishes the ethnic identity of the sniper; he is Bosnian Muslim, working a "24-hour shift…". The next image connects sniping with a specific target: an older woman running for cover behind some garbage containers (yet she is exposed to this sniper from the supposedly safe side in the ethnically divided city). In the next image we see that there are in fact two snipers; while one is shooting, the other is reloading. The "Muslim" sniper then squats behind the window and talks to the cameraman while pointing to the streets where he selects his targets, "I was born here …" he says in broken English." His name is "Predrag," he is 26 years old and a university student. He states that he has been doing this for four months and does not wish to do it any longer. But, in the next image, he fires and immediately runs away from the window urging the cameraman to do the same.

Let us now compare this sniper sequence from "Prime Time Live" with a segment aired by ABC seven months later in which the same sniper appears again, not as a "Muslim" but as a "Serb." That show is called "Land of the Demons" (ABC, March 1993) and is narrated by Peter Jennings. It is a special report exploring why the international community has done nothing to stop the war. The show contains interviews and appearances by many politicians and some military figures. The video sequence, which I here analyze, forms part of a larger story and features the same images of the sniper from Sarajevo as does the earlier "Prime Time Live" show. The larger context of this particular incarnation of the sniper images is the "troubled land of multiethnic Yugoslavia" and the longstanding ethnic hatred between the Catholic Croats and the Orthodox Serbs. This hate, the story conveys, culminated in the Second World War; after the war it was suppressed by Tito's regime

while maintaining an ethnic balance of power, but when Tito died it flared up again. As a result, the republics of the Former Yugoslavia--Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia--decided to secede from Yugoslavia, which the Serbs violently opposed. The segment analyzed here purports to document events that took place when conflict between the Serbs and Croats spilled into neighboring Bosnia in the spring of 1992.

The first image of a uniformed man squatting next to a firing cannon is synchronized with narration that begins with the words, "The Serbian offensive…". This establishes the topic of the sentence as well as the identity of the uniformed man as an ethnic Serb. How do we know that he is Serb? The context introduced prior to this image, Serbian aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina, defines the activity of firing the cannon as an example of this aggression.

Video # 2



In other words, we are led to see this image not as a military exercise, for example, but as firing in an actual conflict. "The Serbian offensive…", this ethnically specific description of an action has been divided into two connected images. The "…offensive" part comes with the following image of urban public disorder--presumably Sarajevo's--caused by the Serbian attack, including the firing cannon. The firing of a cannon and the people on the street running for cover connect the two images in time and space and suggest that this actual firing--or firing such as this-- is causing urban disorder and panic. Splicing two images unrelated in real time to connect "The Serbian" with "offensive" not only connects these two images--firing and taking cover from it--but also establishes retroactively an offensive, rather than a defensive, purpose for the shooting cannon. Because the image of civilians taking cover immediately follows that of the firing of the cannon, it is established by this order of editing images and words that the civilian activities are those of non-Serb victims.

The third image of a civilian man firing from behind a trash container while two other civilians take cover is synchronized with a new sentence in the narration: "The Serbs were convinced that Muslims and the Croats…". Unlike the narration accompanying the first image, in which "The Serbian" establishes the ethnic identity of the uniformed man firing a cannon, in this image "The Serbs" defines the activity of shooting as being carried out by a Bosnian Muslim or a Bosnian Croat. Since the relation of the attack to the victims has been established in the previous two images, the third image shows a civilian man surrounded by other civilians, standing next to the trash container and firing from the gun at the "attacker"; he is in the city and is a civilian; he is defending his city as well as other city dwellers. Such a categorization suggests a defensive form of shooting in

relation to the firing cannon as well as in relation to the image of civilians running for a cover. The position of his gun, shooting from right to left is opposite to the cannon's, from left to right, thus suggesting this must be a defensive response to the cannon's attack. Once again, his ethnic identity must be non-Serb since it corresponds to the defensive activity constructed as Muslim or Croat. The fourth image displays civilians observing a distant shooting activity still related to the Bosnian independence from Yugoslavia. "… who lived there would vote for Bosnian independence from Yugoslavia…" runs the narration in this scene. Shooting on these people and the place where these people live because they want to determine their own sovereignty, is by definition an act of unjustifiable aggression.

The fifth image is central to this analysis of how identity and image are organized, and produced. When Jennings' words, "… Which the Serbs found unacceptable," accompany the image of a sniper, they assign a Serb ethnic identity to the image. The sniping at civilians is, one infers from the context of the story, a way of punishing them for their wish for independence. Serbs are those who did not want to accept the will of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to become an independent country; they are stopping it by means of force--cannons and snipers.

Some concluding remarks on the question of "objectivity" in media

Both TV reports raise interesting theoretical questions, which have in fact a very practical origin. On a general level of meaning, the narration of the reports appears to be the narration of real things happening "over there," which means that images coming from "over there," are the narration's referent. But a close look reveals that the images (sniper) are only an illustration of the narration (the Serb, the Muslim). ABC reserves the right to be specific or only allusive depending on the purpose or resources of the report. In the second video, ABC only implies, through editing words and the image of the sniper, that he is "Serb." However, in the first video, aired seven months before, the image is specifically that of a "Bosnian Muslim." For those who have no memory of the first image, he may be the Serb sniper. Or, we may say, it does not really matter because the Muslim sniper may be illustrating sniping *per se* as an activity done in *reality* by the Serbs. For that evening's news dedicated to the Serb aggression on Bosnia, the image instructs identity that is consistent with the story about Serb aggression on Bosnian civilians, not the actual body of the sniper. And to further destabilize the identity of the sniper we should also note that in the first video the sniper does not identify himself either as "Muslim" or as "Predrag." The narrator does it, so we don't know for sure the sniper's true ethnic identity. He may in fact be a Serb.

We can understand the practical advantages, in editing for the media industry, of re-using video material in different contexts. But this practice does bring into question the validity of the news as a report from reality. Holding 'reality' aside, it lends insight into how the media sets their images to work. The narration is supposed to identify the image and *vice versa*. Under my photo on my driver's license is my name. The order of photo and words constitutes a document for establishing the reality of my identity along the presence of my body. From the standpoint of the principles of objectivity, if I were to place a picture of my son above my name and then attempt to explain that he *illustrates* me, that he looks *enough* like me, as well, that would be fraudulent, given the fact of my body as the referent for the words and image. That is the nature of that kind of document that must have a specific body as its referent as the assumed

relation of objectivity (yet, as we all know, even that can be forged). But in the absence of the body the referent becomes the *story about* the body. In terms of structural linguistics, this could be expressed as follows: the image of the sniper in the ABC report is (to be) referent to the narrative, showing us the actual person who is its subject. But it is also true that the narration is here (to be) referent to the image. Yet at close inspection this is not the case. The relation between the sniper and the Serb/Muslim is only a temporal coincidence designed by the editor not to tell us what really happened in that distant world, or who the sniper really is, but what has happened at the editing table to make the incident appear to be an event in the world. In other words, neither image nor narration has the status of a "true" referent. They are cut in such a way that words work as an illustration of images and images as illustration of words. Nowhere is the referent found. This seems to be a condition of so-called media "objective" reporting, meaning that the report is nothing other than *an illustration of an illustration* thus never about the actual identity or event. It is a pure product of editing practices. The only stable thing here seems to be the corporate logo of the network.

Let us on this point conclude that the remarkable fluidity of the member's gaze in the world of visual technology and geopolitical interests is a resource not only for elucidating social order but also for the production of mass perception about and of social order. Furthermore, we have recognized the unavoidable reality-disjunction in media representation and have shown that use of stereotypes brings visual stability into the politically unstable world. And we have suggested the impossibility of "objectivity" in media, if by that term we mean stereotype-free representation. A 'stereotype' is a standardized meaning, and there seem to be too many of those for media production to foreswear. While politically and ethically undesirable, representational stereotypes--of Muslims, Jews, or Serbs--are seen here as practical achievements of editing. They perform an enormously practical function in stabilizing the fluid gaze in an amorphous world and in facilitating the production and reproduction of the media industry itself as the instrument of global *communication*.[20] This brings us back to Said's faith in the objectivity of media. As we have seen, the US mass media lacks objectivity (i.e. stereotype-free representation) not only towards Muslims but also towards its own white Christian and Jewish kids using computers. We can say objectivity is no longer afforded. If objectivity means seeing events on the screen in the same way they are seen by those who have produced those events, the objectivity of media representation will always remain an impossible ideal. The basic challenge to Said's assumption lies in the irremediable disjunction between the rules of producing events and the rules of producing the seeing of their representation. The only place for objectivity in this context is in accounting for its absence.

[20] Perhaps this explains why the shift of the sniper's identity did not hurt the corporate standing of ABC news; to the contrary, it produced and reproduced the coherence of the ABC news both evenings, maintained not by the logic of the reported events but by editing logic and style.