

# THE MULTI-IMAGE FILM AND AUDIENCE ATTITUDE

At Expo '67 approximately sixty-five percent of the pavilions used multi-image presentations and the reaction to them was universally positive. *Life* magazine declared: "Through images that assault the senses and expand the mind (Expo '67) explodes the world into a revolution in communications", while *Saturday Review* saw the audience's involuntary gasps and cries during multi-image presentations as showing "a degree of empathy that goes far beyond mere plot involvement."

During Expo '67 and its big brother Expo '70 in Osaka, psychologists, media specialists and film makers alike have wondered at the way in which multi-image films seem to seize their audience and so involve them as to actually contribute to changes in individual personalities. So struck with the format's potential for attitude change was the United Church of Canada that it commissioned its Division of Communication to produce a multi-image film and to examine carefully the phenomenon of mass involvement. To do this the church's production centre, Berkeley Studio, commissioned Munroe Scott, a well known Canadian film writer, to design the project. With the direct cooperation of the Rev. Anson Moorhouse, the audiovisual director, and Miss Jitsuko Sada, the church producer, the multi-image film "That All May Be One" came into existence.

The theory behind it was simple. This new format was capable of something not immediately available to the classical linear film—the dimension of simultaneity. For the first time a whole host of concepts and images could be placed on the screen at the same time creating an emotional impact far beyond that hitherto possible. Since the church was facing drastic changes in public attitude toward it and yet desperately wanted to influence other attitudes of that same public, the multi-image format seemed appropriate. The objective of the film was stated as promoting "active involvement in the church as a viable vehicle for seeking solutions to current social problems."

As a parallel to the production of "That All May Be One", an in depth study of the psychological, sociological and theological implications of the film was commissioned. Your writer was privileged to carry out this study. Out of this came the following observations which have far reaching implications for any producer who would attempt the format.

First of all, data gathered gave clear indications that what was suspected by the Expo commentators is in fact true—the multi-image film does seem to have an effect on emotions and attitude significantly beyond that of the linear film. The startling thing is that this seems directly attributable to the format itself. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, the medium itself has impact upon the emotions—quite apart from the content. Let me hasten to say that this is almost a "nonsense statement" in that one cannot have a multi-image film without content, yet it would appear that the content starts out with a distinct emotional propensity, just by being cast in the form of multi-images. Why is this so? From the study I have come to the conclusion that the effect has a great deal to do with the

demand that the format makes upon the viewer.

There is a theory of attitude development and change which contends that a person develops and adjusts his attitudes and behavior in an attempt to maintain maximum internal harmony among his belief system, his beliefs, and his overt actions. Attitude is held to be the way a person feels about any object, person, or concept. Change that feeling and you have a change in attitude. This theory has been called the "Consistency Theory of Attitude Change" and has given rise to some of the most significant research in the whole field of attitude study.

According to the consistency theorist, any disruption of the internal harmony existing in a person's attitude matrix must be dealt with as soon as possible by the individual. He must either rationalize, reject or alter attitude. The first two are most likely to occur—however, it has been shown that if a "way out" of the inconsistency is presented close to the disruption, there is a tendency to take it. Once this has happened the person must justify his action—and one of the easiest ways to do this is to convince himself that he did the right thing and that the way mirrors his attitude.

With the multi-image film format it is possible to introduce strongly disruptive elements into a person's attitude matrix and, due to the principle of simultaneity, provide a way out of the disruption at the same time. The way out, of course, is designed to move the person in the direction desired by the producer. Granted this does not happen every time, to everybody. But it happens frequently enough to make one seek it out as a significant element.

Closely connected to attitude disruption is the principle of overloading the senses. It has been shown that during a period of sensory overload a person has a tendency to alter his attitude matrix. A primitive form of this is "brainwashing". A more subtle form is the psychedelic approach to music made manifested in rock groups. In the former case the sensory overload is primarily negative with the interrogation introducing a more pleasant alternative in return for changed attitude. In the latter case the overload is positive, exciting the participator to personal release of tension providing the dispenser of the overload with the halo of a deliverer. In this case the participant will move toward the source's expressed attitudes.

The multi-image film provides a format capable of overwhelming the senses, and when employed as a stimulant to personality needs it, in some measure, offers the opportunity of movement toward the producer's attitude. For a more detailed discussion of this you are directed to the author's dissertation entitled "A Comparison of a Multi-Image and Linear Film Formats and Agents of Attitude Change", Syracuse University 1970.

The over-all conclusion cannot be escaped—the multi-image film does seem to address itself directly to the emotions of the viewer and has tremendous potential in the influencing of the viewer's attitudes. This should be a sobering thought. Think of the responsibility this places upon any film producer.