will differentiate analytical writing from the other forms you may often be called upon to do: argument, summary, and personal expression.

What Is Analysis and How Does It Work?

To analyze something is to ask what that something *means*. It is to ask *how* something does what it does or *why* it is as it is. Analysis is the kind of thinking you'll most often be asked to do in your work life and in school; it is not the rarefied and exclusive province of scholars and intellectuals. It is, in fact, one of the most common of our mental activities.

If, for example, you find yourself being followed by a large dog, your first response, other than breaking into a cold sweat, will be to analyze the situation. What does being followed by a large dog mean for me, here, now? Does it mean the dog is vicious and about to attack? Does it mean the dog is curious and wants to play? Similarly, if you are losing a game of tennis or you've just left a job interview or you are looking at a painting of a woman with three noses, you will begin to analyze. How can I play differently to increase my chances of winning? Am I likely to get the job, and why (or why not)? Why did the artist give the woman three noses?

As these examples suggest, most people already analyze all the time, but they often don't realize that this is what they're doing. A first step, then, toward becoming a better analytical thinker and writer is to *become more aware of your own thinking processes, building on skills that you already possess, and eliminating habits that get in the way.* Toward this end, here are five moves to practice consciously, five activities people engage in when they analyze.

Move 1: Suspend Judgment

This first move, suspending judgment, is a singularly difficult thing for most people to do. As the psychologist Carl Rogers and others have argued, our habitual tendency is to evaluate. Walking out of a movie, for example, most people will immediately voice their approval or disapproval, usually in either/or terms: I liked it *or* didn't like it; it was right/wrong, good/bad, interesting/boring. The other people in the conversation will then offer their own evaluation plus their judgment of the others' judgments: I think that it was a good movie and that you are wrong to think it was bad. And so on.

There are several problems with this kind of reflex move to evaluation. Such comments, because they are so general, really don't say much of significance about the subject. The fact that you liked or didn't like a movie probably says more about you—your tastes, interests, biases, and experiences—than it does about the movie. And, although you might go on to substantiate your judgment, saying that you thought the leading man was miscast or the dialogue too long-winded, these further comments tend to be motivated more by your desire to defend your position than by your desire to understand what the film was trying to accomplish. When people leap to judgment, they usually land in the mental pathways they've grown accustomed to traveling, guided by family or friends or popular opinion. Moving through these pathways can become so automatic that thinking stops. If you can break the evaluation reflex and press yourself to analyze before judging a subject, you will often be surprised at how much your initial responses change.

As a general rule, you should seek to understand the subject you are analyzing before moving to a judgment about it. Try to *figure out what your subject means before deciding how you feel about it.*

Move 2: Define Significant Parts and How They're Related

Whether you are analyzing an awkward social situation, an economic problem, a painting, a substance in a chemistry lab, or your chances of succeeding in a job interview, the process of analysis is the same:

- Divide the subject into its defining parts, its main elements or ingredients.
- Consider how these parts are related, both to each other and to the subject as a whole.

In the case of the large dog, you might notice that he's dragging a leash, has a ball in his mouth, and is wearing a bright red scarf. Having broken your larger subject into these defining parts, you would try to see the connection among them and determine what they mean, what they allow you to decide about the nature of the dog: apparently somebody's lost pet, playful, probably not hostile, unlikely to bite me.

Analysis of the painting of the woman with three noses, a subject more like the kind you might be asked to write about in a college course, would proceed in the same way. Your result—ideas about the nature of the painting—would be determined, as with the dog, not only by your noticing its various parts, but also by your familiarity with the subject. If you knew little about art history, scrutiny of the painting's parts would not tell you, for instance, that it is an example of the movement known as Cubism. Even without this context, however, you would still be able to draw some analytical conclusions—ideas about the meaning and nature of the subject. You might conclude, for example, that the artist is interested in perspective or in the way we see, as opposed to realistic depictions of the world.

One common denominator of all effective analytical writing is that it pays close attention to detail. We analyze because our global responses, to a play, for example, or to a speech or a social problem, are too general. If you comment on an entire football game, you'll find yourself saying things like "great game," which is a generic response, something you could say about almost anything. This "one-size-fits-all" kind of comment doesn't tell us very much except that you probably liked the game. In order to say more, you would necessarily become more analytical—shifting your attention to the significance of some important aspect of the game, such as "they won because the offensive

line was giving the quarterback all day to find his receivers" or "they lost because they couldn't defend against the safety blitz."

This move from generalization to analysis, from the larger subject to its key components, is characteristic of good thinking. To understand a subject, we need to get past our first, generic, evaluative response in order to discover what the subject is "made of," the particulars that contribute most strongly to the character of the whole.

If all that analysis did, however, was to take subjects apart, leaving them broken and scattered, the activity would not be worth very much. The student who presents a draft of a paper to his or her professor with the words, "Go ahead, rip it apart," reveals a disabling misconception about analysis—that, like dissecting a frog in a biology lab, analysis takes the life out of its subjects. Clearly, analysis means more than breaking a subject into its parts. When you analyze a subject you ask not just "what is it made of?" but also *"how do these parts help me to understand the meaning of the subject as a whole?"* A good analysis seeks to locate the life of its subject, the ideas that energize it.

Move 3: Make the Implicit Explicit

A definition of analytical writing to which this book will return repeatedly is that it makes explicit (overtly stated) what is implicit (suggested but not overtly stated) in both your subject and your own thinking. This process of converting suggestions into direct statements is essential to analysis, but it is also the feature of analysis least understood by inexperienced writers. They fear that, like the emperor's new clothes, implications aren't really "there," but are instead the phantasms of an overactive imagination. "Reading between the lines" is the common and telling phrase that expresses this anxiety. We will have more to say against the charge that analysis makes something out of nothing—the spaces between the lines—rather than out of what is there in black and white.

But for now, let's look at a hypothetical example of this process of drawing out implications, pausing first to offer a couple of definitions. The process of drawing out implications is also known as *making inferences*. *Inference* and *implication* are related but not synonymous terms, and the difference is a useful one to know. The term *implication* is used to describe something suggested by the material itself; implications reside in the matter you are studying. The term *inference* is used to describe your thinking process. In short, *you infer what the subject implies*.

Now, let's move on to the example, which will suggest not only how the process of making the implicit explicit works, but also how often we do it in our everyday lives.

Imagine that you are driving down the highway and find yourself analyzing a billboard advertisement for a brand of beer. Such an analysis might begin with your noticing what the billboard photo contains, its various "parts"—six young, athletic, and scantily clad men and women drinking beer while pushing kayaks into a fast-running river. At this point, you have produced not an analysis but a summary—a description of what the photo contains. If, however, you go on to consider what the particulars of the photo *imply*, your summary would become analytical.

You might infer, for example, that the photo implies that beer is the beverage of fashionable, healthy, active people, not just of older men with large stomachs dozing in armchairs in front of the television. Thus, the advertisement's meaning goes beyond its explicit contents; your analysis would lead you to *convert to direct statement meanings that are suggested but not overtly stated,* such as the advertisement's goal of attacking a common, negative stereotype about its product (that only lazy, overweight men drink beer). The naming and renaming of parts that you undertake when analyzing should carry you from the actual details to the meanings they imply. By making the implicit explicit (inferring what the ad implies) you can better understand the nature of your subject.

Move 4: Look for Patterns

We have been defining analysis as the understanding of parts in relation to each other and to a whole, as well as the understanding of the whole in terms

APPLICATION:

MAKING INFERENCES

Locate any magazine ad that you find interesting. Ask yourself, *"What is this a picture of?"* Use our hypothetical beer ad as a model for rendering the implicit explicit. Don't settle for just one or even three answers. *Keep answering the question in different ways,* letting your answers grow in length as they identify and begin to interpret the significance of telling details. Attend to your choice of language, because your word choice as you summarize details will begin to suggest to you the ad's range of implication.

If you find yourself getting stuck, rephrase the question as "What is this ad *really about,* and *why* did the advertiser choose this particular image or set of images?" Your repeated answering of the first question should eventually lead you to answer the second question. As we will emphasize throughout the book, your best ideas will come when you allow yourself to repeatedly move over the same ground, casting and recasting the language you use to state what seems to you to be going on. So, be sure to keep answering the question, even if you are fairly satisfied with what you come up with in your first couple of tries. And, as we will also emphasize throughout, try to *write about what you see,* the details of the picture, rather than generalizing about the picture. Eventually you will arrive at some generalizations, but generalizing too soon—moving too quickly from your data to a higher level of abstraction—starves the writing process of what it needs to generate good ideas.

of the relationships among its parts. But how do you know which parts to attend to? What makes some details in the material you are studying more worthy of your attention than others? Here are three principles for selecting significant parts of the whole:

1. *Look for a pattern of repetition or resemblance.* In virtually all subjects, repetition is a sign of emphasis. In a symphony, for example, certain patterns of notes repeat throughout, announcing themselves as major themes. In a legal document, such as a warranty, a reader will quickly become aware of words that are part of a particular idea or pattern of thinking: for instance, disclaimers of accountability.

The repetition may not be exact: in Shakespeare's play *King Lear,* for example, references to seeing and eyes call attention to themselves through repetition. So a reader of the play would do well to look for various occurrences of words and other details that might be part of this pattern. Let's say you notice that references to seeing and eyes almost always occur along with another strand—a pattern of similar kinds of language—having to do with the concept of proof. How might noticing this pattern lead to an idea? You might make a start toward an idea by inferring from the pattern that the play is very concerned with ways of knowing (proving) things—with seeing as opposed to other ways of knowing, such as faith or intuition.

2. *Look for organizing contrasts.* Sometimes patterns of repetition that you begin to notice in a particular subject matter will be significant because they are part of a contrast—a basic opposition—around which the subject matter is structured. Some examples of organizing contrasts that we encounter frequently are nature/civilization, city/country, public/private, organic/inorganic, voluntary/involuntary. One advantage of detecting repetition is that it will lead you to discover organizing contrasts, which are key in helping you to locate central issues and concerns in the material you are studying. (For more on working with organizing contrasts, see "Strategies for Using Binaries Analytically" in Chapter 3.)

3. *Look for anomalies—things that seem unusual, seem not to fit.* An anomaly (*a* = *not, nom* = *name*) is literally something that cannot be named, what the dictionary defines as deviation from the normal order. Along with looking for pattern, it is also fruitful to attend to anomalous details—those that seem not to fit the pattern. Anomalies help us to revise our stereotypical assumptions. A recent TV commercial, for example, chose to advertise the Philadelphia Phillies baseball team by featuring its star, Scott Rolen, reading a novel by Dostoyevsky in the dugout during a game. In this case, the anomaly, a baseball player who reads serious literature, is being used to subvert (question, unsettle) the stereotypical assumption that sports and intellectualism don't belong together.

Just as people tend to leap to evaluative judgments, they also tend to avoid information that challenges (by not conforming to) opinions they already hold. In the desire to make things fit and keep explanations simple, people often screen out anything that would ruffle the pattern they've begun to see. The result is that they ignore the evidence that might lead them to a better theory. (For more on this process of using anomalous evidence to evolve an essay's main idea, see Chapter 4, "Making the Thesis Evolve.") Anomalies are important because noticing them often leads to new and better ideas. Most advances in scientific thought, for example, have arisen when a scientist observes some phenomenon that does not fit with a prevailing theory.

Move 5: Keep Reformulating Questions and Explanations

Analysis, like all forms of writing, requires a lot of experimenting. Because the purpose of analytical writing is to figure something out, you shouldn't expect to know at the outset exactly where you are going, how all of your subject's parts fit together, and to what end. The key is to be patient and to know that there are procedures—in this case, questions—you can rely on to take you from uncertainty to understanding.

The following three groups of questions (organized according to the analytical moves they're derived from) are typical of what goes on in an analytical writer's head as he or she attempts to understand a subject. These questions will work with almost anything that you want to think about. As you will see,

APPLICATION:

LOOKING FOR PATTERNS

Select a magazine ad that includes a significant amount of language, and then (1) identify words that repeat or that are similar to each other, (2) group the resulting categories of words into organizing contrasts, and (3) search for anomalies—significant words that appear not to fit within these patterns of similarity and difference. You may also wish to perform these three operations in relation to the visual aspect of the ad and to consider the relation between the words and the picture. The primary emphasis, though, should rest on the words.

This exercise can produce unusually fruitful results with almost any kind of material. If you are reading this book in connection with your work life or a more advanced course, try the method on something you are reading. This method offers a very useful way of starting to understand and characterize the mental habits of particular authors, experts in your field, and so forth. You can work with as little as a few paragraphs or as much as an entire article or chapter or book. By focusing on repetition, contrast, and anomalies, you press yourself to get closer to your data—to become more aware of what the subject is made of, rather than generalizing broadly about it.

the questions are geared toward helping you locate and try on explanations for the meaning of various patterns of details.

Which details seem significant? Why?

What is the significance of a particular detail? What does it mean?

What else might it mean?

(Moves: Define Significant Parts; Make the Implicit Explicit)

How do the details fit together? What do they have in common?

What does this *pattern* of details mean?

What else might this same pattern of details mean? How else could it be explained?

(Moves: Look for Patterns of Resemblance and of Contrast)

What details *don't* seem to fit? How might they be connected with other details to form a different pattern?

What does this new pattern mean? How might it cause me to read the meaning of individual details differently?

(Moves: Look for Anomalies and Keep Asking Questions)

The process of posing and answering such questions—the analytical process—is one of trial and error. Learning to write well is largely a matter of learning how to frame questions. One of the main things you acquire in the study of an academic discipline is knowledge of the kinds of questions that the discipline typically asks. For example, an economics professor and a sociology professor might observe the same phenomenon, such as a sharp decline in health benefits for the elderly, and analyze its causes and significance in different ways. The economist might consider how such benefits are financed and how changes in government policy and the country's population patterns might explain the declining supply of funds for the elderly. The sociologist might ask about attitudes toward the elderly and about the social structures that the elderly rely on for support.

Whatever questions you ask, the answers you propose will often produce more questions. Like signposts on a trail, details (data) that initially seem to point in one direction may, on closer examination, lead you someplace else. Dealing with these realities of analytical writing requires patience, but it will also make you a more confident thinker, because you'll come to know that your *uncertainty is a normal and necessary part of writing.*

Analysis at Work: An Example

Examine the following excerpt from a draft of a paper about Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* a collection of short mythological tales dating from ancient Rome. We have included annotations in boldface to suggest how a writer's ideas evolve as she looks for pattern, contrast, and anomaly, constantly remaining open to reformulation.

"prewriting" and "writing," that is, between writing to stimulate your own thinking and writing to make others understand your thinking? Our answer is that novice writers hinder their own development by seeing prewriting and writing as more distinct stages in the writing process than they actually are (or should be). Typically, an inexperienced writer's final draft offers a thinly developed list of his or her conclusions, from which all of the thinking about the evidence has been excised. In many cases, the evidence itself has also been excised, presumably because the writer mistakenly believes it is no longer necessary, since he or she has "finished" thinking about it.

Although there clearly is a difference between writing for an audience and writing only for ourselves, the best writing respects the connection between the two: it makes its ideas clear and accessible to the reader by retaining (in revised form) the thought processes that made those ideas clear and accessible to the writer. Here is a good phrase for keeping in mind what early and late stage drafts should have in common: *share your thought processes with the readers.* If readers can't see how you got to the position you are offering them, there is little reason for them to accept it, however smooth the sentence style, grammar, paragraphing, and organization may be.

For a quick overview of what the book offers on organizing the final draft, see "An 'All-Purpose' Organizational Scheme" at the end of Chapter 4.

The ordering principles you will find in the book have three aims: (1) to bring into the final draft the open and exploratory stance that is the best characteristic of prewriting, (2) to make the final draft flexible enough in its shape to accommodate a complex (multi-sided) act of thinking, and (3) to render the paper's organizing framework clear and visible enough to escort readers congenially through the writer's sequence of thought.

Common Charges against Analysis

Once you accept the challenge of thinking and writing analytically—the careful, recursive, and nonjudgmental observation of your subject and of your own thoughts—you can expect to encounter another obstacle. Although analysis is an activity we call on constantly in our everyday lives, many people are deeply suspicious of it. "Why can't you just enjoy the movie rather than picking it apart?" they'll ask. Or, "Oh, you're just making that up!" You may even be accused of being an unfeeling person if you adopt an analytical stance, because it is typical of the anti-intellectual position to insist that feeling and thinking are separate and essentially incompatible activities. Some people fear that trusting our intellects will make us less feeling and less sensitive. With this fear goes the opposite one—that trusting our feelings will necessarily render us incapable of thinking. Both of these fears about analysis have long histories.

Though he was among the most astutely analytical of thinkers, the nineteenth-century English Romantic poet, William Wordsworth, wrote that "we murder to dissect," giving voice to the still-common anxiety that analysis takes the life out of things. This anxiety—so common in Romanticism as to be

virtually a defining characteristic of that intellectual and artistic movement—arose in reaction against an equally extreme position from the eighteenth century (the so-called Age of Reason or Enlightenment), known for its indictment of emotion as the enemy of rationality. In response to the eighteenth century's elevation of reason over all other human faculties, the nineteenth century sought to correct the imbalance by elevating the faculties of feeling and imagination. Few thinkers of either century really adhered to these positions in such extreme forms, but suffice it to say that analysts of human beings seem always to have been perplexed about how our various capacities fit together into a functional whole. One aim of this book will be to demonstrate that taking refuge in either side of the opposition between thinking and feeling is not only counterproductive but also unnecessary.

Charge 1: "Analysis Kills Enjoyment"

Why should enjoyment and understanding be incompatible? To begin to raise doubts about this charge, one need only listen to the conversation of football fans after a game. If analysis is interfering with their enjoyment, they apparently haven't noticed.

At the root of the "analysis kills enjoyment" complaint is the idea that analysis is critical—in the sense of disapproving and negative. From this point of view, the basic activity of analysis (asking questions), along with its deliberate delaying of evaluation, seems skeptical, uncommitted, and uncaring. But raising questions and working out the possible meanings of significant details are not necessarily negative, nor do they require a complete absence of feeling. In fact, analytical thinkers tend to be more dedicated than most people to understanding and thus to being sensitive to rather than attacking a subject. Understanding is not the enemy of enjoyment, at least not for people who enjoy thinking. In any case, the global "I like it/I don't like it" move is less common to people who have learned to think analytically, because they are more likely to make careful distinctions—deciding to like some features of a subject (for well-explained reasons) while disliking others.

Charge 2: "Analysis Finds Meanings That Are Not There"

What about the charge that analysis "reads into" a subject things that aren't there ("reading between the lines")? What does the charge mean, and why do people make it? The phrase "reading between the lines" implies reading not the words on the page but the white space between the sentences. So, presumably, the charge means that the person producing the analysis is basing it on nothing—on white space; in other words, it's all in his or her imagination. For readers who make Charge 2, "not there" doesn't really mean nonexistent, though that's what they say. Rather, it means not overt, not tangible, and suggests as their unstated assumption that all communication is or *should be* a matter of direct statement. Proponents of this view of analysis are, in effect, committing themselves to the position that everything in life means what it

says and says what it means, that meanings are always obvious and understood the same by everyone and thus don't require interpretation.

This view—that all communication is a matter of direct statement—is easily opened to question. You need think only of what people's body positions "say" in addition to (sometimes in opposition to) the words they speak in order to see the error in assuming that all things can be communicated directly.

It is, in fact, an inherent property of language that it always means more than and thus other than it says. How often have you heard a person respond to a challenging personal question with "I don't know," when what he or she really means is "I don't want to talk about it"? And doesn't the "how you doin'?" that we toss at others as we pass them in the hallway really mean "I acknowledge that you and I are acquaintances"—because in most cases we have neither the time nor the inclination to find out how they are really doing?

As these examples demonstrate, people are remarkably adept at sending and receiving complex and subtle signals. Though we may not pause to take notice, we are continually processing what goes on around us for the indirect or suggested meanings it contains. If you observe yourself for a day, you'll find yourself interpreting even the most direct-seeming statements. There's an old cartoon about the anxiety bred by the continual demands of interpretation: a person saying "Good morning" causes the one addressed to respond, "What did she mean by that?"

The truth to which this cartoon points is that a statement can have various meanings, depending on various circumstances and how it is said. *The relationship between words and meaning is always complex.* As Marshall McLuhan, one of the fathers of modern communication theory, noted, communication always involves determining not just what is being said, but also what kind of message a message is. Depending on tone and context, "Good morning" can mean a number of things.

Why does so much communication take place indirectly? When we want to understand a complex subject like love or death, we sometimes need to arrive at that understanding indirectly—by comparison with more tangible and accessible subjects like the weather, the seasons, or baseball, or chess. This is because sometimes it is possible to communicate complex ideas or feelings or situations only through comparison with something that is more immediate and more concrete. It is also the case that human beings seem inclined to think by *association* and by *analogy* (likeness). At the root of indirect communication lies *metaphor*—a mode of expression in which one thing stands for (represents) something else that remains unnamed.

Metaphor is not confined to the arts; it is a pervasive feature of communication. Many linguists argue that all language is metaphor, that we are always talking about things in terms of other things. This is the case not only when we say, "My love is like a red, red rose," but also when we say, "That movie was a piece of trash" or "I could kill you for that." The leap to language is itself metaphorical: The word *c-a-t* is not the same thing as the four-legged feline that purrs.

You can easily test some of these assertions yourself as you go through an ordinary day. What, for example, does your choice of wearing a baseball cap to a staff meeting or a class—rather than no hat or a straw hat or a beret—"say"? Note, by the way, that a communicative gesture such as the wearing of a cap need not be premeditated and entirely conscious in order to communicate something to those who see it. The cap is still "there" and available to be "read" by others as a sign of certain attitudes and a culturally defined sense of identity—with or without your intention. Things communicate meaning to others whether we wish them to or not, which is to say that the meanings of most things are socially determined.

Berets and baseball caps, for example, carry different associations because they come from different social contexts. Baseball caps convey a set of attitudes associated with the piece of American culture they come from. They suggest, for example, popular rather than high culture, casual rather than formal, young—perhaps defiantly so, especially if worn backward—rather than old, and so forth. The social contexts that make gestures, like our choice of headgear carry particular meanings that are always shifting, but some such context is always present.

Because meaning is, to a significant extent, socially determined, we can't entirely control what our clothing, our manners, our language, and even our way of walking communicate to others. This is one of the reasons that analysis makes some people suspicious and uneasy. They don't want to acknowledge that they are sending messages in spite of themselves, messages they haven't deliberately and overtly chosen.

It helps to remember that *interpretive leaps*—conclusions arrived at through analysis—about what some gesture or word choice or clothing combination or scene in a film *means* follow certain established rules of evidence. One such rule is that the conclusions of a good analysis do not rest on details taken out of context; you should instead test and support claims about the details' significance by locating them in a pattern of similar detail (see the previous section on the five analytical moves). In other words, analytical thinkers are not really free to say whatever they think, as those who are made uneasy by analysis sometimes fear.

We should acknowledge, with respect to the "reading between the lines" charge, that analysis sometimes does draw out the implications of things that are not there, because they have been deliberately omitted. Usually we recognize such omissions because we have been led to expect something that we are not given, making its absence conspicuous.

An analysis of the Nancy Drew mysteries, for example, might attach significance to the absence of a mother in the books, particularly in light of the fact that biological mothers, as opposed to wicked stepmothers, are pretty rare in many kinds of stories involving female protagonists, such as fairy tales ("Hansel and Gretel," "Cinderella," and "Snow White"). Taking note of mothers as a potentially significant omission could lead to a series of analytical questions, such as: how might this common denominator of certain kinds of children's stories

APPLICATION:

BRINGING OUT IMPLICATIONS

Try one or more of the following exercises as means of bringing out what is "there" but not overt.

1. Look at a piece of a language to determine various ways in which it communicates indirectly. You might, for example, look at a short poem and discuss with others what the language communicates directly (through overt statement) and what it "says" indirectly. Because metaphor and other forms of suggestion/implication are not confined to deliberately artistic uses of language, you can do this exercise with virtually any written language: the rules sections of a college catalogue or other bureaucratic document are often useful targets. Consider, for example, what is communicated by the following title of a radio program about trends in the world of prime-time sports: "Only a Game."
2. Record a dream. Then determine what the dream "says" overtly and what is "there" metaphorically, that is, by suggestion. What might it mean, for example, if you have a dream in which your boyfriend or girlfriend locks you in a closet and turns into your father or mother? How would the meaning of the dream differ if he or she was inside or outside the closet?
3. The following experiment will demonstrate how much even everyday conversation depends on our ability to read what is suggested indirectly. Try writing down as much detail as you can remember about a recent, relatively brief conversation. First, write a word-for-word restatement of the conversation to the extent that you can. Include description of body language, location, and so forth. Then write an account, a summary, of the same conversation to include what you think was said that the word-for-word restatement would not reveal overtly. Make a list of things that you think were communicated indirectly and how.

be explained? What features of the stories' social, psychological, historical, economic, and other possible contexts might offer an explanation? As this example suggests, things are often left out for a reason, and a good analysis should therefore be alert to potentially meaningful omissions.

Charge 3: "Some Subjects Weren't Meant to Be Analyzed"

The preceding examples, Nancy Drew mysteries and cigarette ads, raise the argument that it is foolish to analyze subjects that were meant only to entertain (like science-fiction movies) or to serve some practical need (like shopping

APPLICATION:

READING WHAT'S MISSING

Here's another example of a case in which a writer might want to pursue the implications of something being left out. Consider what you might make of a cigarette advertisement that pictures a line of laughing young men and women in unisex attire holding one of their number across their outstretched arms, but that does not include cigarettes or any sign of smoking. What might the omission of smoking in the picture mean, since its sponsor no doubt wishes to encourage the activity? What does this omission imply about the nature of the advertisement's message and its means of influencing viewers?

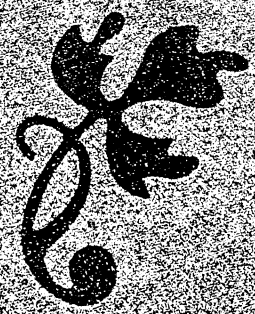
Try doing the same exercise with a political speech or a piece of public relations writing or coverage of the same situation in two different newspapers or magazines (in which case you would consider what one periodical left out—and why—that the other included). In what other kinds of communication might attention to what has been left out be especially revealing?

malls or blue jeans). Should analytical thinkers steer clear of subjects that supposedly weren't meant to be analyzed, like bowling and Barbie dolls and late-night television? This is a more complex question, because it runs into people's prejudices about so-called high-brow and low-brow activities. If asked to name high-brow subjects, most of us would come up with the same kind of list—Mozart's string quartets, for example, or foreign movies with subtitles. To the extent that analytical thinking is labeled a high-brow activity, highbrows are meant to stick to their own turf, being told, in effect: "Take your Mozart but leave my romance novels and fast-food favorites alone!"

The question of intention—what was and what wasn't "meant" to be analyzed—is, at least in part, an extension of the high-brow/low-brow divide. Barbie dolls, for example, and Saturday morning cartoon shows are made for children. But the fact that the makers of Barbie were trying to make money by entertaining children rather than trying to create a cultural artifact doesn't rule out analysis of Barbie's characteristics (built-in earrings, high-heeled feet), marketing, and appeal as cultural phenomena. Similarly, the makers of tough-guy movies may not have intended to produce propaganda on the value of rugged individualism and may even have produced completely different statements of their intentions. What the makers of a particular product or idea intend, however, is only a part of what their work communicates; *intention does not finally control the implications that a work possesses.* In sum, the attempt to cordon off certain subjects as too low-brow for analysis is, ironically, the elitist (in-group and exclusionary) position. Analysis knows no brow. Take any subject about which we want to understand more, and analysis will help.

Writing Analytically

Third Edition



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