

# **Meaning and Responsibility: a conceptual framework for media professionals**

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Storytellers and media workers occupy positions of power. Power comes with responsibility that is often defined in the professional media environment through codes of ethics, which are normative agreements, often in a commercial form. This thesis addresses a relevant problem to individual media-makers and suggests a conceptual framework to discuss issues of responsibility. The study seeks to understand the relationship between meaning and responsibility, as well as whether different author-types lead to different positions on the concept of responsibility. It deals with these questions by adopting two almost opposite approaches to perception, one representing <i>direct</i> perception, derived from the work of James J. Gibson, and the other a processed, or <i>indirect</i>, perception, derived from the work of Roland Barthes. These two approaches are defined according to their understanding of meaning and how this understanding is correlated to the responsibility of the media-maker. The study employs this model by working through a sample text, which in this case is a student-produced documentary film.</p> <p>In this thesis it is argued that an active understanding and awareness of the notion of responsibility is essential for creators of moving images. The study shows further that, independently of this position of responsibility, the media-maker has to be aware of his or her content and its possible perception in order to reduce the risk of unintended outcomes. The key is to master the way to tell the story but perhaps not the message. The latter is a matter of ethical positioning.</p>	
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<p>Sammandrag:</p> <p>Som berättare och media arbetare erhåller man en maktposition. Med makt förknippas ofta ansvar som i professionella sammanhang ofta är definierade via etiska koder som normgivande överenskommelser, ofta kommersiella. I den här studien är idén att undersöka ansvarspositionen ur ett individuellt perspektiv utöver normativa eller kommersiella kontrakt. Studien har för avsikt att se ifall en relation mellan mening och ansvar kan definieras och därmed kunna finna möjlig ram för hur en ansvars position kan se ut. Modellen består främst i att beskriva och begränsa olika former av mening och hur de relaterar till möjligt ansvar beroende av författar-typ (author-type). Som utgångspunkt används två nästan dimentralt olika synsätt för hur människan tolkar sinnesintryck; den <i>direkta</i> upplevelsen och den <i>indirekta</i> upplevelsen som kräver mental processering. Den första representeras av James J. Gibson och den andra av Roland Barthes. Dessa utgångspunkter utvärderas och diskuteras mot en text som utgörs av en student-producerad dokumentarisk film. Uppsatsens tes formulerar att en aktiv förhållning till ansvar är nödvändig för en författare (author) inom rörliga bilder. Resultatet av studien visar även, oavsett ansvarsposition som författare (author), att nyckeln är bemästrande av berättarkonsten framom möjligt ämnat budskap som snarast är en etisk positionering.</p>	
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## **PREFACE**

During my studies in the field of media and storytelling, I have returned again and again to the question of my responsibility as a media worker. It seems that the Western world exists in a postmodern or even post-postmodern era within which it lacks solidarity and a sense of idealism that might bring people together to work for the common good. I can't help but be worried about the implications of this condition, especially when it comes to the media.

Because I am about to depart from the world of education, I am afforded the opportunity to reflect upon my experiences here. After thinking hard about a metaphor for these experiences, I finally found one: I have been riding the horse backwards.

This metaphor is meant as a provocation since provocation appears to be the only viable way, in our current media environment, to get anyone's attention. The metaphor is also an incitement to reflect about the nature of education within the media and especially about the nature and content of moving images. The media environment is now evolving in a very rapid manner and this may provide opportunities for citizens, as opposed to institutions, to mediate and communicate to large audiences. This change is the fundamental thing that must be addressed.

Educational institutions that teach aspiring media workers should look forward, rather than build on the work of yesterday, in order to make a contribution to this environment. They should give their students a reason to enroll. To be more precise, their focus should shift away from the technical aspects of media production and more toward the storytelling that are not easily mastered or learned "out in the wild."

I believe that story is the core element in all media production (or, to avoid the commercial connotation of the word production, the making of content). It worries me that so much content is produced without reflection other than a sense of commercial criteria.

This thesis does not reveal a new truth or a new finding for the academic world; it only explores a rather subjective understanding within the field and makes a few narrow observations. This thesis does, however, invite to a discussion and provide my future col-

leagues with a set of tools or thoughts for our post-postmodern media environment. The thesis is in part a return for all of the work that has been invested in me as a student, but it is mostly a journey of self-exploration.

I have a particular interest in the concept of subjective truth, or more accurately, in the concept of subscribed subjective truth. “Subscription” refers to the sense of a “mental” tool that helps to redefine reasoning. By actively subscribing to various “truths,” I leave myself the option to un-subscribe. My aim in communication, and foremost in face-to-face discussion, is to be able to revise my own views instead of imposing changes on the views of my counterpart. In what follows, I am not concerned about whether this is ultimately a right or wrong concept; it is instead a way to activate a sort of personal 3D glasses that allow me to make sense of my surroundings and my reality. The distinction between “truth” and “reality” is substantial. The latter is defined herein as a perception of “the visual world,” and I will go into greater detail about this later in my paper.

This paper got its inspiration from my senior lecturer, Mr. Matteo Stocchetti, who is one of the few people to bring true academic dimension to the film and television programme at Arcada. I am honored and grateful that he took the time to be my supervisor and I thank him for bearing with me throughout our many lengthy discussions.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The domain of media affords us with the opportunity to inform or mediate to large audiences. The ancient tradition of telling stories to crowds or to small, nearby groups of people has changed. Because of technical evolution, we live in an environment within which we can go online and transmit stories instantly without the physical presence of listeners. We can even receive immediate feedback about what we transmit.

Interestingly, the dynamics of storytelling has largely remained the same; a story is told by an author, or “authority,” and his or her listeners scrutinize the information contained within the story and make their own judgments about it. The main difference between storytelling at a bonfire and storytelling on YouTube is that the reach of the latter tool is much greater and the verification of its information is more challenging since its authors cannot be scrutinized directly. In short, the author has become more powerful because of the magnified reach of the story’s information.

This paper will approach the topic by introducing and describing two different ways for perception that serves the purpose of giving different views and suggestions that could give keys for the relationship between making content (authorship) and how it might be perceived. The idea here is to relate the notion of responsibility to the craftsmanship for content making. Secondly, this paper will introduce a chart, or mapping, that will attempt to give a conceptual tool that will suggest a framework for media workers in context of suggested author-types vis-à-vis responsibilities. The above-mentioned approaches will be discussed further through a sample text in form of a film.

## 1.1 Problem

Being in a position of power implies the notion of responsibility, and this notion will be the main subject and theme of this essay. This thesis explores the concept of responsibility and scrutinizes it together with the notion of meaning since the two are closely related. The concept of responsibility is a well-worn topic within the media, and the outcome of past research is the existence of normative rules and codes of ethics, for media creation. Unlike previous research, this essay attempts to address the problem of a

framework for responsibility connected to the concept of meaning and, furthermore, the possibility of a responsibility that is beyond the presence of normative agreements connected to certain author-types.

The central question is whether it is possible to create a framework for responsibility for authors of moving images.

## **1.2 Relevance**

The relevance of this study lies in discovering whether or not such a framework can be articulated. The research is of clear importance when it is considered from the perspective of the citizenry. The world of media, and thus the world of represented reality, is affected by the responsibility that is (or is not) taken by creators of media. Thus, educational institutions and no less the professional arena within the media environment, play a vital part in enhancing awareness. It is my hope that this essay will contribute to the discussion of this theme, and it is my hope that this discussion will lead to a better world for all of us.

## **1.3 Definitions and limitations**

The core problem that this essay addresses is the relationship of the author's (filmmaker) responsibility and the meaning of the text. This problem can be addressed in many different ways. The notion of responsibility can be broad and highly philosophical, but this essay focuses on a rather practical level. It has the aim of enhancing the set of tools that can be used by makers of media within the field of moving images. Because of this, limitations and definitions must be set.

As stated above, ethical frameworks that guide journalists and professional creators of media do exist. One of the early agreements made was the Canon of Journalism that was adopted 1923 (revised 1975 with new name Statement of Principles) by America's newspaper editors (ASNE 1975). Such self-regulated agreements have since been adopted in most countries and are listed with Unesco (Unesco 2012). The idea within this essay, however, is to go beyond these normative guidelines and seek a different approach by linking the concept of responsibility, dependent of authors' types to that of meaning.

### **1.3.1 Responsibility**

In order to discuss the notion of responsibility alongside my text, I propose a limited and contextually workable definition of the term. In general, the concept of responsibility is complex involving and involves a high degree of philosophical debate. If taken to its length the discussion will go back to antiquity and Aristotle and his text *Nicomachean Ethics*, but the major debate has been ongoing around free will and determinism through Epicurus, Cicero, Augustine, Erasmus, Luther and later with Hume, Kant and Schopenhauer (see Auhagen & Bierhoff 2001, p. 9). I have chosen to use the definition of Dr. Garrath Williams (2009, p.1), and I will first ask, “What is it to be responsible?” rather than, “What is a person responsible for?” From this division, I go further and reduce the first category to the following terms: responsibility as a virtue; retrospective responsibility; and prospective responsibility.

I settle on the following definition. Responsibility is a “general responsiveness to others (for instance, via moral reasoning or feelings such as sympathy); a sense of responsibility for our actions (for instance, so that we may offer reasons for our actions or feel emotions of shame or guilt); and tendencies to regard others as responsible (for instance, to respect persons as the authors of their deeds and to feel resentful or grateful to them)” (Williams 2009, p 1). I make a slight modification to the definition above with regards to what it is to be responsible for someone or something: holding someone responsible is fundamentally a matter of making a moral judgment that is accompanied by an expectation that the agent who performed the act acknowledges the force of the judgment or provides an exonerating explanation of why she performed the action. To hold someone responsible is thus to be one to whom an explanation is owed (Oshana 1997, pp. 76–78; Scanlon 1998, pp. 268–271). As Williams (2009, p 1) points out, the notion of responsibility originally had to do with political thought; this corresponds well with my focus on citizens rather than consumers.

### **1.3.2 Meaning**

*Webster’s Dictionary* (Webster’s 2012) defines meaning as:

1. That which is meant or intended; intent; purpose; aim; object; as, a mischievous meaning was apparent. If there be any good meaning towards you.

2. That which is signified, whether by act language; signification; sense; import; as, the meaning of a hint.
3. Sense; power of thinking.

Defining meaning is just as challenging as defining responsibility if going beyond the dictionary. The definition of meaning has been a subject not only for philosophers but also for behaviorists and linguists. Depending on the time and the context, the elucidation of this meaning can be complicated or even straightforward as is shown later in this paper.

This thesis takes a famous quotation from the dancer Isabel Duncan as the starting point for a definition of meaning (Johnson Lewis 2009) “No, I can't explain the dance to you,” she said; “if I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it.” Duncan’s words can be understood in several ways, and this productive difficulty serves as the theme of this essay. Should everything be translated into words? Maybe some meanings should stay a part of the unconscious without using words to dress them.

How have other thinkers defined meaning? Gregory Bateson (see Byrne 2009) defines meaning by means of a couple of metaphors. The information on one side of a coin provides a hint about, or the meaning of, the other side; a sentence sometimes contains a slash-mark, and the words before the mark provide the meaning of the words that come after. Wittgenstein’s idea that the meaning of a word stems from its use is similar to the behaviorist approach (see Byrne 2009). Paul Horwich (1999, p. 228) argues that:

Each word means what it does in virtue of the fact that a certain acceptance property of the word is explanatorily fundamental vis-à-vis its overall deployment (where what I call an 'acceptance property' specifies conditions in which designated sentences containing the word are held true).

These definitions and examples have their origins in the philosophy of language, but attempts have also been made to define meaning by using a communicative approach. In 1957, for instance, Paul Grice (see Martinich 2000, p. 21) introduced his views with the following examples: “The ringing of the bell means that the bus is full. By raising her hand, Mary meant that she knew the answer. That remark, ‘The coast is clear’, means that the rebels have left.” The idea here is that the intention of the author is always to be recognized (e.g., the ringing of the bell is to be trusted as a sign for stopping the bus).

This approach leans towards an ecological perspective since action and consequences are dealt with based on direct information perceived and leaves out invisible mental parameters.

In *Word and Object* (Quine 1960), W. V. Quine introduced the idea of meaning from the audience's perspective, which was a unique approach at that time. Quine explored the sense of understanding a language as a foreigner. If a field linguist, for example, is to make schemata for a language he has never before heard, he must first find some sort of communication that he can then translate into words. This process involves a holistic approach that leads to outcomes and schemata that result from different kinds of inputs, and it is highly dependent upon the individuals who make these schemata. Donald Davidson, one of Quine's adepts, develops and refines this idea in his *Belief and the Basis of Meaning* (Davidson 1974), which concludes that audiences must assign certain beliefs to the speaker and his speech (i.e., utterance) in order to be able to interpret.

As can be concluded from this brief review, the notion of meaning is a complex matter that involves context and a dependence on language and empirical evidence (Martinich, p. 35).

Within this essay, meaning will be regarded as dependent upon the theoretical approach taken to define it. Depending on the approach, the notion of meaning will shift. The dictionary definition will be regarded as the simplified and general definition.

### **1.3.3 Ethics**

In order to discuss the concept of responsibility, it is necessary to touch on the subjects of ethics and morality even if not included as a topic within this paper. The definition that will provide the basis for the discussion in this thesis is taken by the philosopher Alan Gewirth, who wrote about ethical rationalism (Arrington 1997, p. 185):

Gewirth believes that it is possible to prove a fundamental moral principle in the optimally strong sense of showing that anyone attempting to deny the principle would contradict herself. This fundamental principle, called by Gewirth the principle of generic consistency, requires that one act in accord with the generic rights of others as well as oneself, these generic rights being those to freedom and well-being.

In a simpler form, it implies that one would act in a way that consequences of one actions could be justified as if to be imposed on one self. The freedom and well-being desired for oneself has therefore also to be allowed for others.

This proposition is sufficient to accommodate the purpose of this thesis since focus is given on the notion of responsibility.

#### **1.3.4 Author**

How might we define an author of moving images as a content utterer? Is this author a type of author-producer, that is, someone who is commercially oriented, or is this type of an author-artist, someone with a different set of values? How does the concept of the author-artist compare to that of the author-citizen? If we examine this issue from the perspective of as an author-producer, we would first have to consider the sense of responsibility toward the producer's sponsors. A sponsor is anyone with a financial or other interest in the product. The responsibility of the author-producer is furthermore defined by a set of codes and norms within the environment in which the product is distributed. Ultimately, in this context, the audience or the consumer's judgment of the product will be a central factor in its production. In the commercial sphere, responsibility lies first with the product's sponsors and second with the producer's own convictions.

An author-artist, on the other hand, is someone who makes art. Art (as separated from the decorative arts and crafts) is something that can be tracked back over 40 000 years ago and even beyond. According to Michel Lorblanchet, an established French archeologist argues that art, describes Paleolithic art as art origin, and that the prime function was to represent the real (Lorblanchet 2007, p. 102). In his article, *Origin of art*, he concludes that (2007, p.109) "humans are by nature artists and the history of art begins with that of humanity." This could suggest that all humans have an artist capability to draw upon. The artist as we know today has gone through some transformation and it might have its starting point when fine art became institutionalized during later part of sixteenth century when the academies of fine art were founded, first in Italy, then in France, and only later spreading elsewhere (Minor 1994). These academies provoked counter-movements to the art that was being produced within them, and soon the modernists came along. This evolution brought us artists like Marcel Duchamp in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Indeed, the evolution of institution-

alized art begins with the strictly regulated definitions of the academies and then generates artistic revolutions as counter-movements. With the emergence of postmodernism, we are perhaps heading toward such an inclusive definition of art that art may simply become *experience* and its context. This would link back to the origin of art as Lorblanchet suggests. In the context of this paper, however, the key is this sense of revolution and representation, which suggests that an artist is a communicator or advocate who may raise important matters and thoughts. One could argue, as a generalization, that an author-artist as opposed to the author-producer would prioritize his or her own conviction before the sponsors.

Lastly the type of the author-citizen that is suggested as the vital type, in context of this paper, lies within the political arena. A citizen is a member of a community and he or she acts within this community. Both the producer and the artist can be citizens, and both can orient their activities toward the goal of improving their communities with different tools, but in order to differentiate between them, we must understand the main focus of these labels. The author-citizen type would mainly act with the community or collective in mind, and he or she uses or provokes, in most cases, a democratic set of tools. The artist may have a lot in common with the citizen, but the artist also works in a different arena. In this thesis focus is on the media professional as an author-citizen type.

### **1.3.5 Film and moving images**

“Film” will be used as an inclusive term that comprises any kind of media that employs moving images, including TV and video. Gibson defines moving images as progressive pictures, and that sense is also used in the context of this paper.

## **1.4 Presentation of approaches and authors**

In the field of film theory, much attention has been given to the language of film, and this term implies that the perception of moving images involves conscious or intellectual processing that is based on culture. This has been a sort of given point for research within the field. It originates from the domain of linguistics, and in particular from Ferdinand Saussure. Saussure’s core idea is that the meaning of a word is dependent upon time, place, the person who utters it, and this speaker’s knowledge of the language

(see Anderson 1996, pp. 36–37). A word may have a referent in the real world, but its speaker provides the specific understanding of it. This leads to the world of concepts, since variants of meaning that are dependent on context are discussed together (i.e., these groupings are concepts). This in turn leads to a distance from or even a broken link with the word's original object. This is the origin of the terms *signifier* and *signified*. The basic theme here is that all, or most, of what human beings know is based on language and culture.

One less known alternative to this approach would be to employ an evolutionary and ecological approach, which suggests that much of our perception occurs directly without mental processing and that, through evolution, higher modes of processing have been added to the lower, earlier modes (Anderson, 1996). This approach might make room for a simpler set of views about our environment and, in this case, help to explain in an alternative matter why movies are so appealing.

James J. Gibson is one of the main exponents of ecological perception. Joseph D. Anderson has made an attempt to build a cognitivist film theory that is largely based on Gibson's work. Roland Barthes is chosen to represent the linguistic approach, and in particular his essay *Death of the Author*. The choice is perhaps debatable—especially the choice of text—but the reason is that the way his text came about and became a sort of slogan to question the established academia points to the core of the linguistic approach to meaning. Its paradox is intriguing and deserves a place in this study

#### **1.4.1 Ecological-cognitive approach based on James J. Gibson, Joseph D. Anderson**

A year before the initial publication of Barthes' essay *Death of the Author* that will be introduced later on in this paper, James J. Gibson, an American psychologist who worked in the field of visual perception, published *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (1966). Gibson's book was largely a continuation of his earlier book *The Perception of the Visual World* (1950). Like Barthes, Gibson was perhaps a rebel, at least in the sense that he questioned the status quo and the establishment. Gibson did not hesitate to reject the theory of behaviorism when he had done thorough testing and found reason to do so. He went on to refine and evaluate his work across almost five decades

and in seven different publications. He published his final conclusions in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1977) and died later the same year.

#### **1.4.2 Playing with fire—The reality play for a filmmaker**

Playing with fire can cause injuries not only to oneself but also to one's surroundings. It can lead to unintended, even fatal consequences. But with training (i.e., play as discussed later), we can minimize these risks and maximize the fire's affordances.

I will in the following discuss a theory of visual perception that has been articulated by James Gibson and furthermore developed by Joseph D. Anderson in context of film. This discussion and presentation is thorough since its approach is not widely known and in context of this paper it gives a unique suggestion for perception of film. This will lead to some interesting thoughts for the topic.

Gibson's theory was developed across five decades and finally summarized in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Gibson's theory was, and continues to be, hotly debated because its provocative approach abandons many well-established psychological explanations of (indirect) visual perception. It also provides a simple and straightforward explanation as to how we perceive our environment.

Gibson's theory was later developed and complemented in the domain of film studies by Joseph D. Anderson in *The Reality Of Illusion: An Ecological Approach to Cognitive Film Theory* (1988).

Gibson's ecological approach to visual perception proposes a view of perception as simple and direct in contrast to the complex and indirect structure of other theories. It distinguishes between the laws of physics and the domain of the "practical" in its understanding of visual perception. This implies that the laws of physics go beyond what can be directly perceived and as such are not useful in this direct sense. Gibson's ecological perspective insists that we recognize the centrality of evolution, within which human beings are part of a larger environmental habitat. Gibson describes this environment as a reality that contains objects, surfaces, and ambient light arrays that are the objects of our perception and consequently allow for our survival. Through the ambient

light array in the medium, which is different from space or air, (not visible without light), the environment mediates the information that human beings perceive. Furthermore, this available information is perceived and selected according to *affordances* (1986, p.127). Human beings actively perform this through a multimodal process that involves touching, smelling, tasting, and sniffing.

In explaining all of this, Gibson provides the example of the flat ground that gives human beings the chance to walk upon it or the fallen log in the woods that can be sat upon. The log, for instance, does not somehow provide the signal that it is a chair; it has no specific sign that suggests that it can be used as a piece of furniture for sitting. It simply can be sat upon. Gibson also claims that vision is a matter of detecting invariants and events that obstructs these invariants. Our visual perception derives not only from our eyes; rather, it comes from the eyes in our heads that rest upon our bodies that have feet on the ground. We are active information seekers with the need to scrutinize what we perceive. We do not stand still, but move about in order to verify our perceptions. Interestingly, Gibson gives our nose a vital function in understanding the self in its environment. We always have our nose in our field of view, and it is thus vital as a referent of the other parts that usually accompany it, like our feet and hands.

Gibson also makes a distinction between “field of view” and “view of the world.” It is the latter that involves perception. We do not perceive images as still pictures like those that derive from a camera and its photographs. There is no image on our retina that somehow transports itself to our brains in order to be analyzed and understood, and there is no little man in our brain who tells us what this image means. Unlike a camera apparatus, the fact that we constantly move our eyes, our heads, and our bodies affords a perception that involves more than what our eyes can see.

Our active hunt for information in context of affordances makes our visual perception something that is logical and necessary for us to live in our environment. We are able to discriminate information according to choices of affordances. This activity works in much the same way as our everyday “audio life,” within which we filter the relevant audio information from all of the ambient noise that is available. Indeed, audio perception is a nested part of visual perception. Anderson takes Gibson’s ideas further and suggests that we are born with an inherent need for synchronicity between visual and audio

perception; this has been verified in tests involving children who prefer experiences with sounds that are synced with accompanying actions—even when the child has not yet learned to speak (Anderson 1996, p. 144) In fact, when we see a movie, we seem to accept that the sounds come from speakers onscreen, even if we perceive the sounds as simply coming from the screen. (This occurs as long as we have a visual referent with which to match the sound.) We are even disturbed when sounds and images are out of sync.

In order to come closer to the topic, we must now leave behind the basic elements of Gibson's theory and move on to the world of illusion as a means of understanding the dynamics of progressive pictures. It appears that some visual processes are too slow to allow us to make decisions or concrete observations about rapid and critical perceptual stimuli. These processes are compensated for by means of a shortcut, and this shortcut is a kind of substitute for the real information. As Anderson (1996, p. 32) writes,

cells connect with each other at synapses, which the electrical signal does not transverse; instead, a chemical release is initiated that flows across the synapse and either excites or inhibits the next cell. The neuron, as the basic processor of the neural system, is relatively simple and dependable, but since a signal must be transformed from electrical to chemical form and back at every synapse, transmission proceeds relatively slowly.

This fact has been confirmed in various experiments such as the Leopard test by Vilayanur Ramachandran and Stuart Anstis (see Anderson 1996), which shows that if we see a leopard run behind a bush and occluded by that bush and then reappearing on the other side, we “see” the same leopard even if its veridical (factually) isn't the same leopard (another leopard coming out on the other side).

These ideas suggest that the concept of illusion is a basic part of our visual perception, a tool that allows us to compensate for missing perceptions that otherwise could compromise our safety or even our lives. Yet this alone does not explain how we can be so attracted to progressive pictures that obviously did not constitute a given from an evolutionary perspective (i.e., it is safe to conclude that we were not constructed to perceive progressive pictures!).

Another “play of mind” that occurs when our perceptions contradict is familiar to each of us when we look at drawings or paintings like those of Escher or Dali. In these cases,

Anderson (1996, p. 44) proposes that the “the winner takes it all” strategy that exists to avoid ambiguity can actually be fatal. We need to choose and to make decisions.

When one views the simplest of conflicting stimuli—two slides consisting of sets of lines tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees presented stereoscopically so that what is presented is a set of lines leaning to the left in one eye and a similar set of lines leaning to the right in the other eye—what one may see first is a grid composed of both sets of lines. But very quickly the lines in one eye will disappear, leaving only the set of lines in the other eye (...). The patterns may alternate, that is, one may first see the lines available to one eye and then those available to the other, but one cannot hold both sets of lines in perception simultaneously.

### **1.4.3 Intellect**

Human beings do have some sort of intellect, be assured, but to arrive at the effect of this intellect on visual perception we must dig a bit further into the neurological system that includes the brain. Gibson argues that direct perception needs no higher understanding or processing in order to function. If a fish can understand the importance of a ledge under which it can hide, this activity cannot involve a higher level of processing. It is at this point that Anderson provides us with an understanding of the dynamics of progressive pictures. The central nervous system is modular for both human beings and fish, and this is because it did not all appear at one time. The current system was built in stages, newer upon older (e.g., new cerebral cortex module, the neocortex), with the new structures leaving the older structures intact. The fish’s brain remained at an elementary stage. Interestingly, when there is conflict between the older and the newer systems, we are steered by the older ones. Still, these systems are all nested within a larger, complex system that Anderson pictures as a classroom with connected computers. It is this complexity that paves the way for thinking and sets human beings apart from other animals. This complexity gives us the ability to process mathematics, language, abstraction, and symbolization, as well as the ability to focus the attention at will. The log that was originally a direct perception becomes, through the activity of the higher systems, a “chair” and then further part of a group or category of “furniture” together with a “table” if taken “home” and utilized in this different context (Anderson, 1996, p. 51).

### **1.4.4 The Play**

In order to be able to explain the fascination of progressive pictures, we must understand the abilities of framing and pretending. Framing and pretending are different from

illusion, which is a “play on the mind” at the level of direct perception. These activities involve a higher level of processing. Furthermore, framing and pretending connect to the concept of play that is part of animal behavior. The issue of the frame or framing is challenging because it works on different levels. As Gibson explains, framing has caused much misunderstanding in the study of perception because of its dual nature. A picture or a photograph is limited by its frame, whereas its surface can be of canvas or paper, indeed of anything that can emit or reflect light in order to allow information to be communicated. In this sense, a picture is both a surface to be perceived and a scene with information and this constitutes a paradox. It is a dual optical array. To answer a question about what you see on or in a photograph, one must consider two different answers, one involves a piece of canvas or paper and the other involve a scene. According to Gibson, this makes the use of pictures in the study of perception challenging to understand (1986, p. 281). Later I will discuss why this is particularly the case with progressive pictures.

The nature of the physical frame of the picture, whether a TV set, computer screen, or movie screen, is significant. As Gregory Bateson (Bateson 2000, p. 144) writes,

Psychological frames are related to what we have called “premises.” The picture frame tells the viewer that he is not to use the same sort of thinking in interpreting the picture that he might use in interpreting the wallpaper outside the frame. Or, in terms of the analogy from set theory, the messages enclosed within the imaginary line are defined as members of a class by virtue of their sharing common premises or mutual relevance. The frame itself thus becomes a part of the premise system. Either, as in the case of the play frame, the frame is involved in the evaluation of the messages it contains, or the frame merely assists the mind in understanding the contained messages by reminding the thinker that these messages are mutually relevant and the messages outside the frame may be ignored.

This is to say that the frame itself works as the rule setter for the play but at the same time does not concern the contents within the frame. This is somewhat different than dreaming. As Bateson (Bateson 2000, p. 301) goes on to say,

in a theater, the audience is informed by the curtain and the framing of the stage that the action on the stage is “only” a play. From within that frame the producers and actors may attempt to involve the audience in an illusion of reality as seemingly direct as the experience of dream. And, as in dream, the play has metaphoric reference to the out-side world. But in dream, unless the sleeper be partly conscious of the fact of sleep, there is no curtain and no framing of the action. The partial negative—“This is only metaphor”—is absent.

We have now come to the concept of play. Play is a vital part of life according to this approach. Without it, we would not have the opportunity to train our skills for living or

survival without potentially fatal consequences. The same goes for many of our fellow creatures. It surely seems like a game when a child plays with a dog, for instance. Its tail and ears can signal that the behavior is “not for real” and its bites are not made at full force. Each of these signals has its opposite, however, when an actual dogfight takes place. This also goes for undomesticated animals. It could be that play acts as a kind of training to enhance and test physical skills. Bates discusses these questions at length, but for practical reasons I want to put forward two aspects of the concept. The first, which is suggested above, is that play is an opportunity to enhance skills; the second is of the sense in which play involves the concepts *real* and *not real*, or to put it slightly differently, *for real* or not *for real*.

When the proper signal has been given, we know that we are playing (i.e., watching a movie). This “play” is the frame and the content within is a re-presentation of real. We can thus begin to understand why progressive pictures are so appealing. In experiencing a movie (that is, not only watching or seeing it, but playing too), we use the same perceptual system as we for activities that are real, but we do so under concept of not real. At some point, we have all probably ducked our heads while watching a movie. How effective this experience is, however, depends upon several factors and not least on the maker and “rule setter” of the film.

#### **1.4.5 Narrative, the possible core in moving images and in life**

It has been declared earlier that narrative is essential and should be the main focus in making moving images. This calls for some elaboration. Anderson (1996, p. 144) has devoted a chapter to this topic. He writes that narrative or the ability to tell stories may play a vital function in making sense of one’s world. When children communicate verbally, they are in fact making narratives out of their experiences. The ecological approach places the narrative function, what we might also think of as secondhand experience, into an evolutionary context within which passing on experience helps the receiver to avoid mistakes that have been made in the past and thus enhance his or her survival potential.

It might be argued that other animals possess narrative capabilities. The honeybee, for example, communicates the place of nectar by flying to other bees and showing them

the way, and it repeats this path until they follow. According to Adams (1996, p. 146), if such activity constitutes narrative experience, it may also constitute the power of language, albeit at a more basic level. Human beings also have the capacity to tell, which is a capacity to consciously acquire information. To go back to Gibson (see Anderson 1996, p. 147):

From an ecological point of view, the point of view of an animal walking on the ground, the basic meaning of the event is in its affordance for the individual. For a given event and a given perceiver there may be a large number, although not an infinite number, of possible relationships and therefore meanings.

Narrative is instrumental in organizing and structuring the meanings of events. Because there are a large number of possible meanings, these meanings need to be reduced to allow people to cope. This leads to the creation of narratives that can be used for future reference. This new information can be applied and thus be allowed to reformulate past experiences. This understanding of narrative opens the door to many explanations, not least about the notion of history. Storytelling is a re-presentation of experience that has been an important part of our evolution.

Due to our active mode of perceiving information, we are constantly looking for stories. This helps us to explain one of the basic reasons why we are so intrigued by movies just as we have always been intrigued by stories around the bonfire. This also gives a hint as to why certain stories are boring to others but of great interest to others. Here, the metaphor of the chess master continues to serve us well, but with a slight modification regarding moving images. The chess master would rather play with someone at approximately the same level in order to feel both challenged and rewarded with the enhancing of his skills. He cannot will himself to play at an amateur level. Similarly, an educated moviegoer always searches for more challenging movies that do not attract more mainstream viewers. A less educated moviegoer might be bored by these challenging movies because, to him, they lack affordances. The interesting difference with the chess master, however, is that the educated viewer might also enjoy mainstream movies. This might be explained by the perceptual absorption that attends the viewing of moving images, which makes all watchers alike whether educated or not.

#### **1.4.6 Narrator**

As declared above, the making of decisions based on perceptions includes the validation of these perceptions by different methods like touching, sniffing, moving closer, and looking around. When we perceive information in a conversation or meet someone for the first time, we make judgments that will later be modified as we come to acquire further information. We look at facial expressions or the ways in which someone moves and behaves and make judgments about the level of threat or affordance that they represent. We implement a process of stereotyping in order to have a structure for these risk analyses. The same applies when we perceive a story. The storyteller, or narrator, tells his story, speaks, makes gestures, uses sounds, and directs his audience's focus around the environment by means of different methods. His story draws upon his experience whether imaginary or actual. The receiver then evaluates this story based on his own experiences (e.g., former stories or "scripts") and the environment in which the story is. The receiver validates the story through the scrutinization of reactions from fellow perceivers as well as judgments about the teller. In order to truly perceive a story, we must trust this narrator. The content of the story is also bounced back and forth for further information about the context within which it is delivered. The result is then apprehended and categorized as a narrative for future reference. Anderson thinks of this as a surrogate reality. "The cinema," he writes, "co-opts this power by presenting a surrogate reality structured as narrative" (1996, p. 148). Human beings seek the validation of narrators in movies. The camera and its angle acts as a narrator, a sort of a visual field monitor that records and frames events. This has resulted in certain general rules for camera angles, such as the over-the-shoulder shot, the establishing shot, and so forth. These rules have been developed mostly by trial and error since the beginning of the era of film. They also seem to correlate well with the theory of visual perception.

An actual narrator who is lifted from the events within the movie, however, can actually alter this "camera angle" narrator. This actual narrator, in whatever technical form it may take, may act within the frame of the movie as the validator with whom the viewer "bounces" the story that is being told. The film viewer is always searching for a narrator in his or her attempt to understand why the story at hand is being told. This narrator must act as the entry point into the story; it allows the viewer to have a relation to the story that is being told and validates the viewer's categorizations. This may mean that

when validation process is insufficient a “meta-narrator” is required. This occurs when the viewer directs questions outside of the movie experience, to the filmmaker, for instance. Still, the question remains, why do we need a narrator in a movie when we accept the given rules of its reality? I will further address this question below.

It also becomes clear that emotions are involved as Anderson (1996, p. 148) writes,

our emotions, seated in the old brain (the part of our brain we share with other mammals) predate our newfound capacity for abstraction, which was conferred upon us by our recent acquisition of a much larger cortex. Stories are structured in such a way as to facilitate channelling new information through the old (and more basic) mechanisms of learning through interaction with the environment (that is, through experience), thereby allowing us to feel and to care about their content. The power of storytelling is in the re-presentation of experience at once to our intellect and to our emotions.

That is, movies trigger emotions because we experience movies with same perceptual mode as we do our experiences outside of the movies (albeit under the concept of play). The absorption that results from viewing the movie is due to the film’s lifelike experience, which often supersedes the viewer’s knowledge that the film is play.

The reasoning presented above leads us to two conclusions. First, direct perception provides us with the basic nature of our reality. To a certain extent, this information is processed in a higher system that involves a more comprehensive understanding that continuously evolves throughout our lives and therefore changes our choices for affordances. As Ulrich Nesser (Anderson 1996, p. 41) has put it:

The chess master, he writes, quite literally sees the position differently—more adequately and comprehensively—than a novice or a non-player would. Of course, even the non-player sees a great deal: the chessmen are of carved ivory, the knight resembles a horse, the pieces are (perhaps) arrayed with a certain geometric regularity. A young child would see still less: that the pieces would fit into his mouth, perhaps, or could be knocked over. A newborn infant might just see that “something” was in front of him. To be sure, he is not mistaken in this: something is in front of him. The differences among the perceivers are not matters of truth and error but of noticing more rather than less.

Second, if the progressive pictures also come to us through direct perception (albeit under the concept of play), this means that the affordances that they provide can match the viewer and—as in other forms of play or in real life—can make a difference. Saying that a film was “life changing” has a certain validity.

The reality play for a filmmaker constitutes the basis of my hypothesis. The filmmaker can be called a “play master” or a “rule setter.” He thus takes responsibility of the rules.

He or she can impose affordances that the viewer cannot physically scrutinize by moving around (or smelling or looking behind himself). The viewer is in a trust relationship to this master, and this constitutes the basis of the master's responsibility. The play master's position is of increased significance because of the potential public reach of his play.

#### **1.4.7 The linguistic approach through Roland Barthes**

Graham Allen writes that Roland Barthes is one of the essential writers in establishing the basis for modern literary and cultural theory. He also holds Barthes influential in several theoretical trends, including structuralism, semiology, post-structuralism and psychoanalytical literary criticism (Allen 2003, pp. 1–2).

Within semiology Barthes contributed with a series of articles and perhaps the most spread would be the book *Mythologies* that was a collection from the journal *Les Lettres* that was published monthly between 1954 and 1956 (Allen 2003, p. 33). In the context of this paper one could find interesting that Barthes use the word myth as expression of a historically specific ideological vision of the world. The following quote from Allens book (Allen 2003, p. 34) Barthes 1957 clarifies it with the following in his preface; “The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the 'naturalness' with which newspaper, art and commonsense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history.” This becomes even clearer in the advertising world that Barthes also refers to in several articles, when certain products become part of a life style. Going further Barthes writes that as the soap is described as creamy liberating clothes from dirt, and detergents are pictured as soldiers in war on the same. Wine, for example, becomes the signifier for the French and thus very seldom would be described in a negative way within French culture or society. The myth as Barthes describes it could perhaps be a concept that describes meaning and reality in relation to environment and time.

In 1967 Barthes wrote *The Death of the Author* while delivering lectures in Philadelphia in the United States. This short essay was the result of an invitation to contribute to the avant-garde magazine *Aspen*. As it happens, the timing and specific environment of its

publication made this text into something extraordinary and it became a platform for much debate and discussion.

These discussions eventually became an integral part of the Yale school in the 1970s (see Bankowsky et al. 2001, pp. 170–174), but Barthes' text included very little that wasn't already covered by the ideas associated to the New Criticism that had circulated decades earlier. But the timing and place of Barthes' work was suitable for an ongoing discussion, and the essay was used to make arguments against established academic opinions. The essay itself is merely a rather literary essay and perhaps not a declaration of a scientific matter. Yet the use of Barthes' essay has transformed the text into something that is used and understood in particular ways for research. This historical interpretation of Barthes' work is relevant to this paper since one might claim that the text itself is passé. This is certainly so, and one might explore domestic discussion in France in order to find out the current status quo of the concept of the author. However, Barthes' text was first published in English for an American public. The French (i.e., what has come to be known as the original) version was published a couple of years later.

In the spirit of Barthes essay the concept of *intentionalism* is often discussed. The nature of intentionalism is debated, and it can carry quite different meanings depending on the purposes for which it is used. The general idea of intentionalism is that, in order to interpret a text, one must first ascertain the meanings that were intended by its maker. In the 1940s, this idea was criticized by W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in their essay "The Intentional Fallacy" (see Wimsatt 1954, pp. 3–18), which claimed that works of art are autonomous entities whose meanings are carried by their internal structures and are not dependent upon intentions of their creators.

Barthes takes these ideas further in his 1967 essay *The Death of the Author*. Barthes claims that to say that a text has an author and to assign a single interpretation to it that corresponds to this author is to impose a distinct limit on that text. In formulating this idea, Barthes uses an analogy between text and textiles. A text, he says, is a tissue of quotations, drawn from innumerable centers of culture, rather than from one, individual experience. According to Barthes, the essential meaning of a work depends on the impressions of the reader rather than on the "passions" or "tastes" of the writer; a text's unity lies not in its origins, or its creator, but in its destination, or its audience.

Furthermore, Barthes claims that it is impossible to figure out what exactly the author has intended in the making of his or her work. Accordingly, he changes the name “author” to “scriptor” in order to better underline the separation of this figure from authority (Robinson 2012).

#### **1.4.8 “The Death of the Author“ in the context of the white box and Mallarme**

Let us travel to the US in the year 1967. Brian O’Doherty, one of the forerunners of the Conceptual Art scene in New York, was given the opportunity that year to be a guest editor of *Aspen Magazine* (The Minimalist Issue 5&6). *Aspen* was an attempt to expand the notion of magazine to “three dimensions” that could include cardboard sculptures, film clips (16mm), voice recordings, and other media. In total, *Aspen* published ten issues between 1965 and 1971. (Among others, Andy Warhol guest edited the FAB Pop Art Issue.) *Aspen* was essentially the first avant-garde multimedia magazine. It was clearly an attempt to fulfill the poet Stephane Mallarme’s dream of the ideal book. For the Minimalist Issue, O’Doherty invited a range of contributions. These included: essays by Susan Sontag (“The Aesthetics of Silence”), Georg Kubler (“Style and the Representation of Historical Times”), and Roland Barthes (“The Death of the Author”); fiction by Samuel Becket (“Text for nothing nr 8”); music by John Cage; and sculpture by Tony Smith (*The Maze*) (see the full list of contributors in the appendix).

Alexander Alberro (Bankowsky et al. 2001, pp. 170–174) describes the process and the motivation behind O’Doherty’s work:

O’Doherty was concerned with reinstating the often maligned legacy of European modernism extending from Russian Constructivism and the Dada tradition of paradoxical thinking to the predetermined structure of serial music and the nonmetaphorical writing of the nouveau roman. Tape recorder in one hand, address book in the other, he scoured the rich bosage of New York culture in search of people who were then heroes to a younger generation: "I assembled all that was of interest to me and the group of artists I was a part of at the time [including Sol LeWitt, Dan Graham, Mel Bochner, Eva Hesse, Robert Smithson, Ruth Vollmer, and Peter Hutchinson] in a kind of election of ancestors and contemporaries, held together in several conceptual schemata, cross-referenced through traditions and themes, and summarized in the language of set theory.

Barthes was giving his lectures in Philadelphia at the same time, and O’Doherty invited him to New York to discuss the theme of the issue and Barthes’ participation. Three weeks later, Barthes sent *The Death of the Author* for publication in *Aspen*.

It is not too farfetched to say that Barthes' essay is to be understood as a contribution to the larger collection of work that was edited by O'Doherty. Barthes was certainly familiar with the New Criticism that was then being discussed in America, but which had peaked in the 40s, 50s, and early 60s. Indeed, "The Intentional Fallacy" comes quite close to Barthes' ideas that the intention of a poem has little to do with the meaning as ascribed to it by the reader (see Wimsatt 1954, pp. 3–18).

Barthes has, however, pointed out that the difference between him and the New Critics is the difference between "deciphering" and "disentangling." Foucault also picked up on this theme in 1969 with his essay "What Is an Author?" but he did not make any reference to Barthes. Andrew Robinson (Robinson 2012) writes that Barthes

is highly critical of realist and naturalist views of writing. For Barthes, literature is built on emptiness: it represents something that is not really there. All the arts of fiction, including theatre, cinema and literature, are constructed based on signs. They function by the suspension of disbelief. They function by calling certain desires or structures into play, causing people to feel various emotions. They are not representations of reality, but rather, a way to induce feelings in the audience.

French students soon found the essay in *Aspen*, copied it, and spread it around university campuses in 1968 during the student revolts (Burke 1998, pp. 20–21). The text quickly became a political statement. It fit well with the student revolting against the stagnant ways of author-centric academia. The paradox is that, in this process, Barthes became an author (perhaps against his will) and found himself advocating for a breach of his own generation's stigma, especially in France.

The important point here is that Barthes' text was given its meaning and place by its users since the same ideas had basically been provided earlier but did not possess the same effect. As such, the Barthes essay and its context of its distribution serve as a means for demonstrating the linguistic approach to media.

Although Barthes avoided discussing moving images directly in much of his writing, his work—especially *S/Z* (1970)—has been used by scholars to understand film narrative. According to Dana B. Polan (Polan 1981), Barthes sees the cinema as a grand metaphor for the submission of self to system: "Ideology is, in effect, the imaginary of an epoch, the Cinema of a society. This declaration sums up Barthes's understanding of film." The depicted in cinema is as much a myth as the cinema itself?

One might question the validity of applying the concepts of *The Death of the Author* to moving images. It has been argued that the essay is about written texts and the contesting of the idea that these texts reveal their authors' intentions or meanings. Barthes claims that a writer does not possess a special genius that is expressed in his or her text but is more of a craftsman who is skilled in using a particular code (Robinson 2012).

The relevance of these ideas to the study of moving images can be approached on several different grounds. There is first the idea of an author within specific films. The scriptor or author of a film is a combination of several originators, including the manuscript writer, the director, and the cinematographer. The author of a film is usually designated by a commercial or practical decision that allows film companies to assign legal and moral ownership. Barthes refers to language as opposed to the text as authored by the scriptor as the real origin of a text. The very same applies to films. Language is its primary origin (linguistic approach). This leads to the possible conclusion that the ultimate meaning of a film is decided by its viewer since a text cannot hold a single meaning but is instead composed of several systems through which it is constructed. What Barthes claims of literature is also valid for film. Films do not represent anything real since what they reference is not really present. Films act upon several systems of language and their infinite transcribability. In essence, *The Death of The Author* liberates the viewer as the central interpreter of texts. In short, it suggests that one should not seek ultimate meanings in any text.

On the other hand, Gibson might argue that because moving images employ more perceptual tools in their interpreters, the perception of these images is fundamentally different than the perception of written texts (see Anderson, 1996). Reading a book engages the imagination because most forms of visual perception or relevant stimuli are absent. With written texts, visual perception is instead focused on codes or symbols that have agreed upon meanings, even if a reference (what reader can visually see) is picked up by the environment outside of the pages of the book. The extended use of imagination will perhaps make the experience of reading the book more subjective and might therefore detract from the control of the author.

## 2 METHOD AND MODEL

The chart below serves as a conceptual systematization that is explained and discussed within this paper. The chosen approaches for a suggested model are twofold: one from the linguistic and behaviorist approaches; the other from their near opposite, the evolutionary and ecological perspective. The idea is to think through the matter from an author-type perspective that will lead to a mapping that suggests perhaps different types of responsibilities.

The model will use the parameters of the ecological approach, the linguistic or behaviorist approach, and the above definitions of meaning and responsibility. These parameters are included in a chart of the interpretive model with columns for each parameter. This allows us to match meaning, from a specific approach, to a specific sense of responsibility depending on author type. This model will provide us with a framework for discussing the notion of responsibility for a media-worker. The model is evidently not inclusive because it is rather restricted; it will merely serve as an elementary mapping to grasp the notion of responsibility for authors' types.

The Interpretive Model:

		Concept of meaning MEANING of the TEXT	
		The concept of Meaning in the Ecological Approach (Me)	The concept of Meaning in Linguistic and Behaviorist Approach(es) (Mb)
Concept of RESPONSIBILITY of the AUTHOR	Author-producer	Concept of responsibility R1	Concept of responsibility R2
	Author-artist	R3	R4
	Author-citizen	R5	R6

**M= meaning, R=responsibility**

Me= the concept of meaning in ecological approach

Mb= the concept of meaning in linguistic and behaviorist approaches

R1= the concept of responsibility as applies to the Author-producer looked at from an ecological approach

R2= the concept of responsibility as applies to the Author-producer looked at from the linguistic/behaviorist approach

R3= the concept of responsibility as applies to the Author-artist looked at from an ecological approach

R4= the concept of responsibility as applies to the Author-artist looked at from the linguistic/behaviorist approach

R5= the concept of responsibility as applies to the Author-citizen looked at from an ecological approach

R6= the concept of responsibility as applies to the Author-citizen looked at from the linguistic/behaviorist approach

The chart will give the following suggestions; the type of author-producer as suggested in the section of definitions is someone that holds its primary responsibility to the sponsor. The ecological approach stresses the direct perception filtered according to affordances, meanings of things as what they afford the observer. This would suggest that the author-producer would accommodate foremost the sponsors since the relationship and dynamics is based on agreement and as such is the primary *affordance*. The text will therefore focus content in accordance with the agreement and thus responsibility lies within. The content and project's main focus is suggested therefore to be pleasing the sponsor. The linguistic and behavioristic approach would suggest a similar arrangement and priority; the author-producer makes similar effort in agreement with the sponsor and makes efforts for the text to correspond to the agreement. The outcome is similar on both approaches, the primary loyalty will be with the will of the sponsor and the responsibility lies within.

The author-artist will make content according to own convictions and beliefs as primary motivations. The ecological approach suggests that the information is represented through the text and perceived directly. The meaning is scrutinized by the observer and according to own affordances. Since it has been suggested that the observer will seek for a narrator either within the frames of the text or by its author it could be argued that some relation and connection will be between the author and the observer. In this case the text is made without the main focus of sponsorship or third-party and as such the information or text is less at risk to be compromised. The linguistic approach would suggest similar conclusions, the coding is of the responsibility of the author but the control of the meaning seems to be challenging according to Barthes's essay. The intentionalism would however give the author a greater responsibility since the intention of the author would be taken into account.

The author-citizen would follow the logic of the author-producer type with a stricter definition of the sponsor. The sponsor role would be relative to the community. The main difference would, however, be that the author's position is not to please the sponsor as above but to reflect upon or enhance its existence (community).

These definitions does not exclude possible hybrids like between author-producer and author-citizen which would be a common case in reality but as stated earlier this chart and mapping is simplified in order to have a basis for further discussions and perhaps research.

### 3 OUTCOME OF THE STUDY

The argument attempted here is that some active position on these matters are to be taken in order to be an informed content utterer;

The ecological approach vis-a-vi responsibility in film is suggested to be perceived through the concept of a play and represented reality. The viewer is thus perceiving a framed reality and will draw upon its own experience to seek affordances. The responsibility of the author, maker, is merely to understand the mechanisms, tools, in order to make the content. The very same goes within the linguistic and behavioristic approach that would focus on the presented codes and their meaning in context. The author can have, as described earlier, the role of a play master or rule setter and some responsibility should be assigned the author. It is evident according to the chart and reasoning above that depending of author-type as mapped above some implications will occur to the notion of responsibility of meaning of the text and if the author does not have a active standing or understanding of such it might compromise outcome as intended. To be noted that the possible intended message of the text, which is different than meaning of a text, is more of an ethical issue that is left out of the scope in this paper.

The study will continue to exemplify the chart with a sample text that will in a concrete way show a rational and outcome for the study. The sample text is a film named *My Joburg State of Mind* (Nylund & Mark Middlewick 2009). This film is a student production and rather good sample because its content includes several universal themes with the following chosen: a) to feel insecure as in safety and b) to be trapped in captivity as in life. The filmmakers that in this case participate within the film, within genre of documentary film, uses concrete examples to describe this captivity but also discusses them in a broader sense.

The title of the film has already some interesting elements to be looked at; with the title, the author(s) does not only introduce a geographical context but also provides an opening for a broader spectrum of interpretation. This could be according the ecological approach the rules of the play, a framework. The concept of state of mind, or mood, already possesses a sort of charge. Given that the historical context references South Africa (Joburg/Johannesburg), the title may present additional tensions depending on

whether the audience or viewer exists in same cultural space, seen from the linguistic approach. The linguistic approach would emphasize that the viewer's need to be in the same cultural space in order to apprehend the content. According to the director Anna-Sofia Nylund (2012, p 2) the film was perceived differently by viewers in South-Africa than in Finland. The perception according to feedback was more positive in Finland. In the following the sample text will be discussed through suggested author-types and progress to a observer's viewpoint and lastly through the presented ecological and linguistic and behavioristic approaches;

The author-producer type would be foremost been concerned with the sponsors that in this case would be the educational institution, since the film was made as a part of a educational course. To be passed the course certain frameworks and requirements have to be acknowledged and considered, not least, the course descriptions set by the institution. In general such description holds elements of pedagogical aims that has been planned in accordance with the institutions overall program and vision.

In this particular case as for a student production a pitch needs to be presented before the teachers of the course in order to proceed with the project. These requirements are not far from the commercial world of film where producers seek financial aid for their films through similar mechanisms. A certain focus is given to presentation or pitch and content will be revised in order to please the financiers or in this case the educational institution. In order to get project approved the rules of the institution needs to be obeyed. It is evident that it is vital for the institution to have a clear standing of what kind of content is to be preferred. The author-artist type would give less focus to the sponsor's will and more to the exploring and observing process. Perhaps even taking some risk in obstruction of the rules in favor of personal belief or interest? The key would perhaps be the questioning of the status quo and proposing alternatives. If the institution would have the same profiling, some paradox would occur – what rules does one obstruct if the framework is allowing? Perhaps the author-artist profiling of the school would construct somewhat different framework for rules that would enhance reflection and allow for different kind of experimental exploring than of what occurs in the commercial environment? The student work of exploration and observation would in such a case be directed outwards towards community and society instead of the institution itself? The author-citizen type would be focused on observation, reflections and

exploration in relation to the society and community as the primary aim. The sample film according to reasoning below would be assigned author-citizen, as a descriptive type.

In the following an observer's viewpoint is given in form of a personal interpretation of the film to explore the concept of meaning in relation to author-type. The alternative would be to describe the content in form of a synopsis of the film or to provide a synopsis from the filmmakers (Nylund 2012, p. 1) But this is rejected due to following attempt to link the author-type to the viewer perception and furthermore by reasoning from discussion above confirmed by both approaches that perceptions are unique to the observer or viewer even if the perception itself can be shared. The views and comprehension of the author of this paper on the sample text is therefore shared, which, was written and noted independently from this study one year ago;

I see (interpret) a young man struggling to move out of his childhood, a bubble if you like, to jump the physical fence that his dad would like to make even higher, hence a refusal to let his son go (not physical). The mother justifies this fence by happiness from relative freedom, hence you need a fence to struggle against but not to jump over. The brother that is accessible only through a gatekeeper and in that particular space outside the sphere of family, at his home, can bounce his thoughts of leaving this security without being a competitor. The urge to be seen "over the fence" is mirrored in through discussions with his friends when provoked with topic of patriotism and leaving them and his country for good. The progress towards the end takes the young man over the fence (out of his known neighborhood) and into the unknown and insecurity. He gets to taste a world that seems to be a new field of opportunities, which is also his adulthood.

In my experience of the film, I recognize the issue of disregarding of certain elements that are a challenge to confront due to my lack of reference. In my cultural space, it is almost impossible to relate to a fenced-in neighborhood and such a framework leaves me, generally, with thoughts of otherness. At a deeper level, one might say that, because of this distance, I am afforded the opportunity to access a more comprehensive way of thinking in relation to my reality. Due to this disconnection and lack of experience with South Africa and its past (and current) history, as well as its issues of crime and insecurity, I perform other tasks of communication with which I can identify and relate. This leads us to a question. If my comprehension matches the intention of the filmmakers, would the viewer who has a different comprehension of the film's semiotics and a different emotional attachment to the film's historical context be able to filter out these layers? Who owns the film's story?

The narrative, semiotics and interpretation suggest that the content has given focus towards a community or citizenry based interest, which is also confirmed by the author (Nylund 2012, p. 1). The issues in the told story shows that the author(s) had intention to explore and give views on themes that could raise awareness and will for action for enhancement in the social environment.

The Ecological approach suggests that the viewer always seeks the narrator, which in this case would be the film's main character. The narrator takes on a narrative that, through visual and auditory context, demonstrates to the other main characters his view about his life. The viewer explores this provided reality through the actions of the narrator and evaluates the information based on what he or she perceives, such as the narrator's behavior and the environment or context within which the rules of play are given. The framing or play informs the audience that the film is a documentary with social actors, and its title provides viewers with the mindset of the main character. In the title *My Joburg State of Mind* (Nylund & Mark Middlewick 2009), the word "my" is connected to the narrator (for lack of other alternatives), and no changes occur to these rules during the film. The main character claims that he is fenced in and trapped, and we as viewers can relate to this view based on what we see. However, this view suggested by the narrator is tested by the narrative that is technically provided by the camera angles with additional visual views that accompany his conversations with family and friends, and we as viewers can observe and explore this additional information and revise our perceptions in combination with our own experiences not only with events within the film but also from events that have occurred outside the frame. In doing so, the viewer assesses affordances that help to construct a subjective narrative about the given narrative that stems from the information flow. According to the ecological approach, the viewer does not interpret signs such as the fence in the film as being something other than a physical obstacle (opposed to the linguistic approach). According to the perspective of the affordances as Gibson has called them, the viewer can name this obstacle as a fence and understand it as a category. Depending on circumstances, the fence may be named differently and processed at higher cognitive levels.

Applying the linguistic, through Barthes, approach to *My Joburg State of Mind* gives focus to the semiotic viewpoint of the film and allows different viewers to accept different interpretations mainly dependent on cultural background and spaces. The question of a discrepancy between the possible intentions of the filmmaker and the interpretations of the audience becomes inevitable since Barthes claims that viewer cannot understand the motivations of the author. The following will explore this further;

Even if it is suggested that the film contains universal themes as described above, it could also be claimed that certain aspects of the film signify differently within local frameworks and this might not have been the intention of the filmmakers. It should also be noted that the filmmaking team includes a mix of different nationalities, which implies that the production has been influenced by a cross-cultural perspective.

The captivity or fence theme that appears throughout the film might be perceived as a locking out of something other than crime. The main character discusses fences in the framework of safety/crime, but the film's fences might also be perceived as referring to the country's history of segregation. If this were true, what would the filmmakers' responsibility be for this them—especially as it raises undesirable themes and debates that might contradict the filmmakers' possible intentions? Is this necessarily a bad thing? Using the ideas of Barthes, the interpretive ownership of the work resides with the audience and leaves the filmmaker free of moral responsibility. This may be good for the filmmakers, but it does introduce certain fundamental issues about overall responsibility. For example, what if the filmmakers had considered the "Third Space" as a setting for the film? The Third Space is a concept developed by Laura Junka in order to bring out themes in a neutral (or noise-reduced) or diversified ground that is distanced from the stereotypical viewpoints (see Stocchetti & Sumiala-Seppänen 2007, pp. 171–196). If the family in the film had been a part of the majority middleclass as opposed to a minority ethnic group, the theme might have been different.

Based on Barthes' work, it can also be argued that the unintentional content that was produced here is of potential benefit. The film's content has been produced within the framework of the reality of the filmmakers and regardless of their intentions it is thus a sum based on a string of events that are in process (both in the making of the film and in the filmmakers' life experiences). This unintentional outcome serves as a platform for discussion because viewers notice it and the theme has a meaning for a certain audience.

### **3.1 Barthes versus Gibson and the sample film**

When Barthes detached the author from his or her text, or the filmmaker from the actual film, this provided a space within which viewers could reflect upon their own perceptions instead of reflecting upon the intentions of the makers of texts. From Gibson's

point of view, such an activity constitutes an academic exercise that requires active intelligence and mood setting that will not work as general rule or by itself. Anderson (1996, pp. 150–159) holds that the author is a narrator and that in films the viewer looks actively for such a narrator in order to validate the story. If the story does not provide a satisfactory validation, a meta-narrator (the maker of the story) will be held for reference. In an important sense, the author or filmmaker cannot be separated from his or her story.

Gibson might agree about the existence of codes if these codes refer to static representations of objects that are not language-based but are verified by the senses. Gibson and Anderson might rather discuss the viewer's awareness of affordances in the environment and the choices that result from these affordances. Making better films or creating a shorter distance between intention and outcome requires an understanding of visual perception. After its release, the sample film raised debate as to whether some elements could be perceived as racist. The scene in the end of film with the main character walking in downtown appeared to some teachers to stand for such a message (Nylund 2012, p. 2). As mentioned earlier, a linguistic approach might have called for a third space for the action of events in order to exclude this risk. (I say "risk" because the theme was allegedly unintended.) The ecological approach argues that the viewer perceives films differently depending on the level of his or her mastering of affordances. The viewer who perceives the notion of apartheid in this theme, although not informed of this within the frame of the film itself, has, according to his or her own affordances and experiences, seen fit to raise this question. By linking a certain chain of elements of the narrative, one can understand that it raises unwanted responses. The middle-class family lives in a middle-class suburban environment with social actors of the same ethnic group that is fenced in within a setting that involves a recent history with related tensions. It stands to reason that this leaves room for speculation. The ecological approach views this outcome as a rational result because of the story's structure and also less because of the validity of the narrator. In this context, the narrator is perhaps not as trustworthy to the ethnic group that is left outside of the story. In the end, the outcome is looked upon similarly in both approaches. A certain awareness and knowledge is needed to bring the filmmakers' intentions closer to active perception.

## 4 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This paper has shown that a framework for the notion of responsibility in relation to meaning is somewhat challenging and complex. Nevertheless the theme is vital and deserves attempts like this.

The proposed model with the accompanying chart that categorizes responsibility and meanings in relation to author-types has shown a possible platform to discuss responsibility for a content utterer. The mapping and exemplification shows that depending on standing and viewpoint as to authorship-type, whether producer, artist or citizen oriented, the outcome will influence meaning of the text. This result might be self-evident, and perhaps because of that, it is challenging to have the concept actively discussed opposed to technical and production dynamics, which seems to be easier to address. This paper has in an elementary approach and attempt to give a framework to lift the topic where it belongs and for further development. It should be noted that even if different meanings lead to different outcomes vis-à-vis responsibility depending upon approach, the skill of storytelling remains a common consideration from both the ecological and the linguistic and behavioristic approaches. The study has also shown that even if both approaches seemed to be near opposite they have to come to many of the same conclusions, Barthes and other linguistics advocates strongly that meaning is related to time and place, but it seems that the Gibson and Andersons views comes close to the same in saying that meaning is as the observer see the affordance. This could imply that meaning will be modified as the experience of the observer and situation changes. This would leave us with the awareness and knowledge as the primary tools for craftsmanship in content making. The framework for the concept of responsibility for a moviemaker is to be holding foremost to the coding or way of telling the story including an active standpoint for author-type and the possible intended message as a secondary factor connected to the notion of ethics and moral standings.

In relation to responsibility one should also consider whether and how moving images have the capability to change the way that receivers perceive their reality. As articulated by Anderson, the ecological approach to cognitive film theory concludes that both reality and the representation of reality through moving images employ the same processes of visual perception. Anderson further suggests that the notion of play occurs when

viewers perceive these images and that this play is a sort of skill training for potential events. The conclusion here is that moving images do possess the capability to change lives. This idea adds another power layer besides the aforementioned power position. Barthes implies that the receiver holds the responsibility for interpretation, but he leaves the door open to the semiotic and linguistic codes that provide speakers with the authority to define the meaning of the words that he or she speaks. It could be argued that how a film is constructed and the content within it do make a difference. Obviously, the meaning of a film can change to some degree depending on its time and place. Even if its meaning changes, however, it will possess the same capability to change lives when the timing and place is right. Could it be that the students who spread Barthes' essay around university campuses affected the outcome of the revolts of the late sixties? Certainly this is a possibility.

For media professionals and makers of moving images, the question of responsibility is at hand, whether or not they will like it to be. It is left to filmmakers' discretion to choose to ignore this notion or not, just as it is left to the filmmakers' discretion to choose to distribute their films (depending on author-type). To mediate, to be a narrator, provides one with an opportunity to inform or to engage with an audience. This implies a latent power structure because the maker or narrator performs the master role of the play and imposes his or her perceptions before receivers can fully assess their contents.

In professional environments, attention must be paid to the nature of this power position. As mentioned earlier, this structure can be dealt with by means of agreements, such as codes of ethics or by obeying the house rules of the filmmaker's employer or financier. This can be done without any deeper reflection or understanding of the issue. The fact that this is the case is why such normative agreements have been excluded from this thesis.

If the concept of responsibility is actively taken for consideration as suggested within this paper, the personal position on these same issues will have an effect upon making of content within film since it acts as a referent to any incitements. With this rationale, the notion of responsibility as defined earlier is vital, and it deserves a place within educational institutions as well as in professional environment.

The study in its theme and topic has been shown as a relevant discussion not least because it has brought to surface some alternative approach to the general status quo why film as a medium is so powerful and it deserves further development and research especially in a rapid changing media climate where content rivalry is growing day by day. I would welcome further studies that would combine the theme presented within this paper with ethical and moral dimensions that would further bring awareness about craftsmanship in storytelling within moving images.

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## APPENDICES

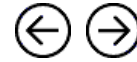
# Appendix 1 Content of Aspen 5 & 6

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Aspen no. 5+6, item 2: Contents

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## Aspen no. 5+6, item 2



[aspen](#) [no. 1](#) [no. 2](#) [no. 3](#) [no. 4](#) [no. 5+6](#) [no. 6A](#) [no. 7](#) [no. 8](#) [no. 9](#) [no. 10](#) [index](#)

## Contents

**aspen 5+6**

for Stephen Mellarmé

guest editor-designer / Brian O'Doherty

guest art directors / David Dalton / Lynn Letterman

B = LuFuRuBuD

28 = 1 + 4 + 5 + 8 + 10

1 box 1 book 4 films 5 records 8 boards 10 printed data

book essays The Death of the Author / Roland Barthes / trans. Richard Howard  
book Style and The Representation of Historical Time / George Kubler  
book The Aesthetics of Silence / Susan Sontag

[www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/contents.html](http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/contents.html)

1/3

"movements"

conceptualism  
 structuralism  
 constructivism  
 tradition of paradoxical thinking  
 objects  
 between categories

"themes"

time (in art and "history")  
 silence and reduction  
 language

persons, things, abstractions, become simply nouns and are thus potentially objectified. As "objects" they may be heaped or dumped in any way (a definition of life?). Or they may perhaps be conjugated in such a way that their positions imply "verbs" in the spaces (silences) between them.

"This invisible grammar can be read within and between categories. As a function of placement, it can be permitted to imply different systems, i.e., languages. Some of these languages we have not yet deciphered, i.e., invented. To identify such a grammar, to read such a language constitutes a test for the reader..."

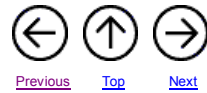
"This linguistics of interval and position is usually closed off by themes and titles, complex nouns that immobilize a system in a particular attitude. In this sense, explanations are modes of concealing what is accessible by removing concepts to the area of other concepts (initiating that process which eventually leads to "meaning" in the least fortunate academic sense)..."

"Placement as a grammatical concept can be extended to any abstraction... to a degree we may speak of meaning as a system of permutations, as a mathematics of placement.... It is, of course, also possible to consider how placement is concealed, how the objectified unit (a person, a concept, a period) can conceivably occur without dimensions, in no place and in no time, and thus approach the condition of art."

— Sigmund Bode in  
*Placement as Language* (1928)

Original format: Single sheet, 17-5/8 by 8 inches, folded twice to 8 inches square.

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## Appendix 2 Interview with Anna-Sofia Nylund

Interview for thesis-essay

Casper Mickwitz

Respondent: Anna-Sofia Nylund

Time: 18.07.2012

With regards to the essay I would like to propose following questions in regards to the documentary film *My Joburg state of mind* that was a student production made 2010 directed by Anna-Sofia Nylund / Mark Middlewick. The production was part of a cross culture programme North South South (NSS).

The following synopsis of the film found on author's Vimeo site; (<https://vimeo.com/25142096>; retrieved 27.06 2012);

*Crime is one of the biggest problems of the apartheid-plagued South Africa, and also one of the biggest reasons for leaving the country. Also Mark Middlewick is tired of living among electric fences, bars and alarms in his house in an upper class villa neighborhood. He yearns to leave abroad, but is the constant state of fear just an illusion, or is life in Johannesburg really as dangerous as it feels inside his own bubble?*

The interview was done by email correspondence in English language as original and answers was submitted in the Swedish language and freely translated by the author of the study paper.

1. The above synopsis is written on your vimeo site, it is the same text written for the initial launch?

*Texten på Vimeosidan är tagen från Docpoints egna beskrivning av filmen, man kan säkert kolla upp vem som skrev den, docpoint 2010 – studentfilm*

Translation: The text on the Vimeo site is taken from Docpoints own description of the film, one could surely check who wrote it, docpoint 2010 - studentfilm

- b) If not, could you describe the difference and what has been revised.

*Vet inte hur vi hade format den ursprungliga synopsisen men nog liknande.*

Translation: Don't know how we formulated the original synopsis but it was similar.

2. Do you have any material, synopsis, from the manuscript at initial stage of production of what the film was to be about?

*Tyvärr har jag inte det här nu. Det är på en hårdskiva hos nån kompis nånstans. Men det skulle handla om "fences" först skulle den bli mera objektiv (Mark skulle vara en intervjuvare inte ett subjekt) men slutligen beslöt vi att det blir intressantare om den blir personlig och handlar om Mark och hans familj och hans syn på saken.*

Translation: I'm afraid I don't have it here with me at the moment. It is on a hard drive at my friends somewhere. But it was to be about *fences* and it was to be more objective initially (Mark was planned to be the interviewer not the subject) but in the end we decided that it was more interesting if it were to be personal and about Mark and his family and his views on the issue

3. Could you describe in your own wording what the film is about?

*Om en ung medelklass man som lever i det livsfarliga Johannesburg, omringad av stängsel. Men är stänglen lika mycket i hans huvud som i den fysiska verkligheten? Är det han som skapar otryggheten?*

Translation: About a middle-class young man that lives in the life-threatening dangerous Johannesburg, surrounded by fences. However, are the fences as much in his head as in the physical reality? Is it him that creates the insecurity?

4. Do you recall the initial feedback of the movie from teachers and fellow students (first feedback), possible discussions. Things that stood out.

*Jag minns att människor i Sydafrika upplevde den som "oautentisk", någon lärare tyckte att den var sedd ut ett för snävt perspektiv gentemot månkulturalismen i landet. Den sista scenen där huvudkaraktären går i Downtown tyckte en lärare att kändes "rasistisk" - vit man går och är rädd i ett område fullt med mörkhyade. Vi förkortade scenen efter kommentaren men fick sedan kritik för att man inte såg tillräckligt mycket av den omgivningen eller av huvudkaraktärens upplevelse. filmen har också kritiserats för att vara för subjektiv, regissör (Mark Middlewick) är både huvudkaraktär och Voice over - det släpper inte in andra perspektiv. I Finland har filmen fått annan feedback. Här har man "trott" mera på den - antagligen eftersom man inte vet så mycket om Sydafrika.*

Translation: I recall that people in South-Africa experienced it as “unauthentic”, some teacher thought it was viewed as of too narrow perspective against the multicultural society that the country has. The last scene where the main character takes a walk in Downtown was perceived as racist by some teacher – a white man walks around and

is afraid in an area of dark-skinned. We did shorten the scene after the comments but then again it got criticized for not showing enough of the environment or the main characters experience of it. The film was also criticized to be too subjective; the director (Mark Middlewick) is both main-character and giving the voice-over – and that doesn't allow for other perspectives. The film got a different feedback in Finland. Here it appears that it was more believed in, this probably due to less knowledge about South Africa.

5. With some time passing, several years, do you have a different view of the content and possible views of the feedback gotten at the time.

*Inte egentligen. Jag tycker att det är intressant hur filmen upplevdes annorlunda i Sydafrika och i Finland, det berättar mera om våra samhällen än själva filmen. Jag tycker att det är trevligt att den kritiseras. Sen har jag kanske lärt mig att feedbacken som ges beror på människotypen personens bakgrunden och erfarenheten och är nödvändigtvis inte ett faktum. Slutligen är det filmmakarna som måste fatta ett beslut om hur filmen kommer formas, detta men hjälp av andras åsikter men inte nödvändigtvis exakt som feedbacken säger.*

Translation: Not really. I think it is interesting that the film was perceived differently in South Africa and Finland, it tells more about our societies than the film itself. I think it is nice that is criticized. I might have learned that the feedback given is dependent on the persons background and the experience not necessarily is a fact. In the end it is the film makers that needs to make decisions how the film is formed, this with the aid of others opinion but not necessarily exactly as it has been given.

Thank you for assisting me in my thesis work!