

NOAM CHOMSKY
AND THE MEDIA 1 - 6
(ENGLISCHE ORIGINALFASSUNG)

81202



MEDIENBEGLEITHEFT zur Videokassette
6 Module aus der Langfassung Manufacturing Consent
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NOAM CHOMSKY AND THE MEDIA 1 - 6

Englische Originalfassung

Video (138 Minuten)
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Noam Chomsky and the Media 1 - 6

6 Module aus der Langfassung „Manufacturing Consent“

1. A Propaganda Model of the Media
2. Concision - No Time for New Ideas
3. A Case Study - Cambodia and East Timor
4. Holocaust Denial - Freedom of Speech
5. Toward a Vision of a Future Society
6. Personal Influences

In einer Montage von Bildern und Worten erkundet der Film das Werk und Leben des kontroversen Autors, Linguisten und radikalen Philosophen Noam Chomsky, der heute einer der hartnäckigsten Kritiker der Medien und einer der wichtigsten Dissidenten in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft ist. Der Film konzentriert sich auf Chomskys Medienanalyse innerhalb demokratischer Gesellschaften, deren Bürger nicht durch rohe Gewalt kontrolliert werden, sondern subtileren Methoden ideologischer Kontrolle ausgesetzt sind. Schockierende Beweise für die irreführende Wirkungsweise der Massenmedien verbildlichen Chomskys Kritik an den Meinungsmachern. Chomsky will den Betrachter ermutigen, sich dieser systematischen Desinformation zu entziehen. Die von ihm vorgeschlagene Methode nennt er „intellektuelle Selbstverteidigung“. Chomskys Theorien revolutionierten die Linguistik und beeinflussten viele weitere Disziplinen, insbesondere die Psychologie, Philosophie und den Bereich der „artificial intelligence“. Seine veröffentlichten Artikel reichen von globalen Fragen der Friedensforschung bis zu sehr spezifischen Problemen menschlicher Intelligenz- und Kreativitätsforschung. In den meisten Veröffentlichungen widmet sich Chomsky politischen Themen. Nach Aussagen von Zitatregistern der Human- und Sozialwissenschaften gilt Chomsky als der am häufigsten zitierte Autor der Gegenwart.

1. A PROPAGANDA MODEL OF THE MEDIA

Den Einstieg in die Thematik bildet ein Interview mit Noam Chomsky in einem Nachrichtensender. Im Verlauf des Gespraches bringt Chomsky den Glauben seiner Interviewpartnerin, die davon uberzeugt ist, in einer Demokratie zu leben und frei uber ihr Schicksal entscheiden zu konnen, ins Wanken. Im weiteren Verlauf zeigt er schlussig auf, dass sich die Rezipienten des Einflusses der Medien nicht bewusst sind, was aber ihre Entscheidungsfahigkeit und die Moglichkeiten einer echt demokratischen Mitentscheidung einengt. In zwischengeschnittenen historischen Ruckblicken wird auf die Entwicklung der Demokratie in England und in den USA eingegangen, in deren Verlauf auch die Rolle der Propaganda beleuchtet wird.

30 Minuten

CONCISION – NO TIME FOR NEW IDEAS

Anschließend an Modul 1 werden verschiedene Aspekte aufgezeigt, wie Menschen durch die Medien beeinflusst werden. So wird Chomsky in einem Gesprach wahrend einer Fernsehsendung das Wort entzogen, weil er Dinge am demokratischen System der USA kritisiert, die nicht in den Bezugsrahmen der allgemein akzeptierten, von den Medien gepragten Meinungen (Consent) passen. Befragungen von Passanten bestatigen Chomskys These, dass die meisten die Beeinflussung durch die Medien nicht bemerken und volles Vertrauen in die Unabhangigkeit ihrer Medien haben. Damit zeigt sich die Funktionsfahigkeit des von Chomsky postulierten Rahmens.

15 Minuten

3. A CASE STUDY – CAMBODIA AND EAST TIMOR

In einer detaillierten Fallstudie vergleicht Chomsky die Berichterstattung uber Kambodscha unter Pol Pot mit der uber die Invasion Indonesiens in Ost Timor. Beide Graueltaten lassen sich in ihrem Ausma vergleichen, beide fanden Mitte der siebziger Jahre statt und beide ereigneten sich im selben Winkel der Erde. Die Berichterstattung uber Ost Timor bestand hauptsachlich in der Verharmlosung der Ereignisse. Als Folge davon starb mehr als ein Drittel der Bevolkerung Ost Timors durch Massenmord und Aushungern. Chomskys Kommentare zur Causa Ost Timor werden erganzt durch Bilder einer kanadischen Fotografin und Aussagen damaliger Betroffener (eines Journalisten der „New York Times“, eines Fluchtlings aus Ost Timor und des Reprasentanten Ost Timors bei der UNO). Die Montage dieser Elemente ergibt das erschreckende Bild einer Komplizenschaft der Massenmedien in einem grausamen Volkermord. Ganz anders verlief die Berichterstattung uber Kambodscha. Hier wurde die offentlichkeit in einem unverhaltnismaig groen Angebot an Berichterstattung uber die

Gräueltaten Pol Pots und der Roten Khmer informiert. Die Fallstudie wirft eine Menge von Fragen auf und wird im Anschluss an die Vorführung zu Diskussionen anregen, die kritisches Denken und - daraus resultierend - verantwortungsvolles Handeln fordern.

29 Minuten

4. HOLOCAUST DENIAL – FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Der intensivste Angriff auf die Integrität Chomskys war, dass man ihn mit dem französischen Schriftsteller und Geschichtsrevisionisten Robert Faurisson in Verbindung brachte. Faurisson leugnet die Existenz von Gaskammern sowie die gezielte Ausrottung der Juden während des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Er wurde von der Universität suspendiert und „wegen Verfälschung der Geschichte“ vor Gericht gestellt. Trotzdem verteidigt Chomsky Faurissons Recht auf freie Meinungsäußerung und beruft sich dabei auf eine aus dem 18. Jahrhundert stammende Tradition. Chomskys Verteidigung der Bürgerrechte wurde von der Presse verfälscht wiedergegeben. Bei einer Diskussion versucht Chomsky den Angriffen aus dem Publikum zu begegnen, kann mit seinen Argumenten jedoch nicht durchdringen. Zu sensibel ist die Thematik, zu stark die Beeinflussung durch die Medien.

12 Minuten

5. TOWARD A VISION OF A FUTURE SOCIETY

Die gegenwärtigen Machthaber besitzen bzw. kontrollieren die Medien und verhindern damit eine Weiterentwicklung der Gesellschaft. Chomsky behauptet, dass die breite Öffentlichkeit seit langer Zeit von jeglicher bedeutungsvollen Teilnahme am demokratischen Prozess ausgeschlossen wird. Er setzt nun auf den Widerstand der einfachen Staatsbürger, denen er Mut macht, ihren kritischen und gesunden Hausverstand einzubringen. Die Industriegesellschaft mit ihren zerstörerischen Tendenzen (Kriege, Umweltschädigung...) muss durch mündige Bürger überwunden werden.

23 Minuten

6. PERSONAL INFLUENCES

Es wird gezeigt, wie Noam Chomskys Denken und politisches Handeln von seinem Lebenslauf beeinflusst werden. Schlüsselemente, wie seine jüdische Herkunft und Erziehung, eine progressive Grundschule, die Weltwirtschaftskrise sowie die Ideologenvielfalt jener Zeit, der Vietnam-Krieg und die Bürgerrechtsbewegungen machten aus dem Linguistik-Professor am

Massachusetts Institute of Technology einen engagierten Kämpfer für demokratische Mitbestimmung der Bürger am Staatsgeschehen.

29 Minuten

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SIX THEMATIC MODULES

excerpted from the award-winning feature
documentary

MANUFACTURING CONSENT

NOAM CHOMSKY AND THE MEDIA

by Peter Wintonick and Mark Achbar

DISCUSSION GUIDE PREPARED BY BARRY DUNCAN,
PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR MEDIA LITERACY

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A PROPAGANDA MODEL OF THE MEDIA **plus EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE MEDIA**

„When you can't control people by force and when the voice of the people can be heard, you have this problem. It may make people 'so curious and so arrogant that they don't have the humility to submit to a civil rule,' and therefore you have to control what they think. And the standard way to do this is to resort to what in more honest days used to be called propaganda. Manufacture of consent. Creation of necessary illusions. Various ways of either marginalizing the general public or reducing them to apathy in some fashion."

- Noam Chomsky

A PROPAGANDA MODEL OF THE MEDIA, plus EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE MEDIA provides an ideal introduction to the six modules in the package. Beginning with Chomsky's response to a college student who role-plays "Jane U.S.A." - someone who naively believes she lives in a democratic society in which she can create her own destiny - the viewer is presented with a cross-section of typically lively Chomsky encounters. Central to a functioning democracy is the necessity of free access to information, ideas and opinions. But what should be our democratic right turns out to be limited and shaped by the biases of institutions and ideologies within the mass media. Chomsky shows how governments, corporations and other elites manufacture the consent of the public to serve their interests.

PRESCREENING ACTIVITIES

☞ **Unless otherwise noted, all page references are to the companion book to the film, *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* (Mark Achbar ed., Montreal, Black Rose Books, 1994 - distributed in the U.S. by Paul & Co., c/o PCS Data Processing Inc., 360 West 31st St., New York, NY, 10001 USA Tel: (212) 564-3730 Fax: (212) 971-7200)**

Review five filters of the media outlined under the heading, "A Propaganda Model" (p. 53):

- 1) size, ownership, and profit orientation (pp. 59-60)
- 2) advertising as primary income source (p. 63)

- 3) reliance on information from government or corporate sources (p. 145)
- 4) flak-negative responses to media to discredit dissenting voices (p. 57)
- 5) anti-communist campaigns - also applicable in the 1990s to anyone perceived to be the evil "other" (p. 108).

Try applying these filters to current situations. The following are some suggestions:

1) Examine the news coverage of a global hotspot, especially where government and corporate interests are at stake. Order a transcript of a mainstream news broadcast. Read along with the video. What effect do the visuals have? Try to characterize the language used in the reports and discussions. How might the choice of words bias a viewer's perception? (See Edward S. Herman's *Beyond Hypocrisy: Decoding the News in an Age of Propaganda, With a Doublespeak Dictionary for the 1990s* Boston: South End • Montreal: Black Rose, 1992).

2) Examine the coverage of the latest government scandal. Discuss how the news was managed.

3) The term "manufacturing consent" is the title of one of Chomsky's and Edward S. Herman's most widely-read books and is a key concept which pervades their work. The term refers to how the dominant media create the conditions for our acceptance of their attitudes and opinions the very essence of propaganda. To make this notion personally relevant, recall situations in your education, the workplace, or in encounters with government, or a large institution or corporation in which you realized they had effectively engineered consent for a regulation or policy, or conveyed a view on what was the proper attitude or political position to be taken. In your examples, try to identify how language and other techniques of persuasion were used.

POSTSCREENING ACTIVITIES

1) There are several good follow-ups to Chomsky's description of the Propaganda Model (in addition to the same exercises described in the Prescreening section). Examine the media coverage of a controversial issue, ideally involving government or corporate policy. Compare coverage in different news sources - newspapers, radio and television. Read, listen to, or watch coverage in alternative media (see below). What are the ideological factors at work? Who is privileged? Who is marginalized? Who is left out?

2) Chomsky discusses the immense power and information control of the media conglomerates. There are many facets to this phenomenon. For more detailed information on the pressure of

advertisers on the content of television or the use of PR flacks to put a good corporate face on such crises as Union Carbide's handling of the toxic gas leak in Bhopal, India, you may wish to consult Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in the News by Martin Lee and Norman Solomon (Lyle Stuart, 1991) and The Media Monopoly by Ben Bagdikian (Beacon Press, 1990).

3) Some radical critics of television share many of Chomsky's concerns but feel that he presumes too simplistically a monolithic relationship between the government and the media, which, in fact, may often be contradictory. In addition, they claim that he overlooks the conflicts between different ruling elites and policies that take place in the media. Read these critics and decide for yourself. An excellent source to consult is Television and the Crisis of Democracy by Douglas Kellner (Westview Press, 1990).

4) Fortunately, there are alternatives to the mainstream media. From college radio and listener-supported stations, to public access TV programs, to magazines, periodicals and computer bulletin boards which systematically critique the news or cover important issues such as health care, environmental protection, sexism and racism from a non-mainstream perspective. A few of the better-known alternative publications include **The Nation**, **Utne Reader**, **Media & Values**, **Mother Jones**, **Extra**, **Lies of Our Times** and **Z magazine** (The last two publications regularly contain articles by Noam Chomsky). Read one or more of these publications and evaluate their perspectives on several recent news stories. (For additional sources, see the Resource Guide, pp. 239-256)

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1) The filmmakers Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick have stated the rationale for their cinematic style in the film: **"There are a diversity of learning 'styles', and information reaches individuals most effectively through different channels: visual, aural, textual, through story, metaphor, etc. Synthesizing many cinematic styles, we tried to make the film work on all these levels. Also, by using a media-within-media perspective, we reveal processes of media construction (including our own) and attempt to create in the viewer a sense of critical engagement."** Everyone should decide for him or herself how these techniques worked. In what situations did these techniques give you a sense of "critical engagement"? Talk about several examples of ideas which were presented in engaging ways, either visually, aurally or both. (see "Notes on Process," p. 12). As a starter, you may want to talk about the image of Chomsky emanating from a video wall installation in the mall, or the use of archival footage or ominous sounding music behind certain visuals. (This discussion starter applies to all six tapes and therefore will be repeated).

2) Select an issue raised in this video and debate its merits and possible limitations. Be sure to support your opinions with concrete evidence. The following are a few suggestions: On the topic of freedom and access to information, Chomsky has written "if the freedoms are such that the only choices that you have objectively are to conform to one or another system of power, there's no freedom." (p. 214) To what extent do you agree with this observation? On indoctrination and democracy, Chomsky comments: "it's not the case, as the naive might think, that indoctrination is inconsistent with democracy, rather, as this whole line of thinkers observes, it's the *essence* of democracy." (p. 43) What do you think he means by this? Do you agree?

3) Explain the thinking behind Chomsky's provocative observation: **"When you can't control people by force - you have to control what people think. And the standard way to do this is to resort to what in more honest days used to be called propaganda. Manufacture of consent. Creation of necessary illusions. Various ways of either marginalizing the general public or reducing them to apathy in some fashion."** (p. 43) Based on your observations of the way the media work and/or your understanding of Chomsky's views, how do you think the public is marginalized or reduced to apathy?

4) Chomsky discusses sports from a critical perspective: **"it offers people something to pay attention to that's of no importance... it's a way of building up irrational attitudes of submission to authority. In fact, it's training in irrational jingoism."** Have spectator sports contributed to the apathy of the public? Some might argue that Chomsky gives insufficient credit to the spectator. Stage a debate on the merits or possible shortcomings of these observations. (See pp. 90-92)

5) The Gulf War is a case-book study of propaganda and the ultimate management of the news. Apply the filters of the propaganda model to the coverage of the Gulf War or the coverage of a war currently taking place. (See pp. 71-74, 78-79; also see [The Persian Gulf TV War](#) by Doug Kellner, Westview Press, 1992)

6) Chomsky describes the process of people working within elite systems who internalize their values: **"and then you regard your self - in a way correctly - as acting perfectly freely."** Elsewhere he states: **"You start saying certain things because it's necessary to say them and pretty soon you believe them because you just have to."** (p. 170) How do you think this process comes about? Share your own experiences of when this has happened. You might refer to the workplace or coming to terms with a belief system as examples.

7) Chomsky said in a published interview: **"I'm not really interested in persuading people. I don't want to and I try to make this point obvious. What I'd like to do is help people persuade themselves."** (p. 208) Why is Chomsky's distinction important? How does Chomsky's evidence and style of delivery succeed in terms of his desire to help you persuade yourself?

8) On the same tape as the Propaganda Model is a short video on the alternative media. How do the working processes of alternative media differ from mainstream media? Do people working in alternative media have the same goals as their mainstream counterparts? Consider some specific situations in recent years in which the insights of alternative media have been especially valuable. What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of alternative media? (See pp. 197-203)

CONCISION: NO TIME FOR NEW IDEAS

"You must meet the condition of concision. You've got to say things between 2 commercials or in 600 words. And that's a very important fact, because the beauty of concision - you know, saying a couple of sentences between commercials - the beauty of that is you can only repeat conventional thoughts."

- Noam Chomsky

This video focuses primarily on the implications of the structure and format of television, especially the consequences of concision and how these factors can shape the messages of the medium. In addition, other issues, such as how democracies handle dissenters, and how the mainstream media have treated the challenges of Chomsky's media critiques are explored. The media construct reality and in the conclusion we see the author participating in that very process.

PRESCREENING ACTIVITIES

- 1) What news programs have you watched in which important ideas could not be explored fully or fairly because of such factors as the limitations of format, time restrictions, or the biases of the host or newscaster? To experience directly the limitations on ideas, try writing some 30-second sound bites on subjects such as economic trends, environmental damage, and foreign policy. What did you learn from this experience?
- 2) How have the media represented controversial issues and the role of dissenters? Some examples might include: the treatment of a public protest and the leaders of that protest; treatment of groups that tend to be marginalized, such as visible minorities, labor and women.
- 3) Tape and transcribe a network TV news story (or order the transcript). Compare the number of words used to tell the same story on TV as in that day's newspaper. What was left out of the TV account? How important is that information to understanding the story?

POSTSCREENING ACTIVITIES

1) For more information about how the news is managed and the ways in which a conservative ideology is maintained, you might read Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in the News by Martin Lee and Norman Solomon (Lyle Stuart, 1991).

2) Neil Postman in Amusing Ourselves to Death (Viking 1984) writes about the impossibility of communicating rational, linear and sequential thought on television because of American television's obsession with entertainment. Compare his analytical approach with Chomsky's.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1) The filmmakers Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick have stated the rationale for their cinematic style in the film: **"There are a diversity of 'learning styles', and information reaches individuals most effectively through different channels: visual, aural, textual, through story, metaphor, etc. Synthesizing many cinematic styles, we tried to make the film work on all these levels. Also, by using a media-within-media perspective, we reveal processes of media construction (including our own) and attempt to create in the viewer a sense of critical engagement."** Everyone should decide for him or herself how these techniques worked. In what situations did these techniques give you a sense of "critical engagement"? Talk about several examples of ideas which were presented in engaging ways, either visually, aurally or both. (See "Notes on Process", p. 12)

2) The video begins with comments from people on the street in Media, PA, followed by an irate college student who accuses Chomsky of "whining" about the elite, the government and its use of thought control to keep radicals like himself out of the limelight (pp. 132-134). Do you feel there is a contradiction between Chomsky's analysis of the media and his own access?

3) It is interesting to see how Chomsky's calm demeanor and cool rationalist style functions in the arena of debate and invective. How do you personally respond to his style of public performance? How well does this style serve him in his encounters with a) John Silber on the Ten O'Clock News b) Bill Moyers c) the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour? How do you think he would fare in programs with some of the combative talk show hosts such as Geraldo, Rush Limbaugh or Larry King? (See Chomsky with Silber, pp.139-144; with Moyers, pp. 20-21, 136, 211, 213; with MacNeil, pp. 157-159; analysis of MacNeil/Lehrer, p. 145.)

4) Comment on the concluding exchange between Moyers and Chomsky: Moyers: **"..most dissenters do not get much of a hearing in this medium."** Chomsky: **"In fact, it's completely understandable. They (the media) wouldn't be performing their societal function if they allowed favored truths to be challenged."** (p. 136)

5) **"In a democratic society, I mean it may be paradoxical, but the freer the society is the more it's necessary to resort to devices like induced fear."** How would you explain this paradox? (p. 137)

6) Of particular interest to Canadians and Europeans is Chomsky's comment: **"A part of the reason why the media in Canada and Belgium and so on are more open is that it just doesn't matter that much what people think."** (p.138) To what extent do you agree?

7) **"You must meet the condition of concision. You've got to say things between 2 commercials or in 600 words. And that's a very important fact, because the beauty of concision - you know, saying a couple of sentences between commercials - the beauty of that is you can only repeat conventional thoughts."** The connection between concision and the consequence of repeating conventional thoughts is important since it seems to be inherent in the format, the commercial underpinnings and even the attitudes of network producers. What do you think Chomsky is suggesting in his dissatisfaction over "conventional thought"? How would you go about provoking unconventional thought in the mass media? Later he says **"you can't give evidence if you're stuck with concision. That's the genius of this structural constraint."** (If you did the sound bite exercise in the Prescreening Activities, how might that experience shed light on the relationship of concision to "conventional thoughts"? (pp. 146-159)

9) The video concludes with Chomsky participating in the constructed nature of the medium with a television camera shooting footage of him for insertion, in subsequent editing, of the introduction and reaction shots. Why do you think the filmmakers included this at the conclusion of this video? How does it relate to the major themes of this video and the other modules? (p. 159)

A CASE STUDY: CAMBODIA AND EAST TIMOR

"There are a number of ways to proceed. One obvious way is to try to find more or less paired examples. History doesn't offer true controlled experiments but it often comes pretty close. So one can find atrocities or abuses of one sort that on the one hand are committed by official enemies and on the other hand are committed by friends and allies or by the favored state itself - by the United States in the U.S. case. And the question is whether the media accept the government framework or whether they use the same agenda, the same set of questions, the same criteria for dealing with the two cases as any honest outside observer would do."

- Noam Chomsky

This video explores the background for the fighting and atrocities which took place in Cambodia and East Timor (the latter is located just northwest of Australia) between 1975 and 1978. Especially in the case of East Timor, the media neglected to cover the story and the international community did little but send arms to the Indonesian invaders. The invasion, subsequent slaughter and mass starvation of East Timor claimed over a third of its citizens. Chomsky discusses the media coverage, especially in The New York Times, and the implications of suppressing the real story. The video concludes with a plea for citizens in democracies to follow through with real action as a result of their ethical concerns.

PRESCREENING ACTIVITIES

1) Locate Cambodia, East Timor and Indonesia on a map. Learn some of the essential political background of these countries. What has been the basis of our foreign policy toward these countries since the 1960s? (See pp. 93-117).

2) Every year, Project Censored publishes a list of ten important but largely unreported news stories compiled by a group of media critics. Suggest possible reasons why these stories were ignored. What does this tell us about the problems facing socially committed journalists in democracies? (Project Censored, Sonoma State U. Rohnert Park, CA 94928; Also see the book, *Censored! The News That Didn't Make the News and Why*, \$ 14.95, Four Walls Eight Windows (1-800-626-4848)

POSTSCREENING ACTIVITIES

- 1) Contact several journalists working in different media and ask them what important stories they believe are inadequately covered or not investigated in your community. Where feasible, apply some of Chomsky's insights. Does the propaganda model work at the level of local news?
- 2) Read some current columns by Noam Chomsky in periodicals such as Lies of Our Times or Z Magazine. Compare Chomsky's perspective on a news story with coverage of the same story in mainstream publications-newspapers, Time, and Newsweek.
- 3) Ask a working journalist to do a database search for stories on "East Timor" and another crisis area in the world for the past year. How do you account for the discrepancy between them?
- 4) **"A propaganda system will consistently portray people abused in enemy states as worthy victims, whereas those treated with equal or greater severity by its own government or clients will be unworthy. The evidence of worth may be read from the extent and character of attention and indignation."** (Manufacturing Consent p. 37). Apply Chomsky's and Herman's observation by following news stories where the government is dealing (or not dealing) with human rights violations or civil wars in other countries.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- 1) The filmmakers Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick have stated the rationale for their cinematic style in the film: **"There are a diversity of 'learning styles', and information reaches individuals most effectively through different channels: visual, aural, textual, through story, metaphor, etc. Synthesizing many cinematic styles, we tried to make the film work on all these levels. Also, by using a media-within-media perspective, we reveal processes of media construction (including our own) and attempt to create in the viewer a sense of critical engagement."** Everyone should decide for him or herself how these techniques worked. In what situations did these techniques give you a sense of "critical engagement"? Talk about several examples of ideas which were presented in engaging ways, either visually, aurally or both. (See "Notes on Process," p. 12)
- 2) Chomsky talks about the advantages of using a methodology of studying paired examples, in this case Cambodia and East Timor. **"...one can find atrocities or abuses of one sort that on the one hand are committed by official enemies and on the other hand are committed by**

friends and allies or by the favored state itself - by the United States in the U.S. case."

(p. 94) Discuss Chomsky's observation in light of the wars which took place in these countries.

3) Chomsky states his position quite bluntly: "There is no Western concern for issues of aggression, atrocities, human rights abuses and so on if there's a profit to be made from them. Nothing could show it more clearly than this case." Which situations in the world today illustrate the same point?

4) Chomsky commends the small group of people who persisted successfully in alerting some key leaders in Congress and at the United Nations about the tragedy taking place in East Timor. Why is this an appropriate way to end this video? What are your emotional reactions to their commitment and to the kind of story they were reporting?

HOLOCAUST DENIAL VS. FREEDOM OF SPEECH

"If you're in favor of freedom of speech, that means you're in favor of free speech precisely for views you despise, otherwise you're not in favor of freedom of speech."

- Noam Chomsky

This video focuses on one of the most controversial areas in Chomsky's career: his defense of the civil rights of Robert Faurisson, a French intellectual who was suspended from his university post because he could not be protected from violence as a result of publishing revisionist literature which minimized Nazi atrocities during World War II, denied the existence of gas chambers and of an orchestrated, genocidal campaign against Jews. Faurisson was later taken to court in part for "falsification of history". It is the classic debate about free speech vs. the right to express unpopular views or even outright lies. The video explores the contexts of Chomsky's defense including the misrepresentation of the debate by the press.

PRESCREENING ACTIVITIES

1) In preparation, viewers may wish to refer to the history of censorship and freedom of expression. There are numerous cases to draw upon: the trial of Galileo for his revolutionary but heretical views on the galaxy; the censorship of books by distinguished writers such as D.H. Lawrence; police protection of neo-Nazis who marched through a Jewish neighborhood in Skokie, Illinois; and other trials of people who have used racist publications or lectures to deny the existence of the Holocaust. (See also p. 174-191)

POSTSCREENING ACTIVITIES

1) Viewers may wish to read more detailed coverage of Chomsky's free speech discourse in Necessary Illusions, (pp. 123-133, 337-355) and Deterring Democracy, (pp. 398-401, reproduced in Achbar, 1994, p. 179). Try applying Chomskian methodology to the actions and coverage of groups in North America such as the Ku Klux Klan, or to the dissemination of pornography.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1) The filmmakers Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick have stated the rationale for their cinematic style in the film: **"There are a diversity of 'learning styles', and information reaches individuals most effectively through different channels: visual, aural, textual, through story, metaphor, etc. Synthesizing many cinematic styles, we tried to make the film work on all these levels. Also, by using a media-within-media perspective, we reveal processes of media construction (including our own) and attempt to create in the viewer a sense of critical engagement."** Everyone should decide for him or herself how these techniques worked. In what situations did these techniques give you a sense of "critical engagement"? Talk about several examples of ideas which were presented in engaging ways, either visually, aurally or both. (See "Notes on Process," p. 12)

2) How do you react to the protests from the Toronto Vietnamese community, which are followed by Chomsky's comments in a BBC radio studio: **"I don't mind the denunciations frankly. I mind the lies. I mean intellectuals are very good at lying. They're professionals at it. You know, vilification is a wonderful technique. There's no way of responding to it ...I mean, the person who throws the mud always wins because there's no way of responding to such charges."** (pp. 173-174)

3) Comment on the patterns of mud slinging that emerged in the clashes over free speech in this video. Share any real-life encounters you may have had in which whoever "throws the mud always wins".

4) Summarize the history of Chomsky's dealings with Faurisson. Do you think his defenders exploited Chomsky for their own purposes?

5) To what extent did you side with Chomsky? In your opinion, how well does Chomsky fare in this dispute over Faurisson's trial? Do you think that Chomsky carries the principles of free speech too far? What would you have done in those circumstances? Chomsky states the gist of his philosophy as follows: **"If you're in favor of freedom of speech, that means you're in favor of free speech precisely for views you despise, otherwise you're not in favor of freedom of speech."** (p. 184) Those who adhere strongly to Chomsky's position may wish to share their experiences - both positive and negative - in consistently holding to their principles during disputes.

6) Chomsky has written "**By entering into the arena of argument and counter-argument, of technical feasibility and tactics, of footnotes and citations, by accepting the presumption of legitimacy of debate on certain issues, one has already lost one's humanity.**" (See pp. 188-191) How would you reconcile these observations with his dealing with Faurisson and others who denied the Holocaust?

TOWARD A VISION OF A FUTURE SOCIETY

"I have my own ideas as to what a future society should look like - I've written about them; I mean, I think that we should, at the most general level, be seeking out forms of authority and domination, and challenging their legitimacy."

- Noam Chomsky

In this video, Chomsky concentrates on the contemporary institutions and powers which have set limits on human progress and offers us some concrete ways of challenging them; in effect, he presents a vision of a future society. Chomsky's work is directed at developing intellectual self-defense for "ordinary people" who are often isolated in their struggles. States are seen to be violent through such strategies as the near-genocide of native peoples. Ultimately, Chomsky feels we must move beyond the myths of modern industrial civilization and the privileged elites who dominate mass communication, and foster the interests of a truly global community.

PRESCREENING ACTIVITIES

1) Since the mid-60s, there have been major gains in civil rights, anti-racism, anti-sexism and environmental awareness initiatives, and many other socially important areas. What activities have you or your friends participated in where you felt you could make some impact? What are some other examples where you can "fight city hall"? What political strategies worked best? What would you now do differently? How did you analyze the system before you acted?

2) Read and discuss the pros and cons of communal living. How successful are "intentional communities" in North America? How successful are the kibbutzim in Israel? What have we learned from their social and intellectual practices? To what extent can transfer take place into the realm of politics? (See pp. 216-218, 255)

3) If we accept the hypothesis that control in the communications industry is exercised by the privileged elite, what are some concrete ways for ordinary people to assume some influence and begin taking control? (See p. 192)

POSTSCREENING ACTIVITIES

1) Chomsky assigns considerable power to television's ability to numb the intellect. Research this topic by reading critics such as Neil Postman and Marie Winn who support this thesis. Then read critics such as John Fiske and David Morley who believe that audiences are not empty vessels to receive messages and can, more often than not, resist the alleged negative effects of the medium. See Television Culture by John Fiske (Methuen 1987), Understanding Popular Culture (Unwin Hyman 1989) and TV Audiences and Cultural Studies by David Morley (Routledge 1992), and John Leonard's article, "Why Blame TV?" in The Nation magazine, Dec. 27, 1993 (Back issues \$ 4 from 72 Fifth Ave, New York, NY, 10011, reprinted in Utne Reader No. 63. May/June, 1994.)

2) The media coverage of the "political correctness" (PC) movement has tended to trivialize social and intellectual changes needed in our pluralistic society. Chomsky has claimed that right wing conservative groups dominate our politics but through an effective propaganda campaign they shifted the blame for harsh standards onto what have been called "left-wing fascists." Read several accounts on political correctness in periodicals and newspapers from 1990 to the present and do a social-political analysis. (p. 210)

3) To learn how teachers can discuss media effectively with their students, it is important to learn about media literacy. The following are some organizations which can assist you: Association for Media Literacy, 40 McArthur St., Weston, Ontario, Canada (416) 394-6992; Strategies for Media Literacy, 1095 Market St. #410, San Francisco, CA 94103; Centre for Media and Values, 1962 Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034; National Telecil, 120 E. Wilson St., Madison, WI 53703.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1) The filmmakers Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick have stated the rationale for their cinematic style in the film: **"There are a diversity of 'learning styles', and information reaches individuals most effectively through different channels: visual, aural, textual, through story, metaphor, etc. Synthesizing many cinematic styles, we tried to make the film work on all these levels. Also, by using a media-within-media perspective, we reveal processes of media construction (including our own) and attempt to create in the viewer a sense of critical engagement."** Everyone should decide for him or herself how these techniques worked. In what situations did these techniques give you a sense of "critical engage-

ment"? Talk about several examples of ideas which were presented in engaging ways, either visually, aurally or both. (See "Notes on Process," p. 12)

2) Chomsky offers a critique on the nature of change in which he points out that **"the reason things change is because lots of people are working all the time.**" This is in contrast to **"in the history books there's a couple of leaders. You know George Washington and Martin Luther King..."** Why is it important to move beyond the 'great leader' model of change to that of the role played by ordinary people? (p. 192)

3) **"No one knows enough to predict what humans will or can achieve. We are faced with a kind of Pascal's wager: assume the worst, and it will surely arrive; commit oneself to the struggle for freedom and justice, and its cause may be advanced."**(p. 224; see also p. 64, Deterring Democracy, New York, Hill and Wang • Scarborough, Harper Collins Canada, 1992). What attitude about people as agents of change and the nature of hope is implied in Chomsky's comments?

4) Chomsky asserts that his work serves the following goal: **"I feel that I'm simply helping people develop courses of intellectual self-defense."** He then states that schools do not provide such courses (See p. 48, pp. 157-158, 194, 227). Is your present discussion part of a school course? To what extent does it provide you with the tools of "intellectual selfdefense?" Brainstorm ideas of what you would like to see included in such a course.

5) Chomsky assigns considerable power to television: **"Each person is sitting alone in front of the tube. And it's hard to have ideas or thoughts under those circumstances."** (p. 195). Debate this notion using concrete evidence for your point of view. (See Postscreening Activities.)

6) After responding to several of the following statements made by Chomsky in the video, brainstorm around what generalizations you can make about his vision of the future and the changes needed in our institutions:

a) **"In an advanced technological society human beings do not have to be forced into the position of tools, of cogs in a machine."** (p. 31)

b) **"We should be seeking out forms of authority and domination, and challenging their legitimacy."** (pp. 35-36)

c) **"States are violent institutions. The government of any country, including ours, represents some sort of domestic power structure and it's usually violent. States are violent to the extent that they're powerful, that's roughly accurate. You look at American history, it's nothing to write home about. You know, why are we here? We're here because some ten million Native Americans were wiped out."** (pp. 208-209)

d) **"I think much of the general population recognizes that the organized institutions do not reflect their concerns and interests and needs. They do not participate meaningfully in the political system."** (pp. 211-212)

e) **"I go into a polling booth and I push one or another button depending on which of those positions I want. That's a very limited form of democracy. Really meaningful democracy would mean that I play a role in forming these decisions, in making, creating those positions."** (pp. 213-214)

7) Over images of environmental destruction, the video concludes with Chomsky's observation that **"the conditions of survival, let alone justice, require social planning in the interests of the community as a whole, and by now that means the global community."** (p. 221-222) In the context of the world in the 1990s, why is it so important to acknowledge the significance of the 'global community'?

NOAM CHOMSKY: PERSONAL INFLUENCES

"I'm not given to false modesty. There are things that I can do and I know that I can do them reasonably well, including analysis, study, research, I mean I know how to do that sort of thing and I think I have a reasonable understanding of the way the world works. As much as anyone can. And that turns out to be a useful resource for people who are doing active organizing, trying to engage themselves in a way which will make it a little bit of a better world. And if you can help in those things, or participate in them, well, that's rewarding."

- Noam Chomsky

This video focuses on the important, formative influences in Noam Chomsky's life - those factors which enabled him to become a politically engaged intellectual. Starting out as a linguist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where his work revolutionized the study of language, Chomsky was radicalized by the 1960s anti-war movement and became a major critic of American policy. We learn about the important Jewish intellectual influences of his family, as well as those defining incidents in his early schooling which made a lasting impression.

PRESCREENING ACTIVITIES

- 1) Viewers who want to learn about linguistics, Chomsky's main professional career, may wish to research the subject and share their insights with the group. (p. 23-29, 240)
- 2) Because of the strong intellectual, religious and cultural influences on Chomsky's life, a useful discussion could center on a) how a religious upbringing may affect your attitudes toward such topics as peace, justice and political dissent b) how intellectual and political stimulation at an early age can affect your attitudes as an adult. (pp. 44-50, 64-65)

POSTSCREENING ACTIVITIES

- 1) **"It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and expose lies."** (p.70) Compare Chomsky's contribution with other individuals, groups or organizations playing (or who have played) an oppositional role in our culture. These would include I.F. Stone, a dissident publishing voice in Washington journalism; Ralph Nader, "the people's advocate" in Washing-

ton; Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth; the Green Party; civil rights advocates such as Martin Luther King and Saul Alinsky; Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting; The Media Foundation (who publish Adbusters, 1243 W. 7th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C., CANADA, V6H 1B7, a magazine which critiques advertising and rampant consumerism). (Other publications and groups are listed in the Resource Guide, pp. 239-256)

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1) The filmmakers Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick have stated the rationale for their cinematic style in the film: **"There are a diversity of 'learning styles', and information reaches individuals most effectively through different channels: visual, aural, textual, through story, metaphor, etc. Synthesizing many cinematic styles, we tried to make the film work on all these levels. Also, by using a media-within-media perspective, we reveal processes of media construction (including our own) and attempt to create in the viewer a sense of critical engagement."** Everyone should decide for him or herself how these techniques worked. In what situations did these techniques give you a sense of "critical engagement"? Talk about several examples of ideas which were presented in engaging ways, either visually, aurally or both. (See "Notes on Process," p. 12)

2) Chomsky's two half-hour interviews with Bill Moyers on public television generated more requests for transcripts than any of the other 50 programs in the World of Ideas series. How might you account for the program's popularity? (p. 21)

3) Chomsky has said, **"Propaganda is to a democracy what violence is to a dictatorship."** (See p. 20, 43) He also admits he himself has often not escaped the ideological indoctrination of the media. (p. 64) Can you identify an example of your own ideological indoctrination?

4) Though Chomsky considers the statistics "meaningless", a survey of citation indexes in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences revealed that Chomsky is the most-cited living author and ranks in the top ten ever, in the company of Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare and Freud. (p. 17) Talking about Chomsky's findings in language, Cambridge historian Jonathan Steinberg states that **"The implications of these views have washed over the fields of psychology, education, sociology, philosophy, literary criticism and logic."** He could also have added artificial intelligence. How might the study of language affect these areas of knowledge? Can you think of others to add to the list?

5) Chomsky states that he can only find "tenuous points of contact" between his work in linguistics and his engagement with politics. (p. 30) What connections might you or your group find between the two areas?

6) Many radicals dissociate themselves from established institutions. Chomsky has been on the faculty of M.I.T. since the 1950s and yet admits in the interview in the video that **"The club of academic intellectuals designed and implemented the Vietnam war and other similar though smaller actions."** What might be the advantages of Chomsky's working within the context of a prestigious university? Are there other outspoken radicals you are aware of operating within universities? How successful have they been in their role as critics or agents of change? How have the institutions compromised their effectiveness? (See p. 34)

7) The film shows us key moments that helped shape the character, courage and social radicalism of Chomsky. How do you think the following influenced him:

- a) his religious background;
- b) working as a kid during the Depression at his uncle's newsstand in Manhattan;
- c) his experience in a progressive elementary school which didn't foster competitiveness;
- d) his shame in not aiding a boy being bullied in the school yard.

8) In his interview with William Buckley, Chomsky makes a strong attack on **"sane, reasonable, sensible"** people who watch with **"apathy and equanimity"** as leaders such as Hitler and modern-day counterparts commit atrocities. **"These reasonable and tolerant people share a very serious burden of guilt that they very easily throw on the shoulders of others who seem more extreme and more violent."** (pp. 68-70) If we take Chomsky's indictment seriously, one might argue that most of us would have to plead guilty. How do you respond?

9) The video concludes with Chomsky's comments on his role as researcher and provocateur: **"a useful resource for people who are doing active organizing, trying to engage themselves in a way which will make it a little bit of a better world."** Elsewhere he said: **"What I would like to do is help people persuade themselves. I tell them what I think, and obviously I hope they'll persuade themselves... I think there are a lot of analytic perspectives, just straight information, that people are not presented with."** (p. 208) To what extent has Chomsky persuaded you in this video or in other interviews and writings about his views on politics and the media? What are the analytic perspectives and/or "straight information" you may have gained? What difference will these insights make in your reading of the news?

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