

The Impact of Feminism on Media Studies - Just Another Commercial Break?

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Danish Summary: Baehr ser først på, hvordan det feministiske perspektiv anfægter den traditionelle medieforsknings begrænsede interesse i forholdet mellem kvinder og massemedier, og derefter på hvordan kvindelige medieforskere har defineret et nyt undersøgelsesområde: Repræsentationen af kvinder.

De forskellige traditioner i den amerikanske medieforskning: Kanyleteorien, Uses and Gratification teorierne og andre kritiseres for enten slet ikke at være kønsspecifikke, eller for at anlægge et statisk eller sexistisk syn på kvinders liv. F.eks. konstaterer Katz og Lazarsfeld i deres "Two-step-flow" markedsanalyse af kvindelige forbrugere fra 50'erne, at mændene havde en stor indflydelse på kvinders synspunkter, og at kvinders motivation for at deltage i det offentlige liv var meget ringe, uden overhovedet at berøre hvilke restriktioner der i det hele taget ligger på kvinders deltagelse i det offentlige liv. Bag Uses and Gratification forskningen ligger den antagelse, at medierne opfylder visse behov, men der fokuseres ikke særlig på kvinders behov for og brug af medierne. I forhold til den neo-marxistiske medieanalyse er det vigtigt for feminister, ikke blot at se på, hvordan medierne forstærker den herskende borgerlige ideologi, men også på, hvordan de udtrykker den patriarkalske struktur.

Der er flere retninger i den feministiske medietradition: Indenfor filmforskningen, der har sin oprindelse i litteraturforskningen, bygges på den franske semiologiske og psykoanalytiske tradition. Massemedieforskningen indenfor TV, aviser og ugeblade er mere sociologisk. Indenfor film har der også været en frugtbar vekselvirkning mellem teori og praksis i den feministiske filmproduktion. Noget sådant er meget vanskeligere at etablere indenfor TV produktion.

Den feministiske massemedieforskning har mere været baseret på de sociologiske, deskriptive og positivistiske modeller. Problemet med denne forskning er, at den forbliver på det deskriptive plan, der ikke sættes i forbindelse med sociale og psykiske mekanismer. Den begrænser sig til hovedtælling eller til dyrkelse af "uafhængige heltinder" og når ikke ud over et liberalistisk feministisk perspektiv. Hovedtællingen stiller sig tilfreds med flere kvinder på skærmen, uanset hvilke roller de optræder i, og dyrkelsen af de nye uafhængige heltinder overser det faktum, at disse ofte har den funktion at forsvare det eksisterende samfund i stedet for at udfordre det, jvf. f.eks. de nye kvindelige detektiver i amerikanske serier. Som modvægt mod disse teorier henter Baehr de sprogligt baserede massemedieteorier ind. Det er nødvendigt at se på, hvordan tekster skaber mening, hvordan kvindeligheden konstrueres i den patriarkalske diskurs. At indse at det, som vi tror er en afspejling af verden, er et repræsentationssystem, båret af en patriarkalsk ideologi. Den sociologiske massemedieforskning bygger på en spejlmodel, hvor spejlet enten gengiver eller forvrænger virkeligheden, og som altså mener at kunne gengive "sande" eller "forvrængede" billeder af kvinder, mens de sprogbaserede teorier bygger på begreber som repræsentation og identifikation, og undersøger ved hvilke virkemidler medierne fremstiller virkelighedsillusionen. Sådanne undersøgelser er nødvendige for at kunne skabe alternative billeder.

Artiklen slutter med en oversigt over feministisk medieforskning, bl.a. om kvinders arbejdsforhold i medierne, og slår

fast, at medieforskningen er ufuldstændig uden det feministiske perspektiv. Som nyt forskningsområde foreslås den problematiske mandlighed.

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Media Studies is hardly much older than the Women's Movement. Although its historical roots largely lie in postwar American theories of mass society and empirical communications research, Media Studies in Britain has yet to constitute itself properly as an academic 'discipline'. One is faced with the vexed problem: what is it exactly that feminism is having an impact on?

From its very beginnings the Women's Movement has responded critically, often angrily, to what it has rather loosely called 'sexism in the media'. Advertisements were an obvious first target and Betty Friedan devoted a large part of *The Feminine Mystique* to a content analysis of women's magazines and to a critique of advertising and market research techniques (Friedan, 1963). Since then the Women's Movement has continued to express concern over women's - and its own - representation in the mass media and feminist activity within media practice and Media Studies has steadily increased.

At present there are just over 20 polytechnics and colleges of Higher Education offering courses on the media. Out of these only half offer a full-time media course. The rest simply include some kind of option usually in Education Studies or the Humanities. The situation in schools and Further Education is hardly better. The subject is viewed with some hostility and not deemed worthy of serious academic consideration. Television, radio and newspapers do not come into the realm of 'high art' compared with a Dickens novel or a Wordsworth poem. It is estimated that only 600 students at this level study the media. (Figures taken from *The Media Reporter* (1978) Vol 11, p. 14-16).

Putting such academic snobbery aside, there are serious practical constraints on teaching Media Studies. There is the lack of broadcast source materials since copyright legislation, as it stands in Britain, makes it almost impossible to resee material even for educational purposes. It is always helpful for students to have a practical component to introduce them to current practices in broadcasting and journalism, but the resources for this kind of work tend to be too expensive to be generally available.

There is also the fact that whereas Film Studies sought respectability at university level, Media Studies has developed over the last ten to fifteen years at polytechnics and colleges which were at one time less constrained by the heavy weight of an academic tradition. It grew out of an interdisciplinary approach and different courses have evolved different solutions to the problems of constructing and teaching across disciplines. Some hang on to, an albeit fragmented, notion of academic disciplines and employ a mix of sociology, social psychology, linguistic theory, semiology, aesthetics etc. Others make the brave attempt at abandoning conventional disciplinary bases by using a range of intellectual approaches to the major problems raised by a study of the media. But both suffer from the sexist assumptions and invisibility of women endemic in mainstream academe.

The quantitative and qualitative peculiarities of British Media Studies (and indeed the British education system) deserve some explanation. Media Studies in Britain has followed the traditionally British approach of 'education for education's sake'. It would rather die than dirty its hands with vocational enterprise. Whilst we do not actively discourage students from pursuing careers in the media industry, we take pains to assure them that a course does not offer a specific training for work in mass communications: 'We certainly don't dissuade those with an interest in journalism and broadcasting from applying, as long as they realise that getting a job may finally depend a good deal more on how well they convince an editor or

selection board of their potential talent than on any academic qualifications which they may possess' (Corner, 1978: 14). Compare this 'apologia' with New York University's Department of Journalism and Mass Communications' prospectus which offers 'a professionally-oriented program, in which students are taught basic skills and theories necessary for careers in newspapers, broadcasting, magazines, public relations and survey research'. In Britain, graduates of Media Studies stand a good chance of gaining entry into the industry almost in spite of their academic qualifications. Many prospective employers are more likely to suspect, rather than welcome, their critical, at times even oppositional, views of existing professional practices and institutions.

Information about employment opportunities in the media industry tends to circulate by word of mouth and there are few clear career routes. There is a strong 'old-boy network' and even after formal training in journalism securing a position usually depends on pressing a personal case (Boyd-Barrett, 1970). Women can often be excluded from the normal recruitment and promotion channels. One reason given for the small number of women in top editorial positions on Fleet Street is that women are discouraged from subbing, working night shifts and from joining in the masculine pub culture of Fleet Street. The main reason why women journalists are concentrated in what may be termed 'women's fields' is not the one given by male journalists - that women are 'not tough enough' for hard news stories - but because they are not afforded the same opportunities to gain the relevant occupational knowledge (Smith, 1976).

In order to assess and outline the extent and direction of feminism's impact on Media Studies, it is necessary first to look at the development and dominant traditions of media sociology to see how a feminist perspective challenges the discipline's limited view of women's relationship to the mass media. Secondly, we need to examine the ways in which feminists involved in a study of the media have recognised the urgent need to specify a new area of enquiry - the representation of women. In some

cases feminist attention to 'images of women in the media' has been less an assault on traditional bastions of academe and more another voice making a parallel demand for curriculum space. The ways in which some of the conventions and inbuilt assumptions of media sociology have been somewhat uncritically adopted by feminist media research will also be discussed.

Media sociology developed as a subject in search of academic respectability during and following World War II. In 1948 Harold Lasswell coined the dictum which was to characterise the discipline for several years. He suggested that the proper study of the media asked the question: 'Who says what, in which channel, to whom and with what effect?' (Lasswell, 1948). Lasswell's approach fragmented the study of the media into exclusive areas such as institutions, producers, content and audiences. It set the scene for a 'dominant paradigm' (Gitlin, 1978) in media sociology which looked at the shortterm behavioural effects of the media, defining 'effects' so narrowly, microscopically and directly that at most only very slight effects could be indicated. The 'hypodermic needle' theory of early media psychologists and sociologists posited a stimulus-response mechanism between the medium and the individual - an injection of media content could produce a measurable behavioural or attitudinal outcome. This approach sought 'hard data' and followed the social-psychological mode of measuring content and effects experimentally and in surveys.

Research in the 1940's and 1950's proposed to dislodge this theory, arguing instead that the power of the media was 'limited' and located within existing structures of social relationships. (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955) 'Personal influence' and social variables such as age, social class, education - gender was not usually considered - were recognised as important intervening mechanisms operating between the message and the audience. Findings supported a 'two-step flow' of communication - from mass media, to opinion leaders, to people - and interpreted the media's role in affirming, rather than converting, people's existing attitudes and opinions as the media having 'no effect' (Klapper, 1960).

This research and its methodology has, in its turn, come under severe criticism. Its concentration on establishing that no direct causal connection exists between individual messages and their effects, deflects attention from questions of media structures, patterns of ownership and control, the media's relationship to the State and their role in constructing, mediating and distributing 'social knowledge' (i.e. their ideological role). As Gitlin affirms: 'Ideology and consciousness are concepts that fall through the sieves of both behaviourism and stimulus-response psychology. They have no ontological standing in the constraining conceptual world of mainstream media research' (Gitlin, 1978).

American media sociology developed as it did with the support and generosity of Madison Avenue and media conglomerates who were anxiously sharpening their tools of persuasion to ensure their millions of dollars spent on advertising would be millions well spent. The classic study of the 'two-step flow' was based on a survey of 800 women in Decatur, Illinois in 1945 and designed to assess the impact of the media and personal influence in four opinion areas - fashion, marketing, public issues and motion pictures (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). The selection of an all-female sample and the marketing orientation of this academic survey was probably determined by the fact that American women represented an enormously profitable pool of consumers whom it was vital to 'persuade' via advertising. In the flow of information to women on public issues, Katz and Lazarsfeld found that: 'Most marked in this sphere is the dominant role of husbands and male parents' (p. 332). They suggest that women are less influential and knowledgeable about public issues because their pre-occupation with domestic duties leads them 'to be less motivated to participate in the area' (p.290). This emphasis on the lack of individual motivation obscures the real restrictions surrounding women's participation in 'public life'.

A comprehensive feminist critique of the sexist orientation and assumptions of this school of mainstream media sociology

has yet to be written. The field is ripe for such examination but requires time and resources outside the scope of this paper. Media Studies has itself developed over the last years a critique and rejection of content analysis and 'effects' research, not on feminist grounds, but in favour of other approaches, most importantly 'uses and gratifications' research and studies of the ideological role of the mass media in society. The former aims to investigate not what the media do to people but what people do with the media, i.e. what uses and gratifications audiences derive. Such an approach assumes that individuals get what they 'need' from the media. Despite the fact that women form a major part of the media audience and come to the media with a particular set of needs resulting from their oppressed position, very few of these studies differentiate the audience according to sex.

Radio for example begins when the houseworking day starts and for many women is their only companion. At present radio's daily diet to 'housewives' often consists of programmes presented by male DJ's who chat to etherise the mind - a classic example of 'palliative radio' (Karpf, 1980). There are, however, to my knowledge very few studies of the particular needs and uses women bring to radio programmes. One early study of women listeners to daytime radio serials showed that women derived a number of gratifications which varied with their 'individual circumstances and problems' (Herzog, 1944). The serials, it was argued, allowed an identification with characters who enjoyed an exciting way of life and the women 'obtained emotional release and stimulus and some vicarious compensation for their own hardships by finding scapegoats in story characters'.

It is useful here to examine this study in the light of the problems 'uses and grats' raises for feminists engaged in media research. Firstly, individual needs tend to be emphasised without reference as to how they are universally related to social and economic conditions: what is it about women's lives that creates the need for emotional release and excitement?

Secondly, there is an underlying assumption that part of the media's function is to provide 'vicarious compensation' thereby accepting the social conditions which create the need for such use of the media. In Herzog's study the sources of women's hardships and their need to identify with exciting characters are taken as given and unchangeable. Thirdly, this approach leads us into a circular argument: finding that women use the media to escape from the drudgery of their own lives infers that they 'need' escapist media content. What they really need is a different life! In a more recent study on children and television, Grant Noble observes that many women use TV as a childminder to occupy their children so that they can get on with housework (Noble, 1975). Once again the assumption seems to be that what women need is more childminding television programmes and not increased childcare provisions. Going back to the question of women and radio, what is missing from this approach is an examination of what kind of needs are not gratified by media output.

Under different socio-economic conditions it might be possible for the mass media to go beyond simply providing escapist 'entertainment' interspersed with the occasional 'balanced, objective and impartial' news bulletin or documentary. In Denmark television programme-makers compiled a manifesto with tips on how to make children's programmes. One prescribed that 'When you want to tell an exciting story - try to relate the conflict in the story to the central conflict in society between labour and capital'. (Bugler, 1976: 328). Even if this type of 'excitement' smacks a little of propaganda we must not be led into the belief that entertainment can ever be neutral. Without this realisation and some analysis of the material and ideological basis of the production and consumption of media artefacts, 'uses and grats' media research can do little more than beg and answer its own questions.

There has been in recent years a clear shift in Media Studies from the controlled experiment, survey and interview situation to an examination of the social, economic and political context

of media organisations and professions and the role of the media as ideological agencies playing a decisive and fundamental part in cultural production. This critique of the media and its role in reproducing capitalist society stems from a neo-Marxist position as expressed in Herbert Marcuse's notion of the media as a 'consciousness industry' propagating a 'one-dimensional' affirmative culture in which the contradictions and barbarism of capitalism are falsely harmonised' (Marcuse, 1964).

Contemporary writers on the media have taken up and re-worked Marcuse's basic premise: 'The fact remains that the mass media in advanced capitalist societies are mainly intended to perform a highly 'functional' role: they too are both the expression of a system of domination, and a means of reinforcing it' (Miliband, 1973). Stuart Hall refers to the media as 'the site of an enormous ideological labour'. He goes on to describe how the media offer 'preferred' meanings and interpretations which 'help us not simply to know more about 'the world' but to make sense of it: ... The media serve, in societies like ours, ceaselessly to perform the critical ideological work of 'classifying out the world' within the discourses of the dominant ideologies' (Hall, 1977). A feminist analysis requires us to extend the study of the way the media operate in relation to the dominant bourgeois ideology to how they function within a patriarchal culture where 'preferred' meanings reside in a male discourse: 'So the answer to the question (can women speak?) is no, or only in a highly negotiated fashion, because the subject position from which mastery of language is possible is a male construct - one which women help to form but which we cannot operate' (Gledhill, 1978). The crucial question then becomes: how are media images and representations of 'femininity' constructed within patriarchal social and sexual relations of production and reproduction? Which leads us to ask: how can representations of women (and men) change unless the structures of patriarchal economic and social relations also change?

Pressure from the Women's Movement, and a growing recognition by feminists involved in studying and teaching Media Studies

of the inherent sexism of the subject, has opened up the whole question of the special nature of women's relationship to the media. The project on the representation of women has not been an even or unified one, which makes it difficult to chart a direct route across its terrain.

Much of the feminist contribution to the debate on the ideological role of the media in society draws its theoretical framework from the massive input of new theories from France. It has looked to semiotics, described as the science of signs in society, especially to the work done by Roland Barthes in his Mythologies (1972) and to structural linguistics with its emphasis on language as a socially produced system actually providing the rules and constraints within which all signification has to work. It has been informed by the neo-Marxist philosophy of Louis Althusser which sees ideology as a level 'relatively autonomous' from the economic and political levels of capitalism and finally by Lacanian psychoanalysis, with its analyses of the human subject through language (Althusser, 1966; Lacan, 1968). Feminist film studies, like film studies itself, has developed independently - and in many ways more sophisticatedly - from feminist studies of broadcasting, newspapers and magazines. The intensity with which feminist film criticism has adopted psychoanalytic concepts - primarily those concerned with the processes of 'identification' and 'recognition' which draw women to films - has not been matched in feminist criticism of other mass media. This separation is due partly to film studies' historical roots which lie more in literary criticism than in sociology, and partly to the easier availability of film as an object of study. Independent feminist film-making has nourished the marriage between theory and practice which, given the monopolistic ownership structure of press and broadcasting, has not been possible in feminist media studies. Much of the research done on women and the media comes more from that strain of American social science empirical positivism outlined above, which organises mass communications research around concepts of 'effect' and 'function' and argues that behaviour resulting from exposure to the mass media obeys

laws of conditioning, reinforcement, sublimation etc. Evidence cited is usually based on content analyses designed to measure certain aspects of a media message (e.g. how many male to female characters; what types of behaviour patterns do female characters exhibit as compared with male characters) and its results tend to remain at the descriptive level.

Studies which examine and document the images of females and males in the media reveal that:

"Regardless of the medium under examination or the scope of the particular study, the conclusions have been very similar: males dominate mass media content, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Roles of males in the mass media have been shown to be dominant, active, authoritative, while females have been shown to be submissive, passive and completely contented to subjugate their wills to the wills of media males. Males in all our mass media have varied roles emphasizing their importance in the spheres of employment, politics, science, history, and the family, while females have only two important spheres circumscribed by their sexuality and their domesticity" (Busby, 1975: 10).

Surveys of the ways in which media content has been dominated by males serve as a useful first step. But the limitations of content cannot help us to understand the relationship between the content described and the social structures which produce it and within which it operates.

Noreene Janus recognises that content analysis can provide a useful tool in researching sex roles in the media, but warns that its uses are 'limited' and its results should be interpreted with great care. She criticises many such studies of being consistent with a 'liberal feminist perspective':

"The studies of women and mass media ask questions that reflect a liberal feminist theoretical perspective since they set up Male vs. Female categories. All males are counted together as a general category and contrasted with an all-female category, with no reference made to the class, race or cultural divisions within each of these categories. Instead, the subjects are distinguished on the basis of visible personal traits (marital status, age etc.). The questions are ahistorical, apolitical, and in no way indicate how the images of women or men are related to the fundamental structures of society" (Janus, 1977).

A further consequence of setting up Male vs. Female categories is the implication that media content might be less sexist if women characters were shown to have the same occupational di-

tribution as male characters or if more women were employed as newsreaders, TV presenters, DJ's etc. In an article on women and radio, Mileva Ross illustrates this position and her support of recent BBC moves to appoint women newsreaders: 'When the pressure was really on, the BBC discovered that, given the opportunities and the training, there were females who could be as 'acceptable' as male newscasters' (Ross, 1977: 19). The characteristics and roles associated with 'maleness' in media images here become the goals 'acceptable' for women in media images and the objective becomes one of integrating women into the system on an equal basis with men.

A major problem that arises out of many of the content analyses documenting images of women in the media stems from their failure to differentiate between different levels of meaning. For example, one woman newsreader reporting an item on 'militant braburning feminists' numerically equals one woman newsreader reporting on feminists' 'reasonable case for abortion on demand'. The method enumerates the visible form (i.e. both newsreaders are women) but leaves out the important question of the difference in the content presented. An increase in the number of female newsreaders here implies a change for the better. But as we already know that news coverage of women concentrates on their appearance, sexuality etc. (Epstein, 1978) more women reading the same old news simply reaffirms the very framework which reproduces sexism. That is not to say that more women should not be employed at all levels of media production, but it does suggest that content analysis as a methodology implicitly influences the kinds of questions asked and that the conclusions it draws may work against feminist interests.

A similar problem arises with the introduction into television and film of so-called independent, powerful 'liberated' women. Elizabeth Cagan writes: 'the assertive, ambitious woman is no longer an oddity but has become a new cultural type' (Cagan, 1978). Noreene Janus points out that the media have selectively presented issues that are 'marginal' to the

Women's Movement. They define liberation in terms of women getting top white collar jobs, gaining equality in sports or having separate vacations from their husbands. She goes on: 'In advertising women are shown to have more control over consumption rather than production activities. The ways in which women's traditional roles reflect and conflict with the demands of the capitalist system are never dealt with' (Janus, 1977). The growing number of women playing policewomen, detectives or attorneys on television (Policewoman, Charlie's Angels) bear little resemblance to feminist aspirations. Ironically, they are portrayed as enforcing rather than challenging the laws that oppress them (they usually end up needing to be rescued by their male partners/bosses) (Gerbner, 1978). Here we are seeing strong women reconstructed into redeemers of the patriarchy (Baehr, 1980).

The fact that heroic women have supplemented heroic men on the screen involves us in more than just media head-counting. It brings us back to questions concerning the media's crucial role in the construction of meaning and in the re-construction and representation of feminism and feminist issues surrounding studies of women and media in order to map out more coherent future projects and approaches to feminist media research. The question of representation as it relates to the issue of realism seems to me to be a major problem in much of the existing research. Betty Friedan condemned the 'sexual sell' used to entice housewives to 'seek identity, purpose, creativity, the self-realization, even the sexual joy they lack - by the buying of things' (Friedan, 1963). She saw the media- through their relationship to the commercial market of commodities, as a major reason for the continued subordination of women. A more recent study of images of women in the media again suggests that media image determine what women are: 'We think we should look more closely at how our attitudes are conditioned, and even manipulated by the media through selection and suggestion. Are the images put out the real ones? In what ways are they 'unreal'? And is this due to omission or falsification?' (King and Stott, 1977). The very concept 'image' assumes that

the media can somehow directly reflect 'reality' rather as if were a mirror on the world. This view of the media inevitably leads to dismay and affront at the way the media 'falsify', 'omit' and 'distort' - i.e. create 'unrealistic' images of women (King and Stott, 1977; (Ed.) Tuchman, 1978; Friedan, 1963; Espstein, 1978; Weibel, 1977 and others).

Writing on the typical women's romance story in popular fiction, Tamar Karet illustrates this approach when she says: 'The female image these books present is largely a reflection of the real world, where it is men who govern nations, fly aeroplanes, make money and fight wars- so it isn't surprising that most of them show women as dependent beings. Nonetheless what they offer is a distorting mirror for this portrays a world that is even more sexist than reality' (in King and Stott, 1977: 103). To concentrate on a criticism of sexist (over sexist!) content or to question the verisimilitude of the women portrayed in popular fiction or in the mass media, is to accept such conventions as narrative, plot, hero/heroine characterisations without recognising that it is these forms, along with the media practices which produce them, which themselves construct very specific meanings and images of femininity. Christine Gledhill recognises the need for feminist analysis to understand the mechanisms which film employs to produce meanings: 'We cannot understand or change sexist images of women for progressive ones without considering how the operations of narrative, genre, lighting, mise-en-scene etc., work to construct such images and their meanings' (Gledhill, 1978, 460). For feminists these aesthetic structures and media practices occupy a central problematic operating as they do within a patriarchal discourse. Feminist film-makers have attempted an intervention into the male-dominated forms of cinema by trying to establish an alternative feminist language of film and allowing a more active and various construction of a film's meaning by encouraging audience discussion whenever possible. Independent film-makers are in a privileged position compared to women working within established media institutions where the possibilities of introducing alterna-

tive modes of media production, distribution and consumption remain severely limited. (This is not to underestimate the considerable difficulties involved in funding and exhibition of independent film projects).

As I suggested previously in this chapter, feminist film criticism has addressed itself to questions of representational forms and audience identification in film, whereas a great deal of work on 'images of women in the media' has tended to use terms like 'conditioning' and 'falsification' which oversimplify women's complex relationship to the media and the process involved in representation. They belong more to the dominant paradigm of media sociology in their suggestions that the media reflect/distort reality and that exposure to media messages has a direct - even measurable - effect on the audience.

The media are not transparent. They do not, and cannot, directly reflect the 'real' world any more than language can. To argue that they do along the lines of Friedan, King and Stott, Karet and others, is to deny the whole process of mediation which comprises a set of structures and practices which produce an ideological effect on the material they organise. By relying on a behaviourist type of 'direct-effects' model of the media these studies present a simplistic, unidirectional and reductive connection between media and behaviour, by arguing that the media determine and directly effect how we see ourselves and how we behave 'as women' in society: 'Watching lots of television leads children and adolescents to believe in traditional sex roles: Boys should work; girls should not. The same sex role stereotypes are found in the media designed especially for women. They teach that women should direct their hearts toward 'hearth and home' (Tuchman, 1978: 37). This approach mistakes the relationship between the media and their users as a causal one. It is not the media in themselves that determine what women are. Women are constructed outside the media as well, and it is their marginality in culture and in the media which contributes to their subordinated positions. 'The ideology of femininity as it is constructed through patriarchal

capitalist determinations must always be seen both in relation to its overdetermination by 'masculinity' and as it is simultaneously included but set apart from the capitalist construction of the 'free' individual. Ideologically, women, as women, whatever their actual place in production, are negatively placed within the social relations of re/production' (Women's Studies Group, CCCS, Birmingham, 1978: 136).

It is a failure of many feminist studies that they neutralise and suppress the vital questions which explore the relationship between women's subordination in terms of their 'economic' place in patriarchal relations under capitalism and the representation of those relations in the ideological domain which women inhabit and construct. Janus proposes one alternative perspective from current 'liberal feminist' research on women and mass media: 'The problem must not be seen as a universal problem of males against females. Rather the problem must be viewed in its historical specific context. In researching the problem, our point of departure must be that we live in a capitalist-society which oppresses people in many diverse ways. Media images reflect not only sexism but also these other forms of oppression based on class, race, and nationality. A holistic and historical approach would recognise these relations when posing its problems for research and shaping its methodology' (Janus, 1977).

I have tried to indicate two major ways in which feminist scholarship has had an impact on Media Studies. Firstly, it has attempted to extend and redirect some of the central questions now being posed within the discipline and secondly, it has carved out for itself a specialised area of study concerning women's special relationship to the media. It is becoming increasingly clear that both of these strands are interconnected and can gain strength and nourishment from each other. A feminist perspective has shifted a crucial debate of Media Studies - the ideological role of the media in capitalist society - to at discussion on the construction of women's exploitation and subordination materially and ideologically within patriarchy.

A body of work, emerging from the Marxist-Feminist current in the Women's Movement has raised the problem of a radical feminist intervention into the forms of media aesthetics and practices already set by the dominant ideology. The growing interest in feminist film theory in the re-reading of Freud by Lacan has questioned the possibility of direct expression and insisted on the contradictory relationship between the language of the dominant class and that of oppressed groups: 'The real issue for feminism is the potential contradiction between woman as characterisation in terms of the independent woman stereotype and woman as sign in a patriarchal discourse' (Gledhill, 1978: 490).

This kind of approach provides an informed insight into some of the premises and limitations of content analysis and current reflection models of images of women. A theoretical examination of the media in terms of their signifying process means understanding that depictions of 'social reality' are mediated by a signifying mode with its own specific structures and determinations. We are now in a better position to move away from what has been a somewhat uncritical acceptance of content studies theoretically locked into the status quo, to asking some of the key questions already on the feminist film theory agenda. To accept that the media as a system of representation are a point of production of definitions is to address oneself to questions of cultural production and cultural reading and to the struggle towards the creation of alternative modes of media production and distribution and progressive images.

Feminist work into sexist content and female stereotyping has focussed attention onto the ways in which particular groups are portrayed and denied access to the media. The concept of 'stereotyping' has been taken up by Media Studies, although its application has been predictably restricted to images of gays, blacks, women, working-class youth etc., which leaves the representation of dominant groups as apparently unproblematic. In my own institution a course on women is included under 'Studies of Deviancy'.

With concern amongst feminists growing about the media industry's attempt to exploit the female (and male) market by selling 'new women' stereotypes, research is beginning to move away from mere description to an analysis of stereotypes as ideological concepts which can be mobilised to accommodate oppositional and alternative views and opinions. More work needs to be done on understanding the structural determinants of female stereotyping and how they function through the media to maintain women as an oppressed group: 'Stereotypes are selective descriptions - they select those features which have particular ideological significance... In each case the oppressed group is characterised as innately less intelligent. It is particularly important for our ideology that attributes should be conceived of as being innate characteristics either of human nature in general (competitiveness) or of women/men/blacks in particular, since this supports the belief that they are not the effect of the socio-economic system' (Perkins, 1979;157).

It is clear that there is still a considerable need for a thorough feminist 'working-over' of mainstream Media Studies. It remains a male-dominated discipline. As feminists working in the area, it is left to our small number to point out male bias and redirect student's interests and attention. It is up to us to point to women's absence and the sexist assumptions and conclusions behind much of the established literature and research. Thanks largely to the Women's Movement, there is now a whole range of books which look at the class, sexist and racist bias of the media. By using these we can make a start at dislodging and redirecting the overstudied and sterile debate about the effect of television on children into the more fruitful discussion of the media's role in sex-role socialisation. Up to now the heavy concentration on overt physical violence in programme content research has unquestioningly assumed non-violent content to be 'harmless'. We now have a firmer basis for a feminist perspective on women's employment and recruitment patterns in the media industry. Women have been gathering vital statistics which illustrate the patterns of discrimination which exist in the media professi-

ons (ACTT, 1975; Eddings, 1980: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977). As feminists we must rework the whole notion of the constituents of media 'professionalism' in terms of 'the clockwork of the male career' (Hochschild, 1971). It is left to us to draw students' attention to the fact that the latest fashion in Media Studies (the participant observation study of 'how television programmes are really made'), when conducted by male researchers regularly ignore the contribution made by production secretaries, production assistants, continuity and clerical back-up - the grades in television where women are concentrated (see Elliott, 1972; Schlesinger, 1978).

As an introductory text why not replace Harold Lasswell's revered dictum of 1948 with Virginia Woolf's infinitely more revealing one of 1928. In *A Room of One's Own* she recalls a lunchtime perusal of a daily newspaper after a morning spent reading academic testaments to female inferiority in the British Museum Reading Room: 'Some previous luncher had left the lunch edition of the evening paper on a chair, and, waiting to be served, I began idly reading the headlines. A ribbon of very large letters ran across the page. Somebody had made a big score in South Africa. Lesser ribbons announced that Sir Austen Chamberlain was at Geneva. A meat axe with human hair on it had been found in a cellar. Mr. Justice commented in the Divorce Courts upon the Shamelessness of Women. Sprinkled about the paper were other pieces of news. A film actress has been lowered from a peak in California and hung suspended in mid air. The weather was going to be foggy. The most transient visitor to this planet, I thought, who picked up this paper could not fail to be aware, even from this scattered testimony, that England is under the rule of a patriarchy'. In these and other ways, feminist perspectives and feminist knowledge can greatly enrich, enliven and extend existing Media Studies. But the question remains: how much does a feminist intervention ultimately depend on the individual feminist who secures it? Are we the 'transient visitors'?

This paper has already indicated, critically at times, the very major contribution made by feminist research to the study of the mass media. It must be recognised, however, that studies of women's relation to the media has tended to occur as an 'option' and I have no reassurance that any of my feminist criticisms of media sociology are shared by, or even known to, my colleagues - all of whom are men. Like other 'women's subjects', *Women and Media* runs the risk of ghettoisation and the danger of confirming a subordinate status within the mainstream of the discipline. The institutionalisation of a separate strand which looks at women, carries with it the assumption that men's participation in the debate is marginal and that their representation in the media is unproblematic. The special study of women may be a necessary step in securing a firm feminist grounding in the attempt to understand and challenge existing media forms and structures. But the questions we raise are ones which will work best as critical ideas influencing and challenging the discipline as a whole. They are too important to be kept just to ourselves.

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Feminist Criticism in Television Studies

By E. Ann Kaplan*

Danish Summary: På baggrund af en kort oversigt over TV-forskningen i USA og England og over udviklingen i den feministiske teori beskriver artiklen udviklingen i den feministiske TV-forskning som et forløb i fire faser: Borgerlig, marxistisk, radikal og poststrukturalistisk feminisme. De tre første beskrives som hovedsagelig byggende på en essentialistisk feministisk filosofi, hvor det kvindelige betragtes som noget essentielt anderledes end det mandlige, med rod i naturen og mere humant og moralsk, med en implicit kritik af det mandlige, konkurrencementalitet og individualisme. Den antiessentialistiske filosofi ser det kvindelige som en side af den patriarkalske orden og beskæftiger sig med hvordan kønsidentiteten, specielt den kvindelige subjektivitet, dannes.

Artiklen gennemgår de fire faser med eksempler fra især forskningen omkring soap-opera, og understreger at faserne ikke skal opfattes som historisk tilbagelagte faser, men at de stadigvæk findes og har deres berettigelse. I forbindelse med den sidste fase, den poststrukturalistiske, udstikker Kaplan i forlængelse af sit eget forskningsprojekt omkring musikvideoer retningslinjer for fremtidens feministiske medieforskning.

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