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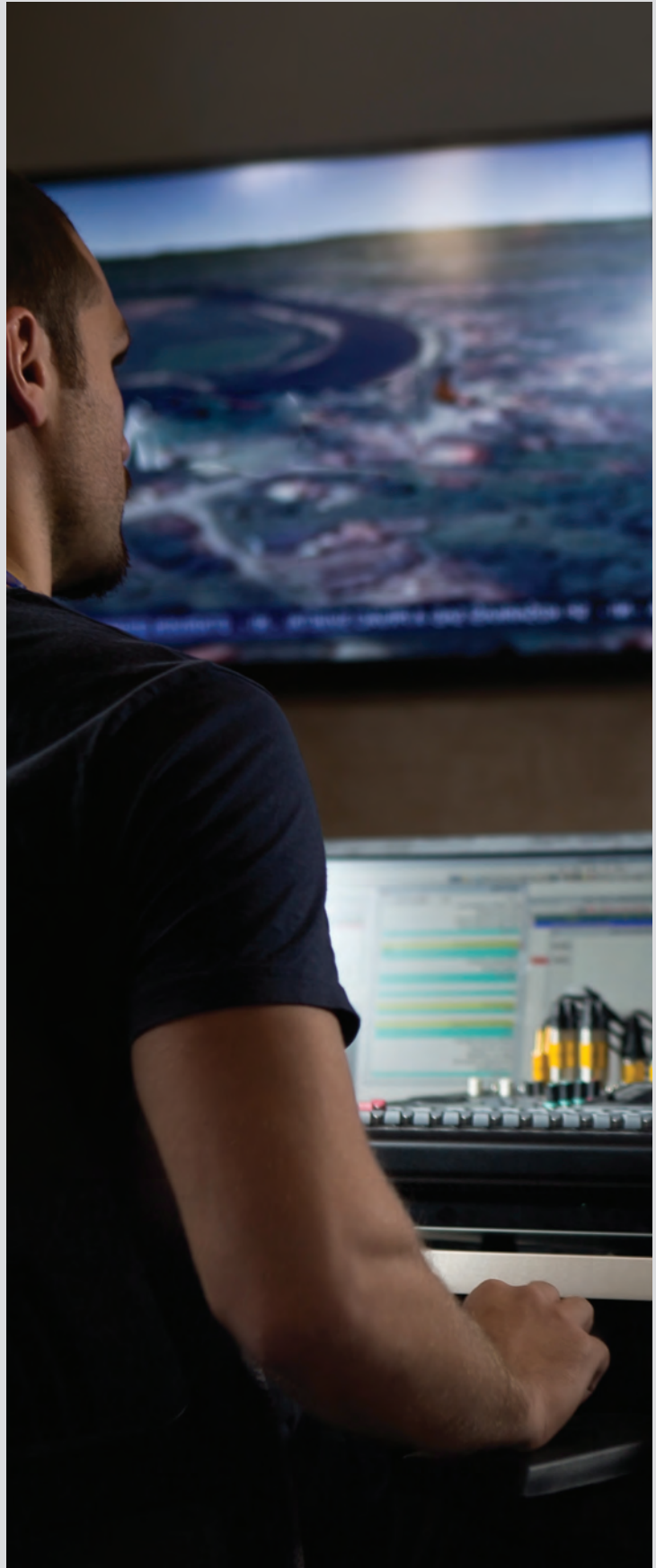
Introduction to Film, Television & New Media

WHAT IS MEANT BY 'MOVING-IMAGE MEDIA'?

1.1.1
The Theorist
of Mass
Communications
Denis McQuail

According to the strictest meaning of the word, a medium is a channel of communication. 'Media', as the plural of 'medium', simply refers to more than one channel. 'The media' also refers to the institutions in which teams of people work to produce the communications we consume. The term is broad enough in its usage to also include the cultural products of the media: texts such as movies and computer games.

- **Moving-image media.** This term refers to the media associated with film, television, video and digital games, which are the media studied in the subject Film, Television & New Media. Text-based media (such as newspapers) and exclusively audio-based media (such as radio) are not included in the study of moving-image media. Still images or photography is also outside of the scope of study.
- **Traditional media** developed in the 19th and 20th centuries. This term refers to the types of media through which a small number of producers communicate with a mass audience. Traditional media are sometimes called 'one-to-many' media.
- **New media** developed in the late-20th century and have come of age in the 21st century. New media are computer-based media with a more complex pattern of interaction between producers and consumers. New media are sometimes called 'many-to-many' media.

Since the turn of the 21st century, the term 'media' has come to include both the traditional media and the emerging new media of computer–based and digital communication.

Figure 1.1 The media scrum. Behind each camera and microphone can be millions of viewers.

Purposes of the media

According to communications professor Denis McQuail (1935–2017), the new and traditional media fulfil the following roles in society:

- **Political role.** The media perform an essential political role in all societies, whether democratic or non-democratic.
  - They provide debate and supply information.
  - They make politicians widely known in the general community.
  - They allow governments to exercise power because politicians have easy access to the media.
  - They promote new ideas, social change and global understanding.
- **Cultural role.** The media are now among the most important communicators about culture.
  - They are agents of socialisation. Like schools, the media educate the young about the meanings of our culture.
  - They provide an experience that we can share. Media programs and images allow many people to have a shared sense of belonging. This is why, for instance, many comedians make jokes about politicians or television shows – because we've all seen them.
  - They provide important pastimes and leisure activities for many people.
- **Economic role.** The traditional media are large industries. The developments in new media have increased the importance of the media to the overall economy.

Traditional media

The traditional media, the so-called 'mass media', includes television and movies. Because their production is so expensive, it is very centralised. As a result, the communication tends to be from a privileged few to many.

The traditional media have all or some of the following features:

- **Large numbers of people are reached.** The audience may truly be a mass **broadcast** audience, or it may be a much smaller **narrowcast** audience. With the exception of movies in cinemas, traditional media products are usually produced centrally but consumed privately.

- **Media products are often multimodal.** Language has a variety of modes of delivery. These include speaking, writing, audio, nonverbal and visual modes of communication. Media products commonly combine several modes.
- **Some form of technology is employed.** Although the technology used may be simple, most traditional media use advanced technological processes.
- **Industrial corporations are involved in production.** With the traditional one-to-many media, large-scale government or commercial organisations control the production processes.
- **There is often multiple authorship.** Since media production is an industrial process, workers often have specialised roles, as on an assembly line.
- **Government regulation often applies.** The media industry is usually regarded as a 'special case' and is subject to some degree of government regulation.

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Figure 1.2 Television transmission towers (one for each channel). Traditional media are broadcast media following a one-to-many model: one broadcaster and an audience of many hundreds of thousands.

New media

The new media are loosely defined and in a process of constant change. Large numbers of people are involved in both the production and the consumption of new media. Anyone with a computer and a multimedia program can be a producer. Rapid changes in technology have affected media production and consumption more than most other areas of society.

Technological change is 'ecological', says American cultural critic Neil Postman. He uses the term in the same way as environmental scientists. 'If you add caterpillars to a given habitat, you do not have the same environment plus caterpillars. You have a whole new environment.' According to Postman, a new technology does not add or subtract something: it changes everything!

New media have all or some of the following characteristics:

- **Digitality.** New media convert information from real-world lived experiences into numbers stored on a computer hard drive.
- **Interactivity.** New media allow the consumer to interact with the product to make certain choices.
- **Hypertext.** Hypertext in new media differs from the linear style of storytelling by allowing people to jump around from text to text and within a text.
- **Dispersal.** New media allow widely dispersed many-to-many communication.
- **Shared.** New media involve user participation and encourage user-generated content.
- **Social.** New media allow groups of people with shared interests to collaborate.
- **Virtuality.** New media have created electronic 'places' and 'spaces'.
- **Global and local.** New media provide instant communication across vast distances, but also make it easier to socialise and communicate with friends locally.
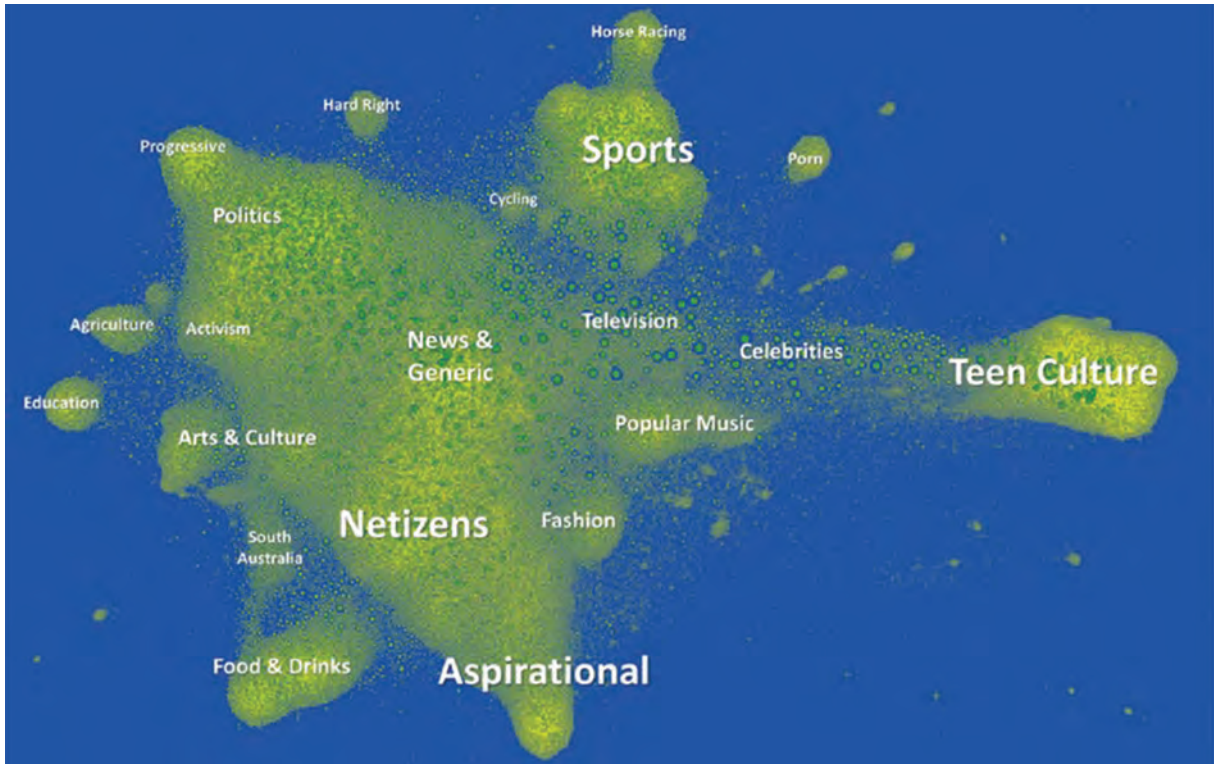- **Everywhere at once.** New media are embedded in everyday objects and in our daily lives.

Figure 1.3 A map of Twitter communications grouped according to the themes of the discussions. The map was produced by Queensland University of Technology's 'Mapping Online Publics' project led by Dr Axel Bruns.

Film, Television & New Media – the subject

Film, Television & New Media is a Queensland Certificate of Education subject that recognises the importance of the media as our primary sources of both information and entertainment. This means that the media are giving us many of our ideas and shaping the way we think. The subject has a long history that spans the movement from traditional linear media to digital new media.

The subject in the 20th century

The study of television, film and moving-image media has a long history in Queensland. Thousands of students have graduated from the subject over more than 40 years. Many of them are now 'movers and shakers' in the media industries in Queensland, nationally and internationally. Included are Hollywood actors, heads of internationally known production companies, and well-known journalists and news readers. A host of production people, such as editors, post-production staff, camera operators and sound-recordists have also graduated from Queensland schools having studied the subject in Years 11 and 12. More than that, the subject has created a generation of people who are highly media literate.

The development of the subject can be broken down into several stages.

Early beginnings

The course has its origins in short film courses taught as part of English in certain independent private schools and some state schools. For example, Anglican Church Grammar School (Churchie) established a film course and its own production studios in 1970. Beaudesert State High School set up its own production courses and an annual film festival in 1977.

At this time, many schools used the junior school English textbook *Mastering the Media* by Barry Dwyer et al., first published in 1971. However, there were no dedicated senior school textbooks for the subject.

The first FTV syllabuses

Writing began on the first Film and Television (FTV) syllabus in 1975, and it was trialled in eight Queensland schools between 1979 and 1980.

1.1.2
Mapping
online publics

The schools were: Beaudesert SHS, Indooroopilly SHS, Noosa District SHS, Gordonvale SHS, Miami SHS, Anglican Church Grammar School, Villanova College and Corpus Christi College (now Mary MacKillop College). The syllabus was approved as a success and implemented state-wide in 1981.

Queensland was the first state in Australia to offer such a course for university entrance. Students in these early syllabuses studied the following key topics:

- visual narrative
- the soundtrack
- news and documentary
- advertising
- **genre** and convention
- propaganda and ideology
- censorship and freedom of expression.

Period of rapid growth

Film and Television quickly became one of the most popular subjects with students in the 1980s and 1990s. More and more schools began to offer the subject. However, it remained a specialty course, and only about 25 per cent of schools taught the subject. In this period, the subject developed its own understanding of itself as a discipline. It also developed its own way of structuring curriculum content.

Several new textbooks made an important contribution in this period. Western Australian teachers Barrie McMahon and Robyn Quin's *Real Images: Film and Television* (1986) brought the study of media codes and conventions to the subject. Queensland teacher Colin Stewart (co-author of this book) published *Media Ways and Meanings* in 1990; this book helped clarify the study of genres in Film and Television.

In 1996, a new syllabus for Film and Television brought about a major shift in the teaching of the subject. This syllabus introduced the study of the key concepts: Technologies, Representations, Audiences, Institutions and Languages. These concepts were introduced from UK curriculums, and they are now the basis of the subject discipline around the world.

The subject in the 21st century

In 2005, the name of the subject was changed to Film, Television & New Media. This was to account for the huge growth in digital media from the early 2000s onwards. Including new media in the name of the subject allowed for the study of video

across a whole range of new platforms that hadn't existed when the subject was first established. These include digital games, internet subscription services and mobile phone platforms.

Moving-image media is the media type that is studied in the subject. This is in keeping with the tradition of the original subject, and its concern with television and film. In many ways, the moving-image media are the most attractive ones for most people; they are also the ones that most resemble the appearance of the actual world. This makes moving-image media the most influential and significant of all media.
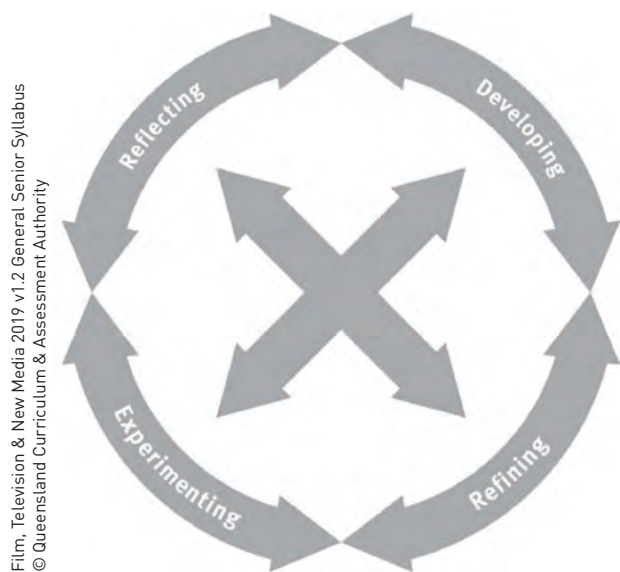
Key concepts in Film, Television & New Media

To come to an understanding of the moving-image media, whether traditional or new, more than just the media product needs to be considered. The media embody social customs and relationships, as well as buildings and hardware such as fibreoptic cable, steel transmission towers and printing presses.

The subject Film, Television & New Media develops understandings about the media around the key concepts. These were originally developed by the British Film Institute. The key concepts allow the study of the media in broad areas of investigation. They are as follows.

- **Technologies.** The technologies of production, distribution and reception are integral parts of the media themselves. They are the tools and the processes used to create media products. How we receive a communication determines how we use it and has an impact on what it means.
- **Representations.** What we see through the media is not reality, but a 're-presentation' of reality. It is constructed from various selection decisions made by the producers. The way the media construct a view of the world provides an insight into their relationship with society.
- **Audiences.** While members of the audience may not immediately think of themselves as part of the equation, without them the media would have no meaning. Audiences consist of individuals and groups. The media products are made for them, and audiences make meaning of them.
- **Institutions (industries and organisations).** Media products are influenced by the organisations that produce them. Roles involved in assembling the products have an

impact on the style of the product. Patterns of ownership and government regulation also have a significant effect. Institutions make it possible to have media products. Institutions also limit what is produced – whether by cost limitations, regulations or just inability to 'think outside of the square'. Institutions both enable and constrain production and use.

- **Languages.** The media have their own way of looking at the world. Each uses a specialised language, whether visual or written. Media products have distinctive ways of telling stories; they have particular narratives and recognisable genres. Moving-image media languages are the systems of signs, codes and conventions that help to create the meanings we get from media products.

Film, Television & New Media 2019 v1.2 General Senior Syllabus
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Figure 1.4 A graphic from the QCAA syllabus showing the interrelationship between each of the key concepts in the subject Film, Television & New Media. Moving-image media can be investigated from the perspective of each of the key concepts. The key concept acts as a lens to look through. The whole system should be considered in the light of the contexts of production and use.

Key terms in Film, Television & New Media

There are some specialised terms used in Film, Television & New Media you may not have heard before. In some cases, you will be used to hearing another term in its place. It is the idea that is important, and more familiar terms can be used interchangeably until you become accustomed to the specialised language used to study the media.

Moving-image media texts or products

The products of the media are often referred to as **media texts**. Media texts or media products are the programs, videos, films and digital games you are familiar with. The term can loosely include any sequence of communication, such as a music video, a radio broadcast or a mobile phone game. Texts have the following features:

- **A text is a unit of meaning that is complete in some way.** A sequence of meaning, or a story, is the most common media text. News stories, television soap operas and movies are sequenced narratives in which the meanings systematically relate to one another: there is a start, a middle and a finish. However, a single image such as a movie poster could also be a text, since it is complete in itself.
- **Media texts are created through a process of selection.** For example, what is finally shown on a television program is the end result of selection decisions made by the scriptwriter, producer, director, camera operator, editor and even the actors.
- **Media texts are said to be 'constructed' rather than natural.** Media texts come with certain perspectives that have attitudes, interpretations and conclusions already built in. This is inevitable because they come from particular contexts. Institutions such as commercial television stations may have constructed the text, and the text may have been aimed at a certain audience, such as 18- to 39-year-olds. The combination of these factors means that a point of view is always present, even in seemingly neutral texts such as news stories.

Moving-image media processes

Media processes are the stages of production that media texts go through from the initial idea to the final distribution to an audience. To make a film, for example, teams of people are involved in the media processes that take the idea and produce a finished feature film for release in cinemas, on DVD and via online platforms.

The staged processes of media production are called pre-production, production and post-production (see page 89).

Mediums

Mediums include the traditional media of television, movies, radio, newspapers and magazines. Media forms also include the new media of the internet and video games. However, modern media cannot be so easily divided. The boundaries between mediums are blurring, and many traditional media are moving into new media forms of delivery. Television is an example of this, as many well-known television programs have both traditional and online delivery.

Platforms

A media platform is a means of delivering media content to audiences. It is a means of allowing audiences to engage with media categories such as film, games or social media. A platform can be regarded as an information or content space.

Platforms can be mediums, sites or services. The term 'platform' can be used interchangeably with 'medium', as in television as a platform. It can also refer to internet sites. YouTube is referred to as a platform. Facebook is a platform. Subscription services delivered over the internet can also be referred to as platforms. Netflix and Stan are platforms.

Context

The context is the surrounding environment of the text. In the subject Film, Television & New Media, the context has two parts: the contexts of production and the contexts of use (or reception).

1 **Production context.** When language, the time of production, nationality, organisation, government regulations and all other factors of a production environment are combined, they create what is called the context. Context refers to all the natural, cultural and social aspects of an environment that help shape the final meaning of a text.
2 **Use context.** The contexts of reception and consumption are the surrounding circumstances in which a media text is consumed or used. The reception context includes the following:
   • surrounding environment of the audience
   • technology used to consume the media product
   • time of day

   • individual personality and life history of the audience member
   • background knowledge or cultural knowledge of the individual.

Genres

Genres (from a French word meaning 'type, classification or category') are used to put media texts into categories according to the characteristics they share. For example, similar plot lines, characters or settings in different films suggest they belong to the same genre. The habitual use of genre conventions tends to mean their structure stays the same – at least for as long as they are a useful way of doing things. Consequently, genres have predictable patterns.

Units in this course of study

The subject Film, Television & New Media is a two-year course that has four units of study. This textbook is arranged to follow those units of work, and to focus on the key concepts of Technologies, Representations, Audiences, Institutions, and Languages (TRAIL).

Unit 1: Foundation. Unit 1 is an introduction to the ways in which the visual languages are used to communicate meaning. You will learn about media technologies, media institutions and media languages.

Unit 2: Story forms. Unit 2 investigates how stories are told in moving-image media, and how the form a story takes changes depending on its platform and contexts of production and use. You will learn some of the formats and techniques involved in creating moving-image media stories. The key concepts to be focused on are media representations, media audiences and media languages.

Unit 3: Participation. Unit 3 explores the potential for media users to participate in the moving-image media experience. Audiences can participate as users across multiple platforms using the internet and smartphones. They can also participate as producers using modern consumer production technology such as DSLR movie cameras. At an advanced level, you will investigate the key concepts of media technologies, media audiences and media institutions.

Unit 4: Identity. Unit 4 is the final unit and encourages experimentation with moving-image media production to explore and question individual artistic identity. Identity expressed through media production can be explored in various aesthetic, historical and cultural traditions and contexts. In doing so, an individual style can be developed. At a more advanced level, you will develop understandings in the key concepts of media technologies, media representations and media languages.

1.1 ACTIVITIES

1 Make a list of all the media productions you have participated in. The list could range from photography to blogs, videos and so on.
   Explain one of these types of productions in greater detail, **giving information** about what you did, who you worked with and who made up the audience for the production.

2 Neil Postman says that technological change is 'ecological'. In small groups, brainstorm some recent technological changes in media and apply Postman's theory.
   Appraise whether it changed the whole environment in some way. As a starting example, **make judgements** about ways in which the increase of downloading has changed the music and broadcasting industries.

3 Select a media form/medium (e.g. television) and consider the characteristics of the media that apply to that media form. Respond to the areas of investigation in the following table.

EXPLAIN	ANALYSE	APPRAISE
Explain how the characteristics of the media generally apply to the medium you have chosen. **Give information** about the way your chosen medium matches the characteristics.	Analyse component features of your chosen medium by **examining** each and **consider** the **strengths and limitations** of the medium.	Appraise the **significance** and **status** of the medium, **drawing conclusions** about its overall **worth** for audiences.