

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

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'I'm going to fly you to Miami like you've never been flown before.

I'm Leslie.

Next time you want to see what you've been missing, fly my wide-bodied, non stop jet from London to sunny Miami.'

(National Airlines ad. Guardian 13/11/74 p 10)

Of course 'Leslie' is also the name of a National plane, but how secondary that knowledge is when a smiling woman's face beams down on the reader. An ad. selling National flights? An ad. selling woman's sexuality as if she were a prostitute for sale. An ad. which demands from us a more complex understanding than this. An ad. from which we can move in order to begin to talk about images of women in the media. And in this paper we do no more than suggest such a beginning. It points to the way in which images are produced images: adverts are so contrived we can see vividly that they are not representing reality but re-presenting it (giving us it again) in a transformed way. It points to a hidden history. Why has woman's sexuality come to be used in this way? Could it not be a man's? It hints at the contradiction that images of women always betray. They are rarely there as active, living individuals, but yet it is one woman who is standing for what women are, whether it is sexual objects, mothers or housewives. It suggests the connotative value of women's images: one simple image, a smiling, pretty face and we are already into the realm of sex or fantasy, happiness or sunshine (She'll fly you to Miami), excitement or power - for men. It persuades us too of equality between men and women: "I'm going to fly you...." balanced by "you ..... fly my wide-bodied ....."

Every day on T.V. and in newspapers, in magazines and at the cinema, in the street and the underground, we see and hear many similar verbal and visual images of women. Usually we take them for granted. They are part of our everyday lives. They appear 'natural'. They appear inert not just because we are accustomed to the various media and do not see their processes of production, but because these are the images we are socialised into categorising women in terms of. And although it may be predominantly the media presenting those images to us from our earliest days, it is the social relations predominantly outside the media, in the family and at work which give rise to these categories. In looking at the media we are moving from the specificity in which each media projects its images to the generalities concerning woman's position in society. So though the media have their own structures and processes, their own codes which translate women into those contexts in specific ways, the level of sexist ideology and its practice arises from a wider base. That sexist ideology, which is lived by us, is the primary determination on the signification of the images of women created in the media. For this reason we feel we are, in this paper, justified in comparing images which are taken from different media.

For instance T.V.'s presentation of the 'Miss World' competition appears because it is a world event and hence newsworthy, because it is entertainment. The Misses of the world are allowed a measure of individuality, if not in terms of their bodily proportions, they do speak about themselves. But are those women that different from the anonymous sexual Leslie of the National ad.? The one sells herself as the most perfect object; the other sells National planes as the most perfect planes. Or the housewife. Jeremy Thorpe's election appeal to the 'housewives' - 'the women who will decide' - is not produced through the same practices, nor for the same ends as the image we

receive from a letter by a 'housewife' who describes when, after a busy and interesting day, an old school friend rings her only to comment: "You poor thing you must be bored as a housewife." (The Sun 24/10/74). Jeremy Thorpe's appeal requires that there are such 'housewife' images around.

We have said that images of women are the end product of media and social practices. But the contribution of media practices: to do with the techniques of camera and lighting, the representation of three dimensions in two, as well as the kind of programme or article - news, documentary, fiction, adverts - structure images in such a way that there is a preferred signification. For when all is said and done the purpose of the media is to signify. There is a transparency in the media images which no individual, individuals who are primarily living out a history and only secondarily signifying what their actions are about, can ever have. The media image is complexly structured, but whether verbal or visual is still more 'simple' than 'real life': we have to understand and read it in a particular way. However, although we can interpret 'simplification' in relation to women as a 'reduction' of women, it focuses for us their fragmentation. That, real as it is, is usually disguised. Because no woman is just sex object, mother, housewife, whore, she manages to unify these contradictory images of herself. She is, on the surface, a woman, underneath, those parts. To illustrate the point, the removal of all obnoxious ads. like National airlines would not necessarily change how men see and treat women. The empty waiting, sexual vessel is how many women are treated by men, but the fact is less obvious when the woman is also a mother and housewife than when she makes a 'simple' appearance in the context of an advert.

This fragmentation is readily evident in the differential distribution of images. On T.V. and radio, if you look and listen long enough, to all programmes, you'll not only see most of the stereotypical images emerging, though in different programmes, and weighted heavily towards some, but also hear individual women doing their best to negotiate out of the images they are being persuaded into. In porn there is only the 'lascivious bitch' or 'passive whore'. In women's magazines no elderly, poor or ugly - and so on.

Not only do women appear fragmented, but each of those fragmented images is condensed. The images are familiar and conventional immediately ripe with connotations, as 'Leslie' is. That simple image which denotes just a pretty woman brings together all those associations: she is a symbol for sexuality, excitement, exotic places etc.. We will see later that it is adverts which most obviously use woman's image to symbolise. It is however a symbol which is iconic. That is part of the signified remains woman. Theoretically something else could signify those areas, but neither something nor man does: it is woman, and it will be important later to understand why. That it is not woman as such that is important in ads is clear from the use of parts of her body only, her body distorted, a focus on breast or lips, to signify sexuality.

But she is also a symbol or metaphor in a different way. Disguised within her appearance is perhaps the most repressed content of our culture, that which men can only cope with in a displaced way. Latently the image of woman often refers not just to women's relation in and to the world, but not surprisingly since most of these images are constructed and read by men, to men's being in the world. As Anthony Wilden suggests:

'The male myth of 'insatiable' female sexuality is in effect a metaphor of the insatiable demands the socio-economic system makes on men as human beings. It is not the women that men cannot satisfy; what men cannot satisfy are the machines: technique, technology, production and performance.'

Or to hint at an area we shall elaborate in detail later, cartoons in the working class press - the Sunday Mirror and Sun - ridicule women to an abominable degree: they appear in all their worst attributes, they are stupid, they nag, they are subservient ..... However does it not make sense that cartoons about man's successful power in the home may also be a displaced way of coping with his lack of power at work? He laughs at women's weakness, not just with scorn, but as a way of distancing himself, defining himself against a state of being he is not allowed to adopt. He cannot be 'just a pretty face', simple and loving; he has to fight in an aggressive competitive world. Michael Crawford as Frank in 'Some Mothers do 'Ave 'em' (BBC 1 Mondays) is funny because he behaves like a woman.

Our analysis of images of women in the media does not pretend to be a thorough and exhaustive enquiry. Our study of the different media and their constituent parts has unfortunately been extremely uneven. Nevertheless with the available material most, but by no means all, taken from the week of October 20-26th, we have been able to analyse and understand in a preliminary way not just that women are oppressed and exploited through the media, but the processes by which that occurs, and the context in which it has to occur.

The distinct areas of the media we look at are:

1. Woman as news - mainly newspapers
2. Woman as sex - papers, films, magazines
3. Woman as humour - papers
4. Woman's self-presentation - mainly women's magazines
5. Woman in ads. - mainly women's magazines and colour supplements
6. Women in fiction - T.V. and women's magazines

#### 1. WOMAN AS NEWS

Looking first at the Guardian, the Observer and the Birmingham Post in the middle class range, and the Daily Mail, the Sun and the Birmingham Evening Mail in the working class range we asked:

- (i) What do women look like when they've made the news - what categories do they fall into?
- (ii) What criteria have put them there? Are those the same as for men?
- (iii) How are they treated?

The material for this section is taken almost entirely from the week October 20th to 26th.

#### Category 1

Women as official politicians and professional women

The politicians were invited to give their opinions on specified topics

Barbara Castle points to Sir Keith Joseph's distorted statistics (Guardian Oct. 25th)

Mary Whitehouse and Jill Knight achieve visibility by virtue of their past opinions

This week delivered no professional women, but surely they do appear?

Category 2

As sportswomen women were almost invisible, except for a straight report of Virginia Wade playing in the Wightman Cup. (Guardian)

Category 3

Women achieve visibility as criminals with crimes ranging from the personal criminal act of passion:

Georgina Howard, in Romeo and Juliet suicide pact (Daily Mail 21st)  
or despair:

Mrs Wise, cousin of the Queen, kills her mentally retarded son (Guardian 23rd)

to the overtly political:

Pat arrowsmith appeals against punishment in Holloway (Guardian 24th)  
Judith Ward, on trial for the M62 coach bomb murders (Daily Mail 25th)

Category 4

Women who achieve visibility because of an unusual occupation for a woman:

First women engineer at Rolls Royce (Mail 22nd)

Lauri Tromski, icon maker! (Guardian 22nd)

First woman to control Napet securities (Guardian 22nd)

Russia's most powerful woman, the Minister for culture, dies  
(Birmingham Post 26th)

Category 5

Women who become newsworthy by virtue of elite status:

This may be inherited status - royalty, or daughters of famous people; or achieved status - 'starts', personalities etc.

The newsworthy action can be traditional:

Princess Anne takes the salute (Daily Mail 23rd)

or unusual:

Chris Everett, top tennis star decides not to marry because of Billy Jean King's Women's Lib influence.  
(News of the World 20th)

or a combination of the two:

Georgia Brown marries (traditional) the father of her 8 year old son (unusual) (The Sun 22nd)  
77 year old American multi-millionairess to marry 29 year old mineworker's son (Daily Mail 23rd)

The most common action is thus to marry, and the next most common is to have an interesting love affair:

Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia and superstar Richard Burton  
(Sunday Mirror 20th)

Category 6

Women who become visible by virtue of borrowed status. They are seen to be supporting famous sons or husbands i.e. they are mothers or wives:

Margaret Trudeau at Orly Airport (Guardian 21st)

Mrs Odessa Clay, mother of Mohammed Ali (The Sun 25th)

Category 7

<p>Women become visible by virtue of being <u>physically/sexually attractive</u>. There is a wide range of coverage in this category, as well as an enormous quantity of examples:</p>				
<p>Pages of pin-ups in the working class (conservative) press Fashion models</p>				
<p>The sexuality theme in advertisements. The mentioning of physical attributes of women <u>whatever</u> they are doing e.g. Mrs Anne Sargent, Chairman of Cash's Name Tapes, "Looks are only one of her assets" (<u>Birmingham Post 9th</u>)</p>				
<p>Although there weren't any this week the category poses the problem of how we would place prostitutes. On some counts here perhaps; on others (remember 'Mrs Warren's Profession'?) in category 1. Any way it points to an active and passive sexual image.</p>				
<p><u>Category 8</u></p>				
<p>Women in humour. Since we deal with that in detail we will do no more than mention it here.</p>				
<p><u>Category 9</u></p>				
<p>Women become visible in the news because they typify a <u>social problem</u>. Involuntarily, through no effort of their own, they come to represent a position over which they had no control. They were victims of circumstances. Some became visible as individuals:</p>				
<p>Mrs Juggins and her son, the <u>victims</u> of high rise flats (<u>Observer 20th</u>) Betty Ford and Happy Rockefeller, the <u>victims</u> of breast cancer Mary Rider, old age pensioner, <u>victim</u> of inflation (<u>Guardian 22nd</u>)</p>				
<p>Others became visible as a social group:</p>				
<p>Adolescent mothers in social classes 4 &amp; 5 gained massive coverage as one focal point in Sir Keith Joseph's attack on the declining moral standards of Britain "Britain: a decadent new Utopia" (<u>Guardian 21st</u>)</p>				

(11) What criteria have you chosen for this work?

The criteria on which I have based the paper is the extent to which women appear in the papers. I have used the following criteria: 1. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 2. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 3. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 4. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 5. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 6. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 7. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 8. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 9. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 10. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 11. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 12. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 13. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 14. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 15. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 16. The extent to which women appear in the papers. 17. 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## COMPARATIVE MODEL OF CATEGORIES OF VISIBILITY

Categories of visibility		Degree of control over image for women	Stereotyped image	Passivity Dependence on men
WOMEN	MEN			
1. Politicians Professionals	large coverage	high	rarely capable	active independent
2. Sportswomen	massive	medium	rarely shown physically active	active independent
3. Criminals	similar	low/medium	ruled by heart easily misled	active independent
4. Unusual Occupation	rare	medium	defined against 'usual'	active independent
5. Elite status	similar	medium	glamorous loving and marrying	(active) dependent
6. Borrowed status	rare	low	supportive mothers and wives	(active) dependent
7. Sex object  Prostitute?	absent  absent	low	physically sexually attractive  witch-like?	passive dependent  men dependent on them
8. In humour	less	none	trivial, silly, frivolous, gentle	dependent
9. Victims of social circumstances	rare	none	fatalist pathetic weak	passive dependent

(ii) What criteria have put them there? Are those the same as for men?

For categories 1-5 the criteria on which women appear in the papers have to do with news values which are independent of women. Men become visible on the same criteria. Though we can say for example that sometimes a political speech by a woman may have additional news value because it is delivered by a woman. What might appear as a woman's exclusive right of appearance - the 'unusual occupation' - has its equivalent for men in unusual activity of any kind: climbing a mountain, sailing round the world - the extraordinary. Women appear less than men on all these counts, first because they are not taken so seriously (their activities in the same sphere are

always secondary), second because there are fewer women politicians, sportswomen and women criminals. We would surmise too that fewer women are seen to do 'extraordinary things'; fewer too are probably recognized as 'elite'.

The criterion for 6 & 7 is being a woman as society defines that. These women appear newsworthy as women, a womanhood reduced to 'sexuality' for men, and 'supporting' or 'serving' men. For 6, whatever action the woman is carrying out - and she may not be acting: he acts and she is just there - has to relate through her husband, children, boyfriend or father. Even the 'housewife's' views on prices are expressed in terms of how they will affect her family's Sunday lunch. The only men who appear in a similar category are the husbands of women who are high up in categories 5-8 e.g. Prince Philip - sometimes.

Category 7 is solely, in newspapers, a woman's province. Men however do appear as sex objects in magazines like Viva, Playgirl and Cosmopolitan. They are too beginning to appear as 'objects' in some men's fashion ads. in the colour supplements.

The criterion has little to do with news values, all to do with 'light relief', as pleasing photographic scenes, cartoons, the crosswords are 'fun', away from the 'serious' business of the news. In this respect they do not have to be women, but as sexual objects symbolising that 'fun' they do.

The victims of Category 9 appear as much for their emotive character, their capacity to induce guilt in the reader. Women here are standing for all those groups who are weak and vulnerable, unable to look after themselves. In other contexts it is the old, the poor or starving Ethiopians. What they have in common, their inability (or prevention) to speak for themselves is exploited to blame them in an asymmetrical way. They are not wholly victims. In this particular case 'the unmarried girls in classes 4 & 5' (a phrase containing two negative connotations already) were irresponsible receptacles of wrong morals filtering down through the education system; morals however that were actively propounded by the 'bully boys of the Left'. Sir Keith leaves the 'bully boys' however to make emotive references to the girls' total inability:

- to keep a man ('deserted or divorced')
- to think ('of low intelligence')
- to absorb formal education ('of low educational attainment')
- to love their children ('to provide emotional stability')
- to rear them ('future delinquents')

The particular forcefulness of this passivity and inability to act is rarely attached to men. Negative references to men generally concern the nature of the action - the 'bully boys'.

The categories of course do merge into each other all the time. Our separation of them only makes their specificity clearer. Thus, Pat Arrowsmith's 'elite' status makes her visibility as a 'criminal' more newsworthy. Similarly in some areas women achieve more visibility than men performing similar actions, simply because they are women acting in a situation where they are grossly outnumbered by men e.g. the category of 'unusual occupation' for women spreads into the category of 'women as politicians'.

(iii) How are they treated?

From the way in which woman is reported it seems that the 'natural' categories within which she appears are 6 and 7. All other categories in

their images attempt to call on notions of 'motherhood', her role as wife or girlfriend, her sexuality and physical attractiveness. A series of Guardian photos consciously illustrate the contradictions that such a categorisation implies, but in true liberal style shows them and leaves them - abruptly, for us to draw our own conclusions. The caption is 'Three working women'. The photos - one above another show a bikini-clad model posing round a car, a cleaning woman with vacuum cleaner standing ordinarily by a car, and third a woman traffic-warden probably booking a car. Yes, all working, but all achieving an identity through their relation to the prime object or subject of the news - the car, the Earls Court Motor Show - an all-male symbol.

Politicians, and professional women when they appear, are sometimes not differentiated from men in their actions. This may have to do with a genuine liberal policy by parts of the media to treat women equally where the occasion merits it and to respect the validity of the Women's Movements' political action. However the media's approach is by no means consistent or far reaching: dismissive humour is the order of the day, albeit a way of coping when they're unsure about the validity of such topics as news. The whole area of sexual relationships and of socialisation into sex roles - about which women not men are concerned - is regarded as less serious, more private than other public issues such as economic inflation, politics and world affairs in general. To make a detour from the press, Brian Redhead in 'A Word in Edgeways' introduced Juliet Mitchell as the author of Psychoanalysis and Feminism ( he stumbled over the word 'feminism') "but" (relieved laugh) "We're not going to talk about that tonight." (The subject was indeed wide-ranging and 'public': on Epochs and Ages.) (Radio 4 10 p.m. 16/11/74). However we can suggest other reasons than the magnanimity of the media towards woman's equality, for the seriousness with which they take women in high office. To be other than serious would not only be making a mockery of women, but of the important arena of public life - a male sphere.

However that arena can be protected in other ways when the woman in question does not hold high office. The threat of femininity on that arena is dissolved by classifying woman out of that arena and into femininity, (or out of that too - she's abnormal) thereby establishing male precedence once more. Norman Shrapnel, writing about Una Kroll the women's rights candidate during the October election, does just that in a necessarily 'humourous' and to us jarring style. In one swoop he makes her into a freak for not subscribing to femininity ('she's the least frivolous practitioner ever to run a surgery') ('in her sensible white sweater she lies in wait for mums'), dismisses the seriousness of her cause in relation to men, gets in a jab at women's liberation and brutally asserts men's superiority by dismissing women in a libellous way to give men the final word. To illustrate, he writes:

'she's getting as many voters as she can lay hands on, mainly women of course'

'They get set in their nervy ways in these dormitory areas' (Could be he's talking about men as well but the 'of course' suggests otherwise)

'She's not the sort of woman's libber who goes in for bra-burning ..... she sets out to ignite the damp mums waiting for their (on the whole) brighter children'

'..... the mums seem less bright than their clothes and far from militant. Any complaints, worries, problems? Nothing special thanks all the same.'

'they're just pre-occupied with mum-matters'

'You soon realise it's not women she's really talking about but people'

(You can almost hear him sigh with relief as he shifts the emphasis onto men in a way which we think trivialises the relevance of Una Kroll's policies for men: they're so unlikely ever to be implemented that they're not worth making).

'There's a display board in the hall entitled "Learning to be a man" which seems to take equality to impressive lengths. And there are quite a few dads in the audience. Can they be some of those exhausted husbands of commuter land ..... now ripe for a spot of domestic job-swapping? If so one of the things they learn from Dr. Kroll in a world worthy of Jonathan Swift, (the gesture to her of some respect on a male scale) is that it costs £3.25 to run a baby for a week' (our emphasis throughout)

For comparison bear this item in mind when we turn to cartoons.

The most common description of women in any of the categories 1-4 is not in terms of their actions but in terms of their 'being' as 'mother' or 'wife'. Una Kroll, Britain's first woman's rights candidate canvassing her constituency of Sutton and Cheam between morning surgery and looking after her four children. (Observer 29/9/74) 'We see her talking to a woman with pram and baby.' Mrs Thatcher was reported to have 'attended a political meeting and prepared the Sunday lunch'

Sportswomen too find themselves in a similar double-bind situation in which they cannot be successful. To win as an athlete say, she has to symbolically become a man - be competitive, aggressive etc. - but she's only allowed to win as a 'weaker' man. However to 'succeed' in that way means to fail profoundly as a woman: to be labelled a freak. It is a 'win' in isolation from men and women. Alternatively she can connive with the media to be sporty and sexy or sporty and a mother, in which case her sport is seen second to her femininity. In both ways the worlds of men and women are kept apart and intact. While a man's sporting activities confirm and strengthen his identity as a man, a woman's identity is challenged.

In category 3 we find that women because they are criminals first, women second are treated in the same way as men: Judith Ward is referred to by her surname in some papers. However whether or not the crime is a 'woman's crime' - a mother murdering her mentally retarded son - the specific emphases in the reporting are on feminine attributes. Thus in the Judith Ward case, she is pointedly asked what she thinks about the children's death:

"There was a long pause in court before she wept on almost a whisper, 'I told him I thought it was horrible.' "

Having turned against her 'natural' role in killing children she is reaffirmed in her femininity by that remark, also by a great deal of crying which the papers lap up eagerly:

"Judith Ward ... broke down and wept.  
She began sobbing as ...  
Dabbing at her eyes ...  
She choked back more tears ..."

(Sun 24/10/74 p.7)

### Category 5

Elite persons and stars of both sexes have to retain their media visibility by acting in an appropriately star-like fashion. But more often

than not it seems that though their access to media visibility is via 'eliteness' their presentation is, for the benefit of the readers (women readers only?) again in terms of 'love', 'marriage' and 'family'. Similarly we shall see that these are the foci of women's magazines' features on 'stars'.

The romance of the week, between 'superstar and princess', a hot combination between two different styles of 'star', was that of Richard Burton 'madly in love with a new Liz - Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia. They are pictured in the romantic setting of a first week-end together in Paris. Then Liz is pictured alone, modelling her fabulous dresses, which at a modest £150 or so each are "less expensive for Richard than diamonds."

(Sunday Mirror and News of the World Oct. 20)

"Lord Lichfield with a heartless disregard for the enterprise of journalism was attempting to keep his love life with Lady Leonora a secret." (News of the World Oct 20)

A rumour that David Frost had stolen Lady Jane from Prince Charles was said to be unfounded.

In contrast to these fairy-tales of princes and beautiful princesses, descriptions of actual married life are very rare and totally unglamorous:

"A Midlands couple make a pledge to have 'no babies for five years' in order to get a mortgage on a terrace house."

(Birmingham Evening Mail 24th)

Here we have the beginnings of 'displacement'. 'Love', 'marriage' and the 'family' are 'real' issues for women, but here they are transformed into a fantasy context where everything is beautiful. The fantasy world offered to the woman reader is distanced from her by class distinctions, but brought close to her by her emotional identification with the women in their relationships to men. The identification at that level reaffirms her in her roles as 'mother', 'wife', 'lover', makes them seem positive whatever their shortcomings in the everyday world. At the same time however the fantast disavows the lack she has, i.e. she is not a star, she's only a mother and wife. She is made to feel, at the least, that there is a possibility of success in those feminine roles. It is not the institutions of marriage and family which bring failures: through their affirmation the only weakness can be at a personal level.

We might perhaps, using Marcuse's concepts, describe this not as fantasy but repressive sublimation, for while the former can be cherished for its own sake - think of childhood fantasies, and Lord of the Rings, about other worlds - repressive sublimation must be a function of the tedium and problems of the real world.

2. WOMAN AS SEX

Every day 'The Sun' prints a picture of a female nude on page 3. On Sunday, one or two of the papers have one of these glamorous photographs on almost every page. These are not the papers aiming at a specifically male audience, i.e. those magazines designated pornographic, and what is shown is not as explicit as in those magazines. Yet, even the most graphic of these are under the same regime of representation as the nude-pictures, accepted by both sexes as part of the 'natural language' of the media. These photographs of the female body in papers such as 'The Sun', 'Sunday Mirror', 'The News of the World'; the presence of the glamourised body in advertising; the exposure of the female in soft-core porn and even in films generally accepted as "erotic" as opposed to pornographic, here the female body is posing, usually, with emphasis on the breasts and exclusion of the genitals. The body is framed-in-the-beautiful photograph, illuminated, presented in smooth, glowing, perfect nudity. John Berger (Ways of Seeing, BBC, 1972) began to point to the ideological assumptions in this form of representation: nudity opposed to nakedness, which in Western media connoted misery and poverty; brutal nakedness as opposed to glamorous and perfect nudity. "To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognised for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude ... Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display." (Ways of Seeing, 54). This distinction is one of importance. "Nudity" is something represented for the viewer. It belongs to the realm of 'beauty', 'art' and 'glamour', and is emptied of the signs of the relationship between subject and object - i.e. the ideological connotations of glamour fix the viewer in a representation which excludes recognition of the debasement of identity of women in their role as sex-object.

It results from a certain fetishistic mode of photography where the viewer can see "the signs of obvious labour" (Barthes), i.e. the technical perfection of lighting, framing and arranging. Benjamin in 'The Author as Producer' (trans in New Left Review) points to the way in which this new objectivity of technical expertise puts the photograph in the position of a fetish; "It is the political function of photography to renew the world as it actually is from within, that is, according to the fashion". As a fetish, "it describes a structure of representation and exchange, and the ceaseless confirmation of the subject in that perspective" (Stephen Heath, 'Screen', Summer 1974 p.108). The viewer is set up as a passive spectator of subject and object - the contradiction of woman whose only identity is as a BODY, as SEX, in a society which confers its greatest rewards on persons who succeeded as individuals in their own right. The body is represented as pure exchange - sex as commodity-object.

What is interesting about the presentation of nudity in the media, and in pornography, is the movement towards a reconciliation of the problem of women's sexuality. One can almost recognise what Barthes describes in 'Le Plaisir du Texte' (Paris 1971), where he talks of ideology becoming a fiction, i.e. reaching a degree of consistency, captivating everything under one hegemonic language, where there ceases to be conflict. The emphasis on women's sexuality in magazines such as 'Cosmopolitan' and 'Viva', and in pornographic films (take for example 'Confessions of a Window Cleaner', exploring the contemporary image of the nymphomaniac housewife), seems to point to a reconciliation of conflict. Women's body as pure pleasure, both for men and for women. The articles and photographs in 'Viva' are the reconciliation of nudity - women represented as "the sex" in a masculine perspective (conventional nude poses) - with the women's subjective realisation of sexual pleasure. The cover of the October issue, advertising its contents with 'Woman Power Now! It's the Real Thing / Nancy Friday: Liberated Mothers and Daughters / Viginal Exercises: Easy! Erotic! Exclusive!' shows the increasing the coming-together of the nude as repository of patriarchal-capitalist ideological sexual pleasure with the woman's own pleasure in sexuality.

The change-over from women as repository of moral values (the same fetishistic structure) as seen in the writing of the heroine in the Nineteenth Century novel, to woman as the repository of pleasure can be seen in the conflicts of representation in the early cinema: the vamp or the sweet innocent; and in certain awkward compromises like the 'Confession film' where the woman admitted her sexuality and confessed it. For the Victorian heroine, the beauty spoke the language of moral intention e.g. Caroline Helstone in Charlotte Bronte's 'Shirley':

"Her face expressive and gentle; her eyes were handsome, gifted at times with a winning beam that stole into the heart with a language that spoke softly to the affections"

The same disavowal of identity is quite clearly seen in eroticism, particularly in Hollywood cinema. Through lack of space I can only generalise, but it is fair to say that the star represents all things to all men. Take for example D.W.Griffith:

"When I consider a young woman as a stellar possibility, I always ask myself, does she come near to suggesting the idealised heroine of life ... The girl to have the real germ of stardom must suggest - at least in a sketchy way - the vaguely conscious ideals of every man. Again she must suggest - and this time equally important - the attributes that most women desire".

Star quality is constantly referred to, expressed in such generalities as 'glamour', 'sex-appeal' etc, and the same language of 'essence' and mystification is used for the contemporary pin-up, or nude picture, masking the structures which support the woman in this position of pure representation. Mailer, writing about Marilyn Monroe, provides a good example.

"She emanated sex, a sweet simple girl on still another back street, emanated sex like few girls ever did ... libido seemed to ooze through her, and ooze out of her like dew through the cracks in a vase... She was already without character. So she gave off a skin glow of sex".

The contemporary stereotype becomes the archetype of woman through her sexuality. Also Barthes on Garbo: "Now the temptation of the absolute mask (the mask of antiquity for instance) perhaps implies less the theme of the secret ... than that of the archetype" (Essays, Fontana, forthcoming).

It is for this reason that Julia Kristeva writes "La Femme, ce n'est jamais ca" (Tel Quel magazine, Paris 1974) i.e. 'Women, that's never the point', you can't BE a Woman. The practice of women can only be negative: "it's not that, and it's not that either". Kristeva: "I understand by woman that which isn't represented, that which isn't spoken, that which stands outside nominations and ideologies". In other words what exists now is woman represented as subject for an ideology which denies the exploration of identity on the same terms of men.

### 3. WOMAN AS HUMOUR

#### Women, the Cartoon and the Popular Press

'Woman' as a stereotype of media production is nowhere so clearly portrayed as in the cartoon of the popular press. This is for reasons indigenous both to the type of humour and to the nature of the method of communication.

Firstly, the essence of cartooning lies in caricature; in exaggeration of characteristics in order to enable quick and easy recognition (think of the length of Edward Heath's nose in any cartoon!). In the same way, 'woman' becomes very tightly defined by her most easily recognised functions. Secondly, (in the examples that have been chosen) the cartoon is static; it has to make its point in a single statement, (short conversation at most) or in a single action, which allows for no subtlety of representation.

The cartoon must also be seen in relation to the audience for which it is intended. Therefore the images which the cartoonist chooses to present will be those which have relevance for the greatest number of his readers. We have all experienced the alienation engendered by lack of understanding of an 'in' joke. The popular press has a distinct, vested, economic interest in avoiding any such alienation of its reading public. Therefore, as Richard Hoggart says 'the massive popular press must restrict itself to the appeals and attitudes which are most popular. . . . There must be no significant disturbing of assumptions.'

Therefore, 'woman' as seen in the cartoons of the Sunday Mirror, Daily Mirror, Daily Mail and The Sun is always seen at the level of her highest common factor, at her most stereotyped and paradoxically in her saddest form.

(N.B. In order to try to produce an analysis related specifically to the most defined image of women and humour, I have chosen to ignore both the strip cartoon and certain cartoons of the middle class press - notably Varoomshka! However, it would be interesting to see this brought up in discussion).

#### Woman as an Object of Humour

In order to analyse 'woman' as portrayed in humour, we must look both at the reasons why people laugh, that is the processes involved in producing the physical act and also at the reasons why such a form of humour exists.

In all the examples I have chosen (from 20th - 26th October) the essence of the humour in the cartoon is ridicule. That is, laughter at somebody, having a joke at somebody else's expense. In all the cases mentioned below, the laughter engendered is at the expense of women. The major emotion that is produced in the reader is one of scorn, and to be scornful it is necessary to convince oneself of one's own superiority. (this superiority can be experienced by both men and women). When an idea of humour is added to that of scorn, then the object of that humour is reduced to a state of debasement.

Max Eastmann, in *The Sense of Humour*, says, 'And the reason why we hate to be laughed at, is that we experience a feeling of inferiority on such occasions ..... For no matter how truly the laughter assures us that they are not hostile, but only happy - they feel no scorn but rather a delighted love of our natural blunder - still there remains the fact that we are inferior.'

If this kind of woman-objectified humour is produced from reducing woman to a state of inferiority, to a state of debasement, it is important to look behind to the mechanisms which result in this kind of action. Hobbes, in his famous opinion about laughter, said that the passion that aroused laughter was 'sudden glory', which was produced either by some sudden act of their own that pleaseth them: or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison thereof, they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them, that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves: who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour, by observing the imperfections of other men.'

In twentieth century terms it is therefore possible to see the cartoons of the popular press as a male-contrived, male-produced, male-supporting ego trip, generating laughter which can be seen as the outward expression of an inner contentment which this real or imaginary superiority inspires!

To be more serious, I would like to suggest that the humour of the cartoons is not just an incidental phenomena which entertains, but that it embodies distinct social mechanisms. These social mechanisms are exactly those which are at work in other form of the media; those mechanisms by which men maintain their position of social dominance both consciously and unconsciously. I do not think that at this stage it is necessary to debate the reality of our male-orientated society. That is, the ideology which tells us that male action, thoughts and words are the reality, the norm, and that women are deviant from that norm. However, that very deviancy has a norm in itself and it is this norm of women which produces the stereotype. As Sheila Rowbotham says 'The media have considerable power to throw back to us a version of ourselves which is presented as the 'norm'. If we take the male-production orientated norm as given, we begin to see how it is possible that women (as in the examples below) are only defined as related to men.

There are two sides to the humour which binds women to this male norm : two ways in which the mechanism of social dominance controls the image of women in the media.

Firstly, there is the exclusive aspect of cartoon humour. This is the aspect which says that masculine and feminine are mutually exclusive and that it is never possible for one sex to do a job which is socially prescribed for the other. This places women completely outside the male norm and then scorns those activities which are traditionally 'feminine', not admitting women to any aspect of the 'real' world. That is, dominance is maintained by not admitting to any comparison of value between the two activities, since there is no common scale of values.

Secondly, there is an inclusive, 'social corrective' aspect of humour, by which women are still seen as deviating from the male norm, but in which she is encouraged to attempt to attain the male world and take on male-based characteristics. The humour is engendered when the woman fails to reach the male norm. That is, maintaining dominance by encouraging women for which she has not been culturally raised and is therefore likely to remain 'inferior'.

Thus, we return to the old dual concept on which women's theory constantly comes unstuck: the fact that women are both inside and outside the system, that they are both 'fundamental and marginal at the same time'.

This duality of women's position produces another, less obvious idea within the humour of women generally; that there is within the idea of derision a sneaking suspicion of envy by the male responsible for the humour. This means that while the superficial cartoon develops the idea of the small-minded housewife, woman as consumer, emotional, illogical, there is an argument that the male cartoonist might well desire to be able to show those qualities of emotion, of frivolity, of concern for family over 'job', which he is forbidden to show because of his own binding to his own male stereotype.

### Specific Examples

I would like to look at four cartoons in detail, to see how woman adheres and deviates from the male norm, adheres and deviates from the female norm, on what aspect of superiority she is always found wanting, whether the humour is exclusive or inclusive and the results of such controlling mechanisms.

1



"Eeny-beeny-niny-no,  
ishe guilty yes-or-no!"

"On the other hand, her cooking leaves  
much to be desired."

2



3.



"I really  
like you -  
you're  
different  
from the  
other  
girls"

4.



"Why, if it isn't Pan's People!"

No.	Male norm	Female norm	Aspect of superiority	Inclusive Exclusive
1.	Serious, logical thought. (woman deviant)	Illogical, frivolous thought. (woman adherent)	Reason over emotion	Inclusive
2.	Innate mechanical skill (woman adherent)	Innate domestic skill (woman deviant)	Inability of woman to cope with her specified domain	Exclusive
3.	Power, violence, lack of emotion (woman adherent)	Gentle emotional (woman deviant)	Power over powerlessness	Inclusive
4.	Importance of sexuality (woman deviant)	Importance of domesticity-non importance of sexuality (woman adherent) modern importance of sexuality (woman deviant)	Broadmindedness(?) over smallmindedness	Exclusive

#### Notes

1. Derisive humour. Woman in male-dominated occupation unable to cope. Child-like misunderstanding of rule of the game.
2. Mutual exclusiveness of roles. Woman must excel at both, in order to excel as a woman.
3. Woman adhering to male norm half applauded for recognition of male power sphere, half derided because incapable of adhering to female.
4. Two female norms - domestic woman and new idea of sexual woman. Even if adhering to former, woman derided for not adhering to latter.

#### Conclusion

There are no claims to originality in the delineation of the above stereotypes. The importance of the images lies in the cultural context in which they exist and are continually reinforced. The importance is in the extent of the stereotyping within certain forms of media presentation. The importance is in the social mechanisms which produce and control these stereotypes on a 'heads I win, tails you lose formula', by creating both inclusive and exclusive humour, without giving women a position of integrity in either.



4. WOMAN'S SELF-PRESENTATION

## Women's magazines:

It would seem plausible that the images of women in women's magazines should bear more relation to how women 'really' are than in media which are not only controlled by, but chiefly directed at men. However as John Berger says :

'Women see themselves as men do, desire themselves to be as men would like them to be.'

## And Eva Figes :

'Woman, presented with an image in a mirror has danced to that image in a hypnotic trance. And because she thought the image was herself it became just that.'

So part of the magazine does that. It gives us woman as man has defined her, ideally as the mother, wife and yes (even here) sex object to, or for him. There's an absence of the non ideal images: no old women, no fat ones - only those trying to get thin, no spotty or miserable ones - unless they are trying to undo their 'abnormal' fat or spotty condition. At the visual level Women's Own 16/10/74 delivered the following images :

- 4 'ordinary' looking older women (if we can count actress Barbara Mullen)
- 5 enigmatic / narcissistic / sensuous
- 22 models (objects - not particularly sexual)
- 2 mothers
- 2 frightened women (sketches for fiction)
- 1 bride
- 1 'distortion' (part of a woman's face blown up for an ad)
- 6 workers (all showing clothes or advertising commodities)

One graphic cartoon drawing for a bank advert shows two women gossiping at a shop door - both looking like Ena Sharples, one woman in turban and overall, and one extremely short mini-skirted, bottom-out-pertinently, wheeling-a-pram young woman.

Any housewives in this issue were disguised as 'models'. Of course this representation is slightly uncharitable in that the 'less attractive' images do tend to appear more frequently in the text - housewives are there.

A similar breakdown for Honey Nov. 1974 delivers the following:

- 13 narcissistic (not ads) 28 ads } these merge slightly -
- 25 models (not ads) 35 ads } status as sex objects?
- 1 mother (only in an ad for a skin product-baby shown too 'soft as a baby')
- 4 'distorted' ie. just hips, legs etc. (ads)
- 3 workers (showing clothes and make up) 14 in ads (some working, some 'just pretty')

Immediately this superficial categorisation presents us with images of women we have not seen in the newspapers. It also directs us to a disparity between Woman's Own, the more traditional older woman's magazine and Honey for the 'more liberated' young woman. We have the 'model', the 'narcissistic' woman and the 'distorted' woman all of which appear more frequently in Honey. What does not immediately reveal itself is the contradictions embodied in the images. The models we can see as woman presenting herself to a man; the narcissistic image we can interpret as woman loving herself in order than man will love her. But that, we suggest, is only part of the signification. The magazine covers begin to direct us to another side, to the other side, that is the in the sexual object too.

These images of women's faces on the covers are so reified, so bright and sparkling, disgustingly so, they're more like Christmas trimmings, shiny things than women. Yet here they are as things supremely shouting 'woman', pointing us inside to a world of women. It's easy to be invidious about them. They're saying : this is how you ought to look: this is how your man wants you : you're failure because you don't look like that however many layers of cream you daub on (and off). Be that as it may, and it is quite likely for some women that that is their relationship to the image, something else is signified. There is a strong focus, not only on 'the face', that most personally revealing part of a human body, but on the eyes, looking directly and intimately at the gazer, on the mouth, smiling friendship. That that potential friendship, talking between women about personal relationships, is contained within its capitalist form of 'thing' - woman as commodity - does not negate it. Rather it poses the problem, non-linguistically, that there is a problem about the relation between 'things' and 'people' in our society.

And indeed inside the magazines we find that the image of women we receive is both as 'things' and people. The positive side of it - woman's belief in herself as a woman does have to do with personal relationships and those tasks which only women carry out. They believe firmly in the goodness of people, they are happy about small, trivial events as well as big ones; their humour, often about their children, is grounded in love. Such attributes reveal themselves vividly on the 'Letter Page'. 'The accident that was a blessing in disguise', in which a woman describes how when she was forced to walk instead of cycle she met her neighbours for the first time.

'We meet and chat and they show their kindness in many ways ..... now I no longer just live in my community - I am part of it'.

Another asks 'Who said we're getting lazy and only watch TV? I've seen so many hand knitted sweaters being worn recently that there must still be lots of women interested in using their hands and not just their eyes'.

In a feature entitled 'The real Mrs. Bond stands up' the contradiction hits us - when we're looking for it. First is 'Mrs. Bond' in all her evening glamour, posing, model like for her man. Over the page though we read her diary while on location with her husband, that diary is woman talking to woman; it focuses on her family.

'I must say that whatever my feelings about this picture and the location, they are coloured by the fact that for the first time we are separated from our children, in all these years together, and whenever Roger has had to work, we've never allowed the family to split, up.'

The beauty and importance to her life are not the clothes she wears or the way she makes-up, but her relationship with her husband and children. Finally she has to leave husband and location and go home to the children. It is a life like any other woman's life. The image then of mother and housewife as it appears in women's magazines is not just as 'borrowed status'. Women if not men feel and talk about their status in their own right; theirs is important 'work'. But it is a letter from the Sun which of recent material most clearly illustrates this.

'Housewife' I had enjoyed another busy day, but a peaceful one compared with the days when my children were too young to go to school.

In addition to the usual chores of shopping, cleaning and cooking, I had prepared my daughter's bedroom, made chutney, fixed a shelf and helped my son with his maths homework.

In the evening when I was making a dress, a schoolfriend I had not met for years phoned me. She is unmarried and a typist. 'Fancy you being a housewife' she said patronisingly, 'Don't you want to have a job? You must get frightfully bored.'

(Sun 24/10/74)

She is living and enjoying proudly (agreed she may have no alternative to being a housewife) a style of life that neither men nor working women can or usually want to live.

Jacky Gillott in the Sunday Times explores 'The case for the feminine woman'. She calls 'feminine' those qualities bound up with 'childbearing and rearing-gentleness, patience, selfishness, a narrow, family centred range of vision!' Feminine processes are 'those functions which are practical, organic, cyclical, tending towards a maintenance of continuity.' It is these qualities and processes she maintains which our technological society has in general lost, which ought to be brought back in. Of course they have not been 'lost', merely downgraded hidden from sight at home while the man is out at work, to be ridiculed in humour, and not respected by the only means our society recognises - it is unpaid. Only women respect it and it is that image which Woman and Woman's Own portray, not without the contradictions which being labelled 'secondary', 'outside work', give rise to. We shall see later in the fiction how these dilemmas are resolved.

This feminine image is explored in a different way in Honey and Cosmopolitan. As in the more traditional magazines it is the woman who is the subject. Whatever pretence there might have been about Cosmo being the female equivalent of Playboy is blatantly untrue. In both Playboy and Cosmopolitan it is woman who is important to the extent that in Cosmopolitan she uses him. Strikingly since we can assume that most women who read Cosmopolitan are working women the fact does not seriously hit us. Both magazines portray women as 'more liberated', but they also portray them as more materialistic. It is they who buy and take advantage of all the trivia that capitalist society has successfully delivered to us. But it is they also who are concerned about their sexuality in a living way. We see that the independent female image still wears her capitalist dress, like the Honey Nov. cover: the plastic woman, not smiling, but sullenly aggressive and independent. That almost aggressive Honey cover does not point us to femininity as we recognized it in Woman's Own - we do not see housewives and mothers - but the putting together of that hat, at that tilt, calculatingly with casual scarves, do lead us to look at fashion. Fashion and make-up are supremely run according to capitalist practice - obsolescence built into their definitions, but as we see the re-presentation of women and their fashion in the magazine context at one level makes a mockery of the world - that world embodied by men - which produces it. So often on the fashion pages in Honey the models pose together against a background of men at work, or not working because the models are impeding their progress. The work arena is trivialised by having fashion shown in it; men and their tasks are made fun of; it is created into a fantasy world which is constantly changing. In this particular Honey we have 'The Gang Show'. A brightly dressed group of young women together with plump white-overalled decorators perform a 'Gang Show' on their trestle bench. The stars? The women of course, 'ganging up' on men. We have also 'Under surveillance'. Here models pose with dim looking men, mostly unattractive (or is that just our subjective view) amid various pieces of 'spy-like' equipment. It is the women who have their arms around the men's shoulders.

Simone de Beauvoir has written 'nothing is less natural than to dress in feminine fashion', though it may seem to be. 'To be decorated' she goes on 'is to be offered', and 'elegance is a weapon, a flag, a defence and a bondage'. The dagger is that fashion becomes a form of narcissism for women because they come to identify with their image. But the image this magazine puts across is a multifaced and dressed one so that no woman could identify with one image. Rather she has to make an image - or so the message has it. Besides the two fashions we've already described (and the clothes on display, hair and make-up are very different) we were also offered a return to nostalgia - to look romantic in second hand clothes, 'the dress that never died', and to 'Feel Free'. The models here are without men, they only have each other as they play with, lean against flexibly, a tarpaulin (perhaps the absent male). We do not deny that we are overemphasising the level at which fashion is asserting woman's independence of men and capitalism, their challenge to that world, but it is

easy to overlook that strand altogether. We have to agree that though there is not one image for woman to be bonded by, the several can just as well be bondage. She still must perform the delicate task of presenting to the world an image that conforms to the images of the moment, and yet also expresses individual 'taste'.

In one article the magazine suggests just that. On 'Style' :

'It is a sense, a touch - nothing more. Something between a talent and a commitment. It is nothing more than a way of expressing yourself - your style. It shows itself in the way you choose clothes and the way you put them together, in the way you interpret yourself through make-up and your hair, the way you decorate the place you live in. More than anything else style comes out of conviction in expressing your personal tastes, fantasies, wishes and your self'

Three young women and one young man are helped by the magazine to find their 'style'. They emerge at the end of the day as plastic people - lifeless. Yet still in the same magazine this notion of 'style' with commodity aids is completely negated. 'Could it be that you're a slut?' reassuringly supports those of us who can live quite happily without being, 'eminently virtuous' about housework, without 'the requisite guilt about fluff in corners to feel instantly impelled to remove it'. We're encouraged, if that's the way we like it, to live in a mess; we're encouraged importantly, as women to feel strong about our position for 'no-one ever calls a man a slut'. 'Sluttishness is essentially female'. The man is excused, she scornfully adds, 'Of course he probably has more spiritual things on the brain, like having a drink or watching T.V.'. Here we don't have the affirmation of 'feminine' qualities that Jacky Gillott discusses but we do have an affirmation of women in the things it is difficult for them to do alone as women. It is easier to be 'stylish' than it is to be a slut: men like the first; they don't like the second.

In a Cosmopolitan (May 1974) we similarly find an image of women finding out about herself, by examining the image she is for men. Carol Dix explores in 'Who's afraid of the female sex drive?' why men are afraid:

'Could the male refusal to acknowledge our sexual desires be a cover up for their own insecurity and resentment?'

She starts from the assumption, as the 'slut' article does, that being 'sexy' (or being a slut) is fine. It's how those men see and treat you that's the problem. The woman's right; the man's wrong. She bolsters woman's own sense of herself:

'respect your own desires .... realise you are not just a "temple over a swere" '

bolsters her by putting men's own weakness on display. (This is in relation to Norma Levy the prostitute whose case 'rocked a government').

'Prostitution is a whole sphere of life in which men are out of control. They probably hate all prostitutes for mocking them. And outside that profession any of us can come in for the insult of creating a similar "prostitution" situation .....

It isn't the sex they are frightened of, it's their lack of control over it.

The image in Cosmopolitan and Honey is of woman crucially bound up in the material world of commodities, but not bound by it; she does not and would not want to speak out against it, but non-verbally comments on it. She uses it and makes of it - fun. Even the one male pin-up that Cosmopolitan sometimes shows - man with the tables turned on him - man as a sexual object - looks, amid a magazine full of women, faintly ludicrous. He's fun too, in a way no female pin-up could be. It is of woman together with other women finding out about herself e.g. earlier pages (and men) usually at the level of interpersonal relationships. Of course she's out to get her man, but so that she is in control of the situation, not him. It is woman searching for a self-respect which is outside the cosiness of home - being a wife and mother - and independent of men, though not without men.

But that image is too rosy for over half the magazines are devoted to adverts in which woman as 'object', on every page stares us boldly in the face. Is it possible, indeed desirable to give such a 'liberal' interpretation of them? We find that, more clearly than elsewhere, in the magazines woman's fragmentation is illustrated. She does appear as a sexual object, frequently, but also too as the narcissistic woman or the worker. Because the images are so 'simple', so 'condensed', the complexity of woman's contradictory images is there on the surface for us to explore.

in a Cosmopolitan (May 1977) we clearly see the image of woman finding out about herself, by examining the image she is in. (The text explains in the article of the female sex drive) why can we do this?

'Could the male refuse to acknowledge our sexual desire for a cover to his? Their own insecurity and resentment?'

the return from the newspaper, on the 'front' outside 'man', that being 'sexy' (or being a girl) is a way of saying 'I've got those on me and I want you that's the problem. The woman's thing; the man's wrong. The woman's woman's own sense of herself:

'I repeat to you my desire... I realize you are not just a "thing" over a word.'

position me by putting me in a position of being a 'thing'. (This is in relation to the way the prostitute does her 'work' - 'I'm a prostitute').

'Prostitution is a whole system of exchange in which men are the only participants. They probably have all procedures for seeking them and outside that are less than any of us can see in for the things of seeking a woman "prostitution" situation.....'

'It's the sex that we're talking about, it's their lack of control over it.'

5. WOMEN IN ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertising is an area where in a disguised way production and consumption come together. There, in all its glory, is the commodity, yet its production, from which it emerged, is completely hidden. To sell the commodity the ad. has to appeal to the success it will be outside that production. Not surprisingly since it is women who literally and symbolically stand 'outside' that arena they feature widely in ads. to men as representation of 'pure' exchange. That same symbolic role functions in the ads. directed at themselves, and it is as consumers first that they appear to themselves:

'Marx, in speaking of man's subjective powers as "objective",..... pointed to the way in which needs are the products of an historical development, not the trans-historical subjective property of individuals, developing in and through a constant reciprocal appropriation of the objective world subjectively ..... If consumption of the object produces the subjective impulse to produce anew, the production of the object creates, in the consumer, specific, historically distinct and developed modes of apprehension - "perception" - and, simultaneously, develops the "needs" which the object satisfies. "Music alone awakens in man the sense of music", he said in 1844. Thus the "forming of the senses" is the subjective side of objective labour, the product of the entire history of the world down to the present".

(Stuart Hall - Intro. to the Grudrisse)

Particularly in ads. we are forced, in order to make sense of them, to look not only at their denotative aspect but at their connotations. We take first ads. from women's magazines, chiefly from those magazines we have already used, then ads. from supplements and newspapers particularly those directed at men.

Women's Magazines

Images denoted	Connotations	Location
worker	independent equal to men	daytime active 'real world'
housewife/mother	loving	(daytime) active in relation to men and children
wife/hostess	organized	(evening)
girlfriend model narcissitic	beauty sex sensuousness natural romantic	'out of this world' 'being'
'distorted'	sex fun effect object fantasy	'fantasy' 'being'

Colour Supplements	Images denoted	Connotations	
	attractive girl  'distorted'  commodity described in feminine terms	sex (ever present) romance beauty fun happiness nature to be served she's serving admiring extravagance success	N.B. We cannot attach these connotations to particular kinds of denoted image as we can with the magazine advertisements

### Women's magazines

#### Worker

These necessarily are daytime images, woman as active independent, 'equal' to men. Needless to say they tend to be adverts for nurses, secretaries, work in banks and the Forces. The contradiction of the 'freedom' of a job but it being a woman's job is sometimes blatant:

WRAC 'A worthwhile job means a secure future. If you're looking for a job that isn't trivial and boring, the Women's Royal Army corps could be just right for you'.

The illustration is of a young girl in white turban basting a joint as a male chef supervises her.

Often jobs are advertised showing a 'pretty' woman, when prettiness is no significant attribute for the job. It is the ads. which directly address themselves to working women i.e. middle class working women, chiefly in the supplements and newspapers which place woman in a more 'equal' role to men:

Midland Bank 'An account with the Midland gives you the confidence that helps you plan your life the way you want'

The photos are of a very middle class woman, a graphic designer at home, at work, with her husband, alone.

#### Housewife/mother

The adverts in magazines tend now to denote women in these roles in a much less direct way. No longer do we often see bright young mums with aprons serving cheese on toast to beaming children and husband. However the images are there in their visual absence: The ads. are directed to you the mother in their prescriptions to love. These are everyday, down to earth images:

Nestles Growing Up Foods

'What do you give him when he prefers calories to protein?'

Babettes nappies

'The more absorbent the nappy you put on your baby ....'

Here the mother is hinted at: we're shown her hand on his bottom.

The 'wife' sometimes appears in company with her husband with the implications of 'equality'. These are mainly in bank and housing association ads.:

Access 'Paying with Access is the simplest part of shopping'  
A middle-aged couple, smiling, are coming out of a shop. Negating the 'equality' is the fact that his arm is around her to help her out the door, but it also tells us that he paid for the item.

### Wife/hostess

Here the image is of wife without her apron, dressed in evening wear, serving food in fairly glamorous surroundings. There is all the association of romance and magic. These tend not to be the images of Woman and Woman's Own:

Creda Cooker 'Carefree entertaining'  
Photo of young woman serving dinner to man.

### Girlfriend Model

Images of girlfriend, model, narcissistic woman merge into one another. They are distinctive in terms of where each casts her gaze: the girlfriend on her man, the model outwards at us, and the narcissistic woman towards herself. They are similar in terms of passivity: they represent woman as merely being. They appear in scenes of fantasy and romance, in exotic, unlikely places. The narcissistic women are often nude. The models usually smile. They are all young and beautiful:

### girlfriend -

New Citrus Musk perfume 'share it with a friend'

There's a photo of a girl in a man's arms as they sit on the grass clothed with autumn colours and light, the impression of fallen leaves around them - contemplative.

'Citrus musk is the cool, clean freshness of lemons blended with the warm excitement of musk. It's so perfectly balanced, so fresh and yet so mellow that it has to be shared - like good wine, music and love!'

Connotations of sex and excitement but also of love romance and peace.

### Model -

These are very much the image of woman as a man sees her. Though no man is actually shown looking at her we can imagine him, outside looking on - yet it is women who are reading these ads. They're pretty, bright and cheerful, or sultry and pensive:

Shaders (hair colour) 'Blonde goes wild'  
4 shades of blonde women pose for the camera. They point to a new, freer life: 'It's wild, life will never be the same again'

Courtauld's Lirelle Clothes 'Lirelle. More than just good looks ..... comfortable, cool and crease defying'  
There are photos of 2 women getting ready, looking at themselves, posing - ready to meet their men. But though the ad. is directed at how you as a woman can make yourself beautiful for a man, it is imbued with fun for yourself, fun with other women, enjoying your own looks, the feel of your own body. This is carried over strongly into the narcissistic image.

Narcissistic

Here the woman is often nude, often when the emphasis is on the face, the photo is misty - cutting us off from her. Sensuousness, privacy woman into herself, enigmatic - not just to gain her man:

Freezemint Creme de Menthe 'Only drink it if you get up when you want to, not when you have to. Green and cool and slightly wicked!'

A hazy photo of blonde woman in white bathrobe drinking.

Boots 'Fragrance at Boots. We have the famous names but we make you feel at home'

Again a misty photo of pensive blonde in long white robe, green ferns in the background.

The natural woman, virgin, frail.

Three Wishes (deodorant) 'Now ..... a beautiful morning-fresh feeling to last your whole day through. Grant yourself three wishes'

A small photo of naked woman using spray.

'Distorted woman'

Surprisingly perhaps it is women's magazines, particularly the younger more 'liberated' ones which carry this kind of ad. They do appear in ads. directed to men but not in quite the same unorthodox way.

Here the woman's body is dissected, parts blown up in size, focussed upon, juxtaposed with objects - real size or magnified, with herself normal size. At one level the purpose is 'effect'. At another it is play with sexuality, highlighting of sensuousness and drama. It depersonalizes woman, makes her into a thing, makes things alive:

Guinness

Just her red lips 'Ladylike' over part of a large glass of Guinness. The wicked, exciting, sexual combination of female and male. There's passivity in the shape of the lips, but fire and activity in their colour.

Natural Wonder 'your lips have never looked this wet before - The formula is rich and juicy'

Phallic. Upright magnified lipsticks, open, bright, and shiny, stand erect beside a woman's profile in which her red, lightly pouting lips caress or are caressed by a lipstick.

No. 7. Boots (make-up)

A double page spread of an enormous eye beside an arm held upright beside a large inviting mouth almost nibbling a lipstick. Difficult to describe, but very sensuous. On the previous page there is the whole of the face full of innocence.

'The bright colours have dazzled themselves out. The pastels have melted away. No. 7's Sunset Strips are here. You're getting warmer'

Without doubt these ads. are using sexual imagery, but it seems importantly to be masturbatory - woman arousing herself.

In the supplement ads. the distortions cannot be of the same order - the body is to be erotic for men not for women:

Leica (camera) 'We've now produced a Leica that suits a few more pockets'

Accompanying the caption is a photo of a woman's body which we can only recognize as such by the hands on the hips.

The significant image of women that appears in women's magazines is, we think, not so much the conventional one we all know about - mother and housewife, but the narcissistic image. It is that which the more sexual 'distorted' image of women seems to support.

Advertisements in colour supplements and papers - mainly for men

Despite the visual image always being pretty and young the image is used in complex ways. The woman denotes more than her body, and a sexuality which is available for men to control.

National Airlines

A smiling girl is a symbol of happiness, fun as well as the sexual category of 'serving' that the copy puts her into.

Courvoisier 'The brandy of Napoleon'

While two men in old French army uniforms play cards in the foreground a woman, clad in a white nightgown, sits in bed - provocatively, the tempting Eve. The white gown (again!) and hints of virginity - the pure female. There are suggestions of romance, of another world as well as her as a sex object - drink brandy and that's what you get.

After Eight Mints 'Life begins after eight'

In the foreground lies a box of open mints on a silver platter, in the background two couples play croquet on the lawn. The setting sun casts its glow on the face and blonde hair of one of the women. Again she stands for beauty, the unusual, the extravagant.

Mateus Rose 'Remember with Mateus Rose the light refreshing wine from the people of Portugal'

Through a romantic nostalgic haze we can see only the face of one pretty woman, young, innocent, in peasant clothes. A man looks at her. Woman near to nature, the simple life.

There are ads. which play on other aspects of femininity. In the Guardian we see a 'working' workingclass woman appearing in a typical role of 'server':

Rank Xerox duplicator

In turban and overall a woman is seen pushing a tea-trolley.

'This gave Rank Xerox an idea'

'Like the tea-trolley it's a convenient and practical way of saving time and money. You don't queue for copies, it comes round to you. And you can move it where the work is .....

Indeed, like the tea-lady, at their beck and call.

Increasingly there are ads. in which man as the 'dressed up object' is featured. Him in his finery with woman there in the background to admire his manliness. At a stretch we could label these as a reversal of roles.

Women's qualities are sometimes used to describe objects, like the National advert. One ambiguous one since it seems to be directed at men and women is the Volvo. While the car is described in terms of its female body, the ad. is also in a complicated way attracting women - a woman is seen gazing over her shoulder at it.

The women's magazine ads. delivered us another expression of women recognizing themselves in terms of male-defined femininity. The ads. in the supplements give us woman as symbol - of all things good (and bad) - the beautiful temptress.

Usually the ads. in magazines and supplements alike present what we called in the introduction condensed images of women. The images are loaded. A woman cannot appear completely as mother, wife, lover and worker. Particularly can she not appear as mother and lover, or worker and lover. She's a fragmented image. Usually one advert can hold only one of those images, a woman is just a mother, a 'pure' mother. Occasionally two are brought together but they are brought together in two women, not one:

Hygena

In an ultra modern kitchen a young blonde woman, tall and slim, dressed in white, is talking to a white-overalled, plump and short middle aged woman. They are both holding cooking utensils. They are united in 'serving', playing a wife's role of cooking. They are separated: the beauty, virgin, sex-object, night-time woman of leisure and fantasy from the everyday, 'motherly', working day-time figure.

The ads. pose for us then, discretely, the different fragments of a woman's life. The ads. keep them apart; in 'real' life women have to negotiate their contradictions. The worker, independent and free, against the mother and wife who serves dependently. The virgin, sexual object against seducer and temptress. Mother against any sexual image. Woman's own self when labelled by men. It is these contradictions which T.V. fiction and women's magazines try to work out, though the contradictions prove so great that 'real' problems are frequently resolved at the level of fantasy.

6. WOMEN IN FICTION

The fiction tends to focus on the arenas of work and family, and although our examples were only few three images of women emerged as 'resolutions':

1. the image of the dependent woman, domestic, soft emotional and vulnerable to the hard world of men
2. the independent feminine image of a career, hard, glamorous, articulate woman, in control - like men.
3. the combination - vulnerable career woman:

Marked Personal (BBC 2 p.m. Wednesday) written by Christopher Bond. Though it focuses on the stereotypical area of middle-class women's careers, the 'soft' or caring institution (in this case the personnel section of a firm) it does portray the women (all single I think) as capable of making responsible decisions within this role. A contrast is made between a despairing, dependent young mother, and the career woman, who is capable both in her work, and in the area of sexual relationships.

General Hospital (ATV 2 p.m. Thurs & Fri) written by Donald James. Again takes the 'soft institution' to weave an intricate web of working and personal relationships inside a Midland Hospital. The 'fifties' formula of a handsome doctor and beautiful nurse romance, has shifted to the more intriguing relationships of working 'equals'. This reflects the actual rise in the number of women doctors now at work. Although they are similarly placed in the career hierarchy there is still the problem of the peculiar phased life history of women in connection with their ultimate domesticity. Though this is not made explicit, an underlying awareness of the potentially disrupting nature of affairs of the heart on a woman's career adds the necessary tension to those attachments. While the man's career progresses as before, the problem for women remains that of choosing between work and marriage, head and heart, even though there is economic equality in the work sphere. She is vulnerable because emotional life and work potential contradict each other, and will continue to do so while equality of responsibility for children within marriage is unavailable. The opening up of educational opportunities for middle-class women, followed by the closing of occupational opportunities on marriage, creates an expectations bottle-neck, a useful dramatic theme, but not one to which any solution became apparent.

Intimate Strangers (ATV 9 p.m. Friday) written by Alick Rowe, is the last present-day serial considered in this brief survey. As in 'Marked Personal', it distinguishes between the capable career woman, who takes on all the characteristic toughness associated with career men (while at the same time preserving a glamorous appearance i.e. they are NOT the unmarriageable dowdy spinsters of earlier fiction) and the vulnerable, dependent wife. She represents the values of a past age, in which faithfulness and service to one man are compensated for by the security of a beautiful home and garden. The career girls (the daughter and the girl-friend who rejects Harry) represent values of

the future in which a lack of emotional ties or 'roots' are compensated for by economic independence and success in terms of masculine career goals.

The primary direction of interest is, can Joan (the wife) achieve anything for herself after 25 years of total dependence?

In Cosmopolitan woman's sexuality is explored much more. In 'Beautiful' by Rachel Billington, dependent as she is on her men - to say how beautiful she is - the heroine uses her sexuality to entice men. She is their ruin: one man destroys his reputation by making the schoolfriend of her daughter pregnant; because of her this same man is later killed by her husband whom she drives to the act. She is a mother, she's clever and has an extremely successful job, she's beautiful and sexy; she needs men.

In one woman are all the problems of being a woman, but the story can only deal with them in a displaced way through fantasy. But whether it is fantasy or not we are made acutely aware of woman's complex relation to the world.

One image of woman not in that story is that of the mother figure as repository of moral values but it is still there in the fiction of Woman and Woman's Own. 'Close to him' by Brenda Lowery (Woman's Own Oct. 26 1974) is concerned again in a displaced way, with the vulnerable, moral woman's relation to the hard world of men. She does work but as a teacher and then a secretary - in a 'motherly' way, but nevertheless she claims a moral victory. It is she who helps some lost children back home, comforting them sympathetically despite their naughtiness. It is a man - the boss - who is first outraged by such 'tolerance' and then grudgingly begins to respect her treatment of them she 'wins' through this kindness: she captivates her man.

This section has been very cursory, but we hope it has at least hinted at how fiction creates its own combined images of women, i.e. it puts together different bits of the fragmentation, in order to pose the real problems which women face.

## CONCLUSION

We have attempted to describe in this paper the ideological modes of subjectivity available for women in the media under capitalism, and it is indicative of the complexity of the 'images' that we can in no way claim to have reached a collective theoretical agreement. Nor are we agreed on how to understand the interlocking mesh of determinations, a complex of technical, ideological, economic and political factors, which make the media, despite individual negotiations with the imposed hegemony, an image-producing system (the difference of treatment of the sexes is immediately exposed when one considers the untenability of the term "images of men in the media"). This sort of study of women can only be a negative one, a process of de-naturalisation, of understanding the 'structuring absences' of the apparently "natural" language of the media. The "transparency" of the media is not a simple matter of "a lie", an imposition of an oppressive and exploitative ideology on women by imposing certain previously-agreed images. It is rather, the presentation of the "natural attitude in which a particular reality is taken for granted, regarded as, in some sense, immediate and absolute" (S. Heath, Signs of The Times, Cambridge 1970).

In other words, the effective role of ideology, to produce the category of 'subject' for the reproduction of the relations of production, has a dual structure:

1. the individual's self-recognition in the structure (STRUCTURE here defined as "that which puts in place an experience for the subject that it includes")
2. the individual's 'mis-recognition' (or mis-appropriation) of self in ideological formations, in that this recognition serves for the reproduction of ideology for its own purposes.

i.e. 'Self' constructed in a state of necessary alienation until the child appropriates the "language of the other" (the language and law of culture; pre-existent modes of subjectivity):

"The child's release from the alienating image will occur through the discovery of subjectivity by his appropriation of language from the other, which is his means of entry into the symbolic order in the capacity of subject" (Wilden: Lacan, The Language of the Self).

In this limited space, we are unable to discuss this question. This is the question which Freudian analysis has posed of the construction of the individual as subject in the 'symbolic' i.e. the individual in its establishment as subject for ideological formation. This is the question of how women appropriate modes of negatively-defined subjectivity from a male-dominated culture, which, in general, excludes them from the relations of production, and thus enter into a culture of difference. It is these relations of production which, to some extent define "identity" in bourgeois culture. The category 'Woman' is thus a negative definition - apparently divorced from the values of the system of production, but validating them in the reproduction of ideological formations as moral centre of the home, or repository of sexual pleasure.

In this paper we have only been able to describe the ideological modes of subjectivity available to women: housewife and mother, sex-object the "insatiable" female, the career-woman. We have described these in their most aggressive forms and also where women have begun to negotiate with these images. The historical presence of Women's Liberation has been a significant factor for the emergence of woman as signifier of woman, not as an empty signifier of the laws of patriarchal culture,

but the group is divided about the implications of the emergence of a space for women to discuss femininity for themselves in the media; that is, whether this is progressive on balance or not. One member of the group writes:

"The family must serve and be seen to be dependent on capitalist production. And it is the woman through the family who is that role. The worker is fed and rested so he can resume work each day; the family reproduces the next generation of workers, physically and in socialising them to step into their parents' roles; the family spends the money he's earned; they consume in order to keep themselves and the economy growing; the woman's body is consumed in the advertising necessary for this growth. It is woman who reproduces, consumes and is consumed.

But women do more than this. They also stand symbolically for all that cannot happen or be along a production line. And in that capacity she stands for more than the opposite of man. Marcuse in 'Eros and Civilisation' maintains that it is behind art that lies the "repressed harmony of sensuousness and reason - the eternal protest against the organisation of life by the logic of domination"

It is in woman too that this lies. At one level it is their sexuality which is the symbol for that which is not work; it is that which you buy for your play. At another, in their everyday lives which support capitalism they do simultaneously live according to different set of values which focus on bringing up children, and on a life which has all the qualities of emotion, feeling and irrationality --- the non-progressive world.

So women reproduce capitalism, they serve it at every point, but they can only do so from a vantage point which has its base partly outside. It is they who inhabit the arena which we strive to buy through work; the arena which must be controlled by work.

Housewife, mother, nurse or teacher are images of women who reproduce physically and socially. Yet we have seen in woman's magazines these same images struggling to say something positive about the way they do that"

However, especially with the examination of woman' as a sex-object in the media, some of us are inclined to see woman's discussions of themselves, their sexuality and 'femininity' (terms already defined by male culture) as the final success of capitalist ideology. It is reaching a degree of consistency where there ceases to be conflict. It has already been said that some of us deny altogether the idea of the realm of the home as potentially outside patriarchal, capitalist ideology: women's sexuality, however, has been potentially disruptive for the central unit - the family - by which the circulation of capital and the social relations of production are sustained. Nevertheless the fetishistic structure by which women's sexuality is re-presented in the media, as we have discussed in the section 'Woman as SEX' illustrates quite clearly how woman is maintained in a position of pure exchange. This re-presentation of woman from male perspective as the SEX, repository of sexual pleasure, contained in the fetishistic visual image "describes a structure of representation and exchange, and the ceaseless confirmation of the subject in that perspective" (S. Heath 'Lessons from Brecht' Screen, Summer 1974)

In other words, despite woman's discussion of their own sexual pleasure, the presentation of the woman's body as this pleasure, maintains woman as commodity-object and as a negative sign in a male-dominated culture. The fact that it is no longer simple exploitation in that now woman is enjoying her body, is potentially the final compromise to capitalism (that is recognising herself and finding pleasure in the modes of subjectivity available in capitalist ideology). But this pleasure is potentially disruptive and an examination of the contemporary images in the media show us the struggle to contain contradiction and impose a hegemonic language.

1. The body as a site of pleasure and power	2. The body as a site of control and discipline
3. The body as a site of resistance and subversion	4. The body as a site of conformity and assimilation
5. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	6. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
7. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	8. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
9. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	10. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
11. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	12. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
13. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	14. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
15. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	16. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
17. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	18. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
19. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	20. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
21. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	22. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
23. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	24. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
25. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	26. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
27. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	28. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
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31. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	32. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
33. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	34. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
35. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	36. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
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63. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	64. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
65. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	66. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
67. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	68. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
69. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	70. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
71. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	72. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
73. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	74. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
75. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	76. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
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87. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	88. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
89. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	90. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
91. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	92. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
93. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	94. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
95. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	96. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
97. The body as a site of self-expression and individuality	98. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity
99. The body as a site of self-actualization and personal growth	100. The body as a site of social conformity and conformity

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