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Domestic space and the construction of identity

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Domestic Space
and the
Construction of Identity

By

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A Thesis submitted in fulfilment of a Bachelor of Arts
Degree with Honours, at the School of Language,
Literature and Media Studies Edith Cowan University.

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Table of Contents

| Page | | |
|-------------|--|---------|
| | Abstract | 3 |
| | Declaration | 5 |
| | List of Figures | 6 |
| Chapter | | |
| 1 | Introduction | 7 |
| 2 | Studies of Mass Culture Narratives for Women. | 21 |
| 3 | View of the Domestic Sphere in the Feminist Tradition | 33 |
| 4 | Australians and their Homes | 46 |
| 5 | Advertising and Discourses of Domesticity | 64 |
| 6 | Women's Pleasure - Feature and Narrative Analysis | 103 |
| 7 | Conclusion | 130 |
| | Bibliography | 140 |

Abstract

This thesis on Domestic Space and the Construction of Identity investigates the construction of feminine identity within the domestic journal. The devalued status of the homes magazine is a direct reflection of the devalued status of women's domestic work and its political insignificance in a patriarchal society which values external paid labour over unpaid domestic work.

This work is of course central to society and homes magazines provide an important focus for research since they intersect with the construction of femininity and roles for women.

The contradictory nature of the domestic journal is such that while it supports the hegemonic order by presupposing that women's sphere is the domestic, it concurrently provides female readers with an important vehicle of self validation in which the home is at the core rather than the periphery of social relations. It is this contradictory nature of the magazine that this study will address, primarily within an Australian cultural framework where the domestic ideal supports the dominant western ideologies in terms of class and gender.

To do so I will formulate a methodology based on the traditions of feminist theory and its perspective on domesticity and mass culture narratives for women, and place these within an Australian cultural framework. The second part of the study concentrates on the application of these theoretical perspective to textual and contextual analysis of the magazines. This will illustrate the domestic agenda and, through the deconstruction of narratives and advertisements, reveal the multiple discourses of femininity through which the reader finds pleasure.

The feasibility of this research project, particularly with regard to the contextual analysis is possible because of my access to 'first hand' accounts of women's reading of the texts through my position on the editorial staff of a domestic journal. The research project is supervised by Michael O'Shaughnessy from the Department of Media Studies.

Declaration

"I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgment, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text."

List of Figures

- Figure 1 - Volta. Home Beautiful, February 1992.
- Figure 2 - Hoover. Delineator, April 1930, p. 89
cited in Marchand, R (1985).
- Figure 3 - Chef. Home Beautiful, February 1992
- Figure 4 - Dri-glo. Home Beautiful, December 1992.
- Figure 5 - Caroma. Home Beautiful, February 1992.
- Figure 6 - Laminex. Home Beautiful, December 1992.
- Figure 7 - Steiner. Home Beautiful, December 1992.
- Figure 8 - Classic. Homes & Living, May 1989.
- Figure 9 - Tasmanian Oak. Home Beautiful,
February 1994.
- Figure 10 - Dorf. Home Beautiful, February 1992.
- Figure 11 - Cristal D'Arques. Home Beautiful,
December 1992.
- Figure 12 - Artis. Homes & Living, March 1994
- Figure 13 - GE Refrigerators. Home Beautiful,
December 1992.
- Figure 14 - Miele. Home Beautiful February 1992.
- Figure 15 - Cover. Homes & Living March 1994.
- Figure 16 - Letter to the Editor 19/04/94.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This research thesis into Domestic Space and the Construction of Identity is a cultural study of the nature of the Australian homes magazine, highlighting the dichotomy in which they can be seen as both an important vehicle for feminine self validation and a popular culture text which supports the hegemonic order and consequently the subordination of women. Textual and contextual analysis will focus on the way in which women can make meaning from the text through the variety of discourses of femininity they are offered and which women inhabit.

My Research draws on two theoretical traditions;

1. Cultural Studies

As a relatively new branch of the humanities, cultural studies and more specifically the research conducted by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in the 1960's, created a new paradigm of mass communication. Cultural Studies was an alternative to the hypodermic approach to media favoured by the Frankfurt School and the empirical base of American mass communication approaches.

Cultural theorists like Stuart Hall, (Hall, Hobson,

Lowe & Willis, 1980), Angela McRobbie (1991) and Dorothy Hobson (Hall et al. 1980) sought to investigate culture as 'lived experience', drawing on the works of Richard Hoggart (1958), Raymond Williams (1961) and E.P. Thompson (1968). They examined ways in which individuals were socially constructed through ideology, language, gender, class and race positions, influenced by Althusser's work on dominant ideologies and Foucault's theories of discourse.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony was also influential. Hegemony describes a set of social relations whereby a dominant class maintains its cultural, political and economic leadership with the consent of the very classes that it subordinates. Consent is not achieved through force or direct coercion but through institutions, images and every day representations which naturalise the dominance of one class or group over another. Cultural Studies concerned itself with the messages and meanings beneath the surface of popular culture texts. Studies investigated how the text gained the consent of the reader and also the possibility for the audience to make oppositional or progressive readings. In this way it challenged the idea of the passive reader investigating instead the ability of the audience to actively make their own meaning.

2. Feminist Theory

Feminism's impact upon the culturalist approach was to add gender to the issue of class, defining these as the axes for social divisions. Feminists argued that sexual difference based on biological determinism was the most fundamental element of social inequity.

The Feminist Culturalist approach to media studies paid particular attention to texts which were popular with women and consequently devalued by patriarchal society. From this feminist perspective, the devalued status of the domestic journal is directly related to the devalued status of the domestic sphere and, it follows, to the trivialisation of women's work within that sphere.

My research methodology is derived from this feminist culturalist approach. It divides this study of Domestic Space and the Construction of Identity into two distinct parts, the first from Chapters 1-3 inclusive, establishes a theoretical base for my own research. In this section I explore:

- a. Other Studies of Mass Culture Narratives for Women
- b. The Domestic Sphere in the Feminist Tradition
- c. Australians and Their Homes

The second section, incorporating Chapters 5 and 6,

gives an analysis of homes magazines and looks at:

d. Advertising and the Discourses of Femininity

e. Narratives and Feminine Identity.

Using this approach my research focuses on these four major areas of investigation.

1. The Domestic Space and Femininity

In the 19th century the ideal setting for women's lives as established by western culture was in the home, clearly delineated from the public and masculine sphere of work. Late in the era the popularisation of the 'angel of the hearth'¹ vision embodied women's role. The model of the dutiful home maker in the service of home and husband was a common construction. In this Golden Age of Domesticity² women's ignorance of the outside world necessarily excluded her from the decision making process.

The Materialist Feminist tradition, lead by exponents like Charlotte Perkins Gillman, (Hayden, 1981) charged that it was women's domestic role which was essential to their powerlessness. They challenged patriarchal social structures by challenging women's role in the

¹Mitchell, J. & Oakley, A. (1976). The Rights and Wrongs of Women. London: Penguin.

²Matthews, G. (1987). Just a Housewife. New York: Oxford University Press.

home. They envisaged co-operative housekeeping as the first step toward equity, whereby a group of women performed all domestic work collectively then charged their husbands for their services. The next step was to move the kitchen away from the isolation of the home to communal kitchens and laundries where baking, washing and sewing could be performed by women as a group. As a collective and as paid workers women's power increased enormously.

The Material Feminist movement is significant because it was the first major movement which challenged private domestic work and which demonstrated alternatives to the nuclear family. The antagonism with which it was greeted by both men and women and its subsequent demise, attested to the naturalisation of hegemony and the role of women based on biological determinism.

However, almost a century later women's two roles defined by Moen (1992) as both wage earner and domestic labourer, has blurred the delineation between masculine and feminine spheres. The repercussions in the contemporary magazine text are apparent when one considers the representation of women, their work, and the discourses of femininity employed in modern media texts. These are most evident in advertisements which

offer the reader a variety of often contradictory reading positions through discourses of technology, creativity, beauty and efficiency.

The work of Judith Williamson (1978) and her semiotic approach to decoding advertisements is instrumental in revealing the discourses of femininity employed both historically and in contemporary journals, and the multiplicity of reading positions on offer. The servile housekeeping is no longer the only image available to advertisers because of the impact of the feminist movement and the redefinition of women's role away from the home and into paid work. My interest is particularly in the way women's identity remains closely linked to the domestic and the subsequent parallels between the home and women where women are encouraged to see themselves defined in domestic terms.

2. The Contradictions of this Space

There are two major contradictions contained within the domestic space.

a. Work and Pleasure

The contradictory discourses of femininity discernible in the domestic text reflect the contradictions intrinsic to the domestic sphere. A well ordered, pleasurable domestic space is essential to the

psychological health of the family and an harmonious family life, and the responsibility for creating and maintaining this sphere and caring for the family is principally a feminine one. Whereas work and pleasure are clearly divided for the male bread winner between the home and the office or factory, there is not such delineation for the domestic worker where the home is a site of leisure and of labour, a source of work and of pleasure.

In her sociological investigation of housework Ann Oakley (1974) proves that the majority of women don't like housework and suffer from the alienation, monotony and the fragmentation which makes it essentially work, a dissatisfaction which is compounded by the devalued status of being just a housewife. Domestic narratives therefore do not stress work - the cleaning, cooking and caring elements of the feminine role, but rather the domestic agenda is of creativity, decoration and entertainment which constructs the home as an important vehicle for feminine self expression. In this representation, charges Coward (1984), the text hides the actual work women perform here and conflict about that work.

Much of this conflict stems from the fact that domestic work is not pleasurable but undeniably work

and to recognise it as such, by giving it a monetary value, is an attempt to address the trivialisation of that work. The exchange of domestic labour for payment supports its political and economic significance in the capitalist economy. The magazine text take for granted a female reader. Since the responsibility for domestic duties, nurturing and caring for husband and family, is the essence of women's work it is this which confines her to the home, and therefore the home which is crucial to her marginalisation and subordination.

b. The Value of the Domestic Sphere

The second contradiction is simply about how important the domestic sphere is for women. Patriarchy demeans it, but insists on its importance for women. Some women argue that despite its separation from the public world of work, politics, and social power it is a space where feminine qualities are valued as positive ones which will influence the men who enter that space.

3. Women's Identity and the Home

The work of Rosalind Coward (1984) highlights the link between women and the home. Textual analysis of advertisements provides essential evidence of the discourse of femininity which merge feminine

beautification and domestic beautification and consequently feminine identity with the home. Such a discourse of femininity which draws overt parallels between the home and women in the service of her family, is fully committed to supporting dominant ideologies in terms of gender by insisting on the importance of visual appearance to define women's identity and by subverting the central processes of work involved in the maintenance of the home.

However, other research into the construction of women's identity through popular mass culture narratives is essential to this study of domestic space and the construction of identity. On the surface women's magazines are considered little more than a tool for the maintenance of patriarchal order and feminine compliance. A Cultural Studies perspective empowers the readers with the ability to negotiate meaning rather than defining them as the passive receivers of the media message. The possibility therefore exists for positive readings for women.

Winship's (1987) research into other genres of women's magazines , Radway's (1984) ethnographic research of romance readers , and Charlotte Brunsdon's (1982) study of soap opera , all provide elements of the methodology employed in this study of feminine

identity and the domestic journal, and the importance of considering not only textual analysis but how the reader uses the text to make their own meaning.

4. Class, The Property Myth and Women's Work

The property myth is deeply entrenched in the Australian psyche. An historical perspective shows that the home carries important messages of class and status in Australian society where improving one's lot in life is being able to afford to move to a better suburb. Evidence is also provided that the home is divided along gender lines where the interior, as the signifier of culture, is women's sphere and the exterior, as the signifier of nature, is a masculine sphere.

The home magazine is an important vehicle for the naturalisation of middle class ideals. These ideals are reflected in a common taste or decor, the purchase of which negates the opportunity the home provides for feminine self expression.

If one were to give credence to the hypodermic model there would be little value for women in the domestic journal. Rather it is simply a device of hegemony naturalising patriarchy in the feminine subjects who it subordinates. Alternatively, the magazines are part of

a feminine culture - not an oppositional one, but one which asserts the value of feminine characteristics within patriarchy. As Fiske (Fiske, Hodge, & Turner, 1987) observes, women readers are not the passive receivers of the media's message. Instead they are able to negotiate the text, acquiring images and products which legitimate feminine values within current social relations.

Many of the most pleasurable experiences in reading the domestic journal are the ways in which it re-addresses social relations by placing the domestic at the core rather than the periphery. Here, the domestic agenda creates a women's world where cooking, entertaining and decorating are of primary importance within the middle class ideal. In order to investigate these issues of domestic space and the construction of a feminine identity the chapters proceed in the following way;

1. A Review of Mass Culture Narratives for Women

This chapter draws on previous research into mass culture narratives for women and specifically the work of Janice Winship (1987), Angela McRobbie (1991) and Janice Radway (1984), in addition to more purely sociological approaches to women's magazines in order to establish a methodology for my own research.

2. Viewing the Domestic Sphere in the Feminist Tradition

Historical approaches to sexual difference and more specifically the feminine role in the home and its implications for the construction and naturalisation of a feminine identity, are discussed here. These major theoretical approaches to gender provide the framework for contextual and textual analysis of the contemporary homes magazines.

3. Australian's and their Homes

The property myth is deeply entrenched in the Australian psyche where investment in a home is the essence of economic security. Drawing on the bush myth and its masculinization of Australian identity, the home is divided along gender lines - the interior, women's world, embodies culture while the exterior, man's world, is nature. Magazines naturalise the middle class ideal by displaying furnishings, colours and architectural styles indicative of that class. This in turn limits the self expressive and creative possibilities the interior of the home holds for women.

4. Advertising and Discourses of Domesticity

As Jean Franco (cited in Modleski, 1986, p.124) observes, different narrative strategies are employed

when women are addressed as members of the work force rather than as consumers. The emergence of labour saving devices in the early 1900's corresponded to the blossoming of the advertising industry in America. If one were to view domestic appliance advertising as a continuum, the changing discourses of femininity apparent therein reveals much about the changing status of women. By analysing advertisements this chapter highlights a central issue of the thesis whereby women are encouraged to identify with their homes through discourses of appearance, beautification and transformation.

5. The Domestic Agenda and Women's Pleasure

Different magazines from this genre are targeted at different socioeconomic groups which correspond to the readers' place in the home making life cycle. This chapter combines analysis of the narratives and photographs with evidence from women readers themselves to conclude on the way in which magazines accommodate the unpleasurable nature of housework within the pleasurable act of reading the domestic magazine.

Issues of gender inequity and women's role in the home are historically bound together and for this reason, a research study into the domestic journal is of

social significance in the investigation of contemporary issues of feminine identity and women's roles. Before proceeding to the theoretical traditions of feminist theory however, it is necessary to make a review of previous studies into mass culture narratives for women as the basis for research into culture as the 'lived experience'.

Chapter 2

A Review of Studies of Mass Culture Narratives for Women.

The term 'women's magazines' takes in a vast range of publications from the perennial British publication Women's Own to the more liberal Cosmopolitan and the left feminist journal Spare Rib. The focus of this study is the homes magazine - a sub-genre of the broader category of women's magazines, in which the focus is primarily on the house and garden.

Previous research into the broader category of women's magazines highlights the contradiction whereby feminine texts provide the reader with pleasure yet support the gender roles which result in her subordination. This chapter will review previous feminist analyses of mass culture narratives whose methodologies will provide the basis for detailed analyses of the domestic journal.

Background

A small group of cultural philosophers exiled from Germany to the United States in 1933 became known as the Frankfurt School and expounded the theory that like fascism, capitalism depended upon the acquiescence of the masses for success. Just as the working classes were governed by the daily rhythm of

the production line and the management techniques of industrialised society, so were they passive receivers of the messages and rhythms of mass culture while at leisure.

The notion of the unchallenged acceptance of a dominant ideology by the consumers of mass culture is unsatisfactory, particularly in terms of feminist theory, for a number of reasons. Firstly, it fails to account for the apparent dualism expected of women. Women's magazines often present a range of different and often contradictory representations of femininity, beginning with the good and loyal housewife to the emancipated business women, very often within the same issue. Secondly, and most importantly, such a theory ignores the ability of the reader to actively make meaning from a text.

Gender and Hegemony

Perhaps the most significant work to date on gender and popular culture comes from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham. The research of Angela McRobbie (1991) in the area of femininity and youth sub-cultures, Dorothy Hobson into housewives and soap opera, (cited in Hall et al., 1980, p. 105) and Janice Winship into women and advertising (cited in Hall, Hobson, Lowe, Willis,

1980, p. 217) are examples of studies which brought together the threads of semiotics, structuralism and social theory to investigate the cultural implications of mass media representations of women.

Author of Inside Women's Magazines, Janice Winship (1987), has written widely on popular culture. She has a degree in Social Anthropology and according to the introduction of her book, she is also a keen reader of women's magazines. It was this apparently contradictory attraction to the magazines as a woman and rejection of them as an academic and a feminist which she suggests is the "nub of feminist concern." (p. xiii)

Winship's analysis therefore is not solely targeted at condemning women's magazines, (although she does not hesitate to do so where warranted), instead she seeks to, "delve beneath simple and dismissive descriptions to explain the appeal of the magazines and to critically consider its limitations and potential for change". (p. 9) According to her findings the magazines are, in their totality, "fiction" narratives in which women achieve success and satisfaction in everyday life within the patriarchal structure.

A Review of Research

For Winship (1987), the path to this conclusion begins with establishing women's magazines in general within an historical and sociological framework, followed by a brief summation of the magazine industry in Britain from the 1960's to the present. In establishing which magazines have succeeded or failed, and how publications have changed in format or design, Winship begins to look at the notion of targeting audiences and market segmentation according to lifestyle.

To do so she draws upon Gramsci's theory of hegemonic order to provide evidence of the way in which women consent to their own subordination through discourses of beauty, romance and domesticity. Gramsci's ideas are based around the notion of hegemony and the conceptualisation of a class structure whereby the economic, moral and political views of one social group are universalised and perceived as common sense.

Instead of class, Winship's analysis views gender as the primary axis of social division. Berger, (1972) coined the phrase "women appear and men act." The role of women as passive and domestic is accepted as natural. For many women, fulfilling this role and reading a publication focusing on the domestic sphere brings both pleasure and self validation.

In the later half of her study, Winship chooses to focus on three publications in detail. Woman's Own as the most popular weekly journal in Britain, Cosmopolitan the most popular monthly journal, and Spare Rib, an example of radical feminist journalism. In both her general and specific investigations, Winship's emphasis is on semiotic analysis of 'visual fictions', particularly cover images and advertising, for which she draws strongly upon the decoding work of Judith Williamson (1987).

Similarly she borrows from psychoanalytic film theory which highlights the power of the gaze. Magazine covers hail the reader as 'you' - the one who can lose weight, be more beautiful, and a better housewife. Meanwhile model images meet the reader's gaze drawing them further into the idyllic image of femininity.

Winship also deconstructs the problem pages and random articles - features which the magazines themselves refer to as fictions. Interestingly her study does not give the emphasis to romance that other researchers have since, she observes, Womens' Own, Cosmopolitan and Spare Rib are targeted at a more middle class audience and the discourse of romance has been appropriated by publications targeted toward the working classes.

I accept Winship's contention that women's magazines are constructed as pleasurable fictions. Therefore a comparison between her research and that of women's romantic fiction by Janice Radway (1984) is worth consideration.

Ethnography

Recognising the disparity between academic estimations of 'pulp' fiction such as that by Ann Douglas (1980) titled Punishing the Liberated Woman, and readers' accounts of their own pleasures, Radway sought answers from the woman themselves through ethnographic research. Rather than dismissing romantic fiction as a pervasive form of ideological indoctrination, Radway (1984) suggests that:

"a good cultural analysis of the romance ought to specify not only how the women understand the novels themselves, but also how they comprehend the very act of picking up a book in the first place." (p.8)

Through her intensive ethnographic research which included interviews and observation of the Smithton women, Radway was able to draw the conclusion that the act of reading romance was in fact an act of resistance to the routines and roles of wife and mother imposed upon them. Further, rather than subordinating the heroine, the readers interpreted the narrative as one which the woman's sexuality and hence

power, triumphed by the transformation of an inappropriate suitor into the ideal husband.

The Text-Reader Interface

Angela McRobbie (1989) who, like Winship, was also active at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham in the late 1970's, was greatly influenced by the notion of the culture as lived experience and the Centre's work on subcultures. Her early work on the teen magazine Jackie relied on textual analysis and resulted in the paper Jackie Magazine: Romantic Individualism and The Teenage Girl. (1989, p. 81). However, in hindsight and in light of studies like David Morley's¹ and Janice Radway's (1984), McRobbie identified the shortcomings of her purely textual analysis. She concluded that such studies as Radway's and Morley's, which identified the importance of the reception of meaning are:

"indicative of a movement away from the centrality of the text in all its ideological glory and recognition of the fact that texts do not simply assert their meanings on 'unsuspecting reader or viewers'." (p. 138)

McRobbie recognises the strength of ethnographic research in identifying the scope for negotiated meaning in a text, however as she explains, this type

¹See Morley, D., (1986). Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure. Comedia, London.

of culturalist approach is not without problems also. Using Radway as an example, McRobbie contends that the most obvious difficulty with ethnography lies in the relationship between the audience and researcher. For example, the Smithton women were eager to please the researcher but were elusive about answering personal questions regarding the sexual pleasure (if any) that romance provided. This may have influenced the conclusions drawn by the researcher. Radway, she contends, emphasised the reader-text interface to the detriment of exploring the wider more complex relationship between gender and leisure within the context of household labour. As this study discusses, delineation between women's work and leisure is problematic since the work involved in caring for the home and its inhabitants is constructed by the domestic discourse as pleasurable.

The Availability of Women

Despite the difficulties of ethnographic research identified since the Smithton research, Radway's chapter on The Institutional Matrix of Romantic Fiction, (p. 19) is interesting, particularly in regard to a research thesis on homes magazines.

The marketing success of both categories hinges upon the concentration of women brought about by the social

constraints placed upon them by society. Liberation for women does not usually extend to freedom from maintaining household supplies and managing the home. Much of the success of the Harlequin Romances depends on their availability through the supermarket and in America, the drug store. As Radway explains "American women were extremely easy to reach." (p. 32) The homes magazine utilises a very similar distribution network and there are very close parallels to be drawn between consumption in the supermarket and shopping centre, and the domestic ideal presented on the front cover of the magazines at the checkout.

A Sociological Perspective

Marjorie Ferguson, a sociology graduate from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a veteran of ten years of magazine journalism, has also researched widely on the phenomena of women's magazines. Forever Feminine: Women's magazines and the cult of femininity (Ferguson, 1983), is a purely sociological perspective, based upon content analysis which employs a methodology aimed at establishing a quantitative base for qualitative research. Her seven year study, (a decade later now somewhat dated), looks at the three leading British women's magazines, namely Woman, Woman's Own and Women's Weekly with random issues as far back as 1949 through to 1974 chosen for

analysis.

Ferguson decided upon the four editorial sections of beauty, the problem page, fiction, and general features for analysis. Interviews and observation supplemented this approach however in vastly different ways to the interviews and observation of either McRobbie (1991) or Radway (1984). Ferguson's interviews primarily explored the function of the editor whilst observation referred to overseeing "the daily business of getting the magazine out". (p. 221) Her work is valuable for its quantitative approach but leaves the audience powerless to negotiate meaning within an agenda set by editorial staff.

It is therefore significant to consider Ann Oakley's study of London housewives which was the basis for her book, The Sociology of Housework (1974). A major motivating factor for this study, according to the author, was the essentially sexist nature of sociology, in which housework was approached as an aspect of the feminine role in the home and the family rather than a work role. According to Oakley:

"The concealment of women runs right through sociology. It extends from the classification of subject-areas and the definition of concepts through the topics and methods of empirical research to the construction of models and theory generally." (p.3)

It is this sexist approach to women's work which Oakley attempted to address by qualitative and quantitative research into women's attitudes to their housewife role.

Women's Work

A final pertinent study in relation to mass culture narratives for women and perspectives on women's work is that of Jean Franco (cited in Modleski, 1986) titled The Incorporation of Women which investigates Harlequin Romance and a Mexican comic strip, Libros Semanales - popular with working class women in Mexico. Franco concludes that "different narrative strategies are deployed when women are addressed as consumers than are deployed when they are addressed as potential members of the work force." (p. 124) Romance forgets the world of work, while Libros Semanales offers work as freedom from the confinement of the family. A parallel is identifiable here in the domestic journal which addresses women foremost as homemakers and consumers with no reference to work - either paid or unpaid.

The sum of these studies into women's narratives and popular culture texts points convincingly to the importance of combining textual analysis with contextual analysis within a cultural framework which

recognises culture as 'lived experience'. While the role of editors in establishing content and layout is significant, to be commercially successful the agenda they set must reflect social conceptions of what it is to be female and the pleasure femininity affords their readers.

Unlike comparable magazines targeted toward men, Wheels, Sporting Shooter, Off Road and Overlander for example, women's interests are governed not by personal interests or hobbies outside of work, but her age and status. In maturity, the romance of Jackie is superseded by the domestic journal and its agenda of cooking, home decoration and maintenance, gardening and planning entertainment and holidays, since these are the principal concerns of the mature reader in the care of her husband and family.

The sociological and cultural studies approaches to mass culture narratives for women discussed here provide a valuable framework for further investigation. However, a methodology for further research is incomplete without accounting for theories of gender difference and their implications for domestic space and the construction of feminine identity. These will be addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

View of the Domestic Sphere in the Feminist Tradition.

Historical approaches to gender divisions, particularly those focussing on women in the domestic sphere, are a vital aspect of an investigation of mass culture narratives targeted toward women as the principle occupants of that space. This chapter provides an analysis of significant feminist approaches to the domestic sphere, highlighting the home and domestic duties as the source of women's subordination, women's attitudes to work and the implications this has for discourses of femininity in the contemporary domestic journal.

Biological Determinism

Donald Horne, in The Public Culture (1986, p. 95), points out the flaws of biological determinism which replaced notions of God as the creator of sexual difference. A genetic blueprint built into the body, bestowing emotional or perceptual difference to the female because of her ability to bear children is problematic, he says, firstly because it fails to recognise that such biological instructions can be disobeyed. Secondly, Horne asks:

"how can those bodily instructions produce
 ...those parts of 'the feminine mystique',
 described by Betty Friedan, of the woman
 necessarily being housekeeper and shopper? How
 did the body know about the house and the shop?"
 (p. 96)

The ideal setting of women's lives in the home and the ideal home setting as rural, is a constant historical theme since the late 1800's and in their essay 'Landscapes with Figures: Home and Community in English Society' (Mitchell & Oakley, 1976 p.140), Davidoff, L'Esperance and Newby study some of the uses made of sexual difference and the domestic ideal. According to them, the primary function of woman as a guardian of the 'temple of the hearth' (p. 153) was closely associated with a middle class emphasis on the home as a moral force during the seventeenth century. This morality would gather momentum into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the sanctity of the home achieved almost religious status.

According to the authors, this function is made explicit in the following extract from Ruskin's lecture "The Queen's Garden", cited Mitchell & Oakley (1976):

"The woman's power is not for rule, nor for battle - her intellect is not for invention or

creation, but for sweet ordering, management and decision. She sees the quality of things, their class, their places". (p. 155)

This model of domestic relations termed the Beau Ideal⁴ provided a framework for the maintenance of hegemony and the naturalisation of the division of labour between the sexes.

The separation of women into two distinct classes, the 'pure' and the 'fallen', was well established by 1750 according to Davidoff, L'Esperance and Newby, (cited in Mitchell & Oakley 1974). The home was the domain of the former, the streets the latter. Unfortunately, women who wished to work outside the home paid by forfeiting all claims to gentility. It is important here to ask from where the naturalisation of the domestic sphere as a feminine sphere arose.

Women's Work - Production becomes Consumption

Hypothesising on the Origins of the Family, Private Property and State, cited in Mitchell and Oakley (1976), Frederick Engels writes of a family based on a mother-right system preceding the father-right system - in which there was a division of labour but

⁴1820 OED, 'that type of beauty or excellence in which one's ideal is realised, the perfect type or model'.

no sex antagonism. The patriarchal lineage displaced the matriarchal as the dominant with the intensification of labour outside the home. According to Engels, the increase in the productivity of labour with the introduction of cattle breeding, the working of metals, weaving and field cultivation created a surplus which gave men new economic power over women.(p. 274)

Donald Horne (1986) once again writing in The Public Culture is unwilling to take sides on the argument that sex and race chauvinisms shaped industrialisation or that conversely, industrialism exaggerated forms of sexism and racism. What he does concede however, is that:

"industrialism accentuated forms of sexism as a social chasm opened between work and home, between public and private with the one honoured by financial reward and the other not. The private work that was seen as women's work supported and enabled the public work that was seen as men's work, providing new - and crucial - aspects of male dominance." (p. 96)

Citing again Mitchell & Oakley (1974), Davidoff's, L'Esperance's and Newby's, 'Beau Ideal', "denied the reality of, and thus made less viable, the existence of households with other structures namely without male heads, with working wives and mother."(p. 173) However, the Material Feminist tradition not only

envisaged alternative types of households but implemented them (though admittedly with limited success), between the years of 1890 and 1920.

The Material Feminists

According to Hayden (1981) Material Feminism drew on the principles of communitarian socialism and the writings of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier. To its devotees it was a hybrid of the two greatest social movements of the late nineteenth century, Marxian Socialism and Feminism.

The Material Feminists' major criticism of Marxist theory was that while it recognised the bourgeois, proletarian relationship between husband and wife, it failed to provide strategies for equity. Instead, it claimed that the emancipation of women was possible only when women take part in production on a large social scale. According to Frederick Engels:

"the fortunes of women and of oppressed classes are ultimately connected: neither can be free until economic formations based on private property have been abolished."(cited in Mitchel & Oakley, 1974, p. 275)

From the feminist perspective, it was because women were confined to sex stereotyped and extremely low paying jobs, excluded from trade unions and male

trades, that they:

"could not define their own struggles for political and economic autonomy in terms of class struggle organised around their husbands' or fathers' occupations. Instead they worked for equal female rights - suffrage, housing, education, jobs and trade unions for women." (Hayden, 1981, p.7)

With gender, rather than class, as the unifying category, Material Feminists believed that the economic exploitation of women's labour was the most basic cause of their inequality. Although it served the capitalist machinery, traditional female tasks like cooking, cleaning, and child care limited women's ability to pursue work outside the home. They therefore actively sought to remove these from the home with collective kitchens, laundries and child care centres. According to one of the movements leading exponents, Charlotte Perkins Gillman, (Hayden, 1981) such work should be undertaken by paid professional domestic workers (interestingly still all women, although women who enjoyed domestic work).

The reasons for the ultimate demise of the material feminist tradition becomes apparent when one considers that it directly challenged patriarchy and therefore the basis of capitalism. Similarly, it incurred the wrath of the majority of women who fully accepted the

patriarchal ideal. In America, two home economists, Christine Frederick and Lillian Gilbreth led the anti feminist, pro suburban home push and it was Frederick who coined the term 'Mrs Consumer' in the late 1920's.

Women and the Consumer Culture

Essential to Frederick's success (she later became a specialist on selling products to women) was her approach to housework as home management where labours were conducted scientifically. The new analogy drawn between the factory and the home saw appliances become tools and the kitchen a workshop. But most importantly, to Frederick, the home was not a place of shelter, but a site of apparently endless consumption and a woman's work was to keep house and consume. Naturally, women's magazines followed the new scientific treatment of the home with layouts that resembled trade catalogues and features that tested housewives' ability to choose wisely, accompanied by time and motion diagrams on the economical use of the kitchen and its appliances.

The turn of the twentieth century and the emergence of a consumer culture was a significant period in regard to the domestic sphere according to Karen Altman (1990), Assistant Professor in Communication Arts and

Sciences at the University of Southern California. She describes it as a period when:

"women's labour changed dramatically as industry took over the productive aspects of the home. Housework became service oriented rather than productive and included consumption of those commodities that had once been home made goods."
(p. 286)

The power that women now held as consumers however, (not just for herself but for the entire family) demanded careful ideological consideration.

According to Altman, in America the 1920's marked the beginning of Roosevelt's, 'Better Homes In America Campaign', spearheaded by Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover with the support the Homes Economics Discipline and a popular women's magazine, The Delineator. The campaign bound together the threads of patriotism and capitalism and reinforced as natural and universal the domestic as women's sphere. It was man's biological destiny to own a home and a woman's to decorate it. The result according to The Delineator's editor, Marie Maloney would be better communities, better babies, boys and girls staying at home, healthier families, happier people and better times (Altman, 1990, p.228). Patriarchy was bestowing responsibility for the moral, industrial and political fibre of the nation on the women who stayed at home.

According to Simone de Beauvoir's, The Second Sex, (1972) unlike others subordinated in capitalist society by race or class, women have no common history and it is this which prevents their consolidation into a strong political force to oppose their subordination. Accordingly, she says, women:

"live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men - fathers and husbands - more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletariat women..." (p. 18)

So fierce was the propaganda campaign and the naturalisation of hegemony, that under the Hoover Administration, Americans firmly rejected the Material Feminists' emancipation of women based on communal living, and the little woman was pushed back into the home, into isolation and the service of her man more firmly than ever before.

Contemporary Attitudes to Housework.

Such was the naturalisation of women's role in patriarchal society, exemplified by the Better Homes In America campaign, that sociologist Ann Oakley (1974) was prompted to investigate women's attitudes to 'womens work'.

According to Oakley, sociology "has treated housework merely as an aspect of the feminine role in the family - as a part of women's role in marriage, or as a dimension of child rearing - not as a work role." (p.2) It is this point, on the naturalisation of domestic as women's work, which is pivotal to any discussion on the domestic space and feminist theories about that sphere.

For her study of women's attitudes to housework, Oakley conducted a series of interviews with London housewives and concludes that her major finding was their dissatisfaction with domestic work which was, in many instances, a direct result from the low social status associated with being "just a housewife". The results of Oakley's comprehensive research are reiterated in later sociological studies like that of Bose, Bereano and Malloy in Household Technology and the Social Construction of Housework, (cited in Lafollett & Stiner, 1984) which claims that the debilitating effects of being a housewife, rather than myth, can be supported by health statistics and that:

"the monotony of the home setting, the repetition of menial tasks, the isolation and lack of stimulation from other adults have been identified as sources of chronic fatigue in full time house wives. (p.273.)

This realisation - that housework is not pleasurable for the majority of women whose responsibility it becomes - has had enormous repercussions in the discourses of domesticity employed in the media industry, particularly in the domestic journal. If the majority of women are dissatisfied with housework and its devalued status in society, it is obvious from the increasing popularity of the homes magazine and television programs which focus on the domestic sphere that the home itself is not representative of that subordination. The opportunity for creativity presented through the home and the associated voyeuristic pleasure displace those feelings of subordination.

The Impact of Entertainment Technologies

As an increasingly important site of leisure for the family where public and private spheres merge, the home continues to grow in commercial importance and this cultural trend is reflected in media programming and the emergence of home shows like Our House, Your Place or Mine and the aptly titled Homes Show.

The incorporation into the home of theatrettes and

entertainment centres⁵ is indicative of a movement away from public leisure like the club and cinema, as television in its various forms including the VCR, the computer, and cable become the fundamentals of home entertainment. Their function in the domestic agenda is two fold; the technologies are both cultural signs whose acquisition gives their owners membership to an identifiable class group and, as Morley and Silverstone observe (1990):

"Television, both medium and message, is becoming a key technology for the selling of other technologies and a focus (competing with other Telecommunications) for a whole range of projected domestically oriented goods and services." (p. 35)

Herein lies the key to the foray of commercial television into the homes and lifestyle genre, a feminine sphere previously held in contempt by a patriarchal society who has now realised the enormous economic potential of tapping a market of home owners in a society which holds the home in extraordinarily high regard.

Rosalind Coward (1984) concedes that the home presents

⁵ Home Theatres and Entertainment Centres are a recent phenomenon in domestic building design, in which a cinema environment is reproduced in the home in a room set aside for that purpose incorporating large screen format, image projection, cinema 'surround sound' and high fidelity sound.

the home maker with creative possibilities that are offered in few other places and yet argues that in women's magazines this visual ideal - the spotlessly clean home, the absence of life and mess - conceals women's work and concurrently conflict between the sexes about that work. (p.71) For women who occupy domestic space as child carers and house keepers, pleasure in domestic based homes magazines and television programs is derived from the validation of the importance of maintaining the home, albeit for the return of the male 'worker' at the end of the day.

The approaches discussed in this chapter to gender division and the sexual division of labour provide a valuable framework for analysis of narratives whose subject is the home, and their function in reinforcing dominant ideologies and constructing feminine identity. The chapter which follows places this division within an Australian cultural framework concentrating on changing social relations, the value of domestic work within those relations and the naturalisation of the middle class ideals reflected in the domestic journal.

Chapter 4

Australians and their Homes

The previous chapter discussed theoretical approaches to gender division and feminist perspectives on the domestic sphere. This chapter will place these approaches within a specific cultural framework by discussing Australian attitudes to the home, their historical bases and their implications in constructing the domestic and more specifically the interior as a feminine sphere. In doing so it will illustrate the paradox whereby the home is an important and tangible investment in the Australian property myth, thereby carrying vital messages of class and status in contemporary Australian society, and yet the work performed therein is attached little political, economic or social significance.

An Historical Perspective and Attitudes to Property.

Australia's first white European settlers were primarily urban dwellers and as King (1984, p.224) observes, their approach faced with the vastness of Australia was akin to giving someone a thousand pounds and watching how they spent it. The pattern of the built environment which resulted reflected a new economic and political freedom which was the very antithesis of the congested cities from which they had

come and allowed for the realisation of the British liberal bourgeois ideal of freedom, democracy and owning a home.

There was no shortage of land in Australia and Governor Phillips, in an early dispatch to Britain after landing in 1788, proposed that the land be granted with a clause that prevented more than one house being built on an allotment 60 feet across and 150 feet deep. (King, 1984, p.228) According to Robin Boyd (1952), this size became the norm in twentieth century subdivisions and later was coined the quarter acre block.

The opening of agricultural land in the 1840's and the struggle for landowners to secure tenure in colonial Australia reflected British attitudes to land as a source of wealth, power and a bourgeois desire for social betterment. Horne (1965), Conway (1985) and King (1984) commenting on Australian culture, have drawn the common conclusion that, as a nation, Australians are devoted to materialism and the focus for that materialism is the home. As cultural theorists Graeme Turner, John Fiske and Bob Hodge indicate in Myths of Oz (1987), the central position of the home in Australian life is a shrunken version

of that early landowner's dream:

"The structure of the contemporary Australian suburban home could in fact be seen as a shrunk version of the free selector's dream; the quarter acre block is a satisfyingly compromised metonym for 'our selection', continuing to assert that everyone's right to acquire property in our egalitarian society." (p.27)

Anthony King (1984) concurs when he states, "colonists bought with them an attitude to land as a source of wealth, power and security and land speculation became a national hobby." (p. 229)

Historically, dependency on the horse and carriage allowed only the wealthy to leave behind growing cities which in the early 1900's had become congested and plagued by inadequate public amenities. However, because settlement occurred comparatively late in Australia, settlement patterns were greatly affected by mechanisation. Trams and cheap public transport facilitated what would later become known as the suburban sprawl. Walking distance to work was no longer a limitation for the working class who could now afford the fare.

Conway, (1985) rather unflatteringly claims that convict settlement equated Australia to the refuse

heap of the Empire. It was this, he says, and the development of the country one as one of bureaucrats and merchants, supplying Britain's raw materials and consuming its products that created the stability of Australian society. This administrative nature of Australia's towns and cities gave birth to their conformity and the myth of egalitarianism which prevails today despite all evidence to contrary.

Zoning and the Materialisation of Class Structures

The speculative nature of Australians, in combination with a dramatic increase in Sydney's population around 1910, focused attention firmly on the need for town planning. As King (1984) describes, apart from ordering urban development, the introduction of zoning would have important repercussions for the growth of suburban Australia.

"For landowners it meant increased land values; for employers a healthy work force...for architects, surveyors and the new profession of planners it meant both work and power; and for the state it meant an increased commitment to the idea of private property." (p. 237)

In reinforcing the capitalist ideology, land zoning effectively materialised a class structure whereby the location of the family home signified the status of its inhabitants. Improving one's lot in life meant

being able to afford to live in a better suburb.

Suburbia and Conformity

The 1920's are generally considered Australia's first suburban era. The result of renewed contact with the British during World War One, according to Conway (1985) resulted in a rash of anglophilia and social climbing and he describes it as a time when:

"roomy but tasteless post war houses which rose in paddocks from South Caulfield and Chatswood across the continent to Nedlands became an outward evidence of the humdrum, flatulent social attitudes of the time" (p. 35).

It is indisputable that suburban development has had an enormous impact on the way Australians live from the way they shop, to the way they socialise and as theorists like John Fiske et al. (1985) reiterate, the cost of the great Australian dream may well be the quality of the remainder of life.

Today Sydney and Melbourne have some of the world's most extensive urban sprawls with all the problems of access, cost of maintenance services and deterioration of lifestyles that makes them almost too large to live in. Reflected in these suburbs is the realisation that the great Australian dream has resulted in an

extraordinarily powerful mortgage mentality undiscernible, according to Fiske, because it is entrenched en masse. But rather than the wealthy occupying the outer suburbs as they did in the early days, the deep seated ethos of home ownership has forced the working classes to the cheaper land in newer outlying estates. In the outer suburbs, poorly serviced by public transport and community facilities, dependency on the automobile has increased and the isolation of women, as the primary occupiers of the home, along with it.

Here in the suburbs, the conformity bought about by the administrative nature of early Australian cities is apparent. Conformity in the suburbs - undifferentiated homes on similar sized blocks, represses class distinctions where being obviously different or better is interpreted as snobbish or even unAustralian. Undoubtedly, in the designs of the new working class 'estates' it is an imposed conformity bought about by the added financial commitment involved in any variation in a predetermined and costed plan that could jeopardise the affordability of the home and the realisation of 'the dream.' As Hugh Stretton (1970) describes, the more money one possesses the more difference one can buy. (p.11)

Undoubtedly the resale myth has been instrumental in perpetuating the sameness of suburbia. It is a myth subscribed to by home owners, real estate agents and many builders and one which Robin Boyd (1952) describes in the following passage:

"Any addition which made the house look more expensive was worthwhile, for the Australian bread winner tended to plan not so much for his own enjoyment, or even to excite his neighbours admiration, as for eventual sale. Any small extras spent on the roof or front porch could be classed as a good investment, because they could be counted on to raise disproportionately the offers of potential buyers. The Australian did not intend sell the house, but he was conditioned, by a century of recurring economic collapses, to remember always that if bad times came this factor would be important." (p.176)

The 'property myth' and the mortgage mentality is so deeply entrenched in the Australian psyche that the goal of home ownership gives life much of its meaning and the realisation of the dream makes even the struggle over a lifetime of mortgage payments somehow bearable. After all, the battler and the underdog are an intrinsic part of the national identity.

The nuclear family is becoming less the norm as divorce, second marriages and extended families have their impact on perceptions of what defines a family. Nevertheless, in Australia the resale myth remains entrenched and continues to produce a standardised

'every family home' that is the real estates agents' fabrication of an ideal. As one Perth builder recently put it, "you end up with people who are.... middle aged with kids about to leave home and they're building enormous homes," all in the name of resale value.'

Hugh Stretton (1970) suggests, in Ideas For Australian Cities that less rigid zoning, mixed use and greater attention to diversity in home design would relieve the monotony of suburbia. However, he is not prepared to condemn it to the soulless, heartless wasteland described by other social commentators:

"You don't have to be a mindless conformist to chose suburban life. Most of the best poets and inventors and protesters chose it too. It reconciles access to work and the city with private adaptable self expressive living space at home. Plenty of adults love that living space and subdivide it ingeniously. (p. 21)

Reconciling Suburbia and the Bush Myth

Popular distaste for suburbia undoubtedly extends from the naturalisation of the Australian bush myth. Images of Australians like the bushman and the digger are popular ones, regularly touted by the advertising

⁴ Dale at Home in Housing - an article by Michelle Phillips in the West Australian Newspaper, October 16th 1993, The Big Weekend Section p. 16.

industry to sell a variety of consumables from beer to political agendas. While the success of such campaigns indicates a particular fondness for these mythical representations, their emergence and perpetuation are questionable in the light of the highly urbanised reality of Australian society.

The fact that most people chose to live in suburbia for economic reasons, including proximity to work and community facilities, suggests that the suburban home and yard is an acceptable mediation between the bush and the city.

In his critique of Australian culture, Donald Horne (1965) observes that only 10 per cent of Australia's population are rural dwellers. Urban centres cling to the fringes of the continent because much of the vast interior remains uninhabitable due to the harsh climate and arid landscape. That such a settlement pattern has nurtured the image of the archetypal Australian as a countryman, at one with nature is curious. Nature and culture is a dichotomy which features strongly in many discussions of a national identity. Leaving behind the cultured environs of England, the unfamiliar Australian landscape was truly 'nature'. Though for most of the new settlers the bush

was menacing, it was this which effectively differentiated them from the Mother Country and so provided the means by which they identified themselves as unique.

The identification with an unforgiving landscape and the fact that as late as 1842 the ratio of men to women was three to one, are responsible for the emergence of a masculine Australian identity. The male myths of the digger, the bushranger and the bonds of mateship had been nurtured by legends like Anzac - masculine struggles against adversity. The international film industry too, according to Turner (1986, p. 114), through nationalistic discourses in films such as Gallipoli, Breaker Morant, and The Man From Snowy River, all construct the intrinsically good qualities of Australians as their maleness, honesty, loyalty and mateship often in contrast to the lack of these qualities in their opponents.

However, as psychologist Ronald Conway (1985) observes in The Great Australian Stupor: "the shared hardships of the first diggers, the beauty of their discovery of the measure of one another gradually dwindles into empty chauvinism." (p. 32) It is a chauvinism (typified by the RSL) that has spawned the 'ocker' and the keg

culture and one which continues to exclude women from a male dominated social life.

Womens and Culture

Attempting to construct a feminist perspective from a largely masculine history, Miriam Dixon remarks in The Real Matilda (1976), that Australia's history largely ignores a corresponding female struggle against isolation and adversity. According to Dixon, the massive uncertainty Australian men feel about issues of authority and legitimacy because of their convict history is directly reflected in Australian women. Dixon explains:

"Using women as the internal mirror to validate themselves, Australia's elite males,...stumbled on ways of ensuring their women should feel even less certain of themselves, even more constricted in their self definition." (p. 224)

This identity crisis is compounded by what Phyllis Moen (1992) describes in her book as 'women's two roles,' in which the demands of work and family spheres are in constant conflict. This is reflected in the contradictory discourse that homes magazines employ to gain the consent of readers.

Writing on the socialisation and interaction of the family, sociologist Talcott Parsons (cited in Kuhn &

Wolfe, 1978) concludes that the adult feminine role continues:

"to be anchored primarily in the internal affairs of the family, as wife, mother and manager of the household, while the role of the adult male is primarily anchored in the occupational world, in his job and through it by his status giving and income earning functions for the family." (p. 161)

As cities sprawled, their centres as places of excitement and danger became a masculine sphere - an urban jungle. In between the city and the bush, largely ignored and often satirised, lay suburbia, epitomising domesticity, femininity and the ultimate castration of the Australian male. However, a century marked by social progress saw very few changes to the plan and operation of the home. Perhaps the most significant was the movement of the kitchen and the home maker with it, from the relative isolation at the rear of the home. Together they moved toward the centre of the home indicating a move toward functionality and reflecting changing social attitudes within the family.

Applying the nature culture dichotomy to the domestic sphere, Fiske et al. (1987, p. 29) proposes that the feminine sphere of home and more specifically the interior, represents culture while the yard and more

specifically the back yard, is nature tamed by man. The Australian identification with a masculine landscape is thus reduced to a suburban quarter acre block and this is the source of much of the contempt directed toward suburbia.

Although borrowed from India, the verandah is a significant part of Australian domestic architecture, representing one of the earliest concessions British builders made to the Australian climate. In his book Verandah, Phillip Drew (1992) describes it as the "touchstone of Australia's national identity", a statement which reflects the enormous significance Australians attach to their home. Beyond such patriotic symbolism, the verandah does have an important function in culture, nature relations. Drew also describes it is "a place of contention and harmony that arbitrates the competing claims of house and garden, man and nature, order and disorder; a heterogenous zone where opposites mingle..."(p.58). Its symbolism is therefore vital to those home magazines like Australian Country Style in which Australianness is the primary discourse.

Excluded from the public sphere of work meant retreat to the domestic for women and the task of negotiating

a meaningful existence therein. The interior of the home is the centre of culture and it is here, through her choice of furnishings that a woman can express individual taste through the choice and arrangement of mass produced goods, (Fiske et al., 1987). Donald Horne (1964), referring to research conducted by an American West Coast Professor of Psychology, Dan L. Alder draws the conclusion that:

"the obsession of many Australian women with their homes goes beyond fashion or normal motherly concern; it represents an attempt to provide spiritual value in material things and modes of living. In a largely non religious and non competitive society an obsession for good taste in homes, in their furniture and decoration and in home entertainment and cooking gives life much of its meaning."(p.66)

As Rosalind Coward (1984) observes, good taste in homes is dictated by the media, the journalists, designers, graphic designers, furnishers and publishers who she says have:

"the hegemony over definitions of design, taste, class, style and elegance... [who] ... control the means of mental production.... [by telling us]...what we should think, what we should buy and what we should like." (p. 68)

As Chapter 6 discusses, the magazine offers the consumption of commodities as the means of achieving

the middle class ideal, however, it should not be ignored that much of the pleasure in contemporary homes magazine is the way in which it effectively places the domestic and the feminine agenda at the core rather than the periphery of social relations.

From my experience, two groups of people agree to have their homes used in magazines. The first Coward (1984) has described in the previous paragraph as builders, designers and those in trades and businesses associated with home building who accept the economic advantages of this type of subversive 'advertising.' The other, is that group who simply enjoy the recognition of their homes as evidence of a superior style. Since style, according to Coward (p. 65) carries messages of definite ideologies of class taste and ideals, it is also a symbol of status and achievement.

Steve, a builder who has a house in bushland on the edge of Perth, is a member of the first group who describes his home as "colonial Australian crossing into old English Revival." (S. Hill, Interview, May, 1993) The verandahs, he says typifies its Australianness, the formal stone portico is representative of English styling. Architectural

features viewed in this way are a metaphor for the identity crisis Australians wrestle with, a crisis which manifests itself commonly in the narrative of homes magazines. The blend of old and new, of traditional and modern, of typical Australian and English styles is a recurring theme with home owners, and is significant for two reasons. Firstly it signifies the way in which Australians define themselves and their abodes as a post-colonial nation. Secondly, it indicates a hesitancy to abandon Britain and its connotations of style, fashion and high culture even two hundred years after settlement.

In my experience Steve is one of the few men who elected to be interviewed in relation to his own home. This interview is significant in that it provided evidence that the male and female place different emphasis on aspects of their home - he on architectural and design aspects which revolve around public display and she on decoration and the arrangement of objects in the private domain therein. By volunteering as an interviewee Steve was able to ensure that his personal and economic agenda, as a home builder, was met in the article which resulted.

According to Marshall McLuhan (1964) the house, like clothing is an extension of our skin - a place to store and channel individual heat and energy. Australians however, are not passionate about mortgages on house and land packages in the suburbs because it provides them with a store of energy or even because it provides shelter. Rather, in a society obviously divided along class lines and which ironically invests heavily in the ethos of egalitarianism, the home signifies a tangible investment in the property myth while encapsulating important messages of status, class, gender and identity.

Undoubtedly, media has significant power in moulding the beliefs and tastes of its audience and this form of mass media promotes and naturalises certain types of homes as the ideal, attainable through the consumption of particular types of goods. In this way, homes magazines support capitalist ideals by promoting consumption as a vehicle for the transformation of women and the material conditions of their existence. However, such a conclusion is too simplistic since it ignores the possibility of an active audience and women's ability to negotiate meaning through discourses other than those associated with

materialism. The following chapter which analyses advertisements will investigate some of these other discourses.

Chapter 5

Advertising- Women as Consumers

I have discussed the 'angel of the hearth vision' construction of women's role in the 19th century in a previous chapter. In this chapter I will be investigating contemporary constructions of femininity through advertising in the domestic journal, and more specifically women's function in a growing consumer culture. Secondly, I will analyse a number of advertisements from the magazines and in doing so highlight the ideological construction behind women's pleasure in relation to the domestic sphere.

Women, Advertising and Consumption

The mid 19th century is described as the Golden Age of Domesticity (Matthews, 1987), a period when women had more time and a greater profusion of utensils and other artefacts with which to create a good home. Subsequently, novels, advice books and periodicals began to reflect the highly positive image of the housewife and her home making skills. This 'cult of domesticity', according to Matthews, (1987, p. 6) would give rise to an entire genre of domestic novels written by and for women depicting heroines demonstrating incredible initiative in creating homes.

As Glenna Matthews describes in Just A Housewife (1987) the middle class woman of the 1850's knew she was essential not only to her family but also to her society. Major changes had occurred by the 1950's, according to Matthews, who maintains that the suburban middle-class housewife was doubly isolated: "physically by the nature of housing patterns and spiritually , because she had become merely the general factotum for her family." (p. xiii) It is interesting at this point to consider some aspects of the discourses of femininity from that Golden Age of Domesticity up to the 1990's and the implications for the ideology of femininity as reflected in contemporary advertisements.

With the rise of this consumer culture, women's work turned its focus from production to consumption, a fact which was well noted by national advertisers. It is not coincidental that the popularisation of the so-called labour saving devices like the washing machine, vacuum cleaner and sewing machine corresponded to the coming of age of the advertising industry. In 1929, Christine Frederick wrote Selling Mrs Consumer, (cited in Hayden, 1981), a book setting forth methods manufacturers could adopt to encourage women to consume as much as possible. According to Frederick

it was their (manufacturers) duty to train women from the hand and craft techniques into a tool technique.

The decline in the availability of servants, the emergence of household technologies like the icebox, the sewing machine and the stove, and later electric washing machines, irons and the vacuum cleaner had an enormous impact on the domestic sphere. Add improved transportation and the creation of national urban markets, aided by new methods of food packaging and preservation techniques like canning and freezing, and the foundations had been laid for the modern consumer society.

The tensions between the home reality, and the home and hearth ideal, grew steadily as the productive capacity of the home diminished. Although hailed as labour saving devices, the ability of household appliances to actually reduce labour remains dubious. As Oakley discusses in her Sociology of Housework (1974), women will extend the amount of housework performed to fill the time available, washing the sheets, for example, two or three times a week instead of once. Therefore a better description of appliances, agrees Matthews (1987), is that of labour changing.

The following quotation illustrates the problem for women who were encouraged to consume in order to achieve the lifestyle presented through advertising. According to Ewan, (1976):

"The old standard dictates a parasitic, non-productive, child bearing existence for the wife, and further implies that she content herself with lower standards of material comfort and well being for herself and her family than her environment encourages her to desire. (p. 122)

Advertising and indeed the domestic journal in its entirety encouraged women to aspire to an ideal attainable through the purchase of commodities, while as a house worker and unpaid labourer she was forced to 'doing without' domestic comforts in order to fulfil her social and biological obligations.

Matthews (1987) describes the 1920's as a time when the volume of advertising rose and " copywriters pioneered new styles of layouts, used photography more extensively and developed non rational styles of appeal to the consumer. (p.180). According to Stuart Ewan in the Captains of Consciousness, (1976) advertising offered consumption as an alternative to other forms of (social) change, and in some way answered the frustration imposed by the passive life style of industrialised society. In evidence, Ewan

quotes Helen Woodward, a leading copywriter in the 1920's;

"To those who cannot change their whole lives or occupations even a new line in a dress is often a relief. The woman who is tired of her husband or her home or a job feels some lifting of the weight of life from seeing a straight line change into a bouffant, or a gray pass into beige." (p. 86)

Cast in the passive role, superficial change to either the home or the body was preferable to any real change which might constitute what Simone de Beauvoir (1972) describes as an authentic existence.

This point is intrinsic to the construction of a female identity particularly in the homes magazine. As early as 1929, the parallel between the female body and the home had clearly been drawn and it is a parallel which endures in contemporary journals. Both the home and the home maker are inscribed by a discourse of beautification where the woman often is often a visual metaphor for the home, or the vanity unit or the crystal ware. (See Figures 10 & 12)

As Christine Frederick (cited in Hayden, 1981) had already observed, woman at home were an extremely profitable market. Again, by 1929 more than 80 percent of the families' needs were satisfied by purchases

made by women and according to Ewan, (1976 p. 167) advertisers felt that through them the new values of mass production would best be conveyed. It remains true in contemporary Australia that the acquisition and furnishing of new homes is a major industry that it in turn supports a plethora of peripheral businesses, from banks to furniture companies.

The advantages for advertisers in a homes and lifestyle magazine is that manufacturers can target a very specific audience - those in the market for a home, be it established or new, and those who own a home and are interested in decorating it. In Australia where the ethos of home ownership is so deeply entrenched, the market is enormous.

Within the sub genre of domestic journals different magazines correspond to readers from different age and consequently socioeconomic categories with Vogue, Belle and Country Style appealing to higher income earners and House and Garden and Home Beautiful (with their articles on budget and apartment decorating), targeting young audiences and lower incomes.

The multitude of roles offered to women is evidenced in the enormous variety of products being sold through

the pages of the homes and lifestyle magazine, from beauty products to kitchen appliances, cleaning products and bricks. It appears today's housewife need not only look good but maintain the homes and its inhabitants impeccably.

Undoubtedly the discourse of domesticity, the way of speaking about the home and women's relationship to it, has undergone enormous changes largely as a result of evolving gender roles and the feminist movement but hegemony remains constant. On August 11th, 1934 an article titled A Man's Castle is Women's Factory commenced thus, "Men are judged by what they accomplish -women by the homes they keep." (cited in Marchard 1985, p. 188) And one might add, patriarchy would have them believe that the quality of the home they keep, hinges upon the products they consume. Such overt references to women's place being in the home are not as acceptable to today's readerships and other discourses are employed by advertisers to encourage women to consume.

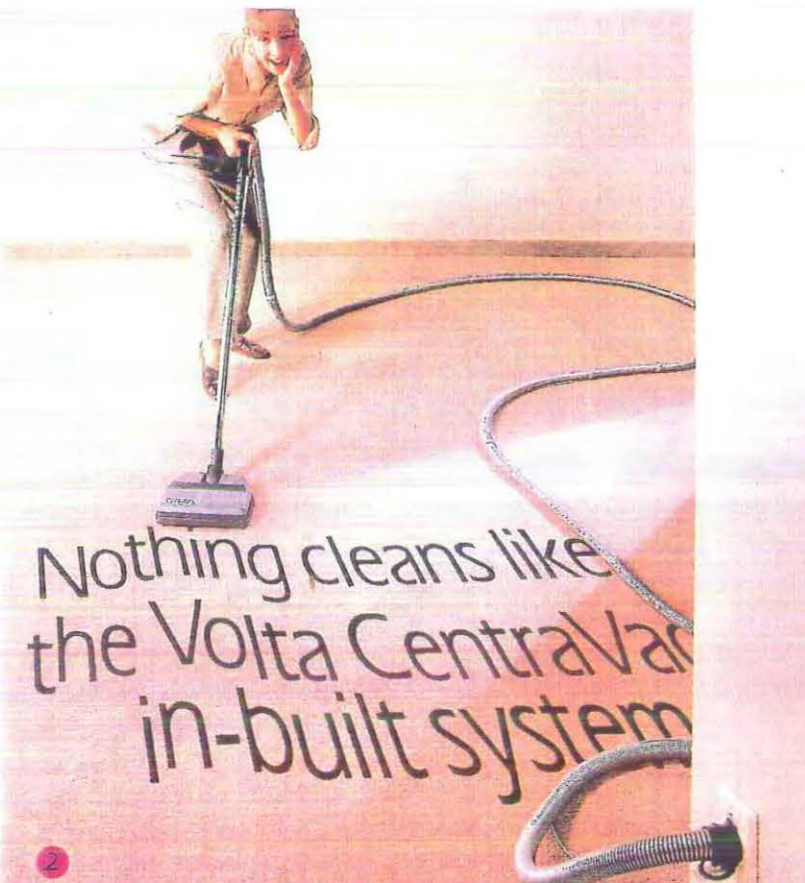
Much can be gleaned about society's perception of women's roles from advertisements for appliances which encoded the ideological functions of femininity. Analysis of the following advertisements show the

discourses of femininity on offer.

1. The Hoover Approach

The advertisement for the modern vacuum cleaner (Figure 1), taken from a 1992 Home Beautiful, suggests that the domestic appliance has the capacity to thrill the domestic worker. The Delineator magazine of 1930, (April p.89 cited in Marchard, 1985, p.273), contained this Hoover advertisement (Figure 2) depicting four women, immaculately coiffured, gazing reverently at a Hoover vacuum cleaner raised to religious status on an altar-like step draped in satin. From a comparison of these two texts it appears the discourses of femininity have progressed little in the sixty years and undoubtedly this traditional approach to women's work still has economic value. Despite the fact that the homes magazine presents a whole range of discourses of femininity, they are very often still contained within the hegemonic order.

Fortunately, anachronistic advertisements of this type are less the norm and more the exception in contemporary women's magazines. As Ellen McCracken (1993, p. 178) concludes in Decoding Women's Magazines, modern work patterns and the duality of women in occupying both domestic and work space has



Nothing cleans like
the Volta CentraVac
in-built system

From the proven force in vacuum cleaners comes
Volta's advanced new force in central or in-built
vacuuming.

Simply plug Volta's hose into the wall and switch
on for dust-free vacuuming that quietly sucks up the
dirt like nothing else and even adds to the value of
your home.

More powerful and efficient than any standard
saver, Volta's revolutionary new system is easier to
use and maintain than you'd ever think possible.

Installation is a breeze for new and most existing
homes. Telephone now for your nearest Volta outlet or

send in the coupon.

For further information write to:
Volta Pty Ltd, 279 Glen Road,
Glenview NSW 1511.

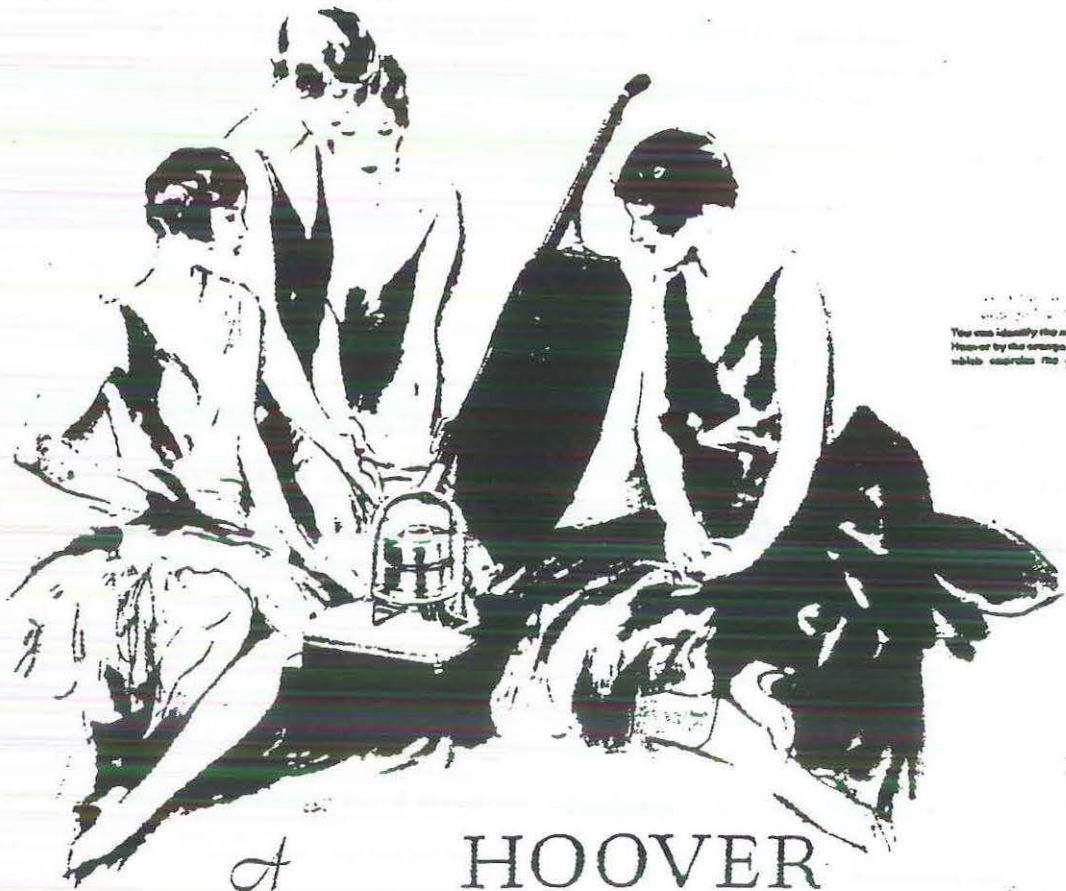
Name: _____
Address: _____
Postcode: _____

VOLTA CENTRAVAC. THE NEW FORCE IN CENTRAL VACUUMING

Volta (Australia) Pty Ltd NSW: (02) 821 2666 Vic: (03) 566 5200 Qld: (07) 362 5944 SA: (08) 297 9157 WA: (09) 470 3222 Tas: (002) 343 394 (Vol 482)

Figure 1: Traditional discourse of femininity where the domestic appliance has the capacity to thrill the domestic worker.

ANNOUNCING



You can identify the new Hoover by the orange band which encircles the motor.

A HOOVER

*The cleaner already first in dirt removal
now becomes 25% more efficient!*

THERE is a new Hoover. It so far outranks anything previously offered that it can truthfully be said to be the finest portable electric cleaning machine ever made. Its extraordinary efficiency can only be shown by comparison with all electric cleaners which have gone before it.

Of these electric cleaners, the one offering the swiftest, easiest, most thorough cleaning, the one ranking first in efficiency by its ability to remove the most dirt per minute, is the recent Hoover.

The new and greater Hoover exceeds that Hoover in its dirt-removing efficiency by 25% and it does this with the expenditure of less human energy than is required by any com-

peting device. The new Hoover gives new significance to the famous cleaning principle, Positive Agitation, which removes embedded grit untouched by ordinary cleaning.

In addition to its unparalleled dirt-removing ability, the new Hoover offers these new refine-

An Extraordinary Feature

of the New Model Hoover is the optional use of the Hygienic, a new sanitary dust bag, combining the filtering qualities of cloth with the disposable cost of paper. Made of pure and treated and strengthened by a patented process, the Hygienic is so stout that it will stand up to cleanings—until the bag is worn out. Then you simply detach and discard the bag.

ments: a new cloth dust bag with a top opening which permits simplified removal of the dirt; a more powerful, smooth running, ball-bearing motor; an improved fan; an automatic friction-stop handle control, which keeps the handle in position without special adjustment; non-rusting, polished Nitralloy beater bars. It is also newly beautiful in line and finish.

Telephone your Hoover dealer or your local Hoover office and ask for a free trial or home demonstration of this new Hoover, Model 725. There is also a greatly improved new popular priced Hoover. Only \$6.25 down, including dusting tool, balance monthly. Liberal allowance for old cleaner.

Figure 2: A 1930's version of figure 1 shows that little has changed in the construction of femininity.

meant that publications like homes magazines have a very fine line to walk between traditional values and modernity.

2. The Absent "Chef"

One repercussion of this modernity has been advertisements which are less overtly gender specific though which nonetheless still predominantly place the women firmly in the kitchen, as in this advertisement for Chef ovens in Home Beautiful 1992.(Figure 3) Although there is nothing which visually indicates a female cook, the diary mode helps the reader formulate that assumption. As Dale Spender (1988) remarks in her introductory remarks to the Australian Anthology of Women's Writing, "... the diary or the journal is part of the traditional literature of women and has for centuries served numerous personal needs."(p. xvi)

Using the same methodology as Judith Williamson (1978) applied in her comprehensive study of advertising though semiotic analysis called Decoding Advertisements, the 'Chef' photograph invites the reader to fill the space left by the absent cook, whose presence is indicated by the signs of a meal in preparation (the rolling pin, the strawberries ready to dress the dessert, the meal waiting to be served).



*Paella from Spain
and a strawberry flan.
Multi-function cooking,
made easy, by you
and Chef*

*Saturday lunchtime 1.00pm. 'What a morning!
Shopping, tidying the house and preparing a
special lunch for our guests.
I couldn't have got it all done without the help
of my Chef.*

*While I was out, my fully automatic Condor
Wall Oven turned itself on, cooked the paella and
the flan, then kept them warm, even though I was
running late. Both, of course, cooked to perfection.*

*New Condor has a fully automatic,
programmable, multi-function main oven, and a
separate grill or second conventional oven, which
allows you to roast, grill or bake many different
meats at the same time with ease.*

*This multi-function oven gives you a wide
range of cooking options: from fan convection mode
which allows cooking on all three levels at once -
saving you time, energy and money; to conventional
mode for traditional baking; to grilling via the
inbuilt element; to defrosting, using the fan only, for
fast, even results.*

*You can see the new Chef
Condor Electric Wall Oven plus
matching hotplates and range-
hoods at leading appliance
retailers or, for copies of the
new Chef brochures, contact
your local Vickers/Chef sales
office or call Craig & Sonley Sales Pty Ltd
on (03) 382 5411.*



CHEF
Is the Best of Company.

Figure 3: Chef, internationalising and glamorising women's work.

The signs - the wine, the kitchen, the food, construct the absent 'you' referred to in the text, who is later revealed by the narrative to be an exceptional being able to do the shopping, tidy the house and prepare a special lunch for guests (cooked to perfection no less) by 1.00pm.

The implication is that all the aspects of domestic management performed in a traditional heterosexual marriage, (which forms the bulk of this 'busy schedule' and is performed on a Saturday, one might assume, because 'she' works during the week outside the home) is women's work. Such a construction gives reason for concern because for many women, particularly those without finances enough to employ domestic help or where children increase the workload markedly, inability to meet society's expectations of this 'superwoman' stereotype can indeed lead to feelings of failure and low self esteem.

In the following quotation Jo Campling (1985) outlines the repercussions for a woman who shirks her feminine duties:

"if a woman chooses not to keep the house clean, not to supervise the children adequately, she is in danger of being labelled as a 'bad' mother or a bad wife - she can be divorced, she can have her children taken away from her by the State.

Housework and child care are not voluntary for married women in contemporary society, unless their class position is such that they have the financial resources to pay others to carry out their responsibilities. But they remain their responsibilities.' (p. 131).

John Berger in Ways of Seeing, (1972, p.132) suggests when such a woman looks at an advertisement, she is envious not of the model herself but of a future vision of herself attainable after purchasing the product. Similarly, in the afore mentioned ad, the reader is not envious of the kitchen but of a future vision of a lifestyle attainable through the purchase of the oven.

Closely paralleling this is the improved class status such a kitchen affords its owner. In the context of the home, magazines like Home Beautiful, Vogue, Homes and Living create a system of desire in which aesthetically pleasing food arrangement and home decorating are the principal visual components. In this instance, the visual representation of the ideal home maker has been replaced with the narrative describing a middle class custom of 'doing lunch' which is further supported by the visual signs like the exotic food, the wine and the kitchen utensils.

In terms of the ideology of femininity being constructed in this advertisement, the implications of cooking described by Claude Levi-Strauss are enlightening. Cooking, according to the anthropologist, is one of the basic means by which nature is transformed into culture in all societies. As Strauss explains, raw food is raw nature and cannot be accepted into culture without transformation. (cited in Fiske et al. 1987, p.42) The transformation of the raw into the cooked, nature into culture, chaos into order is, 'by implication', women's work.

But, women's role is no longer purely and irrevocably domestic and images of the dutiful home maker, the keeper of the castle, are no longer acceptable in a society in which women speak of glass ceilings rather than glassware. As Ann Oakley's study on the Sociology of Housework (1974) revealed, contrary to popular myth the majority of women (regardless of class) don't like housework. A Saturday morning dominated by cooking, cleaning and shopping then, would be considered by that majority as desirable only because it fulfils a social obligation.

Discourses of femininity other than the servile housekeeper preparing dutifully for the return of her

man (or 'our guests') have resulted in advertisements which constructed (both photographically and narratively) other discourses of femininity by setting in motion other abstracts, images and symbols more in keeping with the attitudes, beliefs and values of contemporary society. (Leymore, 1975, p. 35) Janice Winship (1987) observes that the "private sphere has always meant domestic work - to say nothing of many women's additional public and paid work." (p. 54)

But women who reject advertisements that construct women's contentment with domestic servitude as the dominant reading will negotiate meaning through more palatable discourses. Rather than emphasising the cooking, cleaning, caring role naturally assigned to women, the construction of the home (or specific room within) as evidence of individual creativity allow some women to find meaning in the home as sites for display and self expression, rather than toil.

In recognising that the majority of women don't like housework, advertisers have had to reconsider their construction of femininity. Rather than a manifestation of the relentless struggle against the cycle of dirt and mess, of picking up and putting away and of constant cleaning, the home has become instead,

a place where women find pleasure in creating harmony for herself and her family. It is here that work, leisure and pleasure finally merge. Whereas the sphere of work and home is clearly delineated for the male breadwinner (office = work, home = pleasure) they are inextricably bound together for his female partner.

3. Creative Housekeeping

Utilising this lack of separation between work and leisure, domestic discourses can successfully construct work as pleasure. These two advertisements (Figures 4 & 5) illustrate the appellation of reader as artist. The treatment of one photograph to resemble a painting (Figure 4), the surrealist treatment of the other (Figure 5) in its juxtaposition of objects, the romantic shadowy appearance, all construct the bathroom accessories as works of art. The reference to 'Australia's finest water colours' and the 'fine art of colour co-ordination' reinforce such a reading. The co-ordination of bathroom accessories is thus paralleled to an artist creating a painting. Naturally, any sign which refers to the degree and type of work actually performed here - cleaning the toilet and scrubbing tiles would immediately undercut such a construction.



*Brighten your
bathroom with Australia's
finest water-colours.*

Presenting the ultimate in colour co-ordinated designs. Australia's finest collection of towels and robes by Dri-Glo.
Woven in Australia from 100% cotton. Soft, silky and super absorbent. The perfect complement to any bathroom.

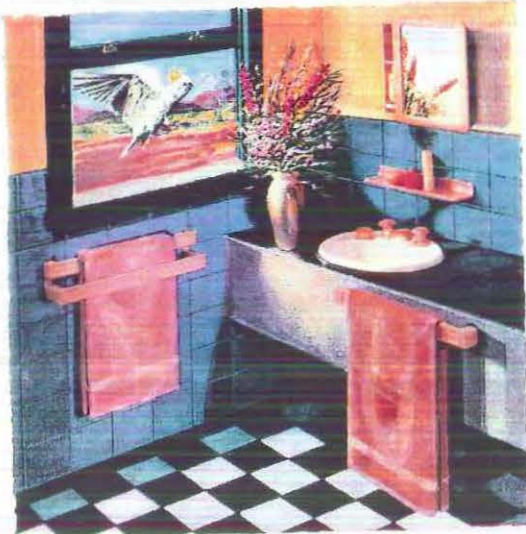
dri-glo

ONE TOUCH AND YOU'LL KNOW

PHOTOGRAPH

Figure 4: Bathroom accessories become expressions of creativity.

THE FINE ART OF COLOUR CO-ORDINATION BY CAROMA.



Bathrooms from the Caroma range, with Bathroom Furniture and Caroma's New Bath.



The BathMate New Collection.
Stylish tapware and accessories by Caroma. For a brilliant finish to your bathroom, at prices that won't decide you. Clean, contemporary designs in a fantastic range of fashion colours. Specially coordinated to help you create your own bathroom masterpiece.

caroma
THE ART OF THE BEAUTIFUL AUSTRALIAN BATHROOM

For more information on Caroma products, write to: Caroma Pty Ltd, 400 George Street, Sydney, N.S.W. 2000. Tel: 02 9231 1111. Fax: 02 9231 1112. Caroma is a registered trademark of Caroma Pty Ltd. All rights reserved.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ POSTCODE _____
COUNTRY _____

Figure 5: In a discourse of creativity, taps become tools for domestic creativity.

In this Laminex advertisement (Figure 6), instead of a palate of colours a collection of curious post modern building blocks signify that a sculptural element can become an intrinsic part of the kitchen by the application of The Laminex Collection. The clearly defined perimeter of the image (the pools of paint in the foreground) draws attention to the fact that, rather than kitchen cabinetry, Laminex is a work of art. The accompanying texts does not speak of surfaces that are easy to clean or resistant to cutting, scalding or staining since this would place emphasis on the tangible work (meal preparation) performed in the kitchen. Instead, it speaks of patterns, coordinating, timeless beauty, moods and other intangibles associated with creativity.

Through discourses of creativity consumers exercise their freedom by choosing products which enable the individual to express personal taste within socially acceptable limits. Paradoxically, the towels, wallpapers and laminexes all share a conformity of style necessitated by mass marketing itself. (Fiske et al. 1987. p. 34)

Nowhere is the multiplicity of roles expected of women as evident as in the pages of homes magazines. The

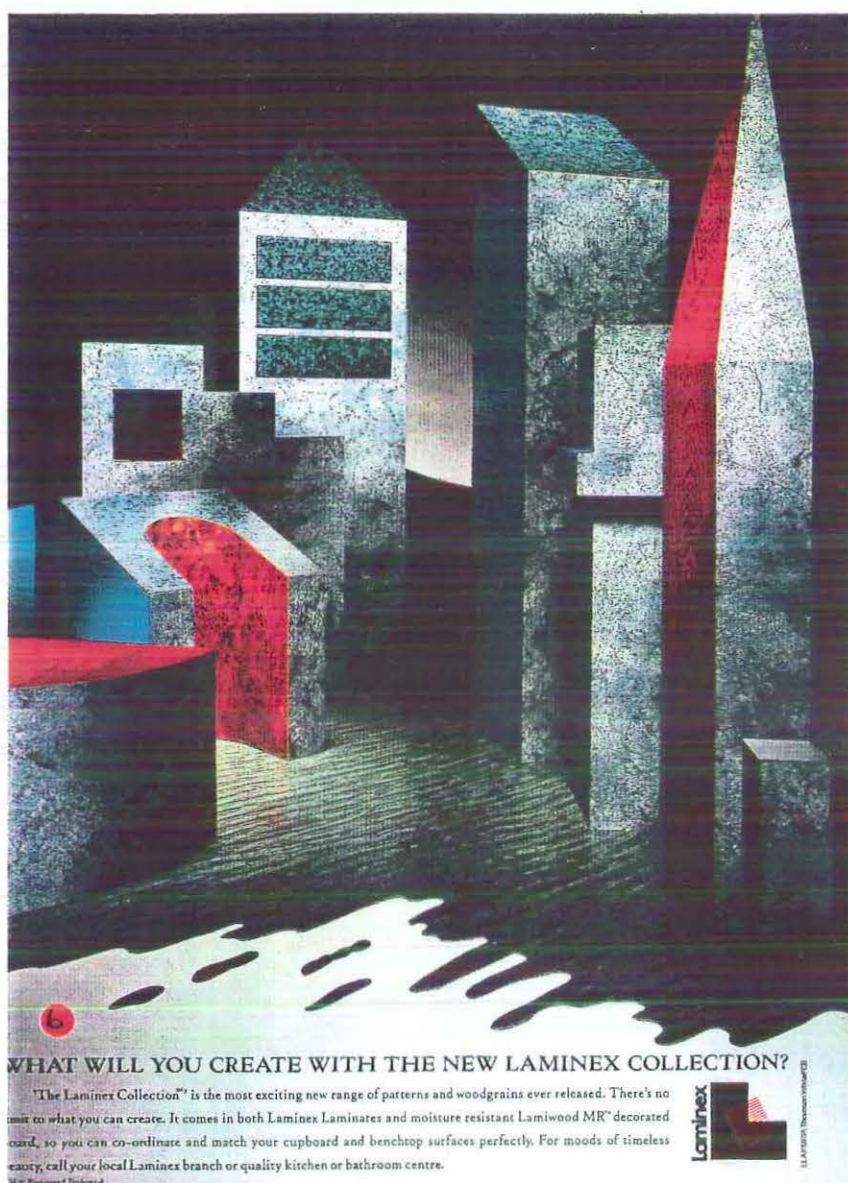


Figure 6: There is no reference to the work performed in a creative kitchen.

advertisement for hair colour (Figure 7) showing the women with the perfectly manicured nails and styled hair as signifying the feminine ideal, is common to more generalised women's magazines like Women's Weekly. Images of the immaculate, totally functional household are common to the advertisements (and features) of homes magazines. However, since the era of the aforementioned Hoover advertisement, advertisers are less overt in demanding beauty and sublime domesticity from their women readers - at least rarely in the same advertisement.

4. The Merging of Feminine and Domestic Identity

The exception of course is in the bathroom and pool advertisement where a towelled or costumed figure is seen stepping out of the shower cubicle, reclining in the bath or applying make-up in the vanity mirror (Figure 8 & 9). Very often in advertising, the female body is represented as the site on which feminine cultural ideals can be manufactured. As Coward (1984) claims in Female Desire:

"we are set to work on an ever increasing number of areas of the body, labouring to perfect and eroticise an ever increasing number of erotogenic zones. Every minute region of the body is now exposed to this scrutiny by the ideal...Moisturise, display, clean off, rejuvenate - we could be at it all day, preparing the face to meet the faces that we meet."(p. 80)

SO NATURAL YOU'D NEVER KNOW



EXPERIENCE THE IDEAL IN HOME HAIR

| Color Classic | Color Sheen | Classic Curls |
|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An exclusive Cream Gel permanent colour formulation - Superior grey coverage - Easy to use directions - Low ammonia - Maximum protection of the hair structure while assuring greater colour retention. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New from Steiner - a semi permanent salon formula - Effectively conditions as it colours - Highlights and enhances natural hair colour - Simple and easy to use - Two applications in one bottle | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natural Curls with optimum hair condition - Two formulations Gentle and Regular - Use with total confidence with easy to follow directions. |

AT SELECTED PHARMACIES, SALONS AND DEPARTMENT STORES
CALL 008 810 111 FOR A STOCKIST NEAR YOU.
FOR STOCKISTS IN SYDNEY RING (02) 888 7666
FOR NEW ZEALAND STOCKISTS RING (09) 623 0701

NEW SALON FORMULA

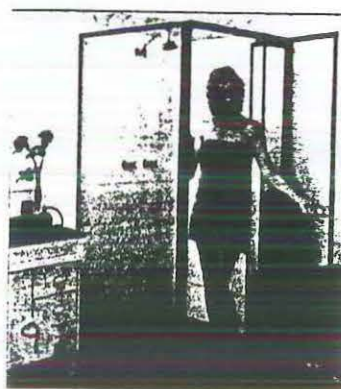
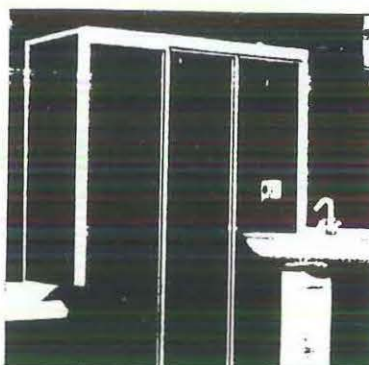
Steiner
Always Sensational

BB 0092

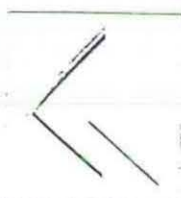
Brown & Assoc 184 R

Figure 7: Sublime beauty is a discourse more common to general women's magazines like Womens's Weekly.

A TRUE CLASSIC



PICT SCREEN



Colour co-ordinated mirrors
available made to size.

Winner of
Australian Design
Award. Adaptable
to all shower
and bath
configurations.
Available in a
selection of
colours.

PICT SCREEN

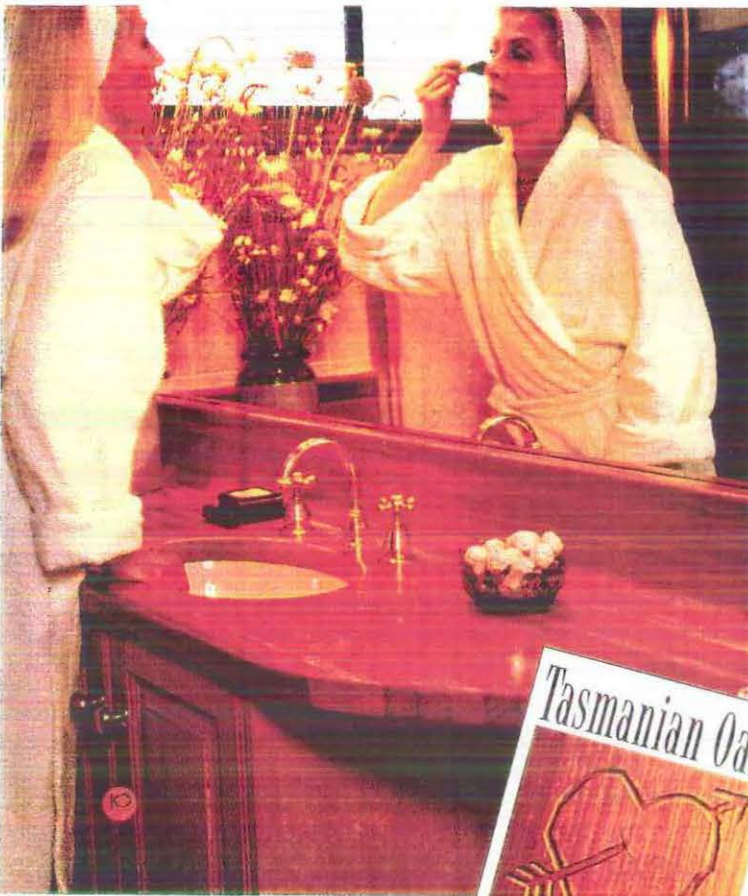
CLASSIC

TRUSS & LUMLEY

19B Augusta Street, Willetton WA 6155

TEL (08) 947 0345
FAX (08) 947 0347

Figure 8: The woman is often portrayed as a manifestation of the for sale sign.



No wood offers more than genuine Tasmanian Oak. It gives a bathroom warmth. And personality. Tasmanian Oak is fashionably light in colour. And, because it takes stain so easily, you can match future trends as well. It's also durable and easy to look after. For more information, contact Tasmanian Timber Promotion Board, GPO Box 1682, Hobart Tas 7001, or call Toll Free: 008 030120.

Tasmanian Oak

It puts the heart in a bathroom.

119. Feb 92

Figure 9 : Bathroom beautification and feminine beautification are often paralleled.

The bathroom is often the site for this body labour and advertisements like this for a vanity unit (Figure 9) support the contention that beautifying the self and the home are primary concerns. Fundamental to this study of feminine identity is the implication women are a visual metaphor for the home. Through discourses of appearance and transformation both the woman and the home benefit from beautification, the former through the application of make-up , the later through the addition of the vanity.

This merging of the female identity and the home is evidenced in the language of the homes magazine which corresponds to the language of femininity. After all, explains Coward (1984) "houses like women are...called stylish, elegant and beautiful." (p.63) Evidence of this can be found in the Dorf advertisement (Figure 10) where the dressing of the bathroom and the dressing of the woman are paralleled - the tap is to the bathroom what the lingerie (bottom left) is to the bathroom's owner - the foundation for the totally 'coordinated,' 'beautiful', outfit that will follow. It is not a coincidence that a feature on "Cheap Tricks for Tarting up Tired Bathrooms" precedes the Dorf Advert and utilises the juxtaposition to further

entice the reader to 'tart up' both bathroom and self.

The Cristal D'Arques advertisement (Figure 11) is more implicit in the parallels it draws between the woman's body and the home. The brushes to the left, used to apply make-up, are tools of feminine beautification. Through the text's messages ('adds beauty to everything it touches') the connection is made to the crystal, which also becomes a tool of domestic beautification. Most importantly the body and the home become one. As one who applies make-up the reader is constructed as female by the advertisement, thus drawing her into the act of touching the brushes and consequently deeper into this domestic feminine ideology.

Advertisements like these depend on traditional discourses of femininity in which a women's value (and thus her home's) is defined by outward appearance.

3. The Cosmopolitan Kitchen

Research has proven women's distaste for housework and advertisers can therefore no longer depend upon this dominating the feminine agenda. The reference to the Paella from Spain in the aforementioned Chef advertisement (Figure 3) is indicative of a trend

the bathroom.
by dorf,
of course.



the first
steps to a beautiful
bathroom.

To achieve a totally co-ordinated look for your bathroom can be quite a daunting task.

After all, you need floor tiles to go with your wall tiles to go with your basin to go with your bath to go with your toilet to go with your towel rack and on it goes!

The secret is to decide on your tapware first.
Dorf, of course.
You'll then find everything else will simply and easily fall into place.



Dorf have designed a variety of shower heads with a variety of functions - from conventional spray to pulsating massage jets.

a totally
co-ordinated look?
of course.

Dorf designs are in constant contact with local and overseas manufacturers of wall-tiles, floor tiles, basins, baths, spas, laminates and even paints.

So Dorf have the shapes, the colours and the finishes to help you create a totally co-ordinated look (no matter what style of bathroom you're after).

Thanks to Dorf, the humble tap is now the important decorating and fashion item it should be.

there's more
to Dorf than just taps,
of course.

Have you ever walked into a bathroom where everything seems to 'clash'? It won't happen to you with Dorf.

The co-ordination expertise of Dorf designers means you can confidently select Dorf accessories knowing they'll add to the overall appeal of your bathroom.

From towel rails to toothbrush holders.

the Dorf magazine.

A twenty-eight page magazine packed with Dorf decorating ideas for your kitchen, bathroom and laundry is now available. For your free copy simply complete the coupon below.

dorf

the leaders in fine tapware.

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Name _____ | | Address _____ | |
| | | Postcode _____ | |
| Please tick and complete then post coupon to: Dorf Australia, PO Box 179, Clayton, Victoria 3168. | | | |
| Style of room | Modern <input type="checkbox"/> | Funeristic <input type="checkbox"/> | Classic <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Status | Home building <input type="checkbox"/> | Home renovating <input type="checkbox"/> | Replacing tapware <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | | Colour scheme <input type="checkbox"/> |

Turning on the Dorf 'flickmover 2' is as simple as turning a page of this magazine.

Figure 10: Lingerie is to a women what these taps are to the bathroom. Both form the foundation for a co-ordinated look.

toward the internationalisation of the domestic sphere, and more specifically the suburban kitchen.

As Rosalind Coward (1984) observed in Female Desire most women have experienced at some stage feelings of isolation and entrapment in the suburban home. Using structural analysis and the binary opposition between Australia and Europe, the latter represents all that is cultured, sophisticated and refined. Electrolux hails its kitchen appliances as the 'latest from Europe's leader' and through the transfer of meaning all the connotations of Europeanness intrinsically become the kitchen's. The consumption of the oven and with it, its connotations of Europeanness, according to Ewan's theory, internationalises the home and in some way relieves women of the frustration of being confined to the suburban and the domestic.

5. Images of Australia

Writing in the Myths of Oz, Fiske et al. (1987) contends that "These magazines remove Australianness from their ideal realm along with other signifiers of vulgarity and low caste." (p. 40) Considering that Europe and Australia are presented as parts of a dichotomy in which the former represents culture and the latter nature, the homes in magazines, according to

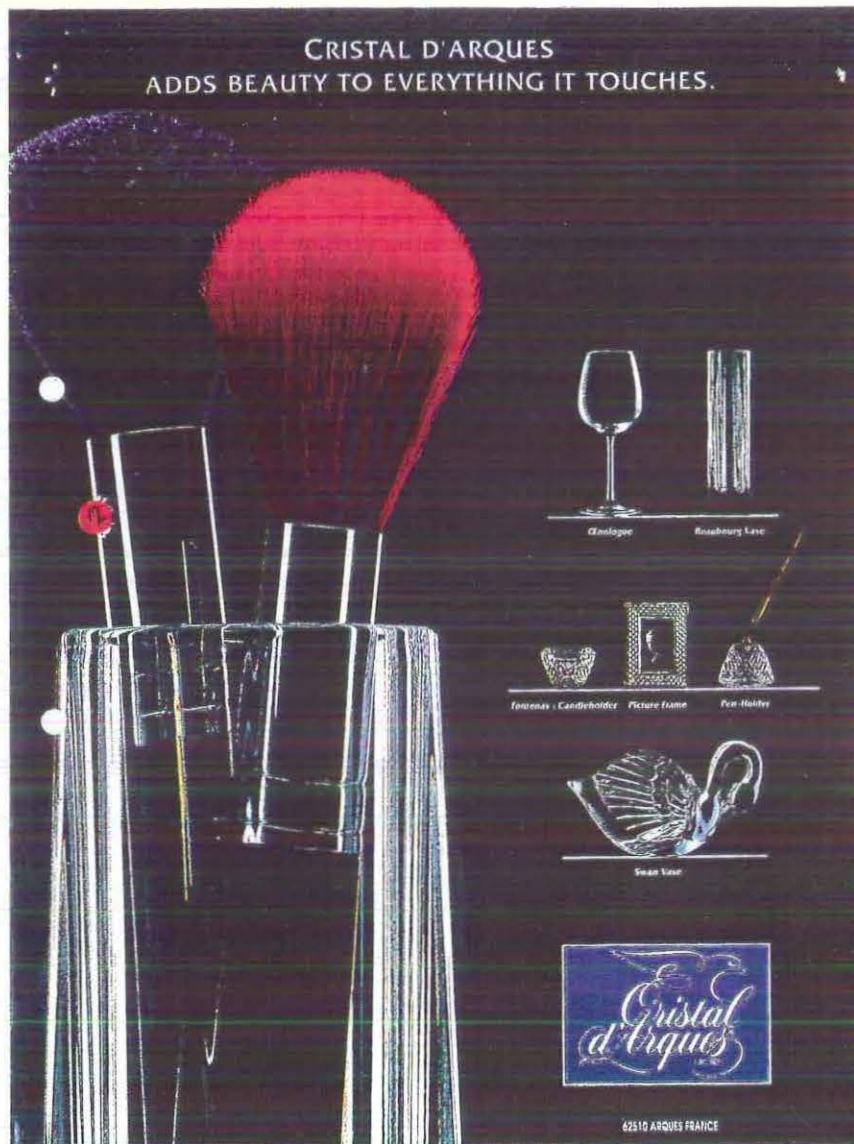


Figure 11: Meaning is transferred. The application of make-up to the face equates the application of crystal to the home.

Fiske, are not identifiably Australian but have been internationalised through their decor. In magazines which target high income earners this manifestation of the 'cultural cringe' is evidenced in discourses of Europeanness, subverted in references to 'metropolitan' and 'cosmopolitan' and exotic locations like 'New York', 'London' and 'Italy' which occur frequently and which support culture over nature, the civilised over the primitive and the intellectual over the physical.

Australia is part of the same referent system but discourses of Australianness in advertisements resist the European ideal through connotations of naturalness (signified by the landscape), ruggedness and durability -traits which embody the masculine national identity. As discussed previously, many advertisements seek to internationalise the Australian home, whereas others like Australian Country Style use Australianness and its connotations to create their product differentiation. This advertisement for Artis Design (Figure 12), for example, links the fireplace to a harsh and desolate Australian landscape (evidenced in the treeless background) in which domestication (of which the ruin is a sign) has not survived but the superior craftsmanship of the

fireplace has. Readers are negotiating meaning through a discourse which hinges on the nation's rural myth and which constructs a masculine Australian identity emphasising the power of nature over culture. A discourse of heritage is also discernible using semiotic analysis, in which the traditional design of the fireplace and the stone wall and chimney signify settlement and the taming of an unforgiving land.

6. Women and Domestic Technology

References to technology and intelligent choices in the home are fairly new to the repertoire of advertising in domestic magazines. Margaret Benston (1980) describes traditional attitudes to technology in Worlds Apart: Women , Men and Technology:

"In our society, boys and men are expected to learn about machines, tools and how things work. In addition they absorb, ideally, a "technological view of the world" that grew up along with industrial society. Such a world view emphasises objectivity, rationality, control over nature and distance from human emotions. Conversely girls and women are not expected to know much about technical matters. Instead, they are to be good at interpersonal relationships and to focus on people and emotions. (p. 16)

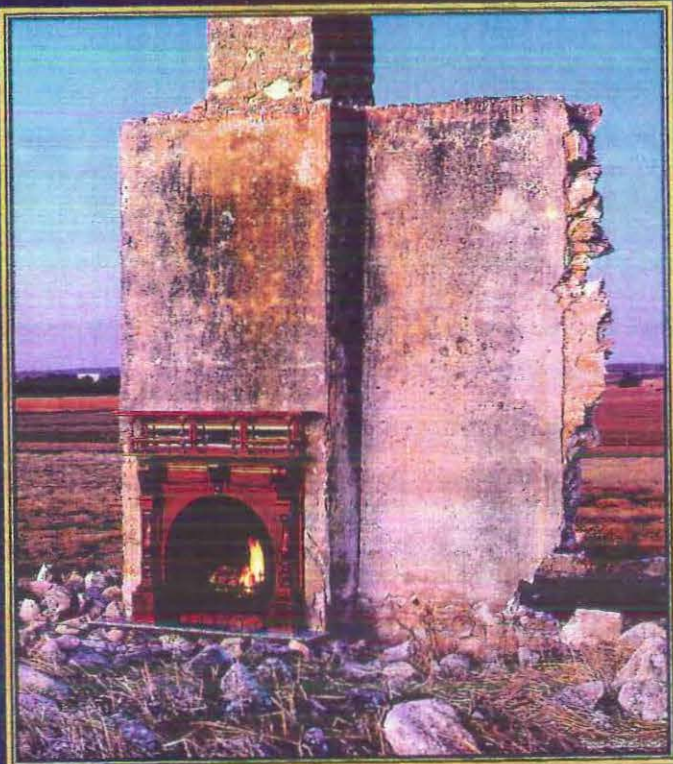
However, the discourse of technology has found its way into the traditionally conservative world of the homes magazine in an effort to keep pace with a more liberal readership. The discourse of technology in women's

magazines and on television is constructed around the notion that technology, in the form of dishwashers, irons, vacuum cleaners and washing machines will reduce time spent on household labour, make it easier and ultimately this will make the housewife happier. However, as Bose, Phillip and Malloy point out in Household Technology and the Social Construction of Housework (cited in Lafollette & Stiner 1989, p. 271) , this may not be the case - making household tasks easier does not necessarily result in increased satisfaction with the housewife role:

"studies of worker alienation in other kinds of jobs note that it is important to distinguish between the task being performed and the context of the worker's routine. Housework is basically manual, and mechanisation of the tasks only means that the worker must now tend the machines. Since much of the work in the home is socially isolated, involves monitoring several activities at once, and has many emotional burdens which are not subject to rationalisation or mechanisation, there may be inherent limits on the degree to which technology may actually ease housework. (p. 272)

The myth of labour saving technology persists however to give credibility to advertisements which ask women to "Imagine how much easier life would be with a Harmony oven and cooktop."

According to Roland Marchant in Advertising the American Dream (1985), the qualities inherent in the



ARTIS
DESIGN

Designers and Makers
of Fine Furniture

Mantelpiece - MacArthur
Fire - Ironstone / Fan Long Fire
Location - Old Reuben, Karriboom

Unit 2, 231 Bank Street, East Victoria Park, Western Australia 6101 Telephone 08 9544

Figure 12: Discourses of Australianness stress durability and masculinity.

refrigerator made it particularly eligible for the role of secular icon:

"As a protector of health through prevention of spoilage it served as the benevolent guardian of the family's safety. As the immediate source of a great variety of life-sustaining foods, it acquired the image of a modern cornucopia. No open refrigerator door in an advertising tableau ever disclosed a sparse supply of food. The gleaming white of the refrigerators exterior suggested cleanliness and purity." (p. 270)

In addition, the refrigerator is also an icon for technological advancement, a discourse which becomes apparent through analysis of the following advertisement.

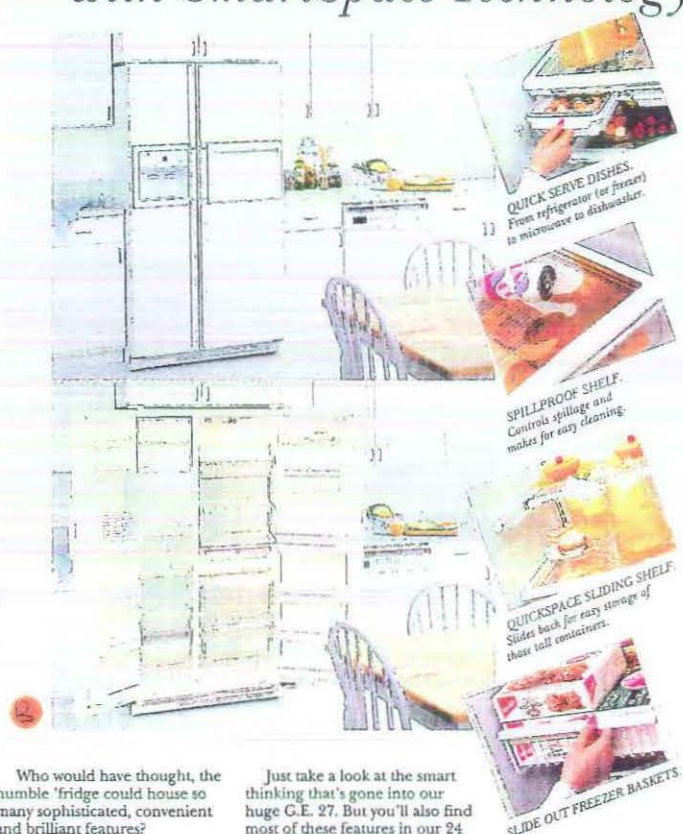
The clinical surfaces of this 'GE' kitchen (Figure 13) carries connotations of a futuristic kitchen in which 'smart space technology' can provide the ultimate refrigerator. The futuristic theme is echoed also in the Miele advertisement (Figure 14) and its abstract image of a washing machine given spacecraft and futuristic dimensions by the angle of the photograph and the darkened image permeated only by the light emanating from within. While phrases like 'megastep', 'technology', 'electronic age', 'computerised', 'megatron' and 'smart', dominate the narratives, there is an obvious lack of any real or detailed technical information. Quick serve dishes, spillproof

shelves, quickspace sliding shelves and slide out freezer baskets can hardly be considered technological breakthroughs and the construction of them as such, immediately undercuts a progressive reading based on technology. Women, if one were to believe the advertisers, remain unable to cope with more than the most simplistic technical information about appliances though fortunately, they are less often pictured draped on them in a human manifestation of the 'for sale' sign.

The changing roles of women have had an impact on advertisers and the way in which they inscribe value to domestic commodities. Recognising that the duality of women cannot be contained to images of women in stereotypical or subservient roles, a diversity of pleasures like creativity, technology and suburban emancipation conceal the function of the appliances for sale and consequently the domestic work that they signify. As the tools for possible transformation, beautification or creativity the prevailing images in advertisements for domestic appliances are those which merge female identity and the physical characteristics of home, defining both by appearance and thus supporting the hegemonic order. The construction of house work as pleasure and the home as an extension of

feminine identity through the narratives and images of the narratives is the subject of the next chapter.

Introducing New GE Refrigerators with SmartSpace™ Technology



Who would have thought, the humble 'fridge could house so many sophisticated, convenient and brilliant features?

Clearly, only G.E.

SmartSpace, a new internal design concept, makes the new G.E. Refrigerator the most advanced, user-friendly refrigerator on earth.

Just take a look at the smart thinking that's gone into our huge G.E. 27. But you'll also find most of these features in our 24 and 22 cubic foot models.

For the latest ideas in refrigeration, visit your G.E. stockist and look into the new G.E. range.

We think you'll be impressed.

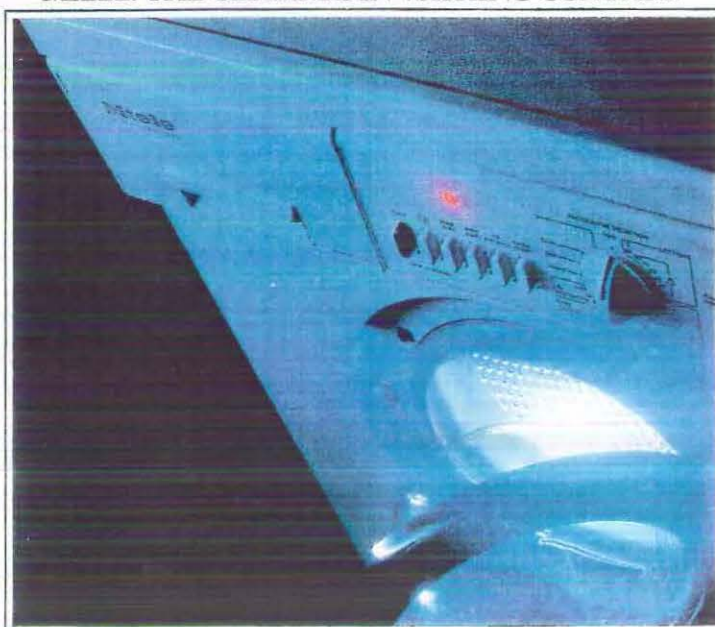


GE Appliances

Whisper. Power. Quiet. 1988

Figure 13: Technology is new to the discourses contained within the domestic journal.

MIELE. THE ULTIMATE IN WASHING CONTROL.



Miele has made the megastep in washing machine technology. Taking the load off your mind as well as your laundry. Putting you in total control, cycle upon cycle.



Miele presents the world's most advanced range of washing machines without compromise. In design, performance and ease of operation.

Miele has developed all its models to cope with this electronic age, right up to its ultimate, fully computerised, state-of-the-art Megatronic. Innovative features that include operating time pre-selection, automatic load adjustment, even check-lights for error. Programmable for all fabrics. From cold up to 95°C. Spin speed from 600 to 1400rpm. Pure German precision.

The Miele Tumble Dryer and Rotary Ironer reflect this same standard of excellence and attention to detail. A quality and style that's unmistakably Miele.



Miele
Anything else is a compromise

Melbourne (03) 743 0064 Sydney (02) 431 0644 Brisbane (07) 843 1818 Adelaide (08) 272 8588 Perth (09) 222 8446 Auckland 39 2107 Wellington 49 3777 Christchurch 44 4335

MADE IN GERMANY

Figure 14; Despite the connotations of technological advancement, the simplistic information undercuts any possibility for a progressive reading.

Chapter 6

The Domestic Agenda and Women's Pleasure

The rise in popularity of homes magazines, the subjects they discuss and use of the photographic image all provide valuable insight into the ideologies of gender and class in contemporary western society. Analysis of the features and their layouts reveals that the source of women's pleasure in the act of reading such mass culture narratives is three fold. Firstly, they provide validation of the domestic sphere as one of significance. Secondly, they provide an opportunity to share a common feminine culture and finally they provide the reader with the voyeuristic pleasure of 'peeping through the keyhole' into an elite and private world.

The Rise of the Domestic Journal

The end of the 19th century in Britain was a period in magazine history marked by the influx of new titles concentrating on the homes and domestic life. Included amongst them were Homes Notes, Home Chat, Ladies' Home Journal - service magazines aimed at the middle and lower market housewives who were primarily concerned with running their homes and their families.

Good Housekeeping was launched in 1922 and became an immediate success as the first real taste Britain had

of the service magazine. In 1919 Homes & Garden came into being as the first of a new genre of middle class magazines devoted in its entirety to domestic life. According to Barrell and Braithwaite (1988):

"The market was a natural because the gardener, the cook and the maid had begun to disappear from the payrolls of the suburban home after the war. Here was a new market of still affluent householders who needed to take a direct interest in the maintenance and upkeep of their houses and their land." (p.14)

Despite women's movement into the work force, dual income families and the greater involvement of men in the domestic sphere, the bulk of domestic duties in the 1990's is still performed by women. A recent study on Working Families showed that women in Australia do about 70% of the unpaid work needed to keep the home running¹. The cook, gardener and maid had been removed from the payroll but these duties have fallen to the principal occupier of the domestic sphere - the woman.

In The Sociology of Housework, (1974) published as a result of her study of British housewives' attitudes to housework, sociologist Ann Oakley concludes that dissatisfaction predominates and that this dissatisfaction is not isolated to working class or

¹ A study called Working Families released by the Federal Government in 1993.

middle class women. In fact, according to Oakley's study, "the incidence of dissatisfaction with housework among the two class groups is the same." (p. 188) According to the research, 70% of women interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with housework, a figure which puts to rest the idea that only a very small number of women are discontented housewives.

If women don't like housework - they suffer from loneliness at being isolated in the home, boredom from the monotony of performing repetitive tasks, and the low social status of being 'just a housewife', then a mass culture narrative, in order to be pleasurable, will not overtly call attention to domestic labour and herein lies one of the major criticisms levelled at homes and lifestyle magazines like that of Communications lecturer Rosalind Coward. In Female Desire (1984, p. 70) she proposes that the visual ideal is signified by an absence of clutter and any sign of mess is therefore a sign of failure.

As Betty Friedan observed on her 1950's tour of America, housewifery has no end, instead, it expands to fill the amount of time available. Friedan uses this example;

"The automatic clothes drier does not save a woman the four or five hours a week she used to spend at the clothes line if, for instance, she runs her washing machine and drier every day....As a young mother said 'Clean sheets twice a week are now possible. Last week, when my drier broke down, the sheets didn't get changed for eight days. Everyone complained. We all felt dirty. I felt guilty. Isn't that silly.'" (cited in Oakley, 1974, p. 111)

Naturally, in homes magazines there are no references to such work but the rooms pictured represent that ideal moment rarely if ever achieved, when the interior is spotlessly clean and perfectly ordered - rooms devoid of mess and most often also devoid of human habitation which causes that mess.

The Ideal Home

This cover image (Figure 15), used by Homes & Living Magazine for the May 1994 issue, was achieved after photographing the room on three different occasions. I was involved with the final shoot from which this image was produced, in my capacity as Editorial Assistant with Homes & Living. It lasted approximately two hours during which time furniture was rearranged, artificial light was introduced and the fire stoked despite the fact it was mid summer, because the picture was proposed for a winter edition. The composition of the furniture was arranged to allow for headings and banners used on a cover photograph. A

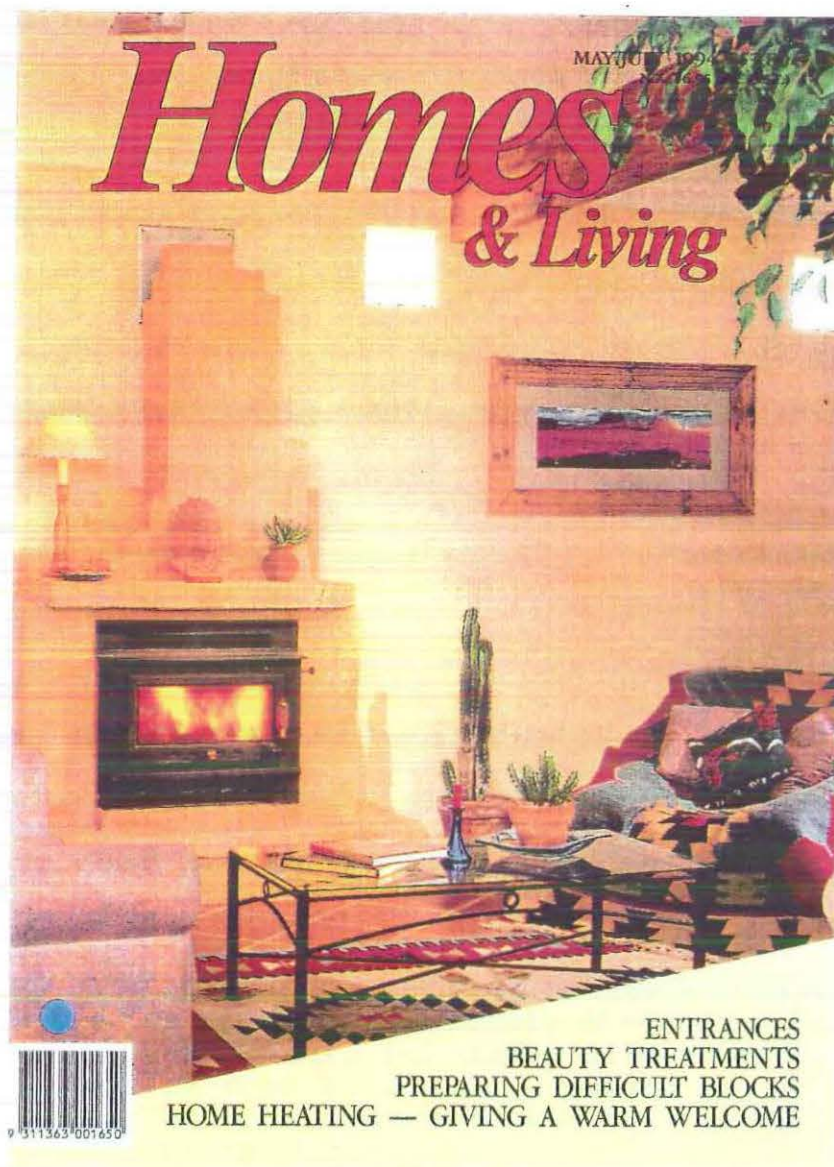


Figure 15: The 'ideal home', pictured as it never is, devoid of mess and human habitation and very much a media construction.

wider angled lens gave it a greater depth of field and invited the reader deeper into the room.

Rosalind Coward (1984) uses the phrase 'ideal homes' to describe the abodes featured in magazines and in light of the way in which the homes are constructed photographically, correctly proposes that the houses are captured as they never are. In the never ending cycle of housework, this 'after' in reality is never achieved for the reader. According to Coward, the image represses any idea of domestic labour. She clarifies the point by saying that labour is there in references to painting, wallpapering and decoration - in creative labour, but:

"Domestic labour, the relentless struggle against things and mess completely disappears from these images. The hard and unrewarding ephemeral labour usually done by a woman, unpaid or badly paid, just disappears from sight. Frustration and exhaustion disappear. Instead a condition of stasis prevails, the end product of creative labour." (p. 66)

Admittedly, few outside the media industry would be aware of the construction of the photographic image, however familiarity with housework would make the reader aware of the amount of work which has gone into achieving the smudgless glass on the coffee table, the spotless floor, the emberless hearth and the dust free

mantle.

In the tradition of David Morley's study of television audiences¹ in which more emphasis was placed on the text and reader interface and less on the 'hypodermic' effect of the media message, one would be justified in arguing that the reader sees the work - the polishing, the dusting, the vacuuming, the cleaning that is behind the creation of the visual ideal in the photograph. It is appreciation of that work, which has gone into creating the ideal moment, which provides the reader with pleasure. By not calling attention to the actual work, the discourse of femininity constructed, particularly through the written text, is one which focuses on creativity rather than drudgery. In reality, most of the homes featured in magazines are middle class homes, decorated by interior designers and not maintained by their owners but by paid domestic workers.

As Angela McRobbie (1991) observed in her study of Jackie: "From Mandy, Bunty, Judy and Jackie to House and Homes, the exact nature of the woman's role is spelt out in detail, according to her age and

¹Morley, D. (1980). The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding. London: B.F.I.

status."(p. 82)

According to Barrell & Braithwaite (1988, P.96) the median age for House and Garden readers in Britain is 43.3, Woman and Home is 50.3 and Country Living 39.5. For woman born into the 1940's or 50's, when gender roles were firmly divided, when marriage, family and care of the home was often a full time occupation, a magazine which validates the importance of the domestic sphere is, for that reader, simultaneously an important text of self validation.

In Australia, the homes magazines are targeted at specific socio-economic group with House & Garden and its emphasis on budget decoration targeted at younger 'first home buyers', Country Style with its nationalistic discourses targeted at an older, more established and conservative readership and Homes & Living and Vogue with its emphasis on design and European culture targeted at the higher income earners.

Self Validation

Regardless of class or status, one of the most obvious pleasures women experience when reading Vogue or Homes & Living is the recognition of the domestic sphere as

a place of significance in a society which generally affords it a greatly devalued status compared to work outside the home. This is supported by my own research and evidenced in an interview I conducted with 'Sybil' in my capacity as Editorial Assistant for Homes & Living Magazine. Since I intend to refer to this interview in detail I will provide some background about the interviewee who was approached as part of a planned series of small features about the seasonal change of decor in her tiny rented flat.

A middle aged woman, separated from her taxi driver husband, (he slept during the day, so she was unable to use the vacuum cleaner or sewing machine for fear of waking him), Sybil is an avid collector of homes magazines buying all of the major publications in that genre. As she readily confesses she has no money but is a keen sewer and extremely proud of her cluttered abode. Her preoccupation with her home borders on the fanatical and with her children grown and left home, she fills her time with continual sewing, rearranging and redecorating her flat.

At the conclusion of our first interview I thanked her for her time to which she responded that it was a pleasure to talk to someone who appreciated all her

efforts.

Sybil's rationale for her obsessive approach to her home was this:

"Personally if I havn't got nice things around me I feel miserable. But if you've got nice things around you, you don't." (Sybil, Interview, April 1994)

When asked about how she felt about maintaining her flat she dismissed the work involved as inconsequential saying:

"I dust every few days and once a month I whip everything down, fill the sink with hot water, wash it all and put it all back up again. In a hour its all clean. If you had all this stuff around and didn't use it all it'd collect dust. But I use it all so it doesn't."

Here Sybil illustrates the contradiction of women's pleasure. By surrounding herself with so many 'nice things,' many of them ornaments with no use whatsoever apart from decoration, she is in fact generating considerably more housework than the hour per month she approximates in maintaining it.

However, it is obvious that harmony and beauty are essential elements of her environment and her emotional well being. Much of Sybil's decor is second

hand, inexpensive - spray painted and adapted in other 'crafty ways' and from our conversation, this ability to adapt discarded items (with tea boxes as kitchen shelves, for example) into a fashionable and obviously admired decor, was the source of much of her pleasure.

According to Ellen McCracken (1993), the emphasis on home improvement and the accompanying devaluation of the readers' current homes in magazines like Homes Beautiful and Better Homes & Living:

"creates a pattern similar to that of the fashion and beauty magazines. Where the latter emphasise improvement of the body, wardrobe and interpersonal relations, Better Homes and Gardens, as the title indicates, promotes the notion that one's home and yard are inadequate and can be bettered through increased consumerism....Whether it be a perfectly prepared meal, a well decorated and landscaped home, up-to-date appliances, an ideal family and marriage, stylish clothing or correctly applied make-up, the image of perfect womanhood in these magazines constitute a single cultural continuum whose material base is consumerism. (p. 192)

Sybil's acquisition of these 'used' goods and their utilisation of them as practical household items could thus be conceived as a resistance to the middle class ideals presented in magazines and her transformation of them into useful items as a way of negotiating meaning within the capitalist framework.

Shared Feminine Culture

An integral part of the pleasure of appreciation is the way in which magazines encourage women to share a common (feminine) culture a fact reiterated by Charlotte Brunsdon (1982) in her study of another form of mass culture narrative for women, the soap opera. Applying Brunsdon's hypothesis homes publications, like soap operas, demand that the audience possess cultural knowledge of the socially accepted codes and conventions of the domestic sphere. To derive pleasure from the highly polished floor, the spotless benches, and the dust free skirthers the reader must possess the female competencies associated with managing the home.

The tone of the letter in Figure 16 provides evidence of this shared feminine culture. Although the Editor (Ms Edge) is unknown to the writer, the tone of the letter is one of familiarity as she invites the reader into her domestic world which is dominated by 'three boisterous children'. The colour of the kitchen provides the point for writing in the hope that it will actually reduce the amount of work the writer will need to perform to maintain the family home, i.e., dirty finger marks won't show.

However, one might also glean a certain pleasure for

21 Valentine Ave 115
WORSHAM STCL
VICTORIA

(053)
826327

Dear Ms. Edge,

I just loved the kitchen on the front cover of your Feb/April magazine. It's difficult to find colour ideas these days as most magazines display white or timber rooms from kitchens through to living rooms. I have 3 boisterous children who love peeling the walls as they walk past. So white is very impractical. I also love colour so thanks for adding a bit of colour to your magazine. I've only just discovered Home & Living and am eagerly looking forward to your next edition.

If it is at all possible I would like to know the actual colour names of the laminex/Formica used in the above mentioned kitchen & the name of the colour paint they've used on the walls & cupboards.

I'll include a self-addressed envelope to make things easier for you.

Once again thanks for a lovely magazine. Keep up the good work.

Regards - Rosemary Gams.

Ref.
19/4/94

Pattina - Foreign
Linen - self
Mixed

Figure 16 : Sharing aspects of feminine culture provides the reader with obvious pleasure.

the writer in sharing her experiences of motherhood with another woman, heightened because the writer is probably confined to home much of the time and has little opportunity to communicate with the outside world, be it about something as seemingly trivial as paint colour. However, in an existence defined by the walls of the family home, it is perhaps understandable that their colour should take on heightened significance. This significance is obviously lost on the owner of the home which Rosemary admires so much, who is perplexed that anyone would be so 'wet' as show such obvious interest in formica and paint colour.

Women as Voyeurs

Intertwined with sharing of female experiences is the voyeuristic pleasure the reader experiences when viewing another's home and lifestyle totally unseen. Most importantly, underlying these pleasures is the subverted promise that the consumption of certain goods will afford the consumer improved class status and membership to an elite group whose superior style has been recognised in the glossy pages of a magazine.

A number of sections are common to most of the magazines which belong to this genre. Food, wine, gardening, travel and the home profiles make up the

bulk of the reading and form the domestic agenda. As discussed in the previous chapter, work, leisure, and pleasure are not clearly delineated for the domestic worker and these sections dictate to the reader what facets of lifestyle are important and pleasurable, regardless of the amount of work actually involved in the cooking, cleaning, maintaining and planning behind each of them. Using semiological analysis one can see that these conventions, operating at both a visual and a narrative level, constitute subcodes and it is through these that different meanings are produced. Interspersed amongst the standard home repertoire may be various sections profiling artists or artisans, a humour piece and advice articles on subjects like do-it yourself paint finishes or colour co-ordination.

In The Front Door, Out The Back

The magazines have a distinct structure. Generally, the short easy to read sections on new or interesting products and shops lead to the longer home profiles which in turn lead to the gardening section. The fragmentation of women's domestic work, identified by Ann Oakley (1974), corresponds to the magazine segmentation. The shorter sections can be read during snatched moments in the day and the longer articles savoured when more time is available.

Using Homes & Living as an example and focusing on the home profile since they constitute the bulk of the magazines, analysis shows that they have distinct narrative structure with a beginning, a middle, and an end that literally takes the reader on a journey through the front door and out the back. This is echoed in the overall layout of the magazines where the home profiles proceed the garden features, which are generally located toward the back. The home - embodying culture and the feminine sphere - always precedes the outdoor section and the sphere of nature. Despite the predisposition to a masculine Australian identity, homes magazines represent a distinctly feminine sphere and their obvious femininity reinforces the contempt many feel toward them.

Transforming Narratives

As with the advertisements discussed in the previous chapter, transformation is a discourse which is evident in the magazine narrative. Articles in Woman's Weekly or New Idea focus on personal transformation with make-overs and guidance on how to co-ordinate wardrobes, and these are readily paralleled to features on home beautification like; 'From Dull To Dazzling', 'A Fresh Start', and 'Riverside Renewal'. The similarities here between the language of feminine

beautification and home beautification are evident in which both depend upon external appearance as their currency. Before and after pictures, the before often taken by the home owner, and the after by a professional photographer, effectively serves to highlight the remarkability of the transformation of the home and subtly also its female inhabitants.

The supporting written text applauds the owner on their achievements, though very few physically undertake any of the work themselves but employ builders and designers to create their 'style' for which they are so heartily congratulated.

However, more important than concern over the interpellation of reader as domestic worker hypothesised by Rosalind Coward (19884), is the magazines construction of 'ideal homes' as evidence of a class ideal. According to McCracken (1993, p. 183), in the 1950's a Good Housekeeping study noted that women read service magazines not only for practical information but for the pleasures of daydreaming, self identification and escape from daily routines.

The aforementioned letter (Figure 16) is evidence of this conclusion and is indicative of a number of

inquiries I receive from magazine readers. Like many of them, asking where to purchase vases, tables, quilts and a variety of household ornaments from brass dolphins to fire surrounds, it suggests that if the goods (in this case paint and formica) can be purchased, the style and the middle class ideal can be acquired along with it. Rather than the reader creating their own personal style, (by choosing their own colours), they seek to copy another's and it is indeed paradoxical that the written text congratulates the home owner on their creative decor yet readers would rather adopt these signs than be creative in their own right. Fiske et al. (1987) explains this phenomenon thus:

"these meanings become available to the women to enable a creative working over of the conditions of their material existence, renegotiating gender roles and constructing new identities for individuals within the family. Such recycling of the elements of mass-circulated culture is a creative use of the imagination and a clear example of the power of the subordinate to make their own popular culture out of the most unpromising materials. (p. 41)

The Language of the Domestic Journal

Coward (1984, p. 64) describes the discourses of home improvement as having a very precise language without a precise referent and the primary function of the photographs is to further flesh out such vague

terminology as elegance, style and homely.

The language of homes writing is primarily descriptive and this passage is typical:

"Downstairs, the master bedroom leading off the main living area is the epitome of simple elegance. One brass bed side lamp, one discreet wall print rose, one mirror ornately framed in brass, one extraordinary wardrobe with attached chest of drawers - the whole only four feet wide." (Homes & Living, May/July 1987, p. 41)

This extract is worthy of closer analysis in terms of a deeper structure since a number of discourse are identifiable which provide information about the domestic ideal. Using the Saussurean insight into linguistics (cited in Leymore 1975), the notion of signifier and signified is useful where the signifier denotes a concept and the signified is quite simply the concept evoked: "The union of the signifier and the signified, the collection of sounds forming a word and the mental representation of this sound, make together the linguistic sign. (p. 4)

One of the discourses of appeal evident in this description of a bedroom is that of intimacy and is supported by references to 'master bedroom', 'discrete' and 'epitome of simple elegance', thus

appealing to the voyeuristic pleasure of experiencing the most private and personal areas of another's home. This is supported by the narrative which takes the reader downstairs, to an area off the main living area away from public view. The female voyeurism here is different to the objectification of male voyeurism, in that pleasure is derived because the narrative and the photograph invite the reader to become a part of the image, rather than simply an onlooker.

Two references are made to brass in this single paragraph, since it carries connotations not only of opulence but also of tradition - a discourse supported by reference to a wall print rose since roses which in this context carry connotations of old worldness and gentility. Finally, the description of the 'extraordinary wardrobe with attached chest of drawers - the whole only four feet wide,' is telling. The following paragraph goes into greater detail:

"featuring a delicately worked scroll top, it was made from baltic pine in or near 1700. While not exactly practical...("it holds about six shirts!").... it is a favourite piece of furniture."

The wardrobe, extraordinary, one surmises because of its age and compactness has no practical value and yet

is testimony to the owners' superior taste. This reading is further sustained by the fact that the owner can afford to possess this piece simply for its 'delicately worked scroll top' and not its ability to house clothes as one might expect from a wardrobe. That all this can be contained within four feet indicates that even the smallest home could accommodate such signs of superior style.

Style and class in homes magazines are closely bound together. Social status is proven by the types of quality goods displayed and the goods displayed are evidence of superior style. Hence, Coward's (1984) belief that: "personal style is in reality nothing other than the individual expression of general class taste and the particular ideals promoted by that class," (p.65) has a great deal of validity.

Interestingly, because they are very rarely (if ever) used, the formal areas of the home proceed the more informal areas in actuality and in their representation in the magazine. The signs which indicate that these are special occasion areas include display cabinets containing special glassware, plush decor and more expensive furniture and ornaments. According to Fiske et al.(1987), in the cyclic process

of domestic labour, entertaining visitors provides a point of public recognition for the home maker. As Fiske contends, one function of these glossy magazines then, is to:

" Offer a re-evaluation of domestic labour, reshaping the social world so that the house, the domain of the private, is at its centre, an effortless source of prestige and appreciation to woman as queen." (p.39)

Homes For Display

Although there is no firm editorial policy, Homes and Living Magazine appears to have a preference for homes that promote the functionalist principles - those which abandon decorative or symbolic trappings so that the objects signify their function and nothing else. The promotion of these homes as the ideal does have important repercussions for women.

Largely, such dwellings are not built to be lived in - their primary function is display and entertainment. All colours are carefully co-ordinated and each object blends with the others. In the quest for stylishness there is no room for jarring individual expression - for mementoes, souvenirs or photographs. As one journalist remarked after interviewing the owner of one of these sterile homes, "it is as though she

didn't exist until 6 months ago when they moved into their new home." Yet another home owner built an expensive home in a fashionable new estate closing the door on her old abode and everything in it to begin afresh in her new Mediterranean style of home which looked identical to many I had previously seen. There was nothing of a personal nature to differentiate it from other homes, nothing that spoke of the people who live there - their personal taste, interests or hobbies.

Rather than taking part in the creation of their environment, women like this have fallen victim to the middle class ideal promoted through the media and in doing so, forgone an important opportunity for self expression. The process is cyclic - the more this homogenous 'European stylishness' appears in magazines, the more consumers adopt it as their ideal. Since building companies provide magazines with these homes to photograph (in return for editorial recognition) the trend continues.

Other magazines like Home Beautiful concentrate on celebrity homes and are appealing to the voyeuristic pleasure of peeping into the lives and homes of such celebrities as socialite Susan Renouf, actress Lisa

Patrick and entrepreneur Harry M. Miller. In the television program, The Home Show, celebrity and journalist combine as actress Rebecca Gilling, singer Shirley Strachan and celebrity Reg Livermore present superior homes and helpful advice on maintaining and improving one's dwelling. The functions of the presenters are divided distinctly along gender lines. Rebecca conducts the tour of the stylish home, while Shirley (a man) planes the door so that it hangs correctly.

Celebrities' homes are often joined by architects and designers abodes in both television and magazine texts. In combination with the journalists they form that group, according to Coward (1984) with the ideological power to impose their tastes and to dictate what the visual ideal is and how it is best represented in the home. However, such a conclusion once again ignores the readers active participation in making meaning from the text. As Fiske et al. (1987) reiterates, for most women:

"the images are not illusions whose insidious power left them helpless victims of the bourgeois gender trap. They used them as 'goods to think with' as a source of ideas and meanings to build into their own houses and lifestyles." (p.41)

The sleek polished surfaces, the monotonous colour

schemes, the functional interiors of this European ideal home are in direct opposition to what Fiske et al. describes as the vitality, variety and brightness of the Australian living room and its working class inflection. (1987, p.35).

Australian Narratives

Country Style and Country Looks, both from the Federal Publishing Group, have harnessed strong feelings of nationalism and the yearning for more traditional, home made, home grown ideals of a more conservative (though not necessarily older) readership. The working class signs of worn, second hand furnishings, country shows and dilapidated homesteads have been acquired by the middle class readership as symbols of a national rural identity. Here the codes of food, wine, interiors and gardens are joined by a discourse of heritage and the construction of a more distinctly Australian representation of domestic space whose reading is a form of resistance to the refined European ideal.

Instead of the postmodern preference for sleek surfaces and strong geometrics, the Australian domestic sphere is signified by bull nosed verandahs, colonial furniture, and most importantly a greater

emphasis on the landscape or garden as signifiers of this country identity. Interestingly, crafts like quilting, wood turning, and potting have a greater dominance harking back to the Golden age of Domesticity in the mid 19th century when the home was a site of production rather than consumption. As Fiske et al. (1987) explains, the outdoors (nature) with its informality "carries a counter-ideology that is a critique of the ideology of possession, the ideology of suburbia." Fiske goes on to say that:

"this counter ideology affirming nature over culture is one of the enduring myths of Australia ,signifying a distinctive Australian relationship with the landscape."(p. 43)

Country Style utilises this to great advantage, paradoxically critiquing suburbia with its second hand, unrefined country look yet promoting the consumption of goods through advertising and home profiles as the way to achieve those country ideals and traditional values.

In the homes magazine, the domestic world is afforded higher status than the world of outside work and the willingness for woman to regularly make this foray into a magazine world in which their world, a women's world, does briefly take priority indicates their

dissatisfaction with the status quo. Rather than ignore women's work the homes magazine recognises it, with different ideological focuses allowing scope for resistance and negotiation if only in an attempt to maximise possibilities for consumption and mobilise the middle class aspirations of many Australians.

Conclusion

Women's relationship to the domestic sphere is in transition. It is no longer the case that women's role is defined by the domestic, as in the golden age of Domesticity observed by Matthews (1987) in "Just a Housewife". Nor is it necessarily sequential, whereby a period of paid employment for a woman ended when she married and took up the full time duties of wife, home maker and mother. Rather, in contemporary society domestic and employment roles are often performed simultaneously, not only because of women's dissatisfaction with the confines of the domestic sphere but also because of economic necessity. Women's relationships are varied - as daughters, sisters, neighbours and employees however, as Moen (1992) observes, it is the wife/mother role that is central to most women's identity..." (p.4). It is the centrality of that role which gives the domestic journal much of its meaning.

This centrality of the domestic role to women's lives is apparent when one considers that despite her 'other' paid work, the home and its inhabitants remain women's responsibility and studies show that women still perform the bulk of the work required to maintain the home. A brief comparison to masculine

attitudes to housework illuminates the naturalisation of domestic work as women's work. A man may perform domestic duties - care for the children, cook a meal or clean the bathroom but he does so voluntarily - he is not obliged socially to do so. While the equality of women may allow her to engage in employment outside the domestic, the same equality does not stretch to sharing the obligation of domestic duties. According to Oakley, (1974) if men choose not to help with domestic work, then women have simply acquired a new work role - employment - in addition to their traditional domestic one. In this way women remain defined and confined because of her domestic obligations.

Feminist perspective in the cultural studies tradition proposed that gender rather than class was the basic element of socially inequity. Early exponents of the feminist movement like the Material Feminists, recognised the limitations imposed upon women by their domestic role and challenged its exclusion from the broader economical framework. In many ways they defied the patriarchal conventions of domesticity with communal kitchens, laundries and labour, believing that women's oppression could only be addressed if she were freed from the confines of domesticity. Rather

ironically the demise of the tradition stemmed from the fact that so few women, because of their exclusion from the labour market, had access to the economic resources to patronise the movement. A contributing factor was the antagonism with which it was greeted by men and women who firmly invested in notions of biological determinism and subsequently believed that women's place was the home in the care and service of the men who were hard at work in the legitimate economy.

That is not to say of course that housework does not have a value. Women after all pay other women to care for their children or clean their house, but as Jo Campling (1985, p. 116) remarks in The Family In Question, it is not a formal economic market such as the exchange of labour in the economy outside the home, but an informal one that operates between neighbours and households. Because household duties are womens work and a part of womens duty according to the marriage contract, they are ideologically ignored. They have no real exchange value and no real and recognised place in the world of work.

And yet ironically patriarchy insists on the importance of the domestic sphere as a place of

significance where children are taught values and beliefs and in keeping with the beau idyll, where women are assigned the status of the moral guardian of home and hearth. It would be an emancipated woman indeed who had never suffered feelings of inadequacy and guilt about a home which did not provide fully for the needs of its inhabitants in terms of the nurturing of children, the provision of food, clothing and cleanliness. After all, according to traditional gender roles, her dedication in maintaining the home and its inhabitants is in many ways an indication of her worth as a woman.

However, in light of the feminist movement and evolving social relationships, anachronistic texts which overtly construct the woman in the service of her home or husband have little currency with contemporary readership. Discourses of technology and creativity and others which seek to internationalise the domestic sphere testify to evolving definitions of femininity in contemporary society and subsequently the dissatisfaction many women feel with their domestic obligation. In actuality, these new discourses of femininity are an attempt by a conservative magazine genre, which relies heavily on the traditional roles of women, to keep pace with

modernity.

In many ways, highlighted on the section of this research paper analysing Advertising and Discourses of Domesticity, the media's construction of femininity is a patriarchal one, which defines a woman by her appearance and through this discourse of appearance and beautification merges the identity of the home and the home maker. Vanity units and crystal as the tools of domestic beautification are paralleled to make-up and the tools of feminine beautification, relying heavily on narratives of transformation where the "Ugly Duckling becomes a Swan". So inextricably bound are the two discourses - of femininity and domesticity that the later becomes a metaphor for the former, particularly in modern advertising discourses. This is problematic, since it serves to reinforce the psychological identification women feel with their homes and consequently the feminine duties which are intrinsic to it.

In the Australian culture where the property myth and mortgage mentality are so deeply entrenched, the domestic journal is of particular significance. Industrialisation saw the decline of women's productive capabilities within the home in direct

relation to her increased capacity for the consumption of mass produced goods. In the context of the modern homes magazine, consumption is motivated by the desire for style - a vague term, popular in narratives which Coward (1984) describes as little more than an expression of an ideological or class ideal. Consumption therefore is motivated the desire to attain the class ideal materialised and naturalised by the images of the stylish, perfectly appointed and maintained home. Shopping for the home thus assumes the status of the ultimate leisure experience and therefore the ultimate form of self expression.

The home then remains ideologically defined as women's sphere serving the hegemonic order in terms of class and gender. But because of changing social attitudes to women's roles, work performed here is not constructed as labour in the service of home and family, but rather as leisure. There is no reference to domestic toil and the inhabitants of the home who generate much of that work as either husbands and children, who are conspicuous by their absence. Rather advertisements, narratives and the associated visuals of the ideal home camouflage the repetitiveness, monotony and frustration that is the reality of housework by an agenda of home craft and leisure.

The ability of women to make their own meaning from the text can not be ignored and the pleasures women experience through their reading are many. The widely held assumption is that writing and reading these magazines demands no specialist knowledge. This assumption is flawed because the magazines demand that both the writer and the reader be competent in the socially prescribed pleasures of femininity and the pleasures the domestic arena affords its readers. In reality the image presented as the ideal home is never achieved. The spotless home devoid of mess and clutter is far removed from the reality of most women's lives, but the female reader gains pleasure from the appreciation of the work behind the image of the ideal home and the creation of the climactic moment when the photograph was taken. They may also find pleasure as Fiske et al. (1987) observes, by incorporating the images and artefacts pictured to change the material conditions of their own existence.

The case study of Sybil is a case in point. A prolific reader of homes magazines, Sybil finds the most pleasure in recycling and making-do, to recreate the magazine's ideal in her own suburban flat. In this way she negotiates her own meaning within the ideological framework and in many way resists the capitalist

ideology and the role of consumption which it designates her as a woman. The act of buying one magazine over another is, in itself, an act of negotiation. The purchase of Country Style for example resists the functionalist agenda of Vogue or Homes & Living and visa versa.

However, as McCracken (1993) observes, the magazines also serve to intensify the inadequacies readers feel about their own homes which are often far removed from the ideal constructioned by the media. This implication is clear in titles like Better Homes. After all, the status of 'better' can only be achieved through comparison with something that is lesser. As I have observed, most of the ideal homes are not maintained by their owner but by paid domestic workers. For those without access to the economic means to maintain the home or to acquire the symbols of style, the image is a debilitating one creating feelings of frustration and low self esteem when the image is constantly unattainable. For these readers the pleasure is that of the voyeur provided with the opportunity to walk unobserved through the most private domain of a privileged class.

The achievement of the ideal is a complex media

image. In this construction of domestic work, the bathroom, signified by the bath towel and the taps for example in the Dorf advertisement (Figure 10) is not constructed as the source of endless and unpleasant toil, but an arena for self expression and limitless creativity as the advertisements analysed show. According to Campling (1991), the magazines assume that all women glean pleasure from a narrow range of feminine pursuits like cooking, gardening and home making. The discourses of femininity constructed around this domestic agenda do not praise the servile functions of domestic labour, but rather the creative capabilities which manifest itself in decor, in the selection and arrangement of goods, in the painting and wall papering aspects which are part of this shared feminine culture.

Women value their homes as a place where feminine values are accepted as positive ones which have a positive impact upon the men who enter that sphere, and in many the homes magazine is a celebration of those feminine values. The most significant pleasure that the magazines provide is that which reorganises social relations by placing the woman, her feminine world and its intrinsic values of nurturing, ordering and interpersonal skills at the centre of social

relations. The home as the feminine domain is recognised and applauded for its importance in social and family relations.

However, the motivating force in a capitalist economy is that of consumption and it is women's potential as consumers, not only for themselves but for her family and her home, which the magazines motivate in the pursuit of 'style' and the promotion of the dominant ideologies of class and gender which that term, used so freely in the language of the domestic journal, encapsulates. The women's magazine takes for granted its reader's domestic role and the middle class ideals of home and hearth, and it is through the naturalisation of inequity in terms of class and gender that they support the hegemonic order.

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