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Research Proposal Project

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## Visual Analysis: Paradise Regained

When analysing an image, or series of images, it is important to try to understand its target audience. The purpose of audience theory is to try to distinguish the relationship between the audience and the text (image), to see how people ingest and interpret information transmitted by the media and how or if the text influences behaviour.

The earliest known theory is the Hypodermic Needle theory which was developed in the 1920's. It suggested that an audience passively receives information with no attempt to process or challenge the text. However, this theory was developed when mass media was relatively new. The power of using advertising to communicate (subliminal) messages was just becoming apparent and governments were producing propaganda as a way of influencing people's opinions. Therefore, this theory reflected its era but quickly seemed outdated and would not be a relevant tool when analysing this sequence of images.

By the 1960's (time of 'Paradise Regained' photographs, 1968), audience theory had developed and it was then believed that audiences made choices about what they did with the information whilst consuming texts. It was thought that people actively consumed texts for different reasons and reacted in different ways. One of these reasons was cultural transmission, using an image to portray and transmit one's personal cultural views in order to influence a spectator, (audience).

Michals uses this form of cultural transmission in his sequence of photographs entitled, 'Paradise Regained'. The sequence begins with a man and woman in what appears to be an office complete with furniture and material possessions such as photograph frames, with the pair dressed in formal wear. It ends with the man and woman in the same room but instead of office furniture it is filled with foliage and the pair are now nude. The semiotics, symbols and underlying meanings, are not apparent when only one of the images is viewed but when the semiotics of the sequence are grouped into a sign system this sequence, along with the title, leads me to believe that Michals holds an immaterial, post-modern cultural view. That

material possessions are not needed to lead a fulfilling life but that bare necessities are 'paradise'.

It seems that Michals is a post-modernist. Post-modernism is, in reference to art, a reaction to modernism or what exists after modernism. With his sequence Michals is reacting to and rejecting the 'modern' as materialistic, his post-modern cultural view being nostalgic in that that simplicity is best.

Whether this transmits to and influences the viewer depends on how the spectator responds and reacts to the images. Chances are that the spectator is an active and willing viewer as the sequence is not part of an advertisement campaign but an artists work that would not be widely viewed. By this I mean if someone has chosen to view a specific art work it is unlikely they will have strong oppositional views to the intended meaning. The process of understanding an audiences reaction to a piece of art is known as psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis (of an art audience) is the act of reading a spectator's reaction to an image as an analysis of an individuals inner beliefs, views and desires. This sequence of photograph's is an ideal specimen for a psychoanalyst as it deals with peoples unconscious mind and how an individual reacts to nudity in public. Nudity, Freud says, is one of the most suppressed inner desires as public nudity is socially seen as indecent. As the sequence begins with a formal scene the spectator does not know what to expect. As the characters begin to loose garments, the readers reaction is questioned, will they go on and show they are not prude or decide they do not agree with it's indecency and intention? Through psychoanalysis more can be said and read into a spectator's personality than the artists.