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Miss Piggy: A Symbol of Femininity in the 90's
- An Analysis of the Educational and Gender Politics in the Muppet
Show

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Introduction

I came to love his art, his spirit, his humanity. But unless you have had the experience of sitting in a village in war ravaged Guatemala or a humble, box-like room in the wretched South Africa Unless you've seen these places the looks on the faces of small children as they watched Sesame Street or the Muppets, you'll never really understand what Jim and his colleagues have done for millions of children all over the world. (Harry Baelafonte on Jim Henson, Finch, pg xii)

This thesis concerns itself with the educational value of '*Sesame Street*', '*The Muppet Show*'/'*Muppets Tonight*' and Miss Piggy all of which are analysed in relation to social, cultural and gender political issues.

I shall discuss how '*Sesame Street*' was used to reach out to underprivileged inner-city youngsters in America. Sesame Street was to be an integrated neighbourhood with not only black, white and Hispanic residents but also a bizarre array of Muppets from Henson's repertoire. I shall examine how '*Sesame Street*' succeeded in enabling children make substantial learning gains as a result of viewing the programme. These learning gains were made by children from both disadvantaged and middle class groups.

'*Sesame Street*' was the foundation block for Jim Henson's work. Within the programme, Henson was given the freedom to experiment with his puppetry techniques. '*Sesame Street*' quickly established a solid viewing audience, however, Henson wanted to broaden his audience and his concepts even further from the direct educational approach used in '*Sesame Street*', to a more subtle and complex form of education in '*The Muppet Show*'/'*Muppets Tonight*'.

'*The Muppet Show*'/'*Muppets Tonight*' appeal to adults and children on different levels. One of the main reasons for this is that both shows constantly allude to sketches which parody other Television shows and movies. The influence of film studies in educating audiences how to interpret television studies through narrative, gender and genre is also part of the focus within my discussions.

Finally, Miss Piggy is important to the analysis within this thesis. I shall address her character in its educational context within '*The Muppet Show*' and '*Muppets Tonight*'. The role of femininity that she performs parodies the Hollywood images of women in the 30's and 40's and subverts the stereotypical images constructed by the patriarchal system. From this, the external audience is in a privileged position to acknowledge Miss Piggy as a progressive symbol of femininity, or it can reject this opinion and accept her as the stereotype which I suggest she subverts.

In order to contextualise my arguments, it is necessary to give some background information on Henson's work.

Henson was fascinated by the medium of television itself. (Plate 1 pg.7)

"When I was old enough to get a job at sixteen, I went out and approached all the little studios in Washington.", (Finch, 1993, pg 4).

In 1954 a local station WTOP, was advertising for puppeteers to create a sketch for the '*Junior, Good Morning Show*'. Henson and his friend Russell decided to produce a show with their puppets, Pierre the French rat and two other characters, Longhorn and Shorthorn. He continued to work with puppets through his college days building a reputation in Washington D.C. It was during his time in college that he met Jane Nebel who was to become his wife in later years. Together they produced a short show with their puppets 'Sam and Friends' which was to be aired between '*The Hinkley Brinkley Report*' and '*The Tonight Show*'. 'Sam' the star of the show, had the face of a prize fighter, protruding Clark Gable ears, a W.C. Fields nose and permanent astonished eyes. (Plate 2 pg. 8)

The Muppet's at this stage were quite primitive hand and rod puppets, however, Henson continued to develop the structure of the puppets experimenting with softer materials. Kermit was to feature on the show also, but at this stage he was not yet a frog. He was more a lizard like character. The original character



Plate 1: A young Jim Henson Refurbishes an early version of Kermit





Plate 2 : Sam - The nominal star of '*Sam and Friends*'



had no collar and his feet were not yet flippers. This show was the predecessor of '*The Muppet Show*', the content of the sketches were parodies of TV shows.

Henson travelled through Europe for a while, acquiring knowledge on the world of puppetry, observing the traditional styles, in order to build up a repertoire for his own creations. It was at this stage that Henson began to meet some potential co-workers. Jerry Juhl was to become the head writer for the Muppet Show and other projects, he was a talented Californian puppeteer and writer, who had acquired television experience performing a children's show on a San Jose station.

Don Sahlin and Frank Oz were well-known puppeteers in their own right. It was Don Sahlin who abstracted the Muppet's, giving them a softer appearance yet more adaptable than the Muppet's from '*Sam and Friends*'. Frank Oz was to become Henson's closest friend. They worked together on a number of creative and challenging projects. Frank Oz was to operate many of the familiar Muppet's on the Muppet Show. Particularly Miss Piggy, Animal, Sam the Eagle, Fozzy Bear, and Bert from '*Sesame Street*'. Henson at this stage began to write some experimental film work which resulted in '*Timepiece*', (1964)

"I thought of myself as an experimental film maker back then, and I was interested in the visual image and the difficult ways of using it."
(Finch, 1993, pg 40)

The film was about dislocation in time, time signatures in the musical sense, time as a philosophical concept and so on...

In 1966 Henson came in contact with Joan Ganz Cooney. She was the producer of news and documentaries at WNET, New York's public television station. She was involved in a programme to provide pre-school education television for children. She asked Henson to design puppets which were to be a feature of this programme.

Jim Henson was to design the Puppet characters for the show, particularly Big Bird, an 8' 2" character. Carroll Spinney was the performer within the Puppet. He had put on Big Bird's head by extending one hand high into the puppet's skull. (Plate 3, pg 11)

'Sesame Street' brought monsters to life in a non-threatening way. The aim of the programme was to educate children with basic skills, achieved through the use of fast moving commercial formats, where the puppets would interact with inner-city children and adults within these commercials. The next development which led to the Muppet Show, was to expand the repertoire of how to maximise the flexibility of the puppets. Henson and his colleagues devised a system of platforming up a set (essentially a set built on platforms). Hidden under these platforms the puppeteers could operate the characters, thus the puppets could move in a more naturalistic way. The Muppet began to get recognition and a pilot was produced entitled 'The Muppet Show - Sex and Violence' which was aired on the first season of 'Saturday Night Live' on NBC.

The show featured a number of new arrivals, The Swedish Chef, Sam the Eagle, Crazy Harry, Statler and Waldorf, Animal, Janice Zooth, Floyd Pepper and Mr Teeth. The show differed radically from the Muppet Show ^{as we know it} in that there was no guest star and the show was presented by Nigel a human puppet lacking in charisma. Miss Piggy was also present but only as a feature character on a spoof of Planet of the Apes entitled 'Return to Beneath the Planet of the Pigs'.

Saturday Night Live never felt right for the Muppet team as the young team of comics and writers recruited for the series quickly developed a chemistry of its own style of anti-establishment humour that was at odds with Henson's gentler anarchy. Throughout the summer of 1975 Bernie Brillstein (a talented agent for William Morris) tried to sell a Muppet series to ABC and CBS however both were doubtful of the Muppet's appeal to adult audiences. Meanwhile the head of ITC - the American division of Lord Lew Grade British based Associated Communication Corporation advised Lord Grade that Muppet's might be well

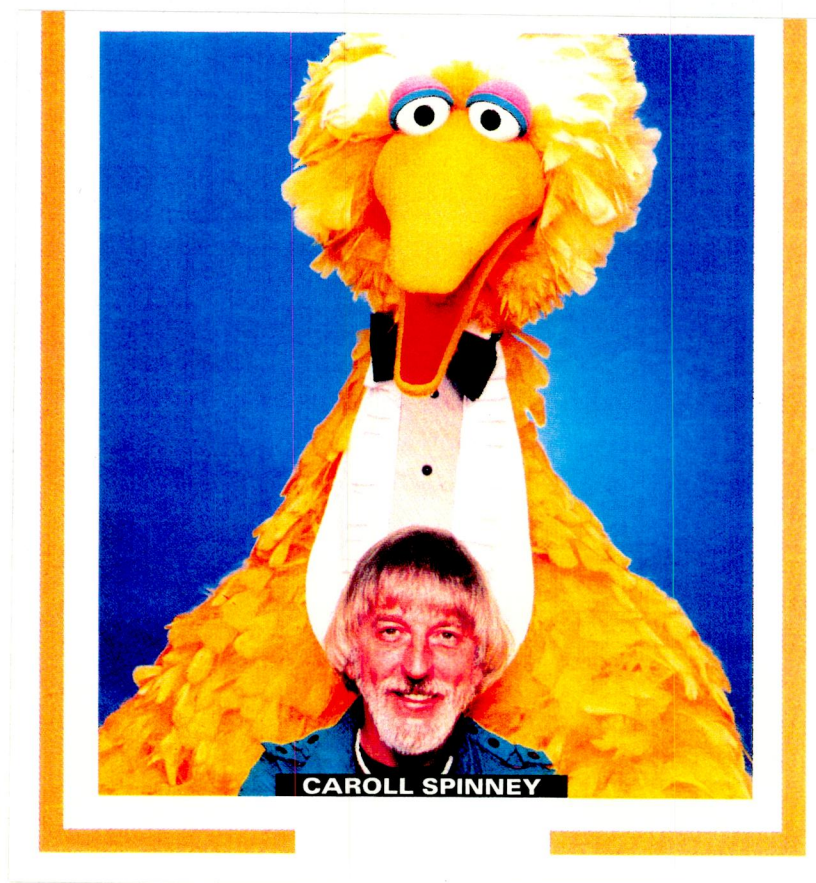


Plate 3 : Big Bird and Carroll Spinney

suites to be syndicated in the American market. It was to be screened in a prime time location taking the 7.30 to 8.00 time slot. Five CBS owned and operated stations indicated their intention to run the show. It was assumed that the show would last for about two seasons, however, it managed to run from 1976 - 1981 and was aired in more than 100 countries.

Jim Henson created and produced a vast body of other projects through the medium of television and film. *'The Great Muppet Caper'*, *'The Muppets take Manhattan'*, *The Witches*, and *'Fraggle Rock'*. However, I do not deal with these within this thesis, as the majority of Muppet films are an extended version of the *'Muppet Show'* format parodying movie structures and narratives. There are also those works such as *'Labyrinth'* and *'The Dark Crystal'*, in which the puppets are far more technical to operate and quite complex in structure. They deserve the attention of another thesis.

The information on Jim Henson, was difficult to acquire as there are a limited number of publications on his work in Ireland. However The Creature Shop (Henson Productions Ltd.) in London provided me with The Christopher Finch book *'The Art, The Magic, The Imagination'*, and a selection of newspaper articles. From this information I was able to analyse Henson's work in greater detail. The remainder of the books and articles within the bibliography were sourced from Libraries within Dublin.

Chapter I - Sesame Street and Pre- School Education

Jim Henson had the ability to tap into the imagination of millions of viewers, both children and adults alike. The power to touch a universal audience suggests that Henson's art and magic is on a par with the classic fairytale.

The earliest published fairytales were executed in the 17th and 18th century by Charles Perrault (*L'Histoires au contes du temps passé*, or *Conte de Ma Mere Loye*, 1967.) It contains 'Red Riding Hood', 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Cinderella', some of the best known and best loved fairytales. These stories appeal to children for various reasons. Essentially because the child can identify with the protagonist in the tale, on both a conscious and subconscious level. The fairytale is a classic tool used in order to teach children how to deal with moral dilemmas which they may be confronted with when growing up. In this chapter I will argue that like the fairytale, 'The Muppet Show', 'Muppets Tonight', etc., have an educational function for both children and adults. I shall discuss how Miss Piggy's character operates in the more educational context of both shows.

The characters within the shows have a major role to play in this teaching practice and they shall be analysed as I go through each show.

There are two types of children's programmes relevant to non-formal education, as Bates discusses in 'Broadcasting in Television'. There are programmes with clear and deliberate teaching objectives aimed specifically at out of school children and those of a more general nature also aimed at out of school children but with indirect educational, social and cultural goals. The most famous of the first type is 'Sesame Street'. The main aim of 'Sesame Street' was to "use popular television techniques to promote an intellectual and cultural growth of pre-schools, particularly disadvantaged pre-schoolers" (Cooney 1968).

In 1966 Joan Ganz Cooney was head of a study initiated by the Carnegie Institute of Children's Television that paid particular attention to how the medium could be used to reach out to underdeveloped inner-city youngsters. She found that all of the programmes being offered to children on television were condescending and vacuous. After a period of fund raising, the Children's Television Workshop (CTW) was set up to produce a show for pre-schoolers.

When Cooney came upon his work, Jim Henson was still involved with Muppet commercials. She had first become aware of Henson a couple of years earlier when a friend had taken her to see a screening of Muppet commercials. She felt that he could contribute to the CTW project. Making commercials was of significance to Henson and his growing Muppet team in a number of different ways.(Plate 4, pg. 15) Commercials supplied income, but they also provided valuable experience and the opportunity to further explore the technical side of puppetry. Jim and Jane Henson broke into the field of commercials in 1957 when they began to make local spots for Wilkinsons coffee. They made more than 300 commercials for this sponsor alone. The commercials were short, lasting just seven seconds - and very much to the point. Henson injected humour into the commercials which made them memorable, especially since they were being shown in an era when the idea of the comical commercial was a novelty.

"Till then," Jim once explained, "the agencies believed that the hard sell was the only way to get their message over on television." (Finch, 1993, pg 22)

Henson's attitude to salesmanship quickly drew attention from other sponsors. The production of commercials had become an important and lucrative activity for the Muppets. Finch discusses how Henson was slow to become involved in the CTW venture because at this stage the television that he was working on ('*Timepiece*', '*The Cube*' (short film) and his commercials) was more orientated towards adults. Henson was finally persuaded to become part of the team that made up CTW. What is important to note is that the Muppets stopped creating commercials when Sesame Street brought them a new level of fame because

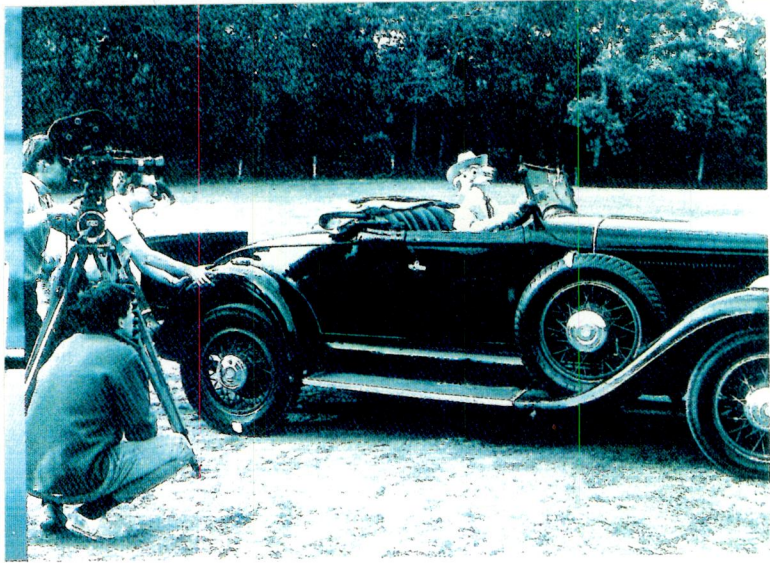


Plate 4 : Stills From commercials produced by Jim and Jane Henson for television in the 1960's



Henson was concerned about the characters doing a children's show at the same time as they were selling products.

'*Sesame Street*' (Plate5, pg. 17) in its second year was reaching an estimated 8 million children in the U.S.A., approximately half of whom were from low income families, Cooney had achieved her aim. Within six years the programmes had spread to sixty nine countries. Since its beginning, '*Sesame Street*' has been intensively and continuously researched and evaluated.

Two independent evaluations carried out by Ball and Bogart (1970 and 1972) found that,

- (1) over a six month period, substantial learning gains were measured in sighting, reading, naming letters, functions of parts of the body, etc.
- (2) those who viewed gained substantially more than those who did not view.
- (3) significant learning gains were made by children from both low and middle income groups. (Bates, 1984, pg 103).

Despite this success, there were also a number of criticisms levelled at the effectiveness of the show. Among some of the criticisms is the belief that the programmes strengthen American cultural and commercial dominance abroad. It is interesting to note that the BBC refused to show '*Sesame Street*' on the grounds that it was culturally alien and unsuitable for British children (Comstock, 1989, pg 71). But it did show '*Yogi Bear*' and '*The Huckleberry Hound Show*' neither of which is in the mainstream of British culture and traditions. However, in the BBC programme '*You and Me*' aimed at 4 to 5 year olds, it also aimed to help children whose background "resulted in restricted - use of language". The programmes were carefully structured with frequent repetition of main points and with audience participation.

Goldsen (1976) in a deeply critical paper, expresses her concerns about how '*Sesame Street*' uses advertising techniques for teaching purposes, aiming at the development of certain tightly controlled learning skills and rote learning.



Plate 5 : The cast of 'Sesame Street'

'*Sesame Street*' is not so much encouraging literacy in its broader sense but the skills needed to be a consumer in American society; how to read advertisements; how to read labels on consumer products; how to read commercial television itself. (Bates 1984, pg.101)

Joan Ganz Cooney discusses in '*The Art, the Magic, the Imagination*', that the basic premise was to create a show that capitalizes on the fact that children were known to love the pace and wit of television commercials, with their slick editing and jingles that stick in the mind. The show, she suggests, could even be sponsored by letters and numbers. "This episode of *Sesame Street* is brought to you by the letters B and D and sponsored by the number 6".

In reply to Goldsens criticism, Cooney argued that it was not '*Sesame Street*' that introduced young minds to the techniques of commercial television. She stated that the first '*Sesame Street*' viewers would have been bombarded by such techniques for at least 2 years already. All that *Sesame Street* did was to take techniques which clearly work with young children and apply them to an educational rather than a commercial purpose. The programme itself merely reflects the society to which it belongs. Therefore it could be argued that this is more a criticism of American values, culture and commercialism than that of the programmes themselves.

Indeed, *Sesame Street* does reflect the society to which it belongs. However should not the purpose of these learning programmes for children be to question cultural established values and set models of social behaviour that encourage unity, equality and respect for difference?

Sesame Street falls into the category of deliberate teaching of non-formal education. However, through the format of the programme and in its use of commercial techniques to encourage learning and by having hosts that represent different cultures in society, the programme is touching on the indirect educational category. Cooney also explains that she wanted;

"a hip, laughing type of show, with humour that children would get something out of but that adults and older siblings would enjoy too" (Finch, 1993, pg 55).

The task of combining pre-reading skills (which is essentially what Sesame Street aimed to encourage) with entertainment is a difficult venture to take on. Without the humour and laughter a child is less likely to build up the enthusiasm to learn. However, the learning skills may be overshadowed if the entertainment takes centre stage.

The fact still remains, that '*Sesame Street*' was an improvement on the alternative programmes available to children in the USA, and in that sense, it can certainly be considered a success.

Another criticism of '*Sesame Street*' is that it did not, in practice, reduce inequality. White children watched as much as black children and as a result gained just as much. It did not therefore reduce the gap between blacks and whites nor did it reduce the gap between disadvantaged and middle class children. It is, of course, a delusion to think that broadcasting can on its own, compensate for social, economic or racial inequalities. They can only be solved by economic and political activities. While '*Sesame Street*', not only reached a large number of disadvantaged children, there is no evidence to suggest that it reduced differences between blacks and middle class, there is also no evidence to suggest that it widened the gap.

To use television to teach the disadvantaged at least as well as advantaged, is a great achievement but to do so by means of programmes that have enchanted millions of children is to be successful.

Yet for Jim Henson the success of '*Sesame Street*' had one major drawback. For all the show's sophistication and despite its proven appeal to adults, Sesame Street was a children's programme. And inevitably, network executives began to think of the Muppets as kiddies' entertainment. Thus the early seventies was both a period of triumph and frustration for Henson - a time during which he

was forced to contend with mistaken perceptions. In fact, Joan Cooney recalls a conversation in which Jim said to her half-seriously "Why did you have to be so successful?" (Finch, 1993, p 81)

In an interview with the producers of '*The Simpsons*', James L. Brooks and Matt Groening discuss how '*The Simpsons*' was produced for an adult audience. They were designed and created to appeal to an older audience, and by doing so, the scriptwriters were given scope to write whatever they wanted without the possibility of offending children. Like the Simpsons 'The Muppet Show'/'Muppets Tonight' were created for an adult audience. However millions of children around the world watch both shows. The fact that a child may not realise that "Pigs in Space" is a parody of '*Star Trek*' does not suggest that he child cannot be entertained by the sketch. By using puppetry to appeal to an adult audience provokes the question of what is adult entertainment.

The beginning of this chapter suggests that like the fairytale, 'The Muppet Show'/'Muppets Tonight' have the same educational function for both children and adults. The fairytale has altered through the centuries to reflect the oral and written storytelling of the society of the time or the philosophy of the storyteller. The Muppet Show/ MuppetsTonight (Plate 6, pg.21) through their format, narrative and characters reflect society since the 1970's.

Miss Piggy's character in Both shows is the Cinderella figure for today's society. She represents one of the options constructed for the female by patriarchal society. The two female protagonists within 'The Muppet Show'/'Muppets Tonight', Miss Piggy and Janice, celebrate the different constructions of femininity. Miss Piggy performs the subversive female as a masquerade and Janice the androgynous female through her transvestite positioning (see chapter 3). Miss Piggy begins her career as a 'worker' on The Muppet Show. She represents the young female aspiring to be a Hollywood star. We are told by

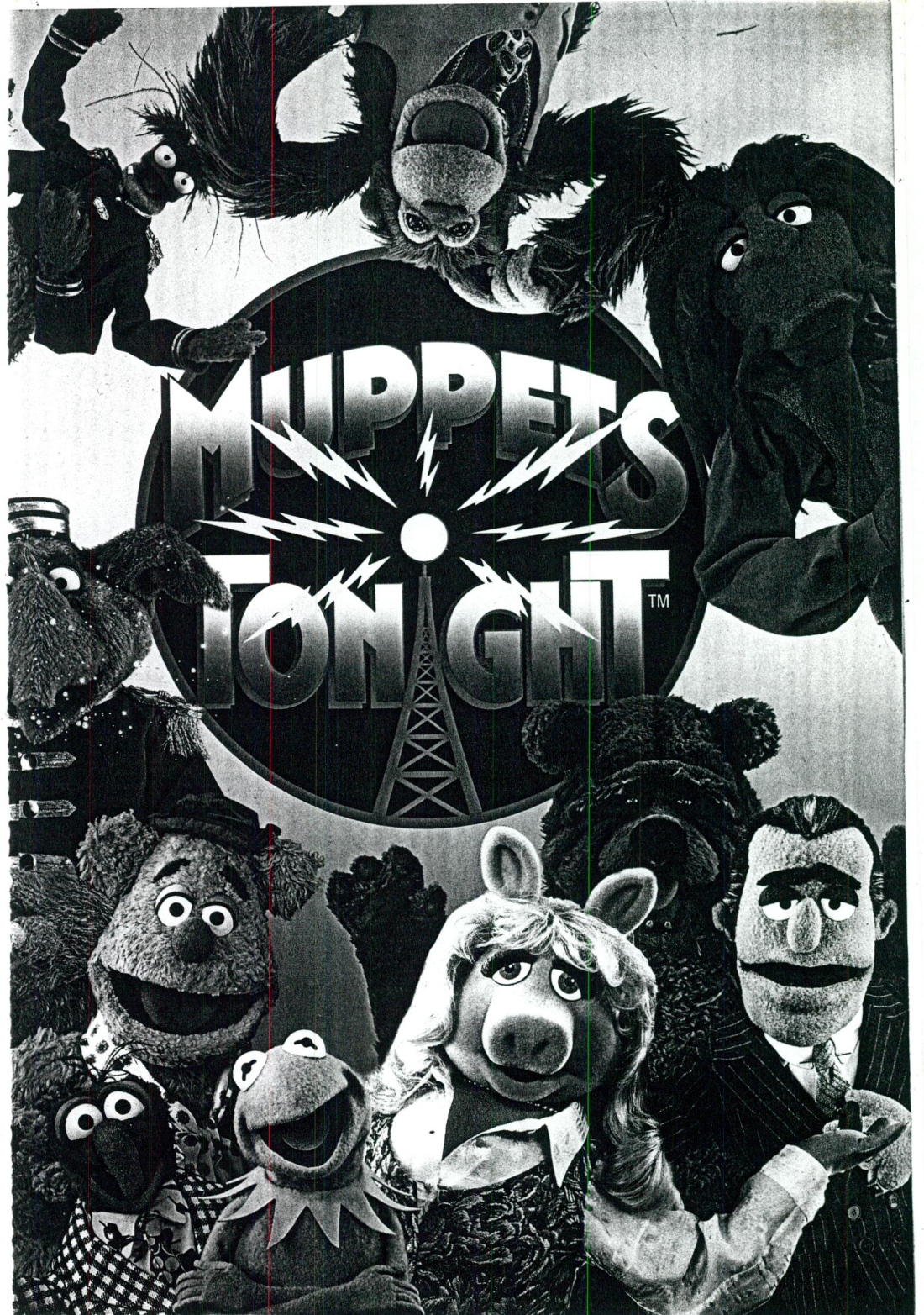


Plate 6 : Characters from *'The Muppet Show'* and *'Muppets Tonight'*



Finch that Miss Piggy came from humble beginnings. Her father had died and her mother treated her badly which resulted in her moving away from home.

This storyline can be paralleled to the Cinderella narrative. However, ^{the} Miss Piggy character is a symbol of Femininity for the 90's therefore she is her own 'Knight in Shining armour' in that she chooses her own destiny and strives to achieve her goals. (Plate 7, pg. 23) Miss Piggy represents the original Cinderella form the 16th century as the original character in European folk tales fought actively for justice and reason. Miss Piggy's feisty character was not prominent from the beginning: rather, it developed over five series with the show as a whole which ran from 1976 to 1981. Miss Piggys character is now a famous star. (Having recently starred in Muppet Treasure Island). Therefore, she is rarely present on the show, occasionally appearing in musical numbers and parodies of sketches. Her character continues to encourages the external audience (essentially women) to be independent and ambitious and to strive for success in a patriarchal society.

'*Sesame Street*', educates children by direct teaching methods. *The Muppet Show and Muppets Tonight* are more subtle in its approach. This is achieved through the intertextuality of its structure. Both shows cut between "live" performances to sketches of which parody TV and movie genres.

By constantly shifting its placement of the subject (as it moves between a number of interrupted fragments) television seems to revel in a pure celebration of difference - a process that is ultimately equal, to its reverse formulation, an agenda of absolute indifference. (Brown, 1994, pg 264)

Both series therefore present a running commentary on the relationship between movies and television and how they educate children to read narratives interactively. They allow children to recognise popular genres and their

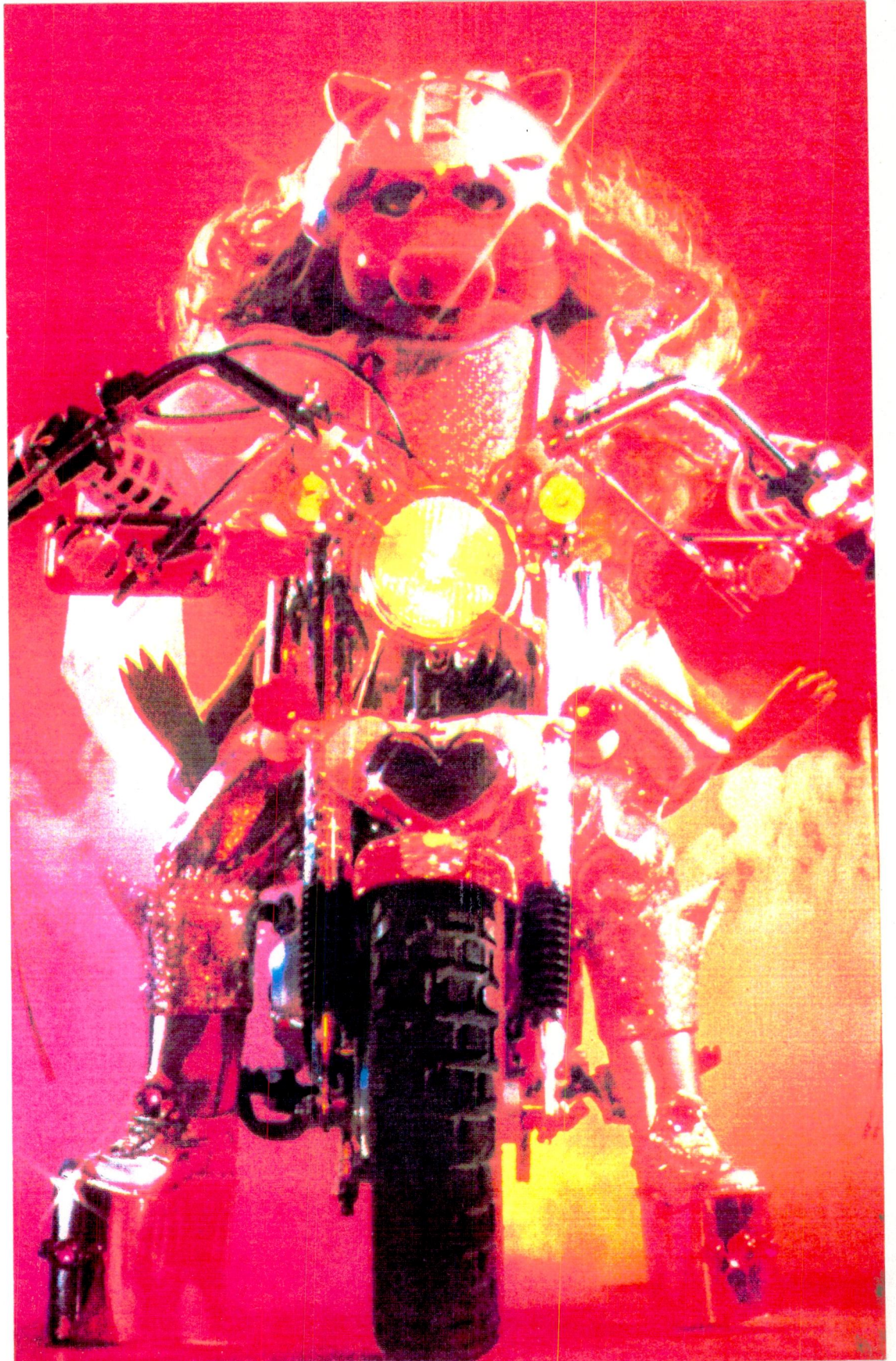


Plate 7 : Miss Piggy coiffed and coutured - smashes through a stain glass window to rescue Kermit the frog , in '*The Muppets takes Manhattan*' 1984



respective iconography. Finally, they disclose television's structural dynamics of new shows replacing old shows, re runs and syndications.

In the following chapter I shall discuss '*The Muppet Show*'/'*Muppets Tonight*' and Miss Piggy in greater detail.

Chapter II - The Muppet Show - narrative and genre

One of the essential reasons for the success of '*The Muppet Show*'/'*Muppets Tonight*' is the extensive use of parody within the show. Indeed the popularity of Miss Piggy's character is attributed to its parodic nature.

Fredric Jameson discussed Parody and Pastiche in post - modern terms in '*The Anti Aesthetic*'.

Both Pastiche and Parody involves the imitation or better still the mimicry of the other styles and particularly of the Mannerisms and stylistic twitches of other styles. (Foster, 1983, pg. 13)

Miss Piggy's character is an amalgamation of different mannerisms and traits of female stars (see chapter III), so too is '*The Muppet Show*' and '*Muppets Tonight*' in that they involve the mimicry of the sitcom, the soap opera and the Hollywood musical.

In this chapter, I discuss Miss Piggy's contribution to the narrative of the shows, this shall be addressed in relation to their format, the consequence of Jim Henson's death, Brian Henson's role in the Henson Company after the death of his father and finally the relationship between the audience and her character.

"A genre is defined in terms of features drawn from a set of text already identified by the Analyst as containing the defining features of the genre. (Allen, 1992, pg. 47)

It is difficult, therefore, to define exactly what genre '*The Muppet Show*' belongs to. The story - line that gelled the show together were usually ludicrous variations on the old Busby Berkeley type of Backstage movie slot (Plate 8, pg 26), the backstage format allowed the writers to include musical numbers and other variety show characteristics as well as parodies of soap opera's, '*Veterinarian Hospital*', space spoofs, '*Pigs In Space*' and movie spoofs, seamlessly into the continuity.



Plate 8 : A Busby Berkeley like number, in which Miss Piggy charms Londons upper crust in '*The Great Muppet Caper*' 1981



Henson and his colleagues constructed '*The Muppet Show*' on a foundation of wit and charm. One could say that the show deconstructs an essentialist concept of identity in that it is formalised in such a way that parodies American T.V. shows and movies.

"In textual analysis, broadcast television has been seen as embodying post modern aesthetics, with its relentless intertextuality its reworking of popular culture, its effacement of history", (Seiter, 1978, pg. 8)

Barthes discusses the importance of intertextuality in terms of characters and events on television. For example, a killing on a detective show can only be made sense of in terms of its relation with a murder story on the news or in the newspapers, or other representations in novels, films, theatre, fairytales and so on.

'*The Muppet Show*' is likewise highly intertextual. The relationship of '*Pigs In Space*', for example, with the original text, is important in order to see the humorous side of the sketch. Miss Piggy playing Ms. Porky Galore in a Bond sketch with Pierce Brosnan can only have real impact if one is aware of the original text.

Having established that '*The Muppet Show*' exhibits a degree of mimicry of one text by another, it is important to assess whether this can be characterised as parody or as pastiche. In Jameson's analysis in '*The Anti Aesthetic*' he addresses pastiche with reference to Star Wars, arguing in that it reinvented the Saturday noon special from the 30's to the 50's - the Buck Rogers type - alien villains, true American Hero's, Heroines in distress and the cliff - hanger at the end whose miraculous resolution was to be witnessed next Saturday afternoon. Star Wars reinvented the feel and the shape of characteristic art objects of an older period, it sought to reawaken a sense of the past associated with those objects.

Pastiche therefore is like parody in that it imitates, wears a stylistic mask, but it is without the laughter, without the satirical impulse.

From this, one can deduce that the sketches and characters within '*The Muppet Show*' are parodies of other shows, soap operas, hospital dramas, and stereotypical types respectively. The overall structural format of the Show, however is a Pastiche, as the show imitates the format of the soap opera and the Hollywood musical with blank parody. Therefore one could say that the shows are based on parodies within a pastiche structure.

Miss Piggy's character features extensively within the parodies on '*The Muppet Show*'. Her character is intertextual in that we can understand her more in relation to the types she portrays and parodies. Within '*The Muppet Show*' she is an actress starring in '*Pigs In Space*', (Plate 9, pg. 29), which is obviously a spoof of Star Trek. The opening sequence, the music, the spaceship resembling a model that has been constructed by a child, all of these tacky unrealistic impression of space reflect the overall ethos of the parody. The captain of the ship parodies the Captain Kirk type. The stern, domineering, deep voiced figure of authority.

'*Muppets Tonight*' continues the parody of the space opera in '*Deep dish nine, The next generation of Pigs in Space*'. As with the original '*Pigs in Space*' the acting is quite stagnant and the puppets animation is quite jerky. The narrative within are usually quite farfetched and unrealistic. Deep dish nine takes full advantage of this through the witty dialogue in the sketch as is evident in the first episode of '*Muppets Tonight*':

The sketch opens with the Captain (no name given in this episode, but he does have an outrageous French accent) giving his captain's log. The crew are exploring the Meta Quadrant. The Captain asks the log if he got that , and the Log (a piece of wood) replies in the affirmative.

[Cranic] the Science Officer (a guy with a brain for a head) speaks:

Craniac: "Captain, we have just finished scanning Meta 4.9."

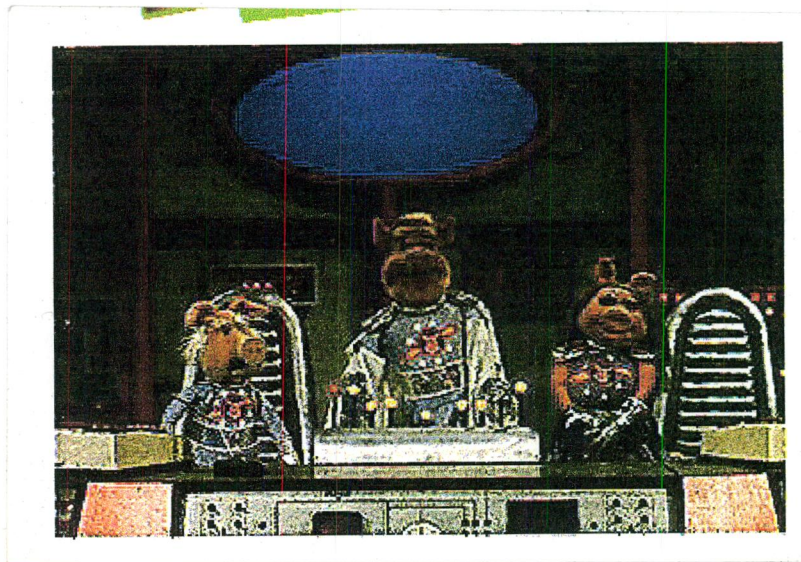


Plate 9 : Dr. Julius Strange pork, Link Hogthrob and Miss Piggy Starring in
'Pigs in Space'

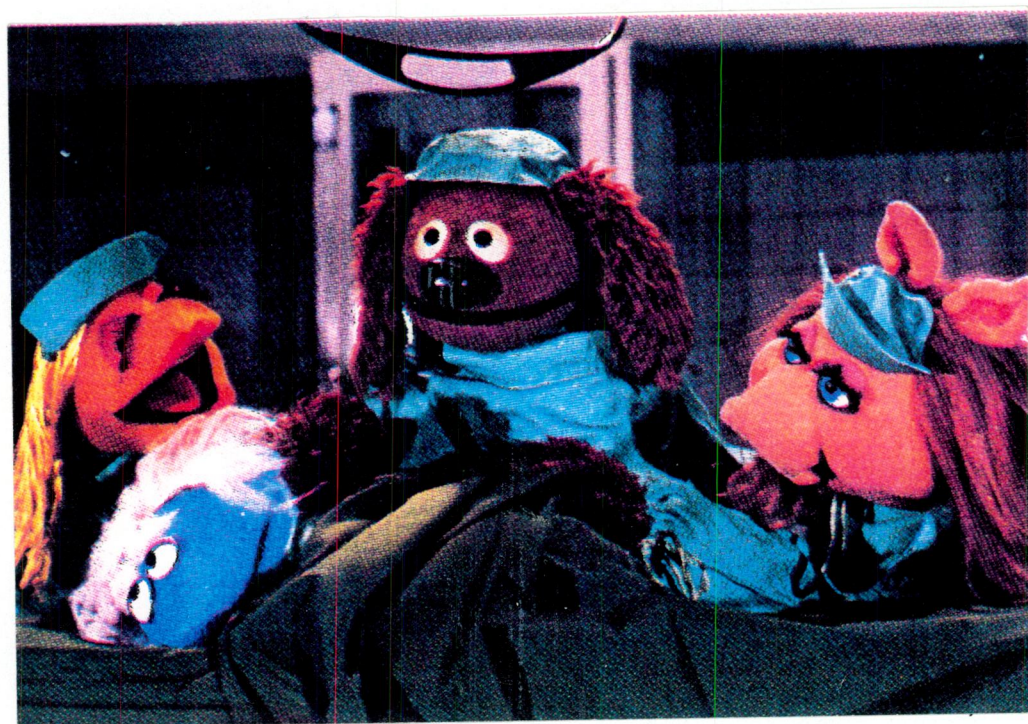


Plate 10 : Nurse Janice, Dr. Rowlf and Miss Piggy in *"Veterinarian' Hospital"*

Craniac: "Captain, we have just finished scanning Meta 4.9."

Piggy: "No we didn't, we just finished scanning Meta 4.8!"

Captain: "Please, I've told you a million times, don't mix your Meta 4's."

They are then attached and boarded by aliens, who just turn out to be Bill and the cactuses and cheeses and such. Piggy accuses them of being the evil[Plourde] and Bill says they aren't, that they just came on because the rattled them to. he proceeds to blow bubbles.

After the sketch is over, Piggy complains about the bubbles in the sketch to Rizzo the rat, saying Star Trek would never have done something that stupid. Leonard Nimoy walks on and corrects her, saying in episode 12 the Enterprise was invaded by a race of evil, super-intelligent bubbles. Piggy remarks, "No wonder your show got cancelled."

Hospital dramas are extremely popular both in Britain and America. The narrative in romance novels such as Mills and Boons, is usually centred around doctors and nurses. Veterinarian Hospital takes up this type of drama successfully. Miss Piggy and Janice star as nurses, while aiding Dr. Ralph (the dog) in the operating room. (Plate 10, pg 29) We never actually get to see any other location within the hospital. Characters from 'The Muppets Show' appear in the sketch each week, a chicken who is love sick, a horse who can't neigh, however the patient never gets cured at the end of each episode. Dr. Ralph, Miss Piggy and Nurse Janice proceed each week to laugh and poke fun at the patients, dropping pieces of jewellery into open wounds etc. At the end of each episode a deep voice from nowhere says "Tune in next week when Dr. Ralph will say.....?".

This device is used in soap operas to entice the viewer back to find out what the answer is. The cliffhanger was a silent movie device; will the hero save the heroine in time before the villain captures her etc. However, in soap operas today there does not seem to be that pressure to have a dramatic cliffhanger

every day, but this is possibly because most soap operas are on at least three times a week and therefore the audience does not have to wait that long in order to discover the outcome.

'*Veterinary Hospital*' has progressed to 'EIEOR' which is a spoof of 'ER' the Emergency Room of a fictional American hospital. The title tune of the sketch, is a reference to the 'Old Mac Donald had a Farm' rhyme.

The sketch itself usually lasts approximately two minutes and consists of nurse and doctor muppets crashing through doors, colliding into one another, and falling on top of patients. Nothing is ever accomplished at the end of each episode.

The audience does not get to see any blood and guts as one does on ER, neither do we get to see any patients on EIEOR which makes reference to the importance that the producers place on the patients in ER. The patients come and go in ER, the audience never gets to know them. Nor do they want to, as they are too concerned with the love relations within the drama.

The parody of EIEOR illustrates this perfectly in that the operating team could be operating on a car engine but as long as there is ample running around and equally as much romance, the audience will enjoy the show. Miss Piggy does not feature in EIEOR and I shall discuss this in relation to the narrative dispensability of her character.

Hollywood Musical

In chapter three I discuss Miss Piggy's character in relation to Hollywood stars, I now however wish to discuss 'The Muppet Show' and 'Muppets Tonight' in relation to the Hollywood musical.

The Backstage type format of Busby Berkeley is used both in 'The Muppet Show' and 'Muppets Tonight'. However 'The Muppet Show' is brought to the

screens from a theatre hall, whereas *'Muppets Tonight'* is situated in a studio owned and run by the Muppets themselves *K-MUP*.

The live audience format is used in the Hollywood Musical. It gives the impression that the external audience are experiencing the spectacle as it happens. "The show must go on" ethos throughout their performances, and the internal audience are kept in the dark about problems that may exist backstage.

The external audience however are taken into the world on the other side of the curtains, they are shown the rehearsals, the making of entertainment is, in a sense demystified. The aura of the star is reduced when we see them off stage as "real" people. While the external audience are privileged over the internal audience in that they get to experience the "real" within the show, this also emphasises the masquerade and theatrical mask the stars must wear in order to maintain the professional standard that is expected of them.

'The Muppet Show' and *'Muppets Tonight'* bases itself on this format in that the Muppets themselves appear to an internal audience, while the external audience are invited backstage to encounter the mayhem that goes on in order to to put on the shows. Thus, for example, we see Miss Piggy refusing to perform because the lights are not flattering, or Fozzy Bear suffering from stage fright.

"Long before television invented the studio audience and canned laughter, the Hollywood musical was pulling audiences into the film for the of shaping responses of the mass audience to the film".

(Feuer, 1993, pg26)

One could say that the internal audience in musicals, like the theatre / studio audience on the *'Muppet Show'* / *'Muppets Tonight'*, are latter day versions of the theatrical claque. It could also be argued however that the theatre audience is in a privileged position in comparison to watching a film or watching the television. This is because the performers receive an immediate reaction from the internal audience, whether positive or negative and can therefore alter their performance as appropriate.

'*The Muppet Show*' and '*Muppets Tonight*' play on this idea in that the external audience are informed that they are a part of a greater audience by the inclusion of the internal audience. By using this technique in the Hollywood Musical the effect is to constantly remind the spectator that he/she is experiencing the performance through the point of view of the theatrical audience while at the same time moving in to address the performance directly to the spectator. The external audience may come to feel that they are part of a live performance.

The Henson team use this device in order to convince the television audience that like the internal audience they have some degree of control over the puppets performance. However with both '*The Muppet Show*' and '*Muppets Tonight*' the external audience are well aware that the studio/theatre audience are in fact Muppets operated by designers who created the show. The internal audience be they Muppets or Martians is important at a structural level, providing an intermediate point of identification as stated in '*The Hollywood Musical*',

"A shot reverse shot pattern, which alternates the point of views of the internal audience with that of their performers, is a common meaning of getting us back and forth from the performance to the narrative".
(Feuer, 1993, pg 29)

For example it is often the case that, after a stars performance, the camera cuts to the band, (Plate 11, pg 34) from the band to Statler and Wardolf , the two cynic in the theatre box before cutting to backstage.

Thes two characters sit and observe everything from the box in '*The Muppet Show*', and from the comfort of their living room on '*Muppets Tonight*' (Plate 12, pg.34) They represent the external audience, observing every mistake that is made by the performers and ridiculing the show in general. The irony of this of course is that they are in fact parodying themselves as they are also part of the act.



Plate 11 : The Muppet Band

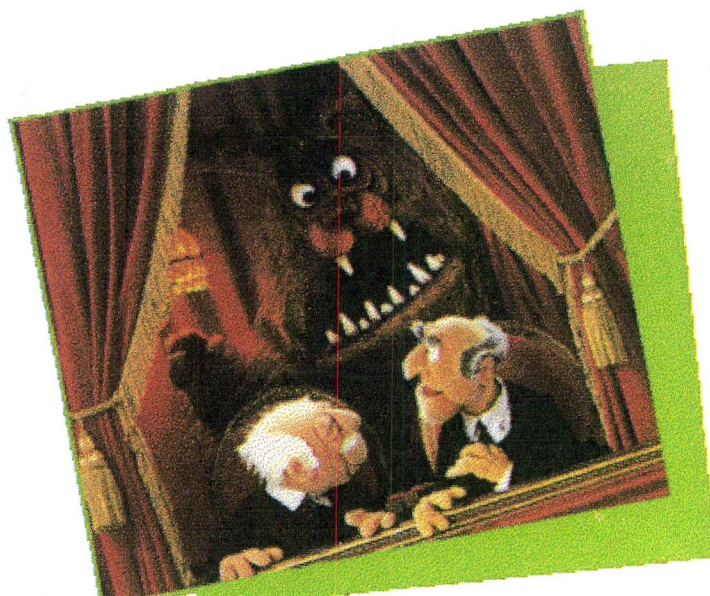


Plate 12 : Statler and Waldorf



Soap Operas

In these respects, *'The Muppet Show'* and *'Muppets Tonight'* share certain features with the Hollywood musical. But such is the difficulty in analysing genre, They can also be regarded as belonging to the genre of the soap opera.

Soap operas consist of a community of characters who interweave in order for narrative to occur. Jill Davis in "Coronation Street", discusses how soap operas are required to have a certain amount of stereotypes. There must also be a prominence of stereotypical women. She addresses this in relation to Bet, who is depicted as a stereotype of the tarty barmaid, will often act as a parody of the type - offering her bosom at her company in caricature of the common or the promiscuous.

Soap opera may be the opium of the masses of women but like religion, it may also be, if not the sign of the oppressed, yet a context in which women can ambiguously express both good-humoured acceptance of their oppression, and some equally good -humoured protest against it.
(Jordan, 1981, pg 51)

Other characters within the show represent different types - there is Fozzy Bear, the comedian, whose jokes are not funny at all, but who you love because he is forever optimistic about his talent.

Soap operas are based on the continuous serial in the weekly format. Its regular appearance allows for the audience to tune in at the same time every week to see what drama is occurring, unlike the series format where it only lasts for a number of episodes until the next season.

The apparent multifamousness of the plots, their inextricability from each other, the everyday quality of narrative time and events, all encourage us to believe that this is a narrative whose future is not yet written. (Jordan, 19, pg.11)

'The Muppet Show' and *'Muppets Tonight'* are series, in the sense that they run for approximately twelve shows per season and then return the following season if successful. Each series is written and recorded before the season

begins. The scriptwriters, designers etc. know exactly what is going to happen to a particular character before the very first episode goes on air.

'The Muppet Show' and *'Muppets Tonight'* are similar to the soap opera format in that, because of the variety of the characters within the shows, the writers have the scope of interesting narratives to develop. Short term narratives exist for maybe up to five or six episodes in most soap operas, in order to keep the audiences' attention span alert, but there are also long term narratives that exist which allow the audience to formulate their own conclusions and destiny for the characters.

In *'Muppets Tonight'*, Garth Brooks was a guest star on the show. He was invited along to sing some of his Country and Western songs. Instead, he sang *'It's Not Unusual'* by Tom Jones, which frustrated Clifford and Rizzo the Rat immensely because this is not what the audience wanted to hear. Within this episode the narrative reaches closure at the end, when Brooks finally sings one of his songs.

What is important within both shows is the multiplicity of the narratives, in each sketch there is a constant narrative occurring and as one issue closes, another narrative is there to take over the intertwining of the stories, and this format is similar to the soap opera.

What is also significant to note is that the sketches on both *'the Muppet Show'* and *'Muppets Tonight'* are approximately two minutes long and in this sense they are similar to TV commercials. At the end of a commercial there is normally some kind of resolution, for example:- the girl has spots and she has no boyfriend; then the girl finds "Oxy-cute-em" and all the boys fancy her. However what is interesting here is that quite a number of commercials, Nescafe etc., are formatted in such a way as to appear like a soap opera with a cliffhanger at the end of the advertisement. The fragmented structure perhaps

owes much to the need for break points at which real commercials can be inserted by the TV network.

As with the commercial, the basis of the cliffhanger is to encourage consumption, to encourage the external audience to buy into the market of the Muppets, to consume the show each week so that it becomes part of their diet.

'*The Muppet Show*' and '*Muppets Tonight*' are soap operas in that they provide a communal context and a shared endeavour. In this sense, the Muppet Band is an example that keynotes the overall structure.

Situation comedies

I have discussed '*The Muppet Show*' and '*Muppets Tonight*' in terms of the Hollywood musical and the soap opera, but there is also yet another genre that the show fits into and that is the ^{sitcom} system.

The ethos of a sitcom is to be humorous and comical. While the soap opera consists of a community of characters, in the majority of comedies, the storyline centres on a small number of protagonists.

Take for example '*Cybil*', the American sitcom, starring Cybil Shepherd, who is a struggling actress whose only source of fame is by acting in offbeat, low grade commercials. The narrative centres on essentially five characters, Cybil, her daughter, her two ex-husbands and her alcoholic "man-eater" friend Mary Anne. The success of this show is a result of quality scriptwriting, but also the double act of Cybil and her best friend. Everything in Cybil's life is instant - she wants everything yesterday and if not she will sing for it. She is disorganised and her life is a bundle of complications. Mary Anne, on the other hand, is tall, slender, decorated from head to toe in Armani and Gucci attire, takes life with a pinch of salt and a double vodka. Cybil, like Miss Piggy however, can be written into a

narrative with any other character within the show and it will still make for engaging viewing.

The Muppet Show can be compared to this because the overall philosophy is one of comedy and humour. The show is also made up of a selection of double act combinations. As well as "Miss Piggy and Kermit the Frog", there is "Statler and Warldof" the two humanoid cynics who sit in the box seat in the audience. "Rizzo the Rat and Gonzo", "Dr. Bunsen Honeydew and Beaker".((Plates 13, Pg. 39)

The sitcom varies in format to the soap opera in that each week the episode has a conclusion. However, while the narrative varies each week, there is an overall storyline that unfolds over a number of episodes, which sustain the external audience interest longer than the device of "tune in next week". This is similar to The Muppet Show in that while there may be closure for the short term narrative, the question whether Kermit will ever find care in his heart for Miss Piggy continues on into another week, another series, etc.

Canned laughter is another device used within 'The Muppet Show' / 'Muppets Tonight'. Laughter is used to prompt the external audience into laughing. The audience within 'The Muppet Show'/'Muppets Tonight' is there also to encourage us to laugh, however, "Canned" is different to "live" as Dieter Rath discusses in "Remote Control",

If particular attraction lies in the promise of the unforeseeable. "Live" is in opposition to "Canned"/recorded just as fresh food stands in contrast to canned food - But as fresh food is not the same as raw food, a live event is not the same as the real. It is rather a symbolic approach to the real.

This is especially true in the case of *The Muppet Show* as the performance itself is neither live nor are the Muppets in fact real. The whole experience of *The Muppet Show* / *Muppets Tonight* is a combination of different formula's and devices in order to parody how they themselves use these devices also, to appeal to the external audience.



Plate 13 : Dr. Honeydew, Beaker, Janice and Gonzo

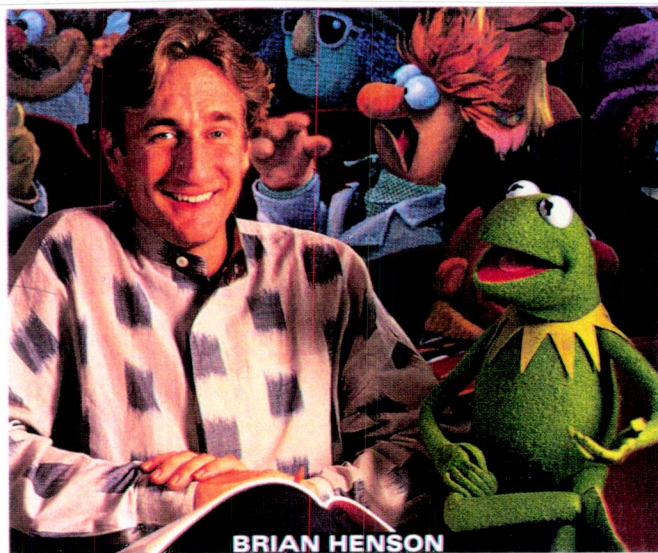


plate 14 : Brian Henson and Kermit the Frog

Miss Piggy and Kermit the Frog (Plate 15 pg. 41) represent the apotheosis of the performance collaboration between Henson and Oz. Bert and Ernie (plate 16 pg 41) in '*Sesame Street*' are also performed by Henson and Oz, however they represent the great comedy teams of Laurel and Hardy, Burns and Allen. Missy Piggy and Kermit represent the Hollywood couples such as Bogart and Bergman. Unfortunately for Miss Piggy however, her love for Kermit is unrequited.

Piggy's clumsy advances provided Kermit with recurring opportunities to display the prickly aspect of his personality and even to give notice of incipient paranoia. (Finch, 1993, pg. 104)

Miss Piggy's ability to act in isolation, is evident in the show, however, when both are together entertaining dialogue occurs.

Unlike texts that have a single protagonist with whom the reader identifies almost exclusively, the soap opera distributes interest among an entire community of characters, thus making any one character narratively dispensable. Even, characters the viewer has known for decades may suddenly die in planes ... (Allen, 1992, pg 111)

This is relevant in relation to the discussion on Miss Piggys contribution to the narrative of both '*The Muppet Show*' and '*Muppets Tonight*'.

It is fifteen years since the last Muppet series was made and in this time Jim Henson has died, Brian his son has taken over the Henson Productions Company and Miss Piggy's character has appeared in a number of Muppet Movies. Miss Piggy's character was little more than a feature player most notably for nurse Piggy in 'Veterinarian Hospital'. It wasn't until the second season, however, the writers gave her a scene that allowed Frank Oz a chance to raise her to the level of prominence she had always known she deserved. The script called for Piggy to slap Kermit, Frank once said :

Instead of a slap, I gave him a funny karate hit. Somehow that hit crystallized her character for me - the coyness hiding the aggression; the conflict of that love with her desire for a career; her hunger for a glamour image; her tremendous out and out ego ...! (Finch, 1993, pg 101).



Plate 15 : Frank Oz , Miss Piggy, and Jim Henson



Plate 16 : Bert and Ernie in 'Sesame Street'



9



Everyone had a favourite Muppet show character, even the stars who appeared on the show were always asked who they would like to appear with, and Kermit and Miss Piggy were usually their first choice. In dealing with the dispensability of Miss Piggy's character, the question I should ask is, could someone else (puppet) act the part of Miss Piggy on 'The Muppet Show', as she is after all appearing as herself on the show.

In an episode of Muppet Tonight, Miss Piggy is late for the closing number with Whoopi Goldberg. Clifford the presenter, and Rizzo the Rat decide to audition some of the other characters on the show (Johnny Fiano, Seymour and Pepe, Miss Piggy's nephew) to perform as Miss Piggy for the closing number.

Each of the characters, take it in turns to perform in front of Clifford and Rizzo the Rat, adorned with plastic nose, ears and curl blond hair, of course none of the characters can recreate her performance successfully thus suggesting that Miss Piggy herself, is not dispensable.

However, whether her character is narratively dispensable is a different issue. If her character was written out of the show altogether could the other characters sustain the successful narratives that presently exist? What effect would her departure have on the other characters within this show?

These questions can be answered by first addressing the events that occurred as a result of Jim Henson's death in May 1990.

It was essentially Brian Henson who took over the day to day running of Henson Productions Ltd.(Plate 14,pg 39) At the time of Jim Henson's death negotiations were underway between the aforementioned company and Walt Disney. Jim Henson was keen to have Walt Disney take over the financial running of the company in order for him to devote his time to what he enjoyed most, creating and producing. However negotiations had begun to disintegrate before Henson's death. Disney could not understand that Henson looked on the Muppets as his friends. There were suggestions made by Disney that once the

merger had been sealed, the characters voices in the show would be dubbed with voices of well known Hollywood Stars. They went against Hensons principles as he felt that only certain people should operate Kermit, and likewise with all the other characters as it was the combination of the character and the puppeteer that brought the Muppets to life.

After constant discussions, negotiations finally fell apart between Disney and Henson Productions Ltd.. The management strategies of both companies were very different.

Brian Henson succeeded, with the help of his brother and sisters to build the company to the reputable stature that it experiences today. Brian Hensons forte was working with marionettes, but he was also more business minded than his father. He was always conscious of the fact that he was the son of Jim Henson. When his father died he realised that he was going to have to be his fathers successor, not artistically but in terms of the future of the company.

"And I think he made a kind of noble sacrifice of his own artistic hopes and then before the age of thirty, brilliantly managed the company back from the brink of oblivion." (Owen, 1993, pg 39)

Steve Whitmire is the designer who came to operate Kermit the frog after Jim Henson's death. Whitmire had worked in the Henson company for the previous 15 years. While Whitmires ability as a puppeteer is not being questioned here, the rapport that existed between Henson and Frank Oz communicated through Kermit and Miss Piggy can not be replaced. It was possibly a conscious decision on the part of both Brian Henson and Steve Whitmire not to give Kermit the Frog, centre stage on the new show '*Muppets Tonight*' (produced by Brian Henson) in reverence to Jim Henson.

In '*Muppets Tonight*' Kermit manages the show, therefore, he only makes a small number of appearances throughout the series. When he does perform it is usually with one of the guest stars e.g. Garth Brooks, or in a solo number.

Kermit the Frog's relative absence from the show has had a direct influence on Miss Piggy's appearance also. Over the five seasons in the original show the audience watched Miss Piggy's character develop with charisma and charm thus enticing and tempting the viewer back each week for more.

"The reader is forced to try to find connections between the hitherto familiar story and new unforeseeable situations. He / she is forced -----
-- network of possibilities and thus begins himself to formulate missing links." (Allen, 1992, pg 108)

This gap allows the reader to become part of the imaginary yet real world, without having the power or the ability to change it. Miss Piggy's character is given an existence beyond the realms of '*The Muppet Show*' in that the audience imagines what her character is doing between episodes, or what will the outcome of her dilemma be in the next episode.

Like Kermit's character, Miss Piggy frequents the show only occasionally. When she does star on the show, again as with Kermit, it is in a duet with one of the guests. Miss Piggy's career has been given a new direction in that she is now, supposedly a famous actress and that is why she cannot feature on the show as often as she/we would like.

"Continuous creation of character text for each character - a biography that has a past and a future within the mythic reality." (Dyer, 1979, Pg 64)

'*Muppets Tonight*' has clearly been able to function successfully without the constant inclusion of Miss Piggy within the narrative, therefore suggesting that her character is narratively dispensable. However this is not to say she could completely disappear from the show.

On the rare occasion that Miss Piggy and Kermit the Frog do appear together on the new show their fiery combination is reminiscent of the original '*Muppet Show*'. This reference also adds weight to the assumption that it is not Steve

Whitmires puppetry that results in the infrequency of Kermit's appearances but out of respect to Jim Henson.

Brian Henson introduced new characters in *'Muppets Tonight'* to possibly inject new blood, and new opportunities for different plots and sketches to develop so that the show does not date. Although it could be argued that because the Muppet show appeals to both adults and children and that it transcends political barriers that it is a classic.

Another possible reason for Miss Piggy's shift in profile is that she was at her pinnacle in the late seventies at a time when *'radical feminism'* was in full force, and this form of feminism could be considered passe.

Whatever the reason *'Muppets Tonight'* has a new female protagonist who features regularly in the show, she does not however take centre stage, as Miss Piggy's character would have demanded. She is clearly based on an American television blonde. Her name is Spamela Hamderson and her character stars in the Bay of Pigs Watch. She is a buxom blonde dressed in a skinny bikini with not much of relevance to say. This is obviously a direct spoof on Bay Watch and Pamela Anderson.

Anderson is the epitome of the dumb blonde of the nineties, in that she plays on the idea that there is an in-depth philosophical side to her, though this side is difficult to see. The fascination that has always been associated with Miss Piggy is that she truly believes herself to be a talented and glamorous actress while the opposite may be the case, she has the powerful ability to convince her audience and control their way of seeing her. Whereas Spamela Hamderson does not have the same presence necessary to capture her audience.

As I have discussed Miss Piggy's character contributes to the narrative within *'The Muppet Show'* and *'Muppets Tonight'*. The fact that she may not feature

in the new show as much as she did in the original, questions her narrative dispensability. However, when she does appear she maintains the feisty, elaborate display of theatrical performance that contributed to her success in the original show.

Chapter III - Miss Piggy a symbol of femininity in the 90's

Miss Piggy the infamous Muppet show character, was constructed by Jim Henson Productions in America during the 1970's. The term "constructed" is important to my analysis as I shall be dealing with the social construction of images of "femininity" and "beauty" particularly as promulgated through the Hollywood star system. Miss Piggy's character, I shall argue, question these images created by society and the film Industry. Her character was created by taking these stereotypical images and traits associated with Hollywood stars and fusing them together, in a subversive way.

"Offers a myriad of different female characters, all variations on the feminine stereotype in radically subverted form," (Bonner, 1992, pg. 85)

In this quotation, taken from a piece in *'Imagining Women'* Goodman discusses how negative images of women who are exploited, physically and emotionally oppressed, can subvert the representations of the feminine and reclaim them as positive images, If read with an awareness of context. Goodman deduces this, from the collection of short stories entitled "Wayward girls and wicked women". Miss Piggy could be looked on as being wicked and wayward, not in a sexual sense but in relation to how she manipulates and dominates her fellow puppets. Attributes not considered as standard feminine traits. Yet, by doing so, she subverts images of femininity and questions what it is to be female.

It may seem strange to compare Miss Piggy to Hollywood stars; Miss Piggy is after all a puppet. However, *'The Muppet Show'* and *'Muppets Tonight'*, (while containing a similar format to sitcoms and soap operas, see chapter II) are based on the Hollywood musical and in this respect Miss Piggy's character is positioned as the star. Indeed the fact that stars are constructed by the film industry suggests that they themselves are like puppets.

I propose to look at the feminine masquerade, i.e.: How Miss Piggy's performance of certain feminine roles is often heightened, with emphasis that it

is indeed a performance. In fact, a scripted performance by the puppet's operator, Frank Oz. The body beautiful shall be addressed by questioning why her physique is modelled on a pig and what connotations this has in relation to the female body.

In this century, women have occupied shifting social positions - wars /jobs - peace/home. Despite these periods when women enjoyed a more privileged position in society (economic independence etc.), the representation of women in Hollywood cinema remained by and large, very conservative. Women's roles were confined to the domestic sphere and to a traditional repertoire of lovers, wives, mothers or sisters of various men. As early as the 1920's :

"Hollywood movies carried a celluloid image worth thousands of words, with the message that private intimacy equalled freedom and the plush of an expensive automobile caped the search for the good life."
(Mattleart, 1986, pg 120).

Not unlike the case of the television soap opera today, there were economic motivations underpinning the representations of women in this way.

A woman's film was developed in the 30's by Hollywood's major film studio as a means of bringing a large female audience (who market research suggested constituted the principal film goers) both into the cinemas and into reach of manufacturers whose need to showcase a wide range of domestic consumer goods led to lucrative deals around "product tie-ins" (Mattlehart, 1986, pg 129) It is against this background, that some of the more notable features of Miss Piggy's role emerge, (e.g. her naked ambition, her acting career - (you never see her in a domestic situation).

In addition her role, and degree to which it represents a shift in how femininity is constructed and reproduced, need to be assessed in the context of other female characters within '*The Muppet Show*'.

In fact there are only two main female protagonists - Miss Piggy and Janice.
(Plates 17/18,pg.50)

Androgynous roles

Janice is the skinny, bass player who has long braided blonde dreadlocks and big lips. Miss Piggy and Janice encompass all types of females in their characters. However, while they may appear to be portrayed as stereotypes themselves, I shall argue that this is not the case : they are both more complex and nuanced.

Janice's character is quite androgynous and this shall be discussed in relation to other Hollywood stars. I shall also look at the depiction of women in androgynous roles, portraying stereotypes of women which are produced through the Hollywood system.

Eisenstein categorises the development of feminine thought into three phases. In the first phase during the early 1970's, sexually constructed differences were judged to be the main source of female oppression and it was argued that social control of women could be reduced by decreasing gender polarization and moving towards some form of androgyny (Zipes,1983, pg.3)

Androgyny itself can be divided into different categories, gender androgyny and sex androgyny. The latter being biological and the former constructed by society. In relation to gender androgyny I shall look at how the film industry use the device of masking the female body with clothes associated with the male to give the impression of sex androgyny.

For example, the 1930's film noir masterpiece "The Big Sleep" starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. Bacall plays the wealthy Vivian (ambiguous name). She enters the story just as Bogart is leaving her house after a business meeting with her father. Bogart enters the drawing room in which Bacall stands dressed in a black and white trouser suit. The only evidence to

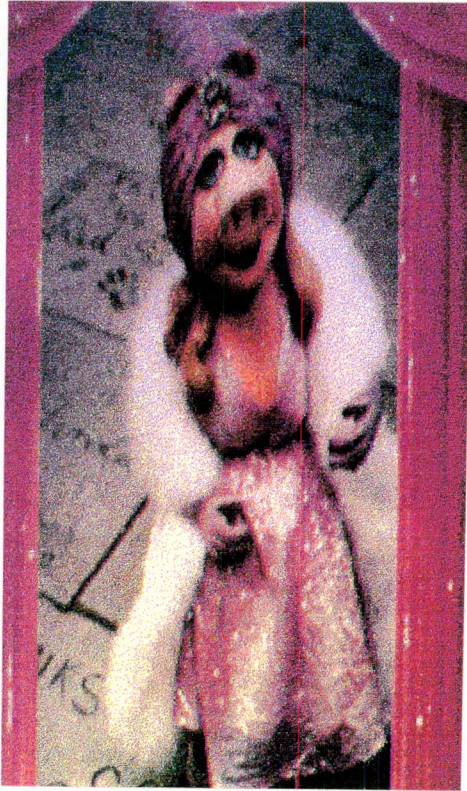


Plate 17 : Miss Piggy



Plate 18 : Janice and the Muppet band

suggest that she is a woman is her long hair and feminine face. The audience does not focus on her body, we focus on the word and mind games she plays with Bogart.

In Richard Dyer's analysis of Monroe and sexually in Hollywood stars, he opens with a quotation from Joseph C. Rheingold :

"The denial of the body is delusion, no woman transcends her body"
(Dyer, 1986 pg, 10).

However in this particular scene one could argue that this is not the case. There has long been a stigma attached to the curvaceous, womanly female, that she is less intelligent or smart than a skinny boyish woman. The reason for this is possibly that men are considered more intelligent than women so boyish looks become equated with male superiority. The use of male clothing associates the wit, intelligence and sharp tongue of Bacall with this view. (Her cross dressing can be seen as another instance of cinema being unable to cope with the female, "so presenting splendid women as men," as Dyer has argued). Just think of the difference had the director decided to place Bacall in a low cut dress.

Androgyny also features on a number of films starring Judy Garland. In *'You Made Me Love You'* Garland sings to a framed photograph of Clark Gable. She sings of the burden of growing from a child into a woman. This in-between stage draws on the idea of the ugly duckling. At this stage of female development one is often appearing quite lanky, and boyish, traits associated with sex androgynous. It is interesting to note that the source of being in-between is one of the reasons gays identify with Judy Garland. The film industry used Garland in this role.

Garland, as Dyer suggests, epitomises other forms of androgyny. In *'Ziegfeld Girl'* she is seen as the androgynous vamp. She appears glamorous and sexy in her attire which consists of bow tie, tails, and silk stockings with heels. Dietrich

and Greta Garbo have appeared in similar roles. Although the bow tie and tails are associated with the male, the silk stockings are the fetishised signs of femininity.

In comparison to this Garland has also played the androgynous tramp in '*Easter Parade*' (Plate 19, pg 53). She is depicted as a clown in a floppy suit. There is nothing glamorous and sexy about this. Dyer suggests that this represents the tragic comic image.

In all of these androgynous images of the former it demonstrates certain stereotypes that are constructed by the media.

The character of Janice in *The Muppets*, represents the sex androgynous female, skinny and boyish. She plays the bass in the Muppet band, an instrument normally associated with a male. The irony of Janice's character is that when she does speak it usually results in an embarrassing moment on the screen. In one particular scene in the film "*Muppets take Manhattan*" (1984), a number of the Muppet characters are in a Hollywood producer's office waiting to meet him. As tensions mount, the Muppets proceed to all talk at the same time. Just as the producer is about to enter the waiting room to meet them, there is silence, but Janice continues her conversation "..... and I said, I'm taking my clothes off for no one mister." As this suggests, Janice's character questions the stereotyped roles invented for women. Her character demonstrates that sex and gender androgyny does not determine the intelligence of an individual.

Femininity and Masquerade

Miss Piggy on the other hand celebrates femininity. As Frank Oz explains, " despite her difficult upbringing she enjoys being a girl." Indeed she perceives herself to be everything that is feminine. This exultation can be paralleled with Eisteinstein's second phase of feminist thought.

From the mid-70's to the beginning of the 80's androgyny was largely rejected in favour of a woman centre perspective. The polarisation



Plate 18 : Judy Garland starring in '*Easter Parade*'

between masculine and feminine was to be maintained and women were urged to isolate and define those aspects of female experience that were potential sources of strength and power for women (Zipes, 1983 pg.3)

This raises many questions about femininity, particularly femininity as masquerade:

The Hollywood star gazes up at the classical ideal of herself, the emphasis on the neck and shoulder of the sculpture bust is replicated by the display of those parts of the stars body. She looks at the image of herself as the sculpture saw her thus the female star becomes a spectator, examining an image of herself represented through someone else's imagination. Her expression is one of wonder, echoing processes of female spectatorship in which feminine ideas are on display to be admired by women in the cinema audience.(Stacey, 1994, pg.5).

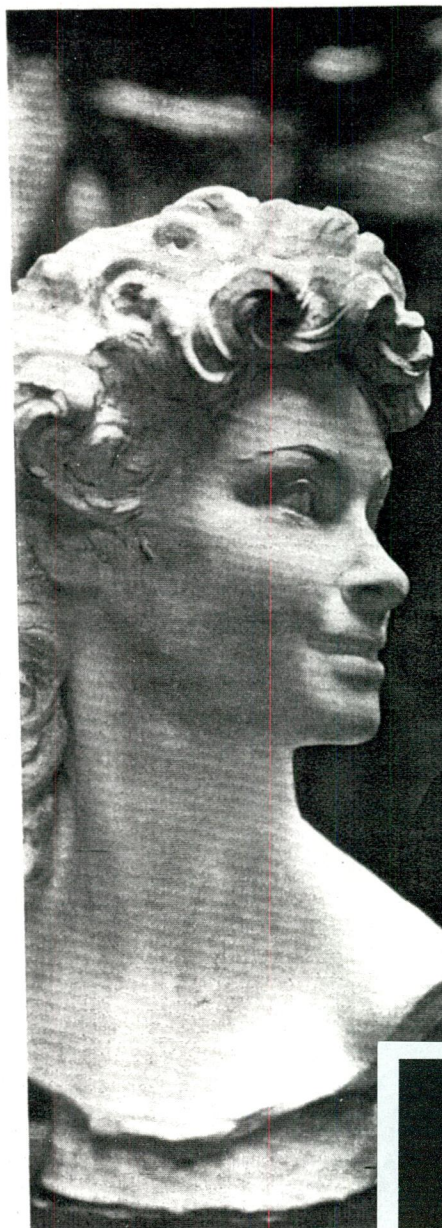
Looking at and being looked at are significant here. In a number of Muppet Show episodes Miss Piggy performs with a star: Raquel Welch singing ' I am a Woman' and Michelle Pfeiffer in Muppets Tonight (Plate 20, pg.55) Miss Piggy is adorned to replicate exactly what her fellow guests are wearing, the low cut white dress of Raquel Welch and the pink bathrobe of Michelle Pfeiffer. She has been constructed to look exactly like them, the irony of course being that she will never physically look like them.

As the Hollywood star, looks at the classical ideal of herself so too does Miss Piggy in the image of Welch/Pfeiffer. The sculpture of Susan Hayward represents an ideal image of herself constructed by the sculptor.(Plate 21, pg. 55)

Raquel Welch has been constructed in a sense to emulate the sexy image that is equated with her. Miss Piggy has been sculpted to reflect this sculpted image by what she wears.

Miss Piggy takes on the role of her guest through her appearance and the synchronised movements of their act. Miss Piggy takes on different constructed roles, through the guise of Welch, sex symbol, curvaceous figure hugging garments, and Pfeiffer, the strong yet vulnerable star (in her own eyes), and sexy yet demure. Miss Piggy echoes the female spectator who aspires to be like these stars. She identifies with these stars, however, though she takes on the different feminine roles that these women portray, Miss Piggy's character

How do you see Susan?



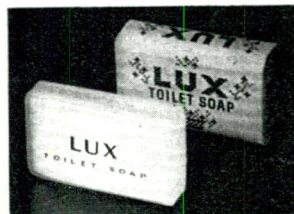
HERE'S SUSAN HAYWARD as the sculptor saw her—sweet and fresh as a spring morning.

But you'll be seeing her as one of the hardest women in history — playing Messalina in her latest film!

However much Susan may change character, one thing remains familiar: that fabulous complexion. Why? Because she's never changed her mind about what's best for beauty. That means she's never wavered in her choice of the whitest soap—Lux Toilet Soap—to keep the lovely sparkle in her skin.

It's the snowy, white look of Lux Toilet Soap that tells you worlds about its purity. You can be sure that it is mild, is gentle—and that every day of Lux Toilet Soap care proves your first impression right!

When 9 out of 10 film stars use it, you can be sure that pure, white Lux Toilet Soap lives up to its appearance!



"DIVINELY FRAGRANT!" Film star Susan Hayward sings the praises of Lux Toilet Soap's exciting perfume, which lingers so deliciously on the skin. In the new French handy-shaped, and easy to hold tablet for long-lasting economy, as well as the familiar size.



9 out of 10 film stars use p

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Plate 20 : Miss Piggy and Michelle Pfeiffer in 'Muppets Tonight'

Plate 21 : Susan Hayward advertising Lux soap



believes that she is essentially better than the image she is reflecting. Thus expressing the narcissistic nature of Miss Piggy's personality.

Miss Piggy is modelled on stars from the first half of this century, physically and emotionally. Her blonde hair and buxom shape equates her to Monroe and Dietrich, her intelligence, aggression and manipulative nature with Davis and Crawford. These big screen glamorous icons were seen as exceptional and extraordinary women.

In the *'Identifying Women'* Haskell discusses the female stars in Hollywood cinema in terms of stereotypes which limit and control definitions of femininity in a male dominated culture - Susan Hayward, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford.

Bette Davis (Plate 22/23, pg.57) baffled her first employers at Universal as they were unsure what "type" she presented. They implied she lacked sex appeal. Maybe it was her voice as she was one of the very first of the personality voices of the talkies, and the roles she was assigned jarred on her personality just as it jarred on them.

In *'The Cabin in the Cotton'* (1932), she played the first forthright bitch of her career. Davis was constantly maddened by Warner Bros. reluctance to give her the right roles. Why was it that Davis had to fight so hard to get the roles she was obviously best suited to? Was it because, by giving her such bitchy roles Warner Bros. were giving in to her wishes and to an extent relinquishing some or the control they exercised over her?

Marlene Dietrich is remembered more for her sex symbol image, her stunning body, goddess, face and charismatic persona.(Plate 24, pg.59) In Dyers discussion in *'Stars'* he talks about the groups of films made by the former and Josef von Sternberg. He discusses how Sternberg uses Dietrich as part of his erotic-formalist (fetishistic) concerns, but goes on to say that Dietrich, as an already signifying element, is also present. In relation to this Molly Haskill



Plate 22 : Bette Davis starring in *'All about Eve'*



Plate 23 : Bette Davis starring in *'The little Foxes'*



places Dietrich in the category of women who resist the stereotypes which they are assigned.

In the resplendence of her beauty, Dietrich comes closest to being a goddess, but she refuses to be one, refuses to take on the generalised aspects of love and suffering with which a mass audience could identify, and refuses to pretend for the sake of a mans ego that love will not die or that she will not love him.

(Dyer, 1979 pg. 179)

The fact that Dietrich and Davis fought so intensely with their director in order to define for themselves what it is to be female and a Hollywood star, questions, as Haskell suggests, the stereotypes constructed for them. However, the fact that they have to constantly battle with the system not just in terms of particular roles that they wished to perform, but in relation to resisting culturally constructed images of how they should appear emphasises, the control that Hollywood and patriarchy in general has over female stars. It also highlights that femininity is primarily a social construction and more a construction made by man. (Dyer, 1979 pg.178)

Miss Piggy plays on this idea of battling with the director to gain more credibility and suitable roles. This is evident through her gestures and feisty personality which dominates the screen and demands attention constantly. In a recent episode of Muppets Tonight, Whoopi Goldberg appears on the show with the intention of singing the closing number, *'Diamonds Are A Girls Best Friend'* with Miss Piggy. However, just as Muppets Tonight is going out on air Miss Piggy is still on an aeroplane travelling from a recent film she has starred in. The presenter Clifford is advised by the studio manager, to have Goldberg perform in a solo. However when Miss Piggy is informed about this she becomes enraged, and proceeds to hurl abuse at Goldberg over the phone questioning her ability as a star and her ability to perform without the talent of hers truly.



Plate 24 : Marlene Dietrich starring in a *'Foreign Affair'*



Miss Piggy's character always gets what she wants. In quite a number of '*The Muppet Show*' and '*Muppets Tonight*' all she has to do is scream, sulk, perform a karate chop and the antagonisers of her aggression are reduced to giving in. In this respect Miss Piggy's "bitch image" and agitation with the other characters can be compared to the acrimony between Davis and the Hollywood system. The irony is, however, that Miss Piggy never has to put up to much of a fight in order to get the limelight she feels she deserves.

In this respect her character demonstrates how Hollywood exercised unnecessary control over Davis. Davis was obviously talented to "the domineering bitch roles" that she starred in and Hollywood moguls were shrewd enough in their casting to know that she was at home with these roles. However, in order to be seen to maintain control over her, they continued to dictate what roles she could perform.

That Miss Piggy's has to act as she does in order to get roles suited to her talents is a statement about the Hollywood system which still wishes to control its stars. A system which remains unchanged from the Davis and Monroe era. .

Carolyn Wilcox is the head designer of Miss Piggy's character

(Plate 25 pg.61) She designs the clothes, the accessories, her physical make up, that creates the image needed, slinky satin dresses, feather boas, glistening jewellery, etc., all equate to the Hollywood star stereotype. Miss Piggy does not look like Marlene Dietrich or Marilyn Monroe, however, the very image that is associated with Dietrich, the image which she tries to repress in her films, is the very look that has been created for Miss Piggy and one which Miss Piggy supposedly enjoys. It would seem that the notion of a director producing an image of a female in order to project his own fantasies is unrealistic in Miss Piggy's case, seeing as she is a puppet.

However, in '*The Loves of Lady Purple*' by Angela Carter, the title character is a puppet who embodies the physical attributes of desirability valued by the puppet-maker. The female puppet seeks revenge on the male creators of the images she embodies, embraces and desires. She subverts the power relation



Plate 25 : The process of glamorising Miss Piggy

between herself and her male creator and whose power is achieved through a "monstrous" lack of "femininity" (Bonner, 1986, pg 86)

Speaking of roles

By celebrating femininity, Miss Piggy contradicts this view, however whether she celebrates or represses it the very fact that her character suggests that women do have the choice to create whatever image they wish for themselves is progressive. For all her eyelash batting and her sweet talking, Miss Piggy is a career woman who remains independent of other male characters. This is precisely the position that Hollywood system has difficulty offering, in anything but consumerist terms.

In any case, what is largely at issue is the field of representatives - the array of possible subject positions opened up in popular narratives - rather than any strict literal notion of "the real".

Miss Piggy's character presents femininity as an elaborate masquerade.

"To speak of a role is to invoke a distinction between the behaviour exhibited and the real person behind or beneath the role, the agent of the role." (Perchik and Posner, 1995, pg15)

Miss Piggy's character as a gender role allows for the separation of ones gender from oneself, in that her overacting and her elaborate decorated self, raise the idea of sexual ambiguity i.e. is she an overdone female, a man dressed in drag, or a homosexual transvestite? Her character constantly plays on this idea and while she exults femininity in all things feminine, it is not solely female femininity but male femininity also. Dyer discusses sexual ambiguity with reference to camp in the cinema.

Camp by focusing on the outward appearances of role, implies that roles, and in particular, sex roles are superficial - a matter of style ... Finding stars camp is not to mock them ... It is more a way of poking fun at the whole cosmology of restrictive sex roles and sexual identifications which our society uses to oppress its women and repress its men - including those on screen.
(Dyer, 1979 ,pg 71).

Dyer discusses how this makes explicit the life - as theatre metaphor which underpins the star phenomenon. He suggests that this sense of the artificial of social performance in relation to Bette Davis manner which is so obviously put on matches with notions of social expectations and requirements of women.

Mary Ann Doane states that a distance between image and feminine subject might be achievable in terms of an understanding of femininity as itself a "masquerade". She discusses notion of masquerade to describe an excess of femininity a flaunting of femininity in order paradoxically to achieve some distance from it.

"The masquerades resistance of patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the productions of femininity as closeness, as presence to itself, as precisely imagistic" (Doane ,1982, pg 27)

Miss Piggy's character could be looked upon as doing exactly what Doane suggests in her discussion by exaggerating the construction of "femininity" by "camping up her performance" she upsets the authority that the patriarchy exercises by creating the image of what femininity should be.

Miss Piggy's character never actually displays her "true self", and if she does, it is unlikely that we can identify what it is because her image constantly changes, e.g. ∴ physically (by the clothes she wear) and in how she performs (demure and sensitive in ^{had} constant to feisty and aggressive).

But does this mean that these various "acts" sit like a mask over the Miss Piggy's character ? As Danto points out about Cindy Sherman's work,

There is something really frightening about Sherman's portraits of portraits as though they lay like a rubber mask of some witch or werewolf on the borderline of horror yet fun. It is as if one knows they are false and yet cannot help but be frightened of them the way we are frightened by someone wearing a mask.(Danto, 1981,pg.11)

What is it that we are afraid of? Is it the mask itself or are we frightened of what is behind the mask? i.e. Is it infinitely better or worse? "What is the human reality behind the grotesqueness of our appearance" The masquerade and the mask provide fascination as much as fear.

In the Muppet film *'Muppets take Manhattan'* (1984) there is a particular scene in which Joan Rivers and Miss Piggy are working behind a makeup and beauty counter in an exclusive department store. Joan Rivers decides to make Miss Piggy beautiful by doing her makeup for her, Miss Piggy ends up with eye makeup dripping from her cheeks, lipstick smudged which blends in with the rouge and mascara that also envelop her face.

The body beautiful

This idea of making up the face to appear beautiful is ironic here as Miss Piggy ends up looking exactly like Joan Rivers after the makeup has been applied. This demonstrating that masking the self with makeup to look beautiful can also mask or hide beauty.

It is through the body that feminine identity is constructed (Haugg, 1980) and fragmentation and commodification of the female body has been a source of much feminist debate about the specificity of women's alienation and oppression. (Stacey, 1994, pg. 206)

Miss Piggy's physique is based on that of a pig. Pigs have different meanings and connotations in different social and cultural contexts. In the west pigs are often associated with fatness and greediness. As I have discussed, Miss Piggy questions stereotypes of femininity, but to have her look like a pig, is this not feeding the stereotypical notion of equating fatness with pigs? Why not have Miss Piggy as a thin pig? I will argue that by using the physique of a pig for Miss Piggy's character questions this very idea.

Pigs are not born fat, they are fed with certain products to fatten them. Enlarged for human consumption. They are not naturally fat, as opinion might suggest. At a literal level they are socially constructed for human consumption.

At this level of representation this too can be said of female stars. They are not born feminine, nor are they in fact born masculine, but are constructed by a quasi industrial system, to an extent for human consumption. Pigs have proven to farmers that they are the most intelligent and sensitive of all farmyard animals by their actions and mannerisms. They demand a lot of attention and whine consistently if they don't get their own way. Qualities which are obviously associated with Miss Piggy's character.

In George Orwell's *'Animal Farm'*, the farmyard animals are used as an allegory for the human conditions. The narrative is based on a communist approach to productivity, and how greed for wealth can overpower the attributes of honest labour and amicable working conditions.

In *'Animal Farm'*, the farmyard animals are used to represent types of people caught up in a Communist regime, (the head pig has been compared to such leaders as Stalin, etc). However, the animals could be identified and other figures depending on ones reading of the text. The paradox of the individual and the mass is intensified by choosing animals as protagonists. This is particularly pertinent to Miss Piggy's character. While she represents different types of female in society she flaunts her narcissistic mask of uniqueness.

The pig symbolises different meanings depending on the particular society. In the Jewish and Islamic religion, pigs are excluded from the diet because they are associated with uncleanness.

It would be misleading to suggest that Miss Piggy's character is unclean because it might suggest sexual connotations. However, although we are aware of Miss Piggy's unrequited obsession for Kermit, and the fact that she plays up to every actor who appears on the show, there is never any suggestion made about sexual encounters in relation to her character.

Miss Piggy's character reflects the complexities of the female star. She is constructed with many layers which subvert and parody stereotypes created by the Hollywood system.

Conclusion

This Thesis set out to consider the Educational and gender political issues within Henson's work.

From Chapter I, I would conclude that Television is a great teacher of many things. What a child is before he/she goes to television, what relations he/she can build up within his family and peer group, what needs he/she takes to television are therefore the chief ingredients of television's effect on him/her. But not wholly, for there is an interaction. The child brings a need to television and television reinforces certain responses to him/her. Over a period of years therefore, the selective reinforcement he gets from 10 to 15 hours of television a week must have something to do with what he knows and what he does.

The Bogart and Ball evaluation substantiates this argument as it proved that by watching 'Sesame Street' inner-city children had made substantial learning gains compared to those children that did not watch the programme.

However 'Sesame Street' was intensely criticised by Goldsen in 1976 accusing the producers of (1.) promoting America as the dominant culture to countries outside the U.S.A. and (2) using advertising techniques for teaching rote learning which encouraged consumerism at such an early age.

The irony of the second criticism is that it was the advertising techniques used by Henson that attracted Cooney to his work.

Henson, however, was clearly aware of the message he would send if continued to make commercials while working on 'Sesame Street'. Therefore he discontinued making them.

'Sesame Street' set out with honourable aims, i.e. To encourage pre-school learning and to reduce the inequality gap. Was it not churlish of Goldsen to criticize the commercial television techniques they employed especially in view of the excellent results they achieved.

Television in isolation does not have the power to cure all social ills. These require sustained political and economic action.

Henson, (as I discussed in Chapter II) was more concerned with indirect and subtle forms of education this was evident in the 'Muppet Show'. The popularity of the 'Muppet Show' was a result of its appeal to both adults and children. Henson created characters which represented different types in our society, and through their performances, the audience experienced an awareness of gender political and social issues.

I concentrated on the character of Miss Piggy in order to explore the educational values within 'The Muppet Show'. I traced her development from her first appearance as Nurse Piggy in 'Veterinarian Hospital' to her present position as a Hollywood star.

Her character portrays a positive image of femininity. By subverting the constructed Hollywood stereotype I have demonstrated that she is a progressive symbol of femininity in the 90's.

For the purpose of this thesis I have only considered the female protagonists in the 'Muppet Show' and 'Muppets Tonight'. Clearly many of the male characters were worthy of analysis, however, the complexities of Miss Piggys character provided the most scope for discussion.

Brian Henson has continued to expand the Henson empire. The question of whether he has compromised the educational mission undertaken by his father is for another day.



Plate 26 : Muppet character merchandise



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Plate 27 : Jim Henson And Bert

