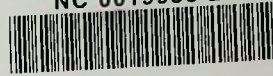Yvonne O'Connell
Tony Fitzmaurice

"GENDER   STEREOTYPING   IN   FILM   AND   TELEVISION"

BY YVONNE O'CONNELL - FINE ART, PAINTING: 1991.

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PREFACE

In this thesis I intend to look at the results of surveys
and studies that have been done on the effects, contentexts
and content of television viewing and the power struggle
both represented on the television screen and caused by
it. I will relate the findings of these studies to gender-
related issues such as sexuality and violence and their
repurcussions on society as a whole. This will lead to
a more generalised discussion of the content of classical
narrative text, it's various components and the ideology
behind its hegemonic basis. During the course of this
essay I will use the terms 'film' and 'television' almost
interchangably, as my focus. is mainly   on television and
I feel the current situation ensures that almost all films
will end up being broadcast on cable or satelite channels
or will be available on video for domestic consumption.
Film comes from a different tradition, and film theory
cannot simply be transplanted from a cinema to a living
room (as my look at David Morleys study will show).
However, film does play an important part in television
viewing. Films usually attract high audience viewing figures
and are usually much better publicised than serial programmes.
Films are sometimes seen as a 'treat' for television viewers
as it is acknowledged that films have a higher budget and
are sometimes more professionally crafted than television
programmes. In my conclusion I look at some feminist interventions
in popular culture and propose a way forward.

> "Till at last the childs mind is these
> suggestions and the sum of these
> suggestions is the childs mind only.
> The adults mind too - all his life
> long. The mind that judges and desires
> and decides - made up of these suggestions.
> But all these suggestions are our
> suggestions!" The director almost shouted
> in his triumph.
>
>   Huxley, Brave New World.

Popular culture has traditionally been the voice of the

people celebrating their lives, airing their grievances

at the problems they encounter and expressing hope for

change and a better future. Unfortunately this is not the

case with the popular culture of advanced capitalism.

It has now lost most of its oppositional features and has

subsided instead into part of the apparatus of domination.

Domination of the social and political structure of class

of the ecological balance, of the ruling ideologys and of

most interest to this particular thesis: of gender behaviour.

The most important medium of popular culture of this century

is television: television is the most accessible means of

information and entertainment for most people. Since television

became widely available in western culture we have witnessed

the demise of interest in many other arts most notably the

literary arts of reading and theatre, as audio visual narratives

took over. Interestingly, music has remained immensely

popular and has become more accessible but unlike television, it has retained many oppositional elements. Within the space of four decades, television has become an integral part of everyday life in almost every country in the world. In western countries, not owning a television set can be interpreted as an almost anti-social act and except in cases of poverty is quite rare.

Sight is for most people the most dominant sense. We give priority to visual stimuli for a number of reasons. We can only come to terms with our environment through sight if we automatically absorb any available information that effects or may effect it or us. Sight can also reach further than any sense, we can normally see things before we can hear touch smell or taste them. Television is first and foremost an image producer and so provides satisfaction for our most dominant sense. It is not surprising that large amounts of viewing is done by millions of people every day. Television is also a more aural medium than cinema, both privilege sight but with cinema this is more intense as it is dark and 'looking' is not restricted.

Many people now living in the first world have grown up with television and they are the most affected by it. Understanding television is like reading, the television displays signals that must be revered and coherently put together to form the meaning intended. Children brought up with television learn to be television literate. They

must understand that television produces images of a reality - a cut refers to a change in scene or a different view point, a fade indicates a longer passage of time, programmes/ stories are punctuated with advertising breaks, etc. Before the age of four, almost all children cannot distinguish between programmes and commercials, by the age of six almost all can, and by the age of ten to eleven almost all understand the purpose of commercials. So it takes quite a few years of television exposure before children understand the structure of the medium, after that they start to deal with the content. [3]

The affects of the content of television have been subject to great debate and numerous studys have been done to examine this, most of them have come up with disturbing findings. One of the earliest, carried out in 1954 by. Dr. Joost Meerloo was a N.Y. school of psychiatry paper called'television addiction and reactive apathy'. Meerloo reached the following conclusions:

1. Television fascination is a real addiction, that is to say, television can become a habit forming device, the influence of which cannot be stopped without active therapeutic interference.

2. It arouses precocious sexual and emotional turmoil seducing children to peep again and again, though at the same time, they are confused by what they see.

3. It continouosly provides satisfaction for agressive
   fantasies (westerns and crime scenes) with subsequent
   guilt feelings since the child unconciously tends to
   identify with the criminal despite all the heroic
   avengers.

4. It is a stealer of time.

5. Preoccupations with television prevents active
   inner creativity children and adults merely sit and
   watch the pseudo world of the screen instead of
   confronting their own difficulties. If there is a
   conflict with the parents - who may have no time
   for their youngsters - the children surrender all
   the more willingly to the screen. The screen talks
   to them, plays with them, takes them into a world
   of magic fantasies, for them television takes the
   place of a grown up and is forever patient. This
   the child translates into care [2]

Meerloo went on to say 'Television....prepares the mind
more easily for collectivisation and cliche thinking. It
persuades the onlooker to think in mass values. It intrudes
into family life and cuts off the more subtle inter-family
communications'.[3]

The idea that people can become addicted to television is
one that is either not considered seriously or treated as

a joke, e.g.: the pun in the programme 'telly addicts'.
Many people casually joke that they are addicted to television
but never fully consider the concept. The idea that large
amounts of television viewing is normal is reaffirmed and
is the focus of much attention in the popular press,(see
Appendix A.)

That television is a very seductive medium is apparent
but given the hegemonic unreality it espouses it is not
clear why it is so seductive. The idea has been put forward
(by Guy Lyon Playfair in 'The evil eye', see the bibliography),
that television subtly hypnotises its viewers. This is
not as fantastical as it may first seem. Hypnotism used
to induce orders to be carried out by patients is best induced
by moving an object in front of a patient rythmically,
'bright ones were best ...... the patient must be made to
understand that he is to keep the eyes steadily fixed on
the object'[4]. When we look at something during normal
conciousness, we see it in two ways, the right side of the
brain observes the information and its emotional (if any)
associations. The left side provides an analysing service
to assess the information and see if it is credible or useful
to us. However, the left side of the brain can be lulled
into a false sense of security or complacency by a
regularly repeated stimulus especially anything with a
flickering light (as in hypnosis). This allows the right
side to absorb any information available unchecked by the
left side. What is television, if not a series of flickering

lights? This is given more credibility by the results of
the Mulhound EEG Scans done on television viewers,(see
Appendix B.) The results showed very slow brain wave activity
while watching television, the kind associated with wholly
passive states - relaxation, meditation, etc, where the
subject is not interacting with the outside world. The
tranquilising effects of television can be compared to
'the shoppers trance syndrome'. Both activities produce
slow beta wave activity in the brain and both are concerned
with consumption. They are like forms of mesmerization
from the abundance of goods or images available.

In a supposedly wholly concious state, children are in an
already perilous situation regarding advertising and the
consumption of social role models. Television puts forward
one view and in order for a healthy viewing situation to
occur, children should be able to counter argue what they
are being told. To do this they must realise the persuasive
possibilities of the medium, and realise that it will contain
biased information. They must be motivated enough to engage
in counter arguing, and have the ability, knowledge and
experience necessary to draw upon for counter arguments,
the same goes for adults. Obviously this situation is
difficult to achieve with children as they do not have the
cognitive or life skills necessary. Acceptance of what
television depicts is all too easy without defences. There
is a lot of evidence to suggest this is true and it is
particularly sad when one considers many of the values children

absorb from television. Television is a unilateral medium
making responses difficult. A study called 'The Notel Study'
was done on a Canadian community a year before and after
receiving television, (see Appendix C.) It noted among other
things that after a year of television watching the
children were more accepting of gender related stereotipication
and they had also become more violent and aggressive.

2

Violence in our society has been repeatedly linked with
television. The connection drawn between violence and
sexuality on television and film,and the increase in sexual
violence and crimes in general has been seen as cause and
effect situation (as will be discussed later). Likewise
the pornography industry has been growing and, its violence
content increasing with the introduction of 'snuff movies'
approximately a decade ago. The entertainment industry
is becoming more and more competitive and to attract
audiences, frequently has to use sensationalist tactics.
Stimulation must become more and more extreme to produce
satisfaction for mass audiences. Whether watching television

portraying violence, incites violence or releases tension
has been continuously debated. But the Eyseck and Nias
study [5] provides persuasive evidence for the former.

Eyseck and Nias set up laboratory experiments to monitor
effects of watching violent television. Children were
divided into two groups and given a film to watch, half
were shown a violent film, the other half a neutral film.
The children were then either given a task to complete or
simply let out to play. The children who watched the violent
film in all circumstances behaved more violently than the
other children. The adults used in the experiment were
unaware that they were the subjects of the experiments.
They were told to administer electric shocks to people as
punishments for making mistakes in what they thought were
learning ability tests. The strength and duration of the
shocks could be measured precisely. After a while the
'torturers' were divided into two groups and shown two
different films. One group was shown a neutral film, the
other a violent one (the Knife scene from 'rebel without
a cause'). Thr group who saw the scene from 'rebel without
a cause' subsequently gave increased shocks of a longer
duration. This was the first study of its kind and Eyseck
and Nias found them consistent in providing evidence that
film violence increases our willingness to hurt or to
insult another person.[6] The explanation for this, is the
desensitisation theory. The process of desensitisation

is used in therapy for phobia eradication. It involves
exposing the phobic person to images and representations
of the object of their phobia. The images are shown in
sequence varying from a very unthreatening one(e.g. small
drawing/photograph) to more threatening images until finally
the person gains enough confidence to confront the phobic
object (e.g.a snake). At all times during the therapy the
person only deals with the most threatening image that they
can cope with while remaining in a relaxed state, so they
come to associate confronting the feared object with a relaxed
state. Eventually in most cases after several weeks the
phobia dissappears. Viewing television in the home offers
the ideal setting for this process. People watch scenes
of second hand violence while comfortable and relaxed in
ther own homes. Contrasting the way they would feel if they
were actually faced with a real rape, robbery or murder.
When this is repeated over and over it begins to have an
ever decreasing affect on the viewer. In 1985 The National
(American) coalition on television violence announced that
the average sixteen year old American has seen approx.
two hundred and fifty thousand acts of violence on television.
A violent act which when encountered in the outside world
would be extremely unpleasant is instead encountered at
home and unconciously associated with all the connotations
of home (love, food, family etc.). Thus, violence becomes
a sort of unconcious "norm".

Eysenck said "It would need a very powerful argument indeed to persuade anyone familiar with the extensive literature on desensitisation, to take seriously the proposition that viewing large numbers of scenes of explicit sex and violence on film or TV would leave the viewer unaffected"[7].

Many people dispose of the argument that television has influenced the increase in violence by saying that society was very violent long before television. However, it is important to note that violent crime rates have risen among young people dramatically but also that violence levels in crime has risen. In 1961 America reached the ninety percent mark for television ownership.By 1963 so had the population of Canada,and England reached the level in 1964. The increase in criminal offences by the young happened in those three countries at precisely the time when the countries first generation raised on television were old enough to commit them. The American/Canadian culture and history is quite different from that of Britain and it would be difficult to explain the parallel increase in violence were it not for the "similar systems of entertainment-orientated violence saturated television"[8].

Repitition of behavioral patterns shown on television has been a large issue of contention in the violence debate particularly. The copy cat syndrome seemed particularly strong in relation to video nastys. The advent of video recorders introduced a number of problems.

It became easier for children to get access to material they wouldn't otherwise see as supervision by parents is not possible on a 24 hour basis. Video recorder availability introduced the "video nasty". In 1984 the English House of Commons set up a working party of teachers and medical practitioners to investigate the extent that video nastys were influencing children.

> "They found that 45% of all children in
> the seven to sixteen age group had seen
> at least one video considered to be
> obscene and subject to prosecution.
> More than 20% had seen 4 or more. Some
> had been profoundly affected by them,
> psychiatrists reporting anxiety symptoms,
> depression, phobia, over-excitement,
> sleep disturbance, behaviour disorders,
> reality distortion and precipitated or
> worsened psychosis".

Video nastys unlike much of the glamour television programmes show violence occurring in familiar urban environments akin to where their viewers reside, leading to confusion as to what is real and not real. These videos almost always combine explicit sex with explicit sensationalist violence linking the two together. One sad extreme example is that of a 4 year old girl who was shown a video nasty by her mother. She told her teacher "and now I know all about sex ...... sex is when a big man knocks you down onto the floor and gets on top of you and you scream and scream until it hurts". Her mother justified showing her the video by saying "Well she's got to find out about life sometime has'nt she?"[9].

The working party found an alarming new amount of violent
behaviour and language in schools. They interviewed
one pupil consequently expelled for viciously attacking
other children, who admitted to being a video nasty addict.
Another study done in Australia came up with similarly
alarming results on the effects of watching video nastys
on children. Given the large numbers of children who
had seen the videos and considering that they were not
the purchasing audience, we are only left to guess at
the number of adults who have seen or regularly watch
these videos. Obvious psychological damage has been
done to many of the children in the survey. It is not
realistic to think that once humans reach the age of
18 or 21 they cannot be affected by material of a potent
nature. Video nastys have been cited in many cases of
violent crimes particularly rapes and murders. Connections
have been drawn between obsessive watching of video nastys
and the perpetration of crimes depicted in them (but
whether this connection is truthful or mere propaganda
is unclear). This is not to say that people blindly
absorb the material they see and duplicate it. Clearly
many individuals can watch this material with no obvious
destructive implications. The process of individual
decoding of images and narratives on television contains
the possibility of many different readings and reactions.
This points towards a discussion of censorship but that
is not the issue in question here. Individual viewers
tend to process what they see in relationship to their

personal circumstances and life experiences. Social

class is an important factor as different class positions

tend to inspire different interpretations of most forms

of culture.

> "Middle class viewers tend to be scared
> into social conformity and fear of crime,
> making them succestible to law and order
> political ideologys, whereas individuals
> prone to violent behaviour may act out
> violent or criminal fantasies nurtured
> by heavy television/film/video watching.
> Likewise although programmes like Three's
> Company and Charlies Angels are encoded
> as vehicles of puritan sexual morality
> (no sexual encounters take place leaving
> the womans sexuality ever "available"
> to the viewer) they may be decoded as
> stimulants to promiscuity or sexual
> fantasy" (10).

While personal circumstances play a large part in decoding

and reacting to broadcast material, there is no doubt

that it does effect viewers. The studies looked at have

shown that television has an imput into the violence

in our society but also effects the gender roles and

rules. The implications of the desensitisation theory

have only been applied to violence, they can however

be applied to other factors of television viewing. Gender

stereotyping is an obvious case for study. Television

portrays sexual difference in an appallingly reductive

manner and particularly misrepresents women. If exposure

on a constant basis to images result in a certain degree

of acceptance or tolerance and given the high amounts

of television viewing in the western world particularly,

the existence and maintainance of sexism and patriarchy
have been aided by television.

<u>3</u>

I now intend to look at how television portrays women
First, the quantity of representations of women is not
the same as that of men. I carried out a survey of
the programmes on offer on six television stations for
one day. There were a total of ninety eight programmes
and for these I designated three categories 1) Male
2) Neutral and 3) Female. The Male category encompased
programmes presented by men or with male protagonists
or were aimed specifically at men, examples of these
programmes were most of the films, sports, some documentarys,
comedies, adventure/detective series and cartoons (childrens
programmes were included). The Female category was a
reversal of the male one and Neutral was for programmes
that did not have a bias towards one sex e.g. comedy
childrens programmes, news broadcasts, music, films and
soap operas. The breakdown of the categories were as

follows: 1) Male   -   51

            2) Neutral   -   39

            3) Female   -   8

The first two categories are numerically close but the
programme types led to a large difference in airtime,
as almost all the films were in category 1, and also
items like sports broadcasts, they took much larger airtime
than the neutral items such as half hour soap operas
and news broadcasts (note this survey was carried out
before the Gulf War). The female category had relatively
short programme durations too, which points to a great
lack of positive female role models in leadership positions.
As a corollary to the desensitisation theory the margin-
alisation of women depicted on television and affirmed
there makes it more difficult for more progressive notions
of improvement for women to flourish. Since women form
over half the population these figures seem to point
to an error of judgement regarding content orientation,
but not when one looks at the context of television
viewing and the power struggles in that situation.

An English study carried out in 1986 by David Morley
documented the gender related different approaches to
television viewing. They found clear differences in
approach between the sexes as had James Lull in an
American study six years earlier.

Since the home is a designated leisure area for men,
and contains the sphere of work for women, men find it
much easier to pursue leisure than women do in the domestic
environment. Women often expressed guilt at watching
television and frequently did so distractedly, e.g. while
sewing or ironing.Many women felt that for them to just
watch television was an indefensible waste of time.
Planning of viewing was usually left to the husband or
elder children. Many of the women had a much more take
it or leave it attitude to viewing not caring if they
missed things with the exception of a few serials or
chat shows which they remained intensely loyal to and
knew the time and day of transmission. Video recorders
proved another gender dominated element.

> "None of the women interviewed operate
> the video recorder to any great extent,
> relying on husband or children to work
> it for them. This is simply an effect
> of their cultural formation as 'ignorant'
> and 'disinterested' in relation to
> machinery in general, and is therefore an
> obvious point but one with profound effects
> nonetheless" (11).

It was also rare for women to make contributions to the
hiring of video tapes.

Men and women showed different programme type preferences
and channel preferences. In the English study almost all the
women favoured ITV and the men BBC, particularly BBC 2.

The men said they preferred documentarys (political or
wildlife), sport, some comedy, especially male centered
comedy, like Only fools and horses, detective series,
especially the more realist dramas. Women on the other
hand preferred escapist fiction, chat shows and frequently
preferred regional news broadcasts to international affairs
orriented ones. One very contentious issue was that
of television related talk: almost without exception,
all the men interviewed wanted silence during television
watching and while some said they subsequently discussed
news broadcasts with friends, most only admitted to
discussing sport. Women however discussed what they
saw before, during and after watching, much to the annoyance
and bafflement of the men present. "... the man and his
son preferring to watch in silence, and unable to understand
how the wife and daughter can watch and talk at the same
time"[12]. Another study done in 1983 points out the higher
degree of men's attentiveness to television. "Fathers,
while viewing television with their wives and children
tend to become engrossed in the television programme
relying on Mothers to ennact the parenting role with
the children"[13]. The Morley study noted that fathers
were less responsive to family members during watching
television and particularly during news broadcasts while
mothers retained a responsive parenting role across
programme types.

In some families television viewing served as a form
for gathering and some group discussion but in most
it served as an alibi against interfamily communication
for the men.

The largest gender related difference in family viewing
was that of programme selection. James Lull observed
"Fathers were named most often as the person who controlled
the selection of television programmes. Children and
Mothers were more likely to regard fathers this way than
were fathers themselves"[14]. Lull found that fathers
controlled more programme decisions than any other single
family member (or collection of family members), and
that they were more than twice as likely as their wives
to control such decisions. Indeed fathers were found
to act alone on their programme decisions in more than
ninety percent of the cases observed.

This is reiterated over and over again in the Morley study
with depressing regularity. Men control the programme
choice with little or no regard for other peoples preferences,
"Women will only usually watch the kinds of material
which they particularly like when their partner is out
of the house (at work or leisure) whereas the men will
often watch the material which they alone like, while
their partner is there - she simply would busy herself
around the house, or sit without really watching"[15].
Both men and women surveyed had a clearly defined idea

of what constituted womens and mens programmes and womens
programmes were usually seen as inferior. They (women)
usually had an emphasis on romantic fiction. Reporting
on one mans ideas Morley says 'Clearly for him "good"
and "fiction" are simply incompatible categories'[16].
It is the most powerful member of the family who defines
what is trivial or important, serious or silly, which
frequently leaves women and their pleasures downgraded
objects and objects of fun, so that they have to consume
(the films and programmes they like) almost in secret.
Many women accept the terms of the masculine hegemony
which defines their pleasures as trivial. By accepting
their second class taste they deny themselves full access
to the most common form of entertainment and information.
Morley said that women do not watch as much television
as men and when they do it is often less attentively
and more fragmented viewing in light of their domestic
responsibilities. Thus, while more women may be "available"
to view television more of the time and their potential
viewing hours considered as a mere matter of quantity
may be greater than those for men, when we consider
attentive viewing, their reported viewing is lower than
that of mens. So the control of programme choice is
primarily a male domain and the highest attentive viewing
figures were clocked up by men, if any channel directors
had done market research would'nt they address the television
structure in general to men? This would help to explain the marginalised
status of women that we currently experience.

It is not merely the quality of female representation
that is important, but even more so, the quality of female
representation.   Mere under-representation would (as
a corollary to the desensitisation theory) lead to the
marginalisation of women, however, women are not only
under-represented but also mis-represented. It is this
misrepresentatlion of women that is television's (and
films) most significant and damaging contribution to
gender specific/related alienation.

<u>4</u>

Classic narrative text (the structure given to almost
with exception, all fictional film and television viewing)
functions on two levels. <u>Level One</u> is the imaginary
world of the screens, the story, the microcosm of the
world that has been created. This world has many formal
regulations but the ultimate aim of classic narrative
text is to give pleasure to the spectator so the text
always works towards that aim - towards closure. The
protagonist of almost all classic narrative text is
male and the women in the text act either as catalysts

(delayers) of action, or rewards of action. Womens'
actions are very limited and are usually reactions to
the given situation rather than actions in their own
right - independent of the pre-existing order. The passivity
of women is required by the text to ensure the reassurance
of closure and thereby to produce the desired pleasure for
the spectator. Level two of classic narrative text is
it's relation to the socio/historical "real world". In
this world the patriarchal order is dominant, it marginalises,
denies and miscontructs femininity and women. Women are
defined as lack or otherness in the way they have traditionally
been in all the arts before the advent of the electronic age.
Kristena said that "women" means "that which is not represented,
that which is unspoken, that which is left out of meanings
and ideologies"[17]. So on either level of classic
narrative text, women are restricted and contained both by
the construction of the imaginery screen world that has
been created and in it's reference to the real world and
its inherent sexism and discrimination.

The representation of women by the mass media in general
seems sometimes to be so pathetically inacurate and
synthetic that it could almost be humourous. But any
notons of humour quickly dissipate when one considers
the vast impact these images and ideologies have on our
culture. The women we usually see adorning our television
screens fit quite easily into the ready made stereotypes
of mothers, whores, gossips, bitches, unintelligent women

and childish women and the plenthora of similar sexist concepts. There is constant unflinching emphasis placed on womens sexuality in all but a few narratives. Even women who are supposedly assexual (old or disabled women) are contrasted with young more sexual women to underline that sexuality by the ("assexual") womens "lack" of sexuality. This ensures that attention focussed on women, focusses on their sexuality. The sexualisation of women is done at every stage of production, from actress choices, dress, make-up, programme/film advertising, dialogue, camera work - a frequent method of introduction of female characters in a narrative is that of a camera shot of her feet and then slowly craning up her body to her face, introducing first the body (usually conventionally slim and attractive) and then the woman. Even music has been encoded to signify female sexuality to the point that saxaphone music is rarely played unless there is a black miniskirt in the vacinity.

Even though women display a heightened sexuality, it is a very ridigly defined one. The depicted sexuality panders to the male ego and eye, slim, attractively dressed, made up women oozing heterosexuality, adorn our screens. Many of the most stereotypically passive behavioural patterns of women (and men) occur in male orientated genres where violence is usually a pre-requisit for any male attempting to prove his manhood. The limiting roles available to women in these games usually relegate women to highly sexualised

beings whose only contribution to the text is this highly
visible sexuality. The high violence factor common in
most of these films is accepted with the ease of the
acceptance of the stereotypically passive behaviour of
both sexes which places male violence in the same context
as female sexuality. Constant reresentation of this scenario
inevitably leads to a connection being made on some concious
or subconscious level by viewers.

Violence is portrayed as a sort of innate drive in men and
has been accepted as such by the popular media. Womens drives are
significantly less visible but are usaully in some way
connected to their reproductive organs. Male image makers
and sometimes female ones following a male tradition, portray
women as objects to be consumed and veiwed. This voyerism
encourages women to look at themselves with mens eyes and
objectify themselves.

> "Men act and women appear. Men look at women.
> Women watch themselves being looked at. This
> determins not only most relations between men
> and women, but also the relation of women to
> themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself
> is male, the surveyed, female. Thus she turns
> herself into an object and most particularly an
> object of vision; a sight" 18

Sex and violence are the two most negatively publicised
elements of television (particularly violence as I have
already discussed). It seems strange that the two should
be equated which they frequently are and it seems even

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stranger that of the two, sex is seen as the most
socially destructive. This is apparently becuase of the
high amount of violence on our television screens (from
childrens television to late night adult viewing) and
the relatively low amounts of sexual activity depicted.
It seems more socially acceptable i.e., is deemed less
socially destructive to penetrate a person with a knife
or bullet that to penetrate them with a penis, that it is
more acceptable to see someone involved in some form of
explicit violence than some form of explcit sexual activity.
Sexual activity is usually shown in the context of of power
domination and control rather than a mutual exchange of
love/affection/pleasure between equal people.   The
acceptability of displays of violence over sexual
representations is a depressing statement on notions of
perceived female and male sexuality.

Even though male sexuality and reality is repressed by
male controlled structures, those in power deam the
sufferings inflicted on men (if they are aware they exist
at all) are a small price to pay for the maintanance of
the patriarchal system. By repressing women and enforcing
a dominent role on men,   the old order is kept in position.
The relationships of male image makers to women and the
portrayal of their bodies has had a long and inglorious
tradition. From Titian to Allen Jones, male artists have
rendered female nudes in passive positions facing the
spectator with a look of intimacy suggesting the

possibilities of future gratifications. Many of these
paintings were not available for public consumption,
they were commissioned and displayed privately. To own
the painting was to own the woman. Similarities arise
with film and television particularly with publicity shots
film posters and video covers. Traditionally women were
presented as devoid of body hair except on a few accepted
areas - crown of the head and eyebrows and eyelashes. Body
hair was supposedly a sign of sexual prowess and women were
allowed to be signifiers of sexual desire but must also
be passive, lying back thinking of England, Italy, Spain
or whereever. Even today womens' bodies are censored and
remoulded, they bow to convention. The aim was to pander
to the sexuality of the male consumer, it had nothing to
do with the sexuality of the male consumer, it had nothing
to do with the sexuality of the woman being represented.
A new sexual identity had been constructed for her to
assume and so it is with todays representations of women
in films and television. Image makers and consumers
have colluded in an act of imperialism over womens
sexuality. Images are created to confirm to a male
defined ideal.

Binary opposition is an element of hegemonic narrative
texts we see repeated over and over again. It is more
characteristic of television narratives because of the
demands placed on that medium by the circumstances of
its viewing. As I have already discussed television must
battle for attention over other domestic concerns. It
has developed its own simple repetitive code. It is
made relatively easy for a viewer to enter into a
narrative at any point and be able to identify
the main character types (good guys/bad guys). The
combination of good vs bad, active vs passive are used
because they are easy to understand. Stereotyping is
accepted becuase there is no time to do anything else.
The world consists almost entirely of heroes and villans.
Binary opposition has been most notably used to depict
the relationship of men to women and the suppression
intrinsic to that relationship. Elaine Croux examines this
in her book "La Jeanne Nee", under the heading of'where is
she'. She draws up the following list of binary oppositions:

Activity - Passivity	Father - Mother
Sun - Moon	Head - Emotions
Culture - Nature	Intelligible - Sensitive
Day - Night	Logos - Pathos

In the end they all come back to the fundamental couple

of male/female. This dichotomy is re-affirmed constantly
in society From an early age boys and girls learn eg. what
colours are appropriate to their sex. In the male female
dichotomy, women are assigned the passive, receptive or less
prestigous roles. As in the case of television viewing
and the hierarchial structure of who decides what is
trivial and what is important the values assigned to men
have far more prestige than women. This is not because of
their innate superiority but because men have had the power
to give them superiority.

The traditional shot, counter shot structure is used to
depict interaction between characters in a narrative. In
this structure the camera assumes the eyeline of both
characters in turn, so the spectator feel he/she is as close
as possible to being present in the situation. This
structure almost always has a feeling of male control
about it so that the spectoator is given the male position
to identify with more so than the female one. In Laura
Mulvey's 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative
Cinema"[19] she maintained that pleasure from narrative
film is derived from the two processes objectification
of the image and identification with it. Objectification
is a result of the scopophilic drive and the power inherant
in owning the gaze. Identification is a process of
pleasureble identification with the (male) protagonist
and through identification with him, the power indirectly
to posess the female character who is displayed as a
sexual object for him. The male lead usually compels
the story forward and in identification with this the
spectator is identifying with that power to advance the
situation - to share in that power. Her argument hinged
on compulsive identification with the male as the only
non-masochistic position available for women to identify
with. She felt that all classic narrative cinema
ostracised women from powerful positions and constructed
an image of the spectator as male, or female identifying
with the masculine viewpoint. She did not allow for the
possibility of there being a positive female gaze and

decided that the oppression caused to women was due to the
pleasure-giving structure of cinema and its inherant
sexism. Mulvey decided the only positive potion was for
a feminist avant garde cinema which was by comparison to
mainstream cinema, almost pleasureless. Subsequent work
has underlined the inadequacies of her article. However,
it has remained a cornerstone of feminist film theory.
The subsequent article in 1981 "Afterthoughts on Visual
Pleasure"[20] give female spectators a more mobile position
and she acknowleged the presence of a female gaze. This
came from re-reading Freud's theories of the difficulties
of attaining heterosexuality for women. As women are
required to give up future aspirations to phallic activity
and must also relinquish the female love object as infants,
they oscilate between masculine and feminine identifications
because of the precariousness of their situations. The
pleasure women derive from narrative texts and their exact
point of identification is not clear. However, a rigid
structuralist type of approach will solve nothing. The
gratificationless feminist avant garde cinema never broke
through to mainstream audiences simply because of its lack
of pleasure (and inaccessibility). It served only to
bolster the troops which in itself is a necessary and
worthwhile task, but in terms of altering cultural percept-
ions, is futile. Women too need pleasure, and get it from
mainstream cinema (albeit in a depressingly hegemonic way),
or otherwise they would not go to the cinema or watch
television. There is evidence to suggest that female

spectators prefer female stars.[21] The female spectators may
identify with the screen actresses' ability to be desirable
to men. However, there is also the phenomenan of audience
fascination with female screen stars (and fascination in relationships
between female stars depicted in narratives eg "All About
Eve" and "Desperately Seeking Susan".) The relationships
are interchanges of feminine fascinations

> "This fascination is neither purely identification
> with the other woman, nor desire for her in the
> strictly erotic sense of the word. It is a desire
> to see, to know and to become more like an
> idealised feminine other, in a context where the
> difference between two women is repeatedly
> re-established". 22

This should not be surprising seeing as our culture has
such a high trade in images of women. Women are presented
as both the object and focus of desire. What this means
for heterosexual women is not yet quite clear but lesbian
readings of many films and television programmes have
definately not been hegemonic. In non-leabian work there
has been a history of alternative readings by the gay
community.

The question of the gaze is still a difficult one and room
must be allowed for shifts in identification. In the
majority, film and television give us idealised male
heroes who in Lacanianterms give back to men their 'ideal
 I", the mirror image of perfection. Women on the other
hand are given only powerless figures who are passive and/or

victimised, which reinforces the sense of worthlessness it is so easy for women to acquire in this society. These women too are ideal images of perfection but more images (ie. powerless) than their male equivalent, they lack the power of the protagonist. If the ultimate aim of narrative texts is pleasure giving (though it doubtless has many other functions; educational, carthic socialising, propaganda etc) spectators will alter their positions according to their drives to adjust to what gives them pleasure. Sub-groups can usually take subversive readings from any text and this must always be considered by anyone engaged in producing art. People will always bring their own life experiences to bear on their readings of any text, their hopes, desires and fears will all contribute to their interpretation and positions of entry. Unfortunately,there does exist a bias towards masculine orientation, not the monolithic structure Laura Mulvey suggested, but nonetheless a strong element in the majority of our viewing choice.

Binary opposition is not a satisfactory structure; the logic of culture vs nature, with culture (humans)playing the dominant role is gradually disintegrating as ecological disasters are immanent. The head/emotions and intelligible/ sensitive concepts deny men access to their feelings and women to power to act. Feelings and the want to do are drives and if thwarted lead to confusion and alienation. Characteristics labelled 'masculine' are socially undesirable in women and likewise 'feminine' characteristics

the subject of derision when exhibited by men. Television
reinforces this mode of behaviour constantly.

From television children observe how they are supposed to
act and behave when taking their position in society. With
the social changes taking place there are more working
mothers and single parent families, so television is often
used as a babysitter due to the unavailability of parents.
Television becomes a source of comfort and therefore is
more easily accepted and less readily criticised by
people who have experienced it that way. The good/bad/,
male/female, active/passive dichotoms, are easy to consume
because the fixed values are comforting in their stability.
Unfortunately, the binary oppostiion values give us a
world where everything is either black or white with no
grey in between. Role models have become so rigidly
defined by these standards that it can lend to intolerance
and conformist attitudes. Cult stars almost always conform
to their gender specific roles. The male stars are tough
and conform to certain looks, like Clint Eastwood and
Harrison Ford. Female stars are usually very good looking
and stars like Jodie Foster, Julia Roberts, Michelle
Pfeifer of the last decade have a new spirit of independence
but a compulsory vunerability too, they must have a helpless/
passive side to comply with the requirements of classic
narrative text. Even though many texts marginalise women
and there are less female stars then male ones, ther is still
the cult of over-valuation of fetished (female) star

worship.   Select female actresses have always been
exhaulted by the media and public, and still are.   This is
much more prevailent in the film industry, but exists also
in television narratives (eg. Dallas and Dynasty) to a
lesser degree.   Part of the reason for this is because
film is inscribed more firmly in the realm of fantasy than
television and has more space for fantastically "perfect"
being than the more domesticatic orientated television.
Marketing is another causitive factor.   Traditionally films
were marketed by the pulling power of their stars and the
popularity of the genre .   Visibility and definition came
from whatever the main actor and actress projected of
themselves, so image and glamour became more closely
associated with films and cinema. E.Ann   Kaplen has
suggested that the reason for the cult (in Freudian terms)
is that the camera unconciously fetishises the female
figure rendering it phallus like, so as to mitigate womens
threat.   Men, that is, turn the represented figure into a
fettish so it becomes reassuring rather than threatening.
This however, is an idea complying with the idea of a
phallocentric cinema, and it derives womens desire (and
fascination as has been mentioned).   Perhaps as women have
been presented as commodities, it is really a case of
commodity fetishism (by men).

The hegemonic ideal promoted by television will never be
attained by most people in the way they or their partners
look or in the lifesytle they lead.   Nevertheless, the

a hegemonic value system will have a large impact on their

lives in their relation to it and particularly their

efforts to attain it. These values are just images and

give the illusion of choice.

> "A capitalist society requires a culture based
> on images. It needs to furnsih vast amounts
> of entertainment in order to stimulate buying
> and anethisize the injuries of class, race and
> sex. But it needs to gather unlimited
> information, the better to exploit natural
> resources, increase productivity, keep order,
> make war, give jobs to bureaucrats. The
> cameras twin capacities to subjectivise reality and
> objectify it, ideally serve these needs and
> strenghten them. Cameras define reality in the
> two ways essential to the workings of an
> advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for
> masses) and as an object of surveillance (for
> rulers). The production of images also furnishes
> a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced
> by a change in images. The freedom to consume
> a plurality of images and goods is equated with
> freedom itself. The narrowing of free political
> choice to free economic consumption requires the
> unlimited production and consumption of images"

Since those who control the media are almost all (rich)

men, there is every incentive for them to present the

capitalist patriarchal scheme of things as the most

attractive system available and to convince the less

privileged that the oppression and limitations in their

lives are inevitable. If people can be persueded of this,

the imposition of social controls become unnecessary as

they regulate their own behaviour. Gramasci's concept

of idealogical hegemony suggests that idealogy is a

shared view and thereby makes direct controls unnecessary.

Both the ruling class and the ruled, perceive idealogy

simply as social values and the natural state of existance (despite the fact that this is not in both parties interest). Hegemonic ideology tends to legitimate dominant values, institutions and ways of life, so the content of most of our films and television programmes are not surprising. Television and film do not produce ideology it repackages and represents ideology, that is the ideology of the spectacle. This ideology as previously stated comes mostly from the hegemonic tradtiion but also to a very small extent from other fringe groups and sub-cultures. Watching television, is watching almost continous re-affirmation of white heterosexual capitalist, patriarchal values.

Sometimes however, threats to existing hegemonic ideology are permitted to be expressed in culture, examples of this range from marxist and feminist publications, to various television programmes: especially documentaries and some comedy (notably the Monty Python series from the early seventies). There are different reasons for allowing these threats to hegemonic ideology into mainstream culture; the first is money. The short term benefits (financial) may be seen to outweigh the long term negative effects: the invitation to question ruling ideologies. There is also the motive of appeasment.

The relationships of feminism to the film and televison industry has been a changing one. During the second

world war, the media encouraged women to work and discard
many traditional ideals, to help their country in a time
of hardships. This push proved to women that they were
just as capable as men at doing many things that they
previously believed they were unable to do. They also
relished the financial independence they had gained. The
end of the war signaled a reversal drive to push women
back into traditional 'feminine' roles. This provided
the stimulus for the birth of feminism that grew into
the womens movement of the 60s, 70s and 80s and is still
with us. After the war the"film noirs"and"womens films"
of the period encouraged women to retreat to conventional
home based family making. It encouraged mistrust of
indepentent women and showed what horrors could befall
their children through lacking a devoted mother. Children,
family life and neat homes were celebrated with the
emphasis on consuming as a source of happiness,
particularly for women, as long as they remained the passive
partner in their marriage. Women who were not passive in
films were usually punished or were shown to be morally
inferior. Despite government campaigns and media pressure
the genesis of the womens movement had started initially
around neighbours kitchen tables and gradually to the
concious raising groups of the 70s. By the 70s, women
imformed by feminism (and the slowly increasing tolerance
of feminist ideas) constituted a large enough and lucrative
enough audience to justify to the broadcasting of
previously considered reactionary material. Programmes

such as "The Mary Tylor Moore Show" and its
subsequent spin-off series showed women becoming independent
and living without the help of their family or a husband
to support them financially. The programmes were not
exactly incitments to revolution, but their very presence
was a public acknowledgment of a social upheaval. To
represent an idea on television or film can be construed
as an affirmation/acceptance of it. But the reasons for
allowing subtly feminist material on television may not
have been so noble. As has been suggested, fetishism may
by an attempt to nullify the threat posed by women, by
representing them and going through the subsequent
identification. Similarly, by representing diluted
images from the womens movement it can be absorbed into
the culture and its threat is removed.

A number of these more progressive representations of women
have been broadcast over the years (one of which I will
disucss in greater detail). All in some way contradicting
to the patriarchal hegemony. One common trait in all
these programmes American or British, is that the women
in them are seen very much as a novelty. The representations
are of strong women but they also come across as unique
and are rarely presented as being in positions that are
viable options for other women. The last twenty years in
particular have been a time of intense political change
for women and, as during all periods of social change, the
issues in question come under a great deal of social

scrutiny. Part of the media debate on feminism and the
changing role of women has been in the form of narrative texts.
The representation of strong women was inevitable, but not
always progressive, e.g. Joanna Lumley's character in
'The Avengers' was supposedly a positive female role
model but she too aquiesced to the status of sex object,
as does Joan Collin's character in 'Dynasty'. These
supposedly progressive images have been appropriated by
hegemonic culture and subverted for their own ends
either by distortion or textual isolation. There is also
the problem of appeasment by images i.e.'thinking"if-women
are-represented-as-"liberated"-on-television,-then-they
must-be-so-I-don't-need-to-compaign/fight-for-anything".
There is also the ever present problem of how small the
quality of these images are in relation to their totally
hegemonic counterparts, they are not plentiful enough to
have a strong impact on mainstream culture.

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Starting with "Midnight Cowboy" in 1969 a number of (male)
buddy movies were released. The provided the stimulus

for the plenthora of male partner centred television
detective series that followed, and were very successful in
getting high viewing figures world-wide. The men in these
programmes were defined by personal and professional
relationships to each other. Initially women were
marginalised completely to wives and girlfriends who were
seen for 30 seconds per programme e.g. "The Streets of
San Fransisco". Alternatively they were the victims of
crime. When women were given roles as police officers or
detectives, they were usually just present to create
sexual interest and had a minimal contribution to make to
the crime solving aspect of their jobs e.g. Heather
Lochlear's character in "T.J. Hooker". Meanwhile, the men
were busy proving their masculinity by the obligatory use
of violence before the resolution of the crime. The
emphasis with female characters was (and to a large extent
still is) on the glamour of their characters rather than
their ability to do their job. The potential progressive
work that could be done in relation to realistic depitctions
of female strength is negated by the insistance on glamour.

Series like "Moonlighting" and "Dempsy and Makepeace" are
more about the dynamics of sexual tension in the partner-
ships than the crime solving aspects. The women in these
series have introduced high fashion to detective dramas
adding to their conventional appeal.

A handfull of series however have shown women in the

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positive light of competancy at their job without necessarily
being the object of a heterosexual love interest. These
programmes provide the very necessary representation of
positive independent role models. But as already mentioned
the impact of these series is undermined by the representation
of these women as unique and isolated in the male world they
work in. There are rarely other women co-workers coming up
through the ranks to join them in positions of authority.
Programmes like "The Gentle Touch" and "Juliet Brave" focus
on the womans personal life in a way male centred dramas do
not. This is both a good and bad thing, good as it gives
more rounded character development and bad as it takes part
of the focus away from the woman's job (supposedly the
focus). The wider issues of sexism and patriarchal order
never seem to be as important to these women as they would
be to any woman who had to struggle for recognition in any
area as male dominated as policy for detective work.

One series in this genre is unique in that it has captured
the public imagination and can be defined (albeit "watered
down") as feminist in essence: "Cagney and Lacey". Even
though the actresses concerned have said they do not consider
themselves feminist[23] the programme depticing female
co-workers without the usual exploitative elements must be
influenced (and helped) by the growth of feminism. The
show has closed down for a period of a few months and gone
through two main actress changes for the part of Christine
as there were fears the previous actresses were too butch

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and spectators might read lesbian undertones into the series. The show is now estimated to have nine million regular viewers as well as a substantial American audience.

The two female leads, Christine and Mary-Beth are friends and partners. They are caring and efficient at their job as police detectives working in New York. The married life of Mary-Beth is explored in her relationship with her children and husband Harvey. The difficulties of unemployment for Harvey and of working and having a family for Mary-Beth are both plot themes. In contrast Christine is single (the writing team consist of two women friends and one of their husbands) and comes from a wealthier background than Mary - Beth. Both characters express diff- erent ideas, often influenced by their differing backgrounds and personal lives, but neither viewpoint or situation is seen as more important or correct then the other. The work issues that are dealt with are varied, but many are from feminist related concerns like child abuse, rape, abortion, sexual harrasement, violence against women and pornography as well as the usual homocides, kidnapping and robberies. A major difference between Cagney and Lacey and most detective series is that the perception of crime is not seen as something alien or isolated, instead it becomes more personal and is related to the womens' own lives. For example, in the episode dealing with pornography Mary-Beth also has to deal with her son's consumption of "girlie magazines". In this way, controversial issues are

related to both the public and private sphere of life. The
two women discuss their cases professionally and also form
their personal point of view providing discussion and
material for audience contemplation/discussion in both
the personal and political situations.

Humour surfaces in the series as an important device. This
has long been an element on subversive attack, especially
the tradition of political characterisation. The humour
is most apparent in Cagney and Lacey's approach to dealing
with Isbecki, a co-worker obsessed with his own machismo.
He constantly tries to redeploy Cagney and Lacey into the
realm of heterosexual love interests and therefore into
disempowerment. Cagney and Lacey deflect Isbeck's
derogatory comments and actions back onto himself by
mocking him. The power he exercises in his attempts to
sexualise the women and display his own potency is
dissipated. Instead Cagney and Lacey reversing the power
situation and assuming the dominant positions by their put
downs of him, they open up the situation, inviting laughter
from other characters present and the spectators. They
return Isbecki's gaze and instead of controlling it give it
to everyone present. It is this kind of action that is
likely to open up more discussion and debate on grater
issues. A more serious approach to sexist behaviour in
the series, like dramatic anger has the potential to
frighten people off and alienate them from the offered
identification with the women's point of view. This is

the kind of intervention necessary to promote fruitful
idealogical change. The series is one of the few mainstream
narratives that show relations between men and women that are
not sexually oriented.

There is a lot of emphasis placed on the emotional closeness
of the two women. The last scene in a dramatic two part
episode (which dealt with Christine taking a sergeant's
exam and Mary-Beth having an operation to stop the spread
of breast cancer) was a feeeze frame of Christine and
Mary-Beth in mutual gaze as Christine leans over Mary-Beth
in bed. The mutual gaze is usually only used in the
depiction of heterosexual lovers and donates strong
emotional affection. The fact that their personal life is
shown in the unexploitative way it is, gives the show an
edge of realism lacking in similar shows. When Mary-Beth
became pregnant she was shown to be pregnant for the
approximate duration of a pregnancy instead of skimming
over it with the usual four week television-pregnancy.
During this time Mary-Beth also addressed a meeting of
many other pregnant women co-workers on pregnancy and
(police) work. Through sequences like this we get the
sense of continuity with womens achievements unlike in
"Juliet Bravo" and "The Gentle Touch" women are shown to
be advancing in the world of work. The issued in this
programme refreshingly are not two womens' sexual
availability but their friendship and professionalism.

CONCLUSION

The very act of television watching is subject to the
patriarchal hierarchy and it's ideology is similarly
orientated to consumers of the politically and socially
predominant ideology, of which sexism is a major
component. Television's espousal of hegemonic
ideology, coupled with it's persuasive capabilities make
it a strong factor in the maintenance of capitalism and
patriarchy. The revolutionary possibilities of a
feminist counter-cinema failed, for obvious reasons of
inaccessibility (both material and intellectual) and so
points to feminist intervention into mainstream popular
as the most positive step forward to reaching target
audiences. The popularity of series like Cagney and
Lacey demonstrate that using a pre-existing structure
(like a detective partner show,) that have acheived a degree
of familiarity with spectators, invites them to tolorate
(or accept) ideologies they would otherwise probably
reject. The effects of this more latent approach are not
as obvious or immediate as forthright shock material but
by the generation of tolerance may have a more lasting
effect on cultural perceptions of women. What ultimately
needs to be done is to orientate television ideologies
away from their hegemonic basis, a task which is becoming
more and more difficult with the advancement of the age
of corporate capitalism. I conclude with a quote from

"The Image World" by Susan Sontag,

> "Images are more real than anyone could have
> supposed and just because they are an unlimited
> resource, one that cannot be exhausted by
> consumerist waste there is all the more reason to
> apply the conservationist remedy. If there can
> be a better way for the real world to include the
> one of images, it will require an ecology not only
> of real things but of images as well".

APPENDIXES

Appendix A

In 1986 two sociologists Laurie Taylor and Bob Mullan
surveyed British Tabloids with regard to television.
They found the tabloids (British) employed 40 full time
television reporters. Five daily and Sunday papers during
one week had a total of one hundred and seventy four items
related to television. The space devoted to television
news and gossip exceeded the amount of space devoted to
foreign affairs.

Appendix B

Thomas Mullhound carried out EEG scans on 10 young people
while they watched their favourite television programmes.
Expecting to see plenty of fast beta wave activity (13 to
15 cycles per second) he was surprised to see slow beta
waves (7 to 13 per second) the kind induced by wholly passive
states - relaxation, meditation etc.

Appendix C

Another study done in 1972 by T.M. Williams was a Canadian
assessment of the effects of television viewing on a community.
In the survey a town called Notel (not its real name) was

compared with two neighbouring towns, Multital and United.
Notel did not receive television at the start of the
experiment but was connected to CBC one year after the initial
assessment was done. Both of the other towns received
television before the assessment began. Initially the Notel
adults proved a good deal brighter than those in the other
two towns. They were better at creative problem solving
tests and if they could not do the tests, would try for
longer than their comtempories in the other towns. The
children of Notel came out better academically as well
in ideational fluency. However, they did come last in one
test - the one for agression. Two years later Williams
found a dramatic drop in community participation in Notel
especially among older people. The childrens reading skills
had dropped as well as their desire to try to accomplish
mentally difficult tasks. The children instead of coming
last, now came first with both physical and verbal agression.
Williams also noticed more gender related stereotypically
passive behaviour among the Notel children.

Note - further information on these three studys can be
found in 'The evil eye' by Guy Lyon, Playfair , see bibliography.

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