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TV Aesthetics and the Representation of Women

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Artiklen beskæftiger sig med hvordan TV æstetikken bestemmer fremstillingen af kvinder, dels generelt, og dels gennem en analyse af Bazar.

Bazar er et dansk litterært talk-show der har været sendt direkte hver uge foråret 84, efteråret 85 og foråret 86 med i alt 32 programmer. Programmets tyngdepunkt er sædvanligvis en diskussion mellem fire forfattere om et emne i tilknytning til deres aktuelle udgivelser.

Artiklen tager udgangspunkt i den angelsaksiske feministiske filmteori, der beskriver den klassiske hollywoodfilm som en form, der strukturerer det mandlige voyeristiske blik på kvinden. For at se om de samme mekanismer findes i TV, inddrages nyere teori om TV æstetikken, der på samme psyko- og tekstanalytiske grundlag beskriver TV oplevelsen som en dobbelthed af forventning og frustration i modsætning til filmoplevelsen, der bygger på etableringen af en illusion. TV giver ikke rum for opbygningen af den mandlige almagtillusion og etableringen af det voyeristiske blik. Man kan derimod sige, at alle seere generelt anbringes i en kvindelig eller prædipal situation i forhold til TV.

Men dette betyder ikke, at der ikke kan tales om specifikt kønnede tilskuerpositioner eller fremstilling af køn i de enkelte TV-programmer. For at TV skal kunne sætte seeren i en

tilstand af forventning og frustration, er det nødvendigt at appellere til hhv. kvindelige og mandlige lyster for at forventningen kan opbygges. Dvs. at programmer og dele af programmer på forskellig måde kan appellere til mandlige og kvindelige lyster, og at der derved skabes forskellige former for fremstillinger af kvinder. F.eks. kan hhv. den engelske og amerikanske kvindeggenre Soap Opera og den amerikanske krimiserie Miami Vice beskrives som programmer, der appellerer til og frustrerer hhv. kvindelige og mandlige lyster.

I Bazar er der en konflikt mellem patriarkalske og præødepale elementer: Der er en hierarkisk struktur i anvendelsen af den gennemgående ordstyrer, forholdet mellem de medvirkende, diskussionen der er struktureret som en lineær fortælling med faste roller og konflikter, og der er en flad struktur i sammensætningen af de fire forfattere og en kamerasætning, der er bygget op til at disse fire skal komme i et ligevægtigt spil med hinanden uden ordstyrerens indblanding.

Den fremherskende patriarkale struktur bevirker at de medvirkende kvinder udsættes for, om ikke objektiverende blikke, som ikke kan finde udtryk i det neutrale og verbalsprogdominerede talk-show, så voyeristiske og fetishistiske mekanismer på andre niveauer. Kvinder er enten slet ikke tilstedeværende, eller får en perifer rolle i forhold til mandlige spektakulære hovedpersoner og/eller til programmets hovedtema. Selv når de kvindelige projekter har en fremtrædende placering, bliver de alligevel set fra en mandlig synsvinkel. Men de præødepale træk i programmet giver også kvinderne mulighed for at unddrage sig det patriarkale mønster, hvis de er flere sammen i et program, og kommunikere udenom den mandlige konfliktdominerede diskussion. I det hele taget underordner de kvindelige medvirkende sig ikke uden modstand det patriarkalske system, men benytter forskellige strategier for at iscenesætte sig selv på en måde, der bryder med og peger på det patriarkalske mønster, og derved skabe rum for et kvindeligt udtryk.

The project of this paper is to take a look at how TV aesthetics determine the representation of women. I will especially look at the Danish program Bazar. Bazar is a literary talk-show, usually structured around a discussion between four writers. I have chosen Bazar as an example partly because it has been broadcast for three seasons, and therefore can be considered typical of the program policy of Denmark's Radio, and partly because there are relatively many women in the program compared to other non-fiction programs. It is far more interesting to look at the representation of women when they are actually there!

My theoretical point of interest has been to see how feminist film theory can be adjusted to TV. Feminist film theory has provided us with the most useful tool to investigate the representation of women in visual narratives, but as TV uses other aesthetic devices than cinema, an adjustment is necessary. In my paper I will discuss some recent analyses of the difference between film and TV and especially the implications of gender. As these analyses concern TV on a general level, I also refer to some analyses of programs, addressing themselves respectively to women and men.

Classical Narrative Cinema and the Representation of Women

TV doesn't provide the male spectator with the same pleasure as the mainstream narrative cinema. Because of the dual character of the screen image, with its extreme realism and material absence, and because the spectator sits immobile in the dark theatre, where he can look without being looked at himself, he is allowed the almighty feeling of being the creator of the film, the pleasure of the voyeuristic gaze and of identification with the hero of the film. These are the basic elements of the pleasure in film spectatorship, which is structured according to the needs of the male unconscious (1).

Classical narrative cinema has developed a series of narrative devices to play on the male unconscious, structured by the oedipus complex: The ambivalence of longing for and fearing regression to the presymbolic symbiotic state, the hate/love relationship to women, and identification with the super ego, the father. Hollywood cinema is structured according to the two scopolistic gazes: The desire to identify with another person, and the desire to take another person as an erotic object. Hollywood cinema constructs a linear narrative and a perspective space, and the function of editing is not to dissolve time and space, but to make the narrative more dramatic, effective and dynamic. Characters are one dimensional or at least transparent, and do not change fundamentally. The spectator is offered the possibility of identifying with the principal character. The message of the narrative film is brought about by the action. The action has a subject, usually this principal character, and the spectator has identified himself with the principal character. This means that there is a very polarized subject-object structure: The spectator is the subject of his own perception, the principal character is the subject of the narrative, while the outside world and the subordinate characters are objects of the actions of the main character. This merging of the subject of the narrative, the ideology of the film and the object of identification is the norm, only, however, when the main character is male.

In a society structured by sexual difference, pleasure in looking has been split into active/male and passive/female. The female gaze does not exist in classical narrative cinema, where the spectator is offered only two gazes: The gaze at the woman, making her an object of desire, the goal of ambitions or condemnations to the male hero and identification with the male hero, acting in and controlling the fictional universe. Woman is the object of the gaze, man is the representative of power. The narrative wouldn't function the other way round: The male spectator wouldn't accept a male character being displayed exhibitionally, because he cannot accept objectification, and on the other hand women cannot function as the principal charac-

ter, because men refuse to identify with women, whom they consider inferior.

If the woman is the main character (as in melodrama) the subject is split into two. The woman may remain the narrative subject, but the film is not structured according to her gaze, she is not the visual subject. A male subordinate character is chosen to be the visual subject, through whose eyes we look at the female principal character.

Woman, however, as an object of desire evokes the anxiety of castration:

"The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: Preoccupation with the reenactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment, or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of the film noir), or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it become reassuring rather than dangerous (hence overvaluation, the cult of the female star). This second avenue, fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The first avenue voyeurism, on the contrary, has associations with sadism: Pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control, and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness.

This sadistic side fits in well with narrative. Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end. Fetishistic scopophilia, on the other hand, can exist outside linear time as the erotic instinct is focused on the look alone..." (2).

TV Aesthetics

TV does not provide the male spectator with the same pleasure as the cinema. Image and the spectator situation is different in TV, and does not allow the same voyeuristic experience of power and identification (3).

The TV narrative is not a coherent narrative that tells a story with a beginning and an end. TV consists of small, relatively disparate segments, which are either simply cumulative, like in the news, or have some kind of sequential connection, like in the series and serials. Pleasure in looking at TV does not arise from the possibility of following the development of a story and the solution of the conflict, but to see the same story told over and over again with slight variations. The pleasure in TV-viewing is one of repetition and novelty. On the other hand, segmentalization means that there are constant ruptures in the narrative, which places the viewer in a constant state of frustration. Unlike film spectatorship, which is based on the possibility of illusion, TV-viewing is based on expectation and frustration.

The TV experience is one of being there, feeling close to reality. The narrative devices to build up this experience are the impression of live transmission and direct address. Even though very little TV is actually transmitted live, the instant editing used in studio productions and the very little editing being done afterwards, leaves the narrative time almost like real time (which is very uncommon in film). Direct address is almost prohibited in cinema, because it breaks the illusion. TV, however, is permitted to use direct address

according to certain rules: only the journalists and heads of state are allowed to address the public directly. Through the mode of direct address, the journalist functions as an anchor person, who can establish a consensus with the viewer, leaving the rest of the world outside. The journalist identifies with the viewer and asks the questions the viewer is likely to think of. The experience of TV as real owes more to these devices of immediacy, intimacy and presence than to any realism of the TV image. The TV image does not create the same illusion of reality as the film image. It is smaller and not as gradated, which means that it is less detailed and has less perspective. Therefore the TV image only contains the necessary information, and its style is most often 'normal', only some genres like Music Videos and some series allows for ex-

perimentation. This makes sound in TV as important as image. The TV image must be read in a single glance, and doesn't allow the concentration of the gaze.

Implications Regarding Gender

Ellis as well as Houston, consider implications in regard to gender in the differences between the aesthetics of film and TV. Ellis argues that the female body is not displayed as an object for the voyeuristic gaze because, as he says, of "TV's low emphasis on the construction of the voyeuristic position" (4). The female body is still being displayed in TV, in series like Charlie's Angels for instance, but it is "gestural, rather than fascinating" and "provide material for the glance only" (5). This has also something to do with narrative, he says: "TV's level of investment in voyeuristic activity is generally not intense enough to produce the investigatory and forward-moving narratives that are characteristic of entertainment cinema" (6). As an exception he notes a sort of fetichistic interest in TV's female newsreaders, but with the face instead of the body as object.

Even if the female body is not being displayed as object for the male gaze in TV, patriarchal attitudes can be expressed in other ways. For instance by some of the narrative devices described by Ellis. The construction of "the other" by the mode of direct address, that which is outside the complicity set up by the anchor person and the viewer calls for attitudes like "patronization, hate, wilful ignorance, pity, generalized concern, indifference" (7). Attitudes which can also be described as variations of a patriarchal attitude, as I will argue in my analysis of Bazar. Also the hierarchy set up by the mode of direct address may be invested with patriarchal attitudes. Houston maintains in relation to TV aesthetics and gender, that TV puts its entire scope or spectators in a position much like the feminine subject and spectator.

As it has been theorized in regard to soap opera and melodrama, feminine subjectivity is based on the continuous identification with the mother and an added identification with the father, which allows women a wider range of identification than that of the male spectator.

"The power of the mother position, to which we are never immune (its loss always an invitation to obsession); the sliding from the imaginary pleasure of mastery through the passivity of being ourselves the object of direct address and the seductive gaze; the attendant reduced stake in an apparent coherence of the signified; the multiple identifications called for in the movement from fiction to fiction and mode to mode; finally the forced acceptance of painful delay, deferral, waiting - these characteristics put all of television's spectators into the situation provided for the feminine in theories of subjectivity as well as her actual development and practice in patriarchy. Television in America requires these forms of behaviour, not as the margins of avant garde alterity or even in special texts produced for and about women, but right in the center of the mainstream of what is arguably - for better or for worse - America's most powerful dispenser of text-for-consumption" (8).

Soap Operas and Miami Vice

Even though TV generally doesn't provide the male spectator with voyeuristic pleasure, and places all its viewers in a situation that can be said to be feminine, specific programs and segments of programs still place its viewers in a gendered position. To build up the necessary expectation of fulfilment in men and women, programs must be gender specific. I will exemplify this by a comparison of two programs, which both differ considerably from classical narrative cinema, the soap opera and the series Miami Vice.

Several studies have demonstrated that the soap opera is structured according to female desires and general conditions of life, but also frustrates the female need for autonomy (9). Soaps have several intertwined narratives of equal importance, and as they usually run for years, they have in fact no ending and no beginning. The setting of the daytime soap is very ordinary and not fascinating. There are a lot of characters, but no principal character. The frequent use of extreme close-ups allows for identification and because of the lack of closures we are given the possibility to constantly redefine characters and events.

The soap does not provide the female viewer with strong objects of identification, because the women in the soap control neither the outside world, the action nor the other characters unlike the hero in the classical narrative film. The position offered is more like a motherly position, a multiple identification with several characters and a general interest in the moral issues at play. In soaps there is very little action, but a lot of talking. Even though women in soaps may be victims of sexual harassment, this does not call for a voyeuristic gaze. The incident is not shown, but told by the women themselves, often in extreme close-up. The bad habits of men are pondered at length.

Miami Vice has been called the first postmodernist video (10). Miami Vice is a traditional series, each episode tells a story with a beginning and an end. Compared to the classical cinema narrative no conflicts are solved, nor is any order re-installed. Compared to soaps, however, which go on and on, the action is somehow brought to a stop at a certain point. The setting in Miami Vice is glamorous, the filming fascinating. Compared to cinema narrative, however, the principal characters do not really control the space, nor the action - even though they move around in fast cars and speed boats. There is a fascination with space, but also frustration. Characters do not allow for viewer-identification with a powerful hero, they can be said to be "machines of action" driven by an unknown source of power. The male body is displayed as an object of desire with the chest exposed; fancy clothing worn. The women are either colleagues, androgynous women with male skills, or victims of sexual harassment, on display for the male voyeuristic even sadistic gaze. The relationship between the two male protagonists is always more important than the occasional relationship with women, which hints at a homosexual theme. The two programs seem to fit into the classification put up by Ann Kaplan in regard to Music Videos. Miami Vice is the postmodernist, fallic mode, and the soap opera is the preoedipal, romantic mode. Both address and frustrate male and female desires respectively.

Bazar

In my analysis of Bazar I will try to uncover if the program constructs gendered viewers and how women are represented. Bazar is a literary talk show, produced by Denmark's Radio (DR), and was broadcast for the first time during the spring of 84 with 12 programs. The show was continued in autumn 85 and spring 86. Here I will deal with the first season. It is broadcast at about 9 o'clock every Tuesday as one of the late evening programs, and runs for about 40 minutes. The basic structure of the show is a discussion among most often four writers on a subject with some relation to their writing. The show is transmitted live, which is something new in this genre in DR.

Bazar seems to be a typical TV program as described by Ellis, although with some significant exceptions. Firstly, the organization of time: Bazar is broadcast live, at almost the same time every week, and has now run for three seasons. To broadcast a literary program live is something entirely new in DR, however this program-policy is part of a general trend towards live transmissions. Live transmissions is mostly used in the so-called "channel programs", that started about 1980, as a mixture of entertainment and journalism, a tendency explicitly named "pleasurable presence". The aesthetics of Bazar seems to be an extension of this trend; until Bazar appeared, literary programs in DR mostly consisted of interviews with individual writers, combined with some form of visualization. They were broadcast as individual programs, or as part of a magazine program.

The segments of the program are the following: The host/anchor person presents the subject of the evening in close-up and direct address; the signature; the host presents the writers and their books; the discussion. Some programs include some kind of performance, often music, and sometimes the writers themselves read excerpts from their books. At the end, the host again addresses us directly and recommends further reading on the subject.

The program is both more and less segmented than one could expect. The performances are not very intergrated in the discussion as a whole, but functions more as a diversion or a rupture than as impetus for further discussion. On the other hand one might expect a discussion between four equal discussants to go in many directions and touch on a variety of subjects, however, the discussion most often proceeds in a highly structured manner: with a main theme, a foreseeable conflict and solution and fixed parts for the participants for instance a part as the principal character. The program is rather packed, and we get the impression that we are in a hurry, thereby enhancing the impression of being where the action is, of immediacy and presence. The signature may be read as addressing a male and a female viewer at the same time. Every signature contains a series of slides behind a stylized book with turning pages. There are pictures of nature: Trees, water and one very significant picture of a vagina-like flower, on which the camera zooms in. The meaning might be, that the fascination of litterature is like the fascination of the female sex. If this sequence of pictures, however, appeals to the male gaze, the soundtrack is explicitly about female sexual fascination. The underlying music is a song by the female singer/songwriter Anne Linnet called "Night train", about the womans desire for her lover during a nightly ride. Secondly, the organization of space: The setting is the same in all programs of the first season. The writers sit in comfortable chairs on either side of an oblong coffee table, the host sits at the head of the table. The space is circular, the TV studio delimited by bookshelves. The public is placed in rows before the bookshelves in two half-circles. The three cameras are each situated in the corner of a triangle with center at the coffee table. One camera points directly at the anchor person. This means that there is not a constant central perspective. The discussion is not filmed from one side of the action which is the typical way of shooting discussions. This scenography and the situation of the cameras allows for two different modes of address. First, the anchor person's direct address to the viewers, presenting the subject and the writers. Second the discussion between the writers,

which can occur without the anchor person being on the screen. This is an exception from the traditional mode of address in TV, and it allows occasional breaks in the traditional firm link between the anchor person and the viewer, and the hierarchical mode of address. This is a technique which may give women an opportunity to express themselves outside of the patriarchal setting, as I will demonstrate later on.

Thirdly, the characters: There are five groups of characters: The host/anchor-person, the writers, the performing artists, the experts and the public. The characters are not allowed to forget their parts, and there exists a hierarchy of speech: The host gives the writers the opportunity to speak, interrupts them to let the performers perform or the critics comment. The public is not allowed to speak. A rather fixed pattern determines the definition of the groups of characters. The discussants are almost without exception writers, although one could imagine that this group also could include readers or critics or other people with a professional relationship to literature. There is a sharp division between writers and artists. Only very seldomly are the writers allowed to read quotations from their books, they are generally more presented as opinion holders than as creative personalities. Art somehow has a low priority. The performances are of course thematically related to the content of the program, but it is not an indispensable part of the program, it functions more like a break or a warm-up. To make the dramatic structure function, the discussants are firmly locked into the parts that have been predetermined for them in the discussion. This hierarchy and freezing of the parts contributes to the impression of repetition and familiarity in TV aesthetics. However, the number of participating writers, most of them are rather unknown or have just recently published their first book, points toward a democratic tendency of the program.

The Representation of Women in Bazar

I suggest that there is a tension in Bazar between male and female aesthetics and mode of address, with a predominance of the

male mode. The program allows for a male identification with an all-mighty hero who acts within a well-defined hierarchical world, where he controls the action, the parts and the narrative. This aesthetics also allows of the control of the male ambivalence towards the female, which in turn governs the representation of women in Bazar. But there are also some traits that breaks this male pattern, namely the possibility of multiple identifications put up by the scenography and the situation of the cameras, which allows for another representation of women.

The representation of women is on one hand determined by male objectivization, and on the other hand by the different strategies applied by the female discussants to oppose this objectivization.

The objectivization works differently in different kinds of programs. The programs can roughly be divided into programs mainly dealing with the private as opposed to the public sphere. In programs dealing with the public sphere the participation of women is not considered necessary, as can generally be seen from the very low representation of women in news and current affairs programs. If women appear in these programs at all, they usually have a very narrow range of roles, which generally speaking are not intended to demonstrate a female world outlook.

Women may occasionally appear in these programs in a fetishistic manner, because "women make better pictures" (11). Women can be rendered invisible either by literal absence from the program, or by being put into a position of muteness or inferiority in relation to the main theme of the program. The reason why women appear in these programs at all, may be pressure from the female members of the editorial board, and as a result of public opinion. Confronted with these demands the male strategy is then to render women mute or inferior or use them as fetishes.

On the other hand, women can be protagonists in programs dealing with the private sphere, but she will usually be seen from the male point of view. Here the woman is the object, not of a voyeuristic gaze, but of a voyeuristic, dominating and obsessive narrative.

The strategies applied by women can be either to play on the traits of female aesthetics in the program, or to work against or destroy the male aesthetics. In the following I will demonstrate how these mechanisms function in Bazar.

In three programs "Travelling is living", "The historical novel" and "Unemployment" no women appeared at all. In the program on unemployment a man was chosen to represent the alternative of working in the home, which is not a really radical alternative seen from women's point of view. As for the program on travelling, the usual argument, that no woman was available, was not valid, because a book written by a couple, who had been travelling with two babies had recently appeared. And also in this case the female experiences might have been considerably different from those of the men.

In a program on suspense novels several mechanisms were at work. The discussants were three men and the female author Line Møllebro. She is a very beautiful woman with long blond hair and tight leather trousers, and without diminishing her literary capabilities it is not difficult to imagine her being chosen for the program partly because of her beauty, partly because of her novel, that is about sexual role reversing and female agents. A theme which has a lot of potential voyeuristic interest for the male editors (and of course a lot of interest for feminists, but this point of view was not touched upon at all). Despite all this potential interest Møllebro was almost non-existent in the program, except perhaps as a fetish. The main theme of the program turned out to be conventions of the genre, and Møllebro's work was not discussed on its own terms. On the other hand, I think that Møllebro, who obviously is interested in the representations of women, as can be seen in her book, play-

ed on the offered role by representing herself as a kind of Barbarella figure, a parody on the representation of women as object thereby pointing at the fact that 'woman' is a cultural construction, not an essential fact. And thus presenting herself as a subject anyway despite the objectivation.

A program on witches was the only one in the 84 season to have a feminist project as basis. The discussants were two men and two women, but the exchange mainly took place between a female theologian from the lesbian movement, Lene Sjørup and a conservative male preacher, Søren Krarup. A talk between 4 women might have shed light on this theme, in this case however, the discussion was highly polarized. The male preacher was given the part of the visual subject as described earlier, as the one with whose eyes we look at what happens. One of the strategies employed by Sjørup against this was to use the mute public (who that evening consisted partly of women from the lesbian movement) as a weapon against Krarup. She worked against the hierarchy that had been forced upon her and the public alike by - as Ellis says - "recruiting the audience against the interviewer by appealing to a common sense that the media persons do not share...." (p.134). The public ridicules Krarup by their mimic and laughter, and thereby somehow breaks the silence that has been forced upon them.

A program on the culture of youth was one of the rare programs with two male and two female discussants, but still a female narrative and a female look was very sporadic. Numerically the women had the say in less than one third of the time, and then mostly in the beginning when they were interviewed by the host individually. They took very little part in the discussion as a whole. The women (they were about twenty, the men in their late thirties) were caught in the male aesthetics, the conflictual narrative, the pretermind parts. One male discussant, a very talkative and paradoxical character, an expert in computer games was given the part of protagonist, while the other male was given the part as the mouthpiece of the host, thus representative of common sense and defender of traditional

written literature against new technology. At least one of the women - a squatter - seemed to have been given a part - as an opponent to the computer expert. Even though she made some very pointed remarks, she really did not seem to want to take up the offered part, leaving the battlefield to the men, to which they happily entered. The women seemed dominated and alienated, but also consciously determined not to enter the discussion on the given terms. That these women were in the program at all, however, young and almost unknown as they were, points to the conflict in the show between democratic and patriarchal trends. The women were sometimes able to get to talk to each other and support each other's statements as a counterpoint to the conflictual discussion between the men. They thereby used the inherent possibility in the structure of the program of equal, non-hierarchical talk and of multiple principal characters like in the soap operas, as described earlier. This possibility was often used in programs with two female discussants. They made each other subjects by looking at each other.

NOTES

1. This passage builds on Mulvey and Toft.
2. Mulvey p. 421-22.
3. This passage builds on Ellis and Houston.
4. Ellis p. 142.
5. Ellis p. 142.
6. Ellis p. 143.
7. Ellis p. 139.
8. Houston p. 17-18.
9. Modleski and Brunson.
10. This analysis is inspired by a spoken paper by Peter Larsen given at the Center of Mass Communication, University of Copenhagen spring 1986.
11. Jensen and Kleberg p. 68.

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