



Constructive Criticism: “Natural Born Killers”

by Melanie Anne Phillips
& Chris Huntley

Guilty as ~~Sin~~ Charged

Warning: This article contains material that may offend your sensibilities. Proceed with caution.

Indicted, tried, and convicted: Violence in Western culture as crucified in *Natural Born Killers* through its public execution. Take “execution” two ways, as *NBK* kills violence by carrying it to an extreme. Amend “violence IN Western culture” to read “violence AS Western culture.” The message of *Natural Born Killers* is not that violence is engendered by the system or even that violence is inherent in the system, but that violence IS the system. In such a society where violence is the stock and trade, natural born killers rise to the top. In fact, they are destined to rule as royalty, natural born.

The message of *NBK* is clear. So clear that we focus our attention upon it, just as we watch a magician’s right hand while his left is palming the ball. Virtually all the media talk in articles and reviews has been riveted to the issue of violence. Meanwhile, Oliver Stone is performing his magic behind the smoke and mirrors. His intent? To make us more sensitized to the violence in our everyday lives so that we might question its validity. His method? A brilliant form of propaganda. And that is the focus of *this* article: how he did it and how you can too.

Unless you walked out of the show when it first began because it antagonized certain “sensibilities” regarding carnage and mayhem, you were first appalled by the graphic nature of the crimes and then intrigued with the black comedy that sets it in a completely different context. You might sit there, wondering, “I think this is deplorable. I should just stop watching.” Then, scene after scene, Stone twists it all around into a cosmic joke and you find yourself

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Dramatica Workshops Free Through Year End

All Classes through the end of 1994 are FREE and open to all interested. The workshops are held at the offices of Screenplay Systems Inc., 150 E. Olive Ave. #203, Burbank, CA 91502. Dramatica clients have preferential seating. Reservations are strongly recommended and seating is extremely limited.

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Dramatica Users' Group Update

The October meeting is on Wed., Oct. 12th, 1994 from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. or so. Last month *Ghost* was analyzed. This month the group will discuss and breakdown *Ghostbusters*. (No...November will not be an analysis of *The Ghost and Mr. Chicken!*)

Bring a blank, formatted disk to get the latest storyforms available or to get the FirstClass BBS software for accessing Screenplay Systems' FirstClass BBS.

WHERE: The Users' Group Meetings are held at the offices of *Screenplay Systems, 150 East Olive Avenue, Suite 203, Burbank, California, 91502.*

- **Users' Group Meetings:** The second Wednesday of every month from 7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m. including Oct. 12, Nov. 9, Dec. 14. Open to everyone. □

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FREE WORKSHOPS (Cont. from page 1)

As you may know, SSI has been having evening (and weekend) workshops on Dramatica. We have decided to make a few changes, so here they are:

- All workshops through the end of 1994 are FREE and no longer require coupons to attend.
- The workshops through the end of the year are open to everyone interested. Tell your friends.
- Space is limited and is on a first come/first served basis. However, Dramatica owners will be allotted space over non-owners. Windows people that have paid for Dramatica are treated as Dramatica owners and get the same preferential treatment.
- Attendance of the Saturday Dramatica BASICS workshop is still a strongly suggested prerequisite for attending the Tuesday and Thursday night focus workshops.
- All classes currently scheduled for December are canceled. That means that the free workshops are only available through the end of November.
- Next year, all workshops will be for \$\$\$\$. We will most likely have discount coupons for Dramatica owners, but the exact details of this are yet to be determined.
- Audio tapes (and possibly video tapes) of some or all of the workshops should be available by no later than the beginning of next year. How much \$\$\$ they will be has not yet been determined.

WHERE: The Workshops are held at the offices of *Screenplay Systems, 150 East Olive Avenue, Suite 203, Burbank, California, 91502.* The nearest cross street is San Fernando Road. There is plenty of free parking available.

RESERVATIONS ARE RECOMMENDED. Space is extremely limited. Call (818) 843-6557 ext. 532 to make workshop reservations or to obtain class information.

For a complete schedule of 1994 workshops, look to the 1994 Dramatica Calendar on the back cover of this issue. □

NBK (Continued from page 1)

amazed that you are laughing. "I *should* stop watching, but I've never seen anything from *this* point of view before..."

By the time the story is halfway through, you have almost forgotten to look at the violence per se and have become much more interested in looking for the humor. If that is where the story left us, we would merely have been desensitized to even higher levels of violence than we are already. Our tolerance levels would have increased to some degree. There is no good or bad in a system that is inherently evil. From *inside* the system there is no way to evaluate intrinsics. That is why midway through the film we are presented an alternative paradigm in the form of Red Cloud, the Native American. Just as we are becoming settled into accepting the violence as a necessary component of the humor, Red Cloud illustrates a larger context in which another culture exists that is not made of violence. Suddenly, we can see good and evil. Suddenly, we have stepped out of Western culture to see it for what it is, objectively rather than subjectively.

Now we are assaulted full tilt with the media connection through shots of sheepish audiences in front of the television sets vicariously drinking up the blood of their own kind drawn by broadcast wolves. Again, smoke and mirrors that make us question our own role in sitting in the theater watching *NBK*. Still, the only characters who are "worthy" of succeeding are Micky and Mallory. Everyone else is tainted with some degree of restraint. Everyone else is less than "pure." In the pecking order that *is* the Western culture, only the natural born killers have a right to sit at the top of the food chain: cannibalistic christs at the head of the smorgasbord table, "Drink, this is *your* blood... Eat, this is *your* body."

Unlike the first half of the story in which we find ourselves placated into accepting the violence, now we find ourselves ever more sensitized to it with every horrendous event. Instead of finding the humor and forgetting the means, we take note of our desire to root for the root of all evil and rebel against the seeds we find within us.

By the end of the story, we cannot help but be disturbed that we *wanted* the wantonly vicious to

succeed. And that is where the propaganda takes hold. Because Stone has been so successful in sucking us in to the Super Bowl of violence, then turned the tables and made us question the rules of his game, we become so focused on the film itself that we are not aware how many times we are helpless but to think of it while watching Saturday morning cartoons with our kids. Every time a news program airs, we note the gleam in the eyes of the anchor reporting atrocities in a foreign land. We see these things and think of *NBK*, drawing comparisons. But the propaganda is not that we consciously ponder this connection with the overt message of the film, but that we take time to think about it at all. We are focusing on the actual connection, unaware that Stone's amazingly powerful propaganda statement has changed us in a way that prevents us from simply not seeing the violence at all.

The two concepts are closely allied: consciously considering the violence in the media versus not even thinking to consider it. The first is our focus. The second is what *makes* us focus.

If Oliver Stone had merely intended to create an homage to ultra-violence he would have never brought in Red Cloud. Yet, as the film stands, it clearly snookers us into being "deprogrammed" from our stupor and sensitized to violence we had become accustomed to and would otherwise unconsciously ignore.

How did he do that? How can we use the same techniques to further our own pet cause as writers? To understand we must examine both the structure and dynamics of *Natural Born Killers* and how they were transmitted to the audience through storytelling techniques.

Structurally, *NBK* describes three Western worlds, populated by four principal characters. The "real" world is home to Wayne Gale, the TV "journalist." All of his scenes are presented in the most realistic film making techniques. Unusual editing keeps his scenes consistent with the "flavor" of the film as a whole, but they are external manipulations of his reality, not presented as part of its makeup. Wayne Gale starts out fully in the "real" world and gradually *evolves* into the world of the natural born

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killers, becoming a killer himself, though not natural born. This is indicated as the scenes in which he participates become more and more *internally* bizarre, not only in action but in lighting, camera angles, film stock and eventually special effects as his face distorts like Micky's. So Wayne has made the transition from the structured world to the dynamic.

In contrast, Scagnetti, the police detective, has always had a foot in each world. He has straddled the line all of his life. Like a half breed, he is not quite natural born, but still not domesticated enough to be unaffected by the smell of blood. His world is presented as a half and half mix of structural reality and dynamic transformation. Before he ever meets up with Micky and Mallory, he kills a young woman for the thrill. But that is where he proves himself not to be natural born. Those who are the Western Royalty get no thrill from killing: its just what they do. As Red Cloud put it, "Stupid lady, you *knew* I was a snake!"

The filmic storytelling of Scagnetti's scenes reflect the dichotomy of his nature. Although his world is never as distorted as Micky and Mallory's, it is never quite as real as Gale's either. As an example, when Scagnetti investigates the murder scene where Mallory has killed the gas station attendant, the blood pooled behind the boy's head is initially blue. Moments later, seen again the blood is red. This same juxtaposition of imagery is evident as Scagnetti examines the smudges on the shiny hood of the sports car where Mallory seduced the boy. He sees the reality of the evidence just as his associates do, but he also actually sees Mallory, reflected in the metal as if she were still there, reenacting the crime.

The third world belongs to both Micky and Mallory. They share the magic, but from two different approaches. Micky is a do-er, physically making over his world to his liking. In contrast, Mallory is a be-er: she effects change by altering her perception. When we flashback to experience the moment when Micky and Mallory met, we see Mallory's family through her perceptions of them. There is no reality at all in her imagery. Although thrown into a bizarre, sitcom context, the vicious, lechery of her father and the distracted helplessness of her mother are still clearly delineated. We see nothing of her family in

anything but her abstract remodeling. Her world is wholly non-real.

Micky has something to learn from Mallory: how to adjust his perceptions to change the nature of personal reality. Mallory has something to learn from Micky: how to alter her environment rather than just reconfigure it. Because of their different approaches, each sees only part of the picture, even while they are born to the magic. Together, however, they are unstoppable, as they control the entire violent world. This is brought home by their success in evading capture until they are separated at the drug store. Alone, they are vulnerable. When they are once again reunited in prison, their ultimate triumph is unavoidable, as long as they remain joined.

This arrangement serves to make the one faulty line of dialog between them stand out like a sore thumb. In their first meeting scene, Micky asks Mallory, "Do you always dress like that or did you do it for me?" She replies, "How could I do it for you if I didn't know you were coming?" This would lead us to believe that somehow Micky has brought the magic to her and that she did not possess it before. But the manner in which she distorted her family clearly indicates the opposite. To be more true to the scenario of her own magic, her reply might better have been, "How much meat do you have in that bag?," by which she doesn't even acknowledge the question, thereby sidestepping the whole issue.

In the end, both Gale's and Scagnetti's worlds are tested against Micky and Mallory's and found to be wanting. Gale is *impure*. Although he has become a killer, he is not *natural born*. Therefore, Gale might be at the top of the food chain except in the presence of the True Royalty of Western Civilization. Micky is the inquisitor who finds Gale lacking.

In parallel is the earlier scene in which Scagnetti visits Mallory in her cell. This is the only false moment in the thematic flow of the message. Scagnetti has verbalized his pride at having actually killed someone. Through Mallory, he seeks purification so that he can divest himself of the reality ties that bind, and transform himself completely into a genetic predator. As Earth Mother of this cold natural order, Mallory has it within her power to grant this suppli-

cant his request. She can take him into her womb and give him rebirth as a truly natural born killer. Unfortunately, the rebirthing concept got lost in the sexual dynamics. Rather than making it apparent that Mallory understood her power and chose to withhold it, the idea got lost in parody of adolescent date rape. In this way, the scene lost much of its mystical power and Mallory lost much of her mythic aura.

These three worlds, inhabited by the four principal characters define the perspectives of the story. From a Dramatica perspective, Micky is the Main Character (Physics Class) or *first person singular* perspective, *I*. We experience the story primarily through him, which is a standard approach to exploring that view. Similarly, Gale is the Obstacle Character (Psychology Class), identified as the *second person singular* perspective, *YOU*. He is always talking about Micky, talking TO Micky, saying "you this" and "you that." Micky responds in the interview scene saying to Gale, "you this" and "you that." Comparatives often occur between the Main and Obstacle characters and *NBK* is no exception. Micky tells Gale, "We're really just doing the same thing, we're really alike, you and I." Gale angrily retorts that they are quite different. However, through the unfolding of events the point is made that not only were these two characters alike in attitude, Gale eventually proves they are alike in deed as well. Gale changes, actually transforms, and Micky remains steadfast, accepting no substitutes, killing Gale as a pretender to the throne.

In unusual storytelling, the remaining two Dramatica Domains are personified, rather than played out. Scagnetti is the Subjective story incarnate (Mind Class), trapped between Gale's structure and Micky's dynamics. The Subjective Story can be seen in terms of the *first person plural* perspective, *WE*. Scagnetti is the battleground upon which the battle between the two worlds is waged. Even his book, entitled "Scagnetti on Scagnetti," further reveals the dichotomy in Scagnetti's nature. Mallory, on the other hand, is the Objective story (Universe Class) identified as the *third person* perspective, *SHE* (or *THEY*). She represents the *actual* reality of the story, the true magic that has no base in physicality per se,

but the point of view from which all valid meaning is derived.

Consistent with the characterization of storylines is the use of on screen dynamics in the symbology of the film. Normally, storytelling is accomplished by having the audience look at the dramatic potentials of a story and then figure out the dynamics that drive them by watching the potential rearrange and reorder themselves, indicating the forces that have moved them. In the end, enough movements have been documented, scene by scene to draw conclusions as to the dynamic environment that holds the message of the story.

In *NBK*, however, even the dynamics are portrayed right up front for all to see. Changes in film stock, which have no valid internal story impact still serve to connect otherwise disassociated pieces of the drama. Another approach creates comparisons between items of similar or dissimilar shape or color to draw connections. A notable use of this technique is in the opening diner scene in which a cut between the green of Micky's Key lime pie is matched to the green of the jukebox near which Mallory is dancing. Similar colors, similar outlooks, green and green, she is as he is, etc. Third is the use of special effects, such as the face distortion that draws connections at yet another level. And finally, is the editorial technique itself, such as repeating action or editing between two incompatible renderings of a single event.

The last is the most objective approach, imposing its impact from outside the story. The special effects like distortion are the Main Character equivalent, as they are only seen by the audience experientially from the most personal of views. The Subjective perspective is carried through the comparisons of color or shape, and the Obstacle view is presented through the changes in film stock and style, which reflect our perceptions back to us in warped mockery: alternative truths. All of the hidden dynamics are made visible, putting the whole film on trial because there is nowhere left for the audience to hide themselves within the story. The context expands to the real world and we are presented with a fun house mirror, leaving us to ask ourselves, "Is it warped, or are we?"

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A Quick Lesson in Propaganda

by Melanie Anne Phillips and Chris Huntley

Propaganda: 1. *a storyforming/storytelling technique used to impact an audience in specific ways, often employed to instigate deliberation and/or action. (Dramatica)*

Propaganda, n. 2. *any organization or movement working for the propagation of particular ideas, doctrines, practices, etc.* 3. *the ideas, doctrines, practices, etc. spread in this way. (Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary)*

Propaganda is a wondrous and dangerous story device. Its primary usage in stories is as a method for an author to impact an audience long after they have experienced the story itself. Through the use of propaganda, an author can inspire an audience to think certain ways, think about certain things, behave certain ways, and take specific actions. Like fire and firearms, propaganda can be used constructively and destructively and does not contain an inherent morality. Any morality involved comes from the minds of the author and her audience.

This article is *not* about the morality of propaganda. It is designed as a primer on how to create and employ propaganda in stories. With that in mind, let's get down to the nitty gritty.

The Basics of Propaganda

The human mind seeks to understand itself and the world around it. It does this through various ways including organizing information into *meaningful* patterns. Depending on the quantity of the information and the accuracy of its interpretation, a mind will identify a pattern (or several potential patterns) and supply the apparently "missing" pieces to make the pattern, and therefore *meaning*, complete. This *pattern matching* and *filling in of missing pieces* is intrinsic to the processes that create the human "mind." By choosing which piece(s) of the storyform to omit, authors can manipulate the impact a story will have on the minds of their audiences.

In its most basic form, propaganda is a way for authors to have an audience share their point of view. Closed (or complete) stories allow authors to present their points of view in the form of an argument which the audience can then take or leave. Open (or incomplete) stories require its audience to supply the missing pieces in order to get meaning from the story. Just creating an open story, however, does not create propaganda. There must be a pattern to what is missing for it to be a propaganda story.

The amount and nature of the missing pieces have a tremendous effect on the story's propagandistic impact. If you leave too much out of your story, an audience may not make the effort to "fill-in-the-blanks." The story may then be interpreted by the audience as meaningless. If, however, you selectively leave out specific pieces of the storyform, the audience may unknowingly fill in those holes with aspects of its personal experience. In this way, the story changes from an argument made by the author *to* the audience, to an argument made by the author *and* the audience. Unwittingly, the audience begins to share the author's point of view and perhaps coconspirators in its propagation: ergo, propaganda.

Since a propaganda story is based upon a tenuous relationship between an audience and an author, both perspectives should be considered to understand the techniques that can be used and the results that can be achieved.

The Audience

Knowing (or preparing) your audience can have a tremendous effect on how your propaganda will impact them. Here are a couple rules of thumb:

- The more specific the symbols you use to encode your story, the more limited an audience it will effect. The less specific the symbols, the greater potential audience.
- The more specific the symbols used to encode the story, the greater the likelihood it will have an impact on the portion of the audience that understands the symbols. The less specific the symbols, the less impact the story will have.
- The more familiar an audience is with the symbols used to encode a story, the more susceptible

they are to propaganda. The less familiar, the less susceptible.

The Author

Here are the things an author should consider while creating a propaganda story:

1. NATURE OF IMPACT

How you want to impact your audience? Do you wish to play with your audience's:

- *Motivations* (what drives them)
- *Methodologies* (how they go about doing things)
- *Purposes* (what they are striving for)
- *Means of evaluation* (how they measure their progress — their personal yardsticks?)

Pick only one as the area of primary impact. This will become the area of the storyform that you purposefully omit when storytelling. The remaining three areas will be used to support your intent by drawing attention away from the missing piece(s).

2. AREA OF IMPACT

What part of your audience's world view do you wish to impact?

- View of the world around them — “objective reality” (Objective Story)
- View of relationships (Subjective Story)
- View of themselves (Main Character)
- View of others (Obstacle Character)

Choose one of the perspectives. This will be the domain in which to place the “hole” in the storyform. The area of impact determines that part of your audience's world view the propaganda will “infect.”

3. TYPE OF IMPACT: SPECIFIC vs. GENERAL

Do you want the impact on your audience to be of a specific nature, or of a broader, more general nature?

The more specific you make the propaganda, the more specific and predictable its impact will be on an audience. The upside (from an author's point of view) is that specific behavior (mental or physical) can be promoted or modified. The downside is that specific propaganda is more easily identifiable and therefore contestable by the audience.

Specific propaganda is achieved by intentionally *not* encoding selected story appreciations, e.g. the Main Character's motivation or the story Outcome (Success or Failure). The audience will supply the missing piece from its own personal experiences (e.g. the Main Character's motivation in “Thelma and Louise.” What happened to her in Texas is *specifically* not mentioned in the film — that blank is left for the audience to fill).

The more general you make the propaganda, the less specific but all pervasive its impact will be on an audience. Instead of focusing impact on the audience's motivations, methodologies, purposes, or means of evaluation, generalized propaganda will tend to bias the audience's perspectives of their world. The upside (from an author's point of view) is that generalized propaganda is difficult for an audience to identify and therefore more difficult to combat than the specific form of propaganda. The downside is that it does not promote any specific type of behavior or thought process and its direct impact is less discernible.

General propaganda is achieved by intentionally *not* encoding entire areas of the story's structure or dynamics. For example, by leaving out almost all forms of the story's internal means of evaluation, *Natural Born Killers* forces its audience to focus on the methodologies involved and question its own (the members of the audience) means of evaluation.

4. DEGREE OF IMPACT

To what degree do you wish to impact your audience? The degree to which you *can* impact an audience is dependent on many variables not the least of which are your storytelling skills and the nature of the audience itself. There are some basic guidelines, however, that can mitigate and sometimes supersede those variables when skillfully employed.

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Shock as Propaganda — One tried and true method is to control what an audience knows about the story before experiencing the storytelling process so that you can shock them. Within the context of the story itself (as opposed to marketing or word-of-mouth), an author can prepare the audience by establishing certain *givens*, then purposefully break the storyform (destroy the givens) to shock or jar the audience. This hits the audience at a Preconscious level by soliciting an instantaneous, knee-jerk reaction. This type of propaganda is the most specific and immediately jarring on its audience. Two films that employed this technique to great effect are *Psycho* and *The Crying Game*.

Psycho broke the storyform to impact the audience's preconscious by killing the main character twenty minutes or so into the film (the "real" story about the Bates family then takes over). The *shock* value was enhanced through marketing by having the main character played by big box office draw Janet Leigh (a good storytelling choice at the time) and the marketing gimmick that no one would be allowed into the movie after the first five or ten minutes. This "gimmick" was actually essential for the propaganda to be effective. It takes time for an audience to identify on a personal level with a main character. Coming in late to the film would not allow enough time for the audience member to identify with Janet Leigh's character and her death would have little to no impact.

The Crying Game used a slightly different process to achieve a similar impact. The first twenty minutes of so of the film are used to establish a bias to the main character's (and audience's) view of reality. The "girlfriend" is clearly established except for one important fact. That "fact," because it is not explicitly denoted, is supplied by the mind of the main character (and the minds of the audience members). By taking such a long time to prep the audience, it comes as a shock when we (both main character and audience) find out that *she* is a *he*.

Awareness as Propaganda — Another method is to be up front about nature of the propaganda, letting your audience know what you are doing as you do it to them. This impacts an audience at a Conscious

level where they *must* actively consider the pros and cons of the issues. The propaganda comes from controlling the givens on the issues being discussed, while the audience focuses on which side of the issues they believe in.

A filmic example of this technique can be seen in *JFK*. By choosing a controversial topic (the assassination of President Kennedy) and making an overly specific argument as to what parties were involved in the conspiracy to execute and cover-up the assassination, Oliver Stone was able to focus his audience's attention on how "they" got away with it. The issue of who "they" were was suspiciously contentious as the resulting bru-ha-ha indicated. Who "they" were, however, is not the propaganda. The propaganda came in the form the story's *given*: Lee Harvey Oswald had help. By the end of the story, audience members find themselves arguing over *which* of the parties in the story were or were not participants in the conspiracy, accepting the possibility that people other than Oswald may have been involved.

Conditioning as Propaganda — Presenting an audience with an alternative life experience is yet another way to impact your audience. By ignoring (or catering to) an audience's cultural bias, you can present your story as an alternative reality. This impacts an audience by undermining or reinforcing their own personal Memories. By experiencing the story, the message/meaning of the story becomes part of the audience's memory base. The nature of the propaganda, however, is that the story lacks context which must be supplied by the audience. Thus personalized, the story memory is automatically triggered when an experience in the audience's real life summon similarly stored memories. Through repeated use, an audience's "sensibilities" become conditioned.

In Conditioning propaganda, audience attention is drawn to causal relationships: *When A also B* (spatial), and *If C then D* (temporal). The mechanism of this propaganda is to leave out a part of the causal relationships in the story. By leaving out one part, the objective contextual meaning is then supplied automatically by the audience, such as *When A also B* and *If ?? then D*. An audience will replace ?? with some-

thing from its own experience base, while hiding the ?? from its conscious considerations by creating the contraction: *When A also B and then D*.

This type of propaganda is closest to the *traditional* usage of the term with respect to stories, entertainment, and advertising. For example, look at much of the tobacco and alcohol print advertising. Frequently the Main Character (the type of person to whom the advertisement is supposed to appeal) is attractive, has someone attractive with them, and appears to be well situated in life. The *inference* is that when you smoke or drink, you are also cool, and if you are cool then you will be rich and attractive. The connection between “cool” and “rich and attractive” is not really in the advertisement but an audience often makes that connection for itself. The degree of impact on your audience is more dependent on your audience’s life experience outside of the story experience than the other three forms of propaganda.

Crimes and Misdemeanors is a film example that employs this conditioning technique of propaganda. The unusual aspect of the film is that it has two completely separate stories in it. The “Crimes” story involves a self-interested man who gets away with murder and becomes completely OK with it (a Success/Good story). The “Misdemeanors” story involves a well meaning man who loses his job, his girl, and is left miserable (a Failure/Bad story). By supplying two stories instead of one, the audience need not come prepared with its own experiences to create a false context. Most American audiences, however, come to stories with a particular cultural bias. Whereas Failure/Bad stories happening to nice people are familiar but regrettable, Success/Good stories about murderers are uncommon and “morally reprehensible.” The propaganda comes into effect when the audience experiences in its own life a Failure/Bad scenario that triggers a recollection of the Success/Good story — an option that they would not normally have considered. Lacking an objective contextual meaning, both stories are given equal consideration as viable solutions. Thus, what was once inconceivable due to a cultural or personal bias is now automatically seen as a possible avenue for problem solving.

Misdirection as Propaganda — The most subtle, and possibly most effective form of propaganda from a single exposure, is the use of misdirection as a way to impact an audience’s Subconscious. Like the “smoke and mirrors” technique used by magicians, this form of propaganda requires you to focus the audience’s Conscious attention in one place while the real impact is made in the Subconscious. Fortunately for authors, this is one of the easiest forms of propaganda to create.

This technique comes from merely omitting parts of the storyform from your storytelling. What you leave out becomes the audience’s blind spot and the dynamic partner to the storyform piece omitted becomes the audience’s focus. The focus is where your audience’s attention will be drawn (the smoke and mirrors). The blind spot is where your audience personalizes the story by “filling-in-the-blank.” The propaganda then becomes an argument made directly to the audience’s subconscious based on the context in which the story is presented.

Let’s look at some dynamic pairs of partners that appear in a storyform. The following pairs concern the nature of the impact on your audience:

Motivation	<->	Purpose
Methodology	<->	Means of Evaluation

Should you wish to impact your audience’s *motivations*, omit a particular motivation in the story and the audience, focused on the purpose they *can* see, will automatically supply a motivation that seems viable to them (*Thelma and Louise*).

Here are the storyform dynamic pairs that relate to story/audience perspectives:

Objective Perspective	<->	Subjective Perspective
Main Character Perspective	<->	Obstacle Character Perspective

Combining a nature and perspective to impact your audience gives an author greater control over a story’s propaganda. For example, if you wish to impact your audience in how they view the *means of evaluation* employed by the world around them, omit the Objective story means of evaluation elements and the audience’s attention will be distracted by focusing on the methodologies employed (*Natural Born Killers*).

Continued —

A WORD OF WARNING

Propaganda is powerful but using it has its risks. It is like a virus and using it is like using germ warfare. Once an audience is exposed to it, the only way they can neutralize it is to balance it with an equal but opposite force. In American culture, audiences frequently don't like to be made *aware* that they are being manipulated. If the audience becomes aware of the nature of your propaganda, the equal but opposite force can take the form of a backlash against the author(s) and the propaganda itself. Look at the strong backlash against advertisers that "target" their advertising to specific demographic groups (e.g. African Americans, women, Generation X, etc.), particularly if they are trying to sell liquor, tobacco products, or other items considered "vices" in America.

Once released, propaganda is difficult to control and its effects are frequently subject to real world influences. Sometimes propaganda can benefit from real world coincidences: *The China Syndrome's* mild propaganda about the dangers of nuclear power plants got a big boost in affecting its audience because of the Three Mile Island incident; the media coverage of the O.J. Simpson murder case may not have tainted potential jurors (yeah, right), but *Natural Born Killers'* propaganda against the media's sensationalization of violence got a little extra *juice* added to its punch. Often real life or the passage of time can undermine the effectiveness of propaganda: it is possible that *Reefer Madness* may have been effective when it first came out, but to American audiences today, its propaganda against drug use is obvious, simplistic, risible and, more importantly, ineffective. □

Dramatica Internet Address

Questions, comments, and reactions to this newsletter and Dramatica can be sent to us from most computer services via our Internet address:

Dramatica@Screenplay.com

And that is the nature of the propaganda techniques in this story. First it suckers you in. Then, midway, it throws it all into a different context forcing us to reevaluate ourselves. Finally, it leaves us so focused on the violence that we observed, and confused by our reaction to it that we have effectively become deprogrammed and re-sensitized to violence without ever being aware that we had changed.

Many of us may be resistant to the idea that we can be changed by a work in ways of which we are not aware. But this article itself has been modeled after the structural dynamics of *Natural Born Killers*. It begins with a discussion of violence of the piece, and suckers you into looking at the mechanisms of the story. Then it turns the tables midway and diverts the issue to describing how propaganda works, forcing us to focus on that methodology. If it were to end as the film did, it would have concluded with the paragraph above, and everyone who read this article would be unaware they had been changed. How changed? Well, the issue of the morality of using propaganda techniques was never brought up. It was left out intentionally. So if we had not drawn attention to the structure of our own propaganda, that missing aspect would naturally be filled in by the mind of each reader whenever they noticed propaganda in the future. It is an essential question to be answered: is this kind of manipulation moral, even if it is for a good cause?

By bringing this all out in the open, it diffuses the power of our propaganda statement. It takes the force of it from the subconscious and elevates it to conscious consideration where it can easily be disposed of by our readers. We really did not want to impact anyone in a propagandistic manner. Our intent is only to objectively describe some of the techniques by which it can and has been employed, then subjectively illustrate its power by using those very same techniques. As a result, you all now possess some tools, which if used will make both you and your indicted subject Guilty as ~~Sin~~ Charged. □

SSI FirstClass BBS

These directions are for Macintosh Users who already have their modems properly set up.

TO INSTALL THE FIRSTCLASS SOFTWARE ON YOUR MACINTOSH:



FirstClass.sit

- You will first need a copy of the Stuffit file (available from Screenplay Systems).
- Double-click on the file to un-stuff it. The file will expand to create a "FirstClass Client" folder that requires somewhere between 1 and 1.2 MB of disk space.

TO ACCESS THE FIRSTCLASS BBS:

- Make sure your modem is properly connected and turned on.
- Open the FirstClass® Client folder.
- Open the Settings folder. You will find two settings files there: *SSI Local* and *SSI Long Distance*.
- Double-click on the appropriate settings file. Use *SSI Local* if you are dialing from the 818 area code. Use *SSI Long Distance* if you are calling from anywhere outside of the 818 area code.
- FirstClass will bring up the Login screen. Enter the User ID that you would like to use — preferably a name that is unique enough that it won't conflict with someone else's ID.
- Enter your password (you make it up).
- Press LOGIN.
- FirstClass will dial the SSI BBS. Once you are granted access, first time users will be asked to register. Please fill in all of the information. If you do not, the BBS Administrator will revoke your privileges.

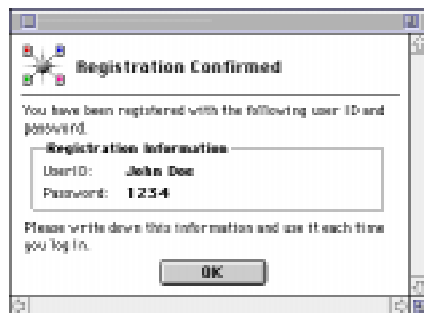
Welcome to FirstClass. As a new user, you must first fill out the following registration form before you may access FirstClass. Please fill out all the fields, then click on the "Register" button. Thank you.

Your First: John Middle Initial: J
Your Last: Doe
Company Name: ACME
Street: 1234 Main Street
City/Town: Berkeley
State/Province: CA
Country: USA Telephone: 555-1234
ZIP/Postal: 91502 FAX: 555-1234

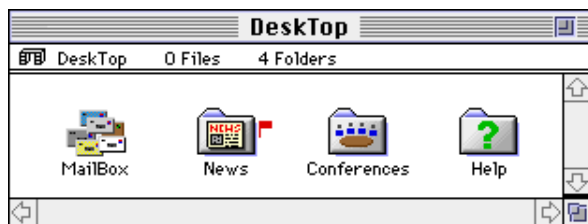
Requested User ID: John Doe
Requested Password: 1234

Cancel Register

- Press REGISTER. The registration will be processed and you will get a confirmation that you have been registered.



- The FirstClass Desktop will appear. It is currently divided into four areas. Mailbox, News, Conferences, and Help.



- New items of interest are noted with small red flags.
- Explore the BBS at your will.
- When you are done, select QUIT from the FILE menu.

1994 Dramatica Calendar

OCTOBER

Tue, Oct. 4 Focus Workshop: Appreciations
Thr, Oct. 6 Focus Workshop: Plot
Tue, Oct. 11 Focus Workshop: Character
Wed, Oct. 12 Users' Group Meeting
(Ghostbusters)
Thr, Oct. 13 Focus Workshop: Theme
Tue, Oct. 18 Focus Workshop: Storyforming
Thr, Oct. 20 Focus Workshop: Storyweaving
Tue, Oct. 25 Focus Workshop: Encoding
Thr, Oct. 27 Focus Workshop: Genre/
Reception
Sat, Oct. 29 **Dramatica Basics Workshop**

NOVEMBER

Tue, Nov. 1 Focus Workshop: Plot
Tue, Nov. 8 Focus Workshop: Theme
Wed, Nov. 9 Users' Group Meeting
Tue, Nov. 15 Focus Workshop: Storyweaving
Sat, Nov. 19 Dramatica Basics Workshop
Tue, Nov. 22 Focus Workshop: Genre/
Reception
Tue, Nov. 29 Focus Workshop: Appreciations

DECEMBER

Wed, Dec. 14 ... Users' Group Meeting
New Class Schedule Begins in 1995

For Workshop Reservations, call (818) 843-6557 ext. 532 • Space is Limited

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Dramatica Newsletter - Dated Material