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Contents

Editorial

- 299** Three Strikes and You're Out?
Toby Miller

In Focus

- 303** Soft Love:
The Romantic Vision of Sex on the Showtime Network
Karen Backstein
- 319** "Sex and the Single Girl" in Postfeminism:
The *F* Word on Television
L. S. Kim
- 335** Contemporary French Television, the Nation, and the Family:
Continuity and Change
Lucy Mazdon
- 351** "Now You're Living":
The Promise of Home Theater and Deleuze's "New Freedoms"
Raiford Guins

Prime Time

- 367** Hizballah's Virtual Civil Society
Jenine Abboushi Dallal
- 373** Index

TELEVISION & NEW MEDIA explores the field of television studies, focusing on audience ethnography, public policy, political economy, cultural history, and textual analysis. Special topics covered include digitalization, active audiences, cable and satellite issues, pedagogy, interdisciplinary matters, and globalization, as well as race, gender, and class issues. Contributors should submit four copies of double-spaced manuscripts following the style guidelines of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (14th edition). Manuscripts will undergo blind review. Authorship should be identified only on the title page. Author name/address/affiliation/position should appear on the title page. References, tables, and figures should appear at the end of the manuscript. Figures should be camera ready. The final manuscript should be submitted on an IBM-compatible disk. Submission of a manuscript implies commitment to publish in the journal. Authors submitting manuscripts to the journal should not simultaneously submit them to another journal, nor should manuscripts have been published elsewhere in substantially similar form or with substantially similar content. Authors in doubt about what constitutes prior publication should consult the editor. Book reviews are welcome. Direct all editorial correspondence to Toby Miller, Editor, *Television & New Media*, Department of Cinema Studies, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, 721 Broadway, Room 600, New York, NY 10003, telephone 212-998-1614, fax 212-995-4061, e-mail toby.miller@nyu.edu (enquiries only; do not send submissions via e-mail).

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Three Strikes and You're Out?

Toby Miller

Brendan Lemon, editor of the queer monthly magazine *Out*, devoted his editorial for the April 2001 issue to outing a major league U.S. baseballer as his boyfriend. Or rather, he almost did. No names, no positions, but some hints—plays for a fabled Eastern franchise and is “a recognizable media figure,” in Lemon’s words. Press reaction has been significant—newspaper column rants, talk-radio populist guesses, Matt Drudge internet dredges, and ESPN polls. These developments encourage us to ponder changes in professional sports with the pull and push of money and the media. What used to be thought of exclusively as jockish, male-spectator sports now include gay men and straight women as desirable targets for marketers. What used to be a subcurrent—sex appeal—is now visible and common in the marketing of sports.

The present moment is one of immense change in the public sexual culture of media and sports. Gay magazines circulate information to businesses about the spending power of their putatively childless, middle-class readership—with slogans like “Gay Money Big Market Gay Market Big Money.” The 1990s brought TV commercials showing Toyota’s male car-buying couple and two men furnishing their apartment together at Ikea, while Hyundai began appointing gay-friendly staff to dealerships, IBM targeted gay-run small businesses, Subaru placed advertisements on buses and billboards that had cars with gay-advocacy bumper stickers and registration plates coded to appeal to queers, and Volkswagen commercials featured two men driving around in search of home furnishings. (These campaigns are known as “encrypted ads” or “gay vague.” They are designed to make queers feel special for being “in the know” while not offending straights who are unable to read the codes.) Polygram’s classical-music division has a special gay promotional budget; Miller beer supported Gay Games ’94; Bud Light sponsored the 1999 San Francisco Folsom Street Fair,

“the world’s largest leather event”; and Coors introduced domestic-partner employee benefits to counteract its antigay image of the past (and was echoed by the major auto manufacturers in 2000). The spring 1997 network TV season saw twenty-two queer characters across the prime-time schedule, and three years later, there were thirty—clear signs of niche targeting—while gay and lesbian web sites were drawing significant private investment. Bruce Hayes, an out gay man who won a swimming relay gold for the United States at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, was a key figure in Levi Strauss’s 1998-1999 Dockers campaign. The next year, Procter & Gamble, the nation’s second largest advertiser, dropped plans to sponsor a projected talk TV show by antiqueer advice giver Laura Schlessinger following lobbying efforts.

Clearly, sports are undergoing immense change, with sex at its center. Sports’ gender politics at the elite level today are far from total domination by straight, orthodox masculinity because of the niche targets that athletes are marketed to (such as straight women and gay men). Of course, evaluations of women’s bodies have long been pivotal to selling goods, with the implied spectator a straight male. The beneficial aspect to marketing sports is its challenges to these gender conventions—the shoe is being sold on the other foot, as it were.

There is, of course, a regressive side to sports as business, such as displacing public attention from structural social inequalities. Our conjuncture continues to be one where, for example, invisible and unpaid women’s work, such as ferrying players, mending uniforms, and so on, is the *sine qua non* of most sports, while men’s power over women continues. But a decade ago, this invisibility extended to fandom: women spectators were excluded from the discourse of football in their voyeurism as well as their emotional and physical labor. Since then, changes have come. The American Dialect Society decreed *soccer mom* its 1996 “Word of the Year,” as politicians vied for electoral support from middle-class women who drove children and men across country. In 1999, David Letterman troped the term when he coined the expression “soccer mamas” for the Women’s World Cup of Soccer winners—both sexy and maternal now. In the mid-1990s, National Football League (NFL) administrators discerned a threat to the game’s man appeal from other media forms and faced mothers who objected to their sons playing so mindlessly violent a sport. The league responded by hiring Sara Levinson to run marketing—the first woman employed in its central-office executive group other than as a secretary. She was selected because her previous job had been as copresident of MTV. The NFL wanted her to push merchandising spin-offs and attract female audiences. This became known as the Women’s Initiative, named because “our research indicates that women like the tight pants on the players.” Meanwhile, male players were complaining about the ritual objectification of

standing near naked as hundreds of administrators, owners, coaches, medics, scouts, and other men calibrated their bodies at meat-market conventions.

Today, retired track star Carl Lewis appears in fuck-me pumps for Pirelli tires, a company traditionally associated with calendars of conventionally attractive women; New York Knicks forward Larry Johnson sells Converse products dressed up as his grandmother; Ottawa Senators rookie Alexander Daigle poses as a female nurse for trading cards; world-champion boxer Chris Eubank models a Vivienne Westwood frock on Milanese catwalks; and lapsed power forward Dennis Rodman wears a white wedding gown to his book signing. Of course, there are misogynistic aspects to drag of this kind, but it is a new and burgeoning practice that suggests other transformations as well. For example, Baltimore Orioles outfielder Brady Anderson's web site features a poster shot emphasizing his crotch and chest and has gained many gay hits—about which he registers a “no comment.” This is a moment when, thanks to commodification of the male subject, he is brought out into the bright light of narcissism and purchase. The overcoding of male desire for women in the popular is being matched by a reversal of the previous undercoding of desire for men among straight women and gay men. Watch this space.



Soft Love

The Romantic Vision of Sex on the Showtime Network

Karen Backstein

Mercy College

Once a perennial also ran, Showtime has climbed to the top of the cable heap with a daring new strategy: making good TV.¹

—Borow (1999)

In this era of so-called family values in the United States, debates on pornography and erotica flood the American popular press—even as depictions of lap dancers, exotically revealing costumes, and soft-focus gauzy sex scenes flood film, television, and advertising. Academics such as Linda Williams, Richard Dyer, Andrew Ross, and Constance Penley have long since entered the fray, but the argument has gone loud and mainstream, with participants on both sides (Andrew Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon for the prosecution, Camille Paglia for the defense) claiming to uphold the feminist banner.

But as Susan Faludi (1995) pointed out in her excellent article “The Money Shot,”² the schism between that part of the porn industry devoted to the “down and dirty” hard-core movie and the more romantic, high-budget, and coy shows produced for cable grew to enormous proportions in ways stylistic, performative, and industrial.

In the United States, pay cable had provided an alternative to the “free” channels, supported by advertising, as well as to basic cable, a series of stations that came with the service and did not need to be specially ordered. Both forms were highly regulated and had limited representations of sexuality as well as restricted language. Initially, such networks as Home Box Office (HBO) (which began airing about three decades ago) found their

niche in presenting uncut, uninterrupted, and uncensored theatrical films; eventually, they also began producing their own programming, always with an eye to what their competition could not legally do without endangering their licenses.

Other than Playboy's own channel, with its complete devotion to sexual content, perhaps no mainstream cable network took such advantage of the ever increasing audience for this type of programming as has Showtime, especially during the 1980s, although HBO still does feature its own documentary-style series *Real Sex* and the voyeuristic *Taxicab Confessions*. And just recently, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the rights of cable TV to show what it wants when it wants, although few of the corporate-owned, larger stations actually show hard-core.³

For years, Showtime Nighttime's diverse soft-core lineup consisted of such shows as *Love Street*, *Compromising Situations*, *Softly from Paris*, *Women: Stories of Passion*, and the station's onetime flagship and best-known program *Red Shoe Diaries*. Arguably, one might include *Sherman Oaks*, a spoof of soapy melodramas that includes numerous soft-core sequences filmed by a voyeuristic cameraman who's documenting a wealthy, rather bizarre California family.

Now that cable stations such as Showtime and HBO have become critical darlings—in the past five years, the latter has swept almost all the Emmy awards for made-for-TV movies, while the former has received praise in major consumer magazines, such as *New York*—as well as mega-powerhouses that offer original programming and creative control that attracts even notable film stars such as Tom Hanks (who executive produced *From the Earth to the Moon* for HBO), it may be time to take a look back into the primordial murk of cable and at what it once offered viewers—before celebrated series such as *Larry Sanders*, *Sex and the City*, *The Sopranos*, and *Beggars and Choosers* and a host of much-applauded first-run films drew quality spectators into the fold. In some respects, different as they are, these soft-core series gave hints of what cable could evolve into and how it could compete by offering adult-oriented fare that the commercial networks could not (by law, by advertising influence, and by the larger mainstream audiences needed for their success). Using a provocative, peek-a-boo picture of Sarah Jessica Parker, *Sex and the City's* comely star, on its cover, *Entertainment Weekly* trumpeted, "Sex on TV: It's Everywhere You Turn, But Just How Far Will It Go?"⁴ On cable, fairly far, although when Fox grabbed the HBO-rejected comedy *Action*, a riotously risqué series about a snarky TV producer, cold feet caused them to cut scenes that cable would probably not have feared to air.

Showtime TV went on the air in 1979 (July 1, at 6 P.M., to be exact) and presently fits snugly into the family of media giant Viacom, which most recently merged with CBS to form an empire of truly staggering

proportions.⁵ Showtime itself has a subgroup consisting of several channels, including the Movie Channel, Flix, and the independently minded Sundance Channel. It continues to expand and fine-tune to target specific viewers more directly, and in June 1999 launched SHOWTIME BEYOND, dedicated to fantasy; there will also be a channel geared to "Generation Y," which is expected to work in a fully integrated web component. The network's programming ranges from theatrically released blockbusters to championship boxing, from original series such as the science fiction shows *Stargate SG-1* and the updated *Outer Limits* to *Beggars and Choosers*, a satire of the back-stabbing world of television production. Recently, *The New York Times* trumpeted that the network had "shattered another taboo" when Showtime presented *Queer as Folk*, an American version of the British limited series that takes a no-holds-barred, explicit look at gay sexuality (Weinraub, 2000). One of the TV movies Showtime has developed is *The Baby Dance*, a Jodie Foster-produced film about surrogate motherhood. And when PBS, possibly frightened by the conservative tenor of a Congress that authorized its public funding, dropped Armistead Maupin's sexually frank *Tales from the City*, Showtime took over the well-regarded series. It did the same for Anjelica Huston's adaptation of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, made for Turner Networks but considered by it too hot to handle; and Showtime also gave Adrian Lyne's commercially cold-shouldered *Lolita* its U.S. distribution and first screening. In addition, the network sponsors a black filmmaker's showcase (with filmmaker grants) and helps fund smaller theatrical features to which it eventually has screening rights.

But even now that Showtime, led by chief executive officer Matt Blank, has turned around and "after two decades' worth of death-watch speculation . . . has 22.3 million subscribers—nearly twice as many as when Blank took over" in 1995 (Borow 1995), the network's repressed returns late at night when the soft-core series go into continually cycled reruns.

Soft-core movies made for cable or direct-to-video release have, of course, received critical attention, as have individual shows—including Nina Martin's analysis of women's desire and voice in *Red Shoe Diaries*. Martin's cogent examination reveals how the show, while purporting to present an unfettered representation of female sexuality, ultimately closes down its protagonists' options, falling into a masculine discourse that permits only socially normative behavior and privileges the heterosexual couple.⁶ In particular, she emphasizes the role of Jake, played by David Duchovny, who narrates the stories and anchors the women's revelations with his own interpretations (Martin 1994, 44-57). However, the intersection of erotica and television, which as an industry always remains invested in selling desire of one form or another and in producing peek-a-boo imagery, has been less investigated. Yet I find it interesting that the softening and the popularization of that most male-oriented of forms—pornography—

should take place in television. Of course, as Linda Williams (1987) stresses in her excellent work *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible,"* in relation to psychoanalytic theory, a model that proposes an apparatus as monolithic does not always provide the clues to understanding the specificity of images and narrative organization. But TV as a mediating medium can hardly be ignored, for in the public mind it has traditionally had a weaker claim to artistic status and a stronger connection with lazy consumption—although this is now undergoing somewhat of a change with the simmering suspicion that somehow television is actually the more writer-friendly medium than cinema.⁷ Many critics have noted the Frankfurt School writers' horror of the mass media's feminized and passive reception as well as their monolithic view of its spectatorial effects. Patrice Petro's "Mass Culture and the Feminine: the 'Place' of Television in Film Studies" provides a lucid and extensive historical examination of both German and American theories of TV. Petro particularly focused on the pervasiveness of phallogocentric metaphors to describe the medium and on the use of images of penetration to describe its effect on the audience. She pointed to

the real and the metaphoric fear of femininity previously articulated by critics of cinema—a fear that directs itself against women as viewers and against the perceptual distraction assumed to follow from mass cultural reception. (Petro, 12-13)

Such ideological assumptions certainly underpin recent political critiques of television and cinema. And this concern can only increase when applied to the combustible mixture of highly sexualized texts, a medium located in the home, and the supposedly lumpen couch potatoes subject to its negative effects. Given that most of the polemical arguments swirling around the issues of hard-core pornography take for granted a certain spectatorial childlikeness, this a priori notion of a nonresistant audience in need of protection can only feed into a censorial agenda. A view such as Andrea Dworkin's, which automatically views heterosexual sex as both violent and degrading to women, sees no complexity either in any form of sexually explicit imagery or in those who partake of them. (Although one can certainly wonder if, with the spate of mass shootings throughout the United States, the tide will eventually turn to censoring violence more than sex.)

Showtime, like other pay-TV stations, including HBO, has suffered less from this backlash than have the regular networks (a fact that has led the traditional broadcast trio of CBS, NBC, and ABC to seething frustration, as they watched Emmy nominations go to cable stations, with their superior freedom). When *NYPD Blue*, years ago now, first bared David Caruso's butt, the debate for and against raged; initially, some sponsors even pulled

their support. Now the idea of voluntary ratings and v-chips has gained acceptance even by so-called liberals. (Although for all the hoopla, most parents appear not to use it; the newest court ruling, however, does put a certain onus on them to get the equipment.) But one must actively request and willingly pay for Showtime, which already broadcasts ratings for everything it airs. Importantly, the ability to shell out dollars to receive this programming implies a more prosperous (dare we say more educated?) audience.

Andrew Ross (1989, 175) has stated that much of the intellectual's traditional resentment of porn emerges from its inextricable connection with the working class and its "produc[tion] and consum[ption] as an object of popular taste." Thus, it is no surprise that *Red Shoe Diaries* and its compatriots aspire to the label of erotica, with its upper-class and literary connotations—no matter how far some of these shows may actually stray from that rather glossy genre. *Softly from Paris* in particular has a cultivated male voice speak of "the first art, the erotic art," to introduce the program, which adapts stories by Aristophanes and other classic, high-art writers, while *Women: Stories of Passion* slyly references Nancy Friday's volumes on women's sexual fantasies. As Ross noted in relation to the somewhat different context of feminist pornography by directors such as Candida Royalle, this seems "like the latest phase in the history of pornography's bid for respectability" (Ross 1989, 172).

This upscale aura informs everything in most of these programs, to a greater or lesser degree, from their mise-en-scène to their casting: the ritzy beach houses, spacious offices, and well-tended mansions in which the action quite frequently plays out are most often populated solely by well-off Caucasians. For example, only three *Red Shoe* episodes I have viewed featured black performers in any significant role, one of whom was the well-known high-fashion model Beverly Johnson; two starred Latinos, and one of those (*Night of Abandon*) was explicitly set in Brazil. However, the heroine was a golden blonde American whose newfound Brazilian paramour fit snugly into the traditional "Latin lover" mold. Blacks are visible in the episode, though: populating the background in the samba school or as nameless participants in a strange scene (ogled by the lead couple) in which an apparently Afro-Brazilian religious rite turns into an orgy.

The other series follow suit, keeping recognizably ethnic protagonists (whether black, Asian, or Native Americans) to a bare minimum and often relegating those few who do appear to the background. In neither *Love Street* nor *Compromising Situations* have I seen any nonwhites in starring roles. *Sherman Oaks* has one black character—and a white who thinks he's black—as well as a stereotypically spicy Latina maid who craves sex with anyone, anywhere. *Softly from Paris*, with its fantasy-filled, historical framework, has dealt with ethnicity only by traveling to "magical realms," as in a

variation on an *Arabian Nights* theme that took place in the “mysterious Orient.” *Beverly Hills Bordello* does feature a “rainbow” of prostitutes in the brothel for some “exotic sex,” but the Madame, who participates most fully in actual stories, is white. Even *Kama Sutra*, an addition to the nighttime lineup, has no Indians involved in the teaching of that ancient erotic technique; rather, a white sex therapist offers instruction to couples eager to improve their bedroom skills. Unless the narrative deliberately unfolds in a decidedly “other” time and space, the bodies it shows seem designed to mirror the imagined spectator and provide a comforting sameness of image. One exception: *Women: Stories of Passion*, one of the latter entries into the soft-core fray, which does have a more multicultural cast and (as we will see later) a slightly different perspective on the genre.

Raymond Williams (1975) has declared that television cannot be understood without attention to flow or the smooth interlinking and passage of programming, commercials, and other promotional material. Although his views are now subject to much debate, I believe that in the case of Showtime, it is important to consider network branding. So, before looking at the stylistic and narrative choices that define each show’s individual style, attention must be paid to Showtime’s scheduling and changing contextualization of these programs as well as their commonalities. *Red Shoe Diaries*, by virtue of its higher budget and notoriety, stands singly and maintains a relatively consistent time slot. At one time, the others, however, appeared in random alternation, following in *Red Shoe*’s footsteps under the more generic title *The Erotic Zone*; now *Red Shoe* remains the most frequently re-aired, but the overarching title has disappeared. Also long gone is the even earlier presentation in which the channel framed each show in the lineup with an ongoing promo centering on a rather nerdy young man. This callow fellow sat at a video control board while, on a nearby monitor, a scantily dressed and obviously horny female taunted and teased him with his inability to enter her on-air universe. Sometimes a beef-cakey male would join her on the screen within the screen, leaving the poor host trapped in the real world in paroxysms of frustration.

This obvious stand-in for the desiring male spectator played out a scene of unfulfillment in which a fantasy land inhabited with sex kittens remained temptingly close but always just out of reach. Like the spectator, too, his only real source of power was the control board’s on-off switch that provided access to the very images making him so hot and bothered. But this simple one-to-one correspondence implies only male viewers, which hardly describes Showtime Nighttime’s viewership, at least for *Red Shoe Diaries*.⁸ The contradictions inherent in this opening sequence become a perfect metaphor for the evening’s programming, which presumably tried to net a mixed gender audience while remaining, for the most part, unable to disengage fully from the male viewing position. In fact, the

hyperbolically bimbolike qualities of the actress on the monitor may have proved offensive to women—unless they saw her open expression of sexuality from the safe space of the monitor as a pleasurable vindictive power. In 1998, Showtime took on the widespread logo *No Limits*, “designed to show that: SHOWTIME pushes the boundaries of everyday television, offering an emotional escape that has no limits and endless possibilities. The tag line . . . captures the essence of the brand image and clearly defines SHOWTIME’s product” (Viacom Press Release from www.viacom.com).

At one point, *Red Shoe Diaries* alone received the honor of a special introductory promo. It opened with a number of rich and sultry female voices, accompanied by scenes from the show, purring the series salutation “Dear Red Shoes,” over and over again. Then the female star of that evening’s episode took over and gave tantalizing hints of her own intimate story—which “nobody will know . . . no one but you, Red Shoes.” Or perhaps one should say, Red Shoes and us. Of Showtime’s programs, *Red Shoe* merits the most attention. As the night’s opening attraction, it bore the responsibility for winning and holding viewers for the less well-known and elaborate shows that followed. In addition, its clearly defined style, popularity, and performances all raise important issues about the soft-core genre. As David Bianculli (1996), television critic for the *New York Daily News*, put it, “Other series . . . have tried to tap the same erotic reservoir, but ‘Red Shoes’ still has the most style and flair.” To examine these questions, I will compare and contrast the elements of this program, particularly its narrative structure and its use of the male body, with the qualities of hard core as outlined in Williams’s (1987) studies of such texts.

On Showtime Nighttime Online, the station’s web site, these words describe *Red Shoe*: “It’s back! It’s beautiful. Zalman King’s *Red Shoe Diaries* returns with five sweetly romantic episodes.” As this little blurb suggests, since its inception as a full-length movie in 1990, *Red Shoe Diaries* has been pitched to women. The originating film, directed by Zalman King (*9-1/2 Weeks, Wild Orchid*), had a dual focalization: that of Jake, who after his fiancée’s suicide comes upon her diary, tucked into a shoebox with hot red high heels; and the dead woman’s narration, taken directly from the journal’s entries. The pages reveal her tempestuous affair, deeply rooted insecurity, and profound unhappiness with her so-called perfect life. In the film’s final moments, Jake, distraught by the knowledge that his “once in a lifetime love” had cheated on him, takes out a classified ad under the name “Red Shoes” asking for personal stories from those who have betrayed or been betrayed. These confessional responses, revolving around issues of duplicity, freedom, loneliness, and most notably, control, structure the series, which began in 1991.

If, as Williams (1987) pointed out, hard core as it moved into the narrative feature film became obsessed with the idea, prevalent at the time, of

sexuality as a problem, *Red Shoe* continues this study but transforms the terms of the investigation. Women's physical pleasure, the locus of films such as *Deep Throat*, here becomes a more overarching and organic concern with the meaning of satisfaction. *Red Shoe* rarely hints that its female protagonists have a problem with the body as such; their quandary arises due to dissatisfaction with a male partner or the general level of control in their lives. While this show is certainly not feminist in its realization, it has chosen on some level to appropriate the terms of feminist discourse. In "Jump," the heroine—like Jake's beloved Alix—has a so-called perfect relationship but feels as if she's merely "going through the motions."

Significantly, she describes this sensation as being like an actress or someone performing a striptease, a motif that runs through several episodes in the series. Quite often, the women relating these tales directly confront the issue of being watched and posing and express discomfort with the situation—which they never do when they are the bearers of the gaze. What Williams (1987, 50) refers to as "the self-conscious control and surveillance normally exercised by the 'properly' socialized woman over her appearance . . . so evident in the soft-core turn on," becomes in this instance a source of displeasure to the protagonists. "Slow Train," a rare period piece set during the Great Depression, features a starving heroine who hesitantly agrees to model for a photographer; we have already seen her watch with a mixture of fear, horror, and compassion as another clearly desperate woman slept with a man for a dollar. Although the brightly paced bluegrass music and rapid-fire cutting during the picture-taking convey a sense of joy as she and the photographer both disrobe and share a bottle of liquor, the sequence ends with her escaping and running back to the railroad to hop the next train, with money in hand. Once aboard—thanks to the proffered arm of a handsome and sensitive fellow vagrant—she tearfully expresses her shame at the whole enterprise, whispering that "he made me put on whore's clothes." Similarly, in "Alphabet Girl," a young model rebels against her photographer lover's domineering personality and his bullying efforts to push her further and further for the sake of an assignment. Ultimately, she walks out on him and on her first high-paying modeling job.

In each case, the ambivalence of putting oneself on display for cash and career can only rebound and reflect on the show itself. Performance, in *Red Shoe Diaries*, becomes a dirty word, deeply opposed to liberation, pleasure, and instinct. Even when not explicitly linked to the camera—as in "How I Met My Husband," in which a dominatrix and the male stripper who becomes her client fall in love and take up more suitable employment—false veneers usually work in opposition to true romance. The interesting twist on this perspective emerges from the show's attitude toward its own performers: the more famous you are, the less you reveal. Obviously,

legitimate actresses do not bare their body unless they are in an art film or receiving a hefty \$12 million paycheck. Guests such as model Beverly Johnson, onetime teen heroine (now indie queen) Ally Sheedy, *Dynasty's* Sammi Davis, *Star Trek: Next Generation's* Denise Crosby, and French art-film actress Arielle Dombasle flash their breasts but otherwise remain fully clothed, leaving the full-scale nudity to the less exalted female performers.

Themes of identity and role-playing also run through the other programs in the lineup. *Love Street* has featured a prostitute during the Prohibition era who is blackmailed by a detective into helping him catch a murderer; at various points, she is forced to act, first with an undercover cop, then with the guilty client, while she is spied on by the brothel owner and later the police. At story's end, she leaves the big city, the painful charade having restored her true though buried sweetness and sense of honor.

One of the most interesting episodes of *Compromising Situations* plays a variation on the hard-core casting couch narrative, of which Williams (1987) found plentiful examples. A sleazy producer auditions a number of actresses for an adult film, demanding that they perform for the camera—just to be sure they will not freeze up during the actual production. The women at first resist, clearly finding the prospect of undressing and miming masturbation unappetizing, but they finally give in. At one point, an unattractive harridan, claiming to be from a Hollywood watchdog group, storms in and accuses the producer of being a phony. It turns out that this “Marian the Librarian” figure is herself an actress, and she returns to the studio for a second encounter, this time poured into a spandex dress of minimal size. The producer neither recognizes her nor sees the small video recorder nestled in a hole in her purse. Before he gets the chance to roll his camera, she engages him in sexual play—and uses her own tape to blackmail him into giving her a part. “Some of us bimbos *can* act,” she announces smugly to the nonplussed producer. In the last shot, she is on set in the star's chair, a diva arrogantly ordering everyone about. Like *Red Shoe*, this narrative plays with fire by pointedly foregrounding female unhappiness at the genre's requirements. (Although the only one with the moxie to make it does seem unperturbed by the idea of undressing.) However, as the poor cousin in the lineup, it offers no subsidiary pleasures for women: it is rather like the bargain basement “Wayne's World” production of the soft-core crowd, with one bare set, cheap costumes, and not always terribly attractive actors.

The epistolary nature of *Red Shoe Diaries* has an assortment of implications for its storytelling choices. As Nina Martin (1994) rightly noted, the show does potentially bracket the female confession with a male's judgmental perspective on her revelations. After the publication of Martin's article, however, Jake's comments have become either increasingly unrelated to the woman's drama or self-consciously, perhaps even self-

reflexively, ironic. Toward the end of the series, he became far more likely to ask his ever-present pup Stella if she's hungry than to wonder about his correspondent's emotions. Barring that, he seems to mock the frequently convoluted and quirky writing style of the show's scripts. When one scribe ends her epistle by sadly noting, "so I love him, and he loves her, and she loves him" ad nauseum, Jake quizzically murmurs to Stella, "So he loves her, and she loves him, and I love you, and I don't even understand this." While on one level this can appear contemptuous of the woman's heartfelt expression, on another it can be seen both as poking fun at itself and distancing the now-famous actor David Duchovny, *The X-Files* star who has always played Jake, from the role and the series. It is worth stressing, however, that Duchovny's continued presence on and loyalty to the show—he stayed throughout its full run—certainly gave the show star cachet, media attention, and fan viewership its competitors lacked. Not surprisingly, once he shot to fame, Duchovny's image and name figured prominently on the sale videos, despite his brief presence in most episodes.⁹

The letter and the voiceover to which it gives rise have some fascinating effects: first, they provide a relatively cohesive structure for the program's often disconnected narratives. Neither *Compromising Situations* nor *Love Street* nor *Softly from Paris* has the episodic and structural continuity that differentiates *Red Shoe* from these solely "one-off" programs—however, *Women: Stories of Passion*, which in many ways seems like a direct response to *Red Shoe*, does have both a continuing character and an overarching structure organizing all the episodes. *Passion* (ironically produced by Playboy Enterprises but written and directed entirely by women) replaces the emotional but mystified-by-women male interlocutor of *Red Shoes* with a female sexual researcher, à la Nancy Friday, writing a book about women's vibrant and wide-ranging fantasy life. Unlike Jake, a loner who reads letters from figures he will never encounter in the flesh, this author meets her subjects, bonds with them, exchanges intimacies in warm girl talk, and it is implied, has a successful romantic relationship of her own. For the female viewer, she is a like figure, while the brooding, emotionally unavailable Jake presumably should stir up maternal and/or sexual interest.

Also in contrast to *Red Shoe*, *Stories of Passion* allows for narratives that acknowledge lesbianism as a life choice (an episode about a seemingly first-time gay encounter that turns out to be a long-established interracial couple's playacting in honor of their anniversary); that suggest women might like the completely unfettered sex more traditionally accorded to a man (a tale about a soon-to-be-married woman who would like a series of pre-nuptial flings with no negative consequences); that happily dramatize the enticements of an older woman for a young male; and that deal with racial issues (a Chinese woman's frustration at a white man's stereotyped "Asian doll" image of her). And, as Jane Juffer (1998) notes, "it shows as much of

the male body as the female; furthermore, women are often presented in the role of teachers, instructing men in how to give women greater sexual pleasure" (p. 224).

If *Women: Stories of Passion's* narration links the series to pop psychology and also, as the title suggests, to the very process of storytelling, for which even young girls are considered to have an affinity, then *Red Shoe's* voiceover and epistolary organization link the show to more lurid confession and to other, earlier forms of female sexual fiction. As Williams (1987) noted, many hard-core films of the 1970s tuned into the zeitgeist of their day by integrating a psychoanalytic perspective into their stories and using therapists as a means of exploring the question of female sexuality, but *Red Shoe Diaries*, by contrast, avails itself of the therapy of the late 1980s and 1990s: public confession and the media. The impetus for those letters comes from a newspaper ad placed by Jake, and as the promo for the show implies, the woman is confessing a history of betraying and being betrayed, of transgressing the limited boundaries of so-called normal heterosexual love. (These transgressions, however, may be as limited as being frosted and turned into a naked living birthday cake for one's husband, a story line generated by a contest to write an episode of the show. The winner was male.) But aside from its nod to our postmodern public culture, in which one feels the need to divulge one's darkest secrets to total strangers, *Red Shoe Diaries* resembles a form of journalism that, for my generation at least, was the girls' equivalent of *Playboy*: rags such as *True Confessions* often provided young females with their first exposure to soft-core porn not imagistically but narratively. Replete with supposedly real-life stories such as "My Husband Made Me Go to Bed with His Best Friend!" or "I Got Drunk and Slept with My Sister's Fiancé—On the Day Before Their Wedding!" these sex-stuffed tales served a purpose that the increasingly explicit romance novels do today.¹⁰

In these articles, the sexual activity is funneled through the female narrator's raging emotions. The writing relentlessly details her body and her sensations, not those of the generic man (or men). Similarly, *Red Shoe Diaries* and all the other soft-corn porn texts ultimately have to confront the male body as a problem. As Dyer (1992) wryly put it, the trouble in hard core is that "the penis is no patch on the phallus" and so requires the most careful of preparations; and if it is true that the cum shot is the traditional epitome of the genre, then soft core has a different problem with the male member: it cannot be shown. This is not to deny the presence of male objectification in *Red Shoe*, which shows great concern with presenting a handsome hunk to match the luscious heroine. However, this question of simple invisibility turns into a matter of complex choreography that affects the show's filming. The arrangement of bodies and camera placement must adjust to this particular game of revelation and cover up. Despite the many divergences

in Showtime's programming, all employ fragmented editing that carefully frames the woman to present her clearly, as well as moving cameras that work in rhythm with moving bodies. Furthermore, her body frequently becomes the drapery that hides her partner, a vision-proof shield sitting or lying atop him that prevents even a glimpse of the penis.

This visual and technological fragmentation extends, in the case of *Red Shoe Diaries*, to the text as a whole, both narratively and ideologically. The carefully stylized and immediately recognizable look cultivated by King, the show's producer, creator, and sometime writer/director, builds into an equally stylized storytelling process, based on achronological inserts and constantly repeated shot sequences that achieve the status of visual leitmotifs. One of Williams's (1987) most original and, I think, inspired observations is her generic comparison of the porn film and the musical. Although that genre is now experiencing a cinematic rebirth in such works as *Dancer in the Dark*, for a time the film musical (except as a Brechtian or postmodern exercise) was nearly defunct. In its wake, and picking up the detritus of its utopian, spectacular imagery, came the music video, and television's soft core not surprisingly mimics that temporally fragmented and rhythm-dependent form as well as that of its compatriot, the commercial. The emphasis that King has placed on both music and dance in *Red Shoe* furthers the comparison: the show's credits, in their long version, alternate images from the original movie with waist-down shots of a couple performing a tangolike dance. *Love Street*, as well, employs a mixture of dance and drama in its titles. In addition, King is well-known for his varied use of music (which includes bluegrass, folk, Satie, and African and Brazilian percussion), even releasing an album of the show's melodies. "The Art of Loneliness," for example, opens with *Koyaanisqatsi*-like shots of a ribbon of road, set to sultry sax music. The entire episode depends on soft, sexy jazz for both its mood and its content.

Increasingly, dance proper has become part of the presentation of sexuality: aside from sequences featuring the omnipresent stripper sliding down a pole (à la Madonna's old "Open Your Heart" video), the episode titled "Tears" starred respected male modern dancer Daniel Ezralow, accompanied by professional ballerinas; and rehearsal sequences took on the bulk of the narrative's emotional baggage. Choreographed fight or stripping scenes, populated by sweaty male bodies and viewed by the central woman (often in the companionship of other females), occur in "How I Met My Husband" as well as in an episode directed by Lizzie Borden. This strategy allows a pleasurable presentation of masculine pulchritude in a style acceptable to soft-core norms. And "Angel" featured a postmodern dance device used by such choreographic heavyweights as Trisha Brown: bungeelike cords, strapped on to the body, that allow performers to soar and swoop as though they have been blessed with a set of wings. In *Red*

Shoe, the acrobatic contraption adds an otherworldly aspect to its tale about a fallen angel who craves physical connection with women—and whose handsome looks attract them—but who is cursed with a kiss that kills. Much of the episode focuses on the flying exploits of this male seraph as he undergoes the cosmic struggle to become human.

Most of the other series have less investment than *Red Shoe* in dance proper, but they have developed an almost linguistic physical language for representing sex and working with winkingly displayed bodies. The arched back and thrown-back head and the undulating torso suggesting pelvic motion have become the sine qua non of the lovemaking sequences (occasionally, it must be admitted, leading to an almost astonishing representational repetitiveness).

While performance and stylization generally remain, as mentioned earlier, the heart of soft core and the opposition to hard core's depiction of the reality of the sex act, *Red Shoe Diaries* and its compatriots are invested in selling desire in a medium that has the same investment. Just as these programs lightly problematize issues of the displayed women, howsoever it might implicate their own projects, *Red Shoe* double dares the audience to uncover its ideology by actually integrating the consumerist enterprise into its stories. At least two episodes have focused on the making of commercials, including one for a "Red Shoes" product (in "Some Things"). The nearly indistinguishable filming of the ad within the show and the show itself clearly align the two. In the same way as Williams (1987) applied Dyer's (1992) definition of utopianism to hard core, these programs see a problem with relationships and sex that must metamorphose into fragmented, airy, and dreamlike images that carry the fragrance of romance—that sell the sizzle, not the steak—because the sizzle is all they can address. In some respect, the series make one recall the origins of the term *money shot* as consumer, not sexual, fetishism.

There is a question of who is taking pleasure in these texts, which always seem to be straddling audiences. Take, for example, one episode of *Beverly Hills Bordello* about a wife frustrated by her husband's lack of libido. When one of her female friends accidentally leaves behind some photos of herself in a lesbian encounter, the wife just cannot stop looking at the pictures—and finally confesses that she has always been intrigued by the idea of sex with another woman. The friend sends her to the bordello, but the encounter (significantly, with a black prostitute) ends with the wife fleeing in fear and shame. Eventually, consummation does occur between the wife and her friend—and the story ends with the husband looking on as the two pose and writhe in firmly stylized fashion for quite some time. On the surface, this might seem like a man's dream scenario. As sex columnist Anka (1999, 48) pointed out in an issue of *Details* devoted to lesbians, the desire to be in bed with a female duo is the number one wish of the magazine's readers:

"It's common for hetero guys to want to watch two chicks work each other up, then jump in, announcing, 'Hello, ladies!'" But the reality in this particular episode proves more complicated. The husband never actually joins in but sits watching like a lump, therefore not giving the male viewer a satisfactory identification figure. As for women, straight ones might choose not to relate to a character who cannot excite her husband, while gay females might simply be insulted by their sexuality ultimately serving as nothing more than a vision for male eyes.

In a world where Showtime and the other networks vie eagerly for awards and acclaims, the networks no longer trumpet the soft-core project: no special promotions making viewers aware of new episodes for the few series still in production, no newspaper or *TV Guide* ads at any time, and (apparently) virtually no attempt to give critics advance notice at the start of the season. Yet such shows, whether freshly minted or often reran, still hold a place on the nighttime schedule. Whether they will continue to do so will say much about the changing face of American television. Will the classy but still sexually oriented series edge them out? Will even the commercial networks, emboldened out of desperation at losing viewers, dilute soft-core's effect by airing more and more erotically charged material? Or will the down and dirty become the sole province of networks such as *Playboy* and their "lower-class" cousins, the public access channels? One will simply have to tune in to find out.

Notes

1. See Borow (1999).
2. See Faludi (1995).
3. See "Court Overrules Law Restricting Cable Sex Shows" in the *New York Times*, 23 May, 2000, A1. The lawsuit was brought by Playboy TV, which had been forced to limit its airtime to between 10 P.M. and 6 A.M., when children were unlikely to watch. (Although it is a by-request, pay-TV channel, there was a question of "signal bleed," meaning certain images and sounds might come through despite the blockage.)
4. See the cover of *Entertainment Weekly*, 6 August 1999. The accompanying inside article, titled "The XXX Files," was by A. J. Jacobs (1999).
5. According to Max Frankel (2000, 20) in his *New York Times* "Word and Image" column, "Viacom swallowed CBS to gain control of 41% of the broadcast market (and began maneuvers to overcome the frail regulatory limit of 35 percent)."
6. See Martin (1994). Also see Juffer (1998) on the representation of love, desire, and work in this series.
7. See such articles in the popular press as "The Triumph of the Prime-Time Novel," by Charles McGrath (1995).
8. Although I attempted to get more precise viewer/ratings information from Showtime, this was not possible.

9. Duchovny repeatedly expressed his fondness for the series and his gratefulness to Zalman King for the opportunity to hone his acting skills. *X-Files* fans were quite aware of this, and the show was repeatedly discussed on the "Mulder Forum." Of particular interest, of course, was the original film that featured him prominently as well as a follow-up episode titled "Jake's Story." In addition, fans knew that Duchovny's brother directed one of the episodes and that his ex-girlfriend appeared as an actress in another.

10. Interestingly, the Showtime web site has recently added an additional feature to the *Red Shoe Diaries* page: a place for viewers to write their own diary entry and to read those of others.

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“Sex and the Single Girl” in Postfeminism

The *F* Word on Television



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Introduction: Defining Postfeminism in Televisual Discourse

An exploration of sex in the nineties as represented in popular cultural texts marks the changing face of feminism in televisual discourse.¹ The questions of women's desire, from whose perspective this desire is put on display, and for whom arise in a range of recent television programs, including *Ally McBeal* (Fox 1997-present), *Sex and the City* (HBO 1998-present), and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-present).² How is feminism defined and represented in current U.S. television? How is a feminist discourse directed (literally and metaphorically) in television shows with decidedly strong and independent women protagonists? And how does a consideration of postfeminism—which involves questions of sexuality, subjectivity, and identity—demonstrate that a program can be at once prowoman but antifeminist?

Ally McBeal feminism is made popular in a postfeminist discourse in which it is acceptable to be prowoman but not to be feminist. That is, education, career, being single, and having a great wardrobe are granted to women on television; moreover, their (hetero)sexuality is celebrated. However, their liberated status is constituted and constructed by male authors (producers and writers and also male television critics) and represented within the context of a cultural epoch in which feminism has become the *f* word. Furthermore, such a glorified single status is ultimately put into question as a burden. “What's a girl to do?” is the dilemma facing our heroines of the nineties and the new millennium: too many choices, too much freedom, and too much desire has led to never-ending searching and even to depression and dysfunction. Just how far have we (not) come?

bell hooks and Susan Faludi, among others, theorize a backlash to feminism. That is, the most effective social movement in the United States has taken a great fall in the hands of the popular. As Faludi (1991) convincingly described,

The press, carried by tides it rarely fathomed, acted as a force that swept the general public, powerfully shaping the way people would think and talk about the feminist legacy and the ailments it supposedly inflicted on women. It coined the terms that everyone used: "the man shortage," "the biological clock," "the mommy track," and "postfeminism." Most important, the press was the first to set forth and solve for a mainstream audience the paradox in women's lives, the paradox that would become so central to the backlash: women have achieved so much yet feel so dissatisfied; it must be feminism's achievements, not society's resistance to these partial achievements, that is causing women all this pain. (P. 77)

Making feminism popular or, more accurately, rendering feminism acceptable in a new postfeminist era has required a transformation—a makeover, if you will—of feminism into postfeminism, of *Murphy Brown* into *Ally McBeal*. The portrayal and concept of independent women who are challenged by their independence (like *Murphy Brown*) has been replaced by the depiction of independent women who are shown as unhappy because of this independence (like *Ally McBeal*): "Now, under the reverse logic of the backlash, the press airbrushed a frown into its picture of the successful woman and announced, 'See, she's miserable. That must be because women are too liberated'" (Faludi 1991, 77). Such postfeminist discourse can be used to condemn feminism's achievements and to suggest a halt to continuing feminist struggle.

One way to gauge how far society has come in terms of the status of women is to examine the ways in which female desire and female pleasure are regulated and controlled (as much through legal and economic mechanisms as through cultural mechanisms such as popular representation). In this article, women's desire and pleasure (postfeminist sex) will be approached through three levels: institutional, textual, and receptional.³ The key thesis is that the representation of the independent woman in U.S. network television at the turn of the millennium is problematically postfeminist/antifeminist as seen in such programs as *Ally McBeal*. But counter to this program, which offers what I consider a false feminism, a program such as *Sex and the City*, which airs on cable television, offers more complex, innovative, and "destabilizing" representations of women through the politics of sexuality.⁴ Furthermore, television and the cultural space it creates serve as sites for struggle and are "sites for constant negotiation" (Brooks 1997, 185). While postfeminist discourse delimits the repre-

sentation and subjectivity of women, there remains an openness and inconclusiveness in the never-ending narrative nature of television itself. In this way, the era of postfeminism does not necessarily signify the death of feminism.

It is important to set up a definition of *postfeminism*, a term that has been bandied about quite a lot recently. There seem to be three general approaches to defining the term *postfeminism*. First, it refers to the era after second-wave feminism: that is, the 1980s and particularly the 1990s—in other words, our present context. Second, as some writers and feminists have observed, postfeminism signifies the backlash against feminism. In fact, it is the fulfillment of the backlash of the 1980s and 1990s such that we are now in a place where people—women, and young women in particular—declare that there is no more need for feminism because they believe equality (equal rights) has been achieved. Third, there are some writers, for example, Ann Brooks (1997, 1), who would like to claim the term more positively “as a useful conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism.” Brooks argued that just as postmodernism and postcolonialism do not mark that modernism and imperialism have been replaced or superseded, postfeminism does not mean that patriarchy has been overcome. Rather, postfeminism engages with the discourse of feminism’s fight against patriarchy while also challenging the hegemonic assumptions that oppression is universal among women, race, and class. In this article, it is the second definition that will be foregrounded, that of postfeminism as cultural material backlash and as represented and reproduced through (mainstream U.S.) televisual discourse.

The question to ask about the television program *Ally McBeal*, for example, is not so much the hyped-up one about whether it is feminist or anti-feminist; rather, the program enables an examination of the question of female desire in the age of postmodernity (which is, in other words, the era of postfeminism) and as embodied in a character like Ally McBeal. More specifically, female desire and its corollary, pleasure—both in the female character(s) and as offered to the female spectator(s)—are held in a state of pseudoliberation and functions in correspondence with the backlash of postfeminism. Similarly, female subjectivity is suspended in the relativism of postmodernity, such that whether women have moved from the position of being the object of desire to the subject position remains open for debate.

Postfeminism in Television: False Feminism

Strong female characters—if not necessarily the figure of a strong woman—have been on American television since its beginning. Since the

matriarchal figures in ethnic comedies in early television such as *The Goldbergs* (1949-1954) and *I Remember Mama* (1949-1956), or Lucille Ball in *I Love Lucy* (1951-1961), female characters have long been negotiating, and thus marking, the boundaries between private and public spheres. A medium constructed and structured for the female consumer, strong female characters—as in major female characters—have existed on television for more than 50 years.

I have written elsewhere about a popular television trend to temper, contain, and normalize the dramatic—and for some, traumatic—changes that were taking place in the 1960s in terms of the women's movement, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War.⁵ For example, the figure of the liberated woman was treated in television, for the most part, by negation. Often, the mother figure in a family was conveniently missing (i.e., dead) in such programs as *Bachelor Father* (1957-1962), *My Three Sons* (1960-1972), *Family Affair* (1966-1971), and *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* (1969-1972), which not only effectively erased the woman and women's issues from the home but also ultimately commented on the changing woman's role without allowing her to speak on her own behalf. By the time the postfeminist era was drifting in, there had been a number of television programs with strong, working, often single women characters, including such 1980s programs as *Cagney and Lacey* (CBS 1982-1988), *Kate & Allie* (CBS 1984-1989), *Designing Women* (CBS 1986-1993), *Murphy Brown* (CBS 1988-1998), and even *Who's the Boss?* (ABC 1984-1992), whose very title raised the important question of the day. Of course, daytime dramas (soap operas) have always focused on women's perspectives and experiences as well as on women as audiences, and many feminist television scholars have written extensively about such "women's programming."

Tania Modleski (1982), in her book *Loving with a Vengeance*, talked about what she calls feminine texts: Gothic novels, Harlequin romances, and soap operas. Her argument is that as feminine texts—texts about and for women—they are devalued. Television and television studies have also been undervalued because of television's connection to the feminine.⁶ On one hand, we ought not underestimate or underappreciate the strong representation of women on television (meaning plentiful and/or interesting); on the other, we need to recognize that there is a difference between a feminist discourse and a feminine discourse. And likewise, there is a distinction between feminist and nonfeminist reading/pleasure in television viewing, depending particularly on the level of awareness a viewer has of the performance of femininity or womanhood. As Brooks (1997, 187) reiterated in her book *Postfeminisms*,

different audiences bring "different frameworks of understandings" to their readings. . . . The concept of "pleasures" and "resisting pleasures" is an im-

portant one in media theory, highlighting the significance of the differentiated audience. In addition, media forms are recognised as “sites of struggles” around which constant “negotiation” takes place, these negotiations occurring at institutional and textual levels and at the level of reception.

Women on television have long been points of identification for women in living rooms.⁷ What makes them interesting or engaging to women viewers is that what their characters deal with are things that women can find important—surface stories about family, husbands, and the laundry and subtextual frustrations about family, husbands, and the laundry. But even if television provides a place for feminine interests, a space for the expression of frustrations, and a site for negotiating oppositional values, television (at least U.S. network television) ultimately contains or repackages feminist discourses into feminine ones.

Having and seeing a strong woman character on television is not necessarily feminist in that, in line with the ideological work of cinema, such strong women are, if not punished, carefully managed. Even arguably feminist programs, beginning with *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS 1970-1977) in the 1970s and *Kate & Allie* and *Designing Women* (produced by a woman) in the 1980s, can be seen through close analysis as limited. *Roseanne* (ABC 1988-1997) (also produced by women) provides an important and full case study (taken up by other authors such as Kathleen Rowe) as a program that focuses on the woman in domesticity. *Roseanne* became the “domestic goddess,” transforming a space of oppression to a queendom in which she ruled; it did not focus on the figure of the single, working woman. Those programs that must deal with the so-called working girl (or single girl in the city) seem to proffer a feminist tone or objective, but it ultimately seems to be a false feminism.

A woman declaring what she wants, and being represented as pursuing it, sort of, is the kind of falsely empowered image of the woman that we get in a character such as Ally McBeal. Yes, in television, a woman has the license to glance—she looks, she sees, and moreover, her glance signifies desire. Ally and her colleagues/coterie in the law firm are shown as having desires—although sexual desires more than professional ones—and Ally is offered up as a falsely desiring subject. Have television programs such as *Ally McBeal* or *Sex and the City* succeeded in moving woman from being the object of desire to the subject of desire? Are the women both objects and subjects, in the same moment? Is Ally thus empowered and liberated and, therefore, does this represent that there is no more need for feminism?

Cable television stations such as Home Box Office (HBO) and the Lifetime Channel (“television for women”) can offer alternative pleasures, which in turn, provide alternatives to or in postfeminist discourses. HBO’s *Sex and the City*, for example, displays (gloriously) and debates (complexly)

women's desire—for men, for work, for satisfaction. Although at moments the show's Samantha and her incredible sexual antics might be considered even more outrageous than Ally's fantastic imagination, that's just it: the women in *Sex and the City* don't just fantasize in a surreal world. They don't just talk, they do; and they don't just think, they act. They also make mistakes and learn and move on and continue to make choices. All the women in *Sex and the City*, Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte, and Samantha, are on display: their professional choices, their choices in lovers, their clothes, and their bodies. The question is, Is the pleasure that such a display elicits exclusively for the male gaze, is it an example of the masochistic female viewer, or is it something else?

Active Appearing: Masquerade and False Consciousness

Moving from passive object of the male gaze to self-objectification does not necessarily achieve subjectivity, and it can be a false freedom. Self-objectification could be defined as the conscious effort to gain attention through one's feminine traits—again, sexual attention, not professional attention. (Moreover, it is performed by women, rarely men.) The argument is twofold. First, this promotes the myth turned practice that a woman's greatest tool is her sex: woman equals sex, still, on this representational plane. Second, this is not a new strategy but a very old one called the masquerade: the performance of femininity. But instead of doing so with irony, Ally McBeal does so with blind revelry. Her gaze is blind.

The women of *Sex and the City*, on the other hand, possess a stronger gaze of others as well as of themselves. They are certainly pleasurable to look at, but their characters possess more motivation, purpose, and depth than to solely elicit a gaze. While offering a watershed in feminist criticism by addressing women's "to-be-looked-at-ness," Laura Mulvey did not theorize female pleasure in her inaugurative work; in Mary Ann Doane's equally influential work, she claimed that female voyeurism and "the reversal of the gaze" is impossible. As Brooks (1997, 171) described,

Doane goes further than Mulvey, in maintaining that the female gaze can gain control of the image by two means. She contends that a distance can be established by the female spectator by adopting the male spectatorial position, which Doane calls "transvestism," or by using femininity as a mask.

While Ally might not be aware of her mask (of femininity? of strength? of independence?), I am not so sure that the women in *Sex and the City* are simply masquerading as strong, independent, and attractive women; they are doing more than just flaunting the femininity as a kind of reaction formation, as Doane described. Television is about the glance rather than the

gaze, as television scholars before us have established. Such a deflected look, if you will, provides the opportunity for alternative sights/sites of and for women.

A student in my class on feminism and film and television used the phrase "active appearing."⁸ Ally might be active as opposed to passive, but the difference between appearing and being looked at is unclear. Ginia Bellafante (1998, 58) in her famous *Time* article called this kind of false consciousness a symptom of the "Camille Paglia syndrome," who "argue[s] that it is men who are the weaker sex because they have remained eternally powerless over their desire for the female body. It is female sexuality . . . that is humanity's greatest force." This is not lesbian goddess worship; this is postfeminist discourse. Postfeminism negotiates, restyles, and even apologizes for feminism and then offers up a new woman (but a different kind of new woman from the 1980s or even the 1920s) who is comfortable and confident in her sexuality and, more specifically, in sexual difference. But this notion of sexual difference is drawn from the sense of empowerment a woman feels by believing she has reclaimed her power over man, which is sex.⁹ Furthermore, this inimitable power that women have over men can only be recognized in (and by) the presence of heterosexual men. Although this expression of sexually aware women may seem to be a liberating idea, it is arguably quite old-fashioned: it is the idea that women get what they want by getting men through their feminine wiles. Just because they are conscious of it or are actively participating in it through actively appearing, they do not transcend the dynamic; they merely continue it.

The notion of the masquerade is about performing femininity as a strategy for surviving in patriarchy. Furthermore, it is about a kind of transformation, at least in consciousness on the part of the woman, but outwardly it acknowledges that the look of the woman remains the same. That is, a masquerade connotes a compromise: the woman acknowledges her performance (which is for the man), at least to herself, but she performs nonetheless. The postfeminist masquerade, on the other hand, seems blind to its own performance.

Negotiating Feminism into Postfeminism in *Ally McBeal*

This article is not intended as a full case study of *Ally McBeal*. Rather, offers it up as an example of the negotiation of feminism in current television. The Fox series began in 1997 with a premiere episode in which Ally McBeal joins the law firm of Fish, Cage, and Associates because she was sexually harassed at her former job. This marks the first of many court cases (most, in fact) in the series having to do with issues about sex and, moreover, that take feminist issues and questions and convert them into humorous answers. The space of the courtroom is set up for backlash. The show

offers female protagonists in roles that are categorically strong: these women are Harvard Law School graduates, they work in an up-and-coming Boston law firm, they have great clothes and great fun, and they do not need men—they just want them. This all can be understood as prowoman rhetoric; what is fascinating to watch—and painful, actually—is to see how the strength of these women is ultimately deflated. There might be a feminine text, but it is far from a feminist one. In fact, this television text negotiates feminism into postfeminism through prowoman rhetoric. That is, they look like strong women; moreover, they believe and act as strong women; but the postfeminist discourse overwhelms them. In the episode that I analyze here, there are two parts: a courtroom scene with Ally fantasizing as she sits at the counsel's table, and Nelle Porter and Ling Woo talking about their careers as lawyers.¹⁰

First, we are given a man's narrative (testimony, actually, for he is being sued for "negative infliction of emotional distress" for taking his best friend's wife), and it is this man's story that becomes Ally's fantasy. Ally, as an attorney, is completely distracted and unprofessional. Led by the man's testimony (about falling in love) and also led by the songstress singing "Do You Wanna Dance," she sinks into the fantasy world.¹¹ Second, Ally's actions are impotent. She looks at men and smiles at them, but they do not return the smile; so neither her glance nor her coquettish smile has power—her feminine wiles fail her. Furthermore, Ally has no voice. She utters only one word in the courtroom: "Sorry," then she mumbles, looks down, and puts her fingers in her mouth. If we were to talk about being active or being passive, the only effective action that Ally engenders is her active imagination. Her fantasy is broken when private fantasy world and public space clash, that is, in the moment of her out-loud sigh/moan; she is publicly embarrassed, happy only in her private thoughts. This is characteristic of Ally throughout the series.

In the second part of this sequence, we have Nelle and Ling talking, in essence, about being working women. Ling is only concerned about how she looks. She is not doing it for the money or for the challenge or even for an interest in the law: "I only work so I can wear my outfits," she says. Although criticized by Nelle, their workplace with "Mutt and Jeff," the senior partners John Cage and Richard Fish, is characterized as fun by Ling. Nelle, who came on the show in its second season, is portrayed as the ice queen and, not coincidentally, as being the only one who is serious about her work. She wears glasses, not surprisingly, and wears her hair up in a tight bun until demonstrative and transformative moments when her long, blonde hair comes tumbling down and her glasses come off to reveal a "hottie" underneath all the ice. This episode in particular is startling in its verbal abuse of Nelle by her ex-boyfriend (whom she dumped) who calls her "a rich-bitch, cold-hearted, ice queen, elitist snob, vicious-witch on a good

day, and a tight-wad cheap-ass too because I paid for everything.” In the last weeks of the third season, which this episode is from, she is increasingly shrill (although in a different way than Ally’s hysteria). And one can see, especially in episodes 319 and 320, she is made to look like a clown, with her colorful suits and overly large fake flowers pinned to her chest. Moreover, after Ling talks about “how hard it is to make it as partner in the big firms”—“big firms” serving as a synonym for patriarchal institutions—Nelle’s confident line implies that through her looks and with the help of a sexual harassment lawsuit, she will make partner in a month. One might argue that it is Nelle’s character that real-life professional women can identify with and that Ally is a foil; however, Nelle is not upheld or privileged by the text and, in fact, like Ally, is defeated by it.

What starts out as potentially powerful—a woman’s desire for a man and another woman’s ambition for professional advancement—ends up as stutters and silence or as empty threats. (The episode following this one displays Nelle regretting her actions against the firm.) Representations of women that have come before *Ally McBeal* have been more progressive. For example, *Designing Women* does offer a feminist discourse, even if in its delivery it is managed or repackaged; *Ally McBeal*, on the other hand, offers a postfeminist (backlash) discourse. Lucille Ball in *I Love Lucy*, although losing narratively, won performatively, as Patricia Mellenkamp (1986) analyzed. And as Janey Place (1980) argued about women in film noir, even if the femme fatale is punished in the end of the film, it is not her demise that we remember but the image and spectacle of her strength (think of Joan Crawford in *Mildred Pierce* or Gloria Swanson as Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*). In postfeminist television, however, we have women who lose both narratively and performatively. There is no power in their spectacle, even if they are presented as being the agents of their own spectacle.¹² For all of Ally’s slapstick pratfalls and near-psychotic fantasies, she does not win performatively because she is unable to rise above the (David Kelley’s) text.

Postfeminist Pleasure in *Sex and the City*

The women in *Sex and the City* wield control textually as well as performatively, perhaps because they are not in pursuit of an elusive ideal. Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte, and Samantha have imperfect (albeit pretty glamorous) lives and are not seeking perfection. Instead, contrary to the postfeminist angst represented in larger culture, although sometimes troubled, in the end these postfeminist women are shown as satisfied with their lives and, more important, with their friendships.

Their perspectives and experiences are presented and debated within the framework of friendship. And it is within the network and support of

women that individual characters come to resolutions about their problems or questions. In a recent episode of the series that is in its fourth season, newly married Charlotte decides, tentatively at first, to quit her job. Her friends are honest in their reactions (unfavorable), but it is through their differing opinions that Charlotte comes to feel firm in her own. The episode begins with the four women meeting for a meal, a regular ritual, and with Charlotte making her announcement to a shocked and somewhat judgmental group. They are dubious of her choice, and Miranda retorts, "Trey [her husband] suggested it?!" Carrie says, "But you love your job." Charlotte replies, "I know. But there's so much more I could do with my life." To which Miranda asks cynically, "Like what?" Charlotte then relays all the possibilities: pregnancy, redecorating their Park Avenue apartment, Indian cooking classes, volunteering at Trey's hospital to help raise money for the pediatric AIDS wing, and perhaps even spending a "lovely afternoon glazing bowls" at Color Me Mine. Carrie's reply is, "Well the cooking and the pediatric AIDS stuff is great. But uh, Color Me Mine, sweetie, if I was walking by and saw you in there, well, I'd just keep on walking. . . . Are you sure you're not just having a bad work week?" Charlotte says, "No, that's not it. I'm quitting, th-that's what I want to do, yup." Samantha then quips, "Well, be damned sure before you get off the ferris wheel. Because the women wanting to get on are 22, perky, and ruthless."¹³ Charlotte spends the episode becoming secure in her decision.

Carrie is the focus of the second story line, which is about her needing to be forgiven for cheating on her boyfriend. She realizes that she is being punished for "her Big mistake" (she cheated with her ex-boyfriend named Big, as in Mr. Big). After taking various forms of punishment—her boyfriend's coldness, meanness, resentment, flirting with other women, and her picking up after his dog—and after her friends ask/tell her "how much longer are you going to punish yourself?" Carrie confronts her boyfriend. She says he cannot keep punishing her and she cannot keep punishing herself and that she is sorry. She then beseeches (although not begs) for forgiveness. She repeats, "You have to forgive me" seven times as though a mantra as well as a demand. They embrace. She is not simply punished for her (sexual) excess as occurs in traditional Hollywood texts, but rather, she recognizes and names the fact that she is being punished—yes, for a moral mistake, but also for being a human being, a sexual woman. She forgives herself and then asks for forgiveness from others. This is a kind of agency that one could call postfeminist that is not set within the framework of backlash politics.

Miranda's character is the prototypical career woman, although she, too, is complicated. Still, she is the one most easily identifiable as the feminist: she is a lawyer and also "bitchy." It is she who Charlotte needs to win over to "get behind her decision" the most. Charlotte calls Miranda the next

morning: "You were so judgmental at the coffee shop yesterday. You think I'm one of those women. One of those women we hate who just works until she gets married." She continues on, striding from one lavish room being redecorated to another: "The women's movement is supposed to be about choice. If I choose to quit my job, that's my choice." Miranda musters, "The women's movement? Jesus Christ, I haven't even had coffee yet." Charlotte declares, "It's my life, and my choice. . . . Admit it, you're being judgmental!" Miranda then replies, "If you have a problem quitting your job, maybe you should take it up with your husband." Charlotte is offended (not really though, as this kind of venting is part of the process of her decision making). She states that she is quitting her job to make her life better and "do something worthwhile like have a baby and cure AIDS." Miranda, exasperated and getting ready for work, simply responds, "You get behind your choice." Charlotte exclaims, "I am behind my choice. I choose my choice." She needs her friends' support (perhaps more than her husband's) to make such important, feminist choices.

Samantha represents the sexual revolution—in its entirety. She is an over-the-top character, yet not a clown or merely a spectacle. She is a sexually free, sexually indulgent, smart, successful woman. She does often serve as comic relief; that is, the sex she has is put into a humorous light rather than an objectified spotlight. But her character is believable. More important, even if she is bragging, she represents woman's full and passionate desire, unleashed and unpunished. Her postfeminist pleasure is wild as well as sated.

Finally, it is significant to consider the space of pleasure that the women in *Sex and the City* occupy. They move through many different spaces: their apartments, restaurants, bars, art galleries, ball parks, the country/suburbs, and all over Manhattan. Unlike the women in *Ally McBeal*, who seem confined to the Boston law office, the bar on the first floor of the same building, and Ally's apartment (as well as her shrink's office), the women in *Sex and the City* go out and move throughout the space of the city. (It ought to be noted that the HBO program has a significantly higher budget than the network television show; still, Ally's pleasure and search for self exists primarily in an internal, psychic world rather than in the external "real world.") In her book on feminist geographies, Linda McDowell (1999, 150) wrote that she wants to blur the sharp associations of gender and space, "and suggest that there is a messier and more complicated set of relationships to be uncovered since so many activities transgress the clear associations between femininity and privacy on the one hand, and masculinity and public spaces on the other." The women in *Sex and the City* surely cross such boundaries. Moreover, McDowell (1999, 155) referenced Elizabeth Wilson's book, *The Sphinx in the City*, in which Wilson disagrees with Janet Wolff's contention that a female flaneur—a flaneuse—is an impossibility. These

women are not masquerading nor are they impersonating men; instead, they are experiencing urban space and participating in urban spectacle and taking (postfeminist) pleasure in it.

What marks *Sex and the City* out most clearly from *Ally McBeal* is the politics of the happy ending. There is a true sisterhood represented in the former, unlike the stereotypical cattiness often played up in the latter. Moreover, the women in *Sex and the City* represent a range of multifaceted characters, a range of different kinds of women, rather than simple tropes (e.g., the bitch, the slut, the good girl, the working woman); they can all be a little of each. And at the end of each episode, there is not the ironic and neat answer that independent women are confused and miserable, which is essentially the message in *Ally McBeal*, but the women are left fairly satisfied. In the episode analyzed here, for instance, Charlotte is finally happy quitting her job, Miranda finds joy in cooking and not working because of a neck injury, Carrie finds forgiveness, and Samantha finds yet another great bed partner. They, in their complicated and imperfect lives, are happy.

Concluding Remarks: Television Criticism and Postfeminism

Television Studies since the beginning has been feminist: television criticism is feminist criticism because its goal is to understand television in its workings as a site for stories for and about women but within patriarchy. It has been studied as a piece of domestic furniture as well as a cultural medium. From very early on, although similar to film in its adherence to gender ideology, television studies delineated the ways in which television was very different from the cinematic experience. The major differences are twofold: (1) the patriarchal gaze of cinema is the heterogeneous glance in television, and (2) film theory has had a difficult time accounting for the female spectator, whereas in television, the female consumer and thereby the female viewer is acknowledged and even targeted. (And furthermore, female spectatorial pleasure is different in television.) It is not a coincidence that so many television programs star female protagonists, which is still a rarity in American cinema. (Erin Brockovich is most recently offered up—cleavage and all—as our millennial heroine.)

To what degree a female-centered television supertext provides or allows for feminism to emerge remains a question. Elsbeth Probyn's (1997) idea of feminism as the other in television sets feminism in (subtextual) opposition to a show's real heroine. Furthermore, she argued that postfeminism in television came hand in hand with new traditionalism, as she quotes from Leslie Savan:

"It was never an issue except among feminists who felt that we were telling women to stay home and have babies. We're saying that's okay. But that's not all we're saying. We're saying they have a choice." As Leslie Savan has pointed out, new traditionalism has become synonymous with a new age of "choiceoisie" and it is precisely this ideology of choice that articulates new traditionalism and post-feminism. (Probyn 1997, 130)

Television criticism has consistently accounted for and analyzed female characters and female viewers and the choices that they have. Emerging from the (second-wave) feminist movement, television criticism shares the goals of deconstructing systems of power and systems of representation. Now that we are, apparently, in a postfeminist era, I think a kind of postfeminist television criticism must also emerge.

Postfeminist television criticism would include a consideration of race as well as class. Neither *Ally McBeal* nor *Sex and the City* successfully addresses or includes women of color. Ling in *Ally McBeal*, in addition to being a problematic representation of an Asian American woman, is not fully integrated with the rest of the characters. As for the urban space in *Sex and the City*, one would think Manhattan is all white with the exception of "the Korean" Carrie gets her orange juice from and the Asian ladies who do their nails. Postfeminism, at least in these television programs, is racialized as white and upper middle class.

A postfeminist television criticism would include in its analysis of television an acknowledgement (however regrettably) that a feminist discourse has been overtaken by a backlash against feminism, which I refer to as postfeminist discourse. Thus, we need to see how prowoman values (which exist in the social world) have been converted into prowoman rhetoric (which is mediated through texts) and then set up in opposition to feminist objectives (also converted from actual values into stereotyped feminist rhetoric). That is, we have to see how the figure of the working woman on television displays and declares that she is liberated (i.e., postfeminist), because she is able to say as Ally would say, "I am a strong working woman whose life feels empty without a man." (Ally also said, "I am a sexual object for God's sake! He couldn't give me a little grope?") Joyce Millman (1997, 4) wrote that *Ally McBeal* suggests that women today are beyond feminism and that "it's strong to be self-diminishing, smart to be indecisive, brave to be a wimp." Postfeminist television criticism would take into account this turnaround in what is considered a strong woman, a turnaround that has engendered a televisual discourse that is prowoman but antifeminist.

One critic wrote that "Ally McBeal is the epitome of the post-modern lawyer who exists in a world where there is little distinction, if any, between private conduct and public image. . . . For Ally, the law and lawyering is an

outlet for her emotional turmoil and her sexual fantasy" (Epstein, 1999, 38). Another critic declared, "But I don't want to mislead you into thinking 'Ally McBeal' is a show about the law. Hey, this is Fox! 'Ally McBeal' is a show about a girl and her love life" (Millman, 1997, 3). More seriously, however, Millman (1997, 2) argued,

"Ally McBeal" and its high strung, feisty heroine are glossy, commercial appeals to the sisterly feeling of female consumers. But what they're really pitching is a male wish-list kind of feminism where women are independent and strong—within reason, of course—and looking foxy counts for 75 percent of the total grade.

This "brainy babe" displays a "do-me feminism," as Ruth Shalit (1998, 28) described. She wrote that such representations of do-me feminism on television serves to "pander to politically correct sensibilities while attracting male viewers in droves." *Ally McBeal* is a television text that offers freedom through a masquerade that "is not one." The women characters on the program are represented as strong women who express their desires and acknowledge the heterosexual world; but their main strategy for survival and success—and happiness—is through their sexuality. If this is post-feminist, what was prefeminist?

In the move from modernity to postmodernity, from the centered self to the decentered subject, women (real and represented) did not get our turn. Just because postfeminism and postmodernism declare the feminist revolution complete and call for pluralism in subjecthood does not mean that we need—or ought—to accept a self-objectifying, schizophrenic woman (i.e., Ally) as our heroine. In fact, we need to actively resist being offered the (s)crap(s) we have been thrown: a posthero as our heroine.

Notes

1. I realize that we have now moved to "sex in the millennium," which takes us to the open possibilities of the internet and cyber sex. Discussions are arising on how gender can be transcended on the internet because gender is disembodied. But I am talking about embodied sex—call me old-fashioned.

2. The syndicated *V.I.P.* (1998-present) is arguably another postfeminist program. It is a television show, about women bodyguards no less, starring Pamela Anderson as Vallery Irons. In April 2000, Anderson split with ex-husband Tommy Lee, again, and as of June 2000, Anderson's representatives have confirmed that she has dropped the Lee from her last name.

3. This methodology is taken by L. Star and referenced by Ann Brooks (1997).

4. *Xena: Warrior Princess*, which is syndicated, is deserving of a separate and full study. The program achieves on many levels: in offering a woman action hero who

is not simply a woman in drag or a woman who becomes a man to become a hero. More particularly, the program challenges narrative and normative heterosexuality and patriarchy in featuring a female buddy (love) story and upholding Amazon women communities and philosophies.

5. See the discussion of women in 1960s television in my forthcoming article, "'Serving' Orientalism: Negotiating Identity Through the Television Text."

6. Andreas Huyssen (1986) wrote in the well-known essay "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other" that there is a gendering of inferior mass culture as feminine.

7. Television viewing has moved beyond the living room. See Anna McCarthy's (2001) new book, *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space*.

8. I thank Hailey Eber and other members of our class, "Feminism and Film & Television at Northwestern University," in spring 2000.

9. I call this *Ally McBeal* feminism as well as Victoria's Secret feminism, often the show's sponsor, along with Herbal Essence, whose commercials contain women's orgasmic cries of delight at their soft and shiny hair and even including one commercial with a lawyer having her hair washed by three buff bailiffs.

10. This is episode 319, "Do You Wanna Dance," which first aired May 8, 2000, on CBS. There are two main major story lines: first, a court case against a man who has had an affair with his best friend's wife, and the other is about Ally's meeting someone on the internet, having internet sex with him, then finding out he is 16 and she is getting arrested for statutory rape (she is found not guilty).

11. The soundtrack to *Ally McBeal* is very popular, and there are several *Ally McBeal* soundtrack CDs by Vonda Shephard, who is even featured in the opening credit sequence.

12. Although arguably it is the writer of the show more than the actress who is the agent of this spectacle.

13. Amanda Fazzone criticized the National Organization for Women's choices of female role models on television in an essay in the 30 July issue of *The New Republic*. She argued that the choice of shows starring twenty-somethings such as *Felicity*, *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, *Charmed*, and *7th Heaven* are not feminist by writing: "It's clear that these female leads are marketed outside their time slots not for their smarts and self-confidence but for their sex appeal" (as quoted in the *New York Times*, 30 July, 2001, C1).

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Contemporary French Television, the Nation, and the Family



Continuity and Change

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I would like to begin this article with two rather sweeping but, I think, ultimately sustainable claims, first about the French nation and second about French television. During the 1980s and 1990s, French concepts of nation and national identity underwent a number of shifts and transformations. The moves toward decentralization introduced in the early years of Mitterrand's administration coupled with increasing acknowledgement of the diversity of French national life, notably through discussion of immigrant experience, bear witness to a gradual calling into question of a *jacobin* identity based on the binary relationship between state and individual citizen. In place of this tradition, there emerged new forms of identity constructed through plurality and difference: consider, for example, the calls for changes to the nationality code and the introduction of a *jus soli* law in the 1980s. However, although these transformations are highly significant, it must be stressed that this negotiation of the nation was and remains an incomplete and ongoing project. The infamous *tchador* affair over the right of Muslim girls to wear the veil in secular state schools, the rise of the *Front National*, and recent discussions about changes in laws governing the use of regional languages all testify to both the continuation and the unfinished nature of this transformation. Nevertheless, I think it is fair to say that the French nation did begin to become something rather different during this period as new ways of imagining it via difference and diversity emerged to challenge paradigms dominant since the Revolution.

Television in France has also undergone a series of transformations since the early 1980s. Clearly, any account of television in France must be linked to the long history of state ownership and the close links between

government and broadcasters. This relationship was developed in the early days of television broadcasting, notably after de Gaulle's achievement of the presidency in 1958. By using television to create a sense of unity and support for the Fifth Republic, de Gaulle was instrumental in beginning to construct television as a medium able to speak to and for the nation. At the same time, his overt and, it must be said, masterful exploitation of television to further his own political ends led to a broadcasting landscape that was not just state owned but was state controlled in an extremely partisan fashion. Thus, public service television was perceived by many to be irredeemably biased, a tool in the hands of the incumbent government. Indeed, through government-friendly appointments and ministerial directives, the Minister of Information continued to control television news output throughout the lifetime of the Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française.¹

The broadcasting landscape began to change during the 1970s; however, it was not until the 1980s that the state monopoly of broadcasting finally came to an end. Just as earlier developments in the French televisual landscape can be seen to emerge from the broader social and political context, so the transformations of the 1980s were closely bound up with political, cultural, and technological changes. Partly a result of developments in cable and satellite broadcasting, they were also a key feature of the ideology and identity of the newly elected Socialist administration and of Mitterrand's presidency. Central to the Socialist and particularly Mitterrand's agenda was cultural policy including the vexed issue of broadcasting. Mitterrand had been a vociferous critic of the Gaullist's political interference in television and radio, and he was determined to create a more open broadcasting arena that would give voice and space to those who had previously found themselves marginalized. Indeed, in many ways the Socialist's plans for broadcasting can be seen as symptomatic of its broader ambitions for social change, the decentralization and renegotiation of citizenship described a moment ago. In July 1982, the Broadcasting Bill was introduced in parliament, signaling a complete reorganization of television and radio and the demise of the state monopoly. The new statute divided the broadcasting system into a complex array of different organizations coordinated by the *Haute Autorité*. Perhaps most significant was the decision to abandon the state monopoly. Although initially broadcasting remained a public service, obliged to conform to well-defined obligations set out in the operating conditions of the various companies, the state finally relinquished its overweening control of all television and radio output, thus opening up new spaces for multiple and even dissenting voices.

Despite the politically partisan nature of much early television, just as the BBC set out to become the voice and the mirror of the British nation, so French television took on a central role in the construction and

representation of French national life. Central to this process has always been the family. Since the very early days of television broadcasting, the family has functioned as both a structuring discourse and a metaphor for televisual production and its relationship with its audiences. Television schedules were organized around a particular notion of family life that in turn patterned and structured the audience's sense of time and space. The family was represented across a whole range of genres, from the game show and sitcom to more serious current affairs programming. Through this representation of recognizable family groups, people "just like us," the viewer at home was invited to identify with the various television channels and their output; he or she became part of the television audience, the vast "national domestic" represented and constructed in these televisual equivalents (Cardiff and Scannell 1987).

Thus, television broadcasting established a notion of nation and national audience through the family. As such, it established a bridge between public and private spaces (a process that, it should be stressed, is both culturally specific and relatively recent), between the domestic and the national, while maintaining a clear distinction between the two. Although the families seen on television may have been extremely familiar, the family audience addressed by television was not a real family with all its attendant ambiguities and uncertainties but rather a national family constructed in and for the public space. It was a means by which television, that is, the public domain, could enter into the private domain and thus reinforce its position as the voice of the nation. By entering the home, television was initially seen as a way of consolidating the family. Its place at the center of family life (a place constructed through programs, schedules, etc.) would bring the family together, encouraging unity and shared pleasures. However, television was also accused of having a quite different impact. Critics described it as the unwelcome guest, coming between family members and bringing potentially dangerous material to the heart of domestic life.²

This process and this potential paradox have a particular resonance in France. The centralization that has traditionally marked French political life extends to the family, which has a long history of state regulation. Family allowances were created in 1939 and continued after the war. Relatively small for the first child, these allowances increased upon the birth of each subsequent child, thus encouraging *la famille nombreuse* and actively setting out to boost the birth rate. These same *familles nombreuses*, families with three or more children, were then eligible for further benefits such as cheaper transport. In addition to these allowances, the *quotient familial* allowed a proportion of income to be exempt from direct taxation for each child and dependent. State aid for the family did not end here; provision for maternity care, maternity leave, and rights have also long surpassed that provided in other European countries. Fiscal and monetary policies have

combined with government campaigns to encourage childbirth. The family, with reproduction as its key task, is monitored by a state that sees it as an integral part of the nation. The advent of mass broadcasting with its appeal to and construction of the family can then be seen as an adjunct or indeed a threat to this earlier form of social control. Television's incursion into the family home could extend state policies and yet potentially threaten their viability and their very authority. In this sense, the longstanding state monopoly of television can be seen as both an extension of other forms of state control (including the regulation of the family) and a means of ensuring their continuation.

However, this national role and, hence, this national family need to be reconsidered in the light of recent developments in broadcasting. The demise of the state monopoly, the advent of cable and satellite television, coupled with the development of new terrestrial channels and the privatization of TF1 have caused a fragmentation of the French televisual landscape and undermined the apparent certainties of the national broadcast to a national audience carried out by a state-controlled public television. A telling example of this is the current competition between the two main terrestrial television channels in France, TF1 and France 2. Competition for audiences and advertising revenue orchestrated by the findings of *médiamat* (the agency responsible for audience monitoring) has meant an increase in popular entertainment on the second channel. Indeed, a cursory glance at the schedules suggests the difficulty in distinguishing between the offerings of France 2 and TF1. Since game shows, variety shows, and the so-called reality shows³ appear on France 2, many French commentators have claimed that Arte/La 5 (founded in 1992 to replace La Sept), with its combination of documentaries, cultural programs, and art films, is the only true public channel to exist in France. The very nature of the new televisual landscape with its insistence upon advertising revenue and the attendant race for audiences means that France 2 is obliged to compete with TF1. This calls into question distinctions between public and private television; both channels broadcast to a broad audience defined as national, and yet their spectators are concomitantly recast as consumers. It has become a truism to describe the shift from public to commercial television in terms of a shift from audience as citizen to audience as consumer, and this is an overly simplistic trajectory that I do not wish to rehearse here. Nevertheless, the competition between the public France 2 and the private TF1 provides ample evidence of a new broadcasting landscape patterned by the discourses of both nation and citizenship and consumerism. Indeed, the torturous passage of Catherine Trautmann's *Loi de l'Audiovisuel* (a much disputed attempt to reconfigure the role of the public channels) through the French parliamentary system in 1999 bears witness to the difficulty in defining the role and identity of public service television in contemporary French

society: should it still attempt to speak to and for the nation? In the late 1990s, how should this nation be defined? How can any single broadcaster address the diversity of identities and cultures that are now acknowledged to make up French national life?

With these transformations in mind, it is imperative to look more closely at the family of contemporary French television. Despite changes in programming, marketing, and target audiences, both schedules and program content continue to be organized around a specific construction of daily, family life. Thus, children's programs are shown on Wednesdays and Saturdays, cookery and lifestyle shows continue to pepper daytime television, and the eight o'clock news on TF1 and France 2 remains as a mainstay of the remit of each channel. Nevertheless, if the televisual landscape has changed and its place in the nation along with it, it seems certain that there must have been some renegotiation of this national domestic, this televisual family. It is striking that despite much analysis of contemporary television in both France and Britain, there has been no real attempt to ask what has happened to this family so long accepted as a central device for the organization of televisual output and address. Unlike television, which has to all intents and purposes been freed from state control, the family in France continues to be subject to various forms of aid and propaganda. Although this intervention is not overly prescriptive (e.g., the *allocation monoparentale* is an allowance paid to all single parents regardless of their marital status), it does continue to infiltrate family life. Yet family life, just like television, has changed dramatically in recent years. Falling marriage rates, rising divorce rates, and a host of other social changes mean that the family is no longer the straightforward category imagined by early television producers and government officials. What is the family in contemporary France? How is it constructed and represented in a changing audiovisual landscape? And why retain the family as an organizing device?

Now, I am not trying to suggest that representation of the family alone can describe and explain shifts in the organization of French television nor indeed developments in French society. However, if we accept the key role played by this construct in the structure and address of the televisual landscape, it does seem to me that the family provides a very useful paradigm for approaching some broader questions about contemporary television and its position within, and relationship to, its social and cultural context. Rather than a linear trajectory from society to television to family life, I would like to stress a circular relationship in which each both acts upon and in some way mirrors or represents the other. In other words, changes in society and in concepts of the nation have an impact on familial identities, which in turn have an impact on television, which also brings about shifts in constructions of the family, the nation, and so on and so forth.

As I mentioned a moment ago, the family is of course present in a wide range of genres and is a central discourse for the organization of schedules and audience address. As such, its usefulness as a paradigm for a study of contemporary television and its place within the nation is problematized by the very vastness of its purview. It is vital to distinguish between representations of the family on television and constructions of the audience as family through scheduling and so forth. The two are linked but not identical. Moreover, no one genre or program can represent television or indeed a particular channel; nevertheless, for the purposes of this discussion, I would like to focus on a selection of debates, televised discussions or talk shows, and their representations of the family.

There are a number of reasons for my decision to concentrate on this specific genre or genre hybrid. First, televised debate has enjoyed a central role in French televisual output since the 1960s. An overview of its history reveals that from the 1960s onward, various types of discussion shows can be found on all the main channels. These programs have different areas of concern (some are specialist, others far more general in their focus) and will be scheduled at different times in the day according to their subject matter and target audience. However, they are clearly a central feature of both public and private television, which is a fact that suggests their role in the battle for ratings and hence in the struggle between the two forms of broadcasting. For example, *Les Dossiers de l'écran*, which first started broadcasting 1 January 1967, altered little in terms of both format and tone until its demise 6 August 1991, suggesting its key position in the identity of the second channel. The eclecticism and spectacle of *Ciel mon mardi*, first broadcast in 1988, transgressed the codes of the traditional *débat télévisé*, revealing it as a product of the newly privatized TF1 and its need to attract audiences via popular, entertaining programs.

Second, an examination of the formal structures and narrative of the televised debate can tell us much about the ways in which the different channels forge their identity, perceive and establish relationships with their audience, and interrogate and interact with civil society. Such an examination is not unique to the discussion show; however, this genre is of particular interest. Through its focus on political and social issues, the televised debate or discussion show can in some ways be seen as public service in action: by attempting to explain and even ameliorate the problems of civil society, such shows attempt to perform a public function and thus reinforce the position of television within the public sphere. Consider, for example, *Place de la République*, a discussion show currently broadcast on France 2 whose title alone I think provides a clear indication of the role it accords itself.

Many of the more recent talk shows and, most strikingly, the reality shows,⁴ have moved from this concentration on the social and political to

an interrogation of the personal and the private or, indeed, to an examination of social and political issues via individual experience. A notable example of this, and one to which I shall return in a moment, is Jean-Luc Delarue's *Ça se discute*, broadcast on France 2 since 1990 and a key program in the channel's current output. This shift reinforces the entry of television into the private sphere and suggests new relationships between viewer, broadcaster, and civil society.

Ultimately, it is this shift from the political to the personal, from the public to the private, that makes these genres so fruitful for a study of both representations of the family and, more broadly, of renegotiations of televisual and national identities. Following the circular model described above, these discussion shows, talk shows, and reality shows emerge from shifts in the televisual landscape and the wider social context while constructing and representing transformations and reconfigurations that they, in turn, incorporate. The very fact that questions of identity increasingly lie at the heart of these genres suggests their role in the various types of identity renegotiation, which, I suggest, have taken place in France in recent years.

In an article published in *Réseaux* in 1995, Marie-Françoise Lévy gave an account of French televisual representations of the family from 1950 to 1986. She described a gradual progression from a normative and quite serious social examination of the family in programs such as *Le Magazine féminin* (a woman's magazine broadcast from 1952 to 1959), *A la découverte des français* (a series of documentary-cum-discussion shows broadcast between 1958 and 1959), and *Zoom* (a magazine show broadcast in the late 1960s) to an increasing focus on the emotional and the affective in programs such as *Si vous écoutiez vos enfants* (Antenne 2 6 February 1979) and *Psy show* (Antenne 2 26 October 1983–27 November 1985). Indeed, Lévy claimed that from 1974 to 1986 (the point at which she concluded her study), transformations within the family were accompanied by the introduction of psychoanalysis to television's investigation of intrafamilial relationships (Lévy 1995, 189). In Lévy's (1995, 192) own words,

la dimension dominante de ces transformations réside, en effet, dans le processus de publicité de la vie privée, dessinant insensiblement les contours d'une météorologie de l'intimité, venant—au début des années 80—se substituer aux récits de vie ancrés dans une pratique sociale du quotidien.⁵

Lévy's work is illuminating, revealing as it does the various ways in which television both mirrors and helps to produce the various transformations experienced by the French family. From the normative and educational discourses of the early shows (Lévy pointed out that the role of the woman as wife, mother, and homemaker was primordial) to the gradual effacement of social issues in favor of the emotional in the shows of the late 1970s and the

early 1980s, television has played a vital role in making sense of, advocating, and reflecting back the French family to its audience. However, Lévy's analysis comes to a halt at a crucial moment. The transformations of the family (divorce, abortion, women's rights, increased availability of contraception, etc.) may well predate the mid-1980s; however, as we have seen, this is a moment of great change for the television industry. As such, it is surely vital to look more closely at the ways in which this new televisual landscape has negotiated the various forms of representation described by Lévy.

Certainly, the family remains a central focus in the various types of discussion shows described above. A study carried out recently at the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel in Paris provides clear evidence of this focus. Using the archive's comprehensive databases, I analyzed the content of a number of contemporary discussion shows to determine the extent to which the family featured as a subject of discussion. I will not discuss all my findings here; however, two key programs suggest the importance of the family in these shows, which are findings borne out by other productions. Thus, *La Marche du siècle*, a discussion cum documentary, broadcast from 30 September 1987 to 18 September 1989 on Antenne 2 and then from 30 November 1989 to the present on France 3, is a significant product of public television. Of 389 programs shown during this period, about sixty focused on the family. Others approached familial issues through the discussion of other topics (e.g., AIDS, sexuality, immigration, etc.). A survey of *Ça se discute* from its origins on France 2 on 12 September 1994 to 13 January 1999 shows that of 193 programs broadcast, forty focus explicitly on the family and a further forty-eight approach the family via discussion of relationships and children. These figures become increasingly striking when we consider that the show initially structured its discussions around, for, and against programs broadcast on consecutive evenings. So of the 193 programs analyzed, seventy-eight are on identical subjects, thus reducing the show's range and rendering the place of the family even more prominent.

These figures provide evidence of the central role of the family in this type of programming. Moreover, the sheer frequency of this type of discussion suggests that, like their predecessors of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, these programs provide a valorization of the family group. This continuity is rendered particularly striking in those programs devoted to very traditional familial structures. Thus, an edition of Mireille Dumas's *Bas les masques* broadcast on 24 May 1994 is titled "Familles nombreuses: quand on aime on ne compte pas" ("Large families: When we love one another we don't count").⁶ Although the program focuses on a variety of large family groups (e.g., an Afro-American pastor with twenty-two children and a family that includes fifteen adopted children from a variety of racial backgrounds) and thus does not simply extol the virtues of natality, it does give

a very positive account of familial relations. In one of the program's rare negative interventions, Genéviève and Catherine, sisters in a family of seven children, describe their difficult relationship with their mother and attribute this tension to the fact that they have not married or had children themselves. Dumas suggests that this is a problem, that they have somehow failed to fulfil their identities as women, and the sisters concur. Somewhat paradoxically, the result of a difficult family life is shown to be the failure to establish new familial relationships. In other words, the program seems to reinforce its valorization of the family group even via this rather negative testimony.

Nevertheless, *Bas les masques* also provides evidence of a clear shift in representations and articulation of the family. Dumas's interrogation of *les familles nombreuses* is limited to a series of personal testimonies and short films showing the homes and everyday lives of the program's participants. The financial implications of having numerous children are only very briefly mentioned, and social issues such as state aid, legal and administrative procedures for adoption, and so on are not raised at all. The family is presented and valorized through the articulation of emotive and affective relationships (a focus clearly signaled by the program's title). By exploring these relationships, the show seems to posit the family group as a crucible for the construction of emotions and identities. As such, the discussion becomes a way of exploring feelings rather than social issues; the family is a wholly private, personal network rather than a space positioned within and penetrated by social and public discourses. This emphasis is reinforced by the program's mise-en-scène, which is dominated by close-ups and shot-countershot structures between Dumas and her guests, thus suggesting the intimacy of confession and mimicking the close one-to-one relationship of the therapy session. This focus on the personal and the complete absence of any analysis of social issues contrasts strikingly with earlier explorations of the *famille nombreuse*. Lévy described (1995, 183) an episode of the influential news magazine *Cinq Colonnes à la une* broadcast on 15 January 1960. The program reports on the *prix Cognac-Jay* awarded each year to a handful of *familles nombreuses*. Three families are interviewed by Pierre Dumayet in their homes. Each family member gives his or her name, age, and profession or daily activities. Their carefully tidied homes are filmed, and the camera focuses on details that reveal the realities of this type of family life (e.g., the numerous pairs of shoes that take up so much space and cost so much to replace). The families are asked about how they manage their day-to-day expenses, and many express concern at how they will make ends meet and the sacrifices this may imply. In other words, the program moves, albeit subtly, from its initial celebration of these large families to a revelation of the problems they create and an implied advocacy of birth control. Lévy (1995) suggested that this shift in position was a means

of raising the question of contraception currently at the forefront of debate with the establishment of the *Mouvement française pour le planning familial* in 1960 and yet still in many ways a taboo or at least difficult topic on television. Unlike Dumas's show of 1994, this much earlier exploration of similar issues moves from the private (the families themselves) to the public (birth control and more generally the financial implications of numerous children).

The focus on the intimate, the emotional, is perhaps not surprising in a show such as *Bas les masques*, which very deliberately sets out to examine a variety of issues via individual experience and affective response. However, this type of emphasis is not restricted to this program alone; it is clearly visible in a range of other reality shows (e.g., the aforementioned *Psy-show* as well as the more recent *L'Amour en danger*⁷) and many apparently more serious discussion shows. A very striking example of this shift from the social and public to the private and intimate is provided by the aforementioned *Les Dossiers de l'écran* and *Ça se discute*, which, I would argue, can in many ways be seen as an attempt to continue the role played by the earlier program in the output of France 2. Although *Les Dossiers . . .* continued after the privatization of TF1, it was, throughout its career, very much a product of traditional public service television. Thus, in a discussion broadcast on 7 October 1980 titled "Les Enfants, otages du divorce" ("Children, Hostages of Divorce"), we find a well-mannered, pedagogical debate. Although two of the participants are invited to recount their personal experience of divorce, they give quite straightforward accounts and say little about their feelings, emotional reactions, and so on. A father tells how, following his divorce, he kidnapped his daughter. Despite his story's potential for excitement and sensationalism, the program's presenter, Alain Jérôme, focuses on the legal struggles and the educational and psychological well-being of the child, making no mention of the circumstances of the divorce and the reasons for the couple's failure to come to an agreement over custody. A fourteen-year-old boy named Bruno, the son of divorced parents, responds to this account reinforcing the program's aim to discuss the impact of divorce on children. Jérôme stresses Bruno's representative role; he is not present to discuss his own feelings or experiences but rather to act as a spokesperson or even metonym for children of divorce everywhere. This is somewhat ironic, since Bruno is highly articulate and hardly typical of fourteen-year-old boys. However, his ability to participate in the discussion coherently and intelligently means that he fulfills admirably his role as representative and is not a young boy with his own personal emotional baggage.

Indeed, the discussion centers resolutely on the legal structures concerning divorce and custody. The psychological effects of familial ruptures on children are discussed, but they are analyzed by a variety of experts (a

judge, a lawyer, a child psychiatrist) and not via individual experience. The program acknowledges changes in French society that have affected family relationships: for example, changes in the law facilitating divorce, shifts in gender roles that have altered marital structures. Nevertheless, this acknowledgment of social change is presented via a highly traditional televisual format.

Ça se discute organizes its discussion of the family in quite different ways. A debate broadcast on 7 October 1998 titled "Quelle vie de famille pour les couples homosexuels?" ("What family life for homosexual couples?") is exemplary. Delarue introduces the program by pointing out that the Pacte civile de solidarité (PACS) is due to be debated in parliament in two days.⁸ The show thus emerges from this highly significant legal, political, and social development reinforcing the sense that both television and the family continue to undergo change in France. However, Delarue goes on to stress that the program will not be about the PACS as such but rather about the sort of family life possible for gay and lesbian couples. He is true to his word; although there is a brief overview of the principal points of the PACS, some brief discussion of the legal implications of the bill, and participation from a politician and a medical expert, the debate is dominated by individual testimonies, accounts of the trials and tribulations, and the pleasures and pains of gay family life. Once again, this emphasis is made clear by the program's mise-en-scène and the dominance of close-ups and shot-countershot between presenter and participant. Moreover, Delarue very explicitly takes the part of his nonexpert witnesses. So-called experts emerge from the audience to sit in front of the other participants, facing both them and the studio audience.⁹ Thus, they are singled out as experts, a process that underlines their special status, and yet at the same time, they are positioned as separate from the other guests and thus in some way as potential targets. Delarue plays upon this status by attacking the experts at various intervals and suggesting that their opinions are less valid than the testimonies of the gay and lesbian participants.

Evidently, this is a somewhat schematic description of the two programs. However, these examples are typical of the tone and focus of each show, and as such, they can be seen to embody a shift that is traceable across a much wider range of programming. The family lies at the heart of these discussion shows, and yet, it is approached in very different ways. *Les Dossiers de l'écran* explores divorce and its impact on children via an examination of the various legal and social structures that surround this process. By including some personal testimony, it nods to the growing presence of the private and the personal in other programs of the period; however, it remains typical of a relatively univocal public service television. It explores changes in traditional familial structures, and yet its tone, address, and content mirror earlier programs, with their normative and normalizing

approach to the family. *Ça se discute* emerges from a very different television landscape and sets out to explore very new conceptions of family life. In its focus on the personal and the private, it extends the developments described by Lévy (1995) and seems to acknowledge the breakdown in the traditional family unit and the fragmentation of the audience at home.¹⁰

I would like to end this discussion with some tentative conclusions as to why these shifts in representation have emerged in this type of programming since the mid-1980s and how they may be connected to broader social and cultural transformations. Given the changes described in familial structures, in the nation (and thus the role of the family audience as metaphor for the nation), and in the televisual landscape and its relation to the state, the very retention of the family as such an important focus and structuring discourse may seem surprising. However, I think it is fair to say that the endurance of the family as a topic of discussion can be linked to the various crises that have hit this institution since the 1970s. The advent of feminism and an ensuing reevaluation of gender roles, the availability of contraception, and changes in the divorce laws have all had a profound impact on the family and are often cited as the cause of rising divorce rates and a decrease in the number of marriages. These programs can to a certain extent be seen as a means of representing these new familial structures (note Delarue's focus on gay and lesbian families) and thus as a positive response to social transformations. However, in many cases there seems to be a rather more reactionary agenda at work as the programs set out to shore up and valorize traditional family relationships (witness Dumas's upbeat account of *les familles nombreuses*).

The shift from analysis of social issues and the place of the family within the public sphere to a focus on personal testimony and emotional response is both typical of the discussion show since the mid-1980s and can be traced to a far broader range of programming.¹¹ I would agree with Dominique Mehl's (1996) claim that this shift can be linked to an "identity crisis" in contemporary French society. As the church and the institutions of the state have lost their authority, longstanding certainties about the identity of the nation and of the individual citizen within it have been called into question. Mehl (1996, 118-25) described the *confession cathodique* ("televisual confession") rehearsed in the types of programs described above as a substitute for these earlier modes of identity construction and affirmation and as both the result of and a cause for the contemporary instabilities in identity. I would go one step further than Mehl and argue that these programs emerge from both a social and a televisual identity crisis. In other words, these extremely hybrid programs reveal the uncertain identity of contemporary television (witness the tensions between public and private television described earlier), of contemporary society (consider the range of issues focused on in these shows), of the individual within society, and of the

relationships between all three. Is the television viewer accorded a space in which to question his or her own identity to approach this far broader interrogation of televisual, social, and national identities? By revealing the fissures at the heart of the family and, by extension, of the nation, does television reveal its own anxieties about its role as the voice of the nation in a diversified audiovisual landscape? By retaining the family as a central focus, does television set out to protect this tradition and thus create a tension between its histories and its possible futures?

Transformations in familial structures evidently emerge from broader social and cultural change. Thus, the aforementioned PACS can be linked to a number of factors, including the decline in the authority of the church, new gender roles, and the increasing visibility of gays and lesbians (partly due to responses to AIDS) within French society. Simultaneously, reactions to these changes, and notably to the PACS, can tell us much about the particular context in which they are situated. Much criticism of the PACS, on both sides of the political spectrum, seems to be rooted in a perception of civil marriage in France as an intrinsic part of the revolutionary tradition. Thus, this particular threat to the family is also a threat to the nation and its history. In other words, this particular reassessment of the family and the discourses that surround and penetrate it are manifestly connected to the broader questioning of the nation and national identity undertaken in France in recent years.

To return then to my initial hypothesis, shifts in the family emerge from and have an impact on broader sociocultural changes, and these, in turn, are represented and constructed on television. What this initial analysis seems to suggest, and I would like to stress once again the partial and incomplete nature of my findings, is that in contemporary France, the family, television, and society and nation are at once both the same and different. The family remains as a structuring paradigm both for television and national identity, and yet this family has clearly altered. To examine it more closely and to assess the ways in which it is discussed and represented provides a way into this complex web of discourses.

In a program broadcast on 4 December 1958 titled *A la découverte des français*,¹² Etienne Lalou and Paul Chombard de Lauwe presented a film depicting the daily lives of the Gaye family in Boulogne Billancourt. André and Gilberte Gaye are teachers and live in a flat above the school with their five children and two nieces. The film follows the family throughout the day; as we see the family sharing their evening meal at seven o'clock and singing as they do the washing up, André describes this as "un moment privilégié de la journée" ("a special moment in the day"). How ironic that this special moment is a time now targeted by television broadcasters in their quest for the family audience and that this happy, functional family exists in a home that does not possess a television. The family in France has

changed, and television articulates this and in many ways reproduces it. Nevertheless, its schedules in many ways suggest a continuation of a traditional family life while revealing anxieties about the demise of the nuclear family. All of this is perhaps rather paradoxical if we consider that television's very structuring of daily time and space may well have contributed to the fragmentation of the family it seems so anxious to overcome.

Notes

1. Broadcasting in France was controlled by the state monopoly organizations Radiodiffusion Française (1945-1949), Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF, 1945-1964), and the Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française (1964-1974).

2. See Lyn Spigel (1990) for an account of some of the issues raised by television and its impact on the family during its first decades in the United States.

3. The reality shows appeared on French television in the 1980s. Guests were interviewed about their lives and experiences and filmed about their daily lives. Thus, various social issues (race, homosexuality, divorce, etc.) were approached via individual, personal experience.

4. It is increasingly difficult to distinguish between these different types of programs. Rather than clearly defined and definable genres, they are genre hybrids, incorporating elements of serious information television, entertainment, social documentary, and so on. This hybridity should be seen as a product of the contemporary televisual landscape; by offering all things to all people, these programs can attract large audiences and straddle the fragmentation of contemporary viewing.

5. "The dominant feature of these transformations was the tendency to publicise private life, to define, unconsciously, a meteorology of intimacy which, by the beginning of the 1980s, had taken the place of life stories anchored in the social practices of everyday life" (my own translation).

6. *Bas les masques* (France 2, 29 September 1992–12 June 1996).

7. *Psy-show* (Antenne 2 26 October 1983–27 November 1985). *L'Amour en danger* (TF1 28 October 1991–6 May 1993).

8. The Pacte civile de solidarité (PACS) passed through the French parliamentary system in 1998 to 1999. It proposed various changes to the laws governing marriage, inheritance, and so forth, but its most controversial measures were those granting certain rights to gay and lesbian couples previously only available to heterosexuals.

9. Note that the nonexpert participants are seated in front of the audience facing in the same direction, thus acting as some sort of extension of this audience and the wider audience at home.

10. The program's focus on individual experience (a focus visible in many of the series' discussions of minority identities) can be seen to mirror gay culture in France, which has traditionally been much less visible and much less organized than in Britain and the United States. However, this is rather ironic given the show's ostensible subject matter as the struggle for the PACS has played a vital role in

establishing and strengthening gay and lesbian pressure groups and gay culture more generally.

11. Note the frequent presence of eyewitness or nonexpert accounts on news programs and the phenomenal rise of the docu-soap in Britain, a genre that is beginning to appear on French television.

12. *A la découverte des français* (4 December 1958–15 January 1959, chaîne 1).

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“Now You’re Living”

The Promise of Home Theater and Deleuze’s “New Freedoms”



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In a control-based system nothing’s left alone for long.
—Deleuze (1995B, 175)

“More Choices. More Options. More Control.” These are a few of the features that the cover of COX Digital TV’s instructional videocassette titled *Going Digital* (1998) promises the home viewer once one subscribes. For the audience pictured on my videocassette cover—a heteronormative, white middle-class couple—nothing but their viewing screen exists in the universe of COX Digital TV; they stare at a monolithic television set surrounded by a blank white background. With COX Digital TV, the viewer is now capable to “Decide What’s On . . . When It’s On . . . And Who’s Going To Watch It!” (*Going Digital*). Thus, the white void can be filled once, as the commentator proudly announces, you “add more life to your television viewing” (*Going Digital*). COX Communication’s marketing slogan is realized: “Now You’re Living.”

Take another example of how the commercial discourses of home theater systems structure the viewing experience. In a recent issue of *Popular Home Automation*, the feature article titled “2010: A Home Theater Odyssey” by Edward B. Driscoll, Jr. (2000), makes use of film critic Lou Gaul’s report on the “horrors” of cinema going in the twenty-first century. Recalling a particularly unpleasant experience involving cellular phone use during a film screening, Gaul remarked that

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society is changing in a way that makes it [not] as much fun to do things in public. The night that the cell phone kept ringing in the theater, all I kept thinking was that if I was at home in my basement with my little home theater with a DVD player and surround sound, it would be perfect. (Driscoll 2000, 31)

This perfection is immediately responded to in kind by Driscoll (2000, 31): "Is it any wonder that an increasing number of families are installing home theaters and media rooms in their homes?" Domesticity becomes the cornered solution to rising social fears within the public sphere. In the case described in Driscoll's article, it is not road rage-induced automobile accidents, sexual harassment in the workplace, or say, violent crimes but a suffered inconvenience in a public cinema that reaffirms the need for a safe and controlled space. In our homes, or at least in those that can afford little home theaters or media rooms, we can meticulously construct our personalized cinematic *cordon sanitaire* free from the pollutants of public viewing. "Now You're Living."

Systems and services for domestic viewing such as videocassette recorders (VCRs), laser disc players, digital videodisc (DVD) players, pay-per-view, Dolby Digital Surround Sound, digital cable, front- or rear-projection TV, satellite, and direct television, to name a few, have become facilely relied-upon appliances for film exhibition and a familiar physical presence within the heterotopic space and place of the home. Due to their immense popularity, commonality, and extensive penetration into rural, suburban, and urban environs throughout the United States, home theater systems' persistent construction of domestic everyday life and visual culture as well as their creation of an imagined private and personalized viewing space attract copious attention from cinema, cultural, and media studies.¹ One may conclude that where and how we view and experience film at present has changed significantly in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Moreover, one may safely wager that the twenty-first century will further advance and compress televisual technologies into existing and perchance unexpected spaces and surfaces. Gaul's little home theater may not remain so, for the media room may not be easily limited to a single space. To borrow Jean-Louis Comolli's (1980) famous maxim, "machine[s] of the visible" will proceed to inundate our public and private cultural geographies.

Accordingly, changes to where and how we consume film open a chasm of questions for the study of visual culture; they mark the beginning of a possible counterhegemonic postcinema epoch. A nexus of questions meant to explore the conditions of possibility that a postcinematic epoch promises circulate freely. How is viewing a videocassette or DVD within the domestic sphere different from watching a film in a cinema? Are home viewers still as immobile as proponents of apparatus theory, such as Jean-Louis

Baudry, would have us believe? And the question that will be of particular importance here: Do users of home theater systems exert more control over what they watch than the cinema experience has traditionally allowed?

The immediate response to this question is an overwhelming yes. Home theater systems, it is argued by Bill Whittington (1998, 76), "encourage greater agency on the part of the spectator, [while] fostering heightened interactivity and control over programming." So why query the rhetoric of viewer control? Celebratory recognition of the VCR's relatively long-standing and only recently challenged supremacy as the home theater system claims that home viewing is the antithesis to the habitual cinema experience and that VCR use affords what public exhibition, not to mention broadcast, has traditionally guarded against: viewer control and activity. Most notably, Timothy Corrigan (1991, 1) detailed a defining characteristic of viewer activity: "the center of movie viewing has shifted away from the screen and become dispersed in the hands of audiences with more (real and remote) control than possibly ever before."

Yet control is an ambiguous concept. Viewer control is even more elusive. Examples of viewer control over televisual information point to replaying specific scenes of a videocassette or alternating between English subtitles and, say, a French-language version of a DVD. Given the difficulty of delimiting the category of viewer control, one may ask exactly who or what is in control, controlling, or controlled. Needless to say, *control* is a term that scholars of visual culture have become comfortable with when assigning value statements to domestic viewing and the promises of home theater systems. Salient to my argument, however, is the possibility that control applied in this manner becomes suspiciously one sided; control within the domestic sphere is exclusively defined in favor of an ideal viewer. A consensual, perhaps imperious conceptualization of the VCR as a machine used by viewers to control televisual images emerges. The consensual view is what this article purports to complicate.

If the notion of control is evidenced by the ability to rent videocassettes from companies such as Blockbuster Entertainment Corporation or record a television program—say an episode of *The Simpsons* to watch at a more convenient time (if ever)—then the analysis of viewer control does not stray beyond COX's *Going Digital* (1998) instructional videocassette or the privileged economic position a film critic has to flee to his little home theater when dissatisfied with public viewing. Seen this way, viewer control is nothing more than the impatience one endures while channel surfing or the ability to press "still screen" on one's DVD player. Setting aside these indispensable faculties for the moment, it may also be the case that home video opens the possibility for collapsing distinctions between producer and consumer. This relation to the VCR is best expressed in the processes of amateur editing, avant-garde video works, documentaries, fan productions,

and camcorder filming. Yet for most VCR owners, the machine's appeal lies in playing prerecorded Hollywood feature films on videocassette, not manufacturing personal productions.²

User-friendly technology that puts the viewer in control continues to be the prime appeal of home theater systems and the subject of their analysis. Reminiscent of the liberally progressive ideals of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's (1986) polemical piece "Constituents of a Theory of the Media," the media are rendered as tools for human consumption and manipulation. Therefore, if this conceptual framework perseveres in augmenting a definition of viewer control, then control is obsolescently restricted to one's ability to use (and afford) home theater systems.

Corrigan's (1991) and Whittington's (1998) examples, previously used to demonstrate how the VCR is understood within the discourses of film and media studies, also reveal that their notion of control is largely employed as a descriptive term to express ways in which home video is said to differ from the cinema and television. My argument works to extend rather than refute this now quasi-orthodox conception of home viewing as emancipatory. It complicates how the category of viewer control can be understood while offering a new appraisal of control and the viewing subject. Unsatisfied with a descriptive and enthusiastically egalitarian account of viewer practices conveniently labeled *viewer control*, I want to suggest that the notion of control, especially in its relation to the VCR, be reconsidered and rearticulated as a social system for the production of new freedoms within a schema of continuous regulation and self-management. That is, the now common ability to order and manipulate televisual information does not shield viewers from modes of restriction and regulation; one actively and willfully participates in multiple control processes through one's viewing choices and decision to employ new media technologies.

To investigate the concept of viewer control from this perspective, it becomes necessary to adopt and employ Gilles Deleuze's position on new communications media. Specifically, they constitute societies of control.³ For Deleuze, control amounts to an elaboration of analyses of disciplinary societies formally initiated in Foucault's (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Whereas the archetypes of disciplinary society "operate by confining people," Deleuze (1995b, 174) suggested that control societies endeavor to map our decisions "through continuous control and instant communication." Control occupies the residual structures of disciplinary society not with enclosure but with the production of new freedoms as its ends—the production and construction of new abilities through communications media. In short, new freedoms are continuous with control. The enabling quality of freedoms cannot be divorced from their corresponding function of control.

To return to Corrigan (1991, 2) for a moment, contemporary cinema's manifestations are conceived as free from "walls": "The four walls of theatrical viewing, which might have once reflected the way movies were able to 'capture' an audience within carefully constructed cultural parameters, are thus no longer." Given that for many, watching a movie is synonymous with watching at home, how can an ordered and manageable film culture exist if we now regularly view outside of the nonneutral, meticulously organized environment of the public cinema? What happens when the cinema no longer traps? Following the appropriation of disciplinary sites by control, the walls of the cinema seem to remain but in a less concrete form. The transition from disciplinary power to the operations of power under the control regime is best illustrated by Deleuze's (1998, 18) metaphor of a "highway":

In making highways, for example, you don't enclose people but instead multiply the means of control. I am not saying that this is the highway's exclusive purpose, but that people can drive infinitely and "freely" without being at all confined while still being perfectly controlled.

In this case, movement is not predetermined, but the paths traveled are always already charted. The so-called treatment of discipline remains positive and now even less constrictive and less obvious.

The New Freedoms of Viewer Control

Why is this turn—one that privileges visual culture and prioritizes control society—paramount for an understanding of home theater systems and the ambiguous concept of viewer control? Anne Friedberg (1993) provided valuable access to the category of viewer control and the key differences between viewing in the personalized confines of a domestic space as opposed to the cinema. Arguing for the transformation of cinema spectatorship incurred by the VCR, Friedberg examined six emblematic features of cinema spectatorship: (1) dark interior for viewing projected images, (2) fixed audience and restricted movement, (3) single viewing, (4) passive viewer, (5) large image projected onto a screen, and (6) flat surface for projection.

Surveying each tenet, Friedberg illustrated how "televisual spectatorship" differs from cinematic. The variances are obvious enough. Aside from the significance of viewer choice and repeatability versus a single viewing and other user-friendly differences between VCRs and film projectors, divergences are most often a result of the space within which one watches. For example, darkness may or may not be a variant in the home (Friedberg reminded us that the television produces light and that it

is a source of illumination). Where the cinema is said to require a docile, immobile spectator, the viewer of video is celebrated for his or her mobility and ability to express control over the images brought into the home. Movement is not restricted due to permanent seating or the stern glances of disgruntled viewers. Any restrictions on mobility result from the viewer's choices and his or her privately arranged viewing space rather than public organization and architecture. Lastly, technological differences exist between cinema and television screen sizes that determine the quality of the image.⁴

In comparison to domestic viewing and VCR usage, the cinema offers a certain physical "outness" that is denied by video. Douglas Davis (1986) contrasted video with film viewing/attendance in his misleadingly titled article "Filmgoing/Videogoing: Making Distinctions." Film viewing is described as follows:

There is the experience of going out to see a film, an experience that begins early in our lives, with the approach of the theater marquee, the press of the crowds, the seat found in the darkness, and then the huge, overpowering screen, larger than any imaginable life. (Davis 1986, 270)

Going out to watch a film is associated with other experiences such as shopping malls, where the act of looking predominates. One does not (frequently) go out to watch a video. When we go out to look, we enter into spaces that we do not control. We are subjected to the spatial organization and systems of others: streets, motorways, parking lots, crowded stores, restaurants, sold-out films at cinemas, and so forth. We abandon familiarity, our personally charted private spheres, so that we can negotiate sites and sights that differ from our intimate spatial experiences.

Convenience, the control of televisual images and communications technology defined in favor of the viewer, the ability to view a videocassette alone or with others, to view films when and how one wishes—these are the practical appeals and standard promises of home theater systems. The ability to control how and what is watched has inspired scholars to proclaim that the VCR is responsible for instigating a new relationship unlike that of film and television between the universal subject and his or her action of viewing.⁵ Working on the commercial discourses that construct the idea of home theater, Barbara Klinger (1998, 10) recalled that as early as 1980, Sony began to aggrandize notions of control into its marketing campaigns. According to Klinger, Sony's VCR was promoted by the telling oxymoron: "experience the freedom of total control." Whether in the form of a company's marketing slogan or sprawled across the pages of *Home Theater*, *Popular Home Automation*, and *Audio Video Interiors* or as academic scholarship on the subject of visual culture, the consensus remains that home theater

systems continue to define control in favor of the viewer and his or her manipulation of broadcasts and prerecorded materials.

This definition of viewer control has formed a binary that demands demolition if the modulations of power in control culture are to be understood through the object of home theater systems. This binary establishes the cinema patron as controlled and passive, whereas the home theater enables a controlling and active viewer. That is, in public the subject is at the mercy of a social milieu over which he or she exerts little to no control. In the home, the opposite occurs: the viewer is in control of the environment and viewing experience through an interface with home theater technology. Gaul's longing for the safe space of his little cinema, as evidenced by his example of the rude cellular phone user, illustrates the lack of control the public sphere offers. What seeps into the home is a matter of choice and control—although only within the cinema/passive and home/active binary. For example, when explaining the interface between premium channels and the digital remote control, the COX commentator allows only the correct amount of public ambiance to enter the home: "You get what you want, when you want it . . . it's kinda like having a multiscreen theater in your home. In short, more choice, more convenience" (*Going Digital* 1998).

The binary is dependent on a separation between the subject and technology. The public theater demonstrates a domination of the subject by technology, whereas the home theater indicates a reversal: the subject comes to dominate the technology required to control televisual images. Control is equated with autonomy and mastery. The autonomous subject uses technology. Mastery occurs through the acquisition of home theater systems. From this Enzensberger-inspired perspective, control is merely the result of organizing tools for personal manipulation.

Deleuze's new freedoms advanced by communications media are based on both autonomy and dependence. New freedoms disrupt the binary that opposes the passivity attributed to consumers of public exhibition to the agency and autonomy of subjectivity in domestic viewing conditions. Control or control societies are the locutions Deleuze used to infer the breakdown of disciplinary power throughout the twentieth century. Yet, Deleuze (1995b, 1995c, 1998) hesitated to transpose control as a total rupture or severe departure from discipline. In "Control and Becoming," "Postscript on Control Societies," and "Having an Idea in Cinema,"—the three short translated articles in which Deleuze explicitly addressed control—he spoke of the transformation from discipline to control. This conversion from discipline to control is construed as an active process: as "entering a new type of society," a "movement towards," a "leaving behind of discipline," or as a "taking over" of disciplinary institutions.

Deleuze's intention is to demonstrate that despite a finalized effect, control will be different from discipline. Like Mark Poster's (1984, 103) early

extension of panopticism whereby “the techniques of discipline no longer need rely on methods of regulating bodies in space,” Deleuze’s account of control is not rushing to label discipline completely ineffectual or antiquated. Instead, he foresaw a new system inexorably distinct from the past. “To be sure,” as Deleuze (1998, 17) wrote, “there are all kinds of things left over from disciplinary societies, and this for years on end, but we know already that we are in societies of another sort that should be called . . . societies of control.” In the system of control, disciplinary deployments remain, albeit ephemerally, while power continues to induce the existence of both.

On the immediate electronic horizon, perhaps already apparent but not totally detached from disciplinary dependence, looms a new generation of systems for positive domination described as new freedoms: user centered and user incorporated. The self-centeredness of new freedoms ideally functions as a lone vehicle on Deleuze’s metaphorical highway. Freedom, activity, and movement, all within the home, are promised when COX Digital TV “puts you in the driver’s seat” (*Going Digital* 1998). The new freedoms of control leads Deleuze (1995b, 175) to sarcastically state, “Compared with the approaching forms of ceaseless control in open sites, we may come to see the harshest confinement as part of a wonderful happy past.” However, this turn to control does not occur without certain repercussions for discipline’s efficacy. According to Deleuze, the principle of disciplinary society—specifically the panoptic schema—was confinement. Its prime concern, as witnessed in Foucault (1977, 205), was how to enclose, organize, distribute, and regulate bodies within a demarcated spatial arrangement for efficient marshalling of “a space not too large.” This model for society (down to the micro-politics of everyday life) invested the body as source and smooth surface for the application and expression of power: “the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body” (Foucault, 26).

As stated earlier, Deleuze believed that Foucault knew that the disciplinary era was coming to an end by the early twentieth century, although no explicit reasons are cited for its demise. Discipline technologies, with their dependence on the body and spatial enclosure, are now confronted by mediascapes composed of nonterrestrial spaces and nonphysical bodies. Of specific importance to control is the terrestrial relationship between viewers, communication technology, and space. New freedoms—the promises of communication technology in the domestic sphere—are expressed as convenience and choice.

Entertainment—the free time for it and the right to it—is a hallmark conducive to the new freedoms promised by home theater systems. As a reminder, when the VCR became readily available in the United States, its primary appeal was not the ability to view Hollywood movies but the freedom to record broadcast shows for viewing at a more convenient time:

organized information and storage. VCRs are not regarded as a burden. Home theater is not seen as a hostile means of confinement or control. When compared to the public viewing experience undergone by Gaul, the home demarcates a sanctuary of viewing pleasure: isolation. Why would it appear to be hostile? After all, it is the user that does the controlling, expressed through the practice of pushing the record button, the laborious task of choosing what to record and when to watch. Like Deleuze's highway model, home theater systems can be said to provide "more choices, more options, more control" (*Going Digital* 1998). They do not restrict. They chart, improve, and license.

In Control//In the Home

Foregrounding communication in the place of confinement acknowledges the new conditions and situations that result from the VCR and the de-centering of the cinema as the principal site for the consumption of filmic images. The cinema matured at a time when events and mass visual entertainment were associated with a certain "outness" and opening influenced by the great vehicles for public exhibition: worlds fairs, department stores, amusement parks, and museums. One traveled outside of the household to see. Video was introduced into a domestic space that had already begun to negate the need for large-scale public exhibition: the world was brought closer.

Video marks a blurring between public and private viewing spaces. However, this blurring does not entail the loss of spatial oppositions: the walls, doors, ceilings, floors, and curtains of architecture. Contrary to Corrigan's (1991) argument, walls are not being knocked down. Instead, events and practices commonly found to operate in public spaces are now much more commonplace in private areas such as one's residence. Reflective of Walter Benjamin's (1973) prescient piece "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," the desire for proximity is easily manipulated: images are brought closer. But today, images are also left close—expected to remain as a visual event and be a regular part of one's everyday life. Images and objects once thought exclusive to public institutions such as the cinema have found their way into the home through a plethora of electronic innovations and reproductive technologies: the VCR is an obvious intervention exemplified by the statistical expression "home penetration."

Moreover, unlike discipline, control de-centers the human body as the supreme site and surface for power to invest and pass through to enact, modify, and exercise itself over actions. Rather than forge a division that externalizes the media from human subjectivity, the body works in conjunction with and is incorporated, colonized, and functions through diverse technologies. Returning to Deleuze's (1998, 18) highway

metaphor—"people can drive 'freely' without being confined"—the mechanisms of control do not directly touch the body but meticulously map its visual environs. This is best expressed by the revered notion of viewer choice. When translated, we find that this expression means what is available at Blockbuster Video or Hollywood Video. Choice is equated with availability and access—a carefully mapped highway.

To continue, Poster (1995) described the relation of the body to control or, as he preferred to conceptualize communication technologies for control, the super-panopticon. He wrote, "The individual subject is interpellated by the super-panopticon through technologies of power, through the discourse of databases that have little if anything to do with 'modern' conceptions of rational autonomy" (p. 87). Following from Poster and Deleuze's highway model, the physical body is only a part of the complex power-knowledge relations that constitute the operations of control networks, not the starting position from which control emanates. The attitudes espoused earlier to summarize conceptualizations of the VCR, that it is a machine used by viewers to control televisual images, is reversed in control culture if the body (the user) ceases to reside in the place of authority and is ever dependent on a prosthetic relationship with communications media technology to engender the new freedoms and security demanded for the domestic sphere.

In terms of where we watch, the household can be read as a total victory for discipline and serves as an exemplar of disciplinary societies. One views in isolation (or with members of the family), partitioned far away from other bodies and in a social institution that is both functional and normalizing. Yet, I find this reading troubling. It fails to take into account communication and information technologies. They render the home environment all the more complex: VCR users seem able to manage what they view in the isolated sphere of the home. However, control, which as Corrigan (1991) would have it is in "the hands of the audience" signified by the common image of a remote control, does not in any way confer a space exempt from disciplinary technologies. The viewer becomes an active vehicle through which control passes. The physical and social milieu of discipline and technological networks of control are in with one at home.

New freedoms are said to result from a breakdown of sites for confinement. Deleuze provided several examples of disciplinary institutions in shambles, such as preservice industry prisons and public schools. These grand institutions are undergoing reappropriation and becoming dispersed. Their final destinations are unknown at present. The cinema can easily make the list; after all, it too is a training ground for the production of knowledge. In the past twenty years, its hegemonic exclusivity has been forced to endure a radical relocation from its conventional and recognizable public sites, twins, shopping centers, malls, drive-ins, multi- and

megaplexes, cinema scales down to the home, lap-top computers (with the introduction of DVD), airplane seat-backs, and mini-vans.

The cinema no longer holds a privileged social patent on where we watch film and how images are consumed. Television put an end to this. As such, the cinematic apparatus of public exhibition is diffused and never reenacted without complications induced by the lack of a captive audience. Today, the multiplex screens of cinema are but a lone option among countless others. The cinema's architectural and social power(s) to frame the experience, dictate order, and prescribe a norm for film viewing while cultivating expectations for visual entertainment is challenged by home theater systems and the uncertainty they introduce to the docility of cinematic control and the effectiveness of its technologies.

The public-private space the cinema attempted to maintain and enforce is, if not finalized, then made apparent with video. However, unlike panopticism, enclosure and confinement are not the end but an always already-achieved beginning. In regard to the supercession of disciplinary sites by control, Michael Hardt's (1998) "The Withering of Civil Society"—an article that meticulously interrogates Deleuze's accentuation of control—clearly states the intrinsic relationship between both. Hardt convincingly suggested that "social space has not been emptied of the disciplinary institutions but [is] completely filled with the modulations of control" (18). The heterotopic place called home can be both a disciplinary carapace and site for imaginary evasion within a larger network of control.

Since video does not require one to go out (excluding the trip to a video store), since one stays in to watch, video nullifies many of the concerns associated with public exhibition such as audience behavior and the prescribed passivity demanded from apparatus theory. In terms of the types of controlling technologies outfitted in the cinema to modify how one can watch, the VCR would seem to perfect the certainty of order and normalization. For example, in the home, one may attempt to mimic this environment in terms of lighting and seating, one may require total quietness from fellow viewers, thus mandating their viewing space from the knowledge/training acquired in public to modify actions occurring in private. The control of where and how one views in private is not directly determined by an external force or institutional power collective. One does not take one's seat among other viewers; one's seat is one's own. The viewer exerts control over how he or she views videocassettes in the personal space. This occurs with control literally in the hands of the viewer.

Viewers do not succumb to the same experiences encountered in the cinema. Film exhibition, the attention the cinema demands, and the surfaces it transcribes are easily bypassed, ignored, overcome, and perhaps forgotten all together when we can construct our own private viewing environment. Therefore, the home can be seen as a possible threat to the normativity of

the cinema when one has the ability to use the home as a private enclosure to view how and what one wants. However, the adage "behind closed doors" that connotes a sense of privacy and the generally accepted "freeing" aspects of video does not apply here.

When considering Deleuze's highway metaphor for control networks and Hardt's claims of the modulations of control with the credulous statement "behind closed doors," we are neither exempt nor located outside of power. Panoptic principles for managing bodies and space are, according to Foucault (1977), a general model applicable to various instances for understanding power relations in their everyday operations and common functionality. VCRs may enable us to view in private but not unimpeded and far from absolved of the workings of power. My point is that spatialized control and power-knowledge technologies that assert norms for the cinema (the panoptic model) and how we see and know its images are not kept out of the home or forbidden to cross its threshold. Any freeing action that does occur is consistent with a system of control and expressive of control.

For these technologies to maintain their normalizing effects, the regulation and control of space like that found in the cinema is not a positive option. Communication, not simply confinement, controls. Viewers are active, productive, and always in control. By in control, I suggest that a scholarly approach to home viewing and critiques of home theater systems account for the tension inherent to participation in control. Organizing one's viewing space and choosing one's viewing materials complements the structures of management that the home theater industry and institution impose. In this way, a more nuanced awareness of the subject in power and, by extension, the function and impact of home theater systems on the cultural and political fabric of contemporary mediascapes may be constructed.

Notes

1. Despite its relatively minor role in the grand history of cinema, the videocassette recorder (VCR) is nonetheless fervidly examined from a diverse array of persuasive perspectives assembled across disciplines. Its cultural history is adroitly condensed into a chapter of cinema history (Gomery 1992, Wasko 1994), while under an altogether different conceptualization, recent industrious efforts have attempted to conjoin video and film under the rubric of "postmodern cinematic spectacle" (Dixon 1995, 1998; Friedberg 1993). As such, video culture is articulated as a postmodernist aesthetic (Cubitt 1991, 1993). The subject of video is further

determined. Exponents of critical/social theory examine video as a technocratic mechanism of and for surveillance (Berko 1992, Poster 1990, 1995).

2. For studies on producer aspects of video, please see Jenkins (1992) and Gray (1992).

3. In direct relation to cinema studies, Deleuze (1995a, 1996) is applauded for his most notable books, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. However, for this article I am concerned not with the space of the image but with the spaces of exhibition. Here, his peripheral work on control societies best suits the immediate emphasis. The subject of control, although indirectly apparent throughout Deleuze's personal work and collaborative ventures with Félix Guattari, is never extensively written on. The three articles presented here best illustrate his translated materials on the subject of control societies.

4. Digital videodisc has relegated the onetime major problem of screen size to a minor disturbance. Letter-boxed prints and enhanced picture ratios greatly improve the conversion from theatrical release to television.

5. Within the context of television viewing and home theater systems, control is often expressed as the viewer's ability to personally manage broadcast scheduling. To cite an early example of how the VCR can affect broadcast, Sean Cubitt (1991, 78) has remarked how the functionality of a VCR allows its users to "disturb the diegetic hold of broadcast, the chance to watch in bite-size chunks, and therefore multiply the available programme formats." This depiction recalls the initial appeal of the VCR: primarily the ability to record broadcasts and playback. Complementing this commonly held account is Corrigan's (1991, 28) sentiment that on the playback of a prerecorded videocassette, the viewing situation is "a *selected* experience and subject to the choices and decisions of the spectator—to stop it, replay parts of it, to speed through sections of it." As such, with the emphasis on viewer decision making, it comes as no surprise that academic scholarship on the VCR has encouraged the response that its capabilities liberate and free users from the domination of broadcast television scheduling and the inconvenient travels outside of the household to a cinema. Douglas Gomery (1992, 276) dedicated an entire chapter to video in his book-length study of film exhibition in the United States. With the advent of home video, claimed Gomery, "no one is dependent on the desires of a theatre owner or television station programmer." On the subject of television, Ellis Cashmore (1994, 201) offered a similar description of the relationship between users and their VCR: "viewers could release themselves from television schedules and organize their viewing according to their own schedules." Alongside studies dedicated to film and television, social theorists of media have also commented on how the VCR permits viewers (once thought passive and inert) to exert a considerable amount of control over their viewing choices. Examining fandom, Henry Jenkins (1992, 71) wrote that "videotape expands control over the programs, allowing us to view as often or in whatever context desired." And as Mark Poster (1991, 48) observed, "the VCR provides the ability to reproduce information cheaply, quickly and easily. It puts the viewer in control of the images he or she views."

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Hizballah's Virtual Civil Society

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Israel lost its protracted war in south Lebanon after 22 years of brutal occupation, from Israel's "Operation Litani" in March 1978 to its withdrawal in May 2000 (Israel continues to occupy the Shebaá farms, which Hizballah vows to liberate). Of course, it is largely the success of the resistance movement's armed struggle in south Lebanon, led by Hizballah, that inflicted cumulative losses on a scale so critical as to lead to Israeli withdrawal. Yet in the final months of occupation, south Lebanon was brought to world attention following a series of remarkable events played out in the international media. The media images displayed around the world of Birzeit University students pelting the French prime minister Lionel Jospin with stones (26 February 2000) in retaliation for calling Hizballah "terrorists" and the students' chants announcing more than solidarity ("from Birzeit to south Lebanon, one people who will not die!") were followed by declarations in Lebanon and around the Arab world that "we are all Hizballah," including that of Yousef Chahine (the famous Egyptian filmmaker), who announced in print his fervent support for Hizballah, save ideology. The lionizing of Hizballah in the Arab world also emanates from the movement's success, particularly since the late 1980s, in developing its profile as a Lebanese and Arab nationalist movement, with a Mao-esque social policy and program for social justice, and as a movement bent on political intervention and participation (in party politics). This has been achieved through increasingly sophisticated and compelling uses of the new media and information technologies.

What is new and striking is Hizballah's innovative uses of new media in adapting and inventing rhetorics, that is, images and video to address conflicting constituencies both local and international. Hizballah's multimedia spread includes *al-Ahd* newspaper as well as al-Manar television station

and Nour radio station, both broadcasting from south Lebanon; but the targeting of conflicting audiences is most clear in the movement's internet presentations. Hizballah's internet strategies in particular must be thought of in terms of presentation and performance and not communication, representation, or dialogue. There are two reasons for this: first, the audiences that Hizballah solicits are no longer limited to potential supporters or sympathizers, local and international (however large this audience is, and it is large). At this point, Hizballah also addresses imagined audiences of nonrecruitable subjects: Western publics and governments, the Israelis and Israeli government, and Arabs and Lebanese with non-Muslim and non-Islamist political and religious affiliations. (Recruitable subjects are those who might support the resistance in the south, either through military participation, political support, campaigning during Lebanese parliamentary elections, or monetary contributions.)

In this sense, Hizballah's discourses, information, and images are recorded and presented but not necessarily communicated or received by targeted audiences. (In other words, it is not always clear whether there's someone on the other end of the phone line.) The second reason is that Hizballah's purpose seems not to render its movement, program, and activities more palatable for hostile or Western audiences. Rather, it seeks to stake its ground in international media as a kind of counterinformation system, which it has done from the beginning, and more recently, to present itself as a vital political player to be reckoned with. As such, Hizballah's media presentation is compelling to the extent that it circumvents the terms of collaboration by addressing Israeli and Western audiences without directly servicing their range of conventions, expectations, and values. Instead, Hizballah presents itself as the liberationist, "social radical" force that it is (the epigraph on its web page, prior to its destruction 7 October 2000 by pro-Israeli hackers, was "Hizballah—social radicals," meaning a movement for social justice) and to which spectators must largely accommodate (so the burden of political accommodation implicitly comes from the other side). In terms of straightforward dialogue, communication, or collaboration, the secretary general of the movement, Hassan Nasrallah, says of possible contacts with the United States, "We do not communicate with the Americans."

Indeed, Hizballah's web site developed into a dynamic presentation that contradicts the implicit contracts of conventional communication, in which addresser and addressee are in dialogue and in affiliation at some level. The transformation I describe in Hizballah's modes of address is evident in its complex political uses of the internet. When the web page was first constructed, it featured a revolving globe titled "Allah's world" and grisly images, such as one depicting Israeli soldiers carrying a bloody, decapitated child victim of an Israeli air raid. The new site (www.hizballah.org)

and www.hizballah.org, crashed by pro-Israeli hackers last October), in contrast, is interactive and user-friendly, not defiant but confident, inventive, and bold. The home page displays a set of images and links to a selection of video clips of Hizballah's guerilla operations (and a link to a free download of RealMedia to enable visitors to readily access the clips). Another still is of Nadia al-Hussain, the anchorwoman of al-Manar (Hizballah's television station), a link to a video clip of a news report. But the first is of Nasrallah himself, a handsome still of him looking charismatic, modestly self-assured, and relaxed in front of an enormous and flamboyant floral arrangement. The web site bears out the figure Nasrallah strikes of worldly sophistication and provides links to what seems like every kind of account written about Hizballah, both hostile and balanced (there is no straightforward or crude propaganda: no need for this, it seems). Links to a host of sites with information about Hizballah, Israeli government agencies and ministries, the U.S. State Department, *Time*, the *International Herald Tribune*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*, for example, are quickly blocked and moved, only to be hijacked again by Hizballah from another location. Another link provides an entire master's thesis on Hizballah from the University of Stockholm, with each footnote featured as a link.

This kind of openness and these confident, rogue internet exploits aim not to strictly control information, media images, and representations but instead to demonstrate the significance of Hizballah's vision and activities—military, political, and social. The aim is also to put on display the apparent frenzied Western media and governmental attempts to control representations of the resistance movement and Israeli occupation and to thwart Hizballah's project to amass, catalog, and publicize wide-ranging perspectives and information. Its web site is essentially a performance site that makes visible the terms of a media and ideological battle, an extension of the battle against Israeli occupation on the ground in south Lebanon for 22 years—the details of which largely remain hidden from view by Western media, governments, and military censors.

The *mélange* of discourses in Hizballah's web site has a rather extraordinary effect, with voices, images, opinions, and information coming from conflicting directions. The opening blurb defining the movement, for example, refers to Hizballah in the third person and strangely employs the (not hijacked but adapted) discourses of Western reportage and scholarship. All together, the rhetorical context seems almost too wide in this interactive web site, as if distant targeted audiences are more estimated and imagined than known. The gaps between addresser and addressee open up imaginative spaces of aesthetic, discursive, and technological innovation and, at times, strangeness and incoherency. As such, Hizballah's internet

exploits amount to a new kind of media performance, one that does not and cannot aspire to the terms of conventional communication.

Hizballah has developed transnational media forms that do not conform to nor are in dialogue with dominant global cultural forms. Its virtual performance space interrupts not only national boundaries but also assumed fault lines of ideological, cultural, and political affiliations. Most recently and dramatically, Hizballah's internet ventures extended to a sophisticated cyberwar, after its site was attacked in October 2000, in support of the current Palestinian Intifada against the Israeli occupation. Since then, Hizballah developed a new internet spread on a much larger scale, with a constellation of sites, each with specific functions. The official site (www.hizballah.org) is rather flat, and the current sites that most resemble the pre-October one are the Manar television site (www.almanar.com) and the site for the Islamic Resistance Support Association (www.moqawama.net). The Manar site includes reportage clips, programming links (e.g., to children's programs), and even *anashid* (resistance songs), many recast from the Palestine Liberation Organization days (such as Marcel Khalifeh's "Unadikum," with lyrics by the Palestinian poet Tawfiq Zayyad). These are accompanied by video clips that interchange episodes from Hizballah's struggle with prayer scenes from al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and footage of Israeli repression in the occupied territories (the demolition of Palestinian homes, shot Palestinian demonstrators being carried off, etc.). The *moqawama* (resistance) site includes links to a large and diverse list of articles in Arabic, English, and French about the movement, Israel, Zionism, and the occupation. For example, the articles include excerpts from Western media, an old British Orientalist text about Zionism and the Bible, articles by leftist Israeli writers (such as Israel Shahak), and Palestinian and Lebanese historians and commentators.

But Hizballah's real virtual energy and creativity, after October 2000, is clearly directed to its ongoing cyber assaults on Israeli sites and, to a lesser extent, U.S. sites and others. The pro-Palestinian attacks far exceed the pro-Israeli ones in number, sophistication, and damage inflicted (particularly in the commercial sector). The most spectacular were attacks on the sites of the Bank of Israel, Israeli Foreign Ministry, Tel Aviv Stock Exchange, and Israeli Knesset, all on 26 October, and the 1 November attack on the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (the pro-Israel lobby).¹ The site was compromised by pro-Palestinian messages and the posting of credit card numbers of thousands of financial supporters of Aipac. Pro-Israeli hackers, in addition to successfully forcing down Hizballah sites, created decoy sites that mock Hizballah's occasional want of suave English prose. One such site reads, "We are sorry to say that Israel was write. The land of Israel belongs to the people of Israel" (www.hizballa.com). More adolescent pranks include a decoy club site featuring inverted Lebanese flags (with

upside-down cedar trees) and a "No Coca-Cola" logo in stylized script, which is then reversed and altered to appear to read "No Muhammad, No Mecca" in Arabic and urges Muslims to boycott this *kafir* (blasphemous) soft drink (<http://clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/hizballah?s>).

It is important to emphasize that these new forms of transnational discourse and virtual creation grew out of the specific political context of south Lebanon, a territory relentlessly marginalized both nationally and internationally. For most of the 22-year Israeli occupation (1978-2000) and resistance to it, Western media decontextualized and dehistoricized south Lebanon, when representing it at all, and otherwise actively obscured it from view. I wish to suggest that certain geopolitical and cultural locales, such as the south Lebanon of Hizballah, present unyielding problems of representation—problems that Hizballah has confronted and successfully transformed in very interesting and effective ways. Instead of thinking of the new transnationalism in implicit terms of Western locales and models of postnational subjects as Third World exiles and emigrés in the West, I wish to foreground south Lebanon as a transnational and liminal space that has presented almost insurmountable challenges of representation.

To recognize and understand new modes of global media that are set in opposition to dominant forms of global culture (and their implicit political agendas), we must shift the location of the transnational—a counter-intuitive notion, and yet concepts of globalism and global culture all have implicit centers. We must think of the transnational in terms of spaces like south Lebanon—a Third World hinterland long concealed from international view—and not First World metropolitan spaces (e.g., in the United States, as the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai finally encourages us to imagine in *Modernity at Large*) or subjects (not usually modeled after, say, migrant workers, but rather the comparatively privileged members of Third World intelligentsia). Most important, we cannot understand opposition to dominant forms of global culture simply in terms of local resistance (the global/local binary). As Hizballah's new media informs us, our understanding of global culture must include new genres, discourses, and political trajectories. These new forms and multilingual discourses are staged from locales and by movements resistant to Western economic and political exploitation and, in terms of their political and cultural agendas, can be imagined to move on a south by south axis.

Note

1. See *Israeli-Palestinian Cyber Conflict Report v2.OPR*, 3 January 2001, iDEFENSE.

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**INDEX TO
TELEVISION & NEW MEDIA
Volume 2**



**Number 1 (February 2001) pp. 1-88
Number 2 (May 2001) pp. 89-180
Number 3 (August 2001) pp. 181-296
Number 4 (November 2001) pp. 297-376**

Authors:

- ABRAMSON, BRAM DOV, see Raboy, M.
BACKSTEIN, KAREN, "Soft Love: The Romantic Vision of Sex on the Showtime Network," 303.
BERNSTEIN, MICHAEL A., Tribute, 71.
COOKE, LEZ, "Troy Kennedy Martin: Forty Years of Writing for the Screen" [Prime Time], 167.
CREEBER, GLEN, "Cigarettes and Alcohol: Investigating Gender, Genre, and Gratification in *Prime Suspect*," 149.
DALLAL, JENINE ABBOUSHI, "Hizballah's Virtual Civil Society" [Prime Time], 367.
DAVIS, HELEN, "*Inspector Morse* and the Business of Crime," 133.
DAWSON, ASHLEY, "Crossing 'The Line': A Case Study in South African Media Practice and Democratization," 117.
DICKINSON, ROGER, ANNE MURCOTT, JANE ELDRIDGE, and SIMON LEADER, "Breakfast, Time, and 'Breakfast Time': Television, Food, and the Household Organization of Consumption," 235.
ELDRIDGE, JANE, see Dickinson, R.
GANDY, OSCAR H., JR., Tribute, 37.
GERBNER, GEORGE, Tribute, 35.
GOLDING, PETER, Tribute, 69.
GUINS, RAIFORD A., "'Now You're Living': The Promise of Home Theater and Deleuze's 'New Freedoms,'" 351.
HAMELINK, CEES J., Tribute, 11.
HAY, JAMES, "Locating the Televisual," 205.
HOWLEY, KEVIN, "Spooks, Spies, and Control Technologies in *The X-Files*," 257.

- KENNY, JAMES F., "Hong Kong Television: A Virtual Leader in Asia" [Prime Time], 281.
- KIM, L. S., "'Sex and the Single Girl' in Postfeminism: The *F* Word on Television," 319.
- LEADER, SIMON, see Dickinson, R.
- LENT, JOHN A., Tribute, 39.
- MAXWELL, RICHARD [Guest Editor], "Remembering Herbert I. Schiller" [Editorial], 3.
- MAZDON, LUCY, "Contemporary French Television, the Nation, and the Family: Continuity and Change," 355.
- MCHESNEY, ROBERT W., Tribute, 45.
- MEEHAN, EILEEN R., and JANET WASKO, Tribute, 17.
- MILLER, TOBY, "Cultural Citizenship" [Editorial], 183.
- MILLER, TOBY, "Revising Screen Studies" [Editorial], 91.
- MILLER, TOBY, "Three Strikes and You're Out?" [Editorial], 299.
- MOSCO, VINCENT, Tribute, 27.
- MOWLANA, HAMID, Tribute, 19.
- MURCOTT, ANNE, see Dickinson, R.
- MURRAY, SUSAN, "Our Man Godfrey: Arthur Godfrey and the Selling of Stardom in Early Television," 187.
- NORDENSTRENG, KAARLE, Tribute, 57.
- PENDAKUR, MANJUNATH, Tribute, 43.
- PROULX, SERGE, see Raboy, M.
- RABOY, MARC, BRAM DOV ABRAMSON, SERGE PROULX, and ROXANNE WELTERS, "Media Policy, Audiences, and Social Demand: Research at the Interface of Policy Studies and Audience Studies," 95.
- VALDIVIA, ANGHARAD N., Tribute, 65.
- WASKO, JANET, see Meehan, E. R.
- WEBSTER, FRANK, "A Life" [Obituary], 7.
- WEBSTER, FRANK, Tribute, 31.
- WELTERS, ROXANNE, see Raboy, M.
- ZHAO, YUEZHI, Tribute, 51.

Bibliography:

"Herbert I. Schiller: Publications, 1955-2000," 75.

Editorial:

"Cultural Citizenship," Miller, 183.

"Remembering Herbert I. Schiller," Maxwell [Guest Editor], 3.

- "Revising Screen Studies" Miller, 91.
"Three Strikes and You're Out?" Miller, 299.

In Focus:

- "Breakfast, Time, and 'Breakfast Time': Television, Food, and the Household Organization of Consumption," Dickinson et al., 235.
"Cigarettes and Alcohol: Investigating Gender, Genre, and Gratification in *Prime Suspect*," Creeber, 149.
"Contemporary French Television, the Nation, and the Family: Continuity and Change," Mazdon, 335.
"Crossing 'The Line': A Case Study in South African Media Practice and Democratization," Dawson, 117.
"*Inspector Morse* and the Business of Crime," Davis, 133.
"Locating the Televisual," Hay, 205.
"Media Policy, Audiences, and Social Demand: Research at the Interface of Policy Studies and Audience Studies," Raboy et al., 95.
"'Now You're Living': The Promise of Home Theater and Deleuze's 'New Freedoms,'" Guins, 351.
"Our Man Godfrey: Arthur Godfrey and the Selling of Stardom in Early Television," Murray, 187.
"'Sex and the Single Girl' in Postfeminism: The *F* Word on Television," Kim, 319.
"Soft Love: The Romantic Vision of Sex on the Showtime Network," Backstein, 303.
"Spooks, Spies, and Control Technologies in *The X-Files*," Howley, 257.

Obituary:

- "A Life," Webster, 7.

Prime Time:

- "Hizballah's Virtual Civil Society," Dallal, 367.
"Hong Kong Television: A Virtual Leader in Asia," Kenny, 281.
"Troy Kennedy Martin: Forty Years of Writing for the Screen," Cooke, 167.

Tributes (to Herbert I. Schiller):

- Cees J. Hamelink, 11.
Eileen R. Meehan and Janet Wasko, 17.
Hamid Mowlana, 19.
Vincent Mosco, 27.
Frank Webster, 31.
George Gerbner, 35.

- Oscar H. Gandy, Jr. , 37.
John A. Lent, 39.
Manjunath Pendakur, 43.
Robert W. McChesney, 45.
Yuezhi Zhao, 51.
Kaarle Nordenstreng, 57.
Angharad N. Valdivia, 65.
Peter Golding, 69.
Michael A. Bernstein, 71.