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## The Hidden Meaning of Mass Communication: Cinema, Books, and Television in the Age of Computers

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**Fereydoun Hoveyda**  
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The ability to discuss different forms of communication can itself take different forms. At best, when we commit to a form for the discussion, we are able to take responsibility for how it works. So when Fereyoun Hoveyda put together his book *The Hidden Meaning of Mass Communications: Cinema, Books, and Television in the Age of Computers*, he made the decision to construct his case in the form of a very personal narrative and an argument about aesthetics.

His object is to argue the central relationships between communication forms as he has experienced their intermingling. We start from the relationship between literature and cinema, and learn that the experiences we have of dreams and dreaming made humans better suited to the cinematic than the (print) literate. But Hoveyda's main thrust is developing a tour through his experience of the cinematic, and along the way considering the rise and fall of other media. Following literature, he considers the relationship between film and theatre, and then between film and television. As he moves from one medium pair to another, he recounts his work on the Cahiers du Cinema, and makes frequent use of the surrounding people to color the events. We are walked through a set of snapshots, as Hoveyda gives us a glance of Goddard or a touch of Truffaut as they shared an obsession with cinema — particularly American post-war cinema — and a set of arguments about who was and was not an auteur. Some of the most interesting parts of Hoveyda's tour outline the qualities of mise-en-scene (a term they recast from theatre) and apply them to the values of current American cinema. We get a sense of how Cahiers du Cinema might have been written if, instead of Orson Welles and John Ford, they studied the films of Edward Zwick and Michael Bay. Such a thought is quite arresting if we consider how influential these subjects of study were when the critics of the Cahiers du Cinema became the filmmakers of the French New Wave. (Consider for a moment the kind of film a French critic might later produce if nourished on Con Air and Pearl Harbor. How would it look then to shoot the piano player?)

Since the form Hoveyda uses is more thoughtful historical tour than lecture, the movement from one set of media comparisons to the next flows rather quickly. Some important matters are, in this passing, left off the itinerary. We do not get, for example, Hoveyda's critique of the Linguistic Turn, which since the revival of Saussure has been at the center of media criticism, treating all media as discourse. He discusses this issue in a more limited frame, contrasting how literature must "say" while film can "show." When considering the issue of a film "language" or "grammar," Hoveyda makes clear that his sympathies lie less with Christian Metz and linguistic semiotics; he finds more persuasive the "deep structure" grammar notion of Noam Chomsky. This fits in well with Hoveyda's idea that our capacity to understand cinema is as fundamental as our ability to be the author of our own dreams, and he senses this dreaming is the deep structure of our experience with film.

Hoveyda does not, however, follow through with this line of thinking when he takes television and film together. He reasserts the traditional critique that the lack of detail available in the television image and its smaller relative size limit television's ability to be subtle, as well as its capacity to center on images, rather than relying on dialogue, explanation, and narration. He acknowledges that advances in home viewing technology add a new dimension to this criticism, but whether or not this brings television closer to our dreaming capacities is not specified.

As we are brought through Hoveyda's memories and reflections, he is at his best discussing these "hidden meanings" of media forms. "Meaning" in these media are the "something more" than the apparent story itself. The hidden meaning is composed of the elements of style that do not merge with the subject; a distinctive film auteur structures her or his work to reflect a form which contains the hidden meaning of that work. Given Hoveyda's role in the founding history of these theoretical approaches, it may not be surprising to find his book attuned more to the aesthetic than to the political. In that sense, Hoveyda's memoir style for walking us between and among these media might be more satisfying if we seek in it a "hidden meaning" that makes us tie our politics to his aesthetics.

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