

T1298  
M0058007NC

NC 0020744 6



NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

Fine Art Painting

Title: The effects of Cinema and Television violence on  
modern society.

by: Jason William Murphy

Submitted to the faculty of History of Art and  
Design and Complementary Studies in Candidcy for  
the Degree of Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting).





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page	1.
Table of contents	2.
Introduction	
Chapter 1:	
Animal aggression a link to inborn or learned actions?	
Chapter 2:	
Links between the media and our actions.	
Chapter 3:	
Catharsis	
Part 1.....	The purging effects of sex and violence
Part 2.....	Desensitization
Part 3.....	The copy-cat syndrome, identification and Polarisation
Chapter 4:	
Experiments on the cathartic/incitement effects of media and environmental stimuli.	
Chapter 5:	
Cinema and procurers of cinema violence.	
Conclusion:	





## INTRODUCTION

Ever since the days of Aristotle who first wrote of the purging effects of viewing violence, the human race has become drawn to the fascination with violence and all its oddities and we have tried to understand the causes and consequences of exposure to real life and viewed violence. Aristotle believed the right stimuli can trigger off the harmless draining of aggressive fashions. He gave this process the name Catharsis.

Evidence for and against the Cathartic theory will be assessed, along with all the relevant theories relating to Catharsis. The theory of identification looks at the effect certain character and situations on t.v. and Cinema on individuals and now we identify with graphic scenes of violence. Some viewers experience Polarisation, which causes the viewer to construct a dismal outlook on life. The polarised person becomes paranoid and develops a fear of people and the outside world.

Habituation is one of the theories which accounts for our defence mechanism when viewing violence. We can distance ourselves from the ritual violence on T.V., and rather







than the violence viewed inciting more violence, we instead recognise the habit of ritual and become desensitized to violence.

The most problematic aspect of television and cinema violence is the danger that the process of constant viewing of such stimuli may incite members of the public to act out perversions on individuals within the public. We must remember that television and cinema are relatively new to us. It is probable that we do not fully understand the possible consequences of a culture controlled by media.





## CHAPTER ONE

Inborn Aggression:

Inborn learned debate:

Mans greatest genetic gift is his vast capacity for learning from his environment. Some have argued that as a result of this one inborn ability he has no need for any others. Rival opinion claims that, on the contrary, man's behaviour is rich in inborn patterns that his behaviour can only be fully understood if this fact is appreciated. In support of this idea that man learns everything and inherits nothing, is put the observation that different behaviour patterns belong to different societies all over the world. Since we all belong to the same species this can only mean that men and women everywhere are learning to behave rather than following some fixed set of genetic instructions.

Since no one is arguing about the fact that we do learn a great deal from our lives the debate for the moment will concentrate in particular, actions which are claimed to be inborn. Essentially the idea is that the brain is programmed to link particular reactions with specific stimuli. The stimulus input triggers off the reaction out put without any prior experience, it is pre-planned





and operates successfully the very first time you encounter the stimulus. The classic example is the newborn baby reacting immediately to its mothers nipple by sucking. A number of infantile reactions seem to be linked, and of this type and are clearly essential to survival. There is not time to learn. The general impression is that man like other animals, is well endowed with a rich variety of inborn behaviour patterns.

Sadly the inborn learned debate has not remained in the scientific aneana, it has escaped into the world of political opportunism. The first abuse was to grab hold of the idea that man has powerful inborn tendencies and distort it. It was easily warped by selecting only those tendencies that suited the political needs. One in particular was stressed - aggression. The approach here was to suggest that if mankind has an inborn urge towards unprovoked aggression then warlike behaviour is natural, acceptable and unavoidable. If man is programmed to fight, then fight he must, and off we go to war with heads held high.

The flaws in this view are obvious enough to anyone who has studied animal aggression and the way it is organised. Animals fight but they do not go to war. Their fighting is done on a personal basis, either to







establish a dominant position in a social hierarchy or to defend a personal territory. In both cases, physical combat is reduced to a minimum and disputes are nearly always settled by display, by threat and counter treat. There is good reason for this. In the fury of close animal combat the ultimate winner is likely to be wounded almost as badly as the loser. This is something a wild animal can ill afford and any alternative method of settling disputes is to be preferred.

To return to the human situation, it is evident that if mankind does possess inborn aggressive urges, they hardly explain occurrence of modern wars. The chances are that men do possess a limited kind of inborn aggressive urges as we see in other primates. It would be strange if we lacked the urge to defend ourselves and our off-spring. Self defence and self-assertion are one thing, mass murder and the savagery of twentieth-century violence is another. This sort of violence could only be compared with the bloodshed witnessed when animal groups become hopelessly over crowded. In other words the extremes of human violence even when they appear to be unprovoked and stemming from some inner, inborn urge to kill, are probably being strongly provided by prevailing conditions of the time conditions unnatural to primates.



The effects and consequences of these differing conditions can be rather indirect for instance, one of the results of animal over crowding is that parental care suffers and the young do not received the usual love and attention that is normal for their species. This happens in human populations aswell, some ill-treated children grow to seek revenge of a violent nature on individuals looked upon as parental substitutes. Violence against these individuals appears to be senseless, and their innocence appears to lead to comments about the animal savagery - unprovoked brutality of a wild beast. The violent man of women who has given is to their primeval, inborn urge to attack their companions. Judges are repeatedly quoted as describing 'thugs' and 'muggers' as wild animals, beast and thereby reviving the fallacy that man is naturally violent and that only if he suppresses his naturally violent and that only if he suppresses his natural urges can be become helpful, co-operative member of society.

In summary, we can see how society has accepted unprovoked aggression as a natural development from our days in the so called animal kingdom. However the logic by thich this opinion is formed is flawed because, as we shall see in the next chapter, the animal kingdom does not support unprovoked aggression.







## CHAPTER TWO

### LINKS BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND OUR ACTIONS!

Many people today hold the view that violence vandalism, cruelty and undesirable sex practices are encouraged and sometimes in part responsible for the undesirable rise to these crimes in our modern culture. Esenck and DK.B. Nias state in there book 'Sex Violence and the Media' that,

"There is not doubt, as we shall see, that the crime increase, violence and vandalism, and what might be called unorthodox or unusual sex practices, over the past twenty of thirty years has been paralled by an increase in the portrayal of violence in the media, particularly films and T.V., by a similar increase in the number of pornographic publication films, and books, and by the greater portrayed of explicit sexual behaviour in the media and literary publications".

The fear of being submerged in a culture of crime, violence, vandalism is something most people will ponder on at some stage in their life. In the year 1958 to '68 there was an increase in crime in the U.S.A. of one hundred percent, and similarly in the United Kingdom







between the year 1960 to 1970 crime almost doubled. I find it hard to blame the media totally for these figures, it may be that the changes in the cultural patterns related to violence and sex have produced the greater permissiveness in the media, rather than the other way about. The degree of crime and violence, of course, varies considerably from country to country: the homicide rate in the U.S.A. is four times that in Australia, six times that in Austria and over eight times that in England and Wales.

Many people today would rate T.V. as one of the more popular leisure pursuits. Among T.V. programmes, adventure, crime, horror, and war films as well as cartoons were most popular, with pop-music programmes (for girls) getting higher ratings. Westerns were the only other type of programme involving violence, not to make the popular lists, perhaps because they are no longer violent enough.

Television is an incredibly large part of our lives today. It influences the way we see the world, and is capable of shaping our thoughts and actions. We are sold, things, we get live footage of events all around the world, shaping our outlook. Sometimes we forget how







we can be manipulated by certain reporters, or how the editing of footage of some events, disasters, wars can change what is actually happening in real life.

Sexually explicit scenes on T.V. has been fairly strictly controlled with the control being more relaxed over the last couple of years. In contrast to the control of sexually soaked scenes on T.V., violence has hardly been censored at all. Even childrens programmes especially cartoons have increased violence. It could be this is what children want to see but we must remember most of the cartoonist and script writers would be adults. Producers claim to have pressure but of them to include more and more slap stick violence into their cartoons, more giant anvils falling on little fluffy creatures more cats being blown up by little mice. They also claim to have pressure from adult viewers to show more serious 'real life' violence on our screens.

Most people have formed their opinions on the possibility of damaging effects of the viewing of sex and violence on T.V. and film, and in pornographic literature on the basis of preconceived opinions even the professionals, psychologists have differences in opinion. Many people



would agree with Krech who wrote of the purging effect of sex and violence portrayed on T.V., and in films in many psychology textbooks. P. 22 : sex and violence in the media.

"What the effects are of..... intense exposure to violence, especially upon children, remains, despite considerable research, a highly..... debatable question". We will not attempt to summarise the data (often conflictuary) and arguments that have been accumulated around this issue. At the moment we hopefully lean towards the view that most children (and adults) effectively, insulate themselves from, say television orgies of terror and violence. It is all make believe and some data suggest that it may even have a cathartic effect permitting the harmless draining off of unexpressed anger".



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PURGING EFFECT OF SEX AND VIOLENCE ON T.V.?

Broadcasters often claim that T.V. can discharge aggression by satisfying a need, or portraying a fantasy thus the person, for instance a sexual deviant may not go out and rape but instead would watch pornography at home, fantasies satisfy a need, and are used when a delay in gratification is necessary. Thus television serves a useful purpose through the medium of catharsis. There is of course considerable evidence against this optimistic view, of television and its mass purging of evil.

When this last point is compared with another supporting view that argument becomes stronger. Many people would argue that to eliminate violence from the screen would not cause it to go away in real life, violence has always been with us, long before the advent of T.V. and the elimination of it would have little or no effect. In support of this one could argue that only emotionally disturbed, or otherwise vulnerable people are effected by T.V. violence and pornography.

Violence is deplored by practically everybody and few







people would find pleasure with the increase in lawlessness, vandalism, violence, etc... particularly in modern urban environments. Pornography does not seem to have the same implications. Some people hold pornography as being a liberator of the spirit, something that can help modern man and woman to drop their inhibitions. It is important to note that, many would not include films of rape, bandage, sex involving children to be liberation. But pornography of a more natural kind may stimulate sexual appetites for normal sex. If pornography could be used to revert a sexual deviant back to a healthy normal sex appetite this would of course be a good thing.

When discussing the arguments on the effect of sex and violence on T.V. and in films. it is necessary to realise the different starting points, people are viewing the sex and violence from. Men and women do not have the same mannerism's, extroverts and introverts, educated persons and uneducated persons, emotionally stable and neurotic people do not all share the same values. Showing a pornographic picture to a shy, inexperienced person will not have the same effect as an older more sexually experienced person.







A widely accepted psychological formula reads  $P=D \times H$ , which mean P Performance (what a person does in a situation) is determined by his (h) habits, multiplied by his state of Drive (D). Our habits may be changed by lengthy periods of learning or by maybe the viewing of one file, but if there is a change in habit to a more deviant manner, it only needs the suitable time when the DRIVE can be performed.

I feel it necessary at this time to say something or the role of theory in this field. Sometimes a good theory is more reliable than numerous experiments in a laboratory combining to give us a basis for discussion . Many ancient theories have been proved to be truths throughout the age;s, even when the believers of such theories were laughed at in their own time. A good example of this would be the study and theories of the ancient Greeks and Eratosthene in the third century B.C. who found the earth to be spherical. Kurt Lewrn, a famous social psychologist used to say a good theory is the most practical thing of all and in the field of social science and psychology, such theories usually originate from laboratory studies.



## PAVLOVIAN CONDITIONING:

There are three major kinds of theories that are relevant to the effect of sex and violence around us especially in the media.

Pavlov was a renowned psychologist and he gave rise to a term called Pavlovian conditioning, because of his work in the experimental field of conditioning and how images effect us short and long term. This is the first set of theories we shall look at . Second are social theories, concerned with those theories involved in modelling and imitation. And third are the so-called cognitive theories, giving rise to concepts of identification.

Through the process of evolution, mans primitive paleocortex or lower brain was enveloped by the neocortex, the organ of rational thought, intelligence, the part of us humans which separates us most clearly from other animals each of the two reaction systems, the primitive, emotional and the modern, rational needs to adapt to circumstances and to foresee likely sources of danger and satisfaction. The neocortex can do this by rational thought and reason in others works cognitibe foresight. The paleocortex being primitive and less





complex a system although less satisfactory, has worked well for millions of years. It is too easy to dismiss the primitive parts of the brain, and stress the importance to man of the neocortex in understanding our habits drives and responses to certain situations.

Pavlov called the primitive system of responses for man 'conditional', conditioned responses. Pavlov began by experimenting with animals food habits. He paired a bell sound with the sight of food, at the sight of the food a dog (for instances) would begin to salivate, Pavlov was able to make the dog salivate with just the sound of the bell by conditioning the dog.

Men and women alike, are prone to this type of conditioning with more emotional reactions. These reactions are controlled by a semi-separate nervous system, the autonomic system.

The relevance to our main theme is plain. Both sexual activity, aggression and violence are deeply rooted in the primitive system and become linked to certain objects or situations through the process of conditioning.





Pavlov believed humans do follow the same laws of conditioning as animals and sexual preferences, in particular, any develop partly as a result of condition. Pavlov after interviewing forty-five sexual deviants under his treatment found that masturbation accompanied by the memory of an erotic incident is the mechanism by which a deviant forms his deviations. We humans have two main system controlling our behaviour, an old fashioned, primitive and powerfully emotional-conditioned system and the new cognitive system. Often these two systems are in opposition. Neurosis is a typical and very widespread condition which exemplifies this opposition.

Pavlov also used and experimented with de-conditioning. He set out to remove 'unwanted' behaviour-patterns, the name for this method is behaviour therapy. One method which would go under the heading behaviour therapy is desensitization, a treatment designed to literally desensitize a person the appearance of feared object, and situations. For example if a person had a fear of spiders, doctors/psychologist would show the person/patient a lot of photographs, videos and slides of spiders gradually getting bigger and more real looking until the person has been de-conditioned a fear has been over come. In this way many fear and anxieties can be over come speedily.



## DE-SENSITIZATION

Desensitization than is the method of changing conduct and emotional reactions which is well documented experimentally both in animals and humans. Mothers some times have to desensitize their children from certain tears it seems inbuilt, that people try to over come their own fears and help other people to over come their fears. It seems highly unlikely that such simple images can effect our anxieties so much and sex and violence portrayals should have no effect, especially when the T.V. and films are designed to have the highest anxiety-raising it can. Desensitization shows us how powerful images can effect us and when it is put in context of just film and media, we are all being desensitized or (Brutalized) as many critics of media would call it. Every day then when we are constantly watching crimes, and when we go to see the latest film which is even more violent than 'resevoir dogs' or whatever the movie is, we are infact helping ourselves to ignore the violence. Violence today for people is not real until it comes up and hits them.

A good example of a practical use for Desensitization is exercised by the U.S. Army. They used film to







desensitize troops sent out on combat missions. The troops are shown a series of films on pain and how it is inflicted and then move on to death and murder and then to even more explicit scenes of harrowing violence. Gradually the troops' reactions to the violence is less severe until finally there is almost no reaction of an emotional kind to the sight of such scene. The next stage sets out to dehumanise the enemy, in which the enemy is shown to be some form of inferior human. In this way desensitization is coupled with a more positive target. The conditional target.

One excellent example of this type of conditioning is demonstrated brilliantly in a film directed by Alan J. Pakula called "The Parallax View", starring Warren Beatty and Paula Prentiss. Warren Beatty gets brought by a group who train assassins to a room and is bombarded with a photomontage of words and images in the most incredible way. First he is shown photographs of romantic places to live, nice houses, a wife and a family. As the photomontage gets quicker scenes of love and sex and pure goodness, flowers, and sweet romantic imagery is slowly mixed with black and white scenes of misery, despair and the lower class suffering in America. Gradually we the viewers get sucked in and because the instigators of the



conditioning had chosen only people suitable or susceptible to this material. They used their knowledge of the subject to manipulate them. In this way they played on the grudges already in the subjects. The subjects were also monitored to measure reactions.

The theory of desensitization can be used for good and to help behaviour therapists to develop their techniques and build a stronger understanding of the effects of exposure to explicit film of sex and violence. It could also lead to a better understanding of how people can be misled by t.v. and films.

In short desensitization is the process of building up a mental defence to a stimulus as a callous is on skin, to protect us from cuts and damage to our parts which are in most contact with ground and objects, lessening the effect of the stimulus to our emotions. The mental callous is achieved by repeated subjection to the stimulus - effect, causing much more of the stimulant action is required to achieve the same strength of feeling as we would of before the defensive wall was built.



## COPY-CAT SYNDROME AND THE IDENTIFICATION THEORY

### POLARISATION

As I have mentioned already our behaviour is partly acquired by copying others such as T.V. characters. In one study 70% of parents said that their children imitated T.V. characters in some form or another, for example using their slang expressions and accents. In a similar survey 60% of children surveyed admitted having spontaneously imitated T.V. or film characters. Sometimes these imitations can have tragic consequences. After the release of the film 'The Deer Hunter' a spate of Russian Roulette swept across America.

There are many other examples of media induced copy-cat syndrome. Numerous burglaries happened around England after a programme called 'Break-in' was shown on T.V. The programme showed in detail how to break in to houses in order to show people how to prevent burglar's breaking in. Some other examples show the greater dangers involved. Rapists acting out their perversions as seen in the exorcist, one such individual became obsessed with Kung-Fu movies and after learning the martial arts began to prey on young woman, after his arrest one of the victims said he had made sounds like those made in the Exorcist.







Critics of the imitation theory point out that T.V. and film violence merely shape the form that the inevitable occurrence of aggressive and anti-social acts will take. In other words (except for the extremities), violence will happen, sometimes T.V. can change the manner of the violence. Instead of brutally beating someone with fists and boots of fury, the aggressor may try a more imitative approach acting like a hero of his or hers on T.V. or in a film, Jean Claude Van Damme for example. Critics who hold this opinion would also claim that the violence on T.V. at least is unreal and is a mere outlet for our human aggressions.

Closely related to the imitation theory is the theory of 'identification', wanting to be like the character, larger than life, on the big screen or even on the T.V. I personally would recognise the identification with film characters more than T.V. The media of film is very powerful. Film makers, today make us drink Coca Cola or Pepsi, they help us keep our cool habits like smoking Marlboro. All the great men and women of the screen smoked Marlboro, at one stage or another, Mickey Rourke, Al Pacino, Robert De Niro, Faye Dunaway the list goes on and so to the product placement in film. I am convinced that through film many people shape their lives. We all



have role models, and everybody talks about who looks like who in the movies from personal experience I have found one of the strongest links between film and the imagination. All of my friends are T.V. and Cinema viewers and all of them, throughout daily life talk about the similarities, look a likes, clothes and new fashion in film. They constantly reference it to their own life, promoting new behaviours. Viewing violence is claimed to have an effect of weakening our inhibitions towards acting aggressively and may make the aggressive acts less unthinkable than before, especially if the violence is acceptable. In a sense a deviant act is legitimized by its very portrayal.

In 1976 Gertner and Gross developed a theory of polarisation. The theory is that excessive t.v. and film violence paints a picture of the dangers that exist in the outside world. Violence shown in this way arouses anxiety and so lead to a paranoid attitude and a mistrust of others. A fear of the outside world can grow. It is fare to say not everyone will immediately identify with the victim and some with the aggressor.



There are many claims for the purging of aggressive, tendencies through the drain off of aggressive impulses. Similarly after acting aggressively people report feeling satisfied. Nevertheless there is little evidence that catharsis is responsible for these effects. People have a tendency it seems towards aggression rather than away from aggressive behaviour. One extreme example is the phenomenon of 'overkill' as pointed out in sex, violence and the media by Eysenck and Nias. Violent criminals tend to become more and more aggressive with time. Their crimes become more and more victorious, Jack the Ripper is reported to have mutilated his later victims more than former victims.

The need for new and more exciting kicks from life is well documented these days. Numerous new sporting events claim to give new thrills and have caught on all over Europe and America. People who may not be of the sporting nature usually look for their kicks and entertainment from theatre, film, t.v. and similar pastimes. If the need for better kicks is there then more violent, sexual films and programmes will be viewed.

The theories of identification, copy-cat and polarisation are all closely linked. All of these theories show how susceptible to media stimuli we are. If exposed to more







## CHAPTER FOUR

### EXPERIMENTS ON THE CATHARTIC/INCITEMENT EFFECTS OF MEDIA AND ENVIRONMENTAL STIMULI:

Chapter five of (The Social Animal by Elliot Arosen), is an insight into the way scientist and psychologist study and experiment with the different opinions and theories on the effect of viewing violence. It is only recently that experimental data was produced to argue out the differing views to violence and sex in the cinema or t.v.

The first experiment I would like to point out investigates the difference between so called justified punishment, for instance the villan getting a beating he deserved and violence against neutral parties. Two students were picked, one was the subject and the other was a confederate of the experimenter and had been coached on how to act. Of course this was not known to the subject. A test was taken by both student and while the test was in progress the confederate deliberately insulted the subject. Similarly two other students took the same test but the confederate in this group did not insult the subject. The experimenter now told both







couples that they would watch a short piece of a film, containing a boxing match. Half the subjects were told the person getting a beating in the film was an unprincipled scoundrel. The idea was to portray the beating as retribution for the protagonists misdeeds: The other subjects were told that the person being beaten had behaved badly, but this was because he had been victimised when he was young, he was now going to turn over a new leaf. Some test were administered and showed subjects had little sympathy for the victim. The experimenters called this justified fantasy aggression, and only the 50% of students who believed the victim to be a scoundrel. The other subjects whom had a more favourable description of the victim. The experimenters called this less justified fantasy aggression.

The next step was to show another fight scene from a movie. The subjects and the confederates were now split up, and a test was set up. The confederates were to design a floor plan for a dwelling which the subjects would judge. If the subject thought the plan to be poor, he was told to administer one electric shock to the confederate linked up to a device in another room.



The results consistently show a greater volume of aggressions directed towards the anger-arousing confederate by the men who had seen the 'bad guy' take a beating than by the men who had felt sympathy for the victim in the film.

It was clear that the people who saw the justified movie violence had not discharged or purged themselves from aggressive tendencies but instead had felt free to attack their tormentor in the next room.

A similar experiment shows how observed aggression has little if any effectiveness in reducing aggressive tendencies on the part of the observer. In this experiment some angered men were told by another student how many shocks to be administered to another person supposedly in the next room who had provoked them. Another group of angered man instead of delivering the shocks themselves, watched other students deliver them. Later the members of both groups had an opportunity to deliver the shocks personally. Consistently the man who had watched in the first part of the experiment now displayed stronger aggression than did the people who had been able to administer shocks earlier. Witnessed







aggression seemed to have been less satisfying than self-performed aggression. These experiments are outlined in Chapter 14 of The Social Animal edited by Elliot Arosen and were conducted by Seymour Feshbach of the University of Colorado.

These experiments just mentioned give some back up to the idea that aggression is not some sort of free floating energy that can just be released by watching violence. Hostile tendencies persist unless the person can actually act out his frustration on the actual person or persons or whatever it may be. Florida State University has shown that angered subjects permitted to commit aggression against the person who had annoyed them often display a drop in systolic blood pressure. They seem to have experienced a psychological relaxation as if they had satisfied their anger and aggressive pressure declined less when the angered people carry out the exact same aggressive activity (in this case motor cars) and believe they have not attacked the source to their frustration. In other words, the car in which the man or woman is driving takes most of the punishment.

This last point can easily be connected with the







Catharsis theory. If for instance a person with aggressive tendencies towards a certain group or type of person was to see his tormentors on t.v. Being punished he may witness a reduction in systolic pressure and vent his aggressiveness. However "the person will not experience relief and may even have more extreme violent tendencies toward the tormentor".

Many aggressive actions can be made seem more acceptable by supplying a cause in order to justify them. This new acceptability is a more immediate result than achieved through the previously discussed forms of desensitization. Yet this desensetisation has the same effect enabling the subject to inact violence and open aggression upon a target to whom he or she feels justified to attack.







## CHAPTER FIVE

### CINEMA AND PROCURERS OF CINEMA VIOLENCE:

Modern cinematic taste yearns for credibility the more real a film is hiped to be the more successful it can expect to become.

One of the first films that makes a break from the set Hollywood formula is Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde", of 1967. At the time of its release a big controversy arose about the violent content in the film. Previous to these films Penn was seen as a producer of violence whos films got more violent as time went on. Penn was accused of enjoying portraying violent events in Bonnie and Clyde and playing with the attraction of repulsion the audience feels with respect to these events leading them to bloodshed and then punishing them when they get theirs.

What is interesting about this film is its relationship to the traditional gangster genre, and how the comforting myths purported in these are de-mythologised in Bonnie and Clyde. In traditional gangster movies the hero frustrated by the limitations of his lower class







origins, is driven to a life of crime. Initially we sympathise with the hero but as he eventually resorts to murder and transgresses 'accepted' moral law we are forced to sanction his punishment. Therefore the myth suggest that society is not repressive or violent, but insists that there is a 'moral baseline' that declares that "crime does not pay". These films essentially state that criminal activity and society are polar opposites and cast judgement accordingly.

Many cult films such as Bonnie and Clyde investigate how we view violence, within our society and how we can be made feel satisfied when the bad guy is violently punished.

Society in Bonnie and Clyde is portrayed as casual and ambivalent towards violence and aggression. The 'heros' are cast as victims of circumstance. Throughout the film we are presented with the depressed society of America in the thirties. The heroes are running away in search of excitement and adventure, romantic fugitives flaunting their crimes for the newspapers. We are carefully drawn into the film and into their lives. The hero's are the only characters we can empathize with because the camera







follows them and the rest of the smaller part character come and go. Even after Clyde shoots a policeman in the face escaping from a bank raid but we are still on his side the act seems to be justified because we are a member of the gang constantly following the gang members. We feel relieved when the gang escape.

Finally the gang is brutally assaulted by the appalling violence and then they die. We retreated from the final sequence with our heroes brutally massacred, left with a terrible recognition of the reality of violence and with the heros myth exploded in our faces. We are purges of the thought of becoming a copy-cat criminal we are shown the right of the law. However one can not help wondering, whether the aggression and violence towards Bonnie and Clyde and the gang would be fantasy for viewers who would be on the other side, a policeman, sheriff or vigilante for example. My point is what is unjustified for me may not be for the next man. Another film which is very important when analysing violence in film is "Taxi Driver" directed by Martin Scorsese. Scorsese is renowned for his films on the differing aspects and consequence of violence. He also directed many other violent cult films like "Raging Bull", "Mean Streets", and more recently "Cape Fear" and "Goodfellas". All these four mentioned films have a strong rooted plot of violence.







Taxi Driver is one of the most quoted from films I have ever encountered. On many occasions I have listened to a person do his impression of Travis Bickle ('the hero') in some of the more psychotic scenes. On such scenes in when Travis is standing in front of a mirror, pretending to ask somebody if they are looking at him. He repeats time and time again "are you talking to me" - "are you talking to me" and so on pulling out a gun each time. The power of this scene can only be explained if you watch it. This scene obviously stimulated a lot people and I personally find it very exciting to watch. The whole idea of the fantasy of a vigilante hero as a tool to rid the cities of "scum, punks, pimps and junkies" as Travis says, "some day a rain will come and wipe all the 'scum' off the streets".

In this film we are presented with the disintegration of the mind of a taxi driver and the world he inhabits. Even after Travis has chosen a victim for his aggression, in a shop, a black armed youth who is attempting to steal the money from the till is shot dead by Travis. This is justified. We still recognise him as the hero, the doer of good.







His second target was a politician whom he planned to assassinate but this plan is ruined and he does not succeed in killing the politician. It is never really clear why he chose this man.

Finally his last act of violence turns out to be a heroic justified slaughter of a pimp, his brothel caretaker and a mobster who is purchasing the time of the prostitute whom Travis has decided to save. In the end of the film Travis is recognised as a hero by society and by the very young prostitutes mother and father and of course by us the viewer.

The violence in Taxi Driver is obviously the most problematic aspect of the film. In 1976, around the time of the films production the simulation of violence had reached a level of mindlessness and predictability. This left three alternatives, exaggerate even more the violence in order to create a thrill, show an actual death or forget the whole area and concentrate on other manifestations of human behaviour.



By 1978 film violence had run its course, only to be revived in the horror, slasher, and revenge movies of the early mid-eighties, films labelled "snuff" videos were made which claimed to show real life murder and disembowlement. I have never seen a 'snuff' film and I feel I should protect myself from them for if I am to believe the film to be a documentation of a real life event my devices for distancing myself are useless. Films such as these would work in two main ways. Either I will identify with the victim and be disgusted, sickened at what I see. It would probably purge me from watching violence again and would install a fear of violence in the real world. It is also possible that a viewer of a deviant manner may get a thrill from such scenes and who knows how far a twisted individual will go to get their thrills.







## CONCLUSION

In conclusion the theories of ritual and habituation are of utmost importance to our theme. There is certain social situations, unlike the conditions in the experiment I have described which impose constraints, on aggression. People are usually aware of the social norms prohibiting attacks on others, consequently they inhibit whatever hostile inclinations might have been aroused by the violent films they have just seen. They succeed in distancing themselves from such acts of violence. They realise the ritual involved in violence.

The habituation theory deals with how humans have become accustomed to the violence on T.V. and cinema. The violence becomes ritualized and because of this people realise that the violence on t.v. and in cinema is only ritual, and is so removed from actual real life. Adults are usually less influenced than children, and seem to find it easier to distance themselves. A child may grow to believe aggressions is a means with which he can accomplish things, it may seem like a desirable behaviour, especially if he is consistently watching violent cartoons. Thankfully screenplays do not consistently convey a message of violent behaviour being







the norm, and children usually have new encounters and stimuli which interest them and they grow to understand the effects, causes and consequences of violence and aggressive behaviour.

Association between the real world and the world portrayed on the screens of t.v.'s and cinema are very inherent in our lives. People are emotionally effected by the drama's on screen to the extent that they associate them with their own life experiences. It seems clear from the experiments I have mentioned and the evidence for copy-copy aggressive behaviour that aggressive films can induce aggressive actions by anyone in the audience. In most instances the aggressive tendencies are short lived and even adults encounter new stimuli and experiences of other emotional kinds. Subject to different influences the former aggressor becomes less ready to attack other people.

Compared with many other animals it is clear that the human species is not particularly well endowed with basis bodily threats displays large numbers of birds, reptiles, fishes and mammals perform immensely impressive hostile display patterns, shivering, jerking, quivering, inflating themselves, erecting fins, dramatically







changing colour. What man lacks in bodily displays he makes up for with cultural inventions. He threatens his rivals with verbal onslaughts, he puts on war paint, dresses up in gaudy uniform, bangs drums, chants, stamps, parces and brandish weapons. On a national level we display ourselves with parades of the military, but on a more informal level we express ourselves by way of protests, sit-ins, marches with banners slogans, badges and ritual salutes, or in the rhythmic and colourful outbursts of football fans as they clap, chant and wave there team colours.

Display of football matches as widley covered and is usually referred to as unruly violent behaviour, it also has a very bad reputation all around the world. However the reality is that compared to the amount of people involved in displays of this kind very few are injured, the fighting a minimal. Like other animals man shows far more threat and bluff than actual blood thurst.

History books and news papers tend to distory this picture, dwelling on the tragic exceptions to the general rule. Television and film have dwelt on the exceptions aswell. When we watch t.v. and are trying to recognise the differences between the real life violence it is easy







to become complacant sitting in front of the t.v. gazing emotionlessly at the screen. Despite the prevailing notion today that violence is rife we are in fact a remarkably peaceful species, when viewed world wide on a day to day basis. To test this you need only ask yourself how many times in your own life you have drawn blood in anger, how many physical blows have you struck, how many gougings, scratching, bitings, or limb-breaking you have inflicted on other human beings. Compare it with the number of times you have been angered and have become involved in argument, disputes and quarrels, and you will find that like other animals, when it comes to aggression you are much more a threatener than an attacker.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexander, Yonah.... In the cameras eye

Washington (P.C.).  
Brassey's (U.S.),  
1990

Aronson, Elliot.... The social animal (4th adition)

New York,  
W.H. Freeman.  
1984

Eysenck, H.J. .... Sex violence and the media

London,  
Temple Smith.  
1978

Kolker, Robert.... A cinema of loneliness

New York Oxford,  
Oxford University press.  
1988

Moonman, Eric..... The violent Society

London,  
Cass.  
1987



