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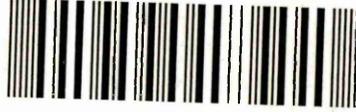
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# **Situation Comedy and the Female Audience**

**A Study of The Mistress**

**Rhona Jackson**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam  
University for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

**November 1993**

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ABSTRACT

SITUATION COMEDY AND THE FEMALE AUDIENCE:  
A STUDY OF THE MISTRESS

This study examines the relationship between a television text and the women in the audience, using Carla Lane's situation comedy, The Mistress [BBC], broadcast in 1985, as a case study. The project is entirely directed by the audience point of view.

An eclectic multi-disciplinary approach was taken to devise an 'open' conceptual model of the audience which located women as key actors in the viewing process. The concept of the Skilled Viewer was developed, incorporating elements from feminist film and television theory, reader response theory, and Uses and Gratifications theory.

A feminist perspective, systematised by an ethnographic account and feminist sociological principles, guided the qualitative methods of data collection from 14 individual and nine groups of women viewers. Their discussions were recorded, transcribed, categorised, and analysed.

Audience responses were classified into Uses and Gratifications categories. Viewers responded on emotional and/or intellectual levels, pointing up concerns relating to identification with stars/characters; aspects of realism; confirmation of personal values; and aesthetic criticism. Responses were defined within a framework of expectation, in terms of anticipations-expressed/fulfilled and/or hopes-expressed/fulfilled. Viewers' 'interpretive strategies' and their source 'interpretive repertoires' via which they understood and enjoyed the text were explored. Reasons were posited for response.

Major findings are as follows. A multi-disciplinary theoretical design supported by a reflexive, compatible methodological approach is effective. Application of the concept of the Skilled Viewer produces a number of findings not available via pre-existing theoretical models. Viewers are active, self-monitoring participants in the viewing process. The text/audience relationship is in constant negotiation. Viewers' enjoyment depends to a great extent on the priorities with which they approach it. Placing theoretical priority on the female viewer can prove methodologically effective. Legitimising their voice successfully empowers the women in the audience.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of this study were to understand and make explicit the text/audience relationship between a television comedy written by a woman and featuring women protagonists, and the women in the audience. The case study used was the first series of the tv comedy, The Mistress [BBC], within the context of the writer Carla Lane's work in general. This enquiry adds to the body of work on television audiences, and continues to redress the balance with respect to the investigation into female viewers. It has two other principal aims. First of all, it confirms the women in the audience as participants in the interpretive process. Secondly, it gives their interpretation a voice.

A feminist perspective directed this research. In this I was guided by Janice A Radway's explanation of her approach to her study of romance readers in the USA, which:

situates the social practices of courtship, sexuality, and marriage within the analytic category of patriarchy, defined as a social system where women are constituted only in and by their relationships to more powerful men.<sup>1</sup>

It was important to take into account, assume their significance, and attempt to explain the subjective feelings of those women who were the subjects of the research. It was

essential to use a theoretical model and a methodological approach which promoted both the centrality of the women in the audience and the validity of their views. I intended to design a research model which would incorporate women's lived experience and learned interpretive expertise.

A number of theories were examined. The most relevant were film and television theory, reader response theory and Uses and Gratifications theory. Each offered useful theoretical and methodological components. None provided an overall model of the audience which was specifically pertinent. Feminist film and television theory had advanced to regard women as central, rather than as marginal or additional, but their concept of the audience was purely theoretical. It did not lend itself to the inclusion of the opinions of active viewers in society. Reader response theory and Uses and Gratifications theory were equally inappropriate as they stood. The former focused on the reader rather than the viewer. The latter was still in the process of developing an explanatory stage which would be theoretically and methodologically adequate. In order to free the study from the limitations of any one of the above theories, whilst simultaneously making use of those elements which were enabling rather than restraining factors, an 'open' and eclectic approach was designed from facets of each. The concept of the Skilled Viewer was thus realised as a multi-disciplinary model. It was underpinned by a feminist perspective, an ethnographic account and methods of

qualitative interviewing developed in reader response theory, television studies, and feminist sociology. It was inspired by the motivations which prompted the research.

### Motivations

Three fundamental interests motivated this project: comedy, narrative, and images of women. Why a story is funny, how the story unfolds, and how women are represented in the visual media intrigue me. A tv situation comedy about women seemed a legitimate focus for study.

The academic rationale for such study was threefold. Firstly, along with soap opera and melodrama, situation comedy had been identified as being particularly popular with the women in the audience<sup>2</sup>. Unlike soap opera and melodrama, the genre had received little critical attention, although hardly an evening passed when one or more sitcoms were not broadcast on one or more of the British television channels. Secondly, the study of humour and the role of comedy had been neglected by those working in the field of Cultural Studies. Since the work of Mast<sup>3</sup> who, in The Comic Mind, identified eight narrative structures which effectively organise humour in film, writers such as Eaton<sup>4</sup>, and Neale<sup>5</sup>, had occasionally, though infrequently, examined aspects of comedy. Their initiatives were not furthered until the BFI conference in 1981 took A Serious Look at Comedy, resulting the following year in the publication of

Television Sitcom<sup>6</sup>. Two in-depth studies in the area did follow. The Logic of the Absurd by Jerry Palmer<sup>7</sup>, and Popular Film and Television Comedy by Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik<sup>8</sup> were published in 1987 and 1990 respectively. Thirdly, all the above dealt with the text and/or the production side. None included the audience dimension. This project had no intention of claiming to be a major investigation into humour and comedy; such a mission must necessarily command the complete attention of a researcher and not be mere component of a broader enquiry. The intention was to explore the function of humour and the role comedy played within one particular illustration of a text/audience relationship. Due to the nature of the audience response, this plan seriously to look into why an audience laughs at a particular text was sadly frustrated, mainly because they didn't laugh very much. The comedy element of the study was marginalised because audience attention was directed elsewhere.

A Carla Lane series was selected as a case study for four reasons. First of all, she was/is one of the very few comedy writers who specifically focuses on women and women's concerns. Carla Lane is generally highly regarded by television critics for the standard and quality of her work, which to some extent set her apart from other examples of the genre. All her series but one<sup>9</sup> feature women as major protagonists and foreground what are traditionally regarded as female preoccupations, such as romance, the family, the home. The Mistress continued themes set up in earlier Carla

Lane series<sup>10</sup> about women's roles, relationships, and anxieties. Secondly, Carla Lane is one of the most prolific writers for television. Her output began in 1969 with The Liver Birds [BBC] and continued consistently until the broadcasting in 1992 of her most recent sitcom, Screaming<sup>11</sup> [BBC]. Thirdly, Carla Lane's name as a writer was exceptionally well-known to the television audience. It was assumed that the fact that she had written the series would be as much an attraction for the audience as the artistes and anticipated content. The fourth reason was that there had been several studies of women writers who have written literary texts for women readers<sup>12</sup>, but no major study of women writing televisual texts for women viewers.

There were two grounds for focusing on the women in the audience. Firstly, sitcom is regarded as a 'women's genre'. Thus, female viewers were a key concern of the enquiry. Secondly, there had been very little in-depth research into the active, social being who is a woman viewer of any type of television programme. Hypotheses had been proposed about the ways in which women appreciate television programmes<sup>13</sup>. Before this study was undertaken little had been done to test those theories on the women themselves<sup>14</sup>. Researchers had failed to elicit opinions and thoughts from the people who do the viewing. The intention of this thesis was to look at the practice as well as the theory.

When I began this inquiry, although television fiction had become an acknowledged area of research, studies tended to focus exclusively on either the text or the audience. That there may be a relationship between the two had either gone unrecognised, or had been ignored. The two alternative methods of textual analysis, content analysis<sup>15</sup>, or semiotic/structural analysis<sup>16</sup>, were theoretically based and presented, without the theory being tested on an audience. Most audience research with respect to visual fiction had consisted of theoretical constructs of the audience<sup>17</sup>, or had been grounded in 'effects' research. Research into the concrete audience had tended to be restricted to news and/or current affairs programmes<sup>18</sup>. Debates around what it is that constitutes 'pleasure'<sup>19</sup> helped to foreground the significance of the text/audience relationship. These debates excluded the point of view of the active audience. There had been little practical attempt in the area of visual fiction to make explicit the dialectical relationship between the text and the audience. Originally it was intended that this research would go some way towards filling the gap between the textual analyses and the analyses of the audience, by revealing how the one informs the other. Whilst this study has been under way more academic interest developed in the area of televisual texts and their audiences<sup>20</sup>. This research contributes towards this growing body of knowledge, particularly in the area of the female television viewer.

Television viewing is a major pastime of contemporary cultural life. During the period that The Mistress was first broadcast, the average amount of time spent watching television per person per week was 24 hours 35 minutes<sup>22</sup>. Television fiction represents half of all television programmes broadcast. Although as an information service and as an education service it has for a long time been taken seriously, it is only over the last 15 years that television primarily as a source of light entertainment has been the subject of serious research. Two parallel fields of study had emerged, one into the text, the other into the audience. The direction this study took was based on four fundamental assumptions. Firstly, in order to examine the text/audience relationship, focus should be primarily on audience interpretation. The place of the text would be solely as the trigger of response. Secondly, concrete television viewers should be the site of study. Thirdly, the audience must be conceptualised as social beings. Fourthly, the television audience is active and skilled. They operate choices and use and interpret television texts in diverse ways. The concept of the Skilled Viewer was designed to realise and test the above assumptions.

### Conceptualising The Skilled Viewer

No pre-existing theoretical model was appropriate. The Skilled Viewer was developed via an eclectic approach. Components from film and television theory, reader response

theory, and Uses and Gratifications theory contributed to its framework.

Film theory was relevant because of its shift of focus from the film text to the pertinent concerns of how the spectator 'looks', and its work in the area of female spectatorship. Attention had turned from the structure of the text to concentrate on what it is that motivates the text, and determines narrative progression. Speculation that the 'desire' of the audience anticipated the 'pleasure' they derived from the film text, had developed into an interest in how the dynamics of the text contributed to the text/audience relationship.

Adapting the psychoanalytic view of 'desire' to argue that it was the motivating force of the narrative, film theorists proposed the following. Male heterosexual desire is the norm. It explains how conventions of film making are structured by patriarchal society to present images of men as active seekers after women, and images of women as passive, fetishised objects both of the men in the film and of the male spectator's desire<sup>22</sup>. 'Desire' motivates the traditional narrative towards a resolution designed to gratify male desire. The 'gaze' was male<sup>23</sup>. It explains the role of women in traditional narrative as bystanders to the actions of, obstacles in the way of, or final rewards for the male hero<sup>24</sup>. Feminist theorists used these premises in three ways. First of all, it was a departure point for

feminist film makers to experiment with film production<sup>25</sup>. Secondly, it offered explanations of how 'women's genres' differ in motivation and presentation from mainstream narrative<sup>26</sup>. Thirdly, they contended that a double identification is necessary for the female spectator who, as a woman must identify with the image of 'woman' as the object of male desire, but, as a spectator she must identify with just that male desire<sup>27</sup>.

These developments were influential and relevant here for two reasons. Firstly, they were predicated on the fact that film narrative parallels society. Secondly, they examined notions of 'looking'. These were fundamental to a study of the socially constituted audience of a visual text.

In terms of the conceptualisation of the Skilled Viewer, problems associated with the psychoanalytic basis of film theory had to be negotiated. These concerned the place of women, theoretical standards concerning the unwieldiness of the model, methodological incompleteness, and its abstraction from the social world. Firstly, traditional Freudian psychoanalysis<sup>28</sup> excludes women altogether or attempts to assimilate them into a theory which is essentially male-defined and male-specific. Freud contended that maleness is the norm, and that the female child experiences her difference from that norm as biological inferiority. This was rejected here. In a study which places the women in the audience centre stage, a theory which

marginalises women was not appropriate. The argument for the double identification of the female spectator, for instance, negates 'woman' as a thinking being in her own right. At best it is questionable, at worst intolerable. Secondly, can such an issue successfully be incorporated without stretching the credibility of the theory itself? It is as if in order to account for women too, the existent framework must be stretched at no matter what the cost to the integrity of the theory. It results in theoretical compromise. Thirdly, film theorists used psychoanalysis to probe the text, but they did not test their findings on an audience. When their primary goal was to discover how 'desire' works within the text, not researching the 'desire' of the audience makes their results inconclusive. Fourthly, the ahistorical, asocial standpoint of traditional psychoanalysis would be at odds with the concept of the Skilled Viewer, entailed in which is an understanding of the audience as historically contextualised social beings.

Feminist theorists brought film theory closer to the requirements of this study. Although acknowledging the work on 'looking', they were unhappy that the only association with her visual image permitted to the female spectator was one of identification. This took for granted that the female spectator could gain only mediated and compromised pleasure, leaving an essential dissatisfaction with whatever she saw on the screen. At the same time there seemed to be a silent assumption that identification disallowed enjoyment. If any

pleasure from the image was acknowledged it was met firstly with a sort of theoretical unease, as enjoyment didn't seem quite to fit with the theory, and secondly with an unsettling feeling that the theorists themselves disapproved. It was as if the very seriousness of reclaiming a central theoretical position for women had blocked out, in the researchers' minds at least, any "lightness" that could be associated with watching a film or television programme. No pleasures were considered other than those dictated by the controlling look. No consideration was given to any other level of understanding, such as, say, being diverted by, or laughing at/with certain images<sup>29</sup>. No account was taken that people may watch visual fiction for its entertainment value.

Chodorow's reworking of Freud offered feminist theorists another avenue of psychoanalysis which permitted the exploration of women's experience. In her book, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender<sup>30</sup>, Chodorow proposed that the psychosexual stages of development incorporate processes of socialisation. They construct gender differentiations of 'masculine' and 'feminine', which become accepted as 'natural' expressions of maleness and femaleness respectively. She argued that where boys/men seek separateness and autonomy for successful psychic maturation, 'connectedness' in relationships was the key to girls'/women's psychic progression. Researchers into television soap opera<sup>31</sup> and melodrama<sup>32</sup>, and into films and

television programmes with active female protagonists<sup>33</sup>, appropriated Chodorow's ideas. Theoretical openings had developed to permit women choices unavailable from within the oppression/repression framework of the Freudian psychoanalytical model. Identification was neither the only thing the text offered, nor was it as simple a process as formerly assumed. Viewers were constrained neither by nor within a process of identification. They could choose to identify or not with the activity or passivity of the image, or with the activity or passivity of the types the image represented<sup>34</sup>. They could seek identification or not, they could take pleasure in identification or not, or they could enjoy the image on some other level of, say, fun<sup>35</sup>. By appropriating psychoanalysis for their own ends, feminist film and television theorists acknowledged that

psychoanalytic models are useful ... to the extent that their application is in keeping with the goals of a feminist agenda.<sup>36</sup>

The Chodorowian perspective placed women as central and active, exercising choice to use an image for ends not determined by patriarchy. These principles corresponded to those of the Skilled Viewer. However, the audience remained a theoretical concept.

Simultaneous with the above developments, and of equal relevance, was the growing belief that film and television should not necessarily be studied in exactly the same way. The only major common constituents of film and television

texts were that they belonged to the visual media and were served by similar literary and sociological traditions and conventions. Comparing their material conditions of viewing showed that they demand approaches of study which account for their distinct peculiarities<sup>37</sup>.

These two stages: women as active audience participants, and a consideration of the conditions of viewing, had particular bearing on this research. They suggested ways in which the theory of the text could accommodate the audience. Firstly, women were permitted to seek pleasure on their own terms and in a positive manner, not solely dependent on their oppressed position in society to dictate (or deny) their enjoyment. Secondly, the consideration of where the film-goers/television viewers encounter the text, acknowledged that those who are looking at the text are more than theoretical abstracts. They are living, active people in a material world in which film and television must compete for their time with other cultural diversions.

Film and television studies' contribution to the concept of the Skilled Viewer were the components of the visual text, the notions of 'looking', female spectatorship, and a consideration of the conditions of viewing. In order to incorporate the concrete audience, an approach was required where the central focus would be on what the audience did with the text rather than what the text offered. I turned to reader oriented criticism.

Reader oriented critics argue that there can be no 'preferred reading' of a text, that readers construct meaning by bringing to the text certain *a priori* assumptions formed by their experiences in a particular society at a specific historical time. The reader and their reading experience are the central focus of study. Stanley Fish's<sup>38</sup> concept of the 'Informed Reader' advanced in the field of reader response theory became the departure point for the concept of the Skilled Viewer. The 'Informed Reader' has both linguistic competence in speaking and understanding language, and literary competence from an experience of literary texts. Diversity of reader-competence is the result of the way in which the reader approaches the text each time they read it. These approaches are 'interpretive strategies', learned from the lived experience of 'interpretive communities', each person belonging to several 'interpretive communities'. All texts, be they literary or non-literary, are of equal status. The same applies to all readings of texts, the literary critic's knowledge of literary accomplishment and/or standards being solely a convention of the critic's 'interpretive strategy', learnt via the 'interpretive community' of literary criticism. The 'Informed Reader' is a self-conscious subject, continually aware of their reading activity. Maintaining that it is the subjective act of reading which should be the principal focus of the investigation, Fish's methodology was to examine his own response to texts.

The 'Informed Reader' is a skilled reader, who has learnt interpretive expertise via reading experience. It was an apt starting point for the 'Skilled Viewer'. Certain issues associated with Fish's theory had to be addressed before a process of adaptation and development could take place. His focus on the reader, act of reading and his own reading experience raised a number of questions. These concerned the negation of the text, the denial of stability of meaning, the analysis of spontaneous response only, the equal status of all texts, the linguistic basis of his theory, and explanatory inadequacy<sup>39</sup>. I proposed the following. First of all, Fish's negation of the text should be reread as a refusal to privilege the text with fixed meaning. Readers could make sense of the text, meaning was not determined by the text. Secondly, any stability of meaning depends on societies as well as texts. Meaning is passed down by people/readers/audience as well as texts. Thirdly, Fish accounted solely for his own immediate response and not any internalised opinions<sup>40</sup>. In this research, spontaneous response to the text of The Mistress, the audience's interpretation of their response and any later, deeper or different response would all be considered. Fourthly, Fish's denial of a grander status to the literary text was helpful because it removed the necessity of justifying the study of a "popular" as opposed to a "quality" television programme. The fifth point, that the linguistic basis of the theory can account for change in the text but not in the reader was defused in Radway's study of romance readers. Radway used

reader response theory as a base, but incorporated Chodorowian theory to account for the changes in the readers. Her methods also helped to remove the sixth criticism, of explanatory inadequacy. She not only stated the 'interpretive strategies' applied by her readers, but attempted to explain why they used them. The seventh question, Fish's use of himself as research subject, pointed up the importance of monitoring my own subjectivity. I was ever conscious of and careful to report my own response both to The Mistress and to the audience response, in order to minimise the risk of imposing my subjective reading on to the women in the audience.

Radway's Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature as an example of reader response theory in practice is a key text which influenced this study. Radway extended and developed Fish's theory. She used an 'interpretive community' of romance readers to find out what in their terms was significant in a romance, and in the act of reading the romance. She compared the readers' descriptions with those the publishing companies defined as significant. She completed her study with a structural analysis of the romance, the framework of her analysis being guided by her readers' descriptive categories. The audience was always primary but she never forgot the texts to which they responded, constantly referring back to them. Her approach was a consciously feminist one. She placed significance on the subjective experience of her readers,

rather than on her own response, thus avoiding the criticism of self-obsession levelled at Fish. By exploring her readers' 'interpretive strategies' she posited reasons for their deployment, thus attempting to account for them.

Although this study was influenced by Radway's use of Fish, I did not merely transfer her model of literary research to the medium of television for a number of reasons. First of all, in order to locate the Skilled Viewer as the key theoretical focus, the audience was even more central. The text was always present via the audience response but there was no textual analysis. Secondly, Radway used one 'interpretive community' of readers. To test their diversity of interpretation, this study interrogated a number of individuals and a number of groups of viewers. Thirdly, the principle of subject selection differed from Radway's. Instead of using research subjects who were connected solely by interpretive convention, a basic assumption here was that women are first of all social beings, who possess the capacity and competence to interpret texts. The focus was shifted from 'interpretive community' where emphasis is on interpretive rather than social experience. Research subjects were approached primarily as members of socially constituted groups whose common experience had led them to hold shared 'interpretive repertoires'<sup>41</sup>.

Reader response theory is specifically concerned with the reader, and reading is a private act which can be undertaken

almost anywhere. This study focused on the television audience. Television viewing is generally a domestically located, social act. Reader response theory had provided the means of focusing on the act of reading/viewing, and of conceptualising the concrete reader/viewer. It advanced the concept of the Skilled Viewer, but in order to make it comprehensive, viewers still had to be socially contextualised. Audience research was, therefore, examined.

The intention here was to undertake a qualitative research project. The principles of qualitative research are that interviews and discussion with the audience will generate rich, in-depth data. Morley had researched into groups of viewers of the tv news programme, Nationwide [BBC]<sup>43</sup>, and Hobson interviewed individual women about the soap opera, Crossroads [ITV]<sup>43</sup>. Their technique was one of 'unstructured' discussions whereby subjects were asked to discuss the programme. As different topics were generated the researcher asked questions to prompt specific opinions. A later study into the popularity of Dallas [BBC] was undertaken by Ien Ang<sup>44</sup>, who drew data from viewers' responses to a newspaper advertisement. Ang's methods were not as relevant to this project as were those of Morley and Hobson, but her findings were pertinent because of the "light fiction" nature of Dallas and her focus on audience opinion.

The emphasis on the audience as the primary focus of investigation raised questions of concern to this study

because they were associated with the theoretical balance between the text and reader. The convention of analysing a text prior to the audience research to establish a 'preferred reading', was criticised for subjectivity, and its status questioned. Its appropriateness for fictional as well as 'factual' texts was queried. Removal of the notion of the 'preferred reading' risked problems of polysemy. Morley resolved the issue by suggesting the research focus be adjusted from the analysis of the text to the 'cultural competence'<sup>45</sup> of the viewer. This development was particularly useful here, the focus on the 'competence' of the viewer corresponding with the interpretive expertise entailed in the 'Informed Reader' and the 'Skilled Viewer'.

A second relevant issue concerning the contextualisation of the viewer arose from Morley's studies. Following his investigation of Nationwide, he noted his failure to take adequate account of the women in the audience. A determination to restore the balance in his next study, into the influences of family position on access to and enjoyment of television<sup>46</sup>, resulted in an over-emphasis on gender as a structuring factor<sup>47</sup>. The problems Morley had encountered concerning the place of the text and the structural factor of gender were fundamental here. They were kept in mind for this study into the socially contextualised female viewer to be wary of from the outset.

It is one thing to state that the audience point of view will guide the research and another to achieve a satisfactory way of doing so. When a piece of research commences with a textual analysis there is a self-evident structure right from the start. For an audience-led study, the audience response must be classified into and presented via a framework which is theoretically and methodologically apt. Uses and Gratifications Theory was brought in to organise the audience response, and to offer illumination of audience response on an explanatory level.

Uses and Gratifications Theory<sup>48</sup> was relevant to the concept of the Skilled Viewer for a number of reasons. It conceptualised the concrete audience as active, self-aware and selective and not directly manipulated by the media text. It asserted that mass media use gratifies audience needs. It assumed that researchers acknowledge the self-aware audience, place value on the audience's own interpretation of their use of the media and that the audience point of view guides the research. It stated that the mass media are in competition with other forms of gratification<sup>49</sup>. Methodologically, Uses and Gratifications could provide a systematic categorisation procedure to order audience data.

Two key developments in Uses and Gratifications theory were pertinent to this study. The first was Denis McQuail's refinement of audience response classifications<sup>50</sup> into four

major categories: Personal Identity; Integration and Social Interaction; Entertainment; and Information. The second was two studies by J D Rayburn and P Palmgreen<sup>51</sup>. They opened up the notion of 'gratification' to accommodate ideas of media use not necessarily dependent on 'needs'. They introduced the notion of expectation into 'gratifications' research by separating the concept of 'gratifications' into 'gratifications-sought' and 'gratifications-obtained'.

McQuail's classifications were adapted so that they specifically applies to the responses of the audience of The Mistress. Taking Rayburn and Palmgreen's work as a starting point, I further explored the notion of 'gratifications'. Assuming that the Skilled Viewer's understanding of television texts and genres would be expressed as expectations, I developed a framework to account for them. Explanations of response would be offered in terms of anticipations-expressed/hope expressed and anticipations-fulfilled/hope-fulfilled.

#### Application of Theories

The concept of the Skilled Viewer was designed. The Skilled Viewer understands and uses the language of the text. The Skilled Viewer is a socially contextualised being who possesses considerable interpretive expertise. The Skilled Viewer actively uses television for a variety of reasons. The Skilled Viewer's interpretation is influenced by their

social positioning and by their gender. The Skilled Viewer is self-aware and self-monitoring and understands the influences on their use.

The multi-disciplinary approach towards the concept of the Skilled Viewer necessarily involved much theoretical borrowing. From film and television theory it took the work connected with the motivation of the text, with 'looking', with images of women, and with the conceptualising of the female spectator. Reader response theory's assumptions that the subjective reading/viewing experience is the chief component for study in the cultural communication and that the reader/viewer has considerable interpretive expertise were espoused. The 'cultural competence' of the audience promoted in audience research and those principles of Uses and Gratifications theory which assert that the audience is active and socially located were embraced, and an explanatory level of expectation was developed. Careful monitoring of their application meant that the integration of components from the above theories would operate via a constructive tension. They would draw out interpretations of audience response which may not have been accessible solely via one model.

#### The Methodological Investigation of the Skilled Viewer

A feminist perspective systematised by an ethnographic account directed the methodological approach. It informed

the principles adopted and the procedures applied in the study of the Skilled Viewer.

The broad principles of three 'feminisms', liberal feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism, were examined. The latter was the most apt, because socialist feminism operates from within but against patriarchy. Within the social hierarchy of patriarchy, the women in the audience of The Mistress could be contextualised and their domestic and family positions located. How their responses were determined by or resisted their structural position could be indicated. Liesbet van Zoonen's approach, which merges socialist feminism with a cultural studies perspective was adopted<sup>52</sup>. The cultural studies approach introduced the dimension of interpretation into the guiding principles. The principles of the socially situated Skilled Viewer with interpretive expertise were, therefore, accommodated in and promoted by the methodological framework.

My relationship to my research subjects was in the tradition described by Brunson as the 'fragmented' approach<sup>53</sup>, directed by an ethnographic account. It resolved the problem encountered by Morley, as social factors other than gender could be considered influential on viewers' response. In accordance with reader response theory, it granted the audience an equal standing to myself, in terms of social status (researcher/researched) and interpretive skill. I monitored and reported as faithfully as possible my own

reactions to the situations, to the women in the audience, and to their response. Thus, the response of those Skilled Viewers who were the women in the audience of The Mistress could be analysed on their own terms.

The methodological criteria of generalisability, replicability and validity were addressed. The aim here was for an accretion of findings, rather than to claim generalisability. The latter is problematic in a qualitative research project and would have detracted from the guiding principles of the study. The principles and procedures of data collection and analysis were precisely detailed so that accretion of findings could be substantiated and that replicability of the technicalities of methods would be possible. In this study, validity was the principle objective. Successful accretion of findings and replicability of methods follows from the achievement of validity. Validity depends on 'face validity'<sup>54</sup> and 'predictive or convergent validity'<sup>55</sup>. The former pertains to the believability of findings, the latter to the probability of like findings being repeated. The stages of data collection, data analysis, and accounting had to be proved sound for the findings to be regarded as valid.

The process of data collection had to be approached sensitively and reflexively. The subjectivity of the research subjects and myself had to be consistently considered, monitored and honestly reported. Two decisions

were made. Firstly, I should use qualitative research methodology in order to interview audience members in-depth. Secondly, I should select viewers who were known to have an interest in particular aspects of the visual media and who were keen to express their opinions.

76 people participated in this study, 14 individual women, nine groups of women, and four men. Subject selection was via the 'snowball'<sup>56</sup> technique. I approached a number of women and asked them to take part and several of them suggested further contacts. Individuals and groups were used for three reasons. Firstly, no other study had researched into both individuals and groups. Secondly, it would enhance the quality of data gained. Thirdly, by comparing the various social/viewing contexts, it would foreground their influences on response. Issues associated with interviewing groups identified by Alan Hedges<sup>57</sup> and Krueger<sup>58</sup> were acknowledged. These concerned group dynamics, possible dominance of certain group members, potential discomfort of others, difficulties associated with arrangements for meetings, numbers of groups and numbers within groups. These problems were negotiated successfully, although two groups with numbers larger than recommended did generate observably less rich data.

Subjects were characterised by categories derived from their own self-descriptions and from my observations of them. These included age, marital/family status, (paid) work,

nationality/colour/racial origin and sexuality. Decisions were taken not to include religion, party politics, regional origin or "official" social class position. Not to include religion may have been an oversight. It was based on the lack of significance of orthodox religion in my own life. In consequence, I barely considered it in terms of my research subjects. Party political affiliation was excluded in order to foreground the feminist principle that the 'personal is political'. Regional origin was omitted because less discussions were arranged in only two of the three regions originally planned. Most took place in Sheffield. Those planned in London and some of the Merseyside discussions failed to materialise. I assumed, therefore, that regional origin would not prove a significant influence. The research subjects' "official" social class descriptions was assigned to Appendix VI. This includes also their perceptions of their social class and my observations about any differences between them. The decision not to include their formal social class descriptions in the main body of the study was taken in support of the principle that women are social beings in their own right. Social class is based on the socio-economic position of the male head of the household and would have detracted from the aim to place as central and empower the women in the audience. In retrospect, as much of the response to The Mistress was associated with social class, its relegation to an appendix was misguided.

Viewers watched episodes of The Mistress as they were originally broadcast or videos of them soon after their first broadcast. Discussions took place in places with which they were familiar and comfortable. I preceded each discussion with two statements. Firstly, I explained that I wanted their opinions because research into women television viewers was under-represented. Secondly, their responses would not be judged in terms of right or wrong.

Many of the audience members were already known to me. This raised issues relating to the nature and conduct of the interviews and to the objectivity of the research. In a study that intentionally set out to elicit subjective opinion, this was justified by beginning with a principle of trust which dictates that the interviewer and interviewee(s) are on an equal footing and hold each other and the integrity of the research in respect. Traditional interview techniques seek statistical data and demand scientific distance at all times, inclusive of the interview situation. A qualitative research project guided by a feminist perspective denies the necessity of such formality during a discussion which concerns feeling and often deeply held opinion. Here, objectivity was achieved by reflexive data analysis and accounting, rather than in the data gathering. My 'fragmented' approach was aided by feminist sociological methods of eliciting data, whereby the process of the data collection is considered as significant as the data collected<sup>59</sup>. During the discussions, it was the conversation

and the people who were conversing that were of prime importance. The focus was only shifted to the data in the analysis stage. The procedure of ethnographic accounting monitored the relationship between the data and its producers. The "human-ness" of the discussion process was consistently (re)united with the response it expressed.

The data analysis was undertaken in five systematic stages. Firstly, it was allocated into four topic areas defined by the audience themselves. Secondly, Uses and Gratifications categories were applied. Thirdly, the 'interpretive strategies' and 'interpretive repertoires' which had generated the responses were identified. Fourthly, the response was described in terms of the framework of expectation I had developed. Fifthly, Chodorow was speculatively applied to certain responses to suggest further explanation.

The investigation of the Skilled Viewers who were the women in the audience of The Mistress was achieved by the rigorous application of methodological principles and procedures which were compatible with the theoretical model.

### The Account

Certain provisos must be considered in relation to the findings and their account. This was a qualitative research project where numbers of subjects were restricted in order

to gain in-depth responses. The argument here was for an accretion of findings rather than generalisability. Thus, I decided not to report the audience response in specific numeric or percentage terms. Firstly, to be so exact would only serve a purpose if the figures could be extrapolated to the rest of the female viewing population. This has been a study of some viewers of one television text and so it would not be fair to suggest that the findings could be generalised even to all female northern British television viewers who watched The Mistress in the mid '80s. Nevertheless, although no statistical correlation can be inferred from the findings here, they are legitimate pointers to ways in which female television viewers overall may respond to a particular television text. Secondly, as numbers and/or percentages would be included solely for the sake of dogmatic pedantry rather than enhancing meaning, they would serve to disrupt the fluency of the account and make it less comfortable for the reader. Accordingly, I have preferred to use the more general terms, such as "many", "most", "the majority of", "several", "few", and so on.

In a study which insists on the centrality of the audience, a major question was where to locate the audience discussions in the order of chapters. I was tempted to introduce the main body of the study with them. This would have necessitated combining all the information in Chapters Two and Five which would have made the first major chapter awfully long and, I suspect, would have appeared tediously

impenetrable. I was persuaded to adopt the present order to make reader access as easy as possible.

The account proceeds as follows. Chapter Two: Perspectives, locates the series in that tradition of television texts conventionally known as situation comedy. Its generic conventions are described. The Mistress is introduced. The four subjects areas most commonly discussed by the women in the audience, Carla Lane, Stars/Characters, Conventions, and Representations of Women are introduced in terms of how viewers related to them. Carla Lane's track record is described, the conventions which influenced response most significantly are recorded, Dyer's notion of 'stars' is debated, and feelings and opinions of images of women are discussed.

The third chapter: Conceptualising The Audience, explains the development of the concept of the Skilled Viewer. The three theories which contributed to its design are explored in detail. How and why specific facets of each were selected is clarified. An explanation of the theory of the Skilled Viewer concludes the chapter.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods, explains the fundamental principles underlying the procedures adopted and how the principles and procedures informed each other to investigate the concept of the Skilled Viewer. The procedures of subject selection, data collection and data analysis are precisely detailed. This includes an

explanation of the problems associated with each and how they were negotiated so that the methodological framework would complement and facilitate the theory design.

The viewing experience of the women in the audience of The Mistress is the subject of Chapter Five: The Audience Data And Its Interpretation. The audience response is described. It is explained in terms of expectation. The anticipations-expressed/anticipations-fulfilled and hopes-expressed/hopes fulfilled are suggested. The 'interpretive strategies' which generated response and the 'interpretive repertoires' from which they derived are explored. Chodorow's ideas are experimentally applied to certain response. Interpretations are suggested.

In Chapter Six: Conclusions, each section of the research is pulled together, conclusions drawn and recommendations made for future research projects.

#### NOTES

1. Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature [University of North Carolina Press, 1984] (pp9/10).
2. e.g. A letter, dated October 1985, from the BBC Data Retrieval Unit states:

[A]lthough there is no target audience as such, it is well known that programmes such as soap operas and situation comedies have a higher reach among women viewers.

3. Mast, Gerald [New English Library, 1973].
4. Eaton, Mick: 'Television Situation Comedy' in Screen Vol 19 [1978] No 4, pp29-44; and 'Laughter in the Dark' in Screen Vol 22 [1981] No. 2, pp61-89.
5. Neale, Steve: 'Psychoanalysis and Comedy' in Screen Vol 22 [1981] No 2, pp29-42.
6. Cook, Jim (ed), BFI Dossier No 17 [BFI, 1982].
7. [BFI, 1987].
8. [Routledge, 1990].
9. Lane's series, I Woke Up One Morning [BBC, 1985] was contrary to her own tradition and focused on four men.
10. e.g. The Liver Birds [BBC, 1969-77], Butterflies [BBC, 1978-80], Solo [BBC, 1981-83] and Leaving [BBC, 1983-83].
11. About three middle aged women all involved with the same man, starring Gwen Taylor.
12. e.g. Modleski, Tania: Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women [Methuen, 1982]; and Radway op. cit.
13. e.g. Brunson, Charlotte: 'Notes on Soap Opera', and Modleski, Tania: 'Rhythms of Reception: Daytime Television and Women's Work' in Kaplan, E Ann (ed): Regarding Television [AFI, 1983].
14. c.f. Several later studies in this area, e.g. Ang, Ien: Watching Dallas [Methuen, 1985]; Morley, David: Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure [Comedia, 1986]; Buckingham, David: Public Secrets: EastEnders and its Audience [BFI, 1987]; Montgomerie, Margaret: EastEnders [unpublished, 1987].
15. For a detailed explanation of content analysis methodology, see Berelson, B: Content Analysis in Communications Research [Hafner Press, 1952]. For examples of its use, see Gerbner, G: 'Cultural indicators: the case of violence in television drama' in Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Science [1970], vol 338, pp69-81; and Glasgow Media Group: Bad News [RKP, 1976].

16. For a detailed explanation of structuralism, see Hawkes, Terence: Structuralism and Semiotics [Methuen, 1977]. For examples of the application of structuralism to the visual media, see Fiske, J and Hartley, J: Reading Television [Methuen, 1978]; and Silverstone, Roger: The Message of Television [Heinemann, 1981].
17. e.g. Elsaesser, Thomas: 'Visual Pleasure and Audience Oriented Aesthetics' (orig. pubd. 1969) in Bennett, Tony et al (eds): Popular Television and Film [BFI, 1982]; and Mulvey, Laura: 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in Screen, Vol 16 [1975], No 3, pp6-18.
18. e.g. Morley, David: The Nationwide Audience [BFI, 1980]; and Wren-Lewis, Justin: Decoding Television News [unpublished, 1984]. See also Hobson, Dorothy: Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera [Methuen, 1982] for an exception to this rule.
19. e.g. Barthes, Roland: The Pleasure of the Text [Cape, 1970]; and Mercer, Colin: 'Pleasure' in Popular Culture, Open University Course U203, Unit 17 [OU, 1981].
20. c.f. Note 14.
21. BBC Annual Report and Handbook 1985 [BBC, 1986], (p157).
22. e.g. Mulvey, op. cit. on how the 'look' of the spectator is constructed in mainstream Hollywood film.
23. e.g. Kuhn, Annette: Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema [RKP, 1982]; and Snitow, Ann et al (eds): Desire: The Politics of Sexuality [Virago, 1984]; and Kaplan, E Ann: Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera [Methuen, 1983].
24. e.g. de Lauretis, Teresa: Alice Doesn't [Heinemann, 1984].
25. e.g. Pollock Griselda et al: 'Feminist Film Practice and Pleasure' in Bennett, Tony et al (eds): Formations of Pleasure [RKP, 1974].
26. e.g. Kuhn, Annette: 'Women's Genres' in Screen Vol 25 [1984] No 18, pp18-25.
27. e.g. Doane, MaryAnn: 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator' in Screen Vol 23 [1982] Nos 3-4, pp74-88.

28. c.f. Freud, S: Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (orig. pubd. 1917) [Penguin, 1974] and On Sexuality (orig. pubd. 1905) [Penguin, 1977]
29. c.f. Wolfe, Naomi: The Beauty Myth [Chatto and Windus, 1990].
30. [University of California Press, 1978].
31. e.g. Brunsdon, and Modleski, in Kaplan (ed) op. cit.
32. e.g. Budge, Belinda: 'Joan Collins and the Wilder Side of Women: Exploring Pleasure and Representation' in Gamman, Lorraine and Marshment, Margaret (eds): The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture [The Women's Press, 1988].
33. e.g. Stacey, Jackie: 'Desperately Seeking Difference' in Screen Vol 28 [1987] No 1, pp48-61]; Byars, Jackie: 'Gazes/Voices/Power: Expanding Psychoanalysis for Feminist Film and Television Theory' and Gledhill, Christine: 'Pleasurable Negotiations' in Pribram, Deirdre (ed): Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television [Verso, 1988]; Gamman, Lorraine: 'Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze' in Gamman and Marshment (eds) op. cit.
34. c.f. Wolfe op. cit.; and Ellis, John: Visible Fictions [RKP, 1982].
35. c.f. Budge op. cit.; Wolfe op, cit.
36. Pribram, op. cit. (p3).
37. c.f. Elsaesser op. cit.; Ellis op. cit.; Morley [1986] op. cit.; Pribram op. cit.; and Gamman and Marshment op. cit.
38. Fish, Stanley: 'Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authorities of Interpretive Communities' (orig. pubd. 1976) in Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authorities of Interpretive Communities [Harvard University Press, 1980].
39. c.f. Iser, Wolfgang: The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett [Columbia University Press, 1974] and The Act of Reading: The Theory of Aesthetic Response [John Hopkins University Press, 1976].
40. c.f. Bleich, David: 'Epistemological Assumptions in the Study of Response' (orig. pubd. 1978) in

Tompkins, Jane P (ed): Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-structuralism [John Hopkins University Press, 1980].

41. cf. Klaus Bruhn Jensen's use of the term 'interpretive repertoires' to define audiences not as  
  
formal groups or communities, but contextually defined agents who employ such repertoires to make preliminary sense.  
  
Jensen: 'Humanistic scholarship as qualitative science: contributions to mass communication research' in Jensen, Klaus Bruhn and Jankowski, Nicholas W (eds): A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research [Routledge, 1991] (p42).
42. Morley [1980] op. cit.
43. Hobson op. cit.
44. Ang op. cit.
45. Morley, David: 'Nationwide: A Critical Postscript' in Screen Education [Summer 1981] No 30, pp6-18.
46. Morley [1986] op. cit.
47. Ibid (p174); c.f. also Gray, Ann: 'Behind Closed Doors: Video Recorders in the Home' in Baehr, H and Dyer, G (eds): Boxed In: Women and Television [Pandora, 1986] for a critique of Morley.
48. c.f. McQuail, Denis (ed): The Sociology of Mass Communications [Penguin, 1972] for articles on Uses and Gratifications theory.
49. c.f. Katz, E, Blumler, Jay G and Gurevitch, M: 'Utilization of Mass Communication by the Individual' in Blumler, Jay G and Katz, E (eds): The Uses of Mass Communications [Sage, 1974].
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51. 'Merging Uses and Gratifications and Expectancy-Value Theory' and 'An Expectancy-Value Approach to Media Gratifications' in Rosengren, K E, Wenner, L A and Palmgreen, P (eds): Mass Communications Research [Sage, 1985].

52. 'Feminist Perspectives on the Media' in Curran, James and Gurevitch, Michael (eds): Mass Media and Society [Edward Arnold, 1991] (p33).
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55. Ibid (p42).
56. Press, Andrea L: 'Class, Gender and the Female Viewer: Women's Responses to Dynasty' in Brown, Mary Ellen (ed): Television and Women's Culture [Sage, 1990].
57. 'Group Interviewing' in Applied Qualitative Research [Gower, 1985].
58. Op. cit.
59. c.f. Roberts, Helen (ed): Doing Feminist Research [RKP, 1981]; and Oakley, Ann: The Sociology of Housework (2nd Edition) [Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1985].

## CHAPTER TWO

### PERSPECTIVES

This chapter outlines the framework within which the audience discussions developed. It begins with a description of The Mistress: the text. Those aspects of the series which the audience themselves deemed most significant are introduced. The Mistress is located in the context of Carla Lane's writing, followed by a discussion of the generic conventions of the series and of sitcom generally. The notion of 'stars' is advanced as a means of explaining the appeal of the stars/characters in The Mistress. How the women in the audience perceived the representation of women in the series concludes the chapter.

#### The text

Viewers discussed the first series of The Mistress broadcast on Thursday evenings on BBC2 in January and February 1985. The series is described in four sections: Characters, Setting, Presentation and Plot. This is followed by a synopsis of each episode.

#### Characters

The three main characters are: Maxine (Felicity Kendal), Helen (Jane Asher), and Luke (Jack Galloway).

Maxine (Max) is a successful business woman, a florist with her own shop. She is single and lives alone with an assortment of pet animals. She is 30, slim, blonde, conventionally attractive, wears casual, modern clothes favouring pastel colours, particularly pink. She is a lousy cook. She is having an affair with Luke.

Luke is a consultant engineer. His professional status is sufficiently high that he has free rein at work to see Max during the day when he chooses. He is 40 and amiably attractive. He has been married to Helen for 16 years. They have no children.

Helen is a housewife. She has a maid to do the housework, but still does some herself. She is in her mid to late thirties, is slim, red-haired and conventionally attractive. Her taste in clothes is expensive, middle-of-the-road, classical fashions. She is a good cook, enjoys 'a good play', and gardening. Luke describes Helen as 'nice'.

Three other subsidiary characters are crucial to the narrative progression. They are referred to here as the 'major-minor' characters. Jenny, Simon, and Jo are confidant(e)s and helpmates of the main protagonists. Jenny has been Maxine's friend since school, works in her shop and borrows her clothes. She is plump and dark haired. Next to Maxine's prettiness she appears plain. Jenny is "going out"

with Bruce. We never meet Bruce. Simon works with Luke. It is implied that Luke is his superior. Simon is plain and bespectacled, envies Luke's association with two pretty women, tells witty stories at his own expense, and is unhappily married to Nancy. We never meet Nancy. Jo is Helen's Filipino maid. She is not very competent either as a maid, or with the English Language. Jo's husband is a rotter. We never meet him.

Other minor characters who contribute to the narrative are: two taxi drivers (Episode 1); Luke and Helen's neighbour (Episode 2); a woman in a restaurant (Episode 3); an arguing couple (Episode 4); an old friend of Jenny's (Episode 5).

### Setting

The series is set in Bath<sup>1</sup>, although this is never stated. The season is late spring or summer. The weather in the outdoor scenes is always fine, and everyone wears warm-weather clothes. Except for two scenes in town, one where Max buys replacement clothes for Luke (Episode 2), and one where Luke and Helen are shopping (Episode 4), all outdoor scenes are in the country, by the sea, or by the river. The majority of scenes are set indoors. Most are shot in Maxine's house, Luke and Helen's house, Maxine's shop, or Luke's office. Others are set in Jenny's flat, Simon's house, a hotel, or a restaurant.

Max's house is small, a "bijou residence" old style (Victorian or Edwardian) end-terrace at the closed end of a cul-de-sac. The front door opens from the street directly into the lounge. The interior décor, design, and furnishings are modern and bright, giving a light and airy impression. The house is always clean and tidy. The cat and rabbit have free run of the house; both use the cat tray. The singing finch in its birdcage lives in the living room. The open-plan living room with its push-button telephone is decorated in pastel shades, the stairs to the bedroom leading from it, the kitchen leading off it. The bedroom is in ivory and a bathroom, which we never see, leads off the bedroom. The kitchen is in cream and white with red accessories. The units having a wipe-clean, melamine surface. Max deals with her paper work in the living room or kitchen.

Luke and Helen live in a large, detached, old style (Victorian or Edwardian) house. The décor, design, and furnishings give a luxurious and comfortable impression. The house is always clean and tidy. The hall, with its dial telephone, is spacious. The lounge is conventionally furnished with heavy curtains and a large, traditional three-piece suite. The kitchen has real pine fittings, which match the very large mosaic pine kitchen table and heavy highbacked carved pine chairs. The bedroom is in shades of dark blue. Luke does the household accounts in his study, a small room lined with books.

Max's shop houses only flowers and plants. It is always clean and tidy. There is no evidence of soil or water.

Luke's office is a converted room in an old house. It is in shades of cream and brown. It is clean and tidy.

Jenny's flat is homely and untidy. Simon's house is dull and ordinary.

### Presentation

The series consists of six half-hour episodes. The opening sequence is a succession of eight pictures in horizontal, oval, ornate frames. They are pictures of "ladies" in close-up and/or reclining luxuriously; paintings of famous mistresses in history<sup>2</sup>. As the pictures succeed each other so the series and cast are announced. The names are presented in an elaborate, flowery, italic-type script. The title, The Mistress appears over the third picture. The sixth picture is overlaid with the information 'by Carla Lane'. The seventh picture has the accompanying announcement 'starring Felicity Kendal'. It is a photograph of the actress in an Edwardian style dress, her hair pinned up in matching fashion. The eighth and final picture in the opening sequence is one of a Victorian party game of Blind Man's Buff<sup>3</sup>, over which is announced 'with Jane Asher and Jack Galloway'. The theme tune accompanying the titles and

credits is Italian Girl in Algiers by Rossini<sup>4</sup>, played by a chamber orchestra.

Max appears in several different settings: alone in her shop, in her home, on the beach, in her van, in taxis, in a restaurant. We see her with Luke in her shop, in her home, on the beach, in a town, in the woods, in his car. She has scenes with Jenny in her shop, in her home, in her van, at a pub. We see her twice with Jenny's friend, outside her shop and outside her home. She seems to lead a busy life and to have some control and operation of choice in her life.

Luke features in a number of settings. He is alone when travelling to meet Max, when shopping for a locket for Max whilst waiting for Helen, when telephoning Max in his own home, and in Max's house when she inadvertently locks him in. We see him with Max as above. He has a number of scenes with Helen in their home and shopping. He is seen with Simon in his office. He appears to be a free agent.

Except for two brief shots when collecting Luke and being dropped in town by him, and once where she is shopping with Luke, Helen is only seen in her own home. Twice she is alone receiving telephone calls from Luke. Otherwise she is with Luke or with Jo. She appears to have no life other than her relationship with Luke.

Plot

The series plot concerns Luke and Maxine's affair. Three questions are constantly posed: Will the affair last? Will Luke leave Helen for Maxine? Will Helen discover the affair? Two other subplots run through the whole series: Will Jenny marry Bruce? Will Simon and Nancy's marriage break up? Each episode also carries its own plot.

Synopses

**Episode 1: Will Luke and Maxine manage to get away for a weekend without Helen suspecting?**

Luke tells Helen he's working late. He spends the evening with Max. Max complains she doesn't see enough of him. He suggests a weekend away.

The weekend. Jenny arrives at Max's house to look after the animals. Luke drops Helen in town and takes the keys to her car to the garage. Max takes one taxi to rendezvous with Luke at another. The second taxi driver hands her a 'Smarties' tube containing a note from Luke arranging to see her at the hotel instead.

The hotel. Luke is constantly on his guard in case someone sees them. Max is annoyed when she overhears him ringing Helen with a story of why he won't be home. They row because he hasn't arranged the weekend properly and has asked Helen

to collect him early the next day. They make up. The following morning Luke leaves with Helen whilst Maxine watches from her hotel room window.

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**Episode 2: Will Helen find out about Maxine?**

1.00am. Max wakes Luke to send him home as his 'stag night' will be over by now. At home, Helen asks if he's drunk. He says 'No'. She gets into his side of the bed.

Next day. In the office, Simon envies Luke for looking so tired. Max rings. They arrange to go for a picnic.

The beach. They play. The tide washes away one of his shoes and soaks his shirt. Walking back to the car they meet Luke's neighbour walking his dog. Luke panics. Max finds it funny. In town, Max buys him a pair of shoes. They plan to go and buy a new shirt.

Luke's home. Luke and Helen eat homemade cake and drink tea in their living room. She quizzes him about his new clothes. Their neighbour calls and asks for DIY advice. He makes no mention of seeing Luke and Max although Luke thinks he will.

That evening. Luke tells Max he can't go on with the deceit. Max hears from a previous boyfriend and Luke insists she ring him back. She does, to say she won't see him as she

loves someone else. They agree to carry on seeing each other. Luke rings Helen to say he's at the office. She tells him the girl in the shoe shop rang to say he'd left his shoe there: 'She seemed to think I was with you. She kept saying: you dropped his card.'

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**Episode 3: Can the affair last despite Helen's increasing suspicions, and Maxine's increasing doubts?**

A restaurant. At lunch, Max is joined by an elderly woman whose advice on men and children make her ponder her future. Later. Jenny announces her engagement to Bruce. Max and Jenny discuss Max and Luke.

Helen's kitchen. Whilst getting ready to go out, Luke and Helen row. She says he has no interest in her, but she's not complaining. He taunts her to 'do something evil for a change'. She pours whisky into a glass.

Later. Max's house. Luke arrives, his shirt soaked where Helen had aimed several glasses of whisky at him. Max is pleased to see him but angry when he goes to move his car to allay suspicion. Luke claims they'd both decided they wanted 'an affair not a marriage'. Max agrees.

Next morning. Luke and Helen at their kitchen table. Helen says she wants a baby. Luke is startled.

Afternoon. In the woods. Max tells Luke she'd like to have his baby. Luke is taken aback.

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**Episode 4: Can Luke persuade Maxine to go on with the affair? Can he persuade Helen there is nothing wrong with their marriage?**

Before work. Jenny advises Max to finish with Luke. The next night. Max accuses Luke of falling asleep after making love, and of always being tired. They row. She tells him to go.

Next morning, Luke discovers Helen has come off the contraceptive pill. They discuss recent tensions in their marriage and he says things will get better. They plan to go shopping. He goes out first 'for a paper'.

Max's house. She tries to clear all traces of Luke from her home, but can only find two photos hidden in a book. Luke rings. She tells him to go away as she wants someone to 'buy her gold locket and spend a whole Sunday with her'.

Town. Helen is in a supermarket. Luke buys a locket for Max. A couple nearby argue loudly. She accuses him of selfishness; Luke becomes thoughtful. He hides the locket in the glove compartment of the car.

Nighttime. Max gets up to make doorstep sandwiches of bread and marmalade. Luke rings. She hangs up. She can't open the

marmalade jar. She rings him to say: 'It's now when I need you. I can't open the marmalade'. He plans to see her on Sunday. She rings off. The marmalade lid unscrews easily.

Sunday. Luke brings Helen breakfast in bed and says he's going fishing. She says she'll go with him as it's his plan and he made breakfast. He is surprised when she wishes him: 'Happy 16th Wedding Anniversary'. He tells her her present is in the car.

Max prepares breakfast for two and takes Luke's photos out of the bin to stand on the breakfast table.

Luke takes the locket he'd bought for Max out of the glove compartment of the car and goes back into his house.

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**Episode 5: Will Max take Luke back?**

The river. Whilst jogging, Max tells Jenny that she is determined to keep Luke out of her life after he let her down by failing to keep their all-day-Sunday date.

Luke's office. Luke and Simon discuss Simon's marriage.

Later. Outside her shop, Max flirts with an American friend of Jenny's as Luke drives up and watches. Luke drives away. She becomes off-hand and the American leaves, puzzled.

Saturday. Planning to stay overnight at Jenny's, Max leaves her house by the back door at the same time as Luke lets himself in at the front. As he looks for her inside, she deadlocks the front door from the outside.

Jenny's flat. She and Max discuss relationships with men and with women. Jenny's American friend arrives and she attempts to "matchmake" him and Max.

Max's house. Luke rings Simon for support. Simon is depressed and needs more support than he can give. Luke rings Helen to find she won't miss him because she is visiting her mother. He discovers two lots of animal food. It dawns on him that Max is out for the night.

Sunday morning. The American brings Max home. Luke is waiting for her, reading a paper, wearing a pink nightie and a comb in his hair. They hug and make up.

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**Episode 6: Will the affair last after they have spent a whole Sunday together?**

Luke's office. He confides to Simon about his affair. Simon agrees to be a fishing trip alibi when Luke is with Max.

Early Sunday morning. Luke and Helen's bedroom. Simon rings to wake Luke. Helen gets up to make his sandwiches.

The country. Luke and Max spend the day picnicking, accompanied by the cat and rabbit.

Helen's home. Whilst hanging curtains, Helen asks Jo if she thinks she's boring because she no longer attracts Luke. Jo tells her about her husband who was 'bad' and left her and her children.

Evening. Max's house. Luke lounges on her couch reading newspapers. Max washes dishes. They row over domestic routine. Jenny rings. Her wedding is arranged for 10 days hence. Luke and Max make it up. Max suggests they go to bed.

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### Carla Lane

The majority of viewers had high expectations of a Carla Lane series, regularly referring to her previous series.

In their article, 'The Gender Game', Andy Medhurst and Lucy Tuck describe Carla Lane as 'the only consistently successful woman writer of sitcoms'<sup>5</sup>. Her track record is remarkable [Fig.1]:

#### Fig.1

The Liver Birds:  
[1969-1977]

about the friendship and romances of two working Liverpool girls (starring Nerys Hughes and Polly

James, later replaced by Elizabeth Estensen);

[The first series of The Liver Birds was co-written with Myra Taylor. All subsequent series were written by Carla Lane].

Butterflies:  
[1978-1980]

about a middle-aged woman, bored and unhappy with her roles as housewife and mother, but uncertain whether to have an affair (starring Wendy Craig and Geoffrey Palmer);

Solo:  
[1981-1983]

about a single woman attempting to live a life alone after the break-up of a long term romantic relationship with a man (starring Felicity Kendal);

Leaving:  
[1983-1984]

about a divorced couple, their lives apart, their relationships with each other and with their adult children (starring Susan Hampshire and Keith Barron);

The Mistress:  
[1985-1986]

about a single woman having an affair with a married man, the problems of their relationship with each other and of his with his wife (starring Felicity Kendal, Jane Asher, and Jack Galloway, replaced after the first series by Peter McEnery).

Discussions were held during the broadcasting of and immediately following the first series of The Mistress in 1985. Her track record did not include two further Carla Lane series broadcast in 1985, consecutive to The Mistress, nor her later series broadcast in 1992<sup>6</sup>.

Lane's comedies are regularly repeated. The Liver Birds and Butterflies have frequently been re-broadcast over the past two decades. One of her most recent series, Bread, was phenomenally popular with six new series since its original showing in 1985. Each one has been repeated.

Along with critical and commercial success, Carla Lane is one of the few writers of tv fiction known by name to the tv audience. That it was she who wrote The Mistress was significant to the women interviewed. Her series had two major appeals: the quality of her writing, and the themes and issues she wrote about. The majority of women in the audience agreed with the "official" critics that Lane's writing was of a very high calibre. Their comments noted the excellent standard of her writing in general and/or their disappointment in this particular series compared to others. In an interview with Morwenna Banks and Amanda Swift for their book, The Jokes's On Us<sup>7</sup>, Lane told them

that she had never felt or been expected to be a mouthpiece for women, and her work has always been about 'relationships' rather than 'issues' ...<sup>8</sup>

but most women in the audience believed that at the heart of Lane's comedies lies always the theme of romantic, heterosexual love, and that how the female characters deal with the conflicts caused by their romantic relationships do indeed become the issues of her series. Discussions highlighted several areas: the reconciliation of an apparent ideal of romantic love with a (fictional) reality of mundane

domesticity; how viewers perceived their own problems to be placed centre stage and sympathetically treated; how Lane's fiction compared with viewers' experiences of social reality; the joy of predicting the outcome of the characters based on their knowledge of former series; and the fun gained by talking about the themes and issues.

### Conventions

Situation comedy is a visual genre unique to television, although its aural equivalent exists on radio. It is massively popular with the television audience and is ostensibly easy to understand. Precisely because of its popularity, its apparent simplicity, and its position at the "fun" end of the heavy drama/light entertainment continuum, there is a common belief that it has little or no depth and lacks cultural value. This is far from the truth. Sitcom relies for its effectiveness on a complex mesh of knowledge and experience that its audience brings to it. In other words, its success depends on recognition. The sitcom text assumes a very skilled viewing public. It presupposes considerable cultural knowledge. It relies on an awareness of social mores and of traditions of humour, as well as a comprehension of the customs of television production.

The conventions of any tv genre incorporate those of broadcasting, of content, and of form.

Conventions of Broadcasting

Scheduling and length are conventions of broadcasting. Scheduling includes time of day and regularity of broadcast. The majority of sitcoms on British television are broadcast at 'prime-time', between 7.00pm and 9.30pm. There are exceptions but these are usually on the minority channels, BBC2 and Channel 4. BBC2 broadcast at a later time those sitcoms considered to be the more "upmarket" and/or "social issue" series like Agony, about an "agony aunt" (Maureen Lipman) on a woman's magazine, or those Carla Lane series post The Liver Birds and prior to Bread. Channel 4 broadcasts repeats of British and American sitcoms earlier in the evening, or introduces new American sitcoms later on. In general, most sitcoms are televised at prime-time, on a weekly basis. Each episode is usually broadcast on the same day at the same time every week until the end of the series. Exceptions to this are rare but do happen. The cast of Agony was mainly female, the action taking place in the magazine office, or in Maureen Lipman's flat where her Jewish mother figured largely. The three male members of the cast were Lipman's rather weak psychiatrist husband and a gay couple who lived in the flat above them. Because of the unusual number of women in the cast, the sole male representation being a gay couple and an effete heterosexual, along with attention being drawn to the stereotypical Jewish mother, it is likely that the BBC considered Agony unsuitable viewing

for prime-time audiences and/or that it might not attract high audience ratings. The first series in 1981 was broadcast at 10.30pm or 11.00pm on Sunday evenings, the show being the first to be replaced if another more topical programme arose. Viewers were either not expected or not encouraged to adopt a regular viewing pattern. Audience ratings for Agony grew and the second and third series were granted an earlier and regular broadcasting schedule<sup>9</sup>. Tv channels often use specific evenings for particular types of programmes to be broadcast. Soap operas have their regular two or three half hours at the same time on several days of the week<sup>10</sup>. During the '80s, Thursdays at 9.00pm or 930pm on BBC2 became ~~the~~ time to expect the Carla Lane sitcoms (other than Bread which from the outset was broadcast on BBC1). Fridays after 9.00pm became Channel 4's regular scheduling of American sitcoms like Cheers<sup>11</sup>, Roseanne<sup>12</sup>, and The Golden Girls<sup>13</sup>, plus newer British comedy programmes such as the improvisational panel game, Who's Line Is It, Anyway?.

Length includes episode-length and series-length. The sitcom episode fits into a half-hour slot, the particular tv channel determining the actual length, advertising constraints necessarily playing their part on the commercial channels. Suffice it to say a sitcom episode lasts approximately half an hour, including its theme tune, titles and credits, and adverts if relevant. A sitcom series made in Britain usually consists of six half hour episodes,

although on occasion a series of 13 episodes is made<sup>14</sup>. American series often last much longer, 26 or 30 weeks not being unusual<sup>15</sup>.

The scheduling and length of programmes were important to viewers of The Mistress on two counts. Firstly, they could plan their viewing time and set aside that half hour from 9.00pm to 9.30pm each Thursday evening, or video the episodes to watch some time later. Secondly, knowing when the programme was on and when they were going to watch it gave them something to look forward to.

#### Conventions of Content

Characterisation, setting, subject matter and plot were the conventions of content which influenced viewers' response.

Sitcom characters must be easily recognisable and must retain audience interest. As episodes last only half an hour, the audience need to understand the characters relatively quickly. At one and the same time, characters must be sufficiently uncomplicated that they can be understood swiftly, but must not be so one-dimensional that they are boring. Routinely, characters in sitcoms are 'types', a stereotype or a social type<sup>16</sup>. Stereotypes portray a concise, usually negative view of a certain kind of person. They exaggerate a few specific mannerisms, quirks,

or aspects of physical appearance commonly agreed to be representative of particular groups of people. They embody a view of these groups held by people who do not belong to them. The loudmouthed, jingoistic, racist, working class Cockney Alf Garnett in Till Death Do Us Part [BBC]<sup>17</sup>, and the desperate, man-hunting Gladys in Hi-de-Hi [BBC]<sup>18</sup> are two classic examples of stereotypes. Social types are more positively drawn. They have the potential to develop because they are not solely dependent for their understanding on recognition of certain physical features or behavioural characteristics. Social types give the audience an opportunity to attribute some depth to a character. They encourage audience recognition of all sorts of social factors, such as gender, social class, regional and age conventions. In Butterflies, Ria could have been portrayed (stereotypically) as the bored, menopausal, housewife; Mrs Boswell in Bread merely as the possessive mother. Each of these descriptions would be apt, but as social types there were other dimensions to them, too. The audience learnt immediately that Ria was middle class, married to a dentist and comfortably off. As the series unfolded they discovered more about her inner self, the woman who reflected on her lot, constantly challenging it by questioning it. She mused on her social position. Should she be more grateful for the material stability and emotional security of a lasting marriage and children she loved? She pondered on her deeper feelings: the intellectual void, and the lack of affection

in her life. In Bread, Nellie Boswell was working class and also regularly deliberated on her lot in life, which was an emotional balancing act. She was torn between her feelings of betrayal by her husband and then wanting him back; the attraction of her would-be lover and her Roman Catholic principles; her fear of her children leaving and her belief that they should be able to look after themselves. Stereotypes, such as Alf Garnett and Gladys, seem larger-than-life, set apart, there to be laughed at. It is difficult to sympathise with a stereotype. An audience can identify with social types, like Ria, and Nellie Boswell. They seem real; they win our sympathy. We are more likely to laugh with a social type than at them.

Crucial to the 'type' of characters in sitcoms are the regional and social class conventions associated with them. Take, The Liver Birds and Bread, Only Fools and Horses [BBC]<sup>19</sup>, Duty Free [ITV]<sup>20</sup> and Last of the Summer Wine [BBC]<sup>21</sup>. The Liver Birds featured two young women from Liverpool, one working class and one middle class, and Bread was about a working class Liverpool family. Both relied on a shared belief that Liverpudlians are witty and have a tradition of living by their wits. The Liver Birds exemplified the time it was written and shown, the late '60s and early '70s, when young women in general could grasp an opportunity of independence previously known only to the few. Of the two characters, Sandra was middle class and principled but

naïve, working class Beryl/Carol was "streetwise" and not beyond bending the law. Bread, written and shown in the 1980s' era of recession called to that cultural knowledge that Liverpool people take on hard times with a smile, or are workshy, depending on how the audience feel about Liverpudlians generally. Its exclusion of middle class characters concentrated the attention on the 'working classness' of the Boswells. Depending on the audience point of view they could either identify with the hardship suffered and humorously overcome, or deride their lot as deserved and the characters as ne'er-do-wells. Its focus on the closeness and support of family life were appealing in two, contradictory ways. It fitted in with the constant governmental promotion of traditional family values, whilst at the same time compensating the insecurities of an audience living through a time when individual ambition/ruthlessness was seen as the way to gain financial success. Moving away from the Carla Lane series, Only Fools and Horses centred on two brothers from London and on an understanding of the Cockney "wide boy". Duty Free compared two couples. The working class Yorkshire couple's holiday was paid for with the husband's redundancy money. The affluent middle class couple from the south-east of England regularly holidayed abroad. Last of the Summer Wine with its focus on three retired men from Yorkshire, relied on a general appreciation of the fine line between Yorkshire dourness and stupidity.

Last of the Summer Wine introduced another cultural dimension: age. Where Butterflies and Bread explored the middle-aged woman, Last of the Summer Wine unmasked the elderly man. Enjoyment of this series depended on our cultural knowledge telling us that old men have time on their hands, may be approaching senility, get on people's nerves, and can get away with behaving like children. Comparing Last of the Summer Wine with Butterflies and Bread also foregrounds the gender conventions at work. The former series just would not work if it were about three old women. The impossibility of role reversal in most sitcoms reveals cultural clichés we all acknowledge, even though we may not agree with them, such as: "A woman's place is in the home", and "Boys will be boys".

The second convention associated with characterisation in sitcoms is that, besides being easily grasped and interesting, the major characters are only strangers in the first episode. The same characters are the protagonists throughout the series.

Thirdly, there are very few major characters in sitcoms. Those which do use more than one or two principal characters tend to employ stereotypes rather than social types for ease of recognition.

The Mistress observed the conventions of characterisation. The three main characters were 'types'. The women were pretty, feminine, and conventional. Maxine was the successful businesswoman, Helen the well-to-do, stay-at-home housewife. Each was obsessed with the man in her life, her priorities were to please him, desiring to be a mother in order to have **his** baby. Luke was the enviable playboy, horrified at the prospect of fatherhood with either woman. He wished only to maintain the *status quo*, the comfort and security of domesticity with his wife at home, and the excitement and risk with his mistress away from home. Secondly, the same characters, plus the same three major-minor characters, appeared in all six episodes of The Mistress. Thirdly, there were just three major characters and three major-minor, characters.

The chief responses to characterisation associated with conventions centred on the social class of the characters and on the expectations of typical Carla Lane characters.

Settings in sitcoms must also be readily recognisable. All settings are the same, or similar, from week to week. So, if we haven't actually experienced the situation of a war time army camp in India, we do have a shared idea of what it was like and can appreciate it in It Ain't 'Arf 'Ot, Mum [BBC]<sup>22</sup>, as we can the holiday camp in Hi-de-Hi, and the prison in Porridge [BBC]<sup>23</sup>.

Responses to settings in The Mistress were influenced by factors such as authenticity, and expectations of a typical Carla Lane setting. Viewers were curious about how well-off people live. Considerable emotion was expressed about the way in which the setting contributed to an overall middle class, southern (south-eastern) 'feel' of the series.

Most sitcoms revolve around the family and the home, those not focusing specifically on family life tending to centre on a close network of people who "live in each other's pockets". Subject matter includes such topics as personal relationships, social protocol, national custom, current issues. Accepted modes of behaviour, traditional attitudes, beliefs, values and manners are pointed up and either contested or reinforced. All the following are suitable and acceptable topics for sitcom: family relationships (Steptoe [BBC]<sup>24</sup>, Till Death Do Us Part, Only Fools and Horses, Butterflies, Bread); love, romance, and sexual relationships (The Liver Birds, The Likely Lads [BBC]<sup>25</sup>, Man About the House [ITV]<sup>26</sup>, Agony, Butterflies, Rising Damp [BBC1]<sup>27</sup>, Solo, Just Good Friends [BBC]<sup>28</sup>, The Mistress, Bread); regional characteristics (Steptoe, The Liver Birds, The Likely Lads, Till Death Do Us Part, Only Fools and Horses, Last of the Summer Wine, Duty Free); social class (It Ain't 'Arf, 'Ot, Mum, Just Good Friends, Duty Free, and all those included in the regional characteristics section); Britishness and/or Britain as a world power (It Ain't 'Arf 'Ot, Mum, Dad's

Army<sup>29</sup>, Till Death Do Us Part, Duty Free); individuality, eccentricity, and whimsy (Porridge, Butterflies, Last of the Summer Wine, Shelley [BBC]<sup>30</sup>); current social problems such as, say, unemployment (Shelley, Bread).

Viewers of The Mistress approached the subject matter of the series from two directions. They discussed the choice of adultery as the subject matter of comedy but, in the main, they were more interested in how the topic was handled. They debated how sympathetically, seriously, or lightheartedly, they believed such a subject should be dealt with, and aired their opinions about the way in which it was treated.

Conventions raised associated with plot were: number, comprehensibility, and closure.

There are always several plots in a sitcom series. There is the overall series plot. Will Penny and Vince marry or remain Just Good Friends? Will Harold Steptoe strike out on his own? Will Shelley get a job? Each weekly episode carries its own plot which pivots on the main one, but is resolved within the episode. There are subplots which run throughout the series alongside the overall plot and other subplots within each episode.

Sitcom plots appear to be straightforward. This is solely because the sitcom audience is *au fait* with its conventions.

It is likely that someone unused to British cultural beliefs may find difficulty in fully comprehending a British sitcom. A viewer from Japan where criminals are regarded as sick, may not understand the plots used in Porridge to promote the central character, Fletch, the prisoner. They may not understand the audience appreciation of Fletch because the Japanese do not share the sneaking admiration of the British for certain classes of prisoner.

Comprehensibility of plot is aided by an understanding of the ways in which plot fits with the broadcasting conventions of sitcom: that the series plot will be continued weekly, that each episode will have a different but related plot, and that subplots will be featured.

Closure is particularly important. Each sitcom episode must satisfactorily resolve the closure of the episode plots and subplots, whilst leaving an opening for the continuation of the series plot. It need not be as open as soap opera where the audience should be able to visualise the characters in real time, as if they continue their lives between episodes. The sitcom audience is able to seal the sitcom characters up with the credits and open the lid on them the following week with the title sequence. However, it is necessary to know that they will be there the following week, so that we can anticipate their actions, predict their reactions, and wonder what else will befall them. The sitcom needs to make

the audience care about the characters in order to invest time in watching their stories unfold week by week. The closure of the whole series at the end of the last episode, when all loose ends are tied up, must be achieved satisfactorily in relation to the episode plot and subplots, and the series. A sitcom, unlike a drama series where the story is usually completed (closed) with the last episode, often leaves an opening so that a further series can be contemplated. Sitcom audiences are very aware of these conventions. They understand the genre sufficiently well to make such remarks as: 'Well, they couldn't marry Penny and Vince off, because then they wouldn't be able to bring back another series [of Just Good Friends]'. When in the final episode of the final series of Just Good Friends, Penny and Vince were indeed married, the tv audience accepted it as the conclusive act to end the series.

The women in the audience of The Mistress demonstrated awareness of plot conventions when they discussed how the major-minor characters were used as devices to trigger or aid narrative progression, and predicted the way the narrative would proceed.

#### Conventions of Form

Conventions of form heighten the perspective of a genre. A television comedy programme may concern the same topic as a

television drama programme. They may both focus on adultery. It is the perspective of the programme which invites the appropriate audience reaction. The perspective of sitcom is the comic. For an audience to laugh at a sitcom they must have a shared understanding of what is comic in our culture.

Two issues are typically considered comic in our culture: an airing of national prejudice, and the pointing up of seemingly universal and eternal problems associated with traditional social institutions such as marriage. The Mistress ostensibly falls into the second camp. Because a variety of viewers expressly remarked on the series' social class consciousness, which is an example of national prejudice, both the above are pertinent. Many situation comedies focus on similar central concerns. The Liver Birds repeatedly drew attention to how aspects of social class can threaten the understanding of friends. The clash of middle class Sandra's pretensions with Beryl/Carol's lack of sophistication frequently caused the comic turn of events. Indicative of Duty Free were two associated, recognisable types of Britishness. Firstly, it demonstrated the xenophobic British superiority over every other non-British nation (previously portrayed somewhat more stridently by Till Death Do Us Part than by the fairly gentle Duty Free). Secondly, it depicted the social class superiority of the middle class couple from the south-east over the northern

working class couple, who suffered corresponding feelings of inferiority. Just Good Friends assumed our understanding of the potential complications involved with a romantic alliance between a middle class woman and a working class man. It also pointed up the difference between the ideal romance and our lived relationships. Butterflies and The Mistress referred us to adultery as the traditional stuff of comedy, from Greek theatre, to Moliere's farces, to television sitcom.

Conventions of form help to underline the comic perspective. They include technical practice, titles and title sequences, performance, laughtrack, and textual address.

All conventions of form could be said to be those of technical practice, as this describes the customs involved with the presentation of the content; with how a programme is produced. Here, the term 'technical practice' is reduced to cover such considerations as filming techniques, lighting, and so on.

Filming techniques sign the pace of a sitcom. In the fast moving series, rapid editing and many scene changes foreground the speed of action and dialogue, and promote the laughter factor. In the slower programmes, attention to character, close-up shots, and the use of voice-overs to convey thoughts, all serve to point up the emotions

underlying the funny lines. Thus, within the same genre of sitcom there can exist the sublime of Butterflies and the ridiculous of Fawlty Towers [BBC]<sup>31</sup>.

The filming techniques employed in the making of The Mistress were a direct issue with one or two viewers, as were the camera work and editing. There were many responses to its pace and action, to the type of lighting used, and to the choice of locations and sets.

The title and title sequences act to hook the audience into watching. In most sitcoms they signal what the series is about, giving a sort of potted version of what is to come. A series entitled The Mistress assumes we understand what a "mistress" is in the appropriate context - a lover, not a wardrobe mistress, for example. To comprehend a "mistress", we have to know about the institution of marriage, for a mistress cannot exist without a marriage - someone else's. In case we are not immediately sure what a mistress is from the title itself, the title sequence displayed a succession of portraits of Victorian and Edwardian mistresses, with a theme tune played by a chamber orchestra, and the final picture is of a game of hide-and-seek. Title sequences of other sitcoms similarly précis what is to follow. The title, Hi-de-hi, accompanied by the rock-and-roll theme tune and the shots of old holiday film, placed us firmly in a 1950s holiday camp. The phrase, 'Duty Free' applies to customs,

but the opening sequence with the title "stamped" over it showed a **British** plane taking off on holiday.

Responses to the title and title sequence of The Mistress were twofold. Firstly, viewers remarked on the title itself, the choice of pictures in the title sequence, their presentation, and the theme tune. Secondly, they discussed how they felt the title sequence related to the series.

Most sitcoms are filmed or videotaped in front of a studio audience, the actors and actresses performing both for the audience and for the camera. Although the finished text is televisual, during the recording the artistes have to take account of the audience present. They often have to wait for the laughter of the studio audience to die down before they can resume their lines. Variety shows, chat shows and game shows are televised in front of a live audience, but sitcom is the only **fictional** genre to feature this convention.

The audience of The Mistress demonstrated their knowledge of performance conventions associated with situation comedy when they discussed how the acting compared, firstly, with their expectations of a typical sitcom, and, secondly, with adulterous behaviour in 'real' life. They were loud in their opinions of the acting ability of the artistes.

Although sitcoms are filmed in front of a live audience, it is not technically necessary to keep the laughtrack in the recorded televisual text. Conventionally, it is always retained presumably as a constant reminder that this programme is to be taken lightheartedly and as an endorsement that the acting was "live".

The laughtrack was the convention of form with which viewers were most familiar. Some failed to notice the recorded studio audience in The Mistress specifically, but all recognised its general inclusion.

Although included under the heading, Convention of Form, consideration of textual address, or how the text 'speaks to' an audience, depends on all the conventions discussed above: of broadcasting; of content; and of those others incorporated under form. How the audience perceive themselves to be positioned and addressed by the text influences their response. John Ellis claimed that television programmes in general speak to their audiences

not as 'you', as people different from themselves. They speak in terms of 'we'. They set out to create a spurious community of interest and identity between themselves, the professionals, and their audience, the public at large .... [which] makes assumptions about the people it is addressing which are at variance with the real people who are watching. The result for most people is an occasional jarring note.<sup>32</sup>

For a textual address to work, the audience need not necessarily agree with, but must collude with the producers of the text in the way it treats with them. The BBC states that 'there tends to be no fixed 'target' audience for each genre'<sup>33</sup>. Viewers of The Mistress were virtually unanimous in believing that women are the target audiences for sitcoms. They accorded with Carla Lane, as a writer of sitcoms, who stated that she specifically 'enjoys writing for women'<sup>34</sup>.

Responses to the textual address of The Mistress fell into three broad categories: the target audience, the 'look' of the programme, and the social class of the series.

### Stars

Much of the appeal of Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher had to do with their stardom. Discussions showed that, as Richard Dyer suggested, audiences are fascinated with some artistes because of their perceived 'typicality or representativeness'<sup>35</sup> for

[s]tars embody social types ... [which] are, as it were, the ground on which a particular star's image is constructed.<sup>36</sup>

The concepts of 'social type' and 'star image' explain how an interest in those-who-do-the-acting as ideal representatives of everyone else fosters a pleasure of identification with the media personality. The audience

attitude towards the roles they play hinges on their knowledge of the personal lives and perceived personalities of the performers. Dyer reworked the notion of 'social type', a term developed by Klapp, stating it to be

a shared, recognisable, easily- grasped image of how people are in society (with collective approval or disapproval built into it).<sup>37</sup>

'Social types' can be used constructively, as distinct from stereotypes, which are often incorrect and destructive because they deal with people 'outside of one's cultural world'<sup>38</sup>. Avoiding the same mistake as Klapp who assumed a balanced representation of society rather than acknowledging 'the hegemony of ... [the] white, middle class, heterosexual ... male'<sup>39</sup>, and never explained how he arrived at his categories of 'social types', Dyer concluded that

one can ... **use** Klapp's typology as a description of prevalent social types, providing one conceptualises this ideologically (i.e. he is describing the type system subscribed to by the dominant groups in society) and of course allows for modifications and additions since he wrote.<sup>40</sup>

The notion of 'social types' allows for

several different, even contradictory categories, reflecting both the ambiguity of their image and the differences in audience attitudes - thus Monroe for instance is used as an example of 'love queen', and 'simpleton', while Liberace is a 'charmer', a 'dude', a 'deformed fool' and a 'prude'.<sup>41</sup>

In Stars, Dyer dealt specifically with film stars. The points he raised about 'social types' pertain also to

television celebrities. The leading role in The Mistress was played by Felicity Kendal, the major supporting role by Jane Asher. Both actresses were well known. Both personify certain identifiable 'social types' and both have 'star images' constructed on the basis of those 'social types'. Both were acknowledged as stars by the audience who discussed their stardom in terms of highlighted features of the 'social types' they represent.

Dyer suggested that via the construction of the 'star image' the ordinariness of the 'social type' takes on an extraordinary quality. She/he who is recognised as being fundamentally "like us" is thus made to appear "not like us", but to be glamorous and/or more exciting and/or particularly talented. John Ellis agreed with Dyer that in film the 'star image' 'shows the star both as an ordinary person and as an extraordinary person'<sup>42</sup>, but argued that where film viewing enhances the 'star image', television viewing has the opposite effect. Because of the familiarity and immediacy of television, television viewing diminishes the 'star image', which may mean that a television performer cannot possess a 'star image' as such. Whilst noting his caution, I disagree with Ellis. He considered the 'star image' from the perspective of the star and the star-making industry only. The responses from the women in the audience of The Mistress suggest that both film and television performers do indeed possess a 'star image'. I should argue

that the material conditions of viewing are a major factor in the construction of the 'star image' **within the audience perception**. They modify the way the star is perceived by the audience.

In Chapter Three: Conceptualising the Audience, the differences between the material conditions of viewing film and television are discussed in detail and so are only summarised here. The material conditions of viewing a film in a cinema emphasise the difference of the experience compared to the rest of the spectators' everyday life. The act of going out to a cinema, and looking at a very large screen some distance away bestows a 'specialness' on the event, which correspondingly affects the spectators' perception of the film star. The **film** 'star image' is constructed from the basis of a recognisable 'social type' sufficiently commonplace for the ordinary member of the public to relate to. The viewing experience enhances the film star's distinct individuality. The star's initially perceived fundamental similarities to the audience are overridden by their distant and larger-than-life appearance on the cinema screen, which makes them seem remote and extraordinary. In contrast, the material conditions of television viewing in the home emphasise the normality of the experience. They neither deny nor diminish the 'star images' of television performers. To do this would be to imply, first of all, that 'star image' and 'social type' are

static concepts, the former having developed in a predetermined way to become a definitive particular, from the latter precise specific. This would be to reject Dyer's suggestion that they are dynamic abstractions representing ideological changes in thought and attitude. Secondly, it refuses any active audience input into the construction of either notion. The audience are comprised of social beings each of whom occupy more than the one role of viewer. Within the television audience are the 'social types' mirrored on the screen. As social beings they contribute to the construction of those 'social types' they recognise on the screen. In their capacity as television-audience-members they actively participate in the production of the 'star image'. A more satisfactory option would be to regard the relationship between 'social type' and 'star image' as a dialectical one, where each feeds the other. The material conditions of viewing in the different visual media can then be understood to highlight different aspects of that relationship. Which aspects receive attention when, are then as much the concern of audience perception as of star/media-industry production. The **tv** 'star image' does indeed point up the ordinariness and the "like us" quality of the tv performer. However, it is an ordinariness which is at the same time, paradoxically, extraordinary; because it is a sort of super-ordinariness. Tv stars appear spectacularly to excel in familiar, even mundane, areas to which the audience can comfortably relate. The tangible reality of the

television screen intensifies the intimacy and familiarity of the star, and foregrounds the 'everydayness' of that 'social type'. The television viewing experience does not do this at the expense of the differences of the individual performer. The material proximity of the television gives the impression that the tv star is physically close: there they are, on the screen in the corner of the room. Of course, in concrete terms, they are not there. They exist solely as electronic images. This image is smaller-than-life and appears to be within the grasp (and power) of the viewer, as opposed to the distant image on the cinema screen. But it is an image nonetheless; an intangible image. Though close at hand the tv star is always just out of reach, so near yet so far.

To summarise: it is proposed that both film and tv performers can possess a 'star image', both of which are constructed from foundations of recognisable 'social types'. A 'star image' fosters a performer's specialness in the eyes of the audience. As the material conditions of viewing each medium differ, so do the perceptions of the audience and, consequently, their contribution to the construction and maintenance of the 'star image'. The **film** 'star image' rests on the audience perception of the performer principally as different, and remote but, somehow, "like us". On the other hand, the focus of the **tv** 'star image', is shifted. The audience appreciates the tv performer first and foremost as

similar to them, and as an intimate; but their intangibility bestows an elusiveness that makes them "not like us". The film star is extraordinary, yet ordinary; the tv star is ordinary, yet extraordinary<sup>43</sup>.

Despite their contrasting foci, the ways in which the 'star image' of the film and tv performer are produced are similar. As the film star image is constructed out of 'media texts that can be grouped together as promotion, publicity, films and commentaries/criticism'<sup>44</sup>, so similar materials produce the images surrounding television performers. Promotion is

the deliberate creation/manufacture of a particular image or image-context for a particular star. It includes (i) material concerned directly with the star in question - studio announcements, press hand-outs (including potted biographies), fan club publications ..., pin-ups, fashion pictures, ads in which stars endorse a given merchandise, public appearances ...; and (ii) material promoting the star in a particular film-boards, magazine ads, trailers, etc.<sup>45</sup>

To a great extent the Hollywood film stars relied on their studios and agents to construct their 'star images'. Contemporary television performers are more personally involved in the building of their image. Each actress in The Mistress had carefully promoted her own 'star image'. Felicity Kendal herself did promote her Keep Fit LP in television and magazine advertisements, her own interest in keeping fit playing also upon her audience's desire to emulate her size eight figure. This created an image of

enthusiasm for life and healthy living, aided by her audience's knowledge of her role as an organic smallholder in a former situation comedy, The Good Life [BBC]<sup>46</sup>. Jane Asher used her hobby of baking individual party cakes, her need to provide her daughter and friends with appropriate costumes for different occasions, and her problems with settling a young baby, to write books which would appeal to an audience to whom her image and image-context were presented as one of contented wife and mother in a happy family. She also endorsed a particular microwave in a tv advertisement, which included an 'in-joke' reference to her cake-making expertise. In the later '80s, both actresses added to their 'star images' by promoting themselves as 'socially committed' when they became publicly involved in 1986 with Amnesty International. In 1989 and 1990, Jane Asher fronted two television charity campaigns associated with children: for Autism and Adoption.

Also included here is the life history that each actress chooses to talk about publicly. Felicity Kendal has often talked about touring India with her theatrical family, and of the effect on the family of her sister's early death from cancer. Until the 1980s, she did not promote herself as other than "bubbly", super-slim, and girlish. Only following her announcement of her plans to marry in the mid '80s, and her subsequent marriage, did she speak out about the experience of bringing up her son as a single parent<sup>47</sup>. With

the press announcement in October 1987 of the birth of her second child, she consolidated her image of family member (daughter) with that of family member (wife and mother). There are aspects of her life that she does not include in her promotion of herself. Although regularly asked about her conversion to Judaism this is not a subject she willingly speaks about, claiming it to be too important an area of her life for media attention. Nor has she spoken publicly about her divorce in 1991, although she has alluded to associated unpleasant publicity in media interviews<sup>48</sup>.

Jane Asher has also put on record her early film and theatrical experiences, playing a deaf mute at the age of five in the film, Mandy [1952] and being the youngest Peter Pan on stage in the West End of London at 12. To publicise her books she has continually relied on the 'domestic credibility' of her 'star image':

Jane Asher equals three children, icing cakes at the kitchen table, retriever, cats, cosy family life.<sup>49</sup>

'Publicity' differs from 'promotion' because it 'does not appear to be **deliberate** image-making'<sup>50</sup>. It seems less calculated, so has a semblance of authenticity and truth, showing the 'real' person behind the star. It is also the point where the fusion of the 'star image' and the 'real' person takes place and where tensions arise between the two, for a star may be promoted as one particular type, yet wish

to be perceived as another. The comedian who yearns to play Hamlet but would never be accepted as a dramatic actor because of his track record and comic image exemplifies such conflict at work.

Film is the 'media text' which initially brings the film actor/actress to the notice of the public and signals their stardom. Television programmes are the 'media texts' which define the tv stars. Dyer noted that there are some film stars whose films are less well-known and, thus, contribute less to their 'star-image' than other aspects of their public life, citing as examples Brigitte Bardot and Zsa Zsa Gabor, whose films 'only a dedicated buff could name'<sup>51</sup>. The promotion of their sex-appeal and glamour was the more powerful factor in the construction of their 'star images'. This point applies to television, too. With Felicity Kendal, the audience were most interested in those television series with which she was associated. The knowledge they had of her private life endorsed how they perceived her from her television performances. Alternatively, they recognised Jane Asher as a star but it was not specific television performances they recalled. Her classical acting reputation, her publications, and her domestic life were more influential factors. This may have to do with the fact that viewers were watching a tv sitcom and Felicity Kendal was known to them as a tv sitcom star, associated in particular with The Good Life, which was phenomenally popular in the

1970s. Jane Asher was regarded as a stage actress. Access to her by the tv audience was to a great extent dependent on her 'promotion' of herself via her books and interviews.

The fourth factor in the construction of the **film** 'star image' applicable also to the **tv** 'star image' is 'criticism/commentaries', which

refers to ... appreciation or interpretation by critics and writers. ... Criticism and commentaries are oddly situated in the star's image. They are media products ... yet it is commonly held that they are to be placed on the side of the audience - the consumers of media texts - rather than that of the industry - the producers of media texts. Critics and commentators are often taken to express rather than to construct the response to a star, and indeed on occasion they may well be expressing a widely-held, pre-existing sentiment or view about a star. More frequently, however, they contribute to the shaping of 'public opinion' about a star (and the relationship of what the media call 'public opinion' to the opinion of the public must always remain problematic).<sup>52</sup>

That the audiences of The Mistress were interested in the "official" criticisms of and commentaries about the series became evident by their references to them. They did indeed regard the 'criticisms/commentaries' as belonging to, or at least associated with themselves. They repeatedly used them to validate their own critical opinions.

### Representations of Women

In this study the term 'images of women' is frequently used. The word 'image' in this term is not a substitute for the

'star image' notion of celebrity and charisma created around and associated with certain artistes. 'Image', as in 'images of women', should be understood as the way in which women in general are customarily represented in the visual media. 'Image' includes the way the women on the screen **look**, as in their physical appearance, plus the way they are presented **as being**; how they portray, indeed how they typify womanhood. However, 'image' is essentially bound up with the notion of 'star image'. How Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher looked, and how they appeared to be as women and as representations/lives of 'woman', were very definitely attributes that the viewers of The Mistress attached to their 'star image'.

Representations of women was a major issue with most of the women in the audience of The Mistress. Discussions centred primarily on women's physical appearance, its value in society, its place in the process of identification, and on the perceived sex-appeal of the actresses. The (frequently negative) emotions aroused in many of the women in the audience relating to the images of women on the television screen meant that feelings were often more clearly expressed than opinions. As Mollie Haskell notes,

[w]oman's image of herself is so entwined in the tangle of myths and inventions made by man that it is hard to look at it straight.<sup>53</sup>

so it was noticeable that several women in the audience of The Mistress found it difficult to communicate their

feelings about images of women. Their frustration often rendered them inarticulate and grasping for expression. Passions were noticeably inflamed when discussing the notion of female beauty where three questions were raised: why was one type of beauty considered superior to others?; who decided what was beauty and who was beautiful?; and how closely did the ideal representation of female beauty match social reality?

In sum, the factors most influential on audience response to The Mistress were: Carla Lane, the conventions of Carla Lane sitcoms and sitcoms in general, the stars/characters, and the representations of women in the series.

How the audience response was approached in theoretical terms is explained in the following chapter, where the concept of the Skilled Viewer is developed.

#### NOTES

1. Information from the BBC in a letter dated 8.9.86.
2. In the above letter the BBC provided the following information about the paintings:

Opening paintings are: Nell Gwynn by Lely; Lily Langtry from the Mansell Collection; Madam de Pompadour by Boucher; Lady Hamilton by Romney.



Wednesday, Friday: 8.00pm). EastEnders and Brookside were also broadcast in an omnibus edition in the afternoon at the weekend, and they were joined in this practice in 1991 by Coronation Street.

11. 1980s/90s sitcom based in a Boston bar, starring Ted Danson.
12. 1980s/90s sitcom centring around a US working class family, starring Roseanne Arnold.
13. 1980s/90s sitcom about three retired women friends, starring Bea Arthur.
14. Carla Lane's Bread was made in series of 13 episodes.
15. e.g. Cheers, The Golden Girls, and Roseanne.
16. c.f. Dyer, Richard: Stars [BFI, 1979] (p54) where he develops definitions originally identified in Klapp O E: Heroes, Villains and Fools [Prentice Hall, 1962]. (See also the discussion later in this chapter under the heading: Stars).
17. 1970s sitcom based around a working class family in London, starring Warren Mitchell.
18. 1980s sitcom based in a 1950s British holiday camp, starring Ruth Maddox.
19. 1980s sitcom about a cockney "wide-boy" and his brother, starring David Janson.
20. 1980s sitcom about a northern working class couple and a south-eastern middle class couple who meet on holiday in Spain, starring Keith Barron and Gwen Taylor.
21. 1980s sitcom about three retired Yorkshire men, starring Bill Owen.
22. 1980s sitcom about a British Army entertainment troupe stationed in India during the Second World War, starring Windsor Davies.
23. 1970s sitcom about two prisoners, starring Ronnie Barker and Richard Beckinsale.
24. 1960s sitcom about a father and son rag and bone business, starring Harry H Corbett and Wilfred Brambell.

25. 1960s sitcom about two north-eastern working class lads, starring Rodney Bewes and James Bolam.
26. 1970s sitcom about a young man who shares a flat with two young women, starring Richard O'Sullivan.
27. 1970s sitcom about a landlord and the people who rent his rooms, starring Leonard Rossiter.
28. 1980s sitcom about a romance between a working class man and a middle class woman, starring Paul Nicholas and Jan Francis.
29. 1970s sitcom about the Home Guard during World War II, starring Arthur Lowe.
30. 1980s sitcom about an unemployed middle class man, starring Hywel Bennett.
31. 1980s sitcom about a Torquay hotel owner, starring John Cleese.
32. Ellis, John: 'Who do they think we are?' in New Statesman, Sept. 1984.
33. Quoted in a letter from Janet Hayward, Asst. Data Retrieval, Information Section, Broadcasting Research Dept, BBC, 23.10.85.
34. Banks and Swift op. cit. (p214).
35. Dyer op. cit. (p33).
36. Ibid (p68).
37. Ibid (p53).
38. Ibid (p54).
39. Ibid (p54).
40. Ibid (p54).
41. Ibid (p54).
42. Ellis, John [1982] op. cit.
43. Although, the broadcasting of films on television, the increasing popularity of home video-hire and satellite film channels bring the film 'star' into the home as often as the tv 'star'. They blur the line between film and tv 'stars' to an even greater extent.

44. Dyer op. cit. (p68).
45. Ibid (p68).
46. 1970s sitcom about two middle class couples. One couple "drop out", the other carries on "keeping up with the Joneses", starring Felicity Kendal and Penelope Keith and Richard Briers.
47. e.g. an interview in Woman Magazine, March 1985.
48. e.g. an interview on Wogan [BBC1], April 1991.
49. Grove, Valerie: Good Housekeeping Magazine, June, 1987.
50. Dyer op. cit. (p69).
51. Ibid (p70).
52. Ibid (pp71/2).
53. Haskell, Mollie: From Reverence to Rape [Penguin, 1974] (p271).

### CHAPTER THREE

#### CONCEPTUALISING THE AUDIENCE

This chapter details how the theoretical model of the Skilled Viewer was conceptualised. It outlines the way in which theories of film spectatorship, television viewing, reader response, and audience response evolved, to clarify their relevance. The theories are evaluated and those constituents selected to contribute to the design of the Skilled Viewer are explained.

#### Film spectatorship

The key area of this study is audience response to a television series. It was important, therefore, to investigate the major theory associated with visual texts, that of film spectatorship. Research into spectatorship followed a period in film studies when the film text had been the key focus of study. When film theorists refocused on the spectator, they were influenced more by current textual analyses than by research into actual audience experience. The major work in film spectatorship is theoretical, the film spectator a hypothetical construct. This may seem at odds with a study of active audience experience in society. But the developments within film theory are relevant here. They repeatedly demonstrate the tensions between the text and the audience, those between

the needs and assumptions of the researcher, and the limitations entailed in a theoretical framework.

Research into spectatorship followed two preceding stages of film studies: 'effects' research into audiences<sup>1</sup>, and textual analyses which drew on psychoanalytic reasoning, the application of which proved questionable.

Many theorists had become dissatisfied with the underlying premise of 'effects' research: that effect presupposes cause. This proposition entailed three assumptions. Firstly, the audience are passive absorbers of any message the film makers transmit. Secondly, film makers consciously and consistently set out to change attitudes and behaviour. Thirdly, effects can be predicted. The first two assumptions proved increasingly unrealistic and it became ever more difficult to demonstrate predicted effects. Similar disquiet was experienced with the privileged method of textual analysis, which regarded the film as a dream-equivalent, Freud's work<sup>2</sup> lending intellectual support to one of the most common ways of thinking about film<sup>3</sup>. The limitations associated with studying film-as-dream were exemplified by two early pieces of work. Reasoning that film is an expression of a 'collective unconscious', Kracauer<sup>4</sup> argued that analysing film texts enabled the discovery of the desires of the society which motivates them. He concluded that German films made between 1919 and 1945 symbolised the growing frustration of the German middle classes, their

increasing distrust of the external non-German world, and the resulting overwhelming national chauvinism which led to the rise of Hitler. Wolfenstein and Leites<sup>5</sup> noted significant differences in textual elements of British, French, and American films, from which they inferred a comparable diversity of national preoccupations, as well as nationally distinct methods of dealing with underlying social/cultural problems. They concluded that the variation of emphasis in the films revealed habitual characteristics unique to their country of origin. Plausible though these conclusions appear, each of the above studies relied on traditional pre-psychoanalytic textual analysis, using psychoanalytic references solely to add credence to their findings. Nowhere in either study is the evidence laid out in psychoanalytic terms with sufficient precision or conciseness to support them<sup>6</sup>. So, their use of psychoanalysis must be regarded as suspect, which in turn sheds doubts on their findings.

Besides the lack of methodological rigour of these early film theorists, other difficulties beset the study of films as dream-equivalents. Problematic were the concept of the 'collective unconscious', the fundamental principle of psychoanalytic theory, and the role of the spectator. First of all, Jung<sup>7</sup> argued that each individual unconscious develops from and is influenced by the 'collective unconscious', a source of common myths and symbols which the individual unconscious has access to and draws on. The film analysts' use of the concept implied that every individual

unconscious is totally determined by the 'collective unconscious', so that each is merely a reflection of the other. It is likely that this understanding obtained from the second problem: that psychoanalysis is essentially a theory of the individual. Where Freud's work concerned personal dreams, film is not only a product of teams of people but also of commercial and industrial institution. Psychoanalytic theory was not developed for the analysis of such social and cultural phenomena and its use here stretched its theoretical boundaries so far that judgement on the findings could only be reserved. Thirdly, crucial to Freud's analysis of dreams was the dreamer's experience. The analyst was only able to analyse the dream from the dreamer's report of it, the psychoanalytic situation consisting of the three components: dream/dreamer/analyst. When adopting psychoanalysis to analyse the film text, film theorists left out that essential middle ingredient. Instead of film/spectator/analyst, the analytic situation consisted of film and analyst only. The endeavour to discover the audience through the text had failed; the attempt to place the spectator's experience at a distance resulted in its exclusion and, subsequently, its negation.

#### Relationships of Looking

Jacques Lacan's re-reading of Freud sought to recover the spectator experience. Via structural linguistics, he provided a way of theorising the relationship of the

spectator to the film, by emphasising how the spectator looks<sup>8</sup>. His assertion that the unconscious is structured like language, and that the use of language prompts the perception of one's own subjectivity, was useful for the analysis of the spectator's relationship to the film. It also proved relevant here in the exploration of my own relationship to the research subjects in the audience of The Mistress. Influenced by Lacan, feminist film theorists reinterpreted traditional psychoanalysis to offer ways in which female spectators could relate to the text.

With respect to looking, Lacan reworked Freud's notion of the Oedipus phase. Freud had insisted that ultimate psychic maturation was determined by the successful negotiation of the Oedipus phase, the process of identification experienced by each (male) child as he develops an awareness of himself, of his relationship to his parents, and of their relationship to each other<sup>9</sup>. Via comprehension of his own mirror-image the little boy comes to understand himself as an entity in his own right, not in physical fusion with his environment and, critically, as separate from his mother. Lacan suggested that, prior to seeing his image in the mirror, the child understands himself and his mother as being one and the same. Their joint self is motivated by mutual, inter-dependent desire, in a state of existence ruled by the unconscious, which he describes as 'The Imaginary'. In the mirror-phase, the little boy becomes fascinated with his own image whilst simultaneously becoming

aware that he differs physically from his mother. He learns to recognise himself as an independent being, to identify first with his own mirror-image and, finally, with his father whom he resembles physically. In so doing, he positions his mother as the Other, as one whom he still desires, but whom he fears because her otherness is signalled by her lack of penis, which difference he experiences as a threat of castration. The Oedipus phase is successfully negotiated with the acquisition of language, when the child enters the conscious state, 'The Symbolic', and the unconscious state of 'The Imaginary' is repressed. The acquisition and use of language permits the unconscious to impinge on the conscious, creating the possibility of subjectivity by providing an opportunity for the conscious to discern a state of being other than and differing from itself. Each time the conscious selects a word, the non-selected of the unconscious is exposed. Comprehension of subjectivity arises from the articulation of "I" which triggers the child's self-awareness faculties of perception and recognition in two ways. First of all, he realises himself as fully separate from other beings. Other is no longer the image of self, for image of self although different from self, is an integral part of individual subjectivity. Other becomes he/she who is not self. The child now learns that in order to use language successfully, to express himself as an autonomous agent and so achieve complete subjectivity, he must relinquish his previous *raison d'être*, the desire for his mother, and abide by the

rules of patriarchal society, the law of the father. With the acquisition of language, gendered subjectivity, itself founded on an awareness of sexual difference, is realised. Language articulates the difference, and so language orders subjectivity. The articulation of "I" proclaims the distinction between the self-that-is and the self that articulates the self; between the 'I' that does the speaking and the "I" that is spoken. This difference defines and continually reconstructs the unconscious. It is the intrusion of the unconscious into the conscious via this difference that permits individual subjectivity not only to exist, but to consist of several varying and often contradictory subject positions. A person can, therefore, adopt various roles depending on time, place and need, and operate unproblematically as/in each without incongruity.

Film theorists such as Christian Metz<sup>10</sup> applied Lacan's theories to the way in which a spectator experiences a film. Proposing that looking at a cinema screen is analogous to looking into a mirror, Metz suggested that watching a film is the replaying of the primary instances of perception and recognition, basically because it is a repetition of the first understanding and realisation of the difference between self and image. The spectator's gaze at the screen is also a displaced fascination with the ideal self of the mirror-image. This in turn represents the security of the pre-Oedipus phase before self-awareness is achieved, and is understood as a repressed (regressive) desire to return to

'The Imaginary'. But, the relationship between spectator and cinema is a substitute not a replica of the relationship between child and mirror. What is ever-present in the latter relationship: the **self-image**, is always absent from the former. Unlike the child, the cinema spectator is equipped with the knowledge of his own subjectivity. He does not need the validation of self that is the self-image for he understands both the object of his perception, and the process of his perception [sic]:

I know I am perceiving something imaginary ... and  
I know that is I who am perceiving it.<sup>11</sup>

The film spectator is at once involved in the cinema screen image whilst at the same time distanced from it, because of the perception and recognition which make up his own subjectivity; because of his existence in 'The Symbolic', or conscious state of being [sic]. This paradox inflicts problems of identity on to the cinema spectator. Looking at the screen becomes a search for the self-image that is absent, whilst simultaneously invoking a desire to "lose oneself" in Other(s), in those images that are actually present on the screen.

Acknowledging Lacan's arguments, film theorists deemed it a reasonable supposition to assume that film is predicated on the desire to look and on the awareness of looking; and to explain the pleasures of looking at film by relating them to those pleasures Freud originally associated with looking. Narcissism, or fascination with one's own self-image,

becomes for the spectator the fascination with looking at an image of one with whom they wish to identify. Voyeurism, the overwhelming curiosity of the child to see his parents' genitals, and to see his parents having sexual intercourse, becomes the desire to look at others, when the person who looks is unseen and the persons looked at are (or behave as though they are) unaware of being seen [sic]. Exhibitionism, the enjoyment of being looked at, is invoked by identification with the image as an image-to-be-looked-at. Fetishism displaces the threat of castration symbolised by woman by representing her simultaneously as the Other, and as a phallic substitute.

Lacan's work and Metz' application are relevant to this study because they draw attention to the self-awareness of the spectator, which when applied to a theory of the audience introduces the potential of activity. The recognition and consideration of my own subjectivity also aided the researching process, for it promoted a self-monitoring aspect to my relationships with the members of the audience.

Developing from Freudian psychoanalysis, however, Lacan retained its male-orientation. The discourse of language is patriarchal, privileging male subjectivity and the expression of phallic power. By proposing that subjectivity is socially determined by the acquisition and use of male-constructed and male-dominated language, Lacan prohibited,

or at best inhibited, the inclusion of women's use of language, women's voice, women's experience in general. His theory does not suffer women to be other than the oppressed, the frustrated, the victimised. If Lacanian theory cannot account for, or at best treats as secondary, female experience, it cannot explain how women look; a question of central importance to a thesis exploring the women in the audience. The progress made by feminist film theorists proved important in this area.

### Female Spectatorship

One of the most influential papers to address female spectatorship was the article, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'<sup>12</sup> by Laura Mulvey. She demonstrated how meaning in film is conventionally constructed by three 'looks' which promote identification with the hero: the look of the camera at what is to be filmed; the looks between the fictional characters within the narrative; and the look of the spectators at the screen. Mulvey contended that the rationale of the narrative is the gratification of male desire<sup>13</sup>. Because traditional narrative proceeds from the male point of view, so the way in which a film is visually presented, the way the looks of the film are structured, powerfully reinforces the male outlook and serves to (mis)represent it as the sole and the natural perspective, rather than as the dominant code. As pleasures of looking are invoked from the male point of view, so mainstream films

specifically address the male spectator. Where Freud explained how the little boy learns to identify like with like, gaining narcissistic pleasure from his own image and from identifying with his father, Mulvey argued that spectators gain narcissistic pleasure from identifying with the image of the male protagonist on the screen. Voyeuristic pleasure is also aroused by the ways in which the female characters are set up for filming, and by the way the looks at the female characters are structured. Narratively, the female characters are marginalised, as rewards for or on the sidelines of heroic action. Visually, they are objectified, fetishised by the use of techniques such as soft-focus lighting and close-up shots, and the general passivity of their image. As spectators, we rarely share in what/whom the female character looks at, for the spectators' look is in effect the look of the camera, and the look of the camera regularly substitutes for that of the hero. We look at what/whom the hero looks at, we see what he sees, and a common feature is that he looks at the female characters. We look at the female characters looking, but not at the object of their gaze. The female image is set up to arouse the voyeuristic pleasure of the spectator via the looks of the male character and of the cameras. Voyeuristic pleasure is further enhanced by the viewing experience, by the distance of the spectator from the film image in the cinema, and by the knowledge the spectator has of actively looking at the cinema screen whereon images are passively presented specifically for his gaze [sic].

Mulvey, and a number of other feminist film critics<sup>14</sup>, extended the argument that the 'gaze' is male to propose that mainstream film text inscribes male subjectivity. They agreed with Metz' advance on Lacan's theory that, as the unconscious is structured like language so films are expressions of the unconscious and subject to the order of language. They disagreed with his contention that knowledge of subjectivity, evidenced by the spectator's awareness of self and faculties of perception, is the pivotal point of the film spectator's pleasure. They maintained that it is the pivot on which **male** pleasure turns, concluding that for female spectators to enjoy film they are obliged to adopt a form of 'dual identification', a notion underpinned by pleasures associated with narcissism and voyeurism. Their proposition was that for any spectator to experience pleasure from a film they must become involved both with the narrative and with the image. As the protagonist of the mainstream film is the hero, the one around whom the story revolves and the foremost image in the film, the spectator needs first to identify with him. The female spectator cannot identify with the hero's image as completely as does the male spectator because she is not male. In order for her to become involved in the story, she needs to become absorbed in, to empathise and identify with, the character of the conquering hero. The female spectator's pleasure in the women characters and in images of women is dependent upon an accord with, and circumscribed by, the male definition of 'the female ideal'. She must look at images of

women as does the male voyeur. Where action defines the images of men, the opposite holds true for images of women. Mulvey contended that the conventional function of images of women in film is to suspend the action, rather than to propel the narrative forward as do images of men. The intention is to provide moments which satisfy the male spectator's desire to look, to gratify his voyeuristic pleasure. Women spectators identify with just those images of women because they arouse their narcissistic pleasure. The feat of dual identification comes into play, because of the notions of the male spectator and the female spectacle<sup>15</sup>.

A reasoned progression from Mulvey's argument is to propose that the male spectator's pleasure from the hero in mainstream film has more to do with adventures and success in the narrative than with image. The pleasure of narcissism from looking at the male image is on offer, but the way the image of the hero is presented means that there is little time for the spectator to dwell in looking. This causes the pleasure associated with what the hero looks like to be secondary to those associated with what he does. The pleasure of voyeurism is positively encouraged in the male spectator because the images of women are set up solely to-be-looked-at. He is encouraged to be the voyeur, and to indulge in fetishism by the ways in which the female images are presented for his gaze. The female spectator, too, is discouraged from seeking pleasure from looking at the hero. Her pleasure from identification with the hero as the man of

action is restricted because she is not male. The only women characters offered for her identification represent objectified passivity. As a spectator, the construction of the image encourages her to share the pleasure of the male voyeur, looking at the image from an obscure distance. As a woman, it invites her to indulge in narcissistic pleasure, for the priority of the female characters is how they appear, not what they do. Because the pleasure of voyeurism is associated with looking at images of herself and not, as it is with the male spectator at images of the opposite sex, it becomes bound up with the pleasure of narcissism. The pleasures induced by the distance of the voyeur and those induced by the intimacy of the narcissist fuse, so that images of women in mainstream film may function to promote in the female spectator those pleasures associated with exhibitionism. The female characters in film are constructed solely to-be-looked-at. They encourage an identification by female spectators. This reinforces the cultural value in social life of the complementary pleasure of themselves-being-looked-at. Pleasure of exhibitionism is also on offer to the male spectator; the hero is after all the predominant image on screen. Yet, it is not the hero's appearance, but his actions, or those worthy facets of his character, such as his courage, his daring, his sensitivity, that are displayed for identification. His character is constructed as the one in command. The male spectator is encouraged to indulge in those pleasures associated with power, with domination of the action and of narrative progression, with

control of the looks at the images and, so, of the images themselves. For the female characters, it is image that brings them notice. For the hero, image is subordinate. Implicit within Mulvey's argument is that narratively and visually the mainstream film promotes, for the male spectator, those pleasures which equate to conventional perceptions of maleness/masculinity, of voyeurism, and fetishism, at the expense of either narcissism or exhibitionism.

Teresa de Lauretis and Linda Williams expanded on Mulvey's argument. De Lauretis<sup>16</sup> suggested that, as in mythology, female activity is usually represented in film as evil personified. The evil character in the traditional narrative of mainstream film is regularly a 'monstrous' woman. This powerful character is always an obstacle to conventional narrative progression, for in psychoanalytic terms, female power represents the threat of castration. Its narrative function is to provide the hero with a risk or challenge. For the narrative to continue he must put a stop to the female activity. De Lauretis argued that, narratively, female activity serves to draw attention to its own 'unnaturalness' and, consequently, to the 'natural' desire that male control should be regained. The norm is not perceived as the dominant code of convention, but as truth. In traditional narrative terms the good hero defeats the evil woman, and his reward is the good woman. Visually, the image of active/good male banishes the image of active/bad

female, replacing it with an image of passive/good female. De Lauretis' argument further implies that any pleasure the female spectator may experience from identifying with the active woman character is doubly undermined. Firstly, female power and activity is associated with evil. Secondly, it is defeated in the narrative and its image banished from the screen.

Linda Williams took the horror film genre and discussed the presentation of opposite poles of identification, both of which are unacceptable to women spectators. They wish neither to recognise themselves as powerful but evil and monstrous, nor to identify with the other female characters represented: the passive, powerless, helpless, and inevitable victims. Williams suggested that the female spectator dissociates herself from the active/monstrous bad image. But, she is so distressed and repelled by the ultimate degradation and/or mutilation of the victim, the alternative good image, that she turns away to seek an image with which she can or would wish to identify. Because film is produced in a male-dominated world, the female image is controlled by a narrative which is on male terms. The only lasting image of woman, the only one supported by as opposed to being destroyed by the hero, and thus the only one with which the female spectator can consistently identify is the passive, fetishised object of the male gaze<sup>17</sup>.

I should argue that the psychoanalytic framework which informed these discussions influenced also the pleasure the theorised female spectator was presumed to gain from this passive image. Any pleasure the women in the audience was permitted to obtain from the objectified image was devalued because of the negative connotations of vanity conventionally associated with the pleasure of narcissistic identification. This use of psychoanalytic principles determined that women could gain no active pleasure from images of women in mainstream film. Mulvey maintained that women can never fully identify as active subjects with images of women in film, because the latter function only as 'bearers of meaning, not as makers of meaning'<sup>18</sup>. The women in the audience of mainstream film are never addressed as active subjects. She suggested that the only way to address the female spectator as an active subject was to create an alternative, or avant garde cinema, which subverts the patriarchal order by refusing to use production techniques which inevitably construct the look to represent man as subject and woman as object. These assumptions constrained the activity of the women in the audience of a mainstream visual text and so work on female spectatorship as developed so far were not appropriate for adopting for this study.

#### Female Spectatorship: Feminist Criticism

Other feminist theorists disagreed with Mulvey et al. They suggested that by turning away from the issue of how women

relate to mainstream film they were supporting those psychoanalytic conceptualisations of women against which they had initially argued. To assert that women film spectators could only be conceptualised as active subjects if a film were an unconventional production accorded exactly with those psychoanalytic principles which proclaimed men as the norm and women as outside that norm. It was to regard women not as women but as non-men, to deny the significance of women's lived experience. They rejected the over-deterministic dictates of Freudian psychoanalysis that sex/gender roles be interpreted in strict male-superior/female-inferior fashion. They were also uneasy with Lacan's concentration on the linguistic determinants of gendered subjectivity at the expense of any other social influence. They proposed that it was essential to regard women as subjects in their own right and on their own terms, as active participants in a society where film is produced, rather than as threats to, victims within, or extra(s) to that society. Rather than merely decrying the images as male constructs, it was crucial to investigate more thoroughly the relationship of women to images of women. Christine Gledhill agreed with Mulvey that 'images of women can't speak for women'<sup>19</sup>, because images of women must constantly support the masculine subject. She insisted that in order to understand women's relationships to images of women, we must understand how the position of women in society is structured differently from that of men and how women's experiences of relationships with others differ from the

ways in which men experience relationships. In her film, Variety, Bette Gordon exemplified just those differences, exploring representation and desire by centring on the way male and female experiences differ. The protagonist is a young female receptionist working in a strip club who watches men watching women.

[Variety] is concerned with watching at all levels, as the fictional narrative of the young woman's voyeurism becomes a metaphor for the way that men watch women ...<sup>20</sup>

The focus on watching pointed up traditional production techniques. It encouraged the audience to question the naturalness of the tradition, without reinforcing a concept of the female spectator as existing and belonging outside the 'natural' male culture, placing her as 'unnatural', in need of a separate, alternative film style, or as someone for whom film is totally unable to cater. Rosemary Betterton<sup>21</sup> further maintained that as reliance on Freudian psychoanalysis reduced all active pleasure of the spectator to male voyeurism, it could not account for all pleasures from looking. It could not explain those media discourses which were commonly agreed specifically to address women, such as film and television melodrama, romantic fiction, and television soap opera. To consider the female spectator as an active subject we must recognise that social constructs such as femininity and masculinity contribute to prevailing definitions of desirability. '[T]here are always differences in the way femininity is represented'<sup>22</sup> and in the meanings

attached to the images by the women in the audience. In the same vein, Jackie Stacey posed the following questions:

[D]o all women have the same relationship to images of themselves? Is there only one feminine spectator position? How do we account for diversity, contradiction or resistance within this category of feminine spectatorship?<sup>23</sup>

Traditionally, psychoanalysis was concerned either with identification with the subject, or with desire for the object. Stacey argued that it thus fails

to address the construction of desires which involve a specific interplay of both processes.<sup>24</sup>

It does not take account of Lacan's argument that individual subjectivity can incorporate different subject positions. From her analysis of two mainstream films, Desperately Seeking Susan [1985], starring Madonna, and All About Eve [1950], starring Bette Davis, Stacey shows that

the pleasures of ... feminine desire cannot be collapsed into simple identification, since difference and otherness are continuously played upon ... Both [films] ... tempt the woman spectator with the fictional fulfilment of becoming an ideal feminine other, while denying complete transformation by insisting upon differences between women.<sup>25</sup>

The arguments outlined by Gledhill, Betterton, Gordon, and Stacey had particular relevance for this current research. They went further than foregrounding the importance of investigating women on women's terms. It is not merely that women live/work/are perceived within/against a patriarchal society, but that because the received wisdom about women is directed by men, the complex diversity of woman/women is reduced to a simple linear model, which is supported by

traditional psychoanalysis. The same holds true for men, who are similarly typified. Any differences between women and men, between women, or between men, are derided, marginalised, or ignored altogether.

Although indicating why Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis cannot fully account for women's experience, feminist critics were loth to reject psychoanalysis altogether, because it had proved useful in providing insights into psychic development. They welcomed the branch of psychoanalysis advanced by Nancy Chodorow<sup>26</sup>, object relations theory, which accommodates women's experience on an equal footing to that of men. Like Lacan, Chodorow suggested that subjectivity is socially constructed. Unlike Lacan, she did not assume that an individual's psyche is solely determined by their inevitable position within a patriarchal linguistic structure. The influences of the child's social relationships must be considered to be key influences in their eventual psychic development. Chodorow argued that the pre-Oedipus phase is as important a learning experience as is the Oedipus phase. It is then that both boys and girls experience their first identification with the primary parent, which is invariably the mother. This identification influences how the child negotiates the Oedipus phase, the little girl expecting continuity and similarity, the little boy change and difference. In Freud's account, the point where the male child realises his separateness is crucial for his development as an individual. Chodorow maintained

that for little girls their 'connectedness' to others is more important, asserting that the negotiation of the Oedipus phase is more complicated for the little girl. Chodorow agreed with Lacan that the Oedipus phase begins the process of socialisation into a gendered subjectivity, but proposed that it is their relationships with others, rather than their acquisition and use of language, which encourage little boys to learn to repress their pleasure in giving love, and little girls to learn exactly the opposite. When the little boy realises that he must give up his first love-object, his mother, in order to identify with his father, he has the reward of phallic power; plus, he can still desire his mother sexually, even though the threat of castration makes him fear this desire. Phallic power enables him to hold her in contempt as one who is inferior. The little girl must transfer her desire from her first love-object, her mother, to her father, but without the reward of phallic power. She learns to deride her mother whom she holds responsible for her lack of penis. Because she is female, she must also identify with the mother whom she deems to be inferior. In consequence, she must accept her own sexual inferiority, for the only way she can attain the phallus is for her to have a baby by her father. Where the boys need to be encouraged to be individual and self-sufficient, Chodorow proposed that it is their involvement with loving and being loved which is crucial to girls' psychic development. Although it is neither predetermined nor essential, in general

[w]omen in our society are primarily defined as wives and mothers, thus in particularistic relation to someone else, whereas men are defined primarily in universalistic occupational terms.<sup>27</sup>

Women are usually defined by their relationships to others, men by what they do.

Chodorow's theories equipped critics with the means to escape the linear perspective of traditional psychoanalysis, to point up the polysemic nature of the visual text, and to show that women were positioned differently from men in relation to the text. Her approach became the privileged perspective for theorists who concentrated on those media texts which appeared to address female viewers, the 'women's genres'. Byars contended that it could explain them in a way that Freud and Lacan could not. Object relations theory enabled the needs of female protagonists neither to appear aberrant within the narrative, nor to promote discomfort for the viewer. Rather than

describ[ing] the masculine (or the feminine) as normative .. [Chodorow] sees an asymmetrically organized sex-gender system that privileges the male and the masculine but that also includes rewards for females that encourage, even necessitate, their participation in a system that represses them.<sup>28</sup>

Chodorow's theories permitted the investigation of the 'strong tradition of resistance'<sup>29</sup> in both film and television, which traditional psychoanalysis was unable to acknowledge because it was trapped by its determinist premise of the male/masculine point of view as the norm. Applying Chodorow to American television soap opera,

Modleski<sup>30</sup> suggested that the focus on caring and nurturing, and on the constant replaying of emotional experience, specifically constitutes an address to the women in the audience. Adding that their formal organisation intensifies their appeal, reflecting the refracted, multi-dimensional lives of female viewers, Modleski concluded that women's pleasures are often attuned to 'the service of patriarchy'<sup>31</sup>. Charlotte Brunson's study of the British soap opera, Crossroads<sup>32</sup> took Gledhill's point about women's position in society to propose that the soap opera narrative inscribes not only a female viewer, but a female viewer who is socially and ideologically constructed to identify with the personal and the domestic, with its 'feminine' preoccupations. In psychoanalytic terms, its formal organisation is conceptualised as an unconscious process. Its lack of closure, interweaving plots, and episodic presentation point up the feminine, in sharp contrast to the straightforward, linear narrative resulting in closure of the mainstream film, which foregrounds the masculine.

Other feminist critics working in the area of television fiction took up these points. Lorraine Gamman questioned the assumption that audiences identify in gender terms as opposed to 'the other categories that contribute to the construction of our identities'<sup>33</sup>. Her article, 'Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze'<sup>34</sup> examined the long-running prime-time American tv cop series, Cagney and Lacey [BBC], featuring two New York policewomen in the

central roles, to illustrate how viewpoint establishes convention. Although this was a mainstream television programme, the dominant gaze was the female gaze. This was possible because the dominant gaze proceeds from those in control of the action, which in this case was Cagney and Lacey; the audience looked at what/whom Cagney and Lacey looked. The dominant female gaze was comfortable and acceptable because the conventions of police series dictate an emphasis on activity. The female protagonists legitimated a narrative and visual focus on specifically female activity and shared female experience, as opposed to the usual mainstream production with its narrow concentration on female sexuality. Female sexuality was not denied in Cagney and Lacey, far from it, but nor was it prioritised or isolated at the expense of any/everything else pertinent to women. Byars supported these findings, when she compared Cagney and Lacey with two American sitcoms, Kate and Allie [Channel 4]<sup>35</sup> and The Golden Girls, both of which featured women as protagonists, and all of which were

concerned with the maintenance and development of relationships, not with the acquisition or proving of power.<sup>36</sup>

She pointed to the way the looks between the characters reinforce the look of the whole programme, set up specifically to draw attention to the closeness of their relationship, rather than to position either as object. Avis Lewallen's article on the book and tv "blockbuster", Lace [ITV] acknowledged that perspective determines how the image

is understood even when women are objectified. Even in Lace where much is made of the characters' physical appearance

[t]his is not to say that the women in the text are not objectified, but this objectification is for the female reader[/viewer].<sup>37</sup>

For viewers of programmes such as these, female sexuality becomes one dimension of female identity(ies), instead of its sole definition.

[It] forces upon the viewer the realisation that femininity is always intertwined with its own reflection: that there is no simple reality simply awaiting its 'accurate' representation.<sup>38</sup>

Budge maintained that images of women are coded differently for male and female appreciation. Discussing the American prime-time tv soap opera, Dynasty [BBC], she suggested that simplistically (psychoanalytically) the female protagonists could be taken as polar opposites of femininity: Alexis as dark, volatile, powerful, a businesswoman; Krystle as blonde, calm, submissive, a wife. Alexis would be the evil monstrous threat, Krystle, the good reward. For de Lauretis and Williams, this would mean that the female viewer would turn from the evil representation of Alexis and seek to identify with Krystle. Budge contended that neither the representations nor the audience reactions to them should be explained in such simple terms. Rather than polar opposites, Alexis and Krystle 'offer conflicting definitions of femininity'<sup>39</sup>, each one being extremely complex. The address of the programme never positioned the audience so that they could respond in so straightforward a fashion that they

identified solely with one or the other. Budge asserted that identification and desire are inextricably bound up with other pleasures. Pleasures from looking generate and relate to pleasures associated with, for instance, the place television programmes play in our lives.

[W]hat about recognising that the fantasy engendered by *Dynasty* is not so much about fulfilling our desires as about being allowed to make fun of them? Or the pleasure of enjoying it as melodrama, or satire (or both!)? Or the pleasure of discussing the form and limits of serial soap as part of the pleasure of consumption?<sup>40</sup>

Budge reasoned against critics such as de Lauretis and Williams to assert that far from an image like that of Alexis repelling the female viewer by her association with evil, it arouses her sense of the erotic. It is not the ultimate downfall of the evil woman that the female spectator remembers but her sexuality, her power, her exciting presence. As Stacey implied, it is a pleasure gained 'from an interplay of both processes', of identification and of desire.

#### Film Spectatorship and Television Viewing

Where initially critics were concerned exclusively with film and film spectatorship, the discussion has gradually moved on to include television and the television audience. Before proceeding further, it is appropriate to discuss whether film and television viewing can be studied in the same way. The most straightforward way into this argument is first to

note the differences between film and television viewing, by comparing the material conditions of watching a film in a cinema with those of watching television at home. [Fig.2]:

Fig.2

<u>Film</u>	<u>Television</u>
[a] Making a conscious decision to go out;	[a] Staying in. Not necessarily a conscious decision not to go out as this is often merely a continuation of what is usual;
[b] The action of going out to the cinema;	[b] Switching the television on. Possibly unnecessary as the norm may be for the television to be "on", so as in [a] it would merely be the continuation of what is usual;
[c] Choosing which film to go and see;	[c] Choosing which programme to watch. Again, a conscious choice may not be involved. It is often more a question of watching whatever is on, without actually deciding on a particular programme. Limitations on choice may depend also on who has control of the "on/off" switch;
[d] Paying to see the film;	[d] No direct monetary payment is involved with viewing individual programmes. Of course, there may be bargaining between family members concerning which programme will be watched when, or British viewers may remind themselves of the tv licence fee. By and large, payment is not associated with permission to view individual tv programmes;
[e] Sitting in the same seat for the duration of the film, the spectator not always being able to choose their own seat;	[e] The tv viewer can move around and go in and out of the room in which they are viewing at will, and can choose their own viewing position;
[f] The spectator is isolated although seated amongst many, the rest of the audience being largely unknown;	[f] The viewer can choose their viewing company, who are usually intimates;
[g] The auditorium is darkened, drawing the focus towards the screen away from the immediate environment; the spectator has no control over the lighting. This is not to say that a film spectator will always focus solely on the screen. Although the auditorium is darkened, it is rarely so dark that the spectator is not aware of others, and attention may indeed wander from the film to others watching the film. Because of the material conditions of the viewing experience in the cinema, it is less likely that a film spectator's concentration will be disturbed;	[g] The television viewer can adjust the lighting of the room at will and, because of competing sources of attention in the immediate environment, the focus of the viewer is not necessarily always on the screen;

[h] The screen is vast and at a considerable distance from the spectator; images are larger than life;

[i] The film sound, contrast, and colour, are fixed by the film makers and the cinematograph projectionist.

[h] The screen is smaller than the viewer, and within easy reach; images are smaller than life;

[i] The viewer can adjust the tv sound, contrast, and colour, at will.

The lists above are not "in order". It is likely that [c] may precede [b] (in either list), depending on priorities. (Please see Thomas Elsaesser's article, 'Narrative Cinema and Audience-Oriented Aesthetics'<sup>41</sup> for a discussion of the material conditions of viewing a film in a cinema; and David Morley's book, Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure<sup>42</sup> for a discussion of the control of tv viewing and access to television within families).

To a large degree, the attention of both the film spectators and the television audience is controlled by the material conditions of viewing. The film spectator has little control over the immediate viewing environment, the viewing conditions of cinema operating to hold and "trap" the gaze on the screen. The television viewer is more in control of the viewing environment, but is more easily distracted by his/her surroundings, and their attention is more likely to wander from the screen. Ellis<sup>43</sup> summed up these differences by stating that 'tv facilitates the glance, rather than the omnipotent gaze of the cinema'<sup>44</sup>. As television must seek constantly to remind viewers of its presence in order to retain their attention, he proposed that this end is achieved by the way in which sound serves the medium. Where sound in film functions chiefly to enhance the image, in

television it has a more fundamentally important purpose, which is that of attention-grabber. Taking up the issue of sound, Gamman and Marshment argued that in theorising the female spectator critics have invariably considered solely relationships of looking, little or no account had been taken of how soundtrack may influence viewers' attention and/or appreciation. This 'negates the important semantic implication of women's voices on the screen'<sup>45</sup>. More significantly for the audience is the importance of sound in the anchoring of meaning. This is particularly relevant with regards to television where, like Ellis, they argued that understanding an image is very much dependent on its accompanying soundtrack. Both diegetic and extra-diegetic sound contribute to the audience's understanding of an image. Just as captions and/or text may explain a photograph or still picture, so the soundtrack contextualises the moving image. It is often the soundtrack which reclaims the glance, luring it back to the television, and retaining attention by setting the image in context, so contributing to its meaning. In terms of this thesis, which concerns a tv comedy series, the relationship of sound to image is a particularly salient feature. Where humour is concerned, sound may reinforce a certain type of comic expression, either by confirming or by contradicting the visual image, subsequently invoking a particular type of response.

An interesting point arising here concerns the oft-expressed belief that radio stimulates the imagination because

listeners create their own pictures in their heads, whereas television restricts the imagination because it provides the pictures. This common suggestion seems also to be made with sole consideration for the visual dimension of television. Yet, in television and in film, sound and vision work together to create meaning and pleasure. Are moving pictures ever shown without some sort of sound accompaniment? Even "silent movies" had musical accompaniment, with textual subtitles substituting for characters' voices. If pictures restrict the imagination that sound alone can stimulate, then surely, to some degree at least, a reciprocal process must go on? Sound must restrict the appreciation of the visual image, for sound moderates and qualifies the meaning of that image by channelling it in a particular direction.

How the immediate viewing environment impinges upon the consciousness of the television viewer foregrounds the importance of considering those familial and social structures which affect the viewing experience. Morley<sup>46</sup> discussed the influences that family position has on access to and enjoyment of television programmes. His interviews with family members living in the same household illustrated how the two fundamental aspects of 'preference' and 'availability' affected viewing behaviour. It was not merely those programmes which people favoured that determined which they watch, but those which they favoured and found most conveniently suited their daily habits. Time of transmission and length of programme played as distinct a part in viewing

practices as type of programme. 'Access' was also significant. The person in control of the on/off switch invariably determined what the whole family watched. This was generally the dominant male in the household, the choice of the eldest son usually ruling the rest of the family in the father's absence. When a remote control device was in use, control of programme choice was regularly demonstrated by its possession. This went as far as the person with the remote control device taking it with them when they left the room, rather than relinquish its power to another. Except in families where the mother played a dominant role, mothers' choice came typically last in order of priority. As access to tv programmes was regularly determined by the male members of the family, Morley concluded that television viewing is a family experience, that the family is structured by gender, and that the act of viewing television reflects that structure by determining programme taste and modes of viewing.

One of the reasons Morley's research was undertaken was a direct result of omissions he perceived in his earlier study, The Nationwide Audience<sup>47</sup>, notably that here he had failed to take adequate account of the women in the audience. He later acknowledged in his Afterword in Family Television<sup>48</sup>, and Ann Gray<sup>49</sup> noted, that a consequence of his inclusion of the female viewer was an over-compensation, resulting in an over-emphasis on gender 'as the strongest structuring element in viewing practice'<sup>50</sup>. In much the same

way as Mulvey asserted that the gender of the film spectator directs the pleasure gained from film, for Morley, gender was the ultimate determinant of how people view television and the pleasure they gain from viewing. Gray suggested that gender must be regarded as a major factor influencing viewing practice, but it 'should not exclude other factors which shape people's lives'<sup>51</sup>.

#### Film and Television Theory: Evaluation and Application

The debate most relevant for this study centred on those aspects of film spectatorship and television viewing which were appropriate for an investigation of the women in the audience of a mainstream television programme.

'Effects' research was ruled out. Its theoretical unreliability and the fact that this project was not interested in conceptualising the audience as a passive mass readily persuaded by the film text/film makers made it irrelevant. Neither was dream-analysis employed. Firstly, it was specifically adapted for the study of film, the nature of television detracting from the absorption factor of the dream experience. Secondly, how would a series be accounted for in dream-analysis? A notion of serial dreams which repeat certain components and introduce others would have had to be advanced. Thirdly, as film-as-dream analysis excludes the actual audience experience it went against the principles of this whole project.

The shift in film theory from textual analysis to theorising the spectator incorporated elements which could aid the construction of a conceptual model in this research. Freudian psychoanalysis which dismissed women as non-men would not be pertinent to a study of women's experience. Lacan's reading of Freud, which prioritises the significance of the mirror-phase was relevant for the study of the visual media. His focus on a norm of maleness made it possible for feminist critics to argue against it, and open up the investigation of difference and change. His notion that the unconscious is structured like language and that acquisition and use of language produces gendered subjectivity, although restrictive in practice, proved helpful because it is a reminder to all researchers of their own as well as their subjects' subjectivity.

The two most useful developments were, firstly, the feminist critics' insistence on the examination of difference and their explorations into the social construction of femininity and masculinity. Secondly, the adoption of Chodorow's reworking of Freud, which offered explanations for women's psychic development. The arguments of these critics and the application of Chodorow's theories reduced the "certainty" of psychoanalysis, simultaneously unlocking the ambiguity of the text and allowing for women and, by implication, men, to be multi-dimensional personalities with complex needs and interests. They prompted those researchers into 'women's genres' on television to theorise the woman in

the audience as social beings. This progress established that differences between viewers are as admissible for study as similarities, and acknowledged forces other than psychological constraints as influential factors on audience response. With respect to this study, they facilitated the discovery of, and a means of positing reasons for, a number of audience opinions and feelings about The Mistress.

Mulvey's arguments that relationships of looking bind the spectator to the film are influential, the dictates of Freudian psychoanalysis could not be followed. It could not be automatically assumed here that the sole explanation for the pleasures female viewers gain from looking at images of women are those relating to narcissism or exhibitionism. This would be to define their pleasure solely in terms of an overwhelming interest in their own physical appearance. Nor was the female viewer conceptualised as being obliged to opt for a dual identification in order to appreciate mainstream visual production. Here, women's desire was to be explored **on women's terms**, not in the traditional way of male ideas about women's desire. Male ideas were not overlooked, for in historical and cultural terms they must be accepted as powerful influences on how women think of themselves. This is where, in this research, the earlier conclusions of film theory were held somewhat in reserve. The arguments concerning relationships of looking are based on the captured 'gaze' associated with film rather than television. So, the differences between watching film and television had

to be taken into account, the screen image of the latter activating a less absorbing effect. As Stacey and Budge suggested, inquiry would be made into how images of women may not be merely fantasies of desire-fulfilment. They may stimulate other pleasures in the women in the audience.

The significance of sound in television, and how it may influence appreciation of image was also considered to be a crucial element in the understanding of comedy.

Despite the differences in the viewing experiences of film and television outlined above, as long as the two are kept in mind as distinctly dissimilar in many ways, they are inevitably linked by the fundamental fact that both are visual media. The work done on film spectatorship, particularly that of the feminist critics, must be useful for the study of television viewing. The two are integrally related by the viewing public who, in this study, frequently referred back and forth between film and television, using their experiences of one to support their opinions of the other. Nevertheless, references to studies in film spectatorship must be constantly modified to account for the differences of television viewing experience.

There has been some disagreement concerning the use of the term 'spectatorship'. Its use in film studies more or less entails notions of distance, of the 'omnipotent gaze', of 'controlling by looking', and to imply that these notions

cannot apply to the television viewer in the cosy, familiar, viewing conditions of home. In order to avoid confusion and prevent misunderstanding, the terms 'spectatorship' and 'spectator' are used here in relation to watching film in particular. The terms 'viewing' and 'viewer' apply to watching television in particular. The general term encompassing both spectator and viewer is 'audience'.

Most researchers into film spectatorship and television viewing so far cited regarded the audience as a theoretical construct. Although their developments enabled a theorising of the viewer as social construct, only a very few, such as Hobson and Morley had tested this on an audience<sup>52</sup>. In this study, attempts were made to take as full an account as possible of how viewers' social and familial roles determined their use of the text and their enjoyment of it. Here, the theorising of the television viewer was always moderated by what the active television viewer said. The need to incorporate the active audience into the conceptual model was paramount. With this in mind, theories of the reader and of the audience were investigated. Two areas of study proved of particular value. The first was reader response theory, a school of research situated within the larger discipline of reader oriented criticism. The second was the sociologically influenced Uses and Gratifications theory, in particular its applications in the field of television audience research.

**Reader Oriented Criticism**

Reader oriented criticism developed within the field of literary criticism, several traditions of which had become established over time. Successively, psychological, sociological and linguistic influences all prevailed, each foregrounding one of the three aspects of the literary communication: the author; the literary text; or the reader<sup>53</sup>. As this study focuses on the audience, so reader oriented criticism was pertinent. It championed the reader as prior. It argued that meaning begins with the reader, and that interpretation proceeds from response.

Reader oriented criticism developed simultaneously in Europe<sup>54</sup> and in the USA particularly from the 1960s onwards, academic interest in the reader being a reaction to the traditional literary critics' obsession with the text and its production, and with their own critical abilities. Critics from each continent shared the philosophical standpoint that it is the reader's own experience which directs where, what, and how meaning will be inferred from, or alternatively, attached to (elements of) the text. They established the principle that legitimacy be accorded to readers' subjective engagements with a text. This validation of the subjective experience questioned the traditional literary critics' assertion of objectivity, which reader oriented critics reasoned to be fallacious. To isolate a text from its readers for criticism does not gain

objectivity. It changes the subjectivity, from that of the reader to that of the critic. Traditionally, literary critics had read texts in place of or on behalf of the readers. Reader oriented critics proposed they should be read **as one with** the reader. Hans Robert Jauss<sup>55</sup>, for instance, referring to the tradition of Marxist literary criticism, argued that its focus on the social and economic context of textual production only effects a partial analysis. Firstly, it excludes the contribution of the reader. Secondly, solely to examine the era of production assumes that meaning in a text is a stable unity. Jauss insisted that meaning changes over time, and that criticism of a text should consider as priority its history of reception as well as its moment of production. He regarded the literary text as a mediator of history between the 'horizon of expectations' of its original readers who lived during its time of production, and the 'horizon of expectations' of those readers reading decades, perhaps centuries, later. The understanding of the text becomes a 'function of history'<sup>56</sup>. Jauss's rejection of the text caused a problem of its own. He never explained how critics at one point in history would be able to understand meanings derived from texts read by readers at another period, without the acceptance of at least a degree of stability of meaning. This problem was inherent within the whole notion of reader-as-meaning-maker.

All reader oriented critics operated with the same fundamental conviction that it is the reader who makes meaning and, correspondingly, shared the methodological aim that it is the reading experience that should be foregrounded. Critics differed both in the construction and application of their theories. These disagreements chiefly concern aspects of the reading experience which, though distinct, are interrelated: the conceptualisation of the reader; and the balance between text and reader. These issues cannot be separated without causing confusion or duplication. How the reader is conceptualised may determine the weight of attention paid to the text. The two points are covered in the same discussion below.

#### The Reader and the Text/Reader Relationship

In his article, 'Epistemological Assumptions in the Study of Response'<sup>57</sup>, David Bleich reviewed how the reader, and the relationship of the reader to the text, had been conceptualised historically by reader oriented critics. Louise Rosenblatt in 1938 first introduced the principle that account should be taken of the subjective reading experience. She proposed that, although the author created the text, the author's intention or experience was insignificant in terms of meaning. Foremost in importance was the 'literary transaction', where the reader 'resynthesis[ed] ... the meanings denoted in the text'<sup>58</sup>, the 'literary transaction' placing equal standing on both the

literary work and on the reader, Rosenblatt implying that each acted on the other. By arguing that it is the reader who defines the text, she was also the first to imply that a text could not **mean** without a reader:

[N]o matter when a text is studied it has to be conceived of as a function of some reader's mind, and that, inversely, it cannot be described 'without reference to a reader' (Rosenblatt, 1938, revised 1969, p29).<sup>59</sup>

Bleich notes an anomaly in Rosenblatt's thinking: her advocacy of subjective criticism was flawed by her claim that the text is equally as active as is the reader. The subjective principle implies that meaning is constructed by the reader's action on the text, not by interaction between text and reader. This problem of balance has beset reader oriented criticism ever since.

Who is the reader? is a question which has proved equally problematical. Critics agree that the reader is a constituent of the human subject. In his article, 'Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers'<sup>60</sup>, Walker Gibson stated that it has long been accepted that the author-as-a-human-being who lived at a particular point in history differs from the author, or 'speaker', who is accessible only via the language of the text. The same dual concept applies to the reader, who consists of the 'real reader' and the 'mock reader'. The one is the human being, the unique individual existing in 'the real world of everyday experience', the other the addressee, the one to whom the author via the text

'speaks', who exists solely in 'the mock world of the literary experience'<sup>61</sup>. The 'real reader' dons the mantle of the 'mock reader' for the duration of the reading experience, plus also, for the **sake** of the reading experience. If the 'real reader' were to bring the full complexity of their lived experience to bear on the text they would reject it as simplistic and irrelevant. The 'mock reader' accepts the role of addressee in the simplified world of literary fiction. The 'mock reader' is 'an artefact, controlled, simplified, abstracted out of the chaos of day-to-day sensation'<sup>62</sup>. Rejecting a text, or resisting absorption into its fictional world illustrated a 'disparity between ourself as mock reader and ourself as a real person acting in a real world'<sup>63</sup>.

Other theorists extended the concept of reader<sup>64</sup>, the most developed theorisations advanced being: Michael Rifaterre's 'Superreader'; Stanley Fish's 'Informed Reader'; and Wolfgang Iser's 'Implied Reader'.

#### Rifaterre's 'Superreader'

Rifaterre's concept of 'Superreader' concerned groups of knowledgeable readers brought together at key moments in a text by their common reaction to stylistic factors. They bring to their reading a 'stylistic competence', or an awareness of style that is specifically literary, not derived from any extra-textual source. They thus recognise

'stylistic fact'. The most important point here was that 'a stylistic fact could only be discerned by a perceiving subject'<sup>65</sup>. In other words, meaning was dependent on the reader. A unit of text does not automatically mean; it is only made to mean by the reader's experience of it. Arguing that 'stylistic fact' is dependent on the reader usefully undermines the assumption of the text-based critics that meaning can only be revealed by textual analysis. However, the concept of 'Superreader' is not without its problems, the two most outstanding concerning the notion of 'competence', and the balance between text and reader. Although not assuming equal competence in all readers, the 'Superreader' fails to explain how it does account for variations of competence. Granting that it is the reader who finds the meaning, Rifaterre assumed that meaning was there to find, that it was encoded in the text. The text was the provider of meaning, the reader merely the unveiler<sup>66</sup>.

#### Fish's 'Informed Reader'

Fish attempted to account for differences in competence.

First of all, he explained that

[t]he informed reader is someone who (1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up; (2) is in full possession of 'the semantic knowledge that a mature ... listener brings to his task of comprehension,' including the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, and so on; and (3) has literary competence. That is, he is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalised the properties of literary discourses, including

everything from the most local of devices (figures of speech, and so on) to whole genres ... this informed reader [is] neither an abstraction nor an actual living reader, but a hybrid - a real reader (me) who does everything within his power to make himself informed.[sic]<sup>67</sup>

The literary competence of the 'Informed Reader' was dependent on a linguistic competence that includes the ability to use language diversely for a variety of purposes, plus the ability to understand its differentiated use. To account for variations in reader-competence, Fish introduced the notion of 'interpretive communities' which explains how one reader may read different texts in a variety of ways, plus why a number of readers may read a single text in the same way. He defined 'interpretive communities' as such because they share a repertoire of 'interpretive strategies'.

[B]oth the stability of interpretation among readers and the variety of interpretation in the career of a single reader would seem to argue for the existence of something independent of and prior to interpretive acts, something which produces them. I will answer this challenge by asserting that both the stability and the variety are functions of interpretive strategies rather than of texts.<sup>68</sup>

Unlike Rifaterre, for Fish it is not the text that shapes a reader's understanding but the 'interpretive strategies' the reader adopts. 'Interpretive strategies' are the result of a reader's social and cultural experience, '[d]ifferent readers agree[ing] on the same interpretive strategies because they belong to interpretive communities'<sup>69</sup>. A single reader is able to operate separate and distinct

'interpretive strategies' depending on with which of several memberships of 'interpretive communities' they choose to identify. For example, Fish regarded the literary critic as no higher in status than those readers whom traditional literary describe as naïve (note the inclusion in his quotation: 'a real reader (me) ...'). All readers are 'Informed Readers', and all readings are granted an equal validity. The only difference between the literary critic and the naïve reader is not one of value, that the former is more knowledgeable than, or more able to appreciate quality than the latter. It is one of convention of 'interpretive strategy'. He, as a literary critic would infer meaning from a text because of those conventions of literary criticism which are the 'interpretive strategies' he had learnt from his membership of the 'interpretive community' of literary critics. Other readers are guided by their own conventions, by the shared 'interpretive strategies' learnt from their respective 'interpretive communities'.

To recapitulate: The 'Informed Reader' is a self-aware subject, who constantly monitors his/her response to the text. The 'Informed Reader' may belong to more than one 'interpretive community'. Hence, a single reader may employ more than one 'interpretive strategy' not only to read different texts, but to read one text at different times, the way in which they read depending upon the experiences they associate with any previous readings and upon the membership of whichever 'interpretive community' they call

at the time of reading. The notion of 'interpretive strategies' explains how several readers may read a single text in the same way. It explains how a single reader may read one text on separate occasions in quite contradictory ways which can be justified within the terms of the 'interpretive community' they use as a frame of reference.

Fish's methodology was to examine the reading experience, defined as his own and others' responses to a text, in a step-by-step procedure. He illustrated how, when criticising poetry, he himself habitually noticed line-endings; they held **meaning** for him, and so he attributed meaning to them. Other readers would observe other factors from which they make meaning and to which they attach value.

There are two aspects of Fish's 'Informed Reader' which proved particularly useful for this research: the notion of differentiated reader-competence, and the significance of the act of reading. Inherent within the notion of the self-observant subject which is the 'Informed Reader' is that the reader approaches the literary text as if in a quest for knowledge. By observing and monitoring their own responses, readers learn, become better informed and more competent to deal first with the current text and, subsequently, with successive texts. The 'Informed Reader' is conceptualised as positive, active, self-aware, and possessing competence which can improve via exposure to texts. The notion of 'interpretive communities' sharing 'interpretive strategies'

which is the essence of the 'Informed Reader', could be usefully adapted to the experiences of the television viewer. Secondly, Fish's assumption that the 'Informed Reader' actively and knowingly engages with the text reinforces the significance of the subjective reading experience in the construction of meaning. This placing of the reader at the centre of research matched the key concerns of a project which regarded the viewing experiences of a television programme as similarly valuable.

Despite its relevance, three major criticisms of the 'Informed Reader' had to be addressed. These concerned theoretical inadequacy, text/reader imbalance, and insufficiently comprehensive methodology.

Wolfgang Iser stated that Fish's dependence on the linguistic competence of the 'Informed Reader' effected a model of reader response too heavily influenced by ideas developed in Chomsky's transformational grammar of linguistic theory<sup>70</sup>. Transformational grammar asserts that language has a dual structure: a 'deep structure' and a 'surface structure'. The former is their 'linguistic competence'. This is the underlying system of meaning which accounts for a speaker's knowledge of and understanding of language, demonstrated by the way they use language to mean in their 'linguistic performance'. The latter, the 'surface structure', is the immediately apparent pattern of language, the way in which sentences are strung together

grammatically. The 'deep structure' can transform the 'surface structure' of language by pointing up ambiguities of meaning which only the competent speaker can fathom. One of Chomsky's examples was: 'Flying planes can be dangerous', which can be understood as "to fly planes can be dangerous" or "planes that are flying can be dangerous". Iser argued that this transformational model works when applied to the way the text affects the reader, but not the other way round. Self-observation generates an/some awareness of experience transformed by the text's effect on the reader, but the model cannot explain this transformation. Changes in a speaker's 'linguistic competence' can be explained by applying the detailed and systematic analysis of transformational grammar to the 'linguistic performance' or speaking experience. There is no analogous set of rules which governs the reading experience. Transformational grammar can show that changes in 'reading competence', in the understanding of a text, do take place. Its framework provides no procedure by which the minutiae of the 'reading performance' can be itemised to shed light on the reasons for change. Iser contended that Fish's construct of the 'Informed Reader' failed because of its place in a linguistically based theoretical framework, which could not be adapted sufficiently adequately to account for the experience of the reader.

Secondly, the championing of the supremacy of the reader, influenced also by the inadequacy of the linguistic theory

underpinning his approach, obliged Fish to focus on the reader at the expense of the interaction between text and reader. This stance effected a one-sided bias towards the reading experience so much in favour of the reader that his attitude to the text approximated to that of existentialism. Not that Fish regarded a text as having no material existence without a reader; rather, he denied the text any existence **other than** its materiality. For Fish the reader is always the creator of meaning, never the discoverer. He rejected the view that meaning in a text can exist without a reader, repudiating any possibility of a notion of text-as-meaning. Fish's whole theory is built on change and denial. He dismissed the notion of stability of textual meaning by refusing the text possession of any constant identifiable meaning at all. He advanced the notion of 'interpretive communities' but denied that 'interpretive communities' are fixed. He asserted that the 'interpretive strategies' of the 'interpretive communities' are ever in flux. The only constancy he acknowledged was that there will always be a variety of 'interpretive communities' which will always share and use a number of 'interpretive strategies'. He explained himself thus:

The only stability ... inheres in the fact ... that interpretive strategies are always being deployed, and this means that communication is a much more chancy affair than we are accustomed to think it. For if there are no fixed texts, but only interpretive strategies making them, and if interpretive strategies are not natural, but learned (and are therefore unavailable to a finite description), what is it that utterers (speakers, authors, critics, me, you) do? In the old model utterers are in the business of handing over

ready-made or prefabricated meanings. These meanings are said to be encoded, and the code is assumed to be in the world independently of the individuals who are obliged to attach themselves to it (if they do not they run the danger of being declared deviant). In my model, however, meanings are not extracted but made and made not by encoded forms but by interpretive strategies that call forms into being.<sup>71</sup>

By denying any stability of meaning, Fish pushed the theoretical orientation towards the reader to its radical limit. Such an approach raised questions of value as regards literature. What is the point of studying reader response to literature when the literary text is of questionable social and cultural significance in the first place?

Bleich argued that Fish's methods could not achieve a comprehensive account of the reading experience as they only took into consideration the instant, or immediate, response. Bleich contended that the reading experience consists of two linked stages of response: 'response' and 'interpretation', which he explained with reference to Fish's own, self-confessed critical habits.

I identify Fish's symbolisation of his texts his perceptual stress on line-endings - as his response, and I identify his resymbolisation of his response - the judgement that ambiguous line-endings make a specific demand on him the reader - as his interpretation.<sup>72</sup>

Fish's methodology was not sufficiently comprehensive to be fully explanatory of the reading experience because he did not take into consideration those experiences which

structured his 'interpretation' and, consequently, affected/effected his 'response'.

Before continuing this discussion by evaluating Fish's theory, Iser's reaction to the 'Informed Reader', his concept of the 'Implied Reader', is introduced. This is to make the investigation of theories of the reader as comprehensive as possible. It is also because Iser's criticisms of Fish were significant in the evaluation of the 'Informed Reader'.

#### Iser's 'Implied Reader'

Attempting to compensate for the failings he perceived in Rifaterre's 'Superreader' and in Fish's 'Informed Reader', Iser defines the 'Implied Reader' as

a textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him: this concept prestructures the role to be assumed by each recipient, and this holds true even when texts deliberately appear to ignore their possible recipient or actively exclude him. Thus, the concept of the implied reader designates a network of response-inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text.[sic]<sup>73</sup>

Like Rifaterre, Iser assumed that there are messages encoded in a text whose meanings await activation by a decoding reader. Where Rifaterre stated that readers are made aware of meaning at significant points by the text, Iser suggested that the text offers several different meanings for the reader to take up. The 'Implied Reader' results from a tension between the 'textual structure' and 'the structured

act of reading', the reader being allowed a degree of power in the construction of meaning. Nor did Iser deny that readers may refuse the role offered by the text. There will always be a tension between the 'Implied Reader' and the 'real reader', the human subject of which the 'Implied Reader' is but one dimension. Generally, however,

the role prescribed by the text will be stronger, but the reader's own disposition will never disappear totally; it will tend instead to form the background to a frame of reference for the act of grasping and comprehending.<sup>74</sup>

The 'Implied Reader' has more control over the text than the 'Superreader', and to a certain extent, Iser accorded with Fish that a reader's personal history and experience must influence the reception of a literary work. Iser's theory, too, suffered from the problems of explanatory inadequacy, and imbalance between text and reader. First of all, just as Jauss failed to explain how, say, 20th century readers/critics could fully comprehend the minds of 18th century readers of the same text without assuming some stability of meaning, so Iser took for granted a degree of fixedness in the text without accounting for it. Secondly, Iser's predicament concerning the balance between the text and the reader came about because of his determination not to fall into what he perceived as Fish's radical excesses. He rejected Fish's three key theoretical principles: his justification of the focus on the subjective experience; his explanation of his own subjective experience of criticism; and his fundamental notion of 'interpretive communities'

deploying 'interpretive strategies'. Fish had used his own reading experience to explain how the subjective experience can be justified, Iser contended that this was mere statement and no justification at all. It justified neither examination of the subjective experience *per se*, nor promotion of the subjective experience over other aspects of the literary communication, particularly when Fish's concentration on the subjective reading experience narrowed to the point of being a total negation of the text. Iser claimed that Fish was misguided to interpret his attribution of meaning in poetry in a particular way because of his use of a conventional 'interpretive strategy'. It was not merely his 'interpretive strategy' that had been influenced by his habitual literary critical practice. His whole methodological approach had been as much determined by convention as were the methods of the text-based critics he argued against. Iser maintained that Fish's customary endorsement of the supremacy of the reader induced him instinctively to place a higher value on any constituent of reading over any other consideration(s) arising which may relate either to the author or to the text. Fish's orientation towards the reader prejudiced his inquiry as much as did that of the traditional literary critics towards the text. To assert that an 'interpretive strategy' is employed because of membership of a particular 'interpretive community' must be accounted more tautological statement than comprehensive explanation.

According to Iser, Fish's theory of reader response was an unnecessarily extreme approach to literary criticism. The text-based critics ignored the reality of the reader and the significance of the reading experience. Fish switched his attention exclusively on to the reader, rejecting any relevance of what it was they were reading. Iser argued that neither the text nor the reader should be investigated at the expense of the other as both are crucial elements in the reading experience. His reaction was to re-insert the text into the debate, to downgrade the power of the subjective experience, and to insist on an interaction between text and reader. He feared that Fish's claims for the non-stability of meaning in a text and the supremacy of the reader in the formulation of meaning were a decline into subjective chaos. This caused him to go one step further and advance the argument that the text is the more powerful participant in the text/reader interaction. Ultimately, Iser's response was to deny, or at least severely to restrict, the reader's capacity for creativity, imagination, and variation. His concept of the 'Implied Reader' relied on the revealing of underlying textual structure; he reverted to advocating textual determinacy.<sup>75</sup>

Iser's theory was not as pertinent to the construction of the Skilled Viewer as was Fish's 'Informed Reader'. Fish. However, it was imperative to confront the problems raised.

An Evaluation of the 'Informed Reader'

Problematic with Fish's theory were the negation of the text, stability of meaning, the nature of response, questions of textual quality, the linguistic basis of the theory, alleged tautology, and whose reading experience should be the object of study?

I should argue the following. First of all, Iser's emphasis on the significance of the text encouraged a re-examination of Fish's refusal of the text. Iser's chief criticism was that Fish advocated consideration of the reader at the total expense of the text. This could be resolved with a counter argument. Fish denied that a text can exist as meaning without a reader. A text without a reader is reduced to a collection of words which have no automatic or 'given' sense. The same logic attests that a reader cannot exist as meaning-maker without a text, for without a text the raw material for making meaning is gone. In asserting that it is the reader who defines the text, Fish failed to acknowledge that without a text the dimension of human subject that constitutes the reader is not. Fish advocated the subjective act of reading to be the most important component in the order of study. It would be impossible to conduct a comprehensive study of the reading experience without substantial reference to what is read, as well as to who is doing the reading and how the reading is experienced. Not only is the text an integral ingredient of the reading

experience, it is the text which defines the human subject as reader. The same applies to a viewer, who is defined as viewer by their viewing of a television set which is switched on. Hence, if Fish's negation of the text-as-meaning is understood as a negation of the text-as-exclusive-and-fixed-meaning, this problem ceases to exist. The power of the text is defused. The reader can refuse meanings on offer in the text, and bring to the text meanings developed from personal experience. The text can never be rejected out of hand because of its significance in the reading experience, but it need not be regarded as the carrier of an objective truth, and can always be considered as secondary to the reader.

Secondly, how should stability of meaning be accounted for? How is it that different readers understand a single text in similar ways if there is no stable meaning inherent within it? Rifaterre and Iser could not answer this question without finally resorting to some degree of textual determinacy. Fish's contention that it is not the text but the existence and operation of successive 'interpretive strategies' in varying 'interpretive communities' not only explains varieties of reader-competence, but also provides an explanation for continuity and, thus, a degree of stability of meaning. His is not an argument that rests easily with those secure in the search for a central, objective truth that transcends time, nor with those who believe that far from being the result of an 'interpretive

strategy', meaning is in fact natural and self-evident. To reject Fish's argument is to fail to come to terms with historical progression. His ideas fill those gaps left by Jauss and Iser who implied that meanings run through societies (of readers) rather than through texts alone. They accord also with those television researchers who argue for the constitution of the viewer as social subject. Fish's insistence that the only constancy is that of change did not merely overturn the authority of any centrality of meaning, it was also an enabling device for further stages of criticism. It provided the means by which critics may investigate those differing 'horizons of expectations' of distant readers, instead of merely noting that variations are likely to exist.

Thirdly, Bleich's criticism that response proceeds in two related stages of 'response' and 'interpretation' could also be taken into account. The apparently spontaneous reactions to a text should be not be taken as 'natural', but explored to expose the underlying reasons for them. In this study, where possible the instant 'response' of the television audience during and immediately following the viewing of The Mistress would be compared with the 'interpretation', the internalised assessments of their own responses expressed by viewers in later discussion.

Fourthly, by continually rejecting the power of the text, Fish's work raised two questions relating to quality.

Firstly, it queried the worth of any literary criticism by rejecting so many of the tenets held dear by the traditional critics. If nothing else this was a useful point as it may encourage literary critics to examine their own preconceptions, aspirations, theories, and practices. Secondly, it pointed up notions of quality **within** a text. What is so special about the literary text that it should be studied over and above other texts? Could the methods of studying literature be applied to the study of other texts? These were important issues to address when, as in this project, the text is not only non-literary but would be commonly considered as 'popular' rather than 'high' art. By denying special value to specific texts, Fish opened the field to texts which may not have had the label "quality" applied to them. He removed the initial value-judgement entailed in a question such as, say, in television research: Why study a tv sitcom?, and enabled its substitution with the converse: Why not? Rather than frustrating study, therefore, Fish's denial of textual value was useful for this research. His lack of prejudice afforded an opportunity to adapt his theory to television research without having to justify the choice of text.

The fifth point was Iser contention that its linguistic basis ultimately proved Fish's theory inadequate because it could not account for change in the reader. This problem has been overcome in one study which applied Fish's theory. In her investigation into readers of romantic fiction, Radway<sup>76</sup>

used Fish's theory of reader response as a base. By adopting an ethnographical account and incorporating the strand of psychoanalysis advanced by Nancy Chodorow, she was able to detail and to interpret the changes in the readers.

Radway's study went some way towards resolving the sixth problem associated with Fish's theory, that of tautology. She went to great pains to explore why the 'interpretive community' of romance readers opted for certain 'interpretive strategies', positing reasons for the use of specific strategies adopted, and examining how they are practised by her subjects. Her methods may not fully discount a claim of tautology, but by operating within a relatively 'open' theoretical framework she was prevented from being automatically trapped into inevitable tautology by her own conceptual approach.

The last criticism was that Fish's examination of his own reading experience invoked claims of obsessive subjectivity. Radway's work removed this problem for her object of study was her romance readers' reading experience rather than her own. However, Fish's original methods were positively useful in this study because his insistence on self-monitoring was an aid to my intention always to foreground my own reactions and opinions, particularly when they differed from those of the women in the audience of The Mistress.

With care, it was possible to overcome or to avoid most of the problems that beset Fish's theory without prejudicially compromising the current research. By taking particular note of Radway's careful and precise methodology situated within a structured theoretical framework many of the problems associated with Fish's original model were removed. Radway's work influenced this current research in two ways. Firstly, her interest in the female reader corresponded with my own interest in the female viewer. Secondly, her focus on the romantic novel was equally appropriate as it is regarded in much the same light as tv sitcom: as "popular" as opposed to "quality" fiction.

#### Radway's Application of Reader Response Theory

Radway's aimed to establish why romance novels were so popular with women readers in the USA against a background of traditional literary criticism which had invariably concluded that romantic fiction was unworthy of the label "literature". Radway believed that popularity did not automatically preclude quality, and that the issue of popularity raises questions which are of equal value to, but not necessarily the same as, the issue of quality. Her research was directly inspired by two factors: romantic fiction's focus on women's preoccupations, and that women were the most avid readers of the genre. My decision to use a case study by Carla Lane corresponded exactly.

Radway's approach was influenced by two developing fields of research. The first were the feminist explorations into literary and visual 'women's genres'<sup>77</sup>. The second was reader response theory, especially Fish's insistence that the location of the reader as a member of an 'interpretive community' was the site where investigation should begin. Radway's research subjects were an 'interpretive community' of women romance readers living in mid-west America. She argued against those critics who assume that readers are controlled by the message expressed by the text. She asserted that meaning is not textually 'given' but is constructed via the reading experience. Her readers' reading experience was the site of her research. She maintained that to understand what the romance text means to its women readers it was necessary to investigate

the complex social event of reading where a woman actively attributes sense to lexical signs in a silent process carried on in the context of her ordinary life.<sup>78</sup>

Radway was concerned that the reading experience must be socially and culturally located in the context of women's lives in general. Only thus was it possible to find out **why** women read romances, and why they read them **when** they do. Her ideas correspond to Morley's suggestion that viewers' choice of television programmes are as much concerned with availability and access as they are with preference. She deliberately espoused methods of examining the immediate reading experience and the socio-cultural influences on it, in order to

escap[e] myopic concentration on textual meaning alone, [so that] it should be possible to see that a whole set of reasons, including quite practical ones having to do with availability and length, often prompt women to turn to romantic fiction.<sup>79</sup>

In Reading the Romance, Radway reviewed the romantic novel publishing industry and her readers' descriptions of romances, and also examined the traditional language and narrative strategies of romantic fiction. Her main interest was an exploration of the act of reading the romance itself, and the explanations the women readers gave of it. Her investigation into the reading experience proceeded in four stages: questionnaire; discussion; analysis; interpretation. She began by administering a detailed questionnaire to establish the socio-cultural and familial influences brought to bear on her readers, reviewing and restructuring the questionnaire several times in order to take account of factors which her readers deemed significant, but which she as the researcher had not initially considered. She followed this with in-depth discussions on the romantic novel. Next, she carried out a structural analysis of a number of romances. Unlike most former structural analyses Radway's was directed by her reader-discussions. By examining the topics foregrounded by the readers she identified what the romance reader seeks from the romance novel and constructed the 'ideal romance' and the 'failed romance' from the reader's point of view. Her interpretation of the reader response was guided by Chodorow. Throughout her work, Radway used an ethnographic account. In this way, she was able to

report her findings systematically and objectively, whilst at the same time ensuring that it was a description which coincided with and would be recognised by her readers.

Radway not only applied Fish's model, she extended and developed it, and to some extent at least, filled those gaps identified by Fish's critics. Her emphasis on the primacy of reader perception prevented her from falling into the trap identified by Fish as a fault of traditional literary critics and encountered also by researchers into the television audience: that of valuing her own reading of the text above that of the reader. Her ethnographic account bestowed a critical distance on the necessarily more intimate methods of data collection. She structured her research approach within an anthropological framework, by applying an 'etic/emic' approach traditionally used by anthropologists when researching into alien cultures. This approach can be best explained as follows [Fig.3]:

Fig.3

'Etic' Approach

- [a] Studies behaviour from a position outside the system;
- [b] Examines many cultures and compares them;
- [c] The structure is created by the analyst;
- [d] The criteria for judging it are considered as absolute or universal.

'Emic' Approach

- [a] Studies behaviour from within the system;
- [b] Examines only one culture;
- [c] The structure is discovered by the analyst;
- [d] The criteria for judging it are relative to its internal characteristics.

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She began with an 'imposed etic', working within their own structure and looking at the culture or, where Radway was concerned, at the activity of reading the romance, as an outsider. As she learnt more about how her subjects felt about this activity, she gradually abandoned her 'imposed etic', for a 'derived emic', adapting her questions to elicit the data her readers regarded as priority. This anthropological perspective

assume[d] that cultural rituals also carry covert or tacit meanings in addition to those that are explicitly recognised, [and] I have attempted to infer from the women's conscious statements and observable activities other, unacknowledged significances and functions that make romance reading into a highly desirable and useful action in the context of these women's lives.<sup>81</sup>

Radway focused on her readers' subjective experience in the context of the rest of their lives. Her own reading experience was secondary. In so doing, she avoided that decline into personal obsession and theoretical chaos feared by Iser. At the same time her methods forbade her to impose any 'preferred reading' on to her audience. By consistently referring from readers to text and back to readers, she constructed the common interpretation that was the audience reading. Her analysis was systematically directed by her readers' ideas, thereby being as little contaminated as possible by her own opinions. However, her repeated reference to the text, whilst resolving the above problems, carried a disadvantage of its own. Radway's methods should have permitted the investigation of interpretation in the two stages suggested by Bleich, analysing the spontaneous

reaction, or 'response', and the underlying justification for it, the 'interpretation'. Her use of Chodorow should have provided means to examine in-depth the 'interpretive strategies' of her readers. I should argue the benefits of using Chodorow to probe her readers' response were limited because she looked no further than the text for a rationality of that response. Her analysis of her readers' response ceased with her construction of the 'ideal romance' and 'failed romance'. She stopped short of any comprehensive in-depth analysis of the response itself. The concentration on the audience of The Mistress in this study, where the access to the text is accessed via their response would avoid this problem.

Radway's research was not blindly copied here. Neither the text of The Mistress nor the television industry which produced it was analysed. Nor was it relevant to construct an 'ideal situation comedy' from the audience response, audience preference for how a sitcom should be being but one example of response. The same applies to the programme makers. It was the audience perception of their intention rather than the purpose the producers declare/perceive themselves to have which held significance here. Questionnaires were not used, but Radway's mode of data gathering by in-depth discussions, and her application of reader response theory and speculative use of Chodorow to interpret her data was followed.

Radway used qualitative methodology to elicit her data from her group of readers. Her open approach facilitated in-depth discussions from which she was able to draw conclusions of some substance. Significantly, she found that the romance industry and the romance reader each approach the romance novel with a different set of expectations. By using a similar approach to Radway and regarding the audience in this study as Skilled Viewers knowledgeable about sitcom, and allowing them to direct the discussion so that what was important to them framed the analysis, valuable conclusions could be made here.

Radway's subjects were drawn from an 'interpretive community' of romance readers from the same region of the USA. Only one of the nine groups here could be characterised as an 'interpretive community' *per se*. The M A Film Studies Students alone conformed to the label, as it was an interest in the 'reading' of particular (film) texts which distinguished them as a group. Mutual concerns other than textual appreciation defined the other groups: friendship, family relationships, joint use of facilities, and so on. It would have been misleading to describe either the individual research subjects solely as representatives, or the groups as examples of 'interpretive communities', because they were not selected on those grounds. The subject selection here observed a fundamental principle of the study which was to illustrate how women's social contextualisation bears on their cultural experience (see Chapter Four: Methodology for

a full discussion of Subject Selection). It was imperative that their existence as social beings be the descriptive cornerstone of the women viewers' subject position here. That they were interpreters of texts was the pre-eminent constituent of that subject position because it was via their responses to The Mistress that the life experiences influence their attitudes and behaviour were revealed. It was incumbent on this research to relate the interpretations of the text as much as possible in terms of the women's common social experience as members of socially constituted groups which had led them to hold shared 'interpretive repertoires', rather than to prioritise membership of 'interpretive communities'. A tendency of the latter approach is to narrow the focus. The social context of that community is not necessarily excluded, but it behoves a conscious effort to include it as critical, when it should be automatically central. The term 'interpretive repertoires' is useful because it does socially locate the audience whilst retaining a focus on interpretation. The audience are defined as

formal groups or communities, but contextually defined agents who employ such repertoires to make preliminary sense.<sup>82</sup>

Radway formulated the 'ideal romance' and the 'failed romance' from her readers' priorities, but does not state how she classified her readers' responses, how she itemised her data and, therefore, how she was able to conclude what was most significant to them. Although much of the work here

followed Radway, it is important to explain how the viewers' response to The Mistress was categorised, by clarifying the use of Uses and Gratifications Theory.

### Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications theory was pertinent to this study for three reasons. Firstly, because it incorporated a notion of the active, socially constituted audience. Secondly, because it provided a systematic structure within which the audience data could be analysed. Thirdly, it was a developing, grounded theory which permitted the exploration of a previously unexplored level of explanation.

Uses and Gratifications developed to counteract the direct 'effects' audience research tradition which privileged the text over the audience. It denied the notion of the audience as passive "sponge", and argued for its opposite. It placed control in the hands of a motivated, discriminating audience. Uses and Gratifications established an avenue of research to investigate 'the choice, reception and manner of response of the media audience'<sup>83</sup>.

The fundamental principle of the theory is that mass media use gratifies audience needs. Taking the television audience, Uses and Gratifications contends that the viewer makes a conscious and purposeful selection of specific programmes to satisfy particular identifiable needs. These

are needs which the audience prefer to be gratified by television viewing rather than by other available means such as, say, conversation, or reading. In conceptual terms, there were two logical steps from this notion of the active, self-aware audience. The first was to take for granted that the audience is capable of interpreting their own use of the medium. The second was that the researcher would attribute credit to the audience point of view when analysing and evaluating their responses. The basic assumptions of the model can be summarised thus:

- [a] The audience is conceptualised as active.

Consequently,

- [b] There is no assumption of any direct effect on audience beliefs, attitudes, or behaviour;
- [c] The mass media do not provide the only means of satisfaction, but are obliged to compete with other sources of need gratification;
- [d] It is assumed that the audience is sufficiently self-aware adequately to report back on why they use the mass media as they do;
- [e] The audience perspective is accorded priority, the analyst suspending judgement until thorough investigation of audience responses has been completed.<sup>84</sup>

Methodologically, researchers gather data via survey and/or interviews and allocate it into descriptive clusters. This technique provides a way of systematically charting audience responses and has been used to analyse audience response to various media: to radio programmes<sup>85</sup>; to newspapers<sup>86</sup>; and, to

television programmes. With respect to the latter, research has been done into audience response to 'factual' genres such as news and current affairs programmes<sup>87</sup>, to the light entertainment quiz programmes<sup>88</sup>, and into response to fictional genres such as the one-off play<sup>89</sup> and soap opera<sup>90</sup>. A study has also been done into how different members of the family use television in general<sup>91</sup>.

Uses and Gratifications is a grounded theory. Researchers continue to revise and update the approach. In his book, Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction<sup>92</sup>, McQuail refined the descriptions used in the field into four major categories: Personal Identity; Integration and Social Interaction; Entertainment; and Information. All audience responses to every type of television programme could be summarised under one of the above four categories, each of which was subdivided to allow the response to be described as precisely as possible. In a study such as this which focuses on the audience of light fiction the first three categories at least were overwhelmingly pertinent.

The principles which provided the rationale for the Uses and Gratifications approach, the concept of the active audience and the notion of corresponding needs and gratifications, have also been cited as sources of weakness in the model. These problems had to be addressed. They concerned, firstly, the psychological approach to the audience which constrained the definition of needs to be solely in psychological terms.

Secondly, there was no definitive model of needs and gratifications. Thirdly, there were potential problems of polysemy. Fourthly, the basic functionalism of the model, that audience need causes media use which effects audience gratification, was unworkable. Fifthly, there has been imprecise use of the term: 'active'. I should add a sixth criticism concerning terminological imprecision.

Criticisms that Uses and Gratifications was psychologically oriented arose because of its assertion of the active, motivated audience member. This proposition was developed to counter the deterministic perspective of 'effects' research. The refuting of outside control resulted in a theorisation of the audience which entailed a tendency to deny any influences either of history or of social association. Critics such as Phillip Elliott<sup>93</sup> contended that this theoretical predisposition could be moderated by returning to the methodological approach of early Uses and Gratifications research. This located the subject in their historical and socio-cultural context, focusing on 'specific types of content and relatively specific types of audiences'<sup>94</sup>. Researchers placed their audiences in their social and historical context for the purposes of interpretation and evaluation of their responses. Any theoretical deficiency was, to a great extent, compensated for methodologically. Later researchers failed so to contextualise their audiences. Simultaneous with and arguably encouraged by the abstraction of subject from

context, researchers tended to ignore any possible situational causes of need, and to concentrate on seeking more apparently universal, psychological needs to be gratified. This succeeded in reinforcing the idea of the audience as an aggregate of individuals consisting solely of mental states, as opposed to socio-cultural beings living at a specific time in history. Elliott demonstrated that with methodological care this need not be so, and that the Uses and Gratifications audience could indeed be socially constituted.

As there was no standard model of needs to which they could refer, so it is left to each researcher individually to identify the needs to be satisfied. They were rarely successful in achieving this aim. Elliott suggested they failed for two reasons. Principally, it was because of the tendency solely to identify needs of a psychological nature. Additionally, poor methodological approaches succeeded only in evincing unsatisfactory generality, because researchers

themselves construct reality ... (for) [g]iven the level of generality at which the questions are aimed, it is not surprising to find that people will subscribe to them.<sup>95</sup>

Not only may an interviewer's questions construct what is included in the 'reality', they can also be responsible for determining what is absent from it. If generalised needs are sought, specific needs are likely to be excluded. Again, this was a theoretical problem, which could be resolved by careful method. If researchers constantly focus on the

audience point of view it would be this perspective that determined the framing of the questions, the researcher's own preconceptions of audience need being of limited influence. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch offered a solution to the problem of need identification by suggesting that as there was no established model of needs, it may be easier for researchers to 'try to work backwards ... from gratifications to needs'<sup>96</sup>. This suggestion appears useful if only because it removes the significance of 'needs' *per se* as **the** priority issue. It does also create an alternative dilemma, for doesn't it in effect merely transfer the problem from one aspect of the research to another? Just as there is no standard model of needs, equally there is no standard model of gratifications. Identification, now of gratifications instead of needs, was still the responsibility of each researcher. Account must continue to be taken of the role of the researcher. However audiences respond they must, to some degree at least, be influenced by the questions and/or comments and/or presence of the researcher. Noting these difficulties, Elliott warned that working from what the audience say may not be as uncomplicated as it seems. He questioned the reliability of an audience's reported behaviour, stating that 'it is naïve to suppose that people can give answers in a social vacuum'<sup>97</sup>. People will always be influenced by their historical and socio-cultural experiences. Morley supported Elliott in his book, Family Television, where he debated potential reasons for variations in response by

investigating ways in which family members use television. He discussed how his chosen methodological approach may have framed and/or constrained the audience response just because his subjects were interviewed as family members, who 'doubtless ... felt a certain need to play out accepted roles'<sup>98</sup>. He justified his methods in that 'I was precisely interested in how they functioned as families, within (and against) their roles'<sup>99</sup>. These critics demonstrated that in order to redress a potential weakness of theoretical concept it is essential to adopt painstakingly systematic and precise methodology and a correspondingly clear and detailed explanation of that methodology. It is vital for the integrity of the research to explain not only **how** responses are sought but **why** they are sought.

In his study into the audience of the news and current affairs programme, Nationwide, Morley explained that an inevitable consequence of Uses and Gratifications '[r]ightly ... stress[ing] the role of the audience in the construction of meaning'<sup>100</sup> is that it leaves itself open to the criticism of polysemy. There is no agreed, standard, textual meaning. An audience member is free to interpret a text differently from the way the producer(s) intended, from other members of the same audience, and from those of other audiences. Morley argued that all texts possess a 'preferred reading', which is that of its producer(s).

The moment of 'encoding' exerts from the production end, an 'over-determining' effect

(though not a fully determined closure) on the succeeding moments in the communicative chain.<sup>101</sup>

The 'preferred reading' of all televisual texts expresses the dominant ideological viewpoint of the society in which it is produced. This is understood by all viewers from that society who may agree with, reject, or challenge it depending on the socio-cultural influences to which they are exposed in/by their position in society. The recognition of the 'preferred reading' dramatically reduced the likelihood of polysemy. In a later article<sup>102</sup>, although still maintaining that 'factual' texts possess a 'preferred reading' Morley questioned whether this notion can/should be ascribed to fiction. Initially, he seemed to be suggesting that because the notion of a 'preferred reading' in a fictional text is questionable, the problem of polysemy must be compounded. If there is no dominant reading assumed, then there is no means by which to compare deviations of interpretation. Morley was not questioning the notion of the ideologically determined 'preferred reading' *per se*. He queried its significance in the analysis of audience response to **fiction**. He questioned: Do **all** texts possess a 'preferred reading'? If a 'preferred reading' does exist, does it restrict the nature of audience response? Can a conceptual approach to the study of audience response which focuses on the interpretation of **meaning** fully account for gratifications from fictional texts? He concluded that the notion of the 'preferred reading' was not sufficiently comprehensive to account for variations in responses to assorted texts. The analytical focus should

instead be shifted on to the diverse forms of 'cultural competence' which audiences bring to bear on distinct forms of television, and which are

unevenly distributed within our society ... facts which are determined outside the sphere of television by family socialisation and by education.<sup>103</sup>

Social roles influence not only how a viewer understands a text, but also the type of and degree of enjoyment they gain from it. McQuail developed the same issue further, advising that researchers into audience response should clearly vary their approach depending on the reason for using the mass media in the first place, by

observ[ing] a closer distinction between 'cognitive' and 'cultural' types of content and media use ... [for gratifications of the former] ... deal in rational uses, especially of information for chosen ends ... [while those of the latter are] ... subject to shaping by highly variable and unpredictable patterns of taste and content preferences, leading to emotional and/or aesthetic satisfactions.<sup>104</sup>

Uses and Gratifications is a functionalist model: mass media use is conceived of as a function which will solve the problem of audience need. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch outlined the way the model was conceptualised.

(1) The social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) mass media or other sources which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratification and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.<sup>105</sup>

Critics argued that its reliance on functionalism was a principal weakness. Elliott explained why two of its central

issues are fundamentally flawed. First of all, a cause-effect model of audience need-use/gratification is theoretically unsound, because its functionalism encouraged explanations which were self-referential. Take the following example: a viewer watches the news on television in order to discover the latest figure for inflation. Uses and Gratifications as developed so far would explain this by stating that **need** (wanting to know the latest on inflation) led to **use** (watching the news) which **gratified** the need (by providing the information required). This statement does not explain the reasons behind the need, describing as it does the manifest behaviour of the viewer. Both problem and solution rest on what the viewer does. The viewer's action is used as evidence to explain itself; it is a "this is what people do because this is what people do" answer. Uses and Gratifications provided no **means** to examine the underlying reasons. Its framework could not explain **why** the viewer chooses to watch television instead of referring to other sources, such as, say, the newspaper, the radio, or talking to other people. It was theoretically inadequate because it operated only on the level of behaviour. Without the means to probe beyond the manifest it could not be tested for there could be no exception to its rule. Secondly, Elliott maintained that its functionalism obliged a mechanistic, linear model, which could not account sufficiently comprehensively for all mass media use. He posed the following questions. Do **all** needs arise from social or psychological circumstances? Can all needs be gratified by

media use, or indeed by other means? Should gratifications always be seen as the gratification of needs alone?

Responding to Elliott's criticisms, McQuail argued that, although the functionalism of the model may not have been theoretically precise in the past, experience showed that it had been apt in practice.

Much work done over a period of forty years seems to show that audience members can and do describe their media experiences in functional (i.e. problem-solving and need-meeting terms).<sup>106</sup>

He maintained that to a certain extent Elliott's first criticism was consequent on problems associated with the second. The over-emphasis on need precluded much investigation into other reasons for media use. It was precisely this over-emphasis that constrained researchers to rely almost entirely on the functionalist attributes of the model, which resulted in the whole approach becoming **over-functional**ist. The shift in Uses and Gratifications research since Elliott's criticisms in 1974 had reduced that emphasis on needs which had 'proved theoretically and methodologically slippery and, to a certain extent, redundant'<sup>107</sup>. A straightforward needs-gratifications theory was too restrictive. Referring back to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch's original proposition, McQuail proposed that recent researchers had realised that explaining effects by making a distinction between mass media use and need gratification was especially difficult. Unlocking the theory

from its self-imposed restrictions, he revised the statement of function as follows:

(1) Personal social circumstances and psychological dispositions together influence both (2) general habits of media use and also (3) beliefs and expectations about the benefits offered by the media, which shape (4) specific acts of media choice and consumption, followed by (5) assessment of the value of the experience (with consequence for further media use) and, possibly (6) application of benefits acquired in other areas of experience.<sup>108</sup>

adding that although this statement may still be

an implied logical sequence which looks conscious and rational, expressed in this way, ... it is much less mechanistic or dependent on functionalist assumptions than the earlier version.<sup>109</sup>

By underlining the de-emphasis on needs, and reconceptualising its functionalist procedure, McQuail reinstated Uses and Gratifications as a viable theory that is developing still. He cited two studies by Rayburn and Palmgreen which demonstrate how research has begun to examine more fully other 'reasons' for mass media use, such as the notion of expectation. The first proposed a distinction between 'gratifications-sought' and 'gratifications-obtained', thereby clarifying the difference between expected and actual gratifications<sup>110</sup>. The second established an expectancy-value approach, whereby expectation of mass media content was conceptualised as providing either positive or negative valuation for the audience members themselves<sup>111</sup>. As Ang demonstrated that viewers' pleasures in Dallas<sup>112</sup> were to a great extent governed by certain expectations, in particular of an

emotional involvement with the characters and of a situational realism which was both recognisable and plausible, so the women in the audience of The Mistress proved to be similarly concerned. Expectation of what was to come in each episode and in the series as a whole was a key issue to be addressed here.

The term 'active', as in the 'active audience', is assumed to mean a motivated, conscious, and purposeful act. The audience member is motivated to make a conscious selection of, say, a particular tv programme for the purpose of gaining a specific gratification. Activity, therefore, does not stop at selection. It also concerns attention to, and involvement in the programme. It is the involvement following the initial selection which results in the gratification. This does not mean that the 'gratification-sought' by the act of selection will automatically correspond to the 'gratification-obtained' by the involvement. Critics raised the following questions: How truly active are the audience? Are there different levels of audience activity? Are there different types of audience activity? For example, when discussing the problematic concept of needs, Elliott stated that if the act of selection is caused by need, can it truly be regarded as active, when it is in fact a reaction to a mental state? This raised the question that, if the audience of 'effects' research is controlled by the text, could it not be said that the Uses and Gratifications audience is controlled by

their own psychology? McQuail's restating of the Uses and Gratifications proposition reduced the significance of Elliott's criticism by reducing the significance of needs. It also provided opportunities to take account of the socio-cultural and historical contexts of the audience. Nevertheless, Elliott's comments obliged an examination of what 'activity' means to Uses and Gratifications researchers.

It is inappropriate to embark on a debate concerning how far 'action' and 'reaction' may be considered a "chicken and egg" situation; how free, therefore, is freedom of choice? From ancient times to present day, philosophers have pondered the relationship(s) between language, thought, action. To attempt to engage with this argument here would merely prove pathetic and inadequate digression. Suffice it to say that a functionalist theory resolves the philosophical problem of the relationship between language, thought, and behaviour by conceptualising all action as a reaction to something else. It is important to distinguish between the meanings and use of the terms 'action', 'reaction', and 'activity'. To state that an action is also a reaction is by no means to imply that it cannot be active, that it could not be described as motivated, conscious, and purposeful behaviour. In contrast to the 'effects' research idea of the message as omnipotent persuader, the Uses and Gratifications audience are capable of making up their own minds about the text. This could be described as reactions

to the text. They are also active responses which may be influenced by preconceived beliefs and/or attitudes formed as a result of socio-cultural experiences. The notion of the active audience in Uses and Gratification research does incorporate selection of, attention to, and involvement in mass media output. The audience chooses which text, decides how much they will attend to it, and how deeply involved in it they become. 'Action' and 'reaction' are components of 'activity' which is conceptualised as a continuing process enduring for as long as the audience chooses to engage with the mass media text. 'Activity' describes the total engagement between audience and text. 'Action' and 'reaction' relate particular behavioural operations of the audience. 'Activity' is the concept which encompasses the 'actions'/'reactions' which do the selecting, attending, and involving associated with engagement with the mass media. Methodologically, it is the 'actions'/'reactions' of an audience that are investigated, itemised and examined, and underlying reasons for them posited, in order to shed more light on the overall concept of 'activity'.

There are two points associated with terminological imprecision. Firstly, many writers use the term 'the media' in place of the term 'the mass media'. To a certain extent this point can be disregarded, as it has become accepted practice to use the former term in academic circles and in society in general. The second point concerns the habitual use of 'the media' as a substitute for 'television' or 'the

medium of television'. Most recent Uses and Gratifications work has been carried out in the area of television viewing. It is particularly irritating to read criticisms which constantly point out theoretical and methodological imprecision, when the critics themselves are barely precise in their own terminology. Uses and Gratifications has been used to investigate more areas of the mass media than have most other audience research models, yet there is a tendency to generalise findings to the whole mass media, when they may have been, say, newspaper-specific, or radio-specific.

#### Application of the Model

The theoretical approach of Uses and Gratifications would have been pertinent for this research into the audience of The Mistress because of its key assumption: the active audience. The theoretical revision undertaken in the 1970s and '80s has developed the model's potential so that it becomes particularly relevant. The work done into the nature of audience activity, and the exploration of gratifications has proved especially useful. A guiding principle of this study was that the television audience are Skilled Viewers, capable of adequately reporting back the reasons they view and the gratifications they experience from viewing. Critics have shown that reasons for, and the gratifications gained from viewing are, to a great extent, determined by the active process of the whole viewing experience. When Morley investigated family viewing, he found that selection can

involve one or more of several factors. It may be the result of a positive desire to watch a specific television programme. It may be a negative choice, being "the best of a bad lot", the significant factor being the choice to watch television as opposed to doing anything else. Programme selection may be secondary to channel selection. Selection in all its forms and complexities is often the privilege of one (usually male) viewer among several. Responses from the viewers of The Mistress concurred with much of these past research findings. As with the subjects of Morley's study<sup>113</sup>, familial role often played a part in the women's degree of accessibility to favourite programmes. Morley's points concerning levels of attention and degree of involvement, points made also by Pingree<sup>114</sup> in her study of day-time and prime-time television audiences, were also supported. Several viewers reiterated statements by Morley's subjects, reporting that they derived a 'guilty pleasure' from certain programmes. This underlines his suggestion that the low cultural value associated with women's taste in television programmes in general affects not only their levels of attention and the intensity of their involvement in the programmes but, more significantly, how they themselves relate to their degree of interest, and how they relate it to others; with embarrassment and guilt.

The discussions by Morley and McQuail concerning the variations of approach to audience response to account for the diverse ways in which audiences engage with assorted

texts to gain different types of gratifications, were also pertinent here. When researching into the Nationwide audience, Morley argued for a 'preferred reading' of the text which reflects the dominant ideology of society at the time. Reviewing the same research a year later he queried how far a fictional text could in fact be said to possess a 'preferred reading'. Subsequently, his study of television viewing in families suggested that investigation into the text/audience relationship would prove more illuminating if the focus of attention were to be shifted so that consideration could be given to what the audience deems relevant or irrelevant, and/or comprehensible or incomprehensible in respect of their lives and interests

rather than being directly concerned with the acceptance or rejection of particular substantive ideological themes or propositions.<sup>115</sup>

A 'preferred reading', because it is carried out by the analyst, is imposed on the audience. Morley's refocusing de-emphasised the significance of any 'preferred reading' and of any perceived deviations from it. Instead of abstracting the text and its decodings from any contextual influence, the concentration on the audience perspective reinserted the viewing experience firmly into the context of people's lives. Examining the ways in which day-to-day circumstances and relationships influence an audience, as inferred from their response, then helps the researcher to understand how and why viewers' opinions are formed and pleasures gained. Ensuring that the viewer is contextualised

undermines the psychological inclination of the model and shifts the perspective on to the viewer-as-a-social-being. In this study, the audience constantly referred to other television programmes, other media, and other people, when shaping their ideas about this series in particular. They used these references to discuss both the form and content of the text as a television programme, as a narrative, as propaganda for/against women's rights, and so on.

Methodologically, Uses and Gratifications was advantageous to this project on two counts. Principally, it lends order to the gathering of data by providing a way of systematically detailing the responses of the audience, which makes the data easier to handle. There was a more indirect advantage, too. The precise itemising of data effectively returns the focus of study to what the audience actually say, and away from the relationship(s) between audience and interviewer. This may seem an obvious and unnecessary point to make, but it is a central issue. The underlying principles of this project insisted on the priority of the audience and that I, as the interviewer, got to know my audience. Relationships between audience and interviewer assumed major significance at this stage in the research, a significance which could have threatened to obstruct my access to the data. At the time of data gathering, the interest in and attention to the people who do the saying was my key concern, much more so than what they actually said. The physical practice of categorising

clears the mind and restores objective distance to the study. When interpreting data, all analysts must bear the context of the interview in mind. As this is a later stage in the research and consequently further removed in time from the interview experience, the recontextualising of the data can be achieved with easier objectivity.

The methodological framework developed by McQuail, based on the four categories: Personal Identity; Integration and Social Interaction; Entertainment; and Information, contained subcategories which covered most of the responses of the viewers in this study. It was necessary in certain instances to modify some of the categories. Some of the original categories were. Some additional subcategories were included where it was considered that the responses of the audience of The Mistress could not be accommodated by the original classifications. The order of categories and subcategories had to be slightly altered to accord with the priorities of the audience of The Mistress. The adapted and amended categories are detailed in Appendix V.

Certain aspects of audience discussion may have proved difficult to categorise in any of the descriptive clusters provided by Uses and Gratifications. One noticeable area was that of textual address. How the women in the audience felt about the ways in which The Mistress 'spoke' to them was of considerable importance to many. The pressures of their social and familial roles strongly influenced the way they

expected to be 'positioned' by the text, and no doubt determined to a great extent how they did actually perceive themselves to be positioned. Where would Uses and Gratifications allocate this area of experience? Arguably, it could be dealt with in terms of Personal Identity, and/or Integration and Social Interaction. Only to deal with it by splitting it into sections which would fit into established categories would be ignoring the notion of textual address as an area of investigation in its own right.

The concept of gratifications had yet to be fully explored. Rayburn and Palmgreen explained the link between

expectation, media use and assessment after the event, by proposing a clear distinction between the first and the third of these.<sup>116</sup>

by coining the phrases 'gratifications-sought' and 'gratifications-obtained'. This development was useful in that it probed the term 'gratifications' and suggested further avenues of investigation. The proposition that expectation is the key component of 'gratifications-sought' only makes apparent that expectation itself is much more complex a concept than has so far been implied. There is neither time nor space to enter into a full discussion here, but one question is crucial: What is meant by 'expectation'? One beginning would be to examine the popular definitions of the term 'expectation', to see how they relate/differ, what they include/exclude. Most people would regard 'expectation', to mean one or to encompass all of the following meanings:

**To presume that** something in particular will happen;

**To wait for** something in particular to happen;

**To predict** something in particular will happen;

**To look forward to** something in particular happening.

All of the above statements express a belief, or an opinion, that something foreseen will come to pass. They are related in three ways. They all begin from a present. They all acknowledge a future. They all in varying degrees profess intelligence of some projected event. It is these varying degrees that illustrate their differences. Each statement is simultaneously related by its present state and its future prospect, yet distinct from the other in the extent of its conviction about the future event. What the statements include are degrees of certainty. What they exclude, by implication, are degrees of doubt. In order fully to appreciate how expectation projects certainty, it is necessary to consider how it incorporates its opposite: **uncertainty**. Just as "inside" cannot be understood without reference, even if merely implied, to "outside", so certainty cannot be experienced without an awareness of uncertainty. A logical deduction is that **if** expectation concerns certainty, **then** it must pertain also to uncertainty. The following explanation is offered here, firstly to clarify how certainty and uncertainty are constituents of expectation, and secondly to demonstrate how

they are experienced within the concept of 'expectation' in everyday life. The proposition is that:

The constituents of expectation are anticipation and hope. Anticipation predicts certainty; but uncertainty is expressed by hope.

Evidence in this study supported this proposition. Several viewers of The Mistress expressed hope for an ending to the series where the wife and the mistress band together against the husband. They did not by any means **anticipate** that this would happen. Far from it in fact; they anticipated that the man would "have his cake and eat it"; would "get the best of both worlds". To a great extent this did happen. But, these viewers deliberately watched the series **in the hope that** their anticipations would be dashed, that the man would get his "come-uppance", and the women would smile in sweet revenge. It appears that there were two types of 'gratifications-sought' at work here. Both related to expectation; one concerned with anticipation, the other with hope. Each is also integral to the other. Each 'gratification-sought' concerned the pleasures experienced from convention; from the anticipation of a conventional certainty and, alternatively, from the hope that certain convention will not be borne out. Anticipation concerned the wish that the narrative should conform to the tradition: following the male protagonist through a story to victory, his happiness being the ultimate goal. Hope was to do with the breaking of that convention. The pleasures the 'gratifications-obtained' from anticipation and from hope were also different, though associated. If the

hope-expressed by the above viewers for the solidarity of the women and the defeat of the man in The Mistress became hope-fulfilled, the pleasure this generated could be variously described as, say, non-conformist, positive, or even victorious, depending on the intensity of feeling the viewers demonstrate. The pleasure experienced when expectation fulfilled was one of **anticipation at the expense of hope** could be described as conformist, negative, or the vicarious pleasure of the victim.

Exploration of the issue of expectation has been ventured here to suggest a potential framework which will satisfactorily explain media usage and its gratification. Uses and Gratifications had previously been a model capable merely of detailing which gratifications are sought and which obtained, and how they are sought and obtained; it had failed to explain sufficiently reliably why they are sought and obtained. With reference to the viewers of The Mistress, it could be said that some sought gratifications to do with notions of Personal Identity, wishing, say, physically to resemble Felicity Kendal or Jane Asher. Or, they sought the reassurance of finding their familial or social roles reflected on screen. They sought these gratifications by taking an interest in the physical appearance of the actresses, comparing them with their own appearances; or by examining the television roles and comparing them with those they themselves occupy in everyday life; by identifying in fact with the people and the roles they play.

Identification, however, is not explanation. It is a description of one type of gratification; and the comparison with the lived experience of the audience is illustration only of how gratification is sought and obtained. Why viewers wish to look like tv actresses, why they may seek reassurance from seeing their own roles mirrored on television, are questions that Uses and Gratifications as applied thus far would not be able to answer.

By developing the work on expectation, Uses and Gratifications could provide a measure of explanation. By expanding existing categories and adding others specifically applicable here, and accessing the relevant aspects of reader response theory to contextualise those responses, the intention was further to unravel the issue of expectation. It is not the identification of variations of response but 'the meanings of differences that matter'<sup>117</sup>. The aim was to explain those differences by defining, comparing, and contrasting responses in terms of expectation; of anticipations-expressed/anticipations-fulfilled and hopes-expressed/hopes-fulfilled. This study put into practice the theoretical work undertaken on expectation, in an endeavour to develop tools which can be used both satisfactorily and effectively on an explanatory level. Rather than compromising Uses and Gratifications theory by incorporating fields of study which would strain its theoretical boundaries, the developments accomplished here add to the

work in the field and result in a more complete theoretical model.

Uses and Gratifications appears to be gender blind for categories are universally applied. Yet, as Morley noted, television viewing is invariably a family experience, whereby gender is a structuring factor on viewing styles. In a project that focuses specifically on one gender this was an important consideration.

Uses and Gratifications had previously been employed solely as a descriptive tool. Recent developments into the issue of expectation were probed here so that at the level of explanation, it may prove effective and successful. The next question to ask was: How would it fit with the other theoretical approaches adopted?

### Theory Compatibility

It is important for the integrity of the research that all theories considered were, if not wholly compatible, then at least able effectively to function in parallel negotiation rather than compromise. To decide their worth, several factors had to be considered. These were basic assumptions, theoretical framework, objective, and methodology. These are detailed in [Fig.4]

Fig. 4

	<u>Film/Tv Theory</u>	<u>Reader Response</u>	<u>Uses &amp; Grats Theory</u>
<b>Basic Assumption:</b>	Dominant social/cultural values govern those conventions which direct mainstream film production;	The reader is the prime agent in the construction of meaning;	The audience uses the text to gratify a need;
<b>Theoretical framework:</b>	Theoretical model of the spectators' experience;	A model of the actual reading experience;	A model of the actual reading/viewing experience;
<b>Objective:</b>	To shed light on the text/audience relationship;	To shed light on the text/audience relationship;	To shed light on the text/audience relationship;
<b>Methodology:</b>	Individual theoretical spectator;	Individual 'real' reader;	'Real' socially constituted reader/viewer.
<b>Subject:</b> Examining whom?	Analyst's opinion	Reader's account of reading experience;	Audience account of viewing experience;
<b>Evidence:</b> Examining what?	spectator experience;		
<b>Explanatory devices:</b> How is evidence interpreted?	Psychoanalytic tools refined and reworked by feminist theorists.	Subjective analysis refined and reworked by practical application.	Tools not yet fully developed.

All three approaches have the same end in view: to explore and understand the text/audience relationship. They each set out from contradictory standpoints and so the means to that end differ. Film and television theory's spectator is a purely theoretical individual. For reader response theory, it is the active individual reader-as-practitioner. For Uses and Gratifications, it is the active reader/viewer as social subject and user of the text. What is considered as evidence varies also. Film theory hypothesises in abstraction from reality how a spectator's understanding is processed and why certain interpretations prevail. Reader response theory examines the actual practice of interpretation, the act of reading. Uses and Gratifications investigates how people use the medium they choose, the latter two drawing conclusions from the user's own account of the experience. Although Uses and Gratifications currently fails in explanatory terms, its categorisation process resolves the practical problem of data classification, and its progress in the area of

expectation promises an exciting avenue of explanation that this study could put to the test.

It must not be assumed that because theories have equivalent or merely pertinent theoretical components that they will work together without problem. There is obviously a manifest tension between the three approaches which cannot and should not be ignored. It is possible to construct a model which draws relevant aspects from each to frame the current research project, whilst simultaneously rejecting those others which are not appropriate. Film theory concerns a visual medium and offers a hypothetical theory of the female spectator against which findings can be tested. Its emphasis on the individual and its exclusion of the active spectator limits its worth methodologically. Reader response theory offers both a model of the competent reader in society and methods of data collection. Its use as a "stand-alone" model falls short for three reasons. The private nature of reading isolates the reader from their immediate surroundings so once again emphasis tends to be on the lone individual. This study is of television viewers and reading is not viewing. The theory lacks a structured mode of data analysis. In both film/television theory and reader response theory, feminist researchers have applied Chodorow's reworking of Freudian psychoanalysis for interpretation and explanatory purposes. Their sources of, and "language" of explanation are compatible, facilitating the integrating of theories of the visual text and textual consumption into one theoretical

model to be a viable exercise. Such a model would still be incomplete. This is where Uses and Gratifications serves. Like the others, Uses and Gratifications theory alone could not provide all the theoretical and methodological answers. Its use in addition to film/television theory and reader response theory resolves a number of issues. Uses and Gratifications can apply to readers or viewers (although care must be taken not to generalise without supportive evidence from one to the other, as discussed above). Although initially psychologically oriented, Uses and Gratifications developed to address the 'social' subject, the socially constituted individual. It provides a detailed and concise system of data categorisation. Its careful application in conjunction with the necessarily speculative, although nonetheless apt, use of Chodorow has the potential to provide explanations which can be considered theoretically and methodologically satisfactory.

The conceptual approach adopts and adapts from the above theories as follows [Fig.5]:

Fig.5

Basic Assumption:	The television viewer is an active and skilled user of television which he/she regards as one of a number of competing sources of gratification and/or distraction, and which the viewer uses for a variety of reasons;
Theoretical Framework:	An examination of the act of viewing against a conceptual model of the viewer's experience;
Objective:	To shed light on the text/audience relationship;
Methodology:	The 'real' socially and familiarly constituted viewer;
Subject:	
Examining whom?	

Evidence: Examining what?	The audience account of their viewing experience, systematically ordered into Uses and Gratifications categories;
Explanatory Devices: How is evidence interpreted?	Tools developed in psychoanalysis and refined in reader response theory, in conjunction with tools introduced but barely developed in Uses and Gratifications Theory.

### Conceptualisation of the Television Viewer

The concept of the Skilled Viewer was developed by using Fish's 'Informed Reader' from reader response theory as a base and incorporating the most pertinent components of film and television theory and Uses and Gratifications theory. The most straightforward way of explaining its design is first to reiterate Fish's theory.

The informed reader is someone who (1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built; (2) is in full possession of 'the semantic knowledge that a mature ... listener brings to his task of comprehension,' including the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, and so on; and (3) is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalised the properties of literary discourse, including everything from the most local of devices, (figures of speech, and so on) to whole genres ... this informed reader [is] neither an abstraction nor an actual living reader, but a hybrid - a real reader (me) who does everything within his power to make himself informed. [sic]<sup>118</sup>

A theoretical construct of the television viewer could not be identical to the 'Informed Reader' for the obvious reason that viewing is not reading. It was developed by revising and paraphrasing Fish's proposal with three major adaptations. These concerned the implication of the term

'informed', the social nature of the viewing experience, and a notion of viewing competence.

First of all, Fish's model was based on the seeking of information. The 'Informed Reader' 'does everything within his power to make himself informed' [sic]<sup>119</sup>. This prioritised the significance of information excluding by implication that arguably more important dimension of the reading experience when reading fiction: of **enjoyment**. This is hardly surprising, for reader oriented criticism developed because of a perceived need to credit the reader with some, or as Fish asserts, with the entire creation of meaning. The quest for meaning was the rationale behind the emergence of theories of the reader. Pleasure in a text was either not considered at all, or discounted as signifying little. Radway demonstrated that there is an interdependent relationship between meaning and pleasure. Her construction of the 'ideal romance' was dictated by the pleasure expressed by her readers in the meanings they associated with particular types of hero and heroine, with particular plot formations, and so on. It was not sufficient, therefore, solely to take account of meaning. Meanings generate particular pleasures, and (anticipated) pleasure is a major contribution to the experience of reading fiction. The next "logical" step in reader/audience-oriented criticism would be an investigation into other dimensions, such as that of enjoyment; to examine its relationship(s) with meaning, and with the reader/audience experience in

general. As far as popular television fiction is concerned, its emphasis on the "popular" assumes that the issue of enjoyment is of paramount importance. This is particularly apparent with situation comedy, where humour and laughter, integral components of the genre, are probably the most easily identifiable evidence of enjoyment. Secondly, the reading experience is essentially solitary and private. Even if the reader reads whilst surrounded by others, she/he is detached from them by the lone experience of reading. The television viewing experience is much more likely to be a familial, or social occasion. Thus are introduced two vital features of the viewing experience which are not obviously associated with the reading experience. These concern viewers' positioning in society, their self-perception and their perception of others; and how television contributes to these attitudes. Thirdly, Fish's concept concerned literary texts. His 'Informed Reader' is dependent on a linguistic competence that entails the ability not only to use and understand language as speech, but also how to read and write. It is essential that a competent television viewer is one who uses and understands the language employed by the medium. But, it is speech, the primary expression of language with which the viewer must be familiar. It is not absolutely imperative for a television viewer to be able either to read or to write. Literacy may enhance the viewing experience, but it is by no means crucial to it. It is essential that a television viewer comprehends the conventions of television production. The reader must

understand how letters form words form sentences form paragraphs form chapters form short stories or novels, and so on. The television viewer must understand how assorted visual and sound units fit together to make the different types of programme. Viewers must appreciate notions of performance. They need to bring to their viewing experience an understanding of acting and presentation.

The theorisation of the viewer in this study had to extend beyond the search for information and incorporate those key dimensions outlined above. A term such as the 'Informed Viewer' would not be appropriate, omitting as it does the element of entertainment. A term such as the 'Entertained Viewer' would equally exclude the seeker after information. Both expressions overlook concerns for self-image and social relations. In order to take into consideration factors such as, say, text selection, the concept of the viewer must account for a competence which allows not only for the internalising of information, for the appreciation of entertainment, and for an individual's concerns with self and others, but also for the application of this knowledge/experience. The most suitable description would be the 'Skilled Viewer'. This term is sufficiently comprehensive to cater for those points raised above, as well as having the potential to expand to encompass possible future pertinent issues, without becoming theoretically unwieldy. It could include dimensions other than information, entertainment, identity, and social relations

involved in the viewing experience, which have yet to be identified and explored. By paraphrasing and adapting Fish, the concept of the 'Skilled Viewer' was realised.

The skilled viewer is someone who (1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up; (2) is in full possession of the semantic knowledge that a mature listener brings to his/her task of comprehension, including the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, and so on; and (3) is a competent television viewer. That is, he/she is sufficiently experienced as a viewer to have internalised the properties of television discourses, including everything from the most local of devices (theme tunes, announcements, outside broadcasts) to whole genres. (4) He/she is also aware of performance criteria (that fictional characters are depicted by actors acting, for instance). (5) The skilled viewer views television from a social and familial position structured by social class and gender, a position which influences their preference for, expectations of, and access to television programmes. This skilled viewer is neither an abstraction nor an actual living viewer, but a hybrid - a socially constituted, active viewer (any one of us) who views television for a variety of reasons, those associated with entertainment, information, personal identity, and integration and social interaction likely to be the most significant.

The balance between the text and the audience had also to be considered. The decision not to undertake a textual analysis was not taken carelessly. There were three reasons for my reluctance. Having taken account of Morley's deliberations, I was loath to imposing a 'preferred reading' on to the research subjects, even though following Radway that 'preferred reading' would be audience-led and constructed from their majority response. Radway's analysis ended with the text. This study intended to focus on the audience from

the beginning to the end of the research. Secondly, whether the 'preferred reading' is drawn from the audience response or not, it undermines the opinions and feelings of those not represented in the 'preferred reading' because there were too few to mention. This would be going against all those feminist critics who advise not only the recognition of differences as well as similarities between women. By following Morley's advice and concentrating on the viewing competence of the audience rather than on the potential meanings the text had to offer, the focus would draw attention to those meanings that the audience do take up from, or attach to the text rather than those identified by the 'preferred reading'. Thirdly, fictional texts in particular concern more than meanings. The assumption here was that fictional texts set out to entertain, and that audiences watch them primarily to be entertained. Two principles held, therefore. To understand their enjoyment it was first essential that the audience must remain **the** key focus of study. This enjoyment of the text must be accepted at least as significant an aspect, if not more so, than the meaning(s) associated with it. It is unlikely that pleasure can be investigated at the expense of meaning because meaning is often the source of enjoyment (even if past studies have found it possible to research meaning with very little emphasis on any pleasure(s) the meaning provided). The nature of the sitcom and its audience demand that audience enjoyment was the primary factor of attention. This was not to fall into Fish's trap of denying the text meaning

without an audience. Iser's criticisms of Fish were carefully considered and his assertion that the text must not be denied in the study of the act of reading/viewing was accepted. There is no refusal of the text here. It was an insistence that the text is subordinate to the audience in terms of significance for this research. Besides its synoptic description in Chapter Two, the sole access to The Mistress would be via the audience response. It is in this response that the priorities of the research lie.

The following chapter explains how the methodological approach worked in conjunction with the theoretical framework to investigate the Skilled Viewer.

#### NOTES

1. c.f. Curran, James et al: Mass Communication and Society, [Edward Arnold in association with Open University, 1977] for articles on the chronology of audience research.
2. Freud, S: The Interpretation of Dreams (orig. pubd. 1900) [Penguin, 1977].
3. Freud argued that conscious behaviour is directly influenced by the unconscious dynamics of regression, symbolisation, and so on, which forces are expressed in dreams. Dreams are the site of tension and contradiction, are where the conscious encounters the unconscious, are where suppressed desires and social mores meet, are expressions of wish-fulfilment, motivated by desire. 'Dream-work', the way desire operates in the dream, consists of four functional elements. 'Condensation', either the compression of several latent ideas into one manifest wish, or repetition of one wish throughout the dream, results in

representation which assumes significance because of density and concentration, or because of constant reiteration. 'Displacement' occurs when elements are represented not by obvious likeness, but by association, the 'dream-work' shifting the intensity of meaning connected with the underlying 'dream-thought' by substituting it with an associated, and so detached, idea or object. 'Considerations of Representability' concerns the actual visual images, for dream images are the unconscious expression of experience equivalent to an individual's conscious expression of experience in language. Images are not, however, ordered according to any conscious logic, and are 'accompanied by regression to infantile modes of thought and feeling' [Wright, Elizabeth: Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice [Penguin, 1984] (p24)]. Sources of representation may vary from such as cultural myths to sexual symbols. Finally, 'Secondary Revision' is a selection and patterning process. It can occur when certain elements appear to be granted significance, but usually takes place when the dreamer attempts to make sense of it either to him/herself, or by recounting it to others according to the rules of conscious thought.

4. Kracauer, S: From Caligari to Hitler: The Psychology of German Films [Hafner Publishing Co., 1947].
5. Wolfenstein, Martha and Leites, Nathan: Movies: A Psychological Study (orig. pubd. 1950) [University of California Press, 1971].
6. Neither, for instance, applied Freud's four components of dream-work with systematic rigour.
7. c.f. for instance, Jung, Carl: Memories, Dreams, Reflections recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffe, translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston [Collins and RKP, 1964].
8. c.f. Mitchell, Juliet and Rose, Jacqueline: Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan et l'Ecole Freudienne [MacMillan, 1983]
9. c.f. Freud 1905 op. cit; and 1917 op. cit.
10. e.g. 'The Imaginary Signifier' in Screen Vol 16 [1975] No 2, pp14-76 (p15).
11. Ibid (p51).
12. Op. cit.

13. c.f. also Barthes op. cit. who notes that progression through the Oedipus phase coincides with the time when a child becomes aware of stories and how they are told, in other words, of narrative.
14. e.g. Kuhn [1982] op. cit.; Doane op. cit.; Kaplan [1983] op. cit.]; and de Lauretis op. cit.
15. The complex notions of the 'male gaze' and 'dual identification' can hardly be done justice here. Each is a critically significant development in the maturation of the theory of the female film spectator. Notable works which cover the discussions in depth are those referenced above [Note 14].
16. de Lauretis op. cit.
17. Williams, Linda: 'When the Woman Looks' in Doane, Maryann et al (eds): Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism [AFI 1984].
18. Mulvey op. cit. (p75).
19. Gledhill, Christine: 'Developments in Feminist Film Criticism' in Doane et al (eds) op. cit. (p32).
20. Gordon, Bette: 'Variety: The Pleasure in Looking' in Vance, Carole S (ed): Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality [RKP, 1984] (p191).
21. Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media [Pandora, 1987].
22. Ibid (p9).
23. Stacey, Jackie op. cit. (p51).
24. Ibid (p61).
25. Ibid (p61).
26. Op. cit.
27. Ibid (p178).
28. Byars op. cit. (p117).
29. Ibid (p125).
30. [1983] op. cit.
31. Ibid (p69).

32. Brunsdon op. cit.
33. In Gamman and Marshment (eds) op. cit. (p7).
34. Gamman and Marshment (eds) op. cit.
35. 1980s sitcom about two divorced friends, who share a house and family and domestic responsibilities.
36. Byars op. cit. (p125).
37. 'Lace: Pornography for Women' in Gamman and Marshment (eds) op. cit.
38. Gamman and Marshment (eds) op. cit. (p23).
39. Budge op. cit. (p108).
40. Ibid (p102).
41. Elsaesser op. cit.
42. Morley [1986] op. cit.
43. Ellis [1982] op. cit.
44. Ibid (p137).
45. Gamman and Marshment op. cit. (p21).
46. Morley [1986] op. cit.
47. Morley [1980] op. cit.
48. Morley [1986] op. cit. (p174).
49. Gray op. cit.
50. Ibid (p32).
51. Ibid, (p32).
52. c.f. also Ang op. cit. In her study, Ang advertised in a newspaper for readers to write in to say why they liked Dallas.
53. c.f. Selden, Raman: A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Criticism [Harvester Press, 1985].
54. c.f. Holub, Robert C: Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction [Methuen, 1984] for a comprehensive explanation and discussion of reception theory, which was the European strand of reader response theory.

55. Jauss was the European critic who coined the phrase 'reception theory' to describe the 'dialectical process of production and reception' [Ibid (p57)].
56. Ibid (p149).
57. Bleich op. cit.
58. Ibid (p42).
59. Ibid (p44).
60. (Orig. pubd. 1950) in Tompkins op. cit.
61. Ibid (p6).
62. Ibid (p2).
63. Ibid (p2).
64. e.g. Prince, Gerald: 'Introduction to the Role of the Narratee' (orig. pubd. 1973), in Tompkins op. cit. Prince proposes four dimensions of reader. 'The Reader' is the real person in the real world who chooses to read the fictional text. 'The Narratee' is the addressee, who exists solely in the fictional text. 'The Virtual Reader' is the target person for whom an author specifically writes. 'The Ideal Reader' is for the author one who wholly approves of the work, and for the critic, is one who wholly understands the work.
65. Iser [1976] op. cit. (p27).
66. c.f. Ibid for a full discussion of Rifaterre's concept of 'Superreader'.
67. Fish op. cit. (pp48/49).
68. Ibid (p168).
69. Ibid (p171).
70. c.f. Chomsky, Noam: Syntactic Structures [Mouton, 1959], and Aspects of the Theory of Syntax [MIT Press, 1965]; and Lyons, John: Theoretical Linguistics [CUP, 1968], and Language and Linguistics [CUP, 1981].
71. Fish op. cit. (pp172/3).
72. Bleich op. cit. (p152).

73. Iser [1976] op. cit. (p34).
74. Ibid (p37).
75. c.f. Holub op. cit. and Iser [1976] op. cit. for an introduction to Reception Theory and Reader-Oriented Criticism in general; Fish op. cit. for comprehensive explanations of the theory of the 'Informed Reader'; c.f. Iser [1974] op. cit. for an explanation of the concept of the 'Implied Reader'; and Tompkins op. cit. for a general history and critique of Reader-Oriented Criticism.
76. Radway op. cit.
77. e.g. Modleski [1982] op. cit. for feminist criticism relating to literary fictional genres which specifically target women; Gledhill op. cit., Brunson op. cit., Modleski [1983] op. cit., Ang op. cit., and Hobson op. cit. for feminist criticism relating to film and television.
78. Radway op. cit. (p8).
79. Ibid (p8).
80. Berry, J W and Dasen, P R (eds): Culture and cognition: Readings in Cross-Cultural Psychology [Methuen, 1974] (p15).
81. Radway op. cit. (p9).
82. Jankowski, Nicholas W and Wester, Fred op. cit. (p62).
83. McQuail [1987] op. cit. (p223).
84. Summary of Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch [1974] op. cit. (p21).
85. e.g. Herzog, Herta: 'What do we really know about daytime serial listeners?' in Lazarsfeld and Stanton (eds) [1949], quoted in McQuail, Denis, Blumler, Jay G and Brown, J R: 'The Television Audience: A Revised Perspective' in McQuail [1972] op. cit.
86. e.g. Berelson, B: 'What Missing the Newspaper Means' in Lazarsfeld and Stanton (eds) [1949], quoted in McQuail, Blumler and Brown: 'The Television Audience: A Revised Perspective' in McQuail (ed) 1972] op. cit.
87. e.g. Morley [1980] op. cit.

88. e.g. McQuail, Blumler and Brown op. cit.
89. e.g. McQuail, Denis: 'The Audience for One Act Plays' in Tunstall, J (ed): Media Sociology [Constable, 1969].
90. e.g. Pingree, Suzanne: 'Audience Activity with Day-time and Prime-time Television' (unpublished, 1981), quoted in Cantor, Muriel and Pingree, Suzanne (eds): The Soap Opera, [Sage, 1983].
91. Morley [1986] op. cit.
92. [1983] op cit.
93. 'Uses and Gratifications Research: A Critique and a Sociological Alternative' in Blumler and Katz (eds) op. cit.
94. Ibid (p256).
95. Ibid (pp256/7).
96. Blumler and Katz op. cit. (p24).
97. Elliott op. cit. (p258).
98. Morley [1986] op. cit. (pp51/2).
99. Ibid (p52).
100. Morley [1980] op. cit. (p12).
101. Ibid (p12).
102. Morley [1981] op. cit.
103. Ibid (p11).
104. Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction [Sage, 1987] (p237).
105. Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch op. cit. (p20).
106. McQuail [1987] op. cit. (p234).
107. Ibid (p235).
108. Ibid (p235).
109. Ibid (p235).
110. Op. cit.
111. Op. cit.

112. Ang op. cit.
113. Morley [1986] op. cit.
114. Op. cit.
115. Morley [1981] op. cit. (p45)
116. McQuail [1987] op. cit. (p235).
117. Ang, Ien [1991] 'Wanted: Audiences. On the politics of empirical audience studies.' in Seiter, Ellen et al (eds): Remote Control: Television Audiences and Cultural Power [Routledge] (p107).
118. Fish op. cit. (pp48/9)
119. Ibid (p49).

**CHAPTER FOUR****METHODOLOGY and METHODS****Aims and Objectives**

The aims and objectives of this project were to turn the research focus on to female television viewers; to facilitate the expression of their opinions by using as a case study one particular television series generally perceived to appeal to the women in the audience; and to analyse the audience interpretation. It was essential that the methodology adopted was guided by principles which accorded with the above.

This Chapter sets out the reasons for the adoption of certain methodological principles. It explains how the technicalities of methods are firmly embedded in, and precisely directed by those methodological principles so that the theoretical propositions outlined in Chapter Three: Conceptualising the Audience could be put into practice.

The chapter is in two sections of principles and procedures for ease of reader access. In practice, each was grounded in the other. Their operation was parallel, concurrent, and interrelating.

In the first section, the feminist perspective is defined followed by an explanation of how it guided the research and my approach to the research subjects. How the methodological

criteria of validity, replicability, and generalisability were resolved in the application of qualitative research methods are explained. The intention to interview women, in particular those with whom I already had contact, determined principles and procedures concerning subject selection, as did the decision to use both individuals and groups. Why they were selected is discussed here. The section concludes with a discussion of the problems concerning the approach to and methods of group interviewing.

The second section explains how subjects were selected and details their descriptions. The "meanings" of the subject categorisations are discussed. Why certain variables were deemed significant to the subjects' descriptions and others were not are considered. How the discussions proceeded and how my relationship to the researched was monitored and understood is recorded and related to the underlying principles for adopting qualitative research methods. The reasons for using an ethnographic account are followed by the details of the technicalities of methods. The ethical issues associated with interviewing, transcribing and interpreting, and how I addressed these matters are raised. The precise way in which Uses and Gratifications were applied, and why they were implemented is clarified. Exactly how and why the notions of 'interpretive strategy', 'interpretive community' and 'interpretive repertoire' are put into practice are defined, as is the particular and careful use of Chodorow.

The methodological principles and procedures are of integral concern to the other. The selection of procedures was motivated by the methodological rationale. The reasons certain principles were adopted resulted from the implementation of particular methods.

### **Fundamental Principles underlying Methodology**

In accordance with the fundamental assumption that women exist within and against a patriarchal society, the traditions and conventions of which undermine and marginalise female/feminine experience, the intention in this thesis was to apply a feminist perspective both theoretically and methodologically. A general aim was to highlight women's struggle for power, and access to opportunity, within a society structured to privilege men, maleness, masculinity. This would be exemplified and supported by this specific analysis of women's viewing experiences. The feminist perspective focuses on gender as a structuring agent of 'material and symbolic worlds and our experiences of them'<sup>1</sup>. This study is compatible in principle with Morley's hypothesis that amongst others 'gender is a determining factor of viewing practices'<sup>2</sup>.

A feminist perspective cannot be simply defined for feminism has not developed as a single linear movement. Hence, it is important to explain what is meant by the term as it is used here. In her article, Feminist Perspectives on the Media,

Liesbet van Zoonen<sup>3</sup> explained that (broadly) the choice of feminist philosophies has become one of three: liberal, radical, or socialist feminism. All are concerned with mass media as instruments of social control. Each approaches the struggle for change from a different angle.

Liberal feminism focuses on gender stereotypes of image, behaviour and self-perception, advocates change through rational persuasion, and enjoins women to take on the male/masculine power structures to "better men at their own game". Radical feminism argues that all women share the same kind of patriarchal oppression and that the only way to gain cultural power is via separatism. Liberal feminism and radical feminism operate with fundamental assumptions which limit their attractiveness for use here. '[F]or liberal feminists women are *essentially the same as men but not equal*'<sup>4</sup>. They argue that "you can't change the rules unless you join the (patriarchal) club". Their success depends on winning the support of powerful men willing to relinquish/share their power and to be prepared to agree to and to promote change. '[F]or radical feminists women are *essentially different from men but not equal*'<sup>5</sup>. Their strategy, to attempt to operate outside patriarchy, ignores the overwhelming power of continuity and tradition and fails to appeal to the non-separatist majority. Where liberal feminism is restricted by its acceptance of patriarchy so, correspondingly, is radical feminism by its refusal. Socialist feminism considers class and economic conditions

to be as significant as gender in the structuring of power relations in society. In terms of film and television, the focus is on the 'way in which ideologies of femininity are constructed in the media, and to whose avail'<sup>6</sup>, but account is also taken of the middle class bias of the (male-dominated) media. Like liberal feminists, socialist feminists believe women should join the labour market. Instead of conforming to male tradition, they propose the labour market be restructured to allow domestic and family responsibilities to be shared more equally by men and women.

Sketching the priorities and parameters of each approach results in summaries only. It would be unrealistic to suggest that any study would slot neatly into any one feminist "package". Despite the discussion of only the barest outlines, socialist feminism offers the most balanced perspective. Liberal feminism operates solely within patriarchy. Radical feminism solely against it. Socialist feminism functions both from within, but against patriarchy.

The central concern of all the above feminisms, the political struggle to change the place/power of women in society, failed to consider any woman's ambition and/or feeling which does not appear to relate to the gaining of social independence. All tended to exclude both the non-feminist woman and the "aberrant" feminist who dares to admit feelings which do not have "official" feminist sanction. These women have been banished to the theoretical

sidelines as she-who-has-yet-to-have-her-consciousness-(fully)-raised. In terms of media audiences and, especially for a study of audiences of light fictional entertainment, this just isn't good enough. Just as the feminist film and television theorists noted that there was no place for fun in the theories they had inherited, so too does van Zoonen observe how the broader feminist philosophies fail to account for just such activity as women's pleasure in the consumption of romantic fiction. The necessity of continuing political activism has burdened all feminist traditions with a "worthiness-attachment" which essentially influences the way in which they encounter (confront/ignore) certain social/cultural phenomena, such as light tv fiction. The study of light entertainment and/or its enjoyment has tended to be excluded from the frame, marginalised within it, or considered with reproach.

As a solution, van Zoonen suggests a more comprehensive approach which merges socialist feminism with a cultural studies perspective. Negotiations of meaning are identified both at the level of reception as well as at the level of text. This implies an

acknowledgement of gender construction as a social process in which women and men actively engage<sup>7</sup>

which plays a part in determining the uses and interpretations of texts. Such an approach also recognises that 'our understanding of contemporary cultural processes (is) fragmented and unpredictable'<sup>8</sup>. By assuming that meaning cannot be inferred merely from the social/political

contextualisation of the audience, it avoids the trap of political essentialism. This perspective permits the possibility that

[i]n each social situation an appropriate feminine identity [may] be established and expressed. Women can use media to pick up and try out different feminine subject positions at the level of fantasy.<sup>9</sup>

It conforms with the theoretical propositions of feminist film theorists, such as Betterton and Stacey, in conceding the possibilities of multiple representations of femininity<sup>10</sup>, and that women may opt for more than one relationship to those femininities<sup>11</sup>.

This research aimed to contribute new knowledge about women's viewing experience within the context of their everyday lives by applying qualitative research methodology guided by feminist principles. Two issues needed to be clarified: the place of the feminist researcher and considerations of methodological criteria.

The place of the feminist researcher involves questions dealt with here and later raised by Van Zoonen, and Brunsdon<sup>12</sup> were: What is the relationship between researcher and researched? How is it articulated? What effects does this relationship have on the results and conclusions of the study? Are there categories of 'we', 'us', and 'them'? Who occupies these categories? Inevitably, women will occupy all and feminists will occupy some, but how does the labelling

of 'women' and 'feminists' influence the feminist researcher and the project as a whole?

Brunsdon suggests that the way a feminist researcher approaches her research subjects determines the answers to these questions. She outlines three approaches. The 'transparent' way assumes that 'woman' is the significant category. 'We' are all 'women'. Researcher and researched are bound together by a 'shared gender experience'<sup>13</sup>. The major criticisms levelled against this approach identify its partiality, due to 'political exclusions (which women?) and epistemological assumptions (do women know differently?)'<sup>14</sup>. Secondly, the 'hegemonic' relationship focuses on 'we' as 'feminists' (researchers, other theorists) first, women second. 'They'/'them' are the research subjects who are all 'women', the likelihood that some may be feminist being rarely acknowledged. Brunsdon argues that central to this issue was the 'identity of the feminist intellectual ... [which] at this stage [was] ... profoundly unstable'<sup>15</sup>. There was an overwhelming tendency within the 'hegemonic' relationship to discover resistance to patriarchal convention at all costs. Rather than explore the audience experience on the audience's terms, researchers imposed their own terms, their 'impulse [being to] transform the feminine identifications of women to feminist ones'<sup>16</sup>. Brunsdon labels the final approach as 'fragmented'

because it is founded on the possibility that there is no necessary relationship between these two categories [of 'woman' and 'feminist']<sup>17</sup>.

There are two methods of the 'fragmented' approach: the autobiographical account, and the ethnographic account. The former is where the feminist researcher attempts to understand and explain her own experiences as, say, a female tv viewer in comparison and contrast to other viewers' reported experiences<sup>18</sup>. The ethnographic account conceptualises gender as one of a number of explanatory categories such as, for example, race and class. It rejects a focus solely on women's culture arguing that women's culture exists within a patriarchal society where men and women often share experiences. Brunson suggests that 'woman' as a category be understood as profoundly complex and problematical, quoting Ang and Hermes to propose that

any feminist standpoint will necessarily have to present itself as partial, based upon the knowledge that while some women sometimes share some common interests and face some common enemies, such commonalities are by no means universal.<sup>19</sup>

This study adopted the 'fragmented' relationship. Firstly, it was the most 'open' approach allowing for more varied discovery. It accepts that women are social as well as gendered beings. Secondly, it permitted the subjectivity of the researcher to be considered whilst allowing the audience to be studied on their own terms. Thirdly, it complemented the socialist feminist/cultural studies approach.

Considerations of methodological criteria concern the ways in which the guiding principles of the research contribute

to and/or support its integrity overall. Issues of validity, replicability, and generalisability must be addressed.

In quantitative research, replicability and generalisability have traditionally taken precedence over validity. There were two assumptions. Firstly, that proof of the soundness of research method is the ability to reproduce it. Secondly, a major justification for any research is that from its conclusions inferences can be made which could apply to the 'population' under study. As yardsticks against which standards of research methods are measured, the criteria of replicability and generalisability should not be undervalued. With methodological rigour and precision the former verifies the validity of the findings, legitimating the manner of their discovery by repetition. The latter confirms them as worthwhile by applying them across a broader sociological spectrum.

Because data definition and gathering in qualitative research are at variance with those of quantitative research the criteria of validity, replicability, and generalisability must be re-addressed. Qualitative research is as concerned as quantitative research with accuracy of data, trustworthiness of approach, and merit and/or benefit of findings. As scales of value, the criteria assume a different order of priority. Qualitative research is less easy to replicate in exact terms. The focus on depth of data rather than numbers of subjects makes generalisation

difficult. It is not that notions of replicability and generalisability are neglected. It is not worth undertaking any research unless the methods used and principles practised are precisely detailed so that the reader understands how the researcher has operated, could apply their methods similarly elsewhere and believes them to be worthy of replication. Generalisation from a qualitative study is problematic but it is possible to argue for an accretion of findings. As further inquiries take place into other text-audience relationships, comparisons of findings could then be undertaken, generalisation becoming more realistic. The difficulties associated with replicability and generalisability should not detract from the importance of articulating the experience of a sample of women such as those in the audience of The Mistress. An overriding aim in this study has been to empower female viewers with a voice, and to report that voice and interpret it as truthfully as possible. Here, validity is the prevailing criterion.

Krueger argues that, first of all, '[v]alidity is the degree to which the procedure really measures what it proposes to measure'<sup>20</sup>. Secondly, validity can be assessed by its 'face validity'<sup>21</sup> and/or its 'predictive or convergent validity'<sup>22</sup>. The former refers to whether the results appear to be believable, the latter to the likelihood of comparable results should the research be repeated on a larger scale. To assess the validity of the procedures adopted here, it is necessary to define how they were intended to give a voice

to the women in the audience of The Mistress and discover their text/audience relationship(s). Secondly, the 'face validity' and 'predictive or convergent validity' of the results should be assessed. Issues are raised concerning data collection, data analysis and presentation.

In qualitative research the manner of data collection is delicate. The researcher must continually monitor the situation to ensure the research subjects can contribute freely. Successful qualitative data collection is a process of being sensitive and receptive, giving care and respect to the researched. A feminist approach to qualitative research goes further and demands the subjectivity of the researcher be continually accounted for. There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, by acknowledging the contribution of the interviewer as well as the interviewee, the audience is not only socially/politically located, but the specific situation of the discussion becomes contextualised for the reader. Secondly, any opinion of the researcher that can be brought to bear on audience reaction is likely either to offer one or contribute to other explanation(s) about issues raised. Thirdly, traditionally the researcher undertakes the whole study only to vanish in the account which is typically reported in the third person. (Re)inserting the researcher achieves two objectives. It helps explain the researcher's role in the discussions but, more importantly, it "owns up" to that role by openly declaring it. Fourthly, for feminists 'the personal is political'. When, as here, conclusions are

drawn from a discussion which is an experience shared by researcher and researched alike, it is imperative to report the 'personal' of the researcher. The subjectivity of the researcher relates quite significantly to the key strength of a qualitative study, validity.

The above principles direct that the actual process of data collection entailed in qualitative research become as meaningful as the data itself. Qualitative methods make it very difficult to forget that the source of the data is a living person with a complex individual and social history. The very nature of the process of data gathering enables the researcher to gain insight into audience priorities. The audience is not only allowed to generate topics, they can determine the length of time spent on, and the depth of feelings expressed about, each topic. Those means of quantitative research methods, such as the structured questionnaires devised to deliver ends in terms of measurement, prompt spontaneous reactions or "answers", which in turn lend themselves to numerical calculation. Qualitative methods are

less structured ... and ... more responsive to the needs of respondents and to the nature of the subject matter<sup>23</sup>.

They encourage a "response" which is essentially more substantial, developing as it does from a dialectical relationship between spontaneous reaction and internalised experience. Opinions and ideas are allowed to develop within the discussion. It is only the crudest use of quantitative

methods which reduces its subjects to socially abstracted numbers responding to specific enquiry, but the nature of qualitative research avoids such reductionism. A final point is the matter of the interviewees' structural position in society. It is as necessary in qualitative as in quantitative research to consider how subjects are socially positioned in order to understand how and why their responses may be conditioned. The variables of sex, race, age, marital status, social class, and so on, must be taken into account. Just as the two methodologies differ in their approach to data collection, so they contrast in the ways in which they take account of the relevant factors. Quantitative methods demand that a statistical representation of the 'population' under study be achieved, so the variables are taken into consideration for representational purposes. In this study I selected a loose cross-section of women based on criteria such as age, class, marital status, assuming these to be yardsticks against which variations in the 'population' of women, and in response, could be measured. These criteria alone could not incorporate the full range of women's potential response. In certain areas, such as social class, the statistical representativeness for which quantitative methods aim is defined in socio-economic terms. It is a categorisation based on the job status of the male head of household, which in turn is judged by the relationship of male workers to production. The further away from the production of goods, the higher the social status of the man. Most women's

relationship to production is mediated by their relationship to men. Unless independent economic status can be proved, women's own (paid) work experience is not considered statistically significant<sup>24</sup>. This study focused on a series identified as a woman's genre, and women were intentionally selected as subjects in order to give a voice to the women in the audience. It did not make sense when selecting women for interview to consider social class solely in its traditional sense. This would have made a mockery of an analysis of women on their own terms. Not that social class should be considered irrelevant. It was essential that the women's "official" social status was taken into account. Socio-economic status, even with its tendency to include women as non-men rather than as people in their own right, is too significant a description in traditional terms to be disregarded. Rather than accounting solely for the structural factors at the selection stage, it was intended here that the qualitative methods used would account also for the ways in which the interviewees perceived themselves to be influenced by their position in society. Social class was considered along with race, age, sex, but other significant variables, such as domestic experience, education, and the women's own self-perceptions would also be weighed in the balance. Domestic experience embraced family and marital status, plus their views on family, marriage, and on their own status in the home. Educational evidence included educational opportunities, the type of secondary schooling experienced, whether or not they had

taken advantage of further or higher education, and their general attitudes towards education. How they perceived themselves is influenced by domestic experience, educational achievements, economic status (both personal, and in relation to men), experience of paid work, sexual orientation, and their level of perceived independence.

The analysis of the response would take place via a series of systematic stages. Data would be classified into the four subject areas most significant to the audience, followed by a more detailed ordering into Uses and Gratifications categories. The 'interpretive strategies' and their source 'interpretive repertoires' would be identified, following which the anticipations and hopes they comprised would be defined, and reasons underlying them posited. By reporting the stages of analysis as precisely as possible, the account would show exactly how conclusions were reached.

The procedures adopted here generated results which achieved both 'face validity' and 'predictive and convergent validity'. The comments viewers made in discussion were believable; they were not constructed solely to satisfy perceived research requirements. The systematic analysis revealed that viewers shared several ways of relating to the text due to their common experience as 'social beings' living in a patriarchal society, whilst simultaneously demonstrating other, diverse interpretations depending on

particular individual experience. This is evidence of 'predictive or convergent validity'.

15 individual women, 15 groups of women, and five individual men originally agreed to take part; a total number of 102 people. 14 individual women, nine groups of women, and four men finally participated, a total number of 76 people.

Both individual research subjects and groups were selected who were either known to me, or known to women already participating in the study. I approached a number of women as individuals or as representatives of groups which I knew already existed. Adopting what in a later study<sup>25</sup> was described as the 'snowball' technique, from a number of these initial contacts further introductions were gained and additional discussions arranged. Although rejecting the significance attributed to a large numerical sample associated with quantitative methods, an attempt was made to select a subject sample which would loosely represent a cross-section of contemporary women viewers. Factors such as social class, sexual orientation, age, and race were taken into account in subject selection.

Certain criteria for subject selection were obligatory. Interviewees should be interested in watching television or tv sitcoms in general, and/or in the subject matter of The Mistress, and/or knew, or knew of, myself sufficiently well to trust themselves in my company and in the company of my

tape recorder. I knew six of the individual women who agreed to participate very well, had met three socially several times, was on "nodding terms" with three others, leaving just one whom I had never met before. Two of the participating groups of women were already known to me before this research got under way. It eventually transpired that I knew at least one member of five of the other seven groups interviewed, although the groups as such were new to me. The Babysitting Circle and the Women's Guild had been contacted several months previously during former audience research into the tv drama/documentary: Threads [BBC]<sup>26</sup>, and had agreed to take part in a discussion at a later date about popular fiction on television. The Community Centre Workers were approached via a local community centre. From this group came further contacts for the Nursery and First School Teachers and the Young Lesbians. Contacts for the Friendship Group, the M A Film Studies Students, the Sewing Class and the Family and Friendship Group were suggested by individual interviewees. The only two groups that were completely unknown to me at the outset were the Young Lesbians and the Nursery and First School Teachers. All male subjects were suggested either by female individual interviewees or by a member of one of the groups. I knew two of the five male subjects very well, had met two others socially several times, and "knew of" the fifth.

A quite crucial problem arises in scientific terms, when as here the interviewer and at least some of the interviewees

already have an established relationship. Subject selection can be a contentious issue in most research projects, and it is particularly so in qualitative research where opinions and feelings are being sought. The aim of this audience research was to discover women's inner feelings about their enjoyment or otherwise of a particular tv comedy series. This may appear to be a trivial subject to discuss, as basically it is about likes and dislikes, and so may be taken to be an easy topic of conversation. Yet, most people find it relatively simple to state favourites, or distinct hates. It is frequently quite difficult to articulate **why** they love or detest someone, or something. In a similar way to Willis who, in his study, Learning to Labour<sup>27</sup>, endeavoured to reveal 'why working class lads get working class jobs', there was a need to explain quite abstract feelings and motives. Unlike his research, more than one group of people would be involved with little time to spend establishing new relationships. It was important to be able to rely for the most part on already established relationships. This would help to remove the problem of any initial distrust; to get over the "getting to know you" barrier. I expected to spend time talking to those women known less well or not known at all before the programme was discussed for two reasons. Firstly, so that we could get used to each other. Secondly, to establish myself as someone genuinely interested in their opinions, and not merely a "nosey" stranger to whom they would be useful.

I decided to use both individual research subjects and groups for three reasons. Firstly, it had never been done before. Secondly, it would avoid the criticism levelled at researchers such as Morley, Hobson, Radway and Willis, that the sole use of either individuals or groups was at the expense of the one not selected. A rich and diverse body of data could be gained which would be at one and the same time complementary and comparative. Thirdly, the assumption was that the use of groups and their immediate social context would be likely not only to provide insight into the social nature of the research subjects but would also be a constant reminder that they were social beings. Comparison of data would be aided by interviewing a number of women first within their groups and then individually.

Although time constraints meant this latter goal was not achieved, the advantages of using groups as well as individuals cannot be overlooked. The two key benefits this study gained from group discussions were summed up in Alan Hedges' article: Group Interviewing<sup>28</sup>, these being where the social context<sup>29</sup> is important; and when understanding and insight are required<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, the animated and stimulating group discussions often appeared to encourage a

diversity of opinion ... [and] help people to analyse their own attitudes, ideas, beliefs and behaviour more penetratingly and more vividly than they could easily do if just alone with the interviewer.<sup>31</sup>

There are also disadvantages associated with group interviewing which must be considered. Hedges noted five,

and in his book, Focus Groups: A Guide for Applied Research<sup>32</sup>, Krueger added a sixth. The first is that, as experienced here, time constraints and number of participants meant that individual group members could not be followed through. Secondly, there is a danger that '[d]ominant or articulate characters'<sup>33</sup> may influence overall group response. Thirdly, some group members may feel awkward and/or constrained before others. Fourthly, one member's assertion of awareness and/or knowledge of a fact does not determine that of all members. Fifthly, there are the organisational problems associated with the arrangements for the meetings, the availability of people, and their reliability, all of which may govern the nature and type of respondents who turn up for the discussion<sup>34</sup>. The final point made by Krueger is that as all groups do not function alike, some will be 'lethargic, boring, and dull ... [others will be] exciting, energetic, and invigorating'<sup>35</sup>.

Individual discussions as well as group discussions were used in this research. Although the original plan to re-interview women group members as individuals fell through, the individual discussions that were arranged would go some way at least to provide a balance of personal in-depth data likely to be missing from the group discussions. Secondly, there were members of most groups who spoke more often or more confidently, or were more strident in their expression than other less talkative, less assured, or quieter women. The only group discussion in which I was consciously aware

of this happening was the Community Centre Workers where one of their number barely spoke at all, and throughout their discussion she appeared to be less at ease than the other group members<sup>36</sup>. Some members of other groups did not speak as much as others, or took longer than others to settle to the discussion before they could confidently air an opinion. It was not apparent to me that during their discussions that any other members of any group felt intimidated by another. This is no guarantee that this did not happen. Without a video or film record of each discussion, minutely studied and subjected to a discourse analysis, it is difficult to confirm these subjective impressions. With such facilities and with more time, a similar, though longer project could devote useful time to the subject of group dynamics and their effect on conscious expression. Hedges third point, that some individuals may be constrained in their expression can only be acknowledged since it is impossible to know what they might have wanted to say. Inroads into this area may be gained if, as Hedges advised, and if my original research design could have been pursued, follow-up individual interviews were to be conducted. Fourthly, I attempted to avoid the problems of taking one member's assertions as representing the whole group by carefully examining all members' responses and only using as representative those I judged to speak for all. The fifth point concerned the organisational problems of arranging a meeting, and expecting people to turn up to it on a voluntary basis, which runs the risk that only those with "an axe to grind"

will put in an appearance. This was where I did indeed count myself lucky. My foreknowledge of the groups made it easier to make arrangements. That they were already established groups, most meeting on a regular basis, meant that few had to go to any special trouble to meet for this project. I had conformed to Krueger's advice to use a number of groups from diverse backgrounds. None of the groups could be described as 'lethargic, boring, and dull', as presumably their voluntary participation meant that they had some degree of interest in discussing The Mistress, but types of discussions did differ, producing a variety of response.

Despite such potential pitfalls, researching into groups should not be considered merely in negative terms. The stimulus engendered by group interaction can positively

capitalise[s] on group dynamics in order to throw light on the research topic. Ideas may be generated which would not have occurred to any one individual<sup>37</sup>.

Questions also had to be addressed concerning the number of, the numbers in, and the type of groups. Stating that its very nature determines that '[a]ll qualitative work is small-scale'<sup>38</sup>, Hedges suggested that the number of groups in any one study should not be lower than four or higher than 12. Less than four is likely to produce too little data. More than 12 could 'produce overkill and stupefaction'<sup>39</sup>. Here, the original plan to interview 15 groups of women was ultimately reduced to nine. The disappointment at first experienced that so many had failed to transpire, turned to

relief on realisation that the amount of data from nine groups would be so vast that more would be unmanageable by one person. By default, the number of groups in this study fell within Hedges' suggested boundaries.

With respect to how many people should constitute a group, Hedges argued that

the quality of the session suffers with larger numbers. The group becomes hard for the interviewer to control. More timid people easily get squeezed out. The group tends to fragment, different sub-groups pursuing their own conversations simultaneously. It takes longer to let everyone have their say on a given issue. The quality of the conversation deteriorates. It is impossible to run a satisfactory group with more than ten people present and there is usually a strong case for getting the numbers down to six or seven participants - normally the optimum size<sup>40</sup>.

Krueger agreed about the problems of too many people, noting further that, although

groups of four to six participants afford more opportunity to share ideas ... the restricted size also results in a smaller pool of total ideas.<sup>41</sup>

In this research, the question of numbers in a group was indeed pertinent. The numbers in the Nursery and First School Teachers group were larger than anticipated (14). The Women's Guild, although numbering only eight, seemed to digress in subgroups at tangents to the main discussion much more so than most of the other groups, resulting in a discussion which was noticeably fragmented. Neither of their discussions appeared to explore as deep levels, nor generate as rich a response as did, say, the Sewing Class (four), the Youth and Community Workers (six), or the M A Film Studies

Students (six). It is likely that the quality of their discussions had been adversely affected by their number. The Young Lesbians also numbered eight, equivalent to the Women's Guild, yet their group discussion appeared to delve considerably deeper. Reading the transcripts and listening to and recalling their respective discussions the Young Lesbians regarded the issues they raised in a more serious and thoughtful manner than did the Women's Guild. Arguably because of their personal experiences and political position in society, the Young Lesbians' conversation constantly returned to images of women and how The Mistress contributed to popular ideas about women. If one member expressed an opinion with which others disagreed, they were good naturedly asked to explain why they thought as they did. The Women's Guild were more "as one" about most topics. They did not have to take issue with one another. The group discussion as a whole rarely centred on any one subject for any length of time and individual attention wandered. It was barely necessary to 'control' either the Nursery and First School Teachers, or the Women's Guild, in a sense of "bringing them to order" to concentrate on the specific subjects. Occasionally, they drifted into subgroups and this resulted in my having to note "unintelligible" or "incoherent" in parts of their respective transcripts, but this happened in most other group discussions, too. There may well have been timid members of the Nursery and First School Teachers group who were overlooked merely because the numbers were distracting, and whose contribution may have

been overwhelmed. I must acknowledge that it was not until I was faced with the larger groups that I recognised the potential difficulty of numbers negatively affecting a group response. When arranging the meetings I had issued no request to limit numbers. I had assumed that as so many people did choose to participate it reflected their enthusiasm for the exercise; a factor which should not be overlooked. Significant to the success of any group discussion is the interest of the participants and the attitude towards the research, both in terms of quality of data, and of group 'control'. Krueger noted that lack of numbers may restrict quality. In this study, the Sewing Class consisted of Krueger's minimum requirement of four, and there were two other groups whose numbers were below it, the Friendship Group (two), and the Family and Friendship Group (three). The richness of the Sewing Class' discussion corresponded with a number of others regarding depth and variety. The audience data arising from the discussion of the Friendship Group and Family and Friendship Group did not provide equivalent insight into their members' attitudes and perceptions as had many others. I should argue that the quality of their discussions was not only affected by their lack of numbers. For each of the latter groups it was the peculiarity of the experience itself which produced data of a less in-depth nature than that of other discussions. Although both groups appeared to be at ease with themselves and with myself, they seemed particularly unused either to

articulating their thoughts or to having their opinions and feelings solicited about television<sup>42</sup>.

Hedges and Krueger differ in their advice on the types of groups to be used. Asserting that the only point in using groups of subjects is if 'there is a real need to talk to them as a unit'<sup>43</sup>, Hedges reasoned that the established structures and dynamics of existing groups and the fact that they have to continue as groups when the research is over, may effectively constrain their contributions and usefulness to the study. Krueger argued that although selection should be governed by homogeneity of interest, the researcher deciding 'who the target audience is and invit[ing] people with those characteristics'<sup>44</sup>, the group should consist of strangers because 'familiarity tends to inhibit disclosure'<sup>45</sup>. I concur with both Hedges' and Krueger that there is a possibility that familiarity may indeed constrain response, but I disagree with Krueger that this should prohibit the investigation of pre-existing groups. An express purpose of this project was to 'talk to [groups] as a unit'; to attempt to discover the influences on that 'unit' and how the 'unit' may prejudice or inspire its members' interpretive reasoning. All the research subjects were approached as women as social beings whose common experience had led them to share certain 'interpretive repertoires'. Those members of participating groups were women whose common interests encouraged them not only to meet for a particular purpose, but also to share ways of

understanding their own lives, society in general, and texts within that society. Contrary to Krueger, I should argue that the influences of their pre-existing relationships were all important. To assemble groups of strangers would have been to defeat the object.

### Procedures

From the late 1960s, early '70s, Carla Lane had written television comedy series which were both popular with the tv audience as well as being critically acclaimed. Each series featured women and centred on their conventional existence of daily domesticity, whilst simultaneously highlighting their dreams of romantic hope. Not only were Carla Lane series original in their focus they were also funny. When The Mistress was advertised as a new Carla Lane series, it appeared ideal material to use as a case study. It seemed to hold all sorts of promises relevant to my research interests, promises which framed certain assumptions I then made. These assumptions related to perspective, quality, focus, plausibility, funniness, appeal, and novelty. Assuming it remained true to her previous form, a series by Carla Lane would present a woman's perspective. What better series to discuss with female viewers than one which centred around women's issues? Lane's reputation would pre-empt any need to justify its choice in terms of quality, a judgement further supported by the actresses starring in it. Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher were well-known and highly regarded

performers by both the public and acting profession alike. The presence of such artistes implied also that there would be a focus on conventional female beauty, justifying a research concern with images of women in the media. The series could be expected to be plausible, Carla Lane being commonly acknowledged as someone who could create a believable fictional world to which an audience could easily relate. It would be funny, Lane's tradition of wit beginning with The Liver Birds; but the humour may co-exist and be enhanced by an acceptable, non-maudlin, level of pathos, as exemplified in Butterflies. The women in the audience would find it humorous not only because of the traditions associated with sitcom in general, but especially because of those attributed to Carla Lane series in particular. That it was a new series appeared useful on two grounds. First of all, the appreciation of viewers participating in this study would be informed by their experience of former sitcoms and previous Carla Lane comedies. Their opinions of this particular series would be fresh and original as they would not be "contaminated" by having already seen it or heard about it. Secondly, its very novelty would prove inviting and stimulating for the audience.

Figures 6-8 below detail the discussions planned which took place. Appendix I records those which for one reason or another either failed to take place or were not later transcribed. The charts below are followed by explanations of the categories by which subjects are described.

Fig.6 Individual Discussions

	<u>Age</u>	<u>Marital/ Family Status</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>(Paid) Work Status</u>	<u>Nation- ality/ Racial Origin/ Colour</u>	<u>Sexual Orient- ation</u>
A	37	single (div- orced)	2 x teen	unem- ployed	British/ Europe/ White (B/E/W)	hetero- sexual
B	70+	widow	3 x married	retired	B/E/W	hetero- sexual
C	47	single (twice div- orced)	none	social worker	B/E/W	bisexual
D	43	single (div- orced)	2 x teen	unem- ployed	B/E/W	hetero- sexual
E	23	single	none	radio producer	B/E/W	lesbian
F	36	married (form- erly div- orced)	1 x teen 1 x u/10	student	B/E/W	bisexual
G	22	single	none	radio producer	British/ Afro- Carib- bean/ Black	hetero- sexual
H	37	married (form- erly div- orced)	1 x teen 1 x u/10	student	B/E/W	hetero- sexual
I	12	daughter	none	school girl	B/E/W	hetero- sexual
J	28	married	none	welfare worker	B/E/W	hetero- sexual
K	38	married (form- erly div- orced)	none	super- market cashier (part- time)	B/E/W	hetero- sexual
L	33	cohabit- ing (div- orced)	(2 step) 1 x teen 1 x u/10	clerk	B/E/W	hetero- sexual
M	38	married	2 x u/10	staff nurse (part- time)	B/E/W	hetero- sexual

Fig.7 Group Discussions

	<u>Group</u>	<u>Numbers in Group</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>National- ity/Racial/ Origin/ Colour</u>
1	Babysitting Circle	6	25+-30+	B/E/W
2	Women's Guild	8	45+-60+	B/E/W

3	Community Centre Workers	6	30+-40+	B/E/W
4	Nursery/ First School Teachers	14	20+-40+	13xB/E/W 1xBritish/ Asian/ Black
5	Young Lesbians	8	17-25	B/E/W
6	Sewing Class	4	50+-70+	B/E/W
7	Friendship Group	2 (4 planned, only 2 arrived)	21 & 29	B/E/W
8	M A Film Studies Students	6	20+-30+	B/E/W
9	Family & Friendship Group	3 (5 planned, only 3 arrived)	1x30/ 2x50+	B/E/W

In order to establish how far the women's opinions were determined by gender, five interviews were planned with individual men. These would act as 'control' interviews. They would be compared with the female interviews to identify and highlight similarities and differences. The male interviews were as follows:

Fig.8 Male 'Control' Subjects

	<u>Age</u>	<u>Marital/ Family Status</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>(Paid) Work Status</u>	<u>Nation- ality/ Racial Origin/ Colour</u>	<u>Sexual Orient- ation</u>
Am	31	single (div- orced)	none	sales assist- ant	B/E/W	homo- sexual
Bm	25	married	none	unemp- loyed	B/E/W	hetero- sexual
Cm	28	cohab- iting	none	store- keeper	British/ Afro- Carib- bean/ Black	hetero- sexual

The subject categories which describe the women in the audience were constructed out of their own self-descriptions and from deductions I made about them. To a certain extent, therefore, they were forged out of inconsistencies. Within the actual discussions, for instance, most referred to their marital/family position and their (paid) work status. If, following the discussion, there was not sufficient information to describe someone, questions were put such as: "If you had to describe yourself as a subject for this or any research what would you say?". Generally, the categories above were the ones produced. The heterosexual women did not describe themselves as heterosexual. For the lesbian women their sexuality was of fundamental importance, it being the first aspect of self to which most referred. They constantly alluded to their sexuality during the discussion. Thus, it seemed unprincipled not to include sexual orientation as a category of critical significance for all women, despite the YoUng Lesbians being the only ones explicitly to acknowledge this. The one black woman interviewed was the sole subject who referred to her racial origin and colour when describing herself and when discussing The Mistress. Other women did remark on the racism they perceived in the programme concerning the portrayal of the Filipino maid. Despite only one explicit reference, racial origin and colour were too meaningful to be ignored. It was assumed that, like sexual orientation, racial origin and colour were key factors which would bear on influences on perceptions, experiences, and understanding of all sorts of matters and concerns.

Four other descriptions were omitted from the subject categories: party political persuasion, regional origin, religion, and social class.

Several people did describe themselves with reference to party politics but, for most, party political preferences were subordinate to personal experiences. A decision was taken that to register party politics as a major category would be to refuse, or at least to undermine, that fundamental feminist principle that politics exists not solely in the public sphere; to deny that 'the personal is political'. Where party political preference did appear to play a part in determining response it is detailed.

Geographically, discussions took place either in Sheffield or on Merseyside. The original intention had been to interview sufficient numbers in each area, plus others in London, to gain information which may suggest regionally influenced differences in response. In practical terms, this proved to be far too ambitious. Lack of time prohibited any discussions taking place in London, and several of the Merseyside discussions were cancelled. Although a number of women from both Merseyside and from Sheffield used their regional origin in their self-description, it did not seem to determine responses distinctly related to either area specifically. However, a number of subjects repeatedly endorsed their "northern-ness", as they compared themselves to the "southern-ness" they perceived the characters in The

Mistress to represent. Viewers in this study used the term "southern" to refer to London and the south-east of England. This made it doubly disappointing that discussions with women in London could not be carried out.

Although Radway had described her subjects' religious affiliation, religion did not appear sufficiently powerful an influence to be considered a significant description here. Two subjects, [C] and [D], did mention that they were Jewish, and I knew that one member of the Babysitting Circle was a devout Roman Catholic. None referred to their religion in the discussions. Nor did any of the other subjects make known any strong religious beliefs during the period of the research. There were times when some interviewees, particularly the older women, referred to the "sin" of adultery in relation to the theme of The Mistress, but such remarks solely acknowledged a religious perspective. They usually prefaced more worldly opinion, such as: "Well, yes, we know it's a sin, but ...". In retrospect, not to include religion as a subject classification may have been an oversight. It does seem anomalous to include sexual orientation, and racial origin and colour, as major classifications because they are so significant to a minority of subjects, and then to do the exact opposite with regards to religion. Had the discussion with the group of Asian women taken place, religion may have been pointed up and subsequently explored as I did know that this group were Muslim. Had their discussion generated responses which

appeared to be motivated by their religious upbringing, religion may have emerged as a meaningful category. In retrospect, not taking account of religion appears to say more about my own attitude than that of the research subjects.

In several instances viewers' own perceptions of their social class status was at variance with what would have been their "official" class description in socio-economic terms. As a principle of this study was to give women a voice not merely as viewers of a television comedy, but also as social beings, the decision was taken to assign social class description to an appendix (see Appendix VI) which details not only their socio-economic label and their own self-description, but also my opinions on the reasons for any discrepancies.

In hindsight, to designate the traditional social class labels to an appendix seems naïve. The evidence of the audience response demonstrated that much of the outrage expressed against The Mistress appeared to be associated with the perceived social class of the series in relation to that of the viewers. As will be seen in the discussion in Chapter Five: Audience Data And Its Interpretation, this was by no means solely, or even principally, a class issue in the accepted, traditional terms of sociological research. For many women in the audience of The Mistress, notions of social class were integrally bound up with regional

identification. Nevertheless, whether wholly informed by them or not, their response was grounded in an awareness of traditional social class positions. Hence, to be comprehensive, the subject categories should have included such contextualisation.

Discussions were arranged to accord with screenings of each episode of The Mistress. Because of the number of meetings arranged some women in the audience watched an episode when it was originally broadcast and some viewed a video-taped episode. Thus, viewers viewed different episodes from the series. This was not a problem anticipated prior to the discussions. Nor was I alerted to it by any background reading. Previous research had covered either series such as soap opera in general, or one television programme, be it a one-off play or one episode of a series. As the data gathering got under way, a certain unease grew that as textual encounters varied so may their interpretation affect the consistency of the analysis. The nature of sitcom conventions and the standard of viewer competence refuted this potential pitfall. This is not to deny the problem because it was not anticipated, nor to ignore it because it was inconvenient for the study. Despite the variety of textual encounters, discussions were sufficiently similar not only to bare, but positively to encourage, comparison. It is recommended here, resources permitting, that any future research project on the same lines attempt to avoid

a similar predicament by requesting subjects to watch at least two or three episodes, if not a whole series.

All discussions were semi-structured interviews for which I had an agenda of topics so that all covered certain common ground (see Appendix II).

The discussions took place in surroundings with which the women were familiar and comfortable, usually within their own homes, in friends' homes, or in a more public room where they regularly met. For instance, the Sewing Group discussion took place at their weekly meeting in the local Labour Party rooms, the women carrying on with their hand sewing whilst they talked; the Nursery and First School Teachers met one lunchtime in the school staff room; the Community Centre Workers met for an extended morning coffee break in the Community Centre, and so on. For a variety of practical reasons, those discussions with the Friendship Group and with Individual Interviewees [E] and [G], took place in my own home. All had been to my home previously and were relaxed and comfortable there. Prior to each discussion I was careful to make two statements about the project. The first was that I had asked them to participate because the study of female television viewers *per se* was under-represented both in terms of academic research and of research by the television industry. Secondly, the discussion was not going to be judged for right and wrong opinions, that I was interested in whatever they had to say

about The Mistress, and that it genuinely didn't matter whether they liked the series or not.

Discussions with individual subjects followed the lines of depth interviews, defined as

conversation[s] in which the researcher encourages the informant to relate, in their own terms, experiences and attitudes that are relevant to the research problem, ... [where] [t]he interviewer is not bound by a rigid questionnaire designed to ensure that the same questions are asked of all respondents in exactly the same way<sup>46</sup>.

In practice, there was little opportunity to keep or wisdom in keeping a scientific distance during the discussion. As Oakley argued in her article 'Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms'<sup>47</sup>, traditional methods of interviewing were formulated by men to gain hard statistical data, and are those which regard both 'researcher and ... researched as objective instruments of data production'<sup>48</sup>. She reasoned that those interviewers who aim to obtain data related to, or provoked by emotion, must use a different approach. In these cases it essential that 'a relationship of mutual trust (is) established between interviewer and interviewee'<sup>49</sup>. How the interviewee perceives the interviewer and the interview situation is of paramount importance for the subsequent data, subjects having 'considerable potential for sabotaging the attempt to research them'<sup>50</sup>. Although Oakley was arguing for an understanding of the developing relationship between interviewer and interviewee when repeated interviews are necessary for research purposes, her assertions were valid here. In this study, the traditional

paradigms of interviewing which look upon the interview solely as a scientific technique of data collection were not appropriate. They specifically ignore the 'human' element, as

a sociology of feelings and emotion does not exist. Sociology mirrors society in not looking at social interaction from the viewpoint of women.<sup>51</sup>

The approach adopted here demanded that subjective experience was given priority. The interview is a form of data collection, but it is a significant experience in itself; an important human, cultural activity. I agree with Oakley's final plea that personal involvement should be recognised as

more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives.<sup>52</sup>

The interview is an unnatural situation at the best of times, for it imposes a structure on a conversation. Some notes must be made about the way in which the interviews/discussions about The Mistress were conducted.

In all interview/discussions, no matter how well people know each other, no matter how relaxed they are in each other's company, no matter how interested in the subject matter, there is always somewhere in the consciousness the awareness that this is a constructed situation. This is not merely two women, or a group of women, discussing a tv sitcom. This is a woman, or a group of women, discussing a tv sitcom with a researcher. This discussion is in front of a microphone and is being tape-recorded. It is critical to take into account

the unnaturalness of the physical situation, as well as the traditionally accepted psychological problems of subjects attempting to please the interviewer by responding in the way they believe he/she would prefer. For instance, several subjects had never previously spoken into a tape-recorder and were quite nervous at the outset, although still keen to participate. Their anxiety usually faded after five minutes or so. There was only one subject who was so nervous she transmitted her mood to myself to such an extent that I felt obliged to terminate the discussion after approximately 20 minutes, as by then we were both feeling somewhat uncomfortable<sup>53</sup>. All the women treated me very kindly. Most were interested to know exactly what the research was about, but understood when I refused to tell them until after the tape-recorder had been switched off, in order to have as little influence as possible on their responses.

This precipitates an important acknowledgement of a key concern associated with these discussions. Prior knowledge of each other was useful, principally because it saved time and effort involved in establishing relationships. It was also the cause of a central predicament. Knowledge of each other in roles other than researcher and researched dictated its own difficulties. On several occasions, an interviewee (followed fairly swiftly by myself) would suddenly become aware of the falseness of the situation and dissolve into laughter. Fortunately, we all had sufficient respect for

each other and/or the situation and/or the project to recover and continue the discussion.

The interview behaviour points up a key fact, that all research is based on trust. Researchers must believe that their subjects deal with them honestly. Research subjects must believe their opinions and feelings are respected and accepted by the researcher and will not be used for unethical purposes. When analysing the subjects' responses, the researcher must examine statements and posit underlying meanings as objectively as possible, but always within their subjects' terms of reference. They should never interpret by rewriting in order to suit their own pre(mis?)conceptions<sup>54</sup>. The final act of trust lies with the reader. When the project is finished and the account written up, the reader must accept the principles by which the researcher has operated. This is by no means to suggest that there should be no criticism. It must be valid to argue that more information, or different information, may have been gained by using other techniques, or approaching the work from another perspective; to argue that the avenues within the research framework may not have been fully explored; or that data may have been misinterpreted. It is essential to recognise, however, that all research is hampered by the limits it initially sets itself. Most qualitative research could be enhanced by additional quantitative data, and vice versa. For any research to be worthwhile, it is imperative that all those involved: the researcher, the research

subjects, and the reader have trust in and keep faith with the specified principles and goals of the study.

Although the qualitative researcher focuses on the experience of the interview/discussion in the collection of the data, the principle of objective distance can be incorporated in the accounting stage. An appropriate method of account must, therefore, be adopted. From the experience of those researchers already mentioned, the most suitable procedure proved to be the ethnographic account. Willis asserted that

the ethnographic account, without always knowing how, can allow a degree of the activity, creativity and human agency within the object of study to come through into the analysis and the reader's experience.<sup>55</sup>

and Radway stated that the ethnographic account

is never a perfectly transparent, objective duplication of one individual's culture for another. Consequently, the content of that account depends equally upon the culture being described and upon the individual who, in describing, also translates and interprets.<sup>56</sup>

The ethnographic account allows not only for the detailing of the data, but for the data to be continually related to its producers, and to its interpreter. First of all, it permits the "human-ness" of the researched to penetrate and influence the analysis; secondly, it admits the "human-ness" of the researcher into the interpretation. By insisting on the reality of the audience at all times the ethnographic account reminds the researcher that audience data is personal expression influenced by social and cultural

conditioning, and not merely abstracted "cold" statistics to be analysed in isolation from its source.

All audience discussions were taped on a Hitachi TKR-5600ER audio cassette tape recorder. Lengths of discussion varied from 15 minutes to 45 minutes. This resulted in over nine and a half hours of audience discussions to transcribe. Significantly, after the tape-recorder had been switched off, most women invited me to stay longer, offering hospitality and a further chat. Most discussions, therefore, although on tape lasting only, say, 35 minutes, would continue for a couple of hours. After leaving, I spent time jotting down field notes of any relevant remarks made when the tape-recorder had been switched off.

Prior to each group discussion I numbered the members from left to right, switched the tape recorder on, and asked each one to state her number and introduce herself in a few sentences to enable ease of voice identification when it came to transcribing the tapes. This proved invaluable for the large group, the Nursery and First School Teachers, and other groups whose members often talked over each other, such as the Women's Guild. Even though each recorded discussion was transcribed as soon as possible after its recording, there were times when it was difficult immediately to identify a voice and I had to rewind to the beginning of the tape to check that contributions were indeed being attributed correctly.

The tapes were then transcribed via a Commodore 64 home computer using the EasyScript wordprocessing package. This was later transferred on to a Philips 486 IBM compatible pc into the WordPerfect 5.1 wordprocessing package. The shortest transcript was 10 pages long; the longest 55 pages. There were eventually over 470 pages of transcripts to analyse. The original transcripts were exactly as the women in the audience of The Mistress articulated their speech, noting all filled pauses ("um"s and "er"s), silences, and repetitions. The final transcripts acknowledge the disruptions in the viewers' natural speech, but omit anything that detracts from the sense. The key to the way in which the audience response is transcribed can be found in Appendix III. This details also the attempt, both within the transcriptions and extracts for inclusion here, not to impose my own values of expression on to the audience's use of language<sup>57</sup>. Appendix IV includes two of the final transcripts, one individual and one group, as examples.

During all the stages of transcribing and analysing the audience response I consistently monitored my own relationship to the research. I was guided by Valerie Walkerdine's article 'Video Replay: Families, Films and Fantasy'<sup>58</sup> in which she stressed the danger of intellectualising the pleasures of watching television entailed in the practice of data collection by participant observation. In a study of this kind, 'the voyeurism of the theorist'<sup>59</sup> must be taken into consideration. In order to

rationalise the essentially abnormal behaviour of observing viewers viewing, the researcher is inevitably constrained by the

desire for knowledge [wherein] is inscribed a will to truth of which the latent content is a terror of the other who is watched.<sup>60</sup>

She added:

'our' project of analysing 'them' is itself one of the regulative practices which produce our subjectivity as well as theirs.<sup>61</sup>

It must also be acknowledged that no matter how carefully directed by theoretical guidelines, even those set up to foreground the audience perspective, all interpretation is inescapably influenced by the opinions of the analyst who is doing the interpreting. Mere acknowledgement does not automatically remove that desire to find 'a truth' which will not only be worthwhile writing about but will also justify the ideas behind the research as well as the hard work involved in carrying it out. Thus, Walkerdine asserted that '[p]olitics ... are central to the analysis'<sup>62</sup>, it being essential that the potential power and control of the researcher over the researched and ultimately over the outcome of the whole project is not be ignored. It must be continually and consistently recognised, monitored, and reported, so that although it is unlikely to be negated entirely, it can at least be controlled and reduced as far as is practically possible.

With these issues in mind, two precautions were taken to ensure that the patterns of interpretation were indeed those

of the audience, rather than any imposed by myself as analyst. Firstly, the analysis began with the tapes of the audience discussions and with the transcripts of those tapes and not, as has so often been the case in the past, with the researcher's own reactions to the text. Because of the massive amount of data it would have been impossible to log and consider every single response. Once all the tapes were transcribed, I read through them and identified at least three major conversation clusters from their constant repetition: Carla Lane, Stars and Characters, Representations of Women. In practical terms, this was done by marking the transcripts with highlighter pens and symbols: yellow, and pink for Carla Lane and Representations of Women, respectively; and red asterisks for Stars and Characters. All the relevant quotes for each heading were then listed on separate sheets of paper. There were also a massive number of quotes which fell outside these categories, which appeared to be related to each other but whose connections were not as plain as those to which the first three headings applied. They seemed to be concerned with how a sitcom is put together, and with the expectations the audience had of the sitcom genre, including remarks on such apparently diverse aspects as subject matter, lighting, setting, scheduling, plot, and so on. After highlighting these quotes on the transcripts in green, they were listed on another sheet of paper. A pattern of interest emerged which related to conventions associated with tv broadcasting in general, and sitcom in particular. A fourth conversation

cluster which could incorporate these quotes was identified as Conventions.

This rather crude content analysis revealed no more than "this is what the majority of women in the audience of The Mistress talked about most of the time". These headings provided outlines of response only, proving to be far too broad to discuss the data they included with any precision or clarity as each incorporated a multitude of related topics. There were other problems, too. The sheer volume of data in each functioned to obscure any clues concerning how or why these topics were of significant. Any animation that had generated the response was lost on the printed page. The longer became the time from the actual discussions the more difficult it was to judge why someone did say what they did solely from the words on the pages of the transcripts. In order to understand and interpret the data, it was necessary to work out strategies to reinstate the audience, and systematise the data so that it was manageable, and would facilitate the research rather than hinder it.

First of all, in order to retrieve the thoughts and emotions behind the data, I put the transcripts to one side and listened to the tapes again. Although I say "again", this was in fact the first time I had really listened to them. Even though I had personally transcribed the tapes, the exercise of transcribing had in truth concerned hearing rather than listening, if listening is defined as paying

attention to meaning. Initial concentration had been on accurately transferring the words heard on the tape on to paper; little regard had been paid to their sense. As reading alone had failed to work, I attempted to attend to the data and unveil its underlying significance by listening alone. Useful though this listening exercise was in bringing researcher and audience back together, in practice trying to apply myself to 24 tapes was very tedious. Although I was interested in the subject matter, it became increasingly difficult to concentrate, and I was repeatedly mentally "switching off". A further strategy was adopted, which was to listen to the tapes whilst simultaneously reading the transcripts. Initially, this was a useful technique as I could mark up the transcripts with capital letters in the margins indicating the type of expression: anger, affection, tedium, and so on. (When later I bought a "talking book" on cassette for a six year old I could personally vouch for this method of absorbing meaning). There was also a contrary effect in that, again, it only worked so far, before it became almost desensitising. Once more, bewilderment set in and the data became overwhelming. There was just so much of it, and my estimation of my own abilities at analysis were gradually diminishing into an ever thickening fog. It was essential to find a strategy which would at one and the same time allow me to climb out of what felt like a total immersion in the data whilst retaining the significance of the audience. So far, all I had discovered was that the audience data was complex; what was now needed was a method

of 'managing [that] complexity'<sup>63</sup>, which was where Uses and Gratifications theory proved useful.

Uses and Gratifications theory yielded a charting mechanism which, although ''fractur(ing)' the data in order to grasp and manipulate them'<sup>64</sup> did not lose sight of the 'complex 'Gestalt' of data'<sup>65</sup> because the categories it advocates are quintessentially audience driven. It was even more appealing because of its promotion of the active audience and 'the idea of plurality and diversity [being] pre-eminently the guiding principle for research'<sup>66</sup>. It stressed 'the significance of the differences between the cultural frameworks available to different individuals'<sup>67</sup>. McQuail's revised categories of Personal Identity, Integration and Social Interaction, Entertainment, and Information were so audience orientated and seemed to apply so well to the audience data generated from viewers of The Mistress that at first they seemed like an answer to a prayer. They effectively transformed a mass of incomprehensible data into manageable order, systematically registering similarities and differences in response. The audience data was thus classified into the Uses and Gratifications categories detailed in Appendix V<sup>68</sup>. The audience did not neatly express their opinions and feelings in strict Uses and Gratifications fashion. Rarely did anyone say anything as specific as: "I watch Carla Lane series because I find reinforcement for my personal values" (see Category <a1>), or: "I like Felicity Kendal because I identify with valued

others in the media as media personalities" (see Category <a4>). Viewers talked around a subject and I categorised what they had had to say.

This was where the second precaution was taken. Following the transcribing exercise, I decided not to record the data merely by listing the appropriate Uses and Gratifications categories with related examples of audience response appended. There were two reasons for this, the first to do with methodological procedure, and the second with ultimate reader accessibility to the data. It would probably have been a more straightforward procedure than the one adopted, involving first and foremost the itemising of quotes relevant to the categories. This seemed to be an incorrect ordering of priorities, elevating the process of categorising over the response being categorised, the "how" of the Uses and Gratifications formula, its categories standing open waiting for data to be slotted in, taking precedence over the "what" of the data. The likely result of listing audience response solely as itemised Uses and Gratifications categories out of the context in which they were raised would encourage a focus on the categories rather than on their content. It would displace the significance of the audience again and confuse the issue. (Chapter Five: The Audience Data And Its Interpretation discusses this point further). Instead, here, those key concerns pointed up by the audience were always kept in mind by contextualising them within the descriptive framework which arose in their

discussions, the headings of which are noted above. Only then were the appropriate Uses and Gratifications categories applied. The effects were threefold. Firstly, the constraints of the classification operation were largely avoided, so the means of categorisation did not become the end. Secondly, it allowed the audience to remain the focal point of the study, for as the stages of research proceed the audience is gradually distanced from its own response. Initially, the researcher is directly concerned with the researched; we saw each other in person and heard each others' real voices. The next step is when the interviewer physically leaves the interviewee(s); I listened to recordings of their voices, transcribed these recordings and read the transcriptions. The final stage was when I selected certain data for categorisation and then submitted this to in-depth analysis. Distancing the data (calling it 'data' and not 'response') from its originators makes objective analysis easier, for it removes the intimate influence of the researched. It also, gradually but determinedly, removes the audience further and further away from the core of the investigation. The intention of this study was to illuminate that experience which is the text/audience relationship, and not to reduce it to an analyst's inventory. It was essential to its integrity always to keep in mind not only that the enquiry must proceed from the audience point of view but that the audience is made up of thinking people whose response is correspondingly active and dynamic. Working with this logic, the reasoned initial step when describing the

audience data was to do so in the context within which it was raised, ordered but not constrained by the Uses and Gratifications categorisation.

Once the categorisation process was completed, the data could be further analysed by interrogating the ways in which the audience approached the text, suggesting their sources of explanation, and examining how they fitted into the framework of expectation.

As detailed in Chapter III, Conceptualising The Audience, Fish's concepts of 'interpretive community' as the source for a number of 'interpretive strategies', and Radway's practical application of same were examined. The notion of 'interpretive community' could not be used here as per Fish and Radway's intention. The women in the audience of The Mistress were not selected on the same basis. Radway's romance readers were members of a group linked solely by common reading experiences resulting in shared conventions of interpretation or, in other words, an 'interpretive community'. Fundamental to the subject selection in this research was to show how women's shared social experience may prevail upon their interpretive faculties. The role television plays in domestic life, the access to it and use of it, and the very nature of television viewing where people 'watch television in extremely heterogeneous ways ... alone, with intimates, with strangers ...'<sup>69</sup> made the social

contextualisation of the viewers as important an emphasis as their shared interpretive practice.

Instead of 'interpretive community', the term 'interpretive repertoires' is used here as it implies that

audiences are not formal groups or communities, but contextually defined agents who employ such repertoires to make preliminary sense.<sup>70</sup>

'Interpretive repertoires' embraces the concept of the 'social being', a viewer who, although an individual, lives in society and is open to socio-cultural influences. It assumes that other factors as well as those solely associated with interpretive tradition may be influential on how texts are understood. These could concern, for instance, group dynamics, such as notions of loyalty, rivalry, power relations, and/or the shared interests which maintain and sustain the group's existence as a group. 'Interpretive repertoires' assumes that conventions of appreciation and understanding derive also from common life experience. This does not deny that the female viewers who participated in this study could be members of a number of 'interpretive communities' such as, say, soap opera addicts, film buffs, or detective fiction readers/viewers. It is to recognise that their membership of socially constituted groups of women with shared social conditioning and life experience was a more significant factor in subject selection than their customs of interpretation *per se*. 'Interpretive repertoires' incorporates the notion of learned ways of understanding without restricting the learning exercise to

previous textual encounters. It promotes the notion that interpretive convention is part of experiential learning, deriving from and contributing to general everyday experience; a dimension of shared understandings and exchanges of views with others who have undergone/are undergoing like situations and circumstances.

By using the concept of 'interpretive repertoires', expressions could be explored as individual articulations shaped by social experience, including the socio-cultural background of the subjects and any history of previous textual encounters brought out within the discussion. How viewers engaged with the text, their 'interpretive strategies' prompting the response, could be identified and their origin, or source 'interpretive repertoire(s)' suggested. First of all, viewers' interpretations would be located within the framework of expectation introduced in Uses and Gratifications theory and developed here (see Chapter Three: Conceptualising The Audience) to include notions of anticipation-expressed/anticipation-fulfilled and/or hope-expressed/hope-fulfilled. Then they 'interpretive repertoires' would be examined and reasons suggested to explain why they may be associated with, or have been generated by common experience. In conjunction with a speculative application of Chodorow, explanations could be advanced which account for the reasons particular social experience may cause some women to favour certain interpretations.

Two conflicting factors pertaining to the use of Chodorow for interpreting the audience response needed to be resolved. First of all, although accounting for social conditioning in the development of the psyche made her theory seem particularly here, her ideas were nonetheless developed within the psychoanalytic tradition, and psychoanalysis is a theory of the individual. How methodologically compatible was Chodorow with a study such as this which insists on the centrality of social beings? On the other hand, the adoption of her ideas by feminist film/television researchers had transformed the ways in which the female audience could be theorised, and Radway's application of Chodorow to readers' response had demonstrated effective practice. These were major academic inspirations for this study.

It was essential that the use of Chodorow should not be dependent merely on expedience. It was not sufficient for academic tradition alone to dictate current practice. There should be no automatic assumption that the use of her theory in former related studies pre-empted the need to look either elsewhere or further. Any application of Chodorowian theory must be adequately justified to avoid placing the guiding principles of the research in jeopardy.

Simplistically, there appeared to be two options. The focus could be adjusted to pay more attention to each viewer as an individual, who could be psychoanalysed first and socially

contextualised second. That is beyond my expertise and is not the point of the study anyway. Or Chodorow could be rejected altogether. This would be to reject the relevance of those ideas which formed the essence of her theory. And Chodorow's ideas are indeed relevant here. Her key concerns match those of this study. She promotes the centrality of women, advocates an exploration of their relationships with others, and encourages the investigation of social conditioning on personal development. It is reasonable and realistic to propose that one feature of social conditioning is how experiences of everyday relationships determine/influence/inspire/relay customs of interpretive reasoning; to submit that aspects of Chodorowian theory could indeed be incorporated here.

Rather than convert to an inadequate psychoanalytic study or to dismiss Chodorow altogether so forfeiting any illuminations of, or alternative rationalisations for response, a third option emerged. This was to incorporate her ideas but solely on a speculative basis, constantly clarifying that this was indeed the practice. Chodorow could then be used as a potential reference point which may assist in elucidating certain responses. Sensibly, she would be used only with extreme care even then. Unlike former film/television studies her theories must not be regarded as absolute, but relevant to the particular rather than in general. Chodorow could be but a limited guide to the interpretation of the audience response to The Mistress, the

theoretical constraints of any psychoanalytic theory proscribing wholehearted dependence. Its focus on the individual, its tendency to self-referential circularity, and the lack of specialist knowledge indicated above, must be ever borne in mind. Though her foregrounding of women's relationships was pertinent, it also had its pitfalls. Chodorow's commitment to the power of mothering constantly steers the analysis to the maternal connection and, whilst not refusing the significance of the mother/daughter bond, one result of this direction is to inhibit/prohibit exploration of other social relationships. Rather than conclude that all response from female viewers derives solely and inevitably from desire for/lack of mother-love, application of Chodorow must remain partial.

Despite these constraints, I should argue that instead of detracting from the research by being methodologically inappropriate, the occasional, careful and speculative use of Chodorow would benefit the research. It would offer a further dimension of explanation to that advanced by Uses and Gratifications theory.

The same motivations which inspired the construction of the theoretical model propelled both the methodological framework and the procedural practice. The principles and practice were never separate issues; each was integral to the other. Principles guide procedures, but they neither guarantee nor solve all issues of "meaning". There was a

constant "to-ing and fro-ing" involved over issues of meaning, their successful resolution being dependent on compatibility of principle and procedure. I had expected potential problems of meaning concerning the actual interpretation of the data, relating to discrepancies between my own and the audience understanding. Questions of meaning, however, were raised and assessed throughout the research. They concerned basic concepts, procedural strategy and validity of interpretation. The concept of 'interpretive community' had to be readdressed because the meanings it entailed were not strictly specific to this project, the principles of subject selection differing from Radway's reader response study. The substitution of 'interpretive repertoire' was acceptable because it was apt in principle and would work in practice. Its acknowledgement that social experience informed interpretive custom corresponded to the theoretical dictum that the Skilled Viewer is a social being. Procedurally, operating notions of 'interpretive repertoire' and 'interpretive strategy' proved unproblematic. I had not appreciated that the physical task of dealing with hundreds of pieces of paper and 24 tapes would so frustrate the search for meaning, that the ordering of data would become a predicament of meaning. The application of Uses and Gratifications categories to the data, following its classification into the four topic areas generated by the viewers, systematised it into manageable order whilst conforming with the principle that it should be audience-led. A problem of meaning associated with validity

of interpretation was presented by the use of Chodorow. Chodorow had developed her theories within psychoanalysis. The majority of previous studies had applied them to the text. Even Radway's interrogation of reader response concluded with the text of the 'ideal' and 'failed' romance. I intended to apply Chodorow to the audience response without psychoanalytic expertise and without resorting to the text. Such application was justified in principle because of the benefits television studies had gained from her theories. Procedurally, application of Chodorow could be experimental only, to hypothesise a further dimension of meaning to the framework of expectation.

Changes in and additions to methodological concepts and procedural strategy resolved these dilemmas. Technicalities of method were constantly evaluated and explored, tested and justified in terms of practical application, methodological appropriateness, and the benefits they would likely accrue. Methodological principles and practice interacted to motivate, facilitate and systematise the investigation into the concept of the Skilled Viewer.

The following chapter introduces the audience data, and details its analysis.

NOTES

1. Van Zoonen op. cit. (p33).
2. Morley, David: Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies [Routledge, 1992] (p161).
3. Op. cit.
4. Ibid (p40).
5. Ibid (p40).
6. Ibid (p39).
7. Ibid (p47).
8. Ibid (p49).
9. Ibid (p48).
10. Op. cit.
11. Op. cit.
12. [1993] op. cit.
13. Ibid (p312).
14. Ibid (p312).
15. Ibid (p314).
16. Ibid (p313).
17. Ibid (p314).
18. e.g. Walkerdine, Valerie: 'Video Replay: Families, Films and Fantasy' (Orig. pubd. 1986) in Alvarado, Manuel and Thompson, J O (eds): The Media Reader [BFI, 1990] (p340).
19. Ang, Ien and Hermes, Joke: 'Gender and/in Media Consumption' in Curran and Gurevitch (eds) op. cit. (p324), quoted in Brunson [1993] op. cit [p315].
20. Krueger op. cit. (p41).
21. Ibid (p42).
22. Ibid (p42).

23. Walker, Robert: 'An Introduction to Applied Qualitative Research', in Walker, Robert (ed): Applied Qualitative Research [Gower, 1985] (p3).
24. c.f. Oakley, Ann [1985] op. cit. on the way women relate to categories of social class.
25. e.g. Press, Andrea L: 'Class, Gender and the Female Viewer: Women's Responses to Dynasty' in Brown, Mary Ellen (ed): Television and Women's Culture [Sage, 1990].
26. An hour length programme broadcast in September 1984 about an alleged nuclear war where Sheffield was one of the first targets to be hit.
27. [Saxon House, 1977].
28. In Walker, Robert (ed): Applied Qualitative Research [Gower, 1985].
29. The term 'social context' is understood to include two associated factors. The first is the actual physical/social context where immediate peer pressure must be taken into account as potentially persuasive on response. The second is the ideological/social context in which the women are located by their experience of patriarchal upbringing, familial position, and opportunities available, whether taken or not, plus perceived opportunities throughout life. I should argue that because they are pre-existing groups, each group would be likely to exist relatively unproblematically in each individual group member's ideological/social context.
30. Hedges suggests that there are in fact four advantages in interviewing groups. The other two are for 'action research', and in order to generate new ideas. [Hedges op. cit.] (p72).
31. Ibid (p74)
32. [Sage, 1988]. In some instances this study conformed to Krueger's advice and concurs with certain of his definitions. It must be noted that groups here were not in all senses typical of the label 'focus group'. The intent here matched that of a focus group, 'to promote self-disclosure among participants' [p24], and selection was governed by homogeneity of interest. But where Krueger stated that '[t]he focus group is ideally composed of strangers' [p15] because 'familiarity tends to inhibit disclosure' [p28], this research argued the exact opposite. Krueger argued that the sole and 'rather narrow purpose' [p29] of focus

groups is to discover insightful data about the subject under discussion. A fundamental assumption here was that pre-existing groups would provide more in-depth data from shared, identifiable sources than would those brought together solely for research purposes. The ideal size of a focus group should number between four and 12. Several groups in this study failed to meet this criterion. The focus group has 'a focused discussion', the topics being 'carefully predetermined and sequenced' (p30) and in the manner of open-ended questions. Although I had prepared an agenda of potential topics for all groups to cover, their sequence was by no means predetermined. If I had to introduce any issues I did so in the manner of an open-ended question, but invariably topics were raised by group members themselves. Krueger insisted that interviewers of focus groups should be carefully trained. I had had quite considerable experience as an interviewer for a number of research projects, but I should not consider myself formally 'carefully trained'. I attended sessions prior to each project where discussions took place about the questions to be asked and the sort of response likely. The manner of approach and the nature of discussion were left to each interviewer's discretion. Any expertise I had was learned from my own experience and not from formal training.

Because of these anomalies, I have not used the term 'focus group', preferring rather the more 'open' term of 'semi-structured' groups.

33. Hedges op. cit. (p73).
34. Ibid (p75).
35. Krueger op. cit. (p46).
36. This group member was the community centre cook, who was arguably not a 'natural' member of the discussion group. She was, for instance, the only member of the group who did not "work" with words.
37. Walker op. cit. (p5).
38. Hedges op. cit. (p76).
39. Ibid (p77).
40. Ibid (p75).
41. Krueger op. cit. (p28).

42. It is likely that they were unused to having their opinions sought about any/everything but from this research I could only make observation on television.
43. Hedges op. cit. (p76).
44. Krueger op. cit. (p28)
45. Ibid (p28).
46. Walker op. cit. (p4).
47. In Roberts (ed) op. cit.
48. Ibid (p38).
49. Ibid (p56).
50. Ibid (p56).
51. Ibid (p56).
52. Ibid (p58).
53. This interviewee then discussed many interesting and relevant points for an hour or more; she just could not cope with being tape-recorded.
54. An example of this would be, for instance: "Everyone knows when a woman says no, she means yes".
55. Willis op. cit. (p3).
56. Radway op. cit. (p9).
57. Walkerdine op. cit. (p341).
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid (p314).
60. Ibid (p340).
61. Ibid (p340).
62. Ibid (p353).
63. Jones, Sue: 'The Analysis of Depth Interviews', in Walker op. cit. (p68).
64. Ibid (p69).
65. Ibid (p69).

66. Ang, Ien [1991] op. cit. (p107).
67. Morley [1992] op. cit. (p80).
68. c.f. McQuail [1983] op. cit.
69. Brunson, Charlotte: 'Text and audience' in Seiter et al (eds) op. cit. (p122).
70. Jensen, Klaus Bruhn, op. cit (p42).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE AUDIENCE DATA AND ITS INTERPRETATION

This chapter is divided into two parts: the description of the audience data, followed by the interpretation of it.

Not every word of every discussion about The Mistress is noted below. Only those responses which appeared to sum up, or describe a general opinion or feeling are registered. Please see Appendix I for the key to the transcripts.

The audience data is recorded under the four main subject areas raised in discussion by viewers of The Mistress. These were Carla Lane, Conventions, Stars and Characters, and Representation of Women. Please see Chapter Two: Perspectives, for an introduction to these areas.

First, a recapitulation of what is defined here as the audience data, or the evidence to be examined. It is:

The audience account of their viewing experience, systematically ordered into Uses and Gratifications categories.

Chapter Three: Conceptualising the Audience, explains the concept of the Skilled Viewer applied here.

Before detailing the actual transcription extracts, it is necessary to explain how they are recorded. As explained in Chapters Three and Four, Uses and Gratifications was used to

classify the data. Following its practical application as an ordering system, its serviceability was limited. Its descriptive framework proved to be not the most elegant of methods of writing up the data. Instead of illumination, the effect of attaching a Uses and Gratifications heading to each response recorded was that of an unnecessary accoutrement which the reader must penetrate before access to the data was granted. This defeated the whole object of applying Uses and Gratifications in the first place. Its deliberate and methodical organisation of the audience response would have been squandered by a writing-up stage which was effectively inconcise, imprecise and awkward to read. In order to make the account as lean and as accessible as possible, the audience data is described below with few specific references to their original Uses and Gratifications labels. Please see Appendix V for a chart of the Uses and Gratifications categories applied to the responses, and Appendix VII for an explanation of how they were specifically pertinent.

I was determined to record the data as concisely and comprehensibly as possible. It was also of paramount importance that this was not done in such a way that it became estranged from its producer(s). Firstly, the audience should not be marginalised in the account. Secondly, response isolated from its speaker(s) cannot be considered to be comprehensive, omitting as it does key contextual information, crucial for the eventual interpretation and for

the reader's understanding of that interpretation. The description of the audience response includes not only extracts of audience discussions, but also observations on what was said, the way in which it was said, and about those who said it. Although some have been deleted to avoid as much frustration for the reader as possible, to a certain extent the pauses in the viewers' speech patterns have been retained in the following quotes from transcriptions. Once again this is to preserve the centrality of the audience by acknowledging in the record of their response that they were people who were speaking spontaneously, sometimes thoughtfully, and frequently in reaction to each other, rather than neat articulators of a prepared script.

The benefits of Uses and Gratifications descriptive categories decreased following the categorisation exercise. Correspondingly, the advantages of adhering strictly to the four headings raised by viewers lessened when it came to the interpretation stage. These headings were originally used to facilitate the account of the data and its understanding. They aided the description, but hindered the interpretation. Where the recording of the data required a "bottom-up" methodology, with its careful attention to masses of detail, the practice of interpretation necessitated a "top-down" approach in order to gain an overview from which to draw conclusions. Examining it from within the four areas would have skewed the focus, resulting in apparent disparate, independent concerns. If an attempt was made to interrelate

the findings from each area, the constant repetition and cross-referencing involved would serve only to confuse. The interpretation drops the four descriptive headings as such. They remain as "invisible" guidelines, but are prevented from acting as proscribing boundaries.

### AUDIENCE DATA: THE DESCRIPTION

#### Carla Lane

It was fundamentally important to many women in the audience that the series was written by Carla Lane. The main attractions were her attention to character, the themes and issues she explores, and the quality of her writing.

#### Characters

Generally, viewers expected Carla Lane to foreground female characters, who would be substantially drawn and would develop throughout the series.

[1] A woman's always the central character  
... and .. her .. sort of thoughts and  
feelings and doubts .. usually about  
being a housewife and being single or  
... being a mistress ..

[M A Film Studies Students]

One woman saw Carla Lane's series as revolutionary with regards to the place of women in television.

I thought Butterflies had broken new ground .. ...  
.. because .. on television ... as opposed to  
radio where you had June Whitfield doing fantastic  
women things ... women have always been

peripheral, they've always been ... the funny charlady, or Her Indoors ... like in The Minders<sup>1</sup> .. ... .. part of the comedy, but on the edge of it ... in ... Dad's Army .. it's the boy's mother .. ... .. who's always in the background ... and good for a laugh ... and I suppose until Thora Hird ... her sort of series, where she is the centre ... I don't think they knew what to do with women, and women weren't writing the stuff and really didn't know how to put a woman ... in the middle of the stage in a comedy, in a situation comedy ... so that with Carla Lane coming along and writing, and there was The Liver Birds, wasn't there? .. ... .. That one was interesting, because ... she was talking about young girls, youngish girls ... who were ... very funny ... I can't remember the series too well, I've just got a fairly sympathetic memory ... of it ... as being good fun with a little bit of wisdom underneath .. ... .. a little bit of streetwise .. ... .. wisdom, which came through and was attractive, and I thought was nice ... especially for girls who hadn't gone out into the world yet.

[D]

Much of the enjoyment gained from The Liver Birds and Butterflies was attributed to the female characters, the following explanation capturing the overriding opinion of most viewers.

I liked ... the central character being a woman ... and I liked the way little things were important, and how .. what was going on, like the daydreams of .. [Ria/Wendy Craig] .. and just little everyday bits were important and were made central to the thing.

[E]

Their expectations that the new Carla Lane series, The Mistress would be equally enjoyable because of the women characters were thwarted.

There's nothing wrong with exploring .. what women think and feel .. ... .. in Butterflies ... there was .. ... .. a much greater attempt to actually

explore the real relationships between males and females ... much more, in terms of husbands and wives and lovers and sons. And therefore, it actually asks men to think about their role in the situation.

[A]

Viewer [A] implied that merely focusing on women was not enough. There should be a chance for all characters to develop, and this should be demonstrated by their relationships with each other. She expanded her thoughts, comparing Ria in Butterflies with Maxine in The Mistress.

There seemed to be much greater complexity .. ... ..  
.. I find it difficult to say what the difference was, but I .. felt that [Ria] was much more real. Much more. .. There was much more depth to the character ... she was fallible, I suppose, because .. ... .. well things ... didn't work out .. they weren't predictable, I don't think ... something to do with Wendy Craig that acted it .. ... .. I mean, she has a different persona from Felicity Kendal ... I think Felicity Kendal's femininity is ... exploited rather than explored ... and I see nothing wrong ... with her ... femininity, or ... any woman's femininity .. it's just the way it's .. used.

[A]

Many viewers thought that in Ria, Carla Lane had captured an "essential truth" which expressed the plight and personality of the contemporary middle-aged, middle class housewife and mother. How fiction compared with fact, and how realistic they perceived the character to be, influenced their opinions of how effective the character was, and how much pleasure they gained from her.

General disappointment was expressed at the lack of depth of the characters in The Mistress.

[Maxine] acts like somebody who has no interests .. ... .. at all .. ... .. not interested in the world about them .. ... .. she's not even interested in flowers .. ... .. she doesn't seem to be interested in anything.

[D]

and

I think I would like a little bit more infilling on the background ... of the characters ... I mean Felicity Kendal as far as you know, hasn't got .. a relation in the world ... the wife does have a mother somewhere, doesn't she? .. ... .. because .. the way people act .. you can understand them much better if you set them against the background that they ... come from ... she's a bit shallow .. ... .. in many ... instances.

[B]

### Themes and Issues

Viewers held the opinion that Lane's comedies illustrated the maxim: "the course of true love never runs smooth". Her focus on heterosexual romance and the trials afforded to the female characters in their expectations and pursuit of the romantic ideal were, for the women in the audience, the key issues of her series. Discussions turned on the following concerns: how, the romance of the situation pointed up the background of (fictional) everyday routine and domesticity they were set against; how "real" problems were reflected and sensitively treated; comparing the characters' experiences with the viewers' own experiences; predicting outcomes for the characters and for the series; and gossiping about the themes and issues.

Viewer [J] positively enjoyed the fictional portrayal of the role conflict so many women have to deal with in daily social life.

The two women are appealing .. to the part of us that wants to be .. the mistress, the interesting ... more attractive, more ... exciting ... woman .. ... .. and, at the same time some sympathy, you've got some feeling for the wife ... we are all in that position ... and you know how difficult it is to remain like the mistress .. ... .. in an everyday situation.

[J]

Other viewers highlighted aspects of realism associated with the roles portrayed.

[8] It's about family life, isn't it? You know .. ... .. I could see our family in it quite a bit.

(Laughter)

[3] Yes, I think you felt for her, didn't you?

[8] You can identify with them.

[Nursery and First School Teachers]

Others concentrated on Lane's choice of subject matter.

[1] I'm **interested** in .. ... .. the subjects that she chooses .. ... .. but ... I wouldn't say that I **liked** them.

[M A Film Studies Students]

All the above quotes illustrate that most women in the audience could identify with the beliefs and values, and with the characters' behaviour as presented in The Mistress. The degrees to which they agreed with or rejected those beliefs and values, and supported or opposed the role behaviour were manifestly different. The final quote above

demonstrates how response is rarely simple or one-dimensional. This viewer appreciated the fact that certain themes and issues were dealt with: 'I'm **interested** in the subjects that she chooses ..', but she did not gain positive enjoyment from those themes and issues: '.. but I wouldn't say that I **liked** them.'

Thinking about the future is grounded in a knowledge of the past, and the interest in discussing the realism of a Carla Lane series, and then predicting how it would proceed and conclude emanated from enjoyable memories of her previous comedies. The following remarks recall The Liver Birds:

I liked .. [The Liver Birds] .. I suppose it was local, because it was Liverpool .. and .. well, the time it was on .. I mean .. ... .. what was it? .. twenty years ago or something .. ... .. that it was on. So I could ... associate with it because I was about eighteen or whatever at the time. I think that's part of it, but I know it was very popular, but I think part of it was the age of the girls in it, and they were in a bedsitter ..

[K]

and

I liked .. the humour in it. I don't know whether it had anything to do with the Liverpool thing .. ... .. you see it was very Liverpool humour, wasn't it? .. ... .. the Polly James, Elizabeth Estensen character .. ... .. was ... a sort of scouser, wasn't she? .. ... .. and Nerys Hughes was the .. ... .. middle [class] .. or so-called .. ... .. because she had all these pretensions to .. ... .. and they seemed to do a lot as well. Although I can't actually remember any of the situations ... it seems as if each week it was .. something slightly different .. some scrape that they'd got themselves into.

[H]

Viewer [K] was brought up and still lived on Merseyside. She described two reasons for liking The Liver Birds: personal identification with the characters and regional identification with the setting. Viewer [H] had lived her life in Sheffield. She described two other facets that attracted her to The Liver Birds. They differed from those of Viewer [K] because of differing personal experiences. Viewer [H] gained her enjoyment from the popularity of Liverpool humour current in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the caricatured social class types portrayed. Both viewers visibly enjoyed their memories of The Liver Birds. Both smiled or laughed fondly when they recalled the series.

Other viewers had pleasurable memories of Butterflies.

[8] I enjoyed .. [Butterflies] .. yes, very much.

[4] Yes, I did.

.. ... ..

[8] It's about family life, isn't it? You know .. ... .. I could see our family in it quite a bit.

(Laughter)

[3] Yes, I think you felt for her, didn't you?

[8] You can identify with them.

[Nursery and First School Teachers]

and,

[4] I used to love Butterflies .. ([3] I liked it.) .. I used to really love it, and ... it didn't seem to be putting women down .. ... .. to me .. 'cause the woman in that seemed to be .. a person in her own right .. ... .. even though

she was basically a kept [woman] .. ...  
.. but she seemed to retain her .. own  
identity .. in all the roles that she  
played .. ... .. she had two grown-up  
sons and a husband and a lover, but she  
still ... stayed herself I think. She  
didn't sort of keep going to pieces over  
the whole thing. ..

[1] She had quite a lot of anguish about it  
though didn't she? I mean you saw that  
..

.. ... ..

[3] .. what she did for me was much more  
realistic .. she spent time on her own  
thinking.

(General agreement)

[4] Yeah.

[1] That's right.

[3] She went off on her own ... and you  
could .. they actually showed her .. ...  
.. with her thoughts.

[Community Centre Workers]

The faces of these viewers lit up as they discussed Butterflies. Their fondness for the series seemed generally to be associated with the following: approval that the central character was a woman who was treated sympathetically; sympathy for and identification with the main character and her situation; and enjoyment of the familiar family setting.

The act of remembering itself seemed also to provide considerable satisfaction. What began as the retrieval of a personal favourite from individual memory developed into a

social pleasure as viewers shared it with the other members of their group and/or with myself.

On the other side of the coin, there were instances where women gave vent to feelings which disagreed with those ideas outlined in Carla Lane series. An example of this is the following viewer's objection to Gemma's behaviour in Solo.

I'm on my own ... and therefore direct experience of what she was supposed to be doing .. I thought she was abysmal .. I thought ... she was weak .. I just didn't like it at all, I couldn't relate to her as a single woman at all ... it was all to do with falling back on men all the time, seeing men as some kind of crutch rather than as .. people.

[A]

Another woman disliked the way Ria in Butterflies was portrayed.

Women work and women are professional and women are occupied, and .. where do they get the time .. to behave .. like she did? ... There must be some women .. because she didn't get ... you know .. the information from nowhere, I mean .. obviously, she did her research .. but .. I can't really believe that there are women so stupid as that woman.

[C]

Viewers [A] and Viewer [C] would strongly disagree with the Community Centre Workers quoted above. That a central female character was treated sympathetically, and women's problems given precedence, were of secondary importance for them. They regarded as most significant those aspects of the women's characters which had been selected for notice. They wanted the focus to be on strength of character and positive

action, rather than on how to bear "a woman's lot". The viewers who were disappointed in the lack of realism in The Mistress felt let down because their expectations of a Carla Lane series were frustrated and, in turn, their ability to predict how the series would turn out was foiled.

Once again, experiences of reality were strong influences on the perceptions of realism as noted above, and on memory and the pleasures of memory, which in turn influenced expectation prediction. Both Viewers [A] and [C] were women on their own who were irritated by the characters of Gemma and Ria because they did not relate to their own experiences of reality. The Community Centre Workers found Ria's independence of thought appealing. Viewers [A] and [C]'s memories of each character were of exasperation because of their lack of practical independence.

#### Quality of writing

Most viewers praised Carla Lane's writing in general but were dissatisfied with The Mistress. Even the following viewer, although expressing doubts about Carla Lane's information sources, remarked

You know ... she's good. You've got to give it to her, she's good, but where did she get it from?

[C]

Those viewers who remembered The Liver Birds all agreed that in that series Lane had captured a certain "spirit of the

time", and most references to Butterflies recalled what appeared to be universal truths about family relationships. One viewer remarked, when describing her 13 year old daughter's pleasure in Butterflies that

[s]he found a ... poetry in that. .. . . And I was happy for her to watch it .. ... .. to some extent, except that I would hate her to live a suburban empty life like that.

[D]

Many viewers also demonstrated as strong a loyalty to Carla Lane as they did to the actresses, Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher (see discussion below in the section: Stars and Characters). If they had liked a previous series of hers and then found they enjoyed The Mistress less well than they had expected, they often looked for reasons other than the author's writing to explain their disappointment.

There's too many derogatory things .. about women in that for me to find them funny. For example, they refer to .. the wife as the teddy bear .. ... .. and that sort of thing, which I think is derogatory to women. It's laughing .. at women ... but it's a very male way I think of laughing at women .. ... .. it's very much a male conception .. ... .. it makes me feel that somebody else has edited what she said ... what Carla Lane's written .. or there's been things added in by different people .. ... .. it a very male conception ... so .. I find it hard to believe that it's Carla Lane as well.

[F]

Viewer [F] implied that male intervention had significantly altered Carla Lane's work. Another woman, although concerned about the representation of women in television, argued that more indirect influences were in operation. She thought that

it was the more subtle, less obvious constraints of a patriarchal society on Carla Lane that prevented her from promoting any more progressive ideas for the roles of women, as they would be rejected by the established decision makers in the broadcasting industry.

You see, you've got to remember that she's writing for ... I think this is the worst thing she's ever done, but it's got touches of her brilliance ... but she's also writing for ... the sort of television for this .. for .. society at this point in time, like, then .. they're refusing to put on anything that's a bit more radical.

[E]

The Sewing Class attributed yet different reasons for what they judged to be a drop in the standard of writing.

[2] It's .. just the fact that .. if a person does something say ... like The Liver Birds and Butterflies ... say .. and she .. ... .. brings something else you expect it .. ... .. to be .. top notch, don't you?

[1] Well, yes .. yes, because she's a good writer, isn't she?

[2] Yes.

.. ... ..

[1] She's good .. ... .. but she had a crash, you know like, when she lost ... some of her fam .. ([2] Yes.) .. on the River Mersey .. (<Int> She lost her son or something, didn't she?<sup>2</sup>) .. Yes, now ... is this the one after that all happened I wonder?

[Sewing Class]

This group were ready to believe that the reason The Mistress was disappointing was that Carla Lane's ability to write had been affected by personal tragedy. Viewer [C],

whose faint praise headed this section, was at a loss to understand how or why Carla Lane was writing about the sort of people portrayed in The Mistress at all. She argued that in straying from her personal roots, Lane was unable to portray realistic characters.

She's not associating with Liverpool from whence she came .. ... .. the .. sort of bracket that she's working in is ... something like ... when I think back to .. ten years ago, the Air Force, and the life we lived then, that's the kind of life she's talking about, but where did she get her information from? .. ... .. because these people live this sort of cloistered existence ... everybody's looking to make everybody else, you know ... but it's an unsort of realistic life, so where did she get her information from, I keep asking myself, because .. ... .. she seems to be removed from the life she comes from .. ... .. you see ... where did she get her knowledge from? That's what I want to know.

[C]

Later, the same viewer modified her opinions, adding that her main objection was not that the characters were unrealistic, but that she saw them as representations of a particular type of woman who existed solely in the prosperous south-east of England.

There are some people in the West End or wherever, you know, in commuter land who really do live like that .. ... .. there really are .. ... .. what I'm trying to say. It is not based on anything north of Watford.

[C]

Viewer [C] could not dissociate Carla Lane from her Liverpool background. She attributed her disappointment in The Mistress to the lack of "Liverpool-ness" or at least to

the lack of "northern-ness" contained in it. Her views were endorsed by other women in the audience.

It's very southern, isn't it? People in the north don't live like that, do they?

[M] [Recorded in field notes after audio tape recorder switched off].

and,

People do live like that .. but ... not very many people.

[A]

It was almost as if viewers were looking for justification for what they deemed to be a lower standard of writing. They wanted to exonerate Carla Lane from personal blame for a poor series, so they searched for influences which may have affected the quality of her writing. The reasons cited for the excellence of Butterflies did not result from any equivalent, contrasting, positive experiences or influences in Carla Lane's life. It was Carla Lane's writing skill which drew the acclaim. No mention was made of any contribution, positive or negative, from a male production team. The influences of the male-dominated society in existence at the time of production of Butterflies were not called into question. Nor were references made to any likely happy events in her personal life. If a viewer failed to enjoy Butterflies this was not attributed to its lack of Liverpool-ness, or northern-ness, or to its inclusion of middle class, south-eastern affluence.

Unquestionably, one of the principal reasons viewers watched The Mistress was because it was by Carla Lane. Her standing as a tv fiction writer held major appeal. They believed that in her material they could look forward to female protagonists and a focus on their preoccupations and developing relationships. They enjoyed sharing memories of previous series, sharing their expectations of this series, and predicting its outcome. They were aware of and approved of Lane's reputation as a skilful, and successful, writer.

### Conventions

The conventions of broadcasting, content and form associated with a Carla Lane comedy series influenced viewing habits and viewers' enjoyment.

### Conventions of Broadcasting

Broadcasting conventions of scheduling and of length of programmes were important to viewers of The Mistress in terms of planning viewing time, and giving them something to look forward to. To a greater or lesser extent television viewing was for most an habitualised aspect of their lives. Several remarked that they would always try to watch a Carla Lane series, either making time to see it when it was broadcast, or videoing it for later viewing.

[1] It was the highlight of my week to watch Butterflies.

[4] Yeah

(General agreement)

[2] ... Or sort of video it and whatever ..  
... .. a highlight of my viewing week,  
yeah.

[Babysitting Circle]

There were also many who, although not too enthusiastic about The Mistress, made a deliberate effort to watch other programmes such as soap operas on a regular basis. They were united in irritation when the scheduling of any programme they routinely watched was altered.

Looking forward to a programme of their own choice figured prominently in discussions. Although this could be construed as rather a sad state of affairs, implying women in the tv audience have so little fulfilment in their lives that a favourite television programme is all they can look forward to, it was not expressed like that at all. It was not that television programmes were the only things these women had to look forward to, but, that they were something regular they could rely on; a sort of weekly treat. The "routine-ness" of the scheduling contributed to their enjoyment, as much as did the promise that they could relax for the duration of that half hour programme even if that brief period dictated the length of their rest.

The expectation of viewing a piece of fiction which may aspire to realism and portray fictional characters in

difficulty but, at the same time, was a lighthearted escape from mundane reality, strongly influenced viewing habits.

### Conventions of Content

Characterisation, setting, subject matter, and plot were all conventions of content which affected viewers in this study.

Response to the way in which the characters were constructed related particularly to how viewers perceived them to portray a particular social class, the middle class. Because of the nature of their response, in that many felt affronted and patronised by what they perceived to be the overall middle class-ness of the series, it has been incorporated in the later discussion in the section: Conventions of Form/Textual Address. Please see also the section below (Setting) for a discussion on the way viewers perceived the settings of the series also to be a 'class' issue). The other key point relating to characterisation was that viewers were manifestly aware that 'types' are conventionally used in sitcoms, and that numbers of characters are kept to a minimum. They repeatedly expressed their disappointment that in The Mistress, unlike in her previous series, Carla Lane had tended to rely more on stereotypes: the "fluffy", funloving mistress; the cool, competent, longsuffering wife. They appreciated the components that go to make up particular types, and several groups demonstrated an awareness that numbers of permanent

characters must be few for ease of understanding both of characters and of plot. In a critical sense, therefore, most viewers understood the reasons behind the inclusion of certain characters, and the exclusion of others.

Response to setting was associated with realism, expectations of a typical Carla Lane setting, regional discrimination, and curiosity about other people. Factors that appealed to some women as being particularly realistic were considered by others to be just the opposite. Viewer [B] found the mistress's house rang true.

I love the .. very discreet cul-de-sac that she lives in .. ... .. that's in the true tradition of all the mistresses .. ... .. that you read about .. ... .. in historical novels .. or in actual historical fact .. ... .. and there she is in this bijou residence ... in a .. very discreet cul-de-sac. .. ... .. It seemed very real to me.

[B]

Viewer [F], concentrating on the artefacts within the mistress's house took the contrary view.

I've never been in a woman's house where she would have .. ... .. a drinks table behind the sofa, that was a very male thing I think.

[F]

Expectations of typical sitcom settings were summed up as

They're usually home settings .. of some sort or other.

[K]

From a Carla Lane series, however, they anticipated not merely home settings but tastefully designed home settings which would appeal to their sense of the aesthetic.

[1] Both [homes were] immaculately well kept  
.. and upmarket.

[Friendship Group]

Whilst the settings in The Mistress were the principal appeal for some viewers, they were a major source of irritation for others. The former watched the series solely for the beautiful settings and were not disappointed. Their counterparts were put off by the very factors that attracted them, such as the co-ordination within the sets, and the femininity of Felicity Kendal's house drew the following conflicting remarks.

I found it studiedly decorative .. ... .. I enjoyed that. .. ... .. And I found that I wanted to see more into their rooms, into their bedrooms and kitchens and living rooms. .. ... .. In the introduction to the Laura Ashley catalogue they were talking about .. the perfect .. oh, you know: .. read our catalogue and you can have the perfect room to match your perfect lifestyle, or something .. ... .. and it just struck me that what interested me about that programme was that everything co-ordinated .. ... .. so beautifully with the characters and with ... I mean .. in that particular episode he gets out of bed in a blue bedroom wearing .. navy blue underpants .. ... .. and everything co-ordinated, you know (laughs) .. and it was very studied, and very ... and it was all very good taste .. ... .. in inverted commas: good taste ... the sort of taste that is ... fashionable and that is being pushed in the shops and .. you know Habitat, Laura Ashley, and this sort of thing .. ... .. sort of pale pastels .. but it also fitted in with the characters, like Felicity Kendal was in the soft pinks and .. the squashy ... pale .. couch .. with ... the lampshade always matched something that she was wearing .. ... .. and the .. sort of voluptuous

bedroom with all pillows and the pale cloudy colours ..

[H]

and,

I ... like Felicity Kendal's [house] very much. ... It fascinates me ... and her clothes do, too, you know .. ... .. she just looks .. fantastic .. ... .. everything's co-ordinating .. ... .. it's typical woman .. ... .. it's obvious that ... the feminine touches have been put in all the way.

[L]

But,

[i]t's terribly terribly ... feminine and all .. ... .. well for a start it's very expensive .. ... .. beautifully done, with lots of little flowery prints here and there .. ... .. It's like everything I totally hate about decorating.

[G]

and,

I think it's symbolic of, or characteristic of the whole production that, for instance .. ... .. the mistress's flat .. ... .. looks immaculate ... as if nobody lives there .. ... .. It's interesting that there's nothing out of place ... there isn't a newspaper on the floor .. ... .. there isn't a book ..

[D]

Whilst the settings for some women captivated them by their charming femininity, others criticised them for lacking individuality and/or for a certain clinical planning. Both types of remark illustrate how viewers expected certain features from a Carla Lane series and that in both cases their expectations were fulfilled. The first viewers predicted beautiful settings, which is what they perceived. The second group of women expected sterile settings.

Equally, that is what they perceived. Both groups also enjoyed airing their criticisms of the settings, be they positive or negative.

All the viewers in this study were from the north of England, living either in Sheffield or on Merseyside. Women from both areas raised the issue of north/south differences. Although all the remarks stated "the south", it is taken here to be the customary phrase for "the prosperous south-east of England". The Young Lesbians commented,

[3] I mean it wouldn't be funny .. if it was somebody who couldn't afford to live ..  
... .. it wouldn't be funny.

... ..

[6] Well, it is, though, because they find Coronation Street funny .. ... ..  
honestly, if you sit ... with some southerners watching Coronation Street .. they piss themselves (laughs) .. ([3] Yeah, because that's how they think all northerners are.) .. because they think that's how we behave.

[Young Lesbians]

The implication here is that "middle class" and "south" are synonymous as are, correspondingly, "working class" and "north". From the introduction of this idea in this context I infer also that they felt patronised by southern programme makers, both in general as well as in terms of this particular series, which includes Carla Lane, the writer. They were suggesting that middle class southern attitudes to working class northerners are habitually disparaging. This was supported by the M A Film Studies students who argued

that because the programme makers were from the south so the focus was on the south and the people who live there. This group, who it will be seen later were so vehemently against the middle class-ness of the series, were equally opposed to its location. Although they didn't know where the exact location was they described it as

[3] Somewhere just rich.

[5] Upmarket.

[M A Film Studies Students]

and asserted that London was the usual location for these types of programmes.

<Int> Why would you think that they would normally be set in London?

[5] Because middle class sitcoms are usually set in London ... or the outskirts, like Suburbiton [sic].

.. ... ..

[4] It's very rare that they look anywhere else .. ... .. because most of the stuff's produced in London ..

[6] And the accent's always ..

[5] Received Pronunciation (laughs).

[M A Film Studies Students]

Other viewers thought the setting determined the type of character and that they were not the type to whom women in the north could easily relate.

There are some people in the West End or wherever, you know, in commuter land who really do live like that .. there really are ... what I'm trying to

say .. it is not based on anything north of  
Watford.

[C]

and,

It's very southern, isn't it? People in the north  
don't live like that, do they? .. ... .. It's just  
not our sort of humour. It's very southern humour,  
isn't it? It's not northern humour at all. It  
doesn't relate to the north at all.

[M] [Recorded in field notes after tape  
recorder was switched off].

Not every individual interviewee or group remarked on the  
location. All those who did so agreed that the choice of  
location left a lot to be desired.

The older viewers showed little interest in the exterior  
locations. They were intrigued by the interiors of the homes  
and were delighted with "seeing how the other half" live.  
They were particularly enamoured with the kitchens.

[1] I'd love kitchens like they have on  
there.

[2] Yes, yes.

[3] Yes, so would I.

[1] Oh, I would, yes.

[2] Yes.

[3] I'd like one of those sort of houses  
that never get dirty as well.

.. ... ..

[2] They have fantastic kitchens, don't  
they?

[3] Yes.

[1] But her kitchen .. oh I do .. looked fantastic her kitchen.

[2] Yes, they do. They do.

[1] You spend your life in your kitchen.

[3] Mm.

[2] Yes. Mm. ... .. Yes, it does .. it does appeal to me.

[1] And me.

[Sewing Class]

Observing the living conditions of the better off and indulging in the fantasy of having such wonderful kitchens appeared to be highly significant pleasures for these women.

Some viewers expressed indifference to the choice of subject matter. Most agreed that, generally and traditionally, adultery was an acceptable topic for situation comedy. The Friendship Group alone regarded it as inappropriate.

[1] I can't think how .. ... .. it's supposed to be funny ... I mean it's not a funny subject, is it? There's sort of two people being .. torn apart because they're desperately in love with the same man .. ... .. and I can't .. I just can't see anything to laugh about in that.

[Friendship Group]

Others disagreed.

Why should .. serious matters be dealt with only ... in a serious way .. like in a .. you know .. heavy drama or something? I mean .. you can get over points just as well in a comedy, in fact probably better ..

[G]

and,

A new Carla Lane sitcom with .. ... .. Felicity Kendal, and ... I think the subject matter .. I thought might be interesting to see how they were going to handle that. .. ... .. I think the first time round .. my main reaction was that I didn't find it very funny .. ... .. slightly thought: oh, it's in a little bit bad taste .. ... .. but then there's some sort of ... convention whereby ... you can get away with bad taste .. ... .. in situation comedy.

[H]

and,

[2] I was interested to see how they'd present it ... knowing she was in it .. I was thinking: well, is it going to be the mistress seen as the scarlet woman who causes man's downfall, or, you know, what angle are they going to take? .. ... .. and they seemed to have landed on the side of women as strength rather than women as a sort of evil, conniving, you know ... leading men down the path.

[Babysitting Circle]

However,

I hate the way it revolves around sex and food. .. ... .. It sort of epitomises what men depend on women for, to provide ... for them .. their nourishment, their shelter and their needs, sexual needs .. ... .. very, very physical, essential sort of things.

[E]

Priorities differed from evaluating the choice of subject matter, to pondering its use for a purpose; from considering the convention of tolerance which authorises comedy to make a statement about serious matters to reflecting on the potential slant to be adopted by the programme makers; and finally to the material process of presentation, the

practical way in which the subject matter was used to achieve the comic.

Many women in the audience expressed disappointment with the series because as far as the mistress herself was concerned the end seemed doomed to misery. Viewer [F]'s comment spoke for many.

I think I expected something more positive . . . .  
.. a more positive view.

[F]

The women in the audience regularly manifested awareness of sitcom plot conventions when they discussed those characters referred to here as the "major-minor" characters in The Mistress. The major-minor characters are so called because although they were not the protagonists they were permanent characters constant to the series, appearing in the majority of episodes as opposed to those other minor characters who appeared only occasionally in one or two episodes at the most. The three major-minor characters in The Mistress were Jenny, Max's friend and employee, Simon, Luke's office colleague, and Jo, Luke and Helen's Filipino maid.

In the discussion below (see the section on Stars/Character) relating to the two female protagonists in The Mistress, it will be seen that the appeal of the actresses themselves was greater than that of the characters they were portraying. This was not so with the major-minor

characters. Viewers only ever discussed Jenny, Simon, and Jo as fictional characters. They were not at all interested in them as private people, nor in their acting histories. The most frequent way in which these characters came up for discussion was when the women in the audience assessed the reason for their inclusion. Viewers drew on their knowledge of narrative in general, and of television comedy in particular, to conclude that each major-minor character was effectively a narrative device; a way of presenting the points of view of the three major protagonists in more depth, Jenny, Simon, and Jo, each acting as confidant(e) to Maxine, Luke, and Helen respectively.

They're .. ... just useful for the particular type of programme that it is .. ... they allow you to work through ... the audience to ... be .. party to ... conversations, and working through the story that you couldn't get from his relationship with his wife, or his relationship with Felicity Kendal as well. .. ... so I ... just think they're .. functions of the plot, if you like.

[E]

### Conventions of Form

Technical practice, titles and title sequences, performance, laughtrack, and textual address were significant influences on response.

It was repeatedly demonstrated that many viewers were frustrated by The Mistress in a number of ways. It did not conform to their expectations of what a Carla Lane series

should be. It is suggested here that the slow pace of her series such as Butterflies and The Mistress contributed to their reflective qualities and in turn gave viewers a chance to ponder not only the issues presented, but on how they were presented. It is unlikely that filming techniques have a direct influence on audience response. It is likely that indirectly it enhances whatever that response is, encouraging the application of critical faculties. If viewers are less than happy with the programme, as in general they did seem to be with The Mistress, they would probably be further vexed when the slowness of pace and general inaction fail to distract their minds from their irritation. Several women talked about sitcoms such as Fawlty Towers or Cheers, those comedies based around speedy one-liners and fast action. They referred to how much they **laughed** at them. Even if they had observed that Basil, the hotel owner in Fawlty Towers, or Sam, the bartender in Cheers, could at times be regarded as rather sad characters, it was the laughs these characters provoked that delighted the audience. Viewers expected the slower 'domestic comedies' to be more in tune with their everyday life and to evoke smiles rather than laughter. The ruefulness of Butterflies appealed to their sense of pathos as well as their sense of the comic, and the women in the audience expected their response to The Mistress to be similar to their reaction to Butterflies. They experienced so little sympathy for Maxine, the mistress, that most felt little loyalty to her, finding the way she behaved in her situation

neither very funny as in Fawlty Towers and Cheers, nor touching as in Butterflies. The filming techniques seemed to intensify their negative criticism of the series in general.

Two viewers made direct criticisms of technical practice.

Viewer [F] was interested in the camera work and editing.

The lip-sync was out quite a lot .. ... .. I think technically it's quite good .. ... .. I don't think they're taking any risks ... it's typical television .. ... .. it's well enough done so that you're not distracted ...

[F]

Viewer [E] was more interested in the lighting and choice of locations, and the use of sets.

It's too clean. It's clean and summery and ... I don't like it. ... I suppose it's typical situation comedy in the lighting and the ... outdoors and .. all the location things .. it's very ... bright and clean, and there's no effects done with the lighting, or anything, it's just .. lacking .. and it's as narrow as the genre of ... situation comedy is, anyway. .. ... .. when they do go outside, it's really sort of .. ... .. she's in the restaurant, eating, it's just the same as if she's inside the house .. ... .. inside his house, or him in his office, or her in the shop .. ... .. When they go outside, like to the woods or something, to have sex .. for a change ... it's just like: oh .. ... .. this is an outside shot, this is an inside shot .. ... .. I really don't like that ... it's not anything new .. either, they're still .. ... .. draining on the same old techniques.

[E]

and,

The interiors are cool and clean, and they're well lit, brightly lit, boring .. ... .. I find it boring .. ... .. it could just be done more imaginatively.

[E]

Viewers [F] and [E] were video-makers, expressly concerned with the conventions of technical production. Both argued that technically the production could barely be faulted but that more creative technical practice would have added to the overall artistic production.

The following woman who had never had anything to do with the making of television programmes, videos, or film, showed how the technical practice of lighting can influence the enjoyment of the 'naïve' viewer. She took a delight in the whole 'look' of The Mistress, stating how much she liked its brightness. Her positive appreciation of the series was underlined by a contrasting negative reaction to the lighting of Coronation Street.

Coronation Street makes me feel depressed, it's so drab.

[L]

I was surprised at the lack of awareness of the M A Film Studies Students. I had expected them to demonstrate an understanding of conventional technical practice. When discussing the outdoor locations, it didn't occur to them that shots from different locations may have been edited to appear as one. They thought it was conventional for sitcoms to be filmed in London.

[3] At first I thought it was in London, you know, 'cause that's what I always think it is .. ... .. but then when she was by the sea, I assumed it was Brighton or somewhere.

[M A Film Studies Students]

There were two types of response to the title and title sequence of The Mistress. The first was associated with the choice of the title and pictures in the title sequence and the way they were presented, and of the theme tune. The second was with how viewers related the title and title sequence to the series.

Many women in the audience stated that by itself, the title, The Mistress, would not have attracted them, although the title plus the knowledge that it was a series written by Carla Lane did intrigue most. One viewer strongly objected to the choice of title, but was also very aware of Carla Lane's own predilection for series titles.

I mean I actually object to the title .. ... I just don't like it at all ... although it could be used as a pun .. is she a mistress of her own destiny, as much as his mistress? .. ... it is possible to take it two ways .. ... But ... I still don't like the title, but I think it's something to do with Carla Lane liking the single word titles.

[A]

Conversely, it was the title which specifically attracted the 12 year old schoolgirl to the series.

When I saw it advertised .. in the Radio Times ... I said to myself: let's see what this is like .. partly because .. one of the reasons is I don't particularly .. I sort .. I don't particularly know what a .. mistress means. That's one of the reasons that I wanted to watch it .. ... .. you know.

[I]

Although other viewers were indifferent to the title, these contrasting quotes illustrate the power a title has of

attracting (or otherwise) an audience, Viewer [A] being offended, Viewer [I] intrigued. They also demonstrate that reaction is as much dependent on the individual viewer's past personal experience as well as on their former tv viewing experience.

With regards to the title sequence, most viewers liked the pictures but did not understand why they had been chosen to represent such a series.

[2] I can't understand why they're there,  
but they're nice.

[Family Group]

The pictures did not provide the correct clues to the series content.

[2] Were we ... meant to assume [the pictures] were all mistresses of one kind or another, I suppose? .. ... ..  
Because her picture came on at the end, didn't it?

[3] Significance was wasted .. ... .. on me,  
I'm afraid.

(General agreement)

.. ... ..

[1] I don't think it was actually appropriate ... to the comedy in the way it was .. portrayed.

[Babysitting Circle]

The main complaint was that

[i]t was (laughs) nothing to do with what came after .. ... .. it didn't give you ... an idea of what you were going to watch.

[M]

Viewer [E], who had suggested that the lighting of the series left a lot to be desired, continued her criticism.

It contradicts, that sort of colouring and those .. pictures ... lead you to expect one thing, and when .. ... .. the scene actually opens, it's very bright and modern .. ... .. so it contradicts in that way.

[E]

She did appreciate why the pictures may have been used.

I suppose the other thing is that the mistress has always gone on, there's always been mistresses .. ... .. throughout the ages ... and I suppose ... that's what it shows.

[E]

Nonetheless,

... I didn't like it.

[E]

Very few women could remember the music which introduced and closed each episode. Only Viewer [B] recalled it, identifying it as 'The Thieving Magpie' by Rossini. (It was in fact "Italian Girl in Algiers" by Rossini). No other viewers who were interested either recognised it or could later recall it. Whenever the subject of theme tune arose many viewers countered their ignorance of the tune introducing The Mistress by referring to the theme tune to Butterflies and how much they had liked that, several remembering it so easily they began to sing it. This may have been because the theme tune to Butterflies was also a song that had achieved popularity when the series was first broadcast. It seems worthy of note that viewers could not

recall the tune of the current series, an episode of which many had literally just watched, but could bring to mind the tune associated with a previous series. Many viewers digressed to bring up the theme tunes of other popular television series, notably EastEnders, and The Bill [ITV]<sup>3</sup>.

A comment which summed up the majority opinion of the title, the title sequence, and the theme music, was

I don't really think it's .. relevant to ... the programme .. because it's meant to be sort of nineteen hundreds, isn't it? .. ... .. the old type mistress, and she isn't at all. .. .... .. Completely out of context really. They go with the music .. ... .. but not with the series.

[L]

It seems fair to say that where the producers' intentions, or the likely 'preferred reading' of the text, expected the audience to locate the mistress in the series as at one and the same time to be continuing the line of mistresses, so relating to history whilst simultaneously representing the "modern woman", the audience reading of the text totally rejected the sequence. Rather than evoking appreciation of the niceties of linking the past and present, it provoked irritation because they saw it as an irrelevance.

Viewers continually demonstrated their knowledge of those performance conventions associated with situation comedy when discussing topics such as the type of action, and the acting ability. The flouting of convention provoked the following remark.

[1] When he was going up the stairs and coming back down again that was just like something from a play rather than ... a television series .. ... .. it looked so sort of false.

[Friendship Group]

The action conformed to the performance demands of theatre rather than of television and so was criticised as looking false because it didn't fit. Other viewers were irritated when the performance demands associated with comedy took precedence over and made light of a serious matter.

[2] To be honest .. ... .. when she said: ... I'd like to have a baby .. it was as if she was .. saying: I'd like to get two pounds of sugar .. ([3] Yes.) .. ... .. There was nothing .. ([1] No feeling.) .. No .. ... .. she was expressionless, ... wasn't she?

[Sewing Class]

One viewer was delighted with the tv performance convention facilitated by the of close-up camera work convention of technical practice, which permits the audience to see the actress acting out an inner emotion.

Felicity Kendal, last night ... when Luke .. had gone .. ... .. at .. whatever it was, a quarter past one .. ... .. in the morning ... did you notice her face as she ... put her head .. ... .. on the pillow .. ... .. and it was lovely .. ... .. you know .. ... .. it made me think ... I know she was only playing the character ... but she is playing .. it .. as though ... you know, it's left her with ... a warm .. feeling .. ... .. even though there had been a little bit of a .. well, a few cross words .. ... .. between them .. and she still had a lovely feeling there.

[B]

(See also the section below: Stars and Characters).

The laughtrack was the convention of form with which all the viewers were most noticeably familiar. A few women in the television audience did not notice the recorded studio audience in The Mistress specifically. All recognised its general inclusion. Viewers who failed to notice the laughtrack in The Mistress were usually those who had most to say in praise of the series. It seems fair to say, therefore, that if a viewer is entertained by a programme, then the reaction of the studio audience rarely intrudes on that enjoyment. Conversely, if a viewer fails to find the programme appealing, the laughtrack recorded from the original studio audience is a source of irritation.

Every single remark that was made about the laughtrack registered objection for the following reasons. Viewers felt that their own judgement of what is funny was undermined; that the programme makers did not share their understanding of what is funny; that the inclusion of a laughtrack was unnecessary. Some women in the audience found their enjoyment spoilt because they could not understand why the studio audience were laughing.

It's a bit intimidating in a way because you're thinking: all these people find it incredibly funny .. . . . what's wrong with me? (laughs)

[G]

A considerable number of viewers thought the laughter of the studio audience to be false.

[1] I think a lot of it is false .. ([2] Yes.) ... this laughing and all that ..

... it's a false laugh to me .. ([2] Yes.) .. ... .. it doesn't sound a genuine laugh.

.. ... ..

[2] It's a canned laughter, isn't it?

[3] Yeah.

.. ... ..

[1] I think ... it's put on .. it's false ..  
... .. ([2] Yes, it is false.) .. ... ..  
they're doing it, because they know the  
cameras are on them .. ... .. it's false  
to me .. ... .. I can see somebody  
standing there with a card, you know,  
saying: laugh .. ... .. laugh, laugh.

[Sewing Class]

These quotes from the Sewing Class introduce two points raised by several people. They either did not believe that the laughtrack on the televisual text was that of a live studio audience, or they thought the studio audience were laughing only in obedience to instruction. Viewers regularly remarked that the studio audience seemed to be laughing at unfunny things.

[5] It always annoys me .. ... .. because they laugh at the most ridiculous things .. ([6] Mm.) .. like, she wakes up in the morning .. switches off the alarm and there's laughter .. (Laughter) .. as if it's funny that you have an alarm clock.

[M.A. Film Studies Students]

One viewer was so amazed at the audience reaction she put it down to mental derangement.

[The] studio audience was laughing .. ... .. for apparently no reason at all. ... How do they get .. where do they get those people from?

<Int> I think things like that, I think they give out free tickets ..

What, do they send them out to loony hospitals, or what? 'Cause like people who just crack up into .. ... .. instant laughter for no reason at all .. amazing .. yeah.

[G]

Another sounded quite distressed when talking about the studio audience laughter, as she felt that the nature of the issues in The Mistress was too sensitive to be laughed at.

I don't like canned laughter.

<Int> Did you notice it in this one?

Yes .. ... .. some things it ... was bad taste ... to laugh, I thought.

[L]

Viewer [E] questioned the technical necessity of retaining a laughtrack for the television transmission. She also suggested that it was technically enhanced.

I do wonder why they put on ... a laugh ... when they do, and they don't in other bits, 'cause I find ... some bits of it are funny and they haven't put in their ... audience laughter .. and the bits where they have put their audience laughter in are the ... the set up bits, really.

<Int> Mm. So, you reckon somebody's standing saying: laugh .. at some time?

... Is it live? Is it recorded live? Before a .. ... .. studio audience? .. (<Int> Yes, yeah. ) .. Well, I wouldn't have known that. I think they touch it up, anyway, afterwards.

[E]

The following quotes, the first from a woman who enjoyed The Mistress and did not notice its studio audience, and the second from one to whom the series gave little pleasure and who was constantly aware of the studio audience, epitomise the opinions of all the women in this study.

I can't stand the forced laughter. You know, you can more or less see them ... putting the: laugh now, card up. .. .. I think usually it doesn't work .. .. I don't like being told when to think it's funny ... I usually don't like it when there's .. great guffaws of laughter at things that I don't think are funny. I like to decide for myself .. .. when I think it's funny, and when I'm going to laugh. .. .. I think most American television is diabolical ... and I can't stand the forced laughter ..

[J]

and,

[2] I'd rather have it without the laughing than with it.

[Family Group]

In sum, viewers who noticed the laughtrack, and this was the majority of women in this study, found it distracting. It did not accord with their own amusement and so made them question their own sense of humour. This in turn made them realise that, to coin a Uses and Gratifications term, the laughtrack failed to 'reinforce their personal values'. As they were aware that the artistes actually heard the laughter of the studio audience, they were unable to 'identify with others in the media and gain a sense of belonging'. The laughtrack succeeded in generating in the viewing audience a feeling of exclusion rather than

inclusion in that cultural universe peopled by the cast, the production team and the studio audience.

Discussions relating to textual address fell into three areas: the target audience, the 'look' of the programme, and the perceived social class of the series which included its focus on the south-east of England. Textual address is more than the sum of these three topics. It is the way in which everything in and about the text works to 'position' the audience. To recapitulate from Chapter Two: Perspectives, Ellis suggested that for a text to succeed, programme makers rely on the collusion of the audience who must "go along" with the positioning offered, television texts in general addressing them

not as 'you', as people different from themselves. They speak in terms of 'we'. They set out to create a spurious community of interest and identity between themselves, the professionals, and their audience, the public at large ..... [which] makes assumptions about the people it is addressing which are at variance with the real people who are watching. The result for most people is an occasional jarring note.<sup>4</sup>

Viewers agreed virtually unanimously that situation comedies were usually targeted at a female audience.

[1] Actually, do you know, I haven't really sat down and thought about situation comedies before, but just .. you know, a few of us mentioning titles, they're the one programmes [sic] that I watch .. ... .. because I rarely ever watch anything.

... ..

[2] Well, women like to laugh, don't they?

.. . . .

- [1] Yes, I think if I'm actually going to sit down in front of the television I want to enjoy myself.
- [2] Yes.
- [3] Yes, I mean, watching a documentary .. ([2] I think men tend to go more for documentaries) .. I've got to be really interested in it ..
- [1] Yes, and I sometimes think: oh well, I just can't be bothered ..
- [3] It is just too heavy .. I need to sort of unwind a bit .. having looked after a child all day .. God, I've had enough ... just want something to take me away from my er .. mundane existence.

[Babysitting Circle]

The Young Lesbians thought that most television was aimed at women in general, but that its influence in society was unfair to women.

- [6] My Dad used to say that ... tv brainwashes you, and I think it does .. ... .. it helps to condition women.

[Young Lesbians]

Later, the same woman did modified her statement by adding

- [6] Yet .. it's interesting to think, though, that when there weren't televisions in the house, women were still conditioned.

[Young Lesbians]

Viewer [J] agreed that most television was made with women in mind.

I think a lot of television's aimed at women ... in the same way that media's aimed at women,

because a lot more is expected of women, in terms of if you actually split down the role, you know the roles that women are expected to play within their lives, a lot of things are aimed at the one, or many of the roles that you are expected to .. play ... you know, a lot of them are about being a wife .. being a mother, being a mistress .. being professional career people, you know ... a lot of different things, really, and I think .. you don't get that many ... that are aimed at men being a lot of different things .. ... .. but I think mostly they're aimed at women, because I ... think there's more pressure on women to be different things .. although men will probably dispute that, that there is equal pressures on men to be different things.

[J]

Viewer [D] was more benevolent, suggesting that sitcoms were targeted at women to redress the balance.

[P]robably the aim is ... almost an altruistic one .. ... .. I think probably they think that there isn't a balance .. ... .. and that women .. ... .. lead funny and comical lives .. with pathos and perception .. ... .. shot through .. ... .. and I think this is an attempt to show that .. ... .. and it really doesn't come off.

[D]

Her last comment foregrounds the point where textual address becomes more than the target audience. '[A]nd it really doesn't come off' shows that she believed that the intentions of the programme makers to 'speak to' women did not work, because what they 'spoke' and/or the way in which they 'spoke' made women in the audience feel apart from, rather than as-one-with, the programme makers. Ellis' 'jarring note' was sounded.

Most viewers took it for granted that the series was aimed at women, that the majority of people watching would be

women and appeared to identify, therefore, with the rest of the viewing audience. Discussions dwelt on the ways in which the programme makers made The Mistress specifically attractive to women and how they themselves felt about its appeal. They discussed the 'look' of the series.

It's typical woman .. ... .. you know .. ... ..  
it's obvious that ... the feminine touches have  
been put in all the way.

[L]

and,

I preferred watching it on my own .. ... .. partly  
because I was very conscious that it was ... a  
woman's programme .. ... .. and also ... that the  
other people who might have watched it with me,  
like .. the kids .. ... .. or P--- [husband]  
wouldn't have been int .. in fact P--- was very  
derisive of it. I don't think he'd even seen it  
but .. ... .. I think he just .. you know, would  
realise that it's not his thing and that .. I  
actually wanted to watch it, you see, so ...  
didn't want somebody around that's going to be  
making stupid comments.

<Int> (Laughs) What makes you think that it's  
a woman's programme?

... I think partly the subject matter ... partly  
Felicity Kendal, although I know that a lot of men  
like her .. ... .. and partly once I'd seen it ..  
and had seen the sort of things that were the  
style of .. ... .. the things that might be of  
interest are things that would interest certain  
kinds of woman .. ... .. I think, like the  
clothes, the hairstyles ... the decor ... and the  
... subject matter.

[H]

Viewers [L] and [H] enjoyed the feminine "feel" of the series; the emphasis on style and fashion and image, Viewer [H] later adding, after the audio tape recorder had been switched off, that by watching such a feminine programme,

she experienced 'a sort of furtive pleasure'. Viewer [F], however, believed the influences of a male production team interfered with the address to the initially targeted female audience; the subject matter and style of the series would appeal to women, but the way in which it had been treated was male; it was a male perception of femininity.

I can't imagine that men would sit down and watch that. .. . . Again, it's so male that you would think it's aimed at men, but it's not. .. The way it's made I would imagine it would be aimed at men, but I wouldn't imagine men would watch it.

[F]

The Young Lesbians held a similar debate.

[1] It's like a fantasy for a man, isn't it?

[2] Yeah, yeah, he'd act it out.

[1] His ideal thing.

[8] Having a mistress and having a wife.

[6] Getting the carpet slippers and ..

[4] Do you know, I disagree, I think it would be the women .. ([3] I do, actually.) ... I actually think it would be the women ... who would turn it on ..

.. . . .

[5] What would women get out of watching that, then?

.. . . .

[4] I still actually think ... it is the women who'll enjoy it more than the men .. . . . I think the women will .. . . . .. laugh, because .. . . . they're not ... aware of the situation that they're in.

[Young Lesbians]

They also discussed why some of them enjoyed The Mistress when others were frankly offended by it.

[2] We laugh at it .. it is on telly .. and .. ... .. forgetting principles etcetera, we actually laugh at it. I think we do .. ([8] I can't .. I don't see ..) .. I think everybody does .. ([1] Yeah.) .. And then .. and then you suddenly realise: Na, that's a bit bad, that, really.

[4] You suddenly realise you've been right off (laughs) ... it dawns.

.. ... ..

[8] But how can you laugh ... and find something amusing when the women are just being continually put down .. again?

[2] Because she says funny things.

[3] (Laughs) I don't know .. I think .. yeah, you fall into the .. the trap ... because ... of the pressures of it, you know ..

[5] So, you can see why images never change.

[3] Exactly.

[2] That's right.

[Young Lesbians]

The above remarks show that where some women took a delight in the feminine 'look' of the series, others were put off by its traditional portrayal. Even those who did find themselves entertained by it were occasionally unsettled, and the 'jarring note' resulted in a reassessment of their own judgement.

The perceived social class of the characters and the series had a fundamental influence on audience response.

They might be realistic to Carla Lane or whoever .. ... .. they're not realistic .. ... .. to like the world I live in now but I've known .. sort of people who live in that kind of world. .. So, p'raps it is realistic .. ... .. to that kind of world ... where everybody has at least three cars and .. ... .. plenty of money .. ... .. and tea and cake at four o'clock in the afternoon, yeah .. on beautiful .. china tea services .. ... .. instead of ... on a plastic plate like everybody else.

[G]

and,

[5] They seem so rich to start off with .. ([2] Well, really superficial.) .. that you didn't bloody care about them .. ... .. 'cause it was so superficial.

[M A Film Studies Students]

For Viewer [G] the middle class lifestyle presented neither equated with her own current way of life nor, in her opinion, with that of the majority of viewers. Her response affected her enjoyment. She recognised that the lifestyle portrayed was representative of a 'real-world' way of life which she had known, but its lack of realism in comparison to the world in which she currently lived, and in which she believed most other viewers of The Mistress to live, detracted from her pleasure. The M A Film Studies Students were aggrieved that the programme was about middle class people at all. They felt they were having middle class-ness thrust at them. The following extract from their discussion can really only be fully appreciated if heard. It was not

what was said, but the venom with which it was said that betrayed their anger.

[2] They were so obviously middle class.

[3] Well, lots of situation comedies are like that ..

.. ... ..

[3] But they were blatantly middle class, you know ... everything was so slick ..

[M A Film Studies Students]

These viewers were incensed at the middle class-ness of the series, and could not identify with the characters at all. In no way could they feel 'part of the same cultural universe' as those characters or as the people portraying them. Rather than a sense of belonging, they felt positively excluded by the fictional world presented. On the surface, theirs appear to be somewhat silly remarks, unnecessarily prejudiced against the middle class. They move from stating 'they were so **obviously** middle class' to 'they were **blatantly** middle class', as if merely being middle class, or portraying the middle classes was somehow aberrant, blameworthy, or shameful in itself. Yet, their remarks must be judged within the whole context of their debate. As it will later be seen, this group vehemently regretted that significantly more attention was not paid to Maxine's businesswoman-role and less to her role as "the other woman" (see discussion below in the section on Stars and Characters), so the comments above reinforced their disappointment at the lack of perceived realism in the series as a whole. Where other viewers intimated that

Maxine's job as owner of a flower shop was particularly apt because it fitted in with the general middle class-ness of the series, this group's objection to such middle class-ness did not seem to include the nature of her work. They seemed to operate with concepts of "middle class" and "work" which were mutually exclusive, for they were so offended by the series' accent on the middle class, that for them any foregrounding of any kind of work would have been preferable. Their perception of what was realistic was dependent on what they believed to be politically acceptable, on an ideological stance which located the bourgeoisie, as in anyone whom they perceived to be part of the social class category "middle class", and "work" as polar opposites. Although the reason for their reaction to its inappropriateness differed from Viewer [G]'s, the M A Film Studies Students' anger at the middle class-ness of The Mistress brought about a similar disbelief in its realism, which in turn affected their ultimate enjoyment of the series. These reactions made it impossible for them to identify with the roles portrayed by people whom some of them, and many of the other viewers, had considered to be 'valued others in the media'.

Those members of the Young Lesbians Group who liked the series thought that its middle class-ness was the nub of The Mistress's appeal. Where the above women objected to the difference between the fictional way of life and their own,

these viewers stated that it was exactly that which attracted them.

[2] Well ... it's so middle class.

[3] I mean ... they're all rich, for one ..  
([2] Well, that's what I mean.) .. you  
know .. ([6] And none of us are.)  
(Laughter) .. Her .. ... .. business is  
flourishing .. ... .. she's got a decent  
flat. He's got a big .. ([7] (Laughs)  
Decent!) ([2] Beautiful flat.) ([4]  
Beautiful .. ... .. he's got some right  
money, a nice car. .. ... .. They don't  
show other side .. ([4] And that's  
horrible as well ..) .. I mean it  
wouldn't be funny .. if it was somebody  
who couldn't afford to live .. ... .. it  
wouldn't be funny.

[Young Lesbians]

The social class of the characters and series resulted in alienating quite a number of viewers. Others were prepared to "go along" with it, and yet others could almost "lose themselves" in its fantasy. The assorted attitudes of viewers towards the inclusion of middle class characters allowed them either to be diverted from real life problems (Young Lesbians) or reminded of them (M A Film Studies Students). Viewer [G] could be said to sit on both sides of the fence, depending on how involved in the programme she was prepared to become.

Most of the women in this study assumed that The Mistress and sitcoms in general were made with the female viewer in mind. The way in which the series was put together, those components which were used to put across the 'look' of a feminine world was appreciated by some but did not ring true

for many. This, along with a feeling of exclusion because of the perceived middle class-ness of the series meant that many in the audience rejected the position offered by the text. For them, the textual address had failed.

### Stars and Characters

The characters were **the** principal talking point for all the women in the audience. There were many areas which came under this heading. The most significant were the 'stars' who portrayed those characters, the artistes' performance, the character's function, and gossip about the artistes.

### Stars

Please see Chapter Two: Perspectives for a full introduction to the concept of 'stars', 'star image', and 'social type'. Briefly, to recapitulate:

Stars embody social types ... [which] are, as it were, the ground on which a particular star's image is constructed.<sup>5</sup>

A 'social type' is

a shared, recognisable, easily-grasped image of how people are in society (with collective approval or disapproval built into it).<sup>6</sup>

This section deals with the form of identification expressed by statements such as: "That's how I should like to be" and/or "That's how I should like to look". It is the identification with a projected, ideal self. An intrinsic part of the enjoyment of the women in the audience was a

fascination in two respects with the real people cast in the roles of the mistress and the wife, Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher respectively. Firstly, viewers were intrigued by the actresses themselves: by their private lives, their previous acting roles, their private and public achievements. Secondly, that each actress symbolised the ideal visual representation of 'woman' proved to be of great interest.

Viewers discussed Felicity Kendal particularly as a symbol of the 'social type', "the girl next door". References relied in the main on her performances in previous television comedy roles as Barbara Good in The Good Life, and as Gemma in Solo.

[5] She's always this like attractive and likeable character. .. ([3] Yeah.) .. They always make her out to be really sort of friendly and vivacious or whatever.

[M A Film Studies]

and,

I tend to think that ... Felicity Kendal can only play ... slightly giddy, frivolous .. ... .. she always plays witty women .. but in a fun sort of way. She would never be caustic in her wit .. ... .. would never ... jibe anyone .. or .. ... .. sort of needle them .. ... .. sort of make fun of them in a hurtful way .. ... .. I get the impression she has that sort of character.

[H]

Felicity Kendal also exemplified other 'social types', such as "the keep fit/look good fanatic". Audience remarks were generally prompted by an appreciation of her slim figure, or specifically, by a scene where Maxine and Jenny jog in the

early morning. Comments invariably included mention of a Keep Fit LP Felicity Kendal had recently issued. Allusions to her having been voted "Rear of the Year" in 1984 included her also in the category of "good sport".

[3] But I think, knowing that Felicity Kendal is in it, you know it's going to be quite good fun.

[Babysitting Circle]

Observations about her private life: that she came from a theatrical family, that she had one young son, that she had recently married, labelled her as "professional career woman" and "family woman".

Less specific references were made concerning Jane Asher's acting roles. The audience were more interested in the type of acting for which she was known: the classical and the dramatic. They saw Jane Asher as the embodiment of "the dedicated artiste", and found it difficult to associate her with light comedy.

Whereas .. Jane Asher, yes ... I could appreciate that she could be the one with ... the sharp wit ... and the slightly .. ... .. she could .. ... .. be clever, and put someone down .. ... .. and I think that's something to do with the fact that ... in a way she was stereotyped ... she couldn't play .. the silly .. ... .. giddy .. ... .. frivolous ... funny lady, I don't think.

[H]

Members of the audience were also very interested in discussing her marriage to cartoonist, Gerald Scarfe, their

children, and her books about speciality cakes, fancy dress, and child care.

Well, I like Jane Asher ... for all sorts of reasons, partly because she can make amazing cakes .. ... .. and she's married to Gerald Scarfe, which .. you know .. I mean .. (Laughter) ..

[A]

[This last comment can only be fully appreciated if the reader is aware that when referring to Gerald Scarfe, Viewer [A] raised her eyebrows and winked in approval].

and,

[1] I was reading an article in ... Woman or Woman's Own about her .. and ... she's written books about ... child care .. ([2] That's right, she does, yes.) .. and ... she's written books about ... decorating cakes .. ([3] Oh.) ([2] Yes.) .. and she's writing another book or something. ... She's quite talented really, Jane Asher.

[Sewing Class]

This focus on her domestic interests implied that Jane Asher even more so than Felicity Kendal, appeared to personify the 'social type', "devoted wife and mother".

The audience recognition of Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher as 'social types' rested in the main on the facts entailed in each actress's 'star image', which is the way in which the stars had chosen to promote and publicise themselves, along with the way in which they were promoted and publicised by their performances.

Response drew attention to the way each of the actresses had consciously and consistently selected those parts of her

life which were to be made public as part of her 'star image', and the context in which she desired that public image to be seen to fit. Viewers were apparently encouraged to watch the series because these two particular artistes were appearing in it. The women in the audience were interested in just those aspects of their lives the stars chose to promote in their 'star image'.

An example of how the notion of 'publicity' applies to the tv performer can be particularly well illustrated by looking at Jane Asher's 'star image'. In interviews she is repeatedly asked, and repeatedly refuses on grounds of irrelevancy to her contemporary life, to talk about her 1960s relationship with Paul McCartney<sup>7</sup>. The audience is also conscious of the 'publicity' element of a star's image. Even though claiming that it did not influence her feelings about Jane Asher as the wife in The Mistress, the same viewer who is quoted above talking about Jane Asher's publications, was interested in discussing what eventually turned out to be incorrect recollections of the actress's private life.

[1] She wasn't Paul McCartney's ... she ..  
was Mick Jagger's, wasn't she?

[2] No, Paul McCartney.

.. ... ..  
[1] ... When she was on the drugs .. (<Int>  
No, that was Marianne Faithfull.) ..  
Oh, God, that's right. ... .. That's  
right. Sorry about that. .. (Laughter)  
.. It was Marianne Faithfull, wasn't it?  
Yeah. ... .. Because I always think  
to myself: well, she's sowed her wild  
oats .. I was thinking of Marianne  
Faithfull, really .. ... .. but they've

both sowed their wild oats ... in their young life ... and she's settled down now, Jane Asher, and she's got three kiddies, I think, hasn't she? .. ... .. And she's .. ... .. made a life for herself, hasn't she? .. ... .. and in this article in ... this woman's magazine I think it was, she was trying to live her .. ... .. past years down, you see.

[Sewing Class]

'Promotion' and 'publicity' appeared to have worked in parallel to create Jane Asher's image in this woman's mind. She referred first to a magazine article 'promoting' Jane Asher, and then to her own confused and faulty recollections of 'publicity' about Jane Asher associated with the 1960s world of rock music and drug culture.

Had this analysis of The Mistress been in the traditional mode and relied solely on myself as analyst, thus denying the views and opinions of the audience, a different emphasis may have been placed. I should have been inclined to attribute far more significance on the relevance of the notion of 'publicity' with respect to Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher. I should have underlined Felicity Kendal's background of touring India with her father's Shakespearean company, attaching much more significance to that part of her acting life than her contemporary well-known comedy roles. My justification would have been that this would be perceived as giving a depth of quality to the potentially lightweight character of the mistress. I should have noted that both privately and professionally Jane Asher has been

associated with "heartbreak". In the 1960s her much publicised romance with Paul McCartney ended unhappily for her after five years. Her television role prior to The Mistress was as the discarded wife of Charles Ryder in the drama series, Brideshead Revisited [ITV]. Such facts, I should have argued, added strength to the casting of Jane Asher as once again the victim of betrayal by a man she loved. However, although one viewer did remark

To me, Jane Asher will always be Paul McCartney's girlfriend.

[H]

she was the **only** one to mention it. Little significance was attached to that part of Jane Asher's private life by the one or two people who did comment, and very few women in the audience recalled Felicity Kendal's Shakespearean history at all. An emphasis on these other points would have taken into account the **media** interest in the stars, rather than the **audience** interest. As they were barely acknowledged by the audience, they must be denied significance in terms of primary audience response associated with The Mistress. No matter how relevant they may have seemed to me, they just did not come up for any lengthy or in-depth discussion.

The way in which the media and the audience focused on different areas of Jane Asher's life is, however, a point of interest. The media, who would probably argue that they were putting the questions most often on the public's (audience's) lips, seemed obsessed with her past. When

questioned in a radio interview if her relationship with Paul McCartney was always coming up for discussion, Jane Asher replied: 'Only when interviewers like yourself bring it up'<sup>8</sup>. For many people or, rather, for many **interviewers**, a five year relationship with a rock star in the 1960s merits more attention than an acting career spanning 30 years. In spite of this media fixation, Jane Asher's **audience** were not of the same mind. Just as she obviously found such questions tedious and irrelevant, so they were sufficiently disinterested in her past private life to refer to it only in passing and in general terms. They repeatedly talked in some detail and with much curiosity about her contemporary private life, elements of which she herself promoted. How significant 'publicity' and 'promotion' are in the constructing and maintaining of 'star images' seems to depend on where the perceiver stands: as a member of the media or as a member of the audience. I should argue that the media researcher occupies a position somewhere between the two, inclining more towards one than the other depending on the nature of the research, and that the research should be clear and consistent about their point of view. In this instance, rather than being as one with the audience line, I should have been leaning too far towards the media's point of view.

Television programmes seemed to have played little part in the construction of Jane Asher's 'star image' in the minds of the tv audience, but to have been a major contribution to

Felicity Kendal's. When considering Felicity Kendal's 'star image' it is important to take account of the notion of 'vehicle'. As

[f]ilms were often built around star images [and] [s]tories might be written expressly to feature a given star ..<sup>9</sup>

so many women identified The Mistress as a 'vehicle' for Felicity Kendal. The following remark was passed even before the audio tape was switched on.

[2] Well, it's just a vehicle for Felicity Kendal, isn't it? It's just so's she can be in it.

[Sewing Class]

The 'vehicle' which was The Mistress reinforced in the audience's mind Felicity Kendal's 'star image' as

[5] .. ... .. this like attractive and likeable character. .. ... .. really sort of friendly and vivacious or whatever.

[M A Film Studies]

Unlike the 'publicity' component of the 'star image' where the media and the audience may be at odds, viewers did acknowledge the 'criticisms/commentaries' as confirmations of their own appreciation and judgement. One woman, for instance had watched an episode and was delighted that she had noticed the same details as had a newspaper critic.

.. one or two very nice touches which tickle my sense of humour. ... In the very first episode, for instance, he said something about his wife ... to start with she'd appear in something pink and flimsy .. ... .. and then the very next time you saw Felicity Kendal, she's got a pink, off-the-shoulder effort .. ... .. now I had thought of

that one before I read the comment in The Observer  
.. ... .. I genuinely had.

[B]

Before their group discussion commenced, members of the Women's Guild produced a cutting from the Daily Mirror [19.1.85] containing that newspaper critic's article. Several other groups enjoyed discussing the article by Nancy Banks Smith in The Guardian [1.2.85] where she had suggested that the series should conclude with the mistress and the wife getting together and heading for a rosy feminist enclave, leaving the husband/lover behind altogether. Those members of the audience who particularly disliked Luke, the husband/lover, and/or the series were charmed by this idea. Several changed their minds about rejecting the series out of hand, and decided to watch to the end in the hope that Banks Smith's prediction would come true. Viewer [K] referred to the television programme, Did You See? [BBC2], which invited relevant guests to criticise other current television programmes. She was interested to hear Jan Francis, an actress well-known for her appearance in another very successful contemporary sitcom, Just Good Friends, endorse her own disappointment in The Mistress. Jan Francis argued that her anticipated enjoyment of a new Carla Lane series starring Felicity Kendal and promising the 'rare treat' of Jane Asher on television, was ruined because the structure of the series had obliged a disproportionate focus on the husband/lover at the expense of the female stars.

Significant to the 'star image' of each actress was that throughout the discussions both the mistress and the wife were invariably referred to as "Felicity Kendal" and "Jane Asher" respectively, as opposed to 'Maxine' and 'Helen'. Remarks such as the one below passed about Solo, where Felicity Kendal played a single woman, Gemma, showed that several viewers did not so much relate to the character, but identified with the actress herself, or with the actress in a role they deemed appropriate for her.

I know it's called .. The Mistress, and as such is a different role from Solo, but, in actual fact .. ... .. the sort of role [Felicity Kendal]'s playing isn't really all that different .. ... .. from Solo, and I suppose, really, once you've done something like that, it must be easier to build on that .. ... .. in your next series. But she seems to play very similar parts on the television all the time.

[J]

The 'star images' of the two female protagonists gave the audience a substantial amount of enjoyment, and outweighed to a large degree their interest in the fictional characters. Discussions also showed that responses to each actress and to their respective 'star image' influenced audience reaction to the whole series. It was generally agreed that Felicity Kendal's former television roles meant her presence suggested the frivolity associated with television comedy. Jane Asher's history of classical roles brought a more serious note to the series. It could be concluded that although the focus of the series was adultery, the inclusion of "good actresses" meant that the

subject of marital infidelity would not be treated in a totally lighthearted manner, but with respect also. Felicity Kendal as a "good sport" confirmed to the audience her suitability to play the character of the mistress, and their references to Jane Asher's home life and domestic interests revealed that they found her appropriately cast as wife/housewife.

The husband/lover was only ever referred to as 'Luke'. The audience related to him as the fictional character he portrayed, as they did to the other characters in the series. Viewers' lack of information about Jack Galloway, other than that he was the actor who played the part, seemed to influence how they considered Luke as a character.

Where viewers referred to two previous Carla Lane series: The Liver Birds, and Butterflies, very little identification with the artistes could be discerned. Audience comments in relation to these two series expressed much more interest in the characters than in the actresses who played them. There was a common belief that there was something extra special about the writing of these series that contributed to the characters and situations. The artistes were not deemed to be as important to the series as were those in The Mistress or in Solo. Neither The Liver Birds nor Butterflies were seen as 'vehicles' for a star, although it was agreed that Nerys Hughes and Wendy Craig did attain fame **via** The Liver Birds and Butterflies respectively.

Judging by the audience response to The Mistress it seems fair to say that the construction of a **television** 'star image' is possible. Dyer alluded to audience attitude when discussing how 'star images' can be perceived, but omitted the more active **contribution** of the audience to its construction, which is a source of paramount importance to this study. If 'social type' is

a shared, recognisable, easily grasped image of how people are in society (with collective approval or disapproval built into it)<sup>10</sup>

the 'star image' which builds on those 'social types' must also be shared. In the final analysis, isn't it the audience who ultimately shapes the 'star image'? First of all, they select those facets of the 'star image' which they find most appealing, from the material presented to them by the star-promotion-package, thus imposing a hierarchy of star features. Secondly, they continue to give or decide to withhold (gradually rather than summarily) their loyalty to/from that star.

Viewers had little sympathy with the characters and were at a loss to understand why people they esteemed would choose to play such vacuous parts. Their questioning of why the actresses took these roles suggested that they were also doubting their own wish to be like them. However, one television series could not shake their faith in Felicity Kendal or Jane Asher either as stars or as capable performers. They justified their loyalty and/or bias with remarks such as, regarding Felicity Kendal:

I think she's asked to do the impossible ... with that script .. ... .. and with ... the direction that's given and ... with the cast around her. I think (laughs) she's on a hiding to nothing in fact.

[D]

and Jane Asher:

And then Jane Asher (laughs) I do wonder why she's .. seeing as she's sort of you only see her on the stage, and in tragedies or whatever, or Shakespearean stuff .. I think that ... why did she ever .. why did she ever come back to television in a role like this

[E]

As with Carla Lane, they removed any direct liability for their own disappointment from the actresses by, in Felicity Kendal's case, ascribing it to the writing, the directing, and the other artistes, and in Jane Asher's case, to an error of judgement.

Other women in the audience came to the series with no wish at all to identify either with Felicity Kendal or with Jane Asher for exactly the same reason some of the former women admired them: because of the type of women they perceived them to represent. They were annoyed that as female viewers they should be expected to relate to a particular type of womanhood. Because they were frustrated by the model presented to them, they were irritated by the actresses who personified it. The result was that their only interest in the actresses' celebrity was one of suspicion. They argued that they were deemed to be stars solely because they

represented an ideal and denied or at least downgraded their acting abilities.

### The Artistes' Performance

The following discussion on performance supports also much of the audience response noted above. (See the section above: Conventions of Form).

The following definition of performance is employed here.

Performance is what the performer does in addition to the actions/functions she or he performs in the plot and the lines she or he is given to say. Performance is how the action/function is done, how the lines are said.<sup>11</sup>

The women in the audience of The Mistress repeatedly demonstrated critical expertise when assessing the acting in the series. As the response of the critic is essentially distanced, so viewers repeatedly took a metaphorical step back from their "feelings" about the programme to appraise both the series and their reactions to it. With respect to the artistes' performance, this judgemental exercise had two related components. First of all, there was the anticipation of a particular performance-style from the stars. Secondly, there was an interest in how the roles assigned to the actresses should/would develop. A comparison of these two sets of expectations with the actual performance of the artistes and the perceived quality of the role often included an evaluation of the way the characters had been

written. (See also the section above: Carla Lane/Quality of Writing). So, they may begin with the star:

[5] [Felicity Kendal] is always this like attractive and likeable character .. . . .  
.. really sort of friendly and vivacious or whatever.

[M A Film Studies Students]

and,

I thought she would have to be some ways flippant .. . . . because that's .. her manner, but at the same time ... strong ... because she always was in The Good Life, wasn't she?

[B]

then proceed to the roles and the quality of the script in relation to them:

I've not seen .. either of them .. I must admit .. in parts .. I'm sure they've done parts .. . . . that they've been very happy about, and have been good, but I haven't actually seen them. I saw Felicity Kendal in ... The Good Life .. . . . and .. she was fine in that .. . . . because she was part of a very strong foursome .. . . . and she kept her corner up, as it were ... but on her own .. . . . she's got real problems. .. . . . And Jane Asher I think has had an interesting life, I think they've both had interesting lives .. . . . which does make it feel .. make it ... more ironic that they should be .. . . . playing such empty parts on television .. . . . when they themselves in real life have knocked around and .. . . . had an interesting sort of life themselves. .. . . . [With regards to Felicity Kendal] I think she's asked to do the impossible ... with that script .. . . . and with ... the direction that's given ... and with the cast around her. I think (laughs) she's on a hiding to nothing in fact. .. . . . [With regards to Jane Asher] I think it's a horrible part for her. ... She's got to be this cool but likeable .. (laughs) .. . . . person, sort of in the background .. . . . I think it's a part that's limiting .. . . . not something that as an actress she could get her teeth into .. not something that would .. . . . develop her as a person because she's way beyond .. such a sort of almost cardboard ... character .. who's simply there .. to .. . . . give some incident to the

plot, such as it is. If she wasn't there, obviously there would be no tension. . . . . I'm sorry for those actresses . . . that they've got to carry very vapid . . . . . parts.

[D]

Her view was shared by another.

Felicity Kendal, I mean I think it's a dire role for her. . . . I think . . . . . I appreciate what a good actress she is, 'cause she's got such . . . nice touches . . . . . that she adds to it, that kind of keep it going, that in a way save it. . . . . And, then, Jane Asher (laughs) I do wonder why she's . . . seeing as she's sort of you only see her on the stage, and in tragedies or whatever, or Shakespearean stuff . . . I think that . . . why did she ever . . . come back to television in a role like this? Although I do think the same with her that she comes across . . . she's got some brilliant lines, and she delivers them really well.

[E]

Although television audiences are rarely so bound up with the characters or the stars that they are not aware of the performance aspect involved in presentation, it could be argued here that loyalty to a well-known artiste may affect the objectivity of critical appraisal. In order further to understand how critical pleasures operate, it is useful to examine the audience opinions of the other major protagonist of The Mistress, Jack Galloway, who was not as familiar to viewers as were Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher.

Viewers' enjoyment of, and skill in evaluating performance was very noticeable in their criticisms of Jack Galloway's acting. Although they thought the character of Luke was not

very well drawn, their lack of sympathy with the character seemed to fire condemnation of the actor's performance.

I think he's a bit colourless, really. I think in the whole thing he really is the weak link .. ...  
... when we were watching it tonight ... his lines are delivered .. with a little bit less feeling ... and ability, I think, as an actor, than Felicity Kendal.

[J]

but,

I suppose actors are only as good as their script, aren't they?

[J]

A group discussion on the same subject went like this:

[3] I think the women are super but I can't see why they're getting so fussed about him.

(Laughter)

[6] That's what I thought .. ... .. I can't see why they should go into hysterics about him because ... he's little and he's ... not really a Don Juan.

.. ... ..

[4] Well, I don't suppose his character has been written strong enough ..

(General agreement)

[Women's Guild]

As the audience discussions moved from artistes to characters to acting, so they revealed a sensitivity to the sensibilities of performance, by their evaluative and comparative skills, and by the overall pleasure they appeared to gain from their critical appraisal.

How the roles were portrayed also affected how the audience related to the characters as shown in below.

### The Character's Function

This section covers the way in which the audience empathised with or rejected the fictional roles. First of all, there is the process of role identification. This is in contrast to the wishful thinking associated with the form of identification discussed above in the section: Stars and Characters which centres on what we "would like to be". Role identification is the acknowledgement of the self-that-is, with how we live our own lives, with how we perceive ourselves to be, and with how we compare fictional representations of the social roles we occupy with their counterparts in real life. Secondly, there is the comparison with the conduct of the characters, the fictional role-occupiers, with that of the audience, the role-occupiers in the social world.

How viewers identified with the fictional characters seemed always to relate to how much they had come to care about them; how much emotional investment they had made in them. Once an audience learns the elementary facts about characters in any television programme their emotions begin to be tested. The audience of The Mistress, for instance, quickly learned key facts such as: Maxine is the mistress;

Luke is Maxine's lover; Luke is married to Helen; Maxine loves Luke; Helen loves Luke; Luke loves Maxine, and Helen.

Ideally, as they realise these facts the audience decides to whom they should give their support. In practice, this often proved problematical. Although entitled The Mistress, much of the series was presented from the point of view of the wife. Helen did not appear on screen as often as either Luke or Maxine, but constant reference was made to her. More than once Maxine agonised over the "rightness" of her and Luke's behaviour. The audience did appreciate that because the series was not solely presented from the mistress's point of view this was a departure from traditional production practices. Because more than one character's perspective was put forward, however, they were unable wholeheartedly to support the mistress's case even had they so desired or expected. Rather than restoring balance and providing an opportunity to choose between the two characters, the presentation of both points of view caused a division of loyalties on the part of the audience.

You can't side with either of the women in it.  
There's no goody and baddy, is there?

[L]

The effects of this split of allegiance were twofold. Many viewers felt were irritated that the wife was the only one ignorant of the "love triangle". Luke and Maxine knew; their confidant(e)s, Simon and Jenny, knew; and the audience knew. Helen, while suspicious, was never sure<sup>12</sup>. A more major

effect was that everyone in the audience turned against Luke. His point of view was presented, but because the audience perceived the two female characters to be constantly hurt by him, his problems were denied. Viewers were at times annoyed by the wife and the mistress, but their sympathies (if they displayed any at all) were totally drawn by the major female characters. Luke was regularly vilified with remarks such as

I think Luke comes across as a spoilt brat .. ...  
.. he seems to be whining all the time.

[L]

and,

[2] He's real pathetic.

(Laughter)

[5] Bastard. (spits)

(Laughter)

[M A Film Studies]

and,

When he has problem with one woman he runs off to the other one. .. ... .. I really .. I really dislike him .

[E]

Because they found it difficult to give their support solely either to the mistress or to the wife, this made role identification on the part of at least some members of the audience somewhat difficult. Two aspects of the fictional roles figured prominently in most discussions and seemed to figure largely in determining whether and to what extent the female viewers related to the fictional roles. These were

the realism of the situations presented, and the role behaviour, the latter to be taken to mean the behaviour which was selected to represent that role.

Discussions fell into three areas, the first concerning judgemental dimensions of perceived realism: comparing fiction with fact. The second was when viewer evaluated the plausibility of the situation. The third is best described as a creative desire, viewers wishing to refocus the situation by choosing alternative behaviour to represent the role. The following quotes exemplify the first two aspects; how viewers related the fictional situation to its real-life equivalent, and assessed its credibility.

If it's a situation that I know a bit about .. but .. I've never done it .. ... .. but not a hell of a lot about, like, say, serving in India<sup>13</sup> ... in the 'forties, yeah, I'm just trying to think .. I think that ... you're less critical .. ... .. you're not always saying: Oh, it wouldn't be like that .. or they've got that wrong .. ... .. you know .. ... .. so, therefore ... you can sit back and enjoy .. ... .. more ... although, in fact, I think that even had you been in the Indian army, like my father was .. ... .. I think it's still beautifully done, that show .. ... .. and ... never mind if it isn't quite (laughs) ... but when you come into a situation that's very close to home, such as ... housewife, or mother, or .. ... .. you know a hell of a lot about that .. ... .. and .. ... .. you're much more easily put off.

[D]

and,

A situation comedy should be about a situation that is possible.

[K]

It was evident from the different reactions of the women in the audience that not everyone agrees on what is realistically possible, or plausible. To a great extent, judgement of realism rested on the personal experience of the viewer. For example, note the following remarks.

Not that I know any mistresses .. ... .. and I haven't been a mistress myself .. ... .. but it didn't seem to be realistic at all.

[M]

but,

S--- [partner] doesn't ... particularly enjoy it. He watches it because I'm watching it ... and he laughs at things which I don't think are funny, like Luke having two meals ... and he said: oh, yeah, that .. you know, that happened to me. I did that. I think that's funny. .. ... .. I hate him talking .. ... .. about things like that .. ... .. it would have upset me if I'd known at the time .. ... .. he'd already eaten his tea, and I'd gone to the trouble and made him .. ... .. I think .. the reason it upset me .. ... .. was .. ... .. even if you were happy and secure, to see Jane Asher sort of sailing along while he's .. taking time out ... to grab a few minutes with this mistress, would make you sort of think: ooh. .. And if you're on the other side ... a mistress, knowing that .. ... .. a man can happily ... get on with two women, or love two people ... you know that there's ... there's no future in it somehow, is there?

[L]

For these two viewers, how realistic the situation was depended on the experiences with which they could draw comparison. Viewer [M] hadn't personally experienced being a mistress and found the programme unrealistic. Viewer [L] thought it was all too realistic. How much enjoyment a viewer gains from a fictional situation was also related to how they identify with the fictional roles. Both the above

viewers were irritated by The Mistress, the grounds being their perceived realism of the situation; Viewer [M] by a lack of realism, Viewer [L] by its excess. Both viewers' opinions were representative of others to whom realism was an important issue. Those for whom it wanted realism could not get involved in the series at all because they found it impossible to believe in. Those for whom it was too real found it impinged so closely on their own experiences that it evoked feelings they were unwilling to recall.

Others consciously recognised that The Mistress was a fictional construction, and judged its realism accordingly.

I think you are influenced by the way a thing's done .. ... .. and you can have ... a man, a wife, a mistress set-up .. ... .. done in so many different ways .. ... .. that you would react differently in all these different ways, you know.

[D]

and,

I can't get into it, because ... it's a created drama .. for television .. ... .. and it never takes me further than that, I'm still looking at it as a created drama .. ... .. for television, so I don't see it as a real-life situation.

[F]

Viewer [J] explained that, difficult though it may be to identify with the overall situation, it was easy to relate to some of the individual scenes. She also suggested that fiction that was too close to real life could not be pleasurable. This was not because it was too close to home as asserted by Viewer [L], but because it would be too boring.

I think Carla Lane's are ... more truly situation comedies, in that you can believe more in the situation that she .. ... .. is trying to get over to you .. ... .. because ... the sort of scripts she writes are .. ... .. are very real life ... show the side of life that we all can identify with .. ... .. a lot .. ... .. like this one we've watched tonight .. ... .. this Mistress thing .. even though they're all, they're very wealthy, obviously ... and as such not many people will identify with their .. ... .. financial situation and .. ... .. lifestyle .. we can all identify with not being able to get .. the lid off the marmalade and things like that .. ... .. I think as well as showing ... a slightly escapist atmosphere ... so it's different from your ev .. 'cause if it was really like that .. ... .. it would be boring, because nobody wants to watch .. ... .. exactly what they are. But, then, on the other hand ... there's a lot of real situations in it that everybody finds themselves in and can ... sort of identify with.

[J]

The 12 year old schoolgirl argued that it mattered little how realistic where the constituent parts, if the whole were unrealistic and implausible.

The ideas, you know of it .. it happens all the time, I know, but .. it .. I find it a bit ... everything in it is .. is .. realistic, but .. all put together I find it's not .. ... .. quite.

[I]

The third factor discussed was the role behaviour. Many viewers found fault with the ways in which certain aspects of the roles in the series were highlighted. They appreciated that because of the theme of love and deceit that the series must centre around the relationships between the mistress and her lover, and the wife and her husband. Although they acknowledged that the "eternal triangle" was the central issue, several viewers suggested that the

characters could be presented in ways they would have found more pleasurable. They found it irksome that the women were not depicted as stronger characters, especially Maxine, the mistress. She was supposed to be an independent businesswoman, but was rarely shown in the capacity of forceful, self-reliant executive. Even when she appeared in the flower shop running her business, she seemed totally preoccupied with her love-life. Viewers' expectations were regularly dashed by the way in which the series avoided a focus on the mistress as successful entrepreneur.

She actually runs a shop, of course it has to be a flower shop .. ... .. (laughs) .. it couldn't be anything more .. (laughs) .. ... .. I didn't feel that that came over very well. I think that that's an ... interesting phenomenon .. to run a business as a woman ... and .. that's not developed .. at all .. ... .. I feel. It ... seems as though all you do in a flower shop is ... hand pretty flowers over the counter .. and ... obviously .. there's a great deal of responsibility in that kind of work .. I mean she's got to see to insurance, wages, and ... buying and .. ... .. selling and choosing ... and VAT .. ... .. and all the rest of it, the sort of unseen that goes on behind ... and that doesn't intrude at all .. ... .. and in fact ... it's not substantial .. ... .. you don't feel that she's actually an independent woman .. ... .. at all.

[D]

Nearly all viewers were adamant that they would have preferred representations of women's roles to be more than that of the passive romantic. Some women in the audience elected to refocus the situation, suggesting an alternative emphasis on Maxine as an active, independent, dynamic and successful businesswoman. They felt this would place the character in a position of strength and provide her with a

depth which would win more audience sympathy, instead of her consistent portrayal as the archetype "woman-in-love", weak, waiting, and regularly disappointed by the man in her life around whom her whole world (sadly) revolves. Although many acknowledged the role behaviour portrayed to be appropriate, often identifying with some of the actions they saw, this by no means meant that they liked it, merely that they recognised it as plausible.

### Gossip About The Artistes

Each individual interviewee and each group consistently talked about the characters in The Mistress and the artistes who played them, comparing them with other fictional characters, and also with their experience of people in real life. The giving and receiving of information about the stars was no mere interchange of knowledge. It was also bound up with elements of curiosity and speculation both about the stars' private lives, and the futures of the characters they were playing. Prior knowledge of the artistes aroused curiosity and stimulated conversation amongst many viewers. This was further supported by remarks concerning Jack Galloway, the actor who played the role of Luke, the husband/lover. Few members of the audience could specifically recall him in previous roles, and those who could were unsure of their accuracy. Enquiries were repeatedly made about him. This implied that the audience were disappointed with their own ignorance, which prevented

them from the pleasure of airing, and sharing information about him. The audience of The Mistress displayed an evident delight in gossiping about the artistes.

### Representation of Women

All the women in the audience of The Mistress were interested in the ways in which women were represented both in the series and in the visual media in general. They often found problems articulating their thoughts. Their discussions covered a number of interrelated factors which contribute to the representation of women: the character, the person portraying the character, the looks of the character/actress, and the role of the character.

Viewers appeared to feel that the general role behaviour of 1980s female characters represented in contemporary television fiction accorded with their traditional representation in film, and with that criticism written by Mollie Haskell a decade previously. Haskell argued that traditionally women in film were never taken seriously, rarely being shown as independent, intelligent, or dynamic. Ambition, for instance, was a male prerogative. The economically successful, self-reliant woman would 'go against the grain of prevailing notions about the female sex'<sup>14</sup>. Women in films were usually only justified by their romantic relationship to men.

Throughout the history of films, ... women generally have been subsidiary to the action, to the profession, to the struggle between conscience and crime, between good and evil, with which a man's soul is engaged. And this has been true even of those films in which they have been romantically central.<sup>15</sup>

The women in the audience of The Mistress wanted roles which were 'exploratory and creative'<sup>16</sup>, which would allow the actresses to develop the characters and give them more substance. They wanted characters who were not constrained by their romantic situation.

Other issues covered were women's physical appearance and its value in society, the place of physical appearance in the process of identification, the emotions women in the audience experienced from seeing these representations, and the sex-appeal of the actresses.

#### Women's physical appearance

The physical appearance of Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher played a major part in these discussions. Whether they admired the actresses or not, viewers were generally disappointed that two conventionally beautiful women were once again representing 'woman'. The fact that throughout the series, no matter the situation they were in, the perfection of the actresses' looks never suffered, merely added to the audience frustration.

I ... think looks will always come into it .. to a woman ... taking a part .. I think ... p'raps it's breaking down a bit ... but you know if ... she's supposed to be under the age of fifty or

something .. ... .. she's going to have to be striking looking .. ... .. sympathetic and attractive looking ... in quite a major way perhaps ... but .. ... .. that is ... gradually being broken .. ... .. and when you think of Nerys Hughes in that terrible .. it wasn't a situation comedy, but a .. ... .. nurse thing<sup>17</sup> ... terrible thing .. but ... they didn't make her ... a glamour girl .. ... .. did they? .. ... .. So here and there you see cracks in that .. ... .. and little levers being shoved in .. ... .. and ... I notice in this show that they are immaculate .. ... .. their houses are immaculate .. their clothes are immaculate ..

[D]

Many women wished for similar looks to the actresses, in order to be considered as attractive as they were perceived to be. Typical reactions to Felicity Kendal were:

She always looks lovely.

[J]

Felicity Kendal's appearance was the main appeal for one viewer.

I watched it for her, Felicity Kendal, really .. ... .. she does fascinate me. I like .. ... .. her clothes .. ... .. and the way she looks.

[L]

Reactions to Jane Asher were similar.

[2] Well, Jane Asher looks expensive to start with.

[6] She does, yes, yes .. ... .. she always looks like that, Jane Asher, yes.

[Women's Guild]

Recognition of this desire to be a 'star' in looks, and the unlikely possibility of its fulfilment was frequently acknowledged. Typical comments made were such as the one immediately above, or exclamations of disbelief when, for

instance in Episode Three, Felicity Kendal awakes in the morning.

[4] When she was laid in bed, though ... she's got like make-up on .. ([3] I noticed that.) .. all her hair's combed and shiny ... everything's just so ..

[5] While the rest of us creep out of bed, you know, and: oh, my God.

[M A Film Studies Students]

They realised that morning in The Mistress was fictional time, and that Felicity Kendal's perfect appearance was as fictional as was the time. This did not prevent some viewers from wishing it really were possible in their own lives to look 'that good first thing' without the preparation they suspected it would in fact involve. Most women agreed that the actresses' physical appearances were too consistently flawless to be really plausible. Some took a delight in the very implausibility of this ideal and constant beauty, as demonstrated by Viewer [L]'s comment above. There were other times when the audience's knowledge of reality overtook their involvement in the programme and good-humoured "sour grapes" remarks were passed, such as, with reference to Jane Asher:

Nobody's as skinny as that.

[A] [Recorded in field notes before tape recorder switched on.]

and, with reference to Felicity Kendal:

[1] It's obscene being a size eight at her age.

[Babysitting Circle] [Recorded in field notes before tape recorder switched on.]

For all the women in the audience the physical appearance of the female stars was of major importance and figured prominently in discussions, reactions were diverse. On a continuum of pleasure-displeasure they ranged from delight to fury. For some, it encouraged identification. For others, it had the opposite effect. Several were enchanted by the conventional beauty portrayed. Others were enraged. The majority acknowledged that the female stars portrayed an ideal of beauty, and were generally considered beautiful. All seemed aware of a certain societal pressure on themselves to try and conform to the type of, and standard of beauty depicted, both of which they also recognised were to a great extent illusory. Some women enjoyed identifying with the images of women on the screen, accepting virtually without question the image with which they were presented as one worthy of striving for in their own appearances. They admired the looks of Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher, and wished to look like them in order to receive admiration. Others also wished to look like the actresses, but denied the power of the image by holding it up to ridicule when comparing it with their own experiences of reality. Although it was not obvious in the transcribed data, it could be detected from the original debates when I could observe the viewers' reactions, and to a lesser extent from the recorded interviews, that several women in the audience had not until then realised how strongly they felt about this issue.

Emotional Reaction in Relation to Images of Women

Many viewers found it difficult to express how they felt about images of women, their anger or irritation often conspiring to mask an intellectual opinion. Their passions were particularly aroused when discussing the notion of female beauty. Three related issues were debated: why one type of beauty was considered superior to others, who defined beauty and the beautiful, and how closely matched were the ideal representation of female beauty and its reality. Many viewers argued that the physical appearances of the mistress and the wife were a direct attraction to the male viewer. They suggested that both Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher possess the type of looks which epitomise male-defined female beauty.

[3] It's like a fantasy for a man, isn't it?

[Young Lesbians]

and,

I think [Felicity Kendal's] chosen for men rather than women.

[A]

and,

[2] They're very womanly .. ([1] Yes.) .. I suppose, and it's an awful, sort of sexist thing to say anyway, but ... they're what, I suppose, men like to think of women as being and some women perhaps would like to see themselves as.

[Babysitting Circle]

and,

I've got a feeling that [Felicity Kendal] is very sexy for men .. ... .. I don't know why I think that. I think someone must have told me that. But

like I couldn't .. possibly see why anybody in their right mind would ever see her as sexy, I mean attractive ..

[G]

A few women in the audience were unconcerned about the direct appeal to men of the actresses' looks. Many were irritated, others exasperated, yet others despairing. For those to whom it was a major issue, it proved further aggravation of their complaint about the realism of representation. They felt "perfect looks" should have been unnecessary in the series and was unfair to women in general. Two groups who were able to articulate their particular annoyance were the Young Lesbians, and the M A Film Studies Students. There were also at least five of the individual interviewees who held similarly strong views, these being Viewers [A], [D], [E], [F], and [G], the latter concluding her above statement with

Felicity Kendal (spits).

[G]

Several members of other groups also concurred. Some viewers, whilst not denying that the actresses were attractive, or at least were perceived to be attractive by most people, claimed that the presence in the series of conventionally beautiful women undermined the realism of the representation. This attitude was summed up by one woman's description of Felicity Kendal.

She's just a chocolate box beauty.

[A] [Recorded in field notes before audio tape recorder switched on.]

with which description it must be fair to say most people associate a glossy image quite far removed from reality.

Those who protested most strongly against the inclusion of what they perceived as unnecessary, untrue, and unfair images of women, pointed out that this led to an inordinate significance being attributed to the physical appearance of the characters, as opposed to, say, their intellect, or the development of their personalities. They argued that the text of The Mistress was a confirmation of the following dominant social values about women. That their physical appearance is of primary importance to themselves, and to men. That all women are vain and narcissistic. That women other than those "blessed" with these particular type of looks are not considered beautiful. That there is no depth of intellect or personality in women, and so there is no point in seeking beyond the surface appearance.

Disagreement with these pervasive beliefs was most clearly expressed by the Young Lesbians' discussion about beauty having more to do with a perceived spiritual depth than outer appearance.

[2] I mean Felicity Kendal is ... very nice looking and all that .. attractive .. ... .. but .. I found more appealing watching Vanessa Redgrave in that ... one where ... she were a Jew in that camp<sup>18</sup> .. ... .. and she'd got her ... her head shaved .. ... .. ([3] .. and they were all going to be killed ..) .. Oh, she was gorgeous in that.

[1] Oh, I wouldn't have said she was gorgeous in it.

[2] Oh, I would .. ... .. ([3] She looked dreadful, but she was still gorgeous .. ... .. in a way.) .. She looked awful, but ... to me ... oh, I just thought: Ooh (sound of approval) (laughs) .. ... .. I just couldn't stop myself. I just felt love for that woman. .. ... .. It was horrific, but I mean, having said that .. she portrayed it in her way. Do you know what I mean? .. ... .. And like to me that is beautiful.

[Young Lesbians]

The notion that the text of The Mistress privileged the physical appearance of the female stars was supported also in the above discussion in the section: Stars and Characters. The majority of all women interviewed stated that they preferred women in visual fiction to be represented as strong and independent personalities. Idealised physical beauty was not, for them, a priority.

Viewers also expressed contradictions in their response to the actresses' appearance. Although the Sheffield Young Lesbians' discussion cited above expressed their opinions on what is beauty, they also remarked that they thought Felicity Kendal was physically attractive.

[4] I thought: I'll watch it because Felicity Kendal's in it.

[3] That was the only reason why I watched it .. ... .. I think she's really attractive. .. ... .. ([2] Yeah, she is attractive.) .. you know like the bit where ... the husband and wife are having a conversation .. my mind just switches off. You know, I just think: .. ... .. this is boring. But, as soon as she [Felicity Kendal] comes back .. (laughs).

[Young Lesbians]

The assorted reactions to the actresses' physical appearance played on various emotions, from anger through to delight depending largely on viewers' own opinions of female beauty.

### The Sex-Appeal of the Actresses

The above remarks show that heterosexual women acknowledged Felicity Kendal's attraction for men. It could not be ascertained whether they are in fact sexually aroused by looking at other women. This is a complex question, which to answer would involve examination not only of the determinants of sexual identity beyond biology and gender socialisation, and of investigation into sexual awareness and sexual preference. It must include an exploration of the fundamental feelings which are involved in the attraction between any two people, regardless of their sex or gender. It would mean posing, and attempting to answer the question: How far is any attraction based on sexual feeling?<sup>19</sup> Investigation in this area would also have to include an examination of self-love or self-hate based around perceptions of self-image. This aspect of the pleasure derived from physical appearance could hardly be addressed here. Its very complexity precludes it being dealt with in any depth. Nevertheless, it was an issue that must be raised, be it only at the surface level of acknowledgement.

**AUDIENCE DATA: THE INTERPRETATION**

It was clear that the women in the audience of The Mistress did indeed share ways of appreciating the programme according to certain common ground. The similarity of responses across viewers, across both groups and individuals, suggested a generalised, collective understanding of many facets of the text. These fundamental areas of agreement provided a common base against which a myriad of variations in response could be measured.

In terms of social experience, all the viewers could draw on a general membership of that social group of women living in a patriarchal Western society in the 1980s. All shared experience of living in the north of England. All were Skilled Viewers with critical expertise, developed via exposure to the conventions of television broadcasting. It was also clear that the shared knowledge provided by such generalised experiences were not the sole determinants of all interpretations. Viewers operated a number of 'interpretive strategies' learnt from a variety of 'interpretive repertoires' to respond to, make sense of, and enjoy The Mistress. The application of more than one 'interpretive strategy' was not dependent on a gap in time, on, say, the one being at the beginning of a discussion followed later by others, distinguished from the original not only by their reasoning, but by the span of time which separated them within the conversation. Viewers often simultaneously applied more than one 'interpretive strategy'

drawn from apparently unconnected 'interpretive repertoires'. This practice frequently produced opinions which were at odds not only with other group members but sometimes with ideas just expressed by the same person. Rarely did these incidents appear to be examples of superficiality, of merely saying something for the sake of it. They demonstrated viewers' abilities to approach the text from various angles, guided by different priorities.

Once categorised it could be seen that, common to all discussions, there were four principal issues which triggered response in terms of expectation: identification; realism; aesthetic criticism; and a need to confirm personal values. These were rarely isolated reactions as the degree of identification with a character or with their situation frequently depended on how realistic they/it was perceived to be, and criticism associated with these factors invariably ensued. Seeking to confirm personal values was apparent in all discussions, covering viewers' expectations of sitcom in general, Carla Lane's standard of writing, the character and characterisation, and the stars of the series.

#### Emotional and Intellectual Responses

There were several ways in which viewers expressed their feelings and opinions about the text, the two most easily identifiable being an emotional response, and an intellectual response. These reactions were multi-dimensional and interrelated, each informing the other, and

contributing to the degree of enjoyment experienced by the women in the audience. The term "contributing to" is used advisedly because the nature of both the emotional and the intellectual responses did not appear solely to depend on the act of viewing. There were at least two other key factors which must be considered direct influences on the viewers' ultimate appreciation. Firstly, account must be taken of what the audience expected from a Carla Lane sitcom. Secondly, how their expectations were shaped by their structural position in society should be considered.

The emotion of the viewers' reactions played a more significant part than merely heightening the intensity of expression. It enhanced the meaning of response, too. To ignore the meaning associated with the emotion of the response would be to undermine how deeply the sensibilities of some women were affected. These viewers took very seriously the politics of the situation in The Mistress. Their responses were immediately recognisable as emotional because of the way in which they were expressed, negatively in anger and outrage by the M A Students and in disbelief and self-criticism by the Young Lesbians, and positively by the enthusiasm of the few from the latter group attracted to Felicity Kendal. They were emotional responses fundamentally fired by personal experience, political beliefs and intellectual thought.

The findings in this study indicate that the response of the viewers to the text is neither linear nor direct. As Bleich suggested, the audience relates to the text by way of the associated stages of 'response' and 'interpretation'; the former, the immediate reaction which appears spontaneous, is structured by the latter, which is the way in which audience member(s) have become accustomed to understand a text by the influences of their own lived experiences. This, too, is an over-simplification. Although Bleich stated that interpretation may inform response, he did not explain how or why the interpretation itself comes about, which particular experiences are more persuasive than others in the forming of beliefs and attitudes. Identifying the 'interpretive strategies' which expressed the responses, and locating them in their associated 'interpretive repertoires' went some way to resolving this issue.

'Interpretive Strategies'/'Interpretive Repertoires'

Particularly strong emotional reactions to the series were manifested by many women in the audience. The M A Film Studies Students, some of the Young Lesbians, several members of other groups, and a number of the individual interviewees passionately condemned The Mistress. The reasons given for such fervour varied from disappointment with the ideas promoted in the programme, and/or with its technical production, and/or with a series that fulfilled neither personal nor critical anticipations/hopes. They justified their emotional reactions intellectually, but in

ways which differed according to their current priorities and past experiences.

The instinctive reaction to The Mistress of the M A Film Studies Students was one of fierce rejection, the apparently spontaneous intensity of which is defined here as an emotional response. It was how they expressed themselves which indicated their emotion. What they actually said, their conscious expression appears then to be an intellectual interpretation. Their defence, or rationalisation, of such vehemence was to ridicule the series for not being presented in a way of which they approved. They derided its overwhelming middle class-ness, its privileging of the characters' appearance over what they did, and the character of the husband/lover: 'a wimp' ([5]). This intellectual interpretation seems heavily influenced by an ideological standpoint which pointedly denies that patriarchal tradition which naturalises women as passive, marginalised, beautiful, objectified and dominated by men, by disdaining representations of women perceived to collude with this view. It could have been argued that the 'interpretive strategy' they applied drew on an 'interpretive repertoire' associated with their membership of the 'interpretive community' of film studies students, who learn not only the history of film, but the conventions implicit in film making, and the feminist attempts to subvert them. As this group was the only 'interpretive community' in the study as such, their 'group-ness' being

defined by their interest in understanding film, surely they would have developed shared interpretive convention to draw on when encountering all visual texts? On the contrary, I suggest that in this case the 'interpretive repertoire' the M A Film Studies Students drew on seemed to have as much, if not more, to do with beliefs formed within/about society as it did with learned interpretive custom. I concluded that their lack of acknowledgement of/interest in/understanding of the technical production of the series demonstrated that their (immediate) responses to The Mistress had stemmed as much from a shared social/political consciousness of the place of women in society as from their 'interpretive' experience. This intellectual awareness guided by emotional resentment and/or enthusiasm for change had fed into their academic studies to influence their interpretive practice and, subsequently, their conscious expression.

The Young Lesbians' ideological position was expressed in terms of anticipations and hopes about representations of women, and female beauty. My own expectations of this group were that they, more so than other viewers, would be sensitive to the place of women in a patriarchal society and of the way in which female sexuality is generally treated. As a consequence, they would be interested in the way images of women were (re)presented in the visual media. I presumed them to have a heightened awareness of these issues because of their own experiences of "coming out" as lesbians in an officially heterosexual society, the celebration of their

own sexuality paralleling its disapproval by many others. This did not prove wholly to be the case. The Young Lesbians were very interested in the position of women in society and in the representation of women in the visual media. They were more interested in images of women than some viewers, but they were no stronger in their objections than others. Early in their discussion, members of this group acknowledged that they were attracted to Felicity Kendal because of her looks; that was why they had watched the series in the first place. Later, all agreed that more attention should be paid to what a woman *is* rather than what she looks like, and that beauty consists of more than an ideal physical appearance. The same members of this group, who had come to The Mistress specifically because of Felicity Kendal, shocked other members when they admitted to liking the series. Although they liked it because they found Felicity Kendal attractive and 'because she says funny things' ([2]), they did not approve of themselves for liking it. They admitted that they were 'forgetting principles' because 'we actually laugh at it' but then realise 'Na, that's a bit bad, that, really' ([2]), for '[y]ou suddenly realise you've been right off' ([4]) and agreed that 'the women are just being continually put down .. again' ([8]).

Although both the M A Film Studies Students and the Young Lesbians, acknowledged the conventional gender socialisation everyone is subjected to, and which the series presented as 'natural', the 'interpretive strategies' they adopted were

alike, but originated from different 'interpretive repertoires'. For the former it was their current academic studies which could be identified as reinforcing a political stance (as well as stimulating an interpretive custom) which took priority when reacting to The Mistress and incited such an impassioned response. For the Young Lesbians, it was specifically their personal experiences concerning their own sexuality which motivated a political interest in images of women and prompted their debate. In terms of anticipations and hopes, the intellectual and emotional response of these two groups were unequivocally the same. Their anticipations were fulfilled, their hopes dashed. Intellectually, they responded similarly to Stars/Characters, critically assessing the actresses and their roles and finding them wanting. Emotionally, the reactions of two or three of the Young Lesbians differed, their anticipation and hope regarding the physical attractiveness of Felicity Kendal being fulfilled.

Similar responses were aired by Viewers [E] and [F]. Both these women were currently video makers in their own right, and their immediate reaction was to question the production values of The Mistress. They were unhappy that, technically, the series was not as artistically creative as it could have been. They suggested that it had been produced to conform with what was traditionally acceptable rather than what was potentially possible, so that technical knowledge of conventions had constrained rather than enabled its

producers: 'it could just be done more imaginatively' ([E]). Their criticism could also be described as politically motivated. Viewer [E] was lesbian, single, in her early twenties; Viewer [F] was bisexual, married with two children. Both seriously objected to the ways in which they perceived the series to be written and presented so that women were represented in a specific and traditional fashion. Viewer [F] insisted that male interference had significantly altered Carla Lane's work, or at least had modified the way in which she had intended her work to be interpreted. Viewer [E] abhorred the way it reinforced a *status quo* where men are dependent on women 'to provide .. ... .. their nourishment, their shelter and [to gratify] their ... sexual needs'. It seems here that these individual viewers' personal experiences of standing out as "different" because they were lesbian/bisexual in a heterosexual society induced them to be very sensitive to what they perceived to be a male idea of the norm of women's lives. Because of their training in video production and their interest in the visual media they knew that different production practices were possible. They could each have referred to a number of 'interpretive repertoires' associated with, in Viewer [E]'s case, her job as a radio producer, or in Viewer [F]'s case, her family/domestic roles as wife and mother. They had instead drawn on other separate though connected 'interpretive repertoires' to develop a single 'interpretive strategy'; the one realised from their intimate experience of being lesbian/bisexual women, the other from the skills

they had learnt as feminist film/video makers. Their preferred 'interpretive strategy' was to condemn the technical and artistic convention practised and to opt for experiment and change to present women from a woman's point of view. Both their anticipations and hopes, generated via personal/social experience and interpretive custom, were frustrated. Their personal and political experiences, and their technical training, had inspired expectations that a Carla Lane sitcom would revolutionise the generic conventions and (re)present strong women in control of their lives. They perceived instead opportunities lost.

In terms of identification, the above viewers could not relate to The Mistress because they could find no representation of woman with which they either could, or would wish to, identify. Other viewers, who discussed the way in which Maxine was presented, did so in relation to their experiences of mistresses in life as they knew it, and encountered additional problems associated with identification. Viewer [M] drew on an 'interpretive repertoire' learned via her experience of being a faithful wife, to argue against the realism of the representation. Viewer [L] referred to an 'interpretive repertoire' concerned with her own experience as a mistress, and took the contrary view. Each found little enjoyment in the portrayal, although for opposite reasons. Albeit both associated with realism, their 'interpretive strategies' were motivated by contradictory personal experience. Viewer

[M] thought the series unrealistic, Viewer [L] that it was all too realistic. Viewer [M]'s opinion was formed through a lack of personal knowledge of how mistresses behave; the way Maxine acted just did not make sense to her. Viewer [L] found Maxine's actions too near a representation of her own. Their lack of enjoyment was brought about by each seeking to identify with the mistress but, for contradictory reasons, failing so to do. Viewer [M] could not recognise, in the role of the mistress, an image of herself with which to identify. Viewer [L] found her own image but refused it. This viewer also stated that the series upset her because 'you know that there's no future in it somehow, is there?'. The actions of the mistress, rather than bringing back any pleasurable memories of her own experiences, recalled the insecurities and hurt involved both in being a mistress herself and in inflicting hurt on a wife.

Although both of the above responses were associated with identification with the mistress, it could not be said that both were emotional responses, albeit contradictory emotions. Viewer [L]'s response was indeed an emotional one, so much so that she found it difficult to articulate her rationalisation of it. Her identification with Maxine was too close for comfort. It made her sufficiently uncomfortable that she wished to reject it. Viewer [M] did not reject the identification; she did not perceive one with which she wished to associate in the first place. Her response was solely on an intellectual level. It was not

that she felt a negative emotion, but that her response was devoid of emotion, regarding the characterisation as imperfect because it did not correspond either with her experiences of, or with her idea of, reality. This in turn meant she could invest neither anticipation nor hope in the character. Where Viewer [L]'s reaction was to despair at Maxine's future, Viewer [M] couldn't have cared less about her future because she felt no sympathy for the character in the first place.

There were women in the audience who chose to identify with the portrayal of Maxine in another way altogether. Unlike Viewers [L] and [M], they neither regarded her as someone who mirrored their own lives, nor as someone who had nothing to do with themselves. They saw her as epitomising an aspect of women's lives they would like to experience:

the part of us that wants to be .. the mistress,  
the interesting ... more attractive, more ...  
exciting ... woman

[J]

whilst acknowledging that in daily life it is rarely possible to be like that for any length of time. Where the former viewers looked only for realism, Viewer [J] anticipated and enjoyed the fantasy of the character. She was prepared to "lose herself" in the representation and forget reality. Viewer [J] was a married woman, currently without children, but who desired a conventional future family life. It seems that in relation to The Mistress, she had operated an 'interpretive strategy' where she expected

lightheartedness and escapism, generated by the 'interpretive repertoire' of tv sitcom viewers. For her it was neither realism, nor the politics of the situation that was important, but the vicarious, displaced (fictional) possibility of excitement via the mistress' exploits. She did not regard Maxine's role as a threat to her own role as wife, so did not require the support of an 'interpretive repertoire' derived from the shared female experience of being a faithful wife. She identified with some of Maxine's behaviour, seeing it as stimulating and sexy. Both her anticipations-expressed and hopes-expressed with respect to the mistress' behaviour became, then, anticipations-fulfilled and hopes-fulfilled.

Some of the viewers who could not identify with Maxine as she was depicted did suggest adjustments to the series so that women such as themselves could feel more positively towards her. The M A Film Studies Students and Viewer [D] argued for a refocusing of the situation so that Maxine could be seen as a person in her own right rather than as someone trapped in a love triangle. Thus, that 'interesting phenomenon .. to run a business as a woman' [D] could be developed. The M A Film Studies Students were mostly younger women, in their early twenties with no family responsibilities, who were currently preoccupied with academic study. Viewer [D] was a lone parent in her early forties attempting to return to the job market. Even though differing in age and background, these responses were

sufficiently alike to suggest an 'interpretive strategy' drawn from an 'interpretive repertoire' associated with feminist politics. Their proposed adjustment of the characterisation and direction of the series reinforced their belief in the struggle for, and the value of, women's social independence.

Similar opinions were expressed in relation to Lane's former series. Commenting on Gemma in Solo, Viewer [A] stated she 'couldn't relate to her as a single woman at all ... it was all to do with falling back on men all the time'. Whereas Viewer [C] objected to the way Ria in Butterflies was presented, questioning her portrayal as someone with 'the time ... to behave .. like she did' when in real life ' [w]omen work and women are professional and women are occupied'. Viewer [A] was a divorced mother in her late thirties, looking for work but unemployed, and Viewer [C] was a divorced social worker in her late forties. It seems likely that their preferred 'interpretive strategy' which validated their place in society was selected from an 'interpretive repertoire' related to the social experience of independent, working women. The focus on women in tv fiction which emphasised them as "kept" or looked after, or implied that having a reliable income of their own as unimportant, frustrated such women who were making their own way in the world. It excluded them from the picture. Their hopes for a realistic representation of strong single women were then unfulfilled.

Comparative Priorities

The responses and the manner in which viewers responded pointed up that it was personal priorities determined by their positions within a social and domestic structure that were the motivating factors. The M A Film Studies Students's discussion, although angry and vociferous, focused on the way 'woman' is conventionally represented in society. They had no axe to grind in relation to the specific image of woman, because they had not occupied and did not presently occupy equivalent roles in their social life. Their position was based on personal politics rather than on personal experience. Viewers [D], [A], and [C] responded more to a representation of **themselves** as well as to the image of 'woman'. All three individual viewers were women in their late thirties/early forties, now on their own after periods of marriage. Viewers [D] and [A] were divorced, lone parents, and Viewer [C] was twice divorced. All were having to make their way in the world independent of men. Their hopes that The Mistress could have put a positive light on the role of the single, self-sufficient, woman, were unfulfilled, when in fact they perceived that that position (their position) had instead been undermined. They could not identify with Maxine even had they wished to do so. Although her position could have been comparable to theirs, the way in which it was presented made a mockery of their own situations, undercutting the principles by which they were living their own lives.

In contrast, the Community Centre Workers and the Nursery and First School Teachers responded pleasurably to Butterflies because they perceived a character who reflected their own lived experience. Most members of these two groups had families of their own. They enjoyed Butterflies because it consistently focused on family life, its very inclusion of family difficulties giving them pleasure because they mirrored circumstances, situations, and issues in their own lives. They liked the character of Ria, regarding her as a realistic and sympathetic reflection of themselves. They identified with her on two counts. In the first place, the role conflicts she experienced reflected their own lived experience, so they felt they were not alone. Secondly, the exposure of Ria's predicaments typified them into acceptability, thus assuring them they and their own problems were normal. Unlike Viewer [J] above, who identified with Maxine in The Mistress because of what she would like to experience, the Nursery and First School Teachers and the Community Centre Workers, identified with Ria in Butterflies because of what they were currently experiencing. They sought and found an 'interpretive strategy' of comfort and reassurance from an 'interpretive repertoire' learned from their own familial roles as wives/partners and mothers. The exasperation of Viewers [A] and [C] at Gemma and Ria's lack of practical independence was because in similar circumstances they had had to learn to rely on themselves. Rather than muse about what they should do, they had had to do it. The Community Centre

Workers and the Nursery and First School Teachers were in family situations similar to Ria's which they found agreeable or, at worst, tolerable. They accepted or "put up with" her want of self-reliance, whilst at the same time being attracted by her independence of thought. Viewers [A] and [C]'s anticipations and hopes of realistic role representation were unfulfilled, those of the Community Centre Workers, and the Nursery and First School Teachers were fulfilled.

It was repeatedly demonstrated that viewers' responses were shaped by their current priorities, values and beliefs, which had been formed via lived experience. When discussing the subject matter of Carla Lane's series, opinions varied depending on what mattered most to the viewer(s) at the time. The Friendship Group were the only viewers who reacted emotionally, perceiving that a sad situation was being presented as comic. They operated an 'interpretive strategy' which raised questions of morality, concerned that for a comedy to focus on a serious subject such as adultery was to trivialise it. Both members of the Friendship Group were in relationships with men and, presumably, their responses to The Mistress drew on an 'interpretive repertoire' associated with romantic insecurity. Others responded intellectually. Viewers [G] and [H] and the Babysitting Circle adopted an 'interpretive strategy' related to the 'interpretive repertoire' developed from experiences as tv viewers-as-critics. Viewer [G] thought that it was not the subject

matter *per se* that was important but how it was used to put the message across: 'you can get over points just as well in a comedy, in fact probably better'. Viewer [H] took an academic interest in the traditional comedic convention. The Babysitting Circle, all of whom occupied the same domestic roles as the Friendship Group, were intrigued to see the position the series would take on adultery and a mistress, and were quite prepared to accept such a topic in a comedy series. Viewer [E] appeared to operate on both emotional and intellectual levels. 'Interpretive strategies' selected from 'interpretive repertoires' associated with feminists, and with video makers, inclined her to object to a treatment of the subject matter which reduced the programme solely to the depiction of male physical gratification.

Many of the above viewers were loud in their outrage, or particularly articulate in their dislike, and their suggestions for improving the series. Others, quieter and milder, in their expression were similarly influenced by their own experiences, expectations and priorities.

The Sewing Class, although relatively accepting of the series in general were, in their reserved way, dismayed by the way in which Maxine told Luke that she wanted to have a baby: 'It was as if she was .. saying: I'd like to get two pounds of sugar.' ([2]) The women in this group were all mothers, and one was a grandmother. All were very involved with their families. It seems fair to say that to all of

them family life was of primary importance. Although there was by no means any suggestion from them that having children should be the major concern for women in general, their reaction does suggest that the handling of this particular issue, the decision to have a baby, offended them because it was presented in a lighthearted, even offhand, manner. The implication here was that they believed that in principle such a decision should be seen to be treated with respect whenever it was taken, in "real" life, on television, even in a situation comedy. The members of this group shared not only their membership of the Sewing Class, but also the personal belief that family, children, and motherhood, are of value. Implicitly, their hopes would be that such personal values would be upheld in the public arena of television. In this instance, they drew, on an 'interpretive strategy' associated with that 'interpretive repertoire' which promotes traditional family values. In sociological terms, it is likely that underlying such a statement is a fear that the position of mother which they occupied and valued was under threat. Their own significance within their families centred round their successive roles as childbearer, child nurturer, adviser to grown children. Both female protagonists in The Mistress expressed the wish to have children, so the series ostensibly supported the *status quo* where, ideologically, "good mother" is the ideal and **the** position to aim for all girl children. Because the issue of children was treated lightly, it is probable that members of the Sewing Class felt that the worth of such

concerns was being questioned; and that, subsequently, their own worth in society, and in their families, was being tested. A reasonable deduction is that the Sewing Class, who were in the main displaced from the daily routine of family life, only one of them still having a child at home, may have been experiencing somewhat of a struggle to retain a central role in their families. They adopted an 'interpretive strategy' which took offence at a scene in The Mistress which they perceived to be an affront to motherhood. To speculate further, it is likely also that, in Chodorowian terms, the 'connectedness' these women sought from the relationships within their families, centring around the maternal functions of those sociological roles was also perceived to be at risk.

Two individual viewers recalled Carla Lane's earlier series, The Liver Birds. Although currently in their mid/late thirties, they seemed also to be seeking similar emotional security in their identification with the characters, only this time with roles they had occupied in the past. Both Viewers [K] and [H] referred to an 'interpretive repertoire' learnt as a 1960s teenager, when on recollection they identified with this series. They employed similar yet distinct 'interpretive strategies', depending on their personal histories. Both viewers remembered that it was about two young independent women. Presumably, they had identified with these characters at the time, either as people like themselves or as people whom they wished to be

like. Although both emphasised the series' 'Liverpool-ness', its import differed for each. For Viewer [K], who was brought up on Merseyside, this was because a locality with which she was familiar had been authorised as important by being broadcast on network television; it "put it on the map". It gave her a feeling of prestige to come from a place that the mass media deemed significant. For Viewer [H], brought up in Sheffield, it was the appeal of Liverpool humour in vogue at the time that mattered, plus the conflicts between middle class Sandra and working class Beryl/Carol. It is probable that both these viewers identified with the characters in retrospect in order to seek an affirmation that their youth had been a period of interest, excitement and fun, as well as a time of emerging female self-sufficiency. With respect to Carla Lane, to the characters, and to the representations of women, each compared The Liver Birds to The Mistress and found the latter wanting, their experience of the former having induced anticipations that the latter did not fulfil.

For many the actresses who played the parts were more important than their fictional characters and situation. For a number of reasons, mostly to do with their knowledge of each actress, several women in the audience of The Mistress regarded Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher as valued others, identifying with them as symbols of 'woman' and appreciated their physical appearance. Both forms of identification involve the pursuit of and yearning for an ideal self and

for a self-image that related to the ideal representation of the actresses' 'star images'. This yen for physical perfection took the form of (frequently acknowledged) wishful thinking, such hopes-expressed often accompanied by earnest debates on the type of women most often represented in the visual media. Those who looked forward to seeing Felicity Kendal or Jane Asher, admired the type of woman they believed they personified in social life or in previous acting roles. 'Knowing that Felicity Kendal is in it, you know it's going to be good fun' ([3] [Babysitting Circle]). These anticipations-expressed revealed 'interpretive strategies' associated with 'interpretive repertoires' developed from their social experience of being women living in a patriarchal society, who are also Skilled Viewers regularly exposed to celebrities not only deemed to be interesting people, but whose physical type is socially sanctioned as ideal. Because of the way in which the roles were portrayed the anticipations-expressed of these viewers were frequently thwarted, and they were disappointed with the actresses in The Mistress. Those viewers who had anticipated little or nothing were dimly satisfied that their anticipations had been fulfilled. But, they were clearly disappointed that stars such as Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher had not been able to break new ground and fulfil their hopes to give public credence to women who, whilst looking sweet and feminine, also lead active and interesting lives. Although differing in terms of anticipation-fulfilment, the hopes of both sets of viewers were equally

unfulfilled. Rarely were the actresses censured for the representation by the women in the audience who wanted to like them. Viewers went to considerable trouble to absolve the stars from all blame, Viewer [D]'s remark summing up a common view: I'm sorry for those actresses ... that they've got to carry very vapid ... parts'. To cope with the disappointment that actresses they valued were playing roles perceived to demean women, many viewers referred again to an 'interpretive repertoire' developed from the shared experience of women living in a patriarchal society, who were critical tv viewers. They employed a further 'interpretive strategy' to enable them to keep their respect for the stars and retain their original values. Rather than reject the artistes out of hand because the parts they played did not satisfy their expectations, they sought and found reasons for their dissatisfaction that were not directly associated with the actresses. Their only criticisms of the artistes were that this time they had been miscast or had made a poor choice of role, their disapproval not extending to them as people/stars. If it had any effect on the way they thought about the actresses, it was merely that in future they would reserve judgement and not take it for granted that a programme would be entertaining merely because they were starring in it. They selected an 'interpretive strategy' which justified their original opinions. The stars could remain high in their estimation, and any uneasiness they themselves may have suffered from a challenge to their own judgements was allayed.

These responses demonstrate that those viewers of The Mistress who considered Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher as 'valued others' already identified with the actresses as they knew them from their 'star images'. They anticipated and hoped that their appearance in The Mistress would reinforce this identification. They particularly wished to be like them and to be perceived to be like them because of the type of woman they represented: beautiful, slim, successful in their chosen field, sexually desired, socially admired. Because of their dissatisfaction with the roles the actresses played, neither anticipations nor hopes were automatically fulfilled, nor was identification always easy, happy or satisfactory.

Other viewers, such as Viewers [A], [M], the M A Film Studies Students, and some members of the Young Lesbians, refused to engage with the identification process. Far from 'identifying with them as valued others', they questioned that such actresses be attributed any worth at all, and despaired that any woman in the audience should desire to identify with them. Like the above viewers who did wish to identify with Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher, these latter viewers called on an 'interpretive repertoire' associated with their common experience as Skilled Viewers. The 'interpretive strategy' they deployed was distinctly different. They came to the series with no loyalty to either actress, so they had no allegiance to retain or sustain. They attached a good deal of blame to the artistes for the

images of women in the series and, subsequently, for their own disappointment. They neither anticipated nor hoped for any better. The motivation for their 'interpretive strategy' was much the same as the other viewers. It justified their expectations and already established value-judgments.

The first group of viewers could be said to derive pleasure from identifying with a projected ideal self by imagining themselves, usually without envy but often somewhat wistfully, as possessing beauty so admired and so desired. They valued the particular type of beauty presented to them, for their identification involved the very concept of, indeed the very act of conforming to the pressure of a generally accepted societal value. Hence, they internalised a societal value as a personal value. The others rejected absolutely any image of ideal beauty. They felt that being regularly presented with characters who epitomised an image of such ideal beauty was an insult to their intelligence. Of this latter number, some were loud in their condemnation not only of the type of looks the actresses possessed, but also of those women who aspired to emulate them. Their remarks, although in contrast to the other viewers or, rather, because they expressed the opposite of those others, in fact further underlined the dimension of values associated with physical appearance. They argued that the type of female beauty generally agreed by society to be fashionable and ideal had over time become naturalised. A definitive model of female attractiveness had become standardised and

apparently attainable for all women, no matter how unlike that ideal were their own facial features and figures.

Similar displays of loyalty, and the same 'interpretive strategy' were demonstrated towards Carla Lane. Repeatedly, the women in the audience of The Mistress acknowledged Lane's high standard of writing, that '[s]he's good. You've got to give it to her, she's good' ([C]), that in Butterflies there was a 'poetry' ([D]), and that even in The Mistress, 'it's got touches of her brilliance' ([E]). Most were disappointed that the series did not live up to their anticipations or hopes of a Carla Lane comedy. Their immediate response was to judge the series as poor. Rather than attributing this to, say, a substandard script because of inferior writing, they sought reasons for their disappointment that did not concern Lane's quality of writing *per se*. The Sewing Class attributed it to the death of a close relative, and Viewer [C] to the fact that she had strayed from her Liverpool roots.

This loyalty to and defence of the stars and of Carla Lane pointed up two fundamental issues, the one relating to the viewers' relationship to the stars in this particular text, and the other to their relationship to a Carla Lane text specifically. First of all, viewers who liked the stars anticipated that their own personal values would be represented by them. When this failed to happen they looked for reasons why. As these viewers had internalised society's

recognition of the stars as eminent and worthy examples of womanhood, so they regarded them as valued others in their lives, people to look up to and to emulate. Hence, though disappointed, they neither chose to distrust the stars, nor did they question their own personal values. In order to safeguard their established beliefs and attitudes they sought to persuade themselves that factors other than the stars or their own value systems had caused their disappointment. Secondly, the women in the audience of a Carla Lane comedy seem to expect more than merely a good performance from the stars or a quality script from the writer. Because she focuses on romantic, and domestic relationships, they appeared to invest an element of hope that, somehow, Carla Lane's series "would make everything all right". Drawing on psychoanalysis, I make two tentative suggestions here. Could this relationship of the audience with female stars as elements of a text, and a woman as constructor of that text, resemble that of the relationship of a daughter to her mother? Firstly, recalling Lacan, viewers seek their own image in the visual text as the child looks for her own image in the mirror. As Metz explained the viewer knows that it is not a mirror image that will be found, but a representation of someone like themselves. To take this further, the female viewer looks for an image of woman with which she can identify because it resembles her. Because of patriarchal tradition, the images of women most frequently presented represent a certain physical type, an ideal. Women viewers will see an image which looks like them

because it is an image of 'woman', but at the same time it is not an image of themselves because they fail to match the ideal. The image is one of perfection for which socialisation into a patriarchal society dictates they must strive. Referring now to Chodorow's argument that mothering, and society's promotion of the successful and the ideal mother, are powerful influences on the development of the psyche, it seems fair to say that there is a stage in the lives of most daughters of loving mothers, longer for some than others, when they believe that their mother is the most beautiful person in the world. She is the woman whom they endeavour to imitate and on whom they pattern their lives. She more than any other is the woman to whom they are exposed for the greater part of their formative years. She is also the socially authorised primary valued other they encounter. Their emulation of their mother is an example of their 'connectedness' with her. As they grow up and begin to lead lives physically separate from their mothers, it seems a reasonable assumption that they displace their expectations of their mother on to other socially sanctioned women of worth; and the women to whom they are most exposed in contemporary times are just those stars of television. Including the respect viewers of The Mistress displayed for Carla Lane as well as for the two actresses, it appears that they react to disappointment with them in much the same way as would a child who has been let down by her mother. The child comes to expect care and affection and is disappointed if on occasion the mother fails to provide them. Rather than

relinquishing love for her mother because of one bad experience, she looks for reasons for the change, reserves judgement on her behaviour, defends her to others who may criticise, and expects a return of her previous nurturing and protection. Similarly, the viewer reacts to the female stars and female writer. The child expects the mother, the viewer expects the mother-substitute, the star/writer, to return to the anticipated ideal; and, subsequently, to reaffirm that female 'connectedness'.

A final reflection ventured with respect to the images of women in The Mistress is that, although as mentioned earlier it was not possible to detect whether heterosexual viewers were sexually aroused by them, several heterosexual viewers who took a positive delight in the physical appearance of the stars. They agreed with Viewer [L], that Felicity Kendal 'just looks .. fantastic'. It is feasible to assume, then, that, by gaining pleasure from looking at images of women who, it is commonly agreed are sexually desirable, these viewers were indulging feelings of narcissism and/or exhibitionism. They hoped to see certain images of women, and their hopes were fulfilled. This seems particularly likely with the television audience and the television star. Where, to see a film in a cinema the audience enters into the cinematic world, the remoteness of the film star encouraging male voyeurism, the opposite attains for television. The television experience is a domestic one. The star enters into the viewer's world. The television viewer

has a sense of control over the television image. In the comparative privacy of her own home the female television viewer can be as self-indulgent as she pleases, safe from social reproach. Looking at images of women with whom she wishes to identify may become analogous to savouring a guilty secret; a "naughty but nice" experience. As Viewer [H] remarked, watching The Mistress was a 'sort of furtive pleasure'. The familiarity, the intimacy, the apparent closeness of a star whose image is at one and the same time your own because it is an image of 'woman', plus that for which you strive because it is an image of the 'ideal woman', invokes narcissistic feelings of desire and admiration. Simultaneously, the image parades its 'idealness', so the viewer can also enjoy a certain displaced exhibitionism, her self-respect secure in the knowledge that any disapproval from herself or other viewers amounts to a rejection of the image, not of herself.

Many viewers, including some who did and some who did not appear to gain the pleasure associated with narcissism or exhibitionism from looking at the images of women in The Mistress managed to gain some enjoyment from them, although in a decidedly different way. As Belinda Budge proposed, they had fun with them. This was not in the same way as viewers did with Alexis/Joan Collins in Dynasty, Budge suggesting that viewers were thrilled by her power and evilness as well as enjoying her physical appearance. Here, by ridiculing the 'ideal-ness' of the image, viewers turned

what had been either an ironic recognition of the unlikelihood of their own identification with the stars, or a powerful element of dissatisfaction with the illusion of the image, into a pleasure. The self-satisfied quotes: 'Nobody's as skinny as that' and 'It's obscene being a size eight at her age', from Viewer [A] and the Babysitting Circle ([2]), respectively, being prime examples. Was this an 'interpretive strategy' which intellectually compensated for emotional disappointment? It seems likely. These Skilled Viewers drew on an 'interpretive repertoire' learnt from shared experience of 'real' concrete women in society, and their conventional 'ideal' visual representations.

Critically, the women in the audience of The Mistress were constantly active. Their criticism was often as much an evaluation of their own reaction as of the series. All the statements concerning performance were examples of the audience as critics. They not only considered the individual performances of the actors, but the performance criteria of sitcoms, and of television fiction in general. They passed judgement on Carla Lane's standard of writing, comparing their conclusions with those of the "official" critics. Their comments on the standard of writing, production, performance, and so on, frequently made them reflect on their own responses, often resulting in self-criticism which was not always complimentary. An associated aspect of criticism was when viewers gossiped about the stars. They seemed to gain a great deal of pleasure from swapping

information about the people on the screen. Both as critics and as gossips they appeared to draw on 'interpretive repertoires' of Skilled Viewers who understood and appreciated performance and broadcast criteria and conventions, and expected to gain with ease information about the personalities they encountered on their television screens. Their 'interpretive strategy' was one which assumed that the people to whom they were speaking were equally interested in trading knowledge about the stars' acting abilities and their private lives.

Viewers' critical skills, the problems of identification, the questions of realism, and the issue of personal values bore considerably on the success of the textual address. Despite many being prepared to compromise by going to some trouble to exonerate the stars and Carla Lane from personal blame for their disappointment, not all viewers could come to terms with the position they were offered by the text. They agreed almost to a woman that situation comedies were usually targeted at female viewers and assumed that The Mistress was made with the female viewer in mind. Most anticipated that it would appeal more to women than men. All perceived the same textual address, that the text of The Mistress 'spoke' to its audience as if she were a conventional woman, happy with her lot within a traditional patriarchal family. There were disagreements about matters of and degrees of enjoyment. Their variations of

appreciation revealed that they experienced their textual positioning diversely.

All approached the text as Skilled Viewers with a certain common understanding, or 'interpretive repertoire' of 1980s television conventions, of tv fictional comedy in general, and of Carla Lane comedies in particular. All approached the text ready to apply certain anticipatory 'interpretive strategies'. It did not help that the introductory sequence set up a series of expectations, in terms of both hopes and anticipations, which were not met by the ensuing episodes. From the outset the viewers' predictions were, if not confounded, then at least confused. For some, the way in which the series was put together, those components which were used to create the 'look' of a feminine world, positively lured them into watching. Viewer [H], for example, finding it 'studiedly decorative ... I enjoyed that ... .. I wanted to see more into their rooms ... .. it was all very good taste', and Viewer [L] enjoying the fact that 'everything's co-ordinating ... typical woman ... .. the feminine touches have been put in all the way'. Both these women had spent considerable time, interest, and money on the interior décor of their own homes. It is fair to conclude, therefore, that their domestic surroundings meant a lot to them, and so they would be correspondingly attentive to the settings in the series. The appeal to their sense of aestheticism was the factor which procured their agreement on the acceptability of the settings and their own

inclusion in the textual address, for each came from very different backgrounds. Viewer [H] was a feminist living in Sheffield in a Victorian terraced house, a mature student with an arts background. Viewer [L] was a "non-political", conventional woman living on Merseyside in a modern, split-level semi-detached house, who had worked for the same employer since she was 17. The 'interpretive strategy' they both operated was one associated with their common interest in design, fashion, "good taste". This preoccupation with style apparently superceded any personal and/or political experience which may have influenced a more ideological standpoint. Rather than being directed by ideology, politics, or social issues, their response was principally triggered by the elegance and luxury of the characters' houses, which basically thrilled them, causing them to hope to see more. It is tempting merely to state that the reason these viewers could accept the textual address was that their hopes of looking at nice things were fulfilled, which is basically what they said. But why did they like those nice things in particular? One rationale for this specific 'interpretive strategy' is that their approach to the text was to seek a form of "approval by association". They related to an 'interpretive repertoire' of learned "good taste". To acknowledge and appreciate that which has been socially confirmed as beautiful would, for them, be the standard to which to aspire. Their conscious expression of such "good taste" suggests an aspiration to certain social

status associated with "cultural knowhow" which brings personal approval/envy from others in its wake.

Other women in the audience who held similar opinions about the settings and, therefore, could be said to collude, to some extent at least, with the position offered by the textual address were the Sewing Class, who were fascinated by "how the other half live", the Women's Guild, and Viewers [B], [J] and [K]. All these viewers were prepared to take the actual situation of the mistress with a "pinch of salt". Even if they felt it regularly failed to uphold their particular personal values they were prepared to suspend their principles and enjoy it as a diversion, rather than a realistic view of life. They had come to The Mistress anticipating and hoping for entertainment and, even if disappointed in part, they were sufficiently intrigued by other elements of the text, such as the settings, to accept and go along with it.

The settings actually put off some women in the audience. Viewers [D], [F], and [E] regarded them as cold and devoid of personality. Viewer [G], although admitting that the décor of the houses was 'beautifully done' took exactly the opposite opinion from Viewers [L] and [H] above: '[I]t's like everything I totally hate about decorating'. This is not to say that these women were not interested in interior décor themselves. Viewer [F], like Viewer [H] was a feminist, mature student, living in Sheffield, in a

Victorian terraced house, who had spent a great deal of time, money and effort renovating and redesigning her own house. For her, everything in the programme was subordinate to the ideological question of the place of women in society and the absence of technical risk in the series. Although these last viewers understood it, the aesthetically associated 'interpretive strategy' which agreed that the settings were indeed tasteful was neither their first nor their foremost response. The 'interpretive repertoires' which took precedence for them prioritised 'interpretive strategies' which, for the former, engaged with individual originality, and for the latter with the treatment of women in visual fiction, and the skills involved with production, over the appreciation of aesthetics.

A third set of viewers found the settings to be one of several components of the text which thoroughly irritated them because of what they perceived them to portray: an overwhelming middle class-ness. Viewers [C], [M], the Friendship Group, the M A Film Studies Students, and the Young Lesbians all declared the series to be so conspicuously "upmarket" that they resented it. It did not relate to a way of life they knew or, in Viewer [C]'s case, presently knew. They also argued that it could only be representative of a way of life they associated with the south-east of England. Not only could they not get involved with the characters, or the stars, they felt excluded by the settings which enhanced the middle class-ness of the series.

They called on an 'interpretive repertoire' derived from their collective experience of living in the north of England to deploy an 'interpretive strategy' which, in hoping for a realistic portrayal of lives to which they could relate, found fault with the settings, and scorned what they perceived to be the middle class textual address. This is not to say that none of these viewers were middle class. At least four of the M A Film Studies Students, one of the Friendship Group, and Viewer [C] could all be described as middle class in socio-economic terms. Because they related the address of The Mistress to the "upmarket south-east", so they ignored their own social class roots, and prioritised instead their northern allegiance. Doubtless, the reason they applied this particular 'interpretive strategy' was to reassure themselves that their personal values, which were neither illustrated nor promoted in the series, were justified.

Finally, a note on the sounds of the series, beginning with the laughtrack. Most viewers understood why a studio audience was necessary for the filming of a sitcom, in order for the artistes to perfect their timing, and so on. Its retention as a laughtrack on the broadcast programme vexed many. Although they anticipated its inclusion, very few women in the audience of The Mistress failed to find it other than an intrusion. As Skilled Viewers, and calling on an 'interpretive repertoire' learned as such, they felt that it undermined just that skill. Its presence frequently

highlighted as funny something which they had not perceived to be so, thus clashing with their own values and opinions. This in turn had an effect on the success of the textual address. The only other sound on which viewers commented was the theme tune. Not that the tune for The Mistress meant much to them, but that catchy theme tunes in general were a great appeal. Ellis noted that sounds hook an audience into watching, and viewers did indeed seem to be very aware of the theme tunes of their favourite programmes, so presumably they listened out for them if they were away from the television to alert them to the fact that their programmes were due to start. Besides this, the women in the audience seemed to gain a considerable amount of fun from singing some theme tunes together. It is reasonable to suggest that here they drew on an 'interpretive repertoire' associated with a common past experience of carefree children/young people with no family/domestic or social responsibilities who have the time and the inclination to sing to express their *joi de vivre*. Alternatively, they may have enjoyed singing in much the same way as they enjoyed gossiping, in order to share their pleasure with others.

### Conclusions

The interpretations above demonstrate that the method of defining audience response to The Mistress in terms of anticipations-expressed/anticipations-fulfilled and hopes-expressed/hopes-fulfilled proved to a great extent to be

effective. The diversity of emotional and intellectual responses could then be identified as 'interpretive strategies' with which viewers chose to engage with the text. Investigating which common social experience had led the women in the audience to develop the 'interpretive repertoires' from which their 'interpretive strategies' obtained clarified, to a certain extent at least, why they responded as they did.

At first glance the operation of such an assorted mixture of 'interpretive strategies' from such a diversity of 'interpretive repertoires' suggests a problem of pluralism. This is not so. There was sufficient shared ground to discern a number of commonplace ways in which the women in the audience appreciated The Mistress and negotiated a text/audience relationship. This was noticeable in relation to the three major collective social experiences on which they could draw. These were their position as women in 1980s Western society, British television viewers and women living in the north of England.

Nor can the criticism of tautology be levelled. Common resort to one 'interpretive repertoire' did not guarantee the adoption of one particular 'interpretive strategy'. Which 'interpretive strategy' was employed appeared largely to be guided by concerns significant to viewers at the time of their textual encounter with The Mistress. These concerns had as much, if not more, to do with interests in and/or

anxieties about issues and beliefs associated with their personal and shared histories of social and domestic experience, as they did with interpretive expertise.

The ways in which these Skilled Viewers approached the text demonstrated not only their critical competence and aesthetic appreciation, but a need to confirm deepseated personal values. This was invariably achieved in their anticipations and hopes about both the realism of the series, and their ability to identify with the stars/characters. As Ien Ang found in her study of Dallas, appreciation of the programme's realism was based on recognition and plausibility. '[T]he field of tension between the fictional and the real ... played an important part'<sup>20</sup> in audience pleasure. From viewers' response to The Mistress, four conclusions can be drawn. First of all, perceptions of, and judgements of realism, were related to personal experience. Secondly, identification with characters encouraged an acknowledgement of realism. Viewers not only wished to 'imagine the characters as 'real people''<sup>21</sup>, they also judged their 'genuineness'<sup>22</sup>. Thirdly, realism mattered to a greater or lesser degree to different members of the audience. Fourthly, realism in fiction, both in the comparison of reality and fiction, and in evaluating the realism of a fictional construction was significant in terms of audience enjoyment.

Three text/audience relationships between The Mistress and the women in the audience could be identified. These were relationships of complicity, compromise, or exclusion. Those viewers for whom entertainment values were their priority during their textual encounter with The Mistress colluded in the position the text offered them. They accepted the fiction. They were prepared to identify with the characters or stars. If they noted the series' lack of realism, they didn't mind too much about it, some actually taking a delight in its fantasy. Other viewers were as interested in the programme's reflection of reality as they were in the entertainment it had to offer and found some fault with the principles it appeared to espouse. They were not sufficiently concerned to deny themselves enjoyment of the fiction and were in general prepared to concede their personal values for the duration of the episode/series. Yet others could only reject the series altogether. They perceived their personal values either to be so contrary to, or to be so neglected by those portrayed in The Mistress that, for them, (lack of) realism became the main issue. They could not in any 'positively' enjoyable way engage with the text, resenting the way it 'spoke' to them. For them, the textual address had failed.

### Reflections

Developing the work done in Uses and Gratifications to advance explanations of response proved beneficial here. First of all, it provided a systematic framework of

expectation via which access to viewers' 'interpretive strategies' and 'interpretive repertoires' could be gained. Secondly, the notion of anticipations/hopes provided opportunities to unpick the 'interpretive strategies' and 'interpretive repertoires'; to clarify what is entailed within each and how and why they relate to one another. Thirdly, identifying the 'interpretive repertoire' directs the research towards the social background from which it arose, thus providing opportunities to posit the underlying reasons for particular interpretation.

A framework of expectation does not, however, provide the whole story. Whilst acknowledging its benefits, I must register a certain unease that the specificity applied, and the labels used for the terms, ultimately obliged certain constraints on the findings. Four issues I encountered must be addressed.

Firstly, the way in which the model of expectation was applied in general meant that certain responses in particular were not satisfactorily accounted for. I refer to those viewers whose response to the images of women in The Mistress was one of ridicule. I considered this response solely in terms of relationships between the women in the audience and the images of women, but did not consider the experience of 'fun'. There are two points here. These viewers expressed neither anticipation nor hope that they would gain fun specifically from images of women in The

Mistress. Had they expected to gain fun in general from a comedy series, could a generalised-fun-anticipated satisfactorily correspond with a particular-fun-gained? To unpick this even further, it now seems anomalous to suggest that fun experienced **at the expense** of the programme/components within the programme, rather than from elements perceived to be **designed to be** funny is as effective an analysis as were other examples of anticipations-expressed/anticipation-fulfilled.

Secondly, it is commonly understood that enjoyment is experienced on a continuum of recognition and surprise. The framework of expectation applied here can hardly deal with a surprise factor. In this study, the common surprise expressed was that the women in the audience didn't enjoy The Mistress. Their anticipation was that they would enjoy it. Their anticipation was in the main unfulfilled. This isn't a satisfactory explanation. It doesn't investigate surprise at all. It just takes note of it. Because of the nature of the series and its audience response, it was barely a problem here. It is likely it would prove problematic in the study of response to other texts. Particularly in the area of comedy and humour it is an important notion to consider.

Thirdly, the actual labels used: 'anticipations-expressed' and 'hopes-expressed' could only take the analysis so far. Besides experiences such as surprise which are barely

comprised in the framework at all, what about those anticipations and hopes not expressed; not stated, but implied? My exploration into the audience response to textual encounters suggested pleasures from narcissism, exhibitionism, a desire to recreate the maternal bond, which I have ventured to explain via speculative use of psychoanalytic theory. These could not be said to be 'hopes-expressed' as they were not manifest in the viewers' conscious expression but were inferred by me.

Fourthly, using such a framework encourages self-referential explanation. Identification of an anticipation/hope directs the analysis to its fulfilment (or not). It was difficult to seek further than the level of behaviour (response) to discover explanation. Defining the 'interpretive strategies' and 'interpretive repertoires' and the experimental use of Chodorow helped to a certain extent. But the framework design "felt" constraining. It kept luring me back to a 'this is what they did because this is what they did' level of explanation.

Practical application has shown that its very design limits the range of analysis. The concept of expectation within gratification needs to be developed further to be considered sufficiently comprehensive. In terms of expectation as a component of gratification, the hopes-expressed for representations of strong women were gratifications-sought. Their hopes were thwarted. But the fun they gained from the

images were gratifications-obtained. Expectation, therefore, cannot operate as a stand-alone gratification. It needs further exploration.

Notwithstanding its partiality and that the above problems attach to it, I should argue that the interpretation of audience data using the theoretical and methodological models designed in Chapters Three and Four has been effective. By providing successive access points through the layers of experience underlying responses they have aided their subsequent explanation(s), and identified three alternative text/audience relationships. More work now needs to be undertaken into the model design, to relieve it of the constraints its own specificity exercises, whilst at the same time restating boundaries to ensure that findings are still contained within a satisfactory framework.

#### NOTES

1. Minder: [BBC] 1980s hour length comic drama series about a crooked businessman, Arthur Daly, and his bodyguard, or "minder", starring George Cole and Denis Waterman. 'Her Indoors': Arthur's reference to his wife.
2. Carla Lane's grandson had recently been drowned in a boating accident on the River Mersey.
3. 1980s/90s twice weekly, half hour police series set in London.
4. Ellis [1984] op. cit.
5. Dyer op. cit. (p68).
6. Ibid (p53).

7. Jane Asher and Paul McCartney were romantically involved for five years in the 1960s and engaged for a short period. c.f. Grove op. cit. for Jane Asher's attitude to discussing that time in her life, where Grove remarks that Jane Asher has 'slapped a D-notice' on discussions about her life in the '60s.'
8. Gloria Hunniford Show [BBC] Radio 2, October 1984.
9. Dyer op. cit. (p70).
10. Ibid (p53).
11. Ibid (p151).
12. This was only true in the first series. In the second series, broadcast 1986, Helen does in fact discover the affair.
13. This is a reference to the sitcom, It Ain't 'Arf 'Ot, Mum op. cit.
14. Haskell op. cit. (p3).
15. Ibid (p272).
16. Ibid (p271).
17. District Nurse: [BBC] 1980s drama series, starring Nerys Hughes.
18. Playing For Time [BBC] 1970s film for television about musicians in a concentration camp in World War II.
19. It may be easier to research this issue from its obverse side, to begin by analysing what it is about someone's physical appearance that others find repellent.
20. Ang op. cit. (p30).
21. Ibid (p33).
22. Ibid (p50).

## CONCLUSION

### Motivations and Aims

Interests in comedy, narrative, and images of women were the fundamental motivations for this research. A situation comedy entitled The Mistress, written by Carla Lane, featuring female protagonists played by well-known actresses presented a legitimate case study. The aim was to investigate these areas from the point of view of the women in the audience. Theory and methodology would be guided by a feminist perspective promoting change in the male/female power structure of the patriarchal order. Findings would add to those studies on comedy in the visual media (Mast, Eaton, Neale, Cook) and into images of women by film and television theorists (Mulvey, Betterton, Brunson, Modleski, et al). By incorporating the dimension of audience interpretation it would augment the field of television audience research (Morley, Hobson) and enhance current understanding of the text/audience relationship.

I approached this project with the basic assumption that most women in the audience watch comedy programmes because they expect them to be funny. This study shows that comic appeal may not be the sole, the inevitable, nor the overriding reason viewers tune in to particular television comedy programmes. Although labelling her series as comedies, or sitcoms, the television audience for a Carla Lane series expected other than "a good laugh". They

anticipated female characters to whom they could relate and whom they would like. Viewers also showed that even had they expected to enjoy an episode but were then disappointed, they gave it further chances to appeal to them, staying with it often for several episodes for a variety of reasons, mostly to do with loyalty to the author or members of the cast. Frequently, they searched for other sources of enjoyment when they were not amused. A number of women in the audience of The Mistress displayed a determination to gain some pleasure from their television viewing, even if the enjoyment they eventually experienced differed from the one they had originally anticipated. This is not to say that the findings here endorse the view that viewers must ever "make the best of a bad job". Although some viewers did indeed gain pleasure of a vicarious nature, this was by no means either the single, nor the overwhelming response. It must also be acknowledged that viewers may have discussed the women in The Mistress in order to give themselves some topic, any topic, to talk about for several other reasons. These could include a wish to cover their embarrassment at not particularly liking the series, a desire to please me in my role as researcher or, for those who knew me in roles other than researcher, not wanting to "let me down".

The audience emphasis on elements of the text other than its funniness dictated that the account spend less time on comedy and humour and attend more to areas the viewers did point up as important to them. How they enjoyed the text,

and how much they enjoyed it must have been affected by what they perceived to be/not to be its comical components, but for this particular Carla Lane Series their expectations for enjoyment seemed barely dependent on an amusement factor.

With respect to narrative, viewers were little interested in general terms in how the story was told, although many were curious about the fate of the female characters. They enjoyed predicting what would happen, often expressing hopes that their predictions would be wrong and the series would conclude with the women happy and victorious. Because the narrative components of the series were not of paramount interest to the viewers in this study, little attention has been paid to them in the account.

The issue of pleasure is undoubtedly the essence of this study. Theoretically and methodologically, attention is consistently paid to the audience experience of aspects of pleasure such as entertainment, fun, preference, and gratification. Throughout history, philosophers have debated the nature of, the processes of, and the reasons for pleasure. Literary, film, and television criticism have inevitably been influenced by such work. Time and space constraints have limited the philosophical significance of pleasure in this study to mere acknowledgement. This is by no means to denigrate its importance. It is to recognise its complexity. To try and incorporate pleasure without contextualising it historically, in order to explain the

selection of certain ontological polemics over others, would result in inclusion for its own sake. It would be insufficiently comprehensive and would effectively compromise the rest of the study.

Notwithstanding these problems, the aims and objectives of this research have been achieved. Previous investigations had sought the identification of humorous components in the text (Mast), or the psychoanalytic construction of visual comedy (Neale) and/or images of women (Mulvey, et al). This project successfully introduces the perspective of the active female viewer, and the notion of audience anticipation/hope into the field of study. It reveals that the priorities and expectations the audience of The Mistress brought with them to their textual encounter regularly governed both their approach to it and their experience of it. It adds to and enhances current knowledge in the area of text/audience relationships.

### The Account

Since I began this research there has been a change in academic preference regarding the way in which theses are written up. Traditionally, the acceptable way was always to write in the third person, which was considered to lend objectivity by removing the subject of the researcher from the printed account. Recently, presumably due to the influence of feminist research, accounts reported in the

first person have been legitimated. The first person is used in the writing up of this account. This has proved advantageous as it resolves a problem relating to both meanings of subjectivity: that of personal bias, and that of the conscious agent. First of all, it makes it easier to be frank about the personal prejudices which may have influenced my approach to the work. Secondly, the use of the first person acknowledges that the person writing the account is responsible for it. Entailed in the use of the third person is a layer of deception where, albeit subtly, the reporter of the research affects to be somebody other than the researcher, which accordingly achieves an account which may appear to be more objective than in truth it is. It ignores Lacan's point that the "I" that is printed in the account is only a part of the researcher's individual subjectivity: the articulated self. Although writing in the third person removes the "I" that is articulated, still preserved though now hidden, is the self that articulates "I", the self-that-is. By using the first person, a researcher recognises that although objectivity is a principle aim, so also is accountability.

Before I began this study there had been few practical investigations into the women in the audience of television fiction. It was an area in which many people were beginning to take an interest. Recently, another related level of study has gained approval and, to some degree, is succeeding the text/audience relationship phase of research. The

investigation into 'gendered discourse' assumes that texts are appropriated either by female or male viewers. The premise is that as '[e]very sign is gendered'<sup>1</sup>, so genres are targeted at and specifically address one gender. That gender colludes in the textual intent, their expectations are shaped accordingly, and construction of the texts concur with these expectations. The objective of gendered discourse analysis is to study the 'gender definitions, gender positionings and gender identifications'<sup>2</sup>. 'Gender definitions' refer to the ways in which gender is marked in a text. 'Gender positionings' indicates how 'gender definitions' are taken up by the audience. Investigation is via textual analysis. 'Gender identification' is the relationship between the 'gender definitions' and 'gender positionings'. It obliges research into

[w]hen, how and why ... male and female persons keep identifying with positions that are defined as properly masculine or feminine in dominant discourse.<sup>3</sup>

Exploration into audience response would seem to be essential here and apparently corresponding with the findings of this research. The approach takes a different line. Firstly, the gendered discourse approach reinstates the text as a primary factor of analysis. One of the principle priorities of this study was to redress the balance and focus on the women in the audience. The method selected revealed the television text to the reader through the eyes/words of the television audience only. The only textual analysis undertaken here is one which relates to

that text which is the audience data. The research design precludes an analysis of the televisual text, entailing by implication that this would jeopardise the central position of the audience. Secondly, the "gendering" of discourse constrains the investigation of variables other than gender which influence response. As Seiter et al found in their study of women soap opera viewers, it 'subordinates other social positions to the gendered one'<sup>4</sup>. Freud's focus on the masculine, and the feminist film theorists' search for the feminine demonstrates the cost of such over-emphasis. I should argue that research into 'gendered discourse' is winning favour in academic circles because it makes life easier for researchers. It returns the text to the centre of the study. Textual analysis becomes a principal objective. The researcher is excused from continual engagement with the social, active audience. Although there is an obligation to seek audience response, the commitment to the audience interpretation is removed. The researcher's analysis of the text becomes the privileged reading; acknowledgement that this is one subjective reading is unlikely. Notions of the male gaze, textual determinacy, the objective and knowing critic are all invoked. In short, it is a revival of the élitist fixation with the text of early film theorists.

There was no textual analysis of The Mistress in order to keep the description as far as possible audience led. This decision, to locate the text solely as a discourse against which audience response could be measured, was not taken

lightly. By not undertaking a textual analysis I ran the risk of accusation, such as that levelled by Iser against Fish, of denying the text. This was not so. Rather than refusal or repudiation of the text, it was an insistence that the audience were not merely one element of investigation, but the crux of the inquiry. They would be not merely ever present in the research focus but ever central to it. By introducing the text from the audience perspective, and following this with those discussion topics in which they were most interested, the perspectives for the subsequent account were established. The audience was confirmed as primary from the outset.

Because its contrasting principles of systematic precision and "openness" facilitated the theoretical and methodological approaches here and because Radway had used it to good effect, I had not questioned the ethnographic procedure of accounting before using it. Certain issues should be addressed. In their book, Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research<sup>5</sup>, Jerome Kirk and Marc L Miller note the following. Historically, ethnography has assisted anthropological approaches to the study of 'exotic cultures'<sup>6</sup>, or those dissimilar to that of the researcher. Contacts are established and introductions made. The role of the intermediaries who bring the researcher and researched together is inevitably ignored. As the researcher becomes accustomed to the research setting so it becomes more difficult to take account of the cultural context. In the

beginning, the cultural conventions brought by the researcher-as-outsider may constrain observations by emphasising strangeness. Soon, as a welcomed participant observer, familiarity reduces initially perceived extraordinariness to the commonplace. Traditionally, ethnographers 'remain on the scene long enough to witness the full cycles of cultural routines'<sup>7</sup>. However, Seiter et al contend that

[e]thnographic audience studies significantly differ from classic ethnography's attempt to understand "other" cultures'<sup>8</sup>.

A study such as this relied on a "sameness" of cultural experience, of shared understandings between myself and the research subjects. I may have been a researcher, but I was also a woman in the tv audience. My 'fragmented' approach conformed with that of Seiter et al in their study of soap opera viewers, my 'communicative strategy [being] to de-emphasise [my] role as academic'<sup>9</sup>. I also took advantage of already established relationships. Any intermediaries involved were consciously acknowledged in the account. The study was conducted

within the context of concrete social exchanges, among subjects whose histories determine the interaction and the kind of discourse which will be used<sup>10</sup>.

Morley and Silverstone explain that ethnographic research is 'grounded in the realities of other people's lives'<sup>11</sup>. They maintain that it is imperative that three basic be applied.

These are the reflexivity of the researcher, rigorous methodological procedures, and consistent attention to the 'importance of the context of actions'<sup>12</sup> are applied.

In this study, consistent attention was paid to the contextualisation of the viewers and to the immediate viewing environment. My interest was in the relationship of the women in the audience to the text of The Mistress. The 'cultural routines' with which I was concerned were the ways in which their 'interpretive strategies' were brought to bear on the text. Within the larger socio-cultural context the findings here would relate to those 'cultural routines' surrounding the domestic use of television revealed by Morley<sup>13</sup>. The identification and investigation of 'interpretive strategies' and 'interpretive repertoires' was an attempt to account for and probe the broader social contextualisation and experience of the viewers here. However, although I used the technique of the ethnographic account, I make no claim to be an ethnographer. It was the principles behind the ethnographic strategy rather than its conventional implementation which made it attractive for use. The ethnographic account orders the qualitative investigation. There were two major advantages associated with it. Firstly, its "openness" facilitated the accommodation of all types of response, the

surprise, invasion, strategy, pleasure, and excitement that characterise the motivation<sup>14</sup>

of both researcher and researched. Secondly, it was an enabling device which allowed the clear reporting of an audience-led study guided by feminist principles. It pointed up not only the response, but those who do the responding and those who elicit it. It insisted on the explicit visibility of the researcher. Thus, explanations were not imposed on the women in the audience but rendered for them about their lived experience via their own responses. The procedure enabled me to remain conscious of the difference between responses which I "shared" with subjects and others where I perceived myself to "lead" someone/a group to a particular opinion. My way of dealing with the latter was to disregard comments in the transcripts which appeared to push the discussion in a direction perceived to please me.

### The Skilled Viewer

The Skilled Viewer was designed as a theoretical model which comprehensively and satisfactorily incorporates both the notions of the visual image and the significance of the active audience. Theoretical components from the fields of film and television studies, reader response theory, and audience research contributed to its construction.

Relevant aspects of film theory centred on relationships of looking and how the spectator was theorised. What the women in the audience of The Mistress looked at, how they understood what they saw, and why they appreciated it in the

ways they did were key issues. So also was the acknowledgement that the audience did actively look, that they were not mere passive receptors of the visual image. This introduced the notion of 'activity' into the theoretical frame.

Lacan's reworking of the Oedipus phase to include the mirror-phase and Metz' adaptation of same to the cinema spectator, suggested ways in which looking at a film, and the spectator's knowledge of looking, could be related to those psychoanalytically-defined desires associated with looking: voyeurism, narcissism, exhibitionism, and fetishism. Mulvey maintained that conventional film production techniques are dictated by patriarchy and restrict the pleasures of the female spectator. She could either experience voyeurism by identifying with the hero or narcissism by identifying with the heroine. I proposed that Mulvey's argument yields a further potential pleasure, exhibitionism. By aspiring to be like the image the female spectator (actively) flaunts its passivity, with the result that the myth of woman as submissive, still and desirable to men, triumphs. In the social world as well as on the cinema screen, female appearance becomes prior. Where in film it is the image of the woman rather than her character which draws our attention, so the female spectator's own appearance claims significance in her lived experience.

The progress made by feminist theorists concerning the theoretical centrality of the female spectator was particularly critical for this study. Mulvey et al's conclusion that the female spectator could only achieve positive pleasure from films where conventional, patriarchal film production techniques were subverted, was not appropriate. Implicit in their argument that choice is restricted to the female viewer is that the skill of the female viewer is somehow less than that of her male counterpart. It emphasised the abiding theoretical centrality of the male spectator, reducing the potential for activity on the part of the female spectator, and doomed her to the theoretical sidelines. Alternative understandings of "how the woman looks", focusing on the activity and centrality of the female spectator turned the attention to the female Skilled Viewer. Issues of gender experience and social conditioning were raised, rejecting Mulvey's stance that change could only be realised from outside patriarchal tradition. The importance of relationships between, and differences between women were foreground. This promised a theoretical model of the female spectator on her own terms, rather than within a framework which treated her as abnormal or peripheral. The adoption of Chodorow's theories were an enabling factor in the exploration of women's relationships and in locating woman as theoretically central. Of significance here was that implicit in Chodorow's theories is that women are social beings. Gendered subjectivity is socially constructed, girls experience the Oedipus complex

differently from boys, 'connectedness' is primary in female relationships. Her theories provided opportunities to challenge the former theoretical determinisms and offered explanations of appeal relevant to this research which traditional film theory could not incorporate.

For instance, questioning the notion of the 'male gaze' Gamman and Marshment argued that an understanding of female activity and shared social experience were at least equivalent elements in the pleasure of identification as were female sexuality and gender. This was borne out in this project when the women in the audience of The Mistress craved to identify with female characters who depicted the activity and busy-ness of their own social experience. For many, such identification was more important than seeking a female image to emulate, as was Byars' suggestion that female sexuality and/or desirability was subordinate to the importance of sustaining relationships. Viewers here also supported Budge's proposal that women in the audience are not compelled merely to identify either with the passive, sexual desirability, or with the evil activity of the female image. On the contrary, they frequently exercise a further choice and have fun with images of women.

The viewing context was an important consideration. Examination showed that the material conditions which govern the audience experience of film and television affect audience response. The principal differences were concerned

with the amount of control the immediate environment exerts on the viewing experience. The gaze of the cinema spectator is more likely to be drawn to the film because of the size of and remoteness of the screen, the darkness of the auditorium, and so on. Ellis proposed that the domestic familiarity of television places it in competition for attention with any number of other distractions. It needs more than visual appeal, relying to a greater degree on sound to 'hook' the viewer. It was assumed here, however, that sound is fundamental to the understanding of all visual images, as in both film and television sound works to suggest certain interpretation of the image. This was significant because the case study was a comedy programme and I expected sound to work in conjunction with the image to promote a particular type of (humorous) response.

Debating the material conditions of viewing in theoretical terms did not consider all the influences on response. Textual encounters here were also affected by conditions of viewing imposed by the immediate social context in which the women in the audience of The Mistress watched the programme. No matter how comfortable the audience appeared to be, each textual encounter had been set up as a function of a research project. Although watching television may regularly be a familial, or sometimes a social occasion, viewing a programme for research purposes is of necessity an 'unnatural' circumstance. Morley's work on the family as television audiences showed how access to television,

convenience of scheduling, and ease with which choice could be accommodated were powerful influences, particularly applying on women's preference for and availability of programmes. Evidence here confirmed Morley's findings, especially in relation to broadcasting conventions. A number of viewers planned their viewing around other members of the family, and household duties. Where Morley's research aimed to discover the 'cultural' place of television in the family, the objective here was to reveal the text/audience relationship of a specific text and a number of women in the audience. The extraordinariness of the situation was taken into consideration via the methodological procedures and in the account. This study acknowledges and attempts to explain the group dynamics observed, and recognises and accounts for my relationship to the research subjects. It supports evidence such as Morley's and adds to his findings. It is in neither its design nor its scope to explore the relationships of those who viewed together in the same manner or to the same depth.

Film and television theory contributed components to the concept of the Skilled Viewer which comprised notions of the visual image, of active looking, of relationships between women in the social world and their image on the screen. With the exceptions of Hobson and Morley who researched into concrete viewers, however, the active audience remained a theoretical construct. It lacked the dimension of lived

experience required in the construction of the Skilled Viewer.

Reader response theory was examined because it emphasised the reader as the site of study, and had been successfully applied by Radway. It was worthy of investigation first of all because it challenged the traditional critical attention to the author or to the text. Secondly, it argued against the conventional tendencies of literary criticism to treat readers as naïve and to proclaim the literary critic's interpretation to be skilled and objective. As this was not only a study of the audience, but one which was to be audience-led, both points were significant. Investigation of the conceptualisation of the reader promised benefits in the design of a parallel theory of the viewer.

Fish's championing of the reader and the central position of the act of reading made his theory was the most pertinent. His notion of the 'Informed Reader' as active, self-aware, self-monitoring, competent, and approaching the text with specific aims and expectations corresponded with the assumption of this study, where the active, knowing, Skilled Viewer is paramount. His attention to the act of reading matched the assertion here that investigation into audience response would determine the text/audience relationship.

Certain problems associated with Fish's theory had to be negotiated. Questions had to be addressed relating to Fish's

denial of the text, his contention that there is no stability of meaning, textual quality, that his notion of 'response' only accounts for spontaneous response, the theory's linguistic basis and that his basic assumptions were tautologous and subjective.

Reworking Fish's theory, and referring to Radway's practical application the above problems were resolved, or at least defused, in ways which proved both theoretically adequate and satisfactory, and adaptable to a theory of the viewer. First of all, I argued that, implicitly entailed in the assumption that a reader only becomes a reader when encountering a text is that a text can only be defined as such when a reader reads it. Secondly, if Fish's negation of the text-as-meaning is understood as a negation of the text-as-exclusive-and-fixed-meaning then the text becomes relevant, but the reader remains primary. This takes account of the diversity of experience the social beings who are readers/viewers bring to their textual encounter. Fish's rejection of the text as meaning-bearer proved of further value because it called into question the so-called objectivity of the traditional critic. It removed the need to rationalise the focus on reader/audience response. It was useful in negotiating the third issue also. It repudiated the need to justify textual quality, facilitating the study of texts, such as situation comedies which aspire more to the label of "popular" than "quality". Fourthly, I intended to investigate the audience spontaneous 'response' as well

as their internalised 'interpretation' by comparing the varieties of response across subjects and within subjects. I referred to Radway's practical application of Fish to resolve three issues. First of all, problems relating to the linguistic basis of his theory were minimised. Although she used Fish as a base, Radway incorporated an ethnographic account and used Chodorow to interpret the changes in her readers. Secondly, Radway's careful exploration of 'interpretive strategies' from the 'interpretive community' of romance readers reduced the potential of tautology. I was persuaded that systematic investigation of 'interpretive strategies' and 'interpretive communities' would provide a reasonable way of accounting for variations of reader/viewer competence, as well as continuity and congruity of meaning without resorting to textual determinacy. Thirdly, Radway adapted Fish's examination of his own reading experience to an investigation of the romance readers' reading experience. This removed the problem of obsessive subjectivity. Fish's preoccupation with his own experience was also advantageous to this study because it pointed up the necessity always to be conscious of, and to make the reader aware of, my own preconceptions and response.

In her study of romance readers, Radway insisted that they were socially and culturally located. Her views on access and availability corresponded with Morley's in the field of television viewing. Her methods of data collection resulted in an attention to the reader which guided her own

interpretation. Her ethnographic account lent an objectivity to her findings. The care with which she carried out her research frustrated criticism of subjective preoccupation and theoretical anarchy.

Although an influential precursor to this study, Radway's research was not wholly copied and adapted to suit an investigation of the television audience. Her philosophical approach to the reader/audience, her methods of data gathering, and her application of reader response theory and Chodorow proved useful. Radway's aim was to construct the 'ideal romance' and the 'failed romance' by comparing the romance 'industry''s intentions with her readers' response. Constructing an 'ideal' or 'failed' situation comedy, or examining the television industry were not appropriate here. Once Radway had outlined the 'ideal romance' and the 'failed romance' she looked no further. Textual explanation concluded her thesis. My project begins and ends with the audience response. Application of Chodorow to the 'interpretation' as well as the 'response' from the conscious expression of viewers of The Mistress speculated underlying reasons for reaction. My methods of subject selection also differed from Radway. Apart from the M A Film Studies Students, the subjects in this study were identified by other than their 'interpretive' convention. Groups here could be defined by convenience (Babysitting Circle, Sewing Class), as socially connected (Friendship Group, Family and Friendship Group), as work colleagues (Community Centre

Workers, Nursery and First School Teachers), as an activity group (Women's Guild), and by solidarity (Young Lesbians). Nor were the individual subjects all selected because they were, say, 'addicts' of Carla Lane's work, as were Radway's subjects addicts of the romantic novel. Additionally, the term, 'interpretive strategies' suggests the socio-cultural influence on response, but does not locate it because the focus of 'interpretive community' is on interpretive rather than social convention. It may be that some subjects did belong to the same 'interpretive communities' but in terms of this study, the communities as such were barely relevant. The notion of 'interpretive strategies' could still be confidently applied, but to use 'interpretive community' would be misleading. In order to stress the social contextualisation of the research subjects and to locate their 'interpretive strategies', I adopted the term 'interpretive repertoires'. This incorporates the ways in which common membership of socially constituted groups leads to shared interpretive custom. Nor was I clear about Radway's methods of categorising her data. I could not discern exactly how she had attributed response to specific 'interpretive strategies'. Fish's theory of reader response and Radway's application had facilitated and justified the theoretically central place of the active, socially contextualised reader, skilled reader and the act of reading. It lacked a systematic approach to the data. In addition, although eminently adaptable to viewing, it was a theory of the reader. The act of reading is a private event.

Although some viewers of The Mistress acknowledged that they enjoyed the 'indulgence' of viewing alone, as Morley showed the viewing experience is usually influenced by familial and domestic distraction. A theory of the viewer would have to account for the skill involved in relating to a visual text whilst surrounded by other temptations and/or diversions.

Uses and Gratifications theory, in the field of audience research, was the third area investigated. It was examined for a number of reasons. It possesses a tried and tested methodological tool of ordering data. This was needed here. It is a developing, grounded theory, theorists constantly re-examining and reworking its fundamental assumptions so that the theory and practice become more streamlined and compatible. I have tried to do exactly that in the development of the theory of the Skilled Viewer. Uses and Gratifications assumes the audience to be active and socially located. I have repeatedly tested the theoretical premises on the audience response and adjusted the model accordingly. McQuail refined Uses and Gratifications original classifications into four major categories: Personal Identity, Integration and Social Interaction, Entertainment, and Information. I adapted them to be specifically appropriate to responses about The Mistress. Uses and Gratifications theory promised a level of explanation still to be explored, that of expectation within the notion of 'gratifications'.

Investigating the problems which have beset previous Uses and Gratifications research, I concluded that they were possible to resolve, or at least compensate for, by precise and systematic methods. Elliott argued that methodological care would produce socially constituted subjects and permit the investigation of other than psychological needs. This reduces the model's tendency to conceptualise the audience as asocial and ahistorical, governed by their own psychology. Consideration of social contextualisation was already an acknowledged aim of this study. Secondly, if the audience response guides the research, then researchers are not obliged to identify the audience needs to be gratified, there being no definitive model of needs and gratifications. Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch proposed that this problem would be further reduced by investigating gratifications rather than needs. This is hardly a solution. It merely shifts the problem from the identification of needs to that of gratification, there being no explicit model of either. My own experience in this study has shown that the role of the researcher and the effect of the interview environment must also be constantly recognised as potential influences on audience response whether this be defined in terms of need or of gratification. It is imperative they be consistently foregrounded, along with those social, cultural, domestic and familial influences which Elliott and Morley argue necessarily constrain response. The social context was an essential ingredient of this study. It provided clues which indicated reasons for response, so the research went further

than merely describing the expression of that response. Having decided against a textual analysis of The Mistress, I was faced with the potential of polysemy, there being no 'preferred reading' against which to compare the audience response. Morley's contention that when studying the audience of fiction the theoretical focus should be adjusted from 'preferred reading' to the 'cultural competence' of the viewer confirmed my decision as appropriate and theoretically acceptable. It was further supported by McQuail's proposal that viewers use factual and fictional programmes to gratify different types of need. It reinforced the notion that the study should be audience-led, and corresponded with reader response theory's promotion of the exploration of interpretive competence.

An examination of the criticism that Uses and Gratifications is an over-functionalist model found that this problem, too, could be minimised. Condemning it for encouraging circular explanations on the level of behaviour but failing to advance any satisfactory rationale for that behaviour, Elliott argued that its mechanistic linearity failed to account for all mass media use. McQuail countered to assert that although not wholly acceptable in theoretical terms, methodologically a functionalist model worked. People do generally understand their use of the mass media in 'problem-solving and need-meeting terms'<sup>15</sup>. Proposing that the model had become over-functionalist because its inordinate stress on needs ultimately constrained the

findings, McQuail reconceptualised the assumptions underlying Uses and Gratifications theory. The result was a model with the potential to expand to incorporate other reasons than needs for use of the mass media, and which was less dependent on linear functionalism.

Two studies by Rayburn and Palmgreen exemplified the new potential and were particularly influential to this research into the women in the audience of The Mistress. First, they probed the concept of gratifications to advance more precise definitions of 'gratifications-sought' and 'gratifications-obtained'. This was interesting because it was noticeable that a common 'gratification-sought' from The Mistress concerned expectations of comedy. Any 'gratifications-obtained', however, were invariably associated with the stars and/or characters. Secondly, Rayburn and Palmgreen suggested that the audience approach to the mass media is one of positive or negative expectancy-value. As Ang found in her study of viewers of Dallas, so viewers in this study constantly responded in terms of expectation. This prompted me to investigate 'gratifications' even further and to suggest that entailed within the concept of gratification are notions of expectation. I proposed that expectation is commonly understood to mean presuming, waiting for, predicting, or looking forward to something in particular to happen. Each of the four possibilities differs in its degree of certainty/uncertainty of the projected future event. I suggested that expectation is comprised of anticipation and

hope, the former predicting certainty, the latter uncertainty. Following on from Rayburn and Palmgreen, I maintained that expectation as a component of gratification could be understood in terms of anticipations-expressed/anticipations-fulfilled, and hopes-expressed/hopes-fulfilled. Its operation in conjunction with the investigation of 'interpretive strategies' and 'interpretive repertoires' and the occasional, speculative use of Chodorow provided methods of research and insights into response not previously advanced.

The model of expectation appeared conceptually sound. In practice, it proved effective but only so far. The functionalism of Uses and Gratifications proved difficult to escape. The framework design with its focus on expression and fulfilment was beneficial at first because it made identification of anticipation and hope straightforward. This avoided the problem noted above of having to define the gratifications on behalf of the audience. It was not sufficiently comprehensive satisfactorily to explain or accommodate all the responses registered here. It was too specific. The "tightness" of its focus constrained the analysis. For instance, I observed certain viewers' fun with the images of women when they ridiculed them with sarcastic and mocking remarks. I explained the experience in terms of images of women but neglected to investigate the experience of fun. This diminishes their response. It reduces its complexity. It undermines the 'activity' of the Skilled

Viewer. Conceptually, the model did not inevitably determine such linear application. In practice, it was difficult to avoid it. The framework of expectation developed here contributes to the work on 'gratifications'. This area still needs developing.

Charting the similarity and differences between the theories of film and television, reader response, and Uses and Gratifications provided an opportunity to evaluate their compatibility. A tension necessarily exists between the original theories, developing as they do from independent and distinct standpoints and using different means to gain their objectives. Nevertheless, it was possible to use them to develop an eclectic conceptual approach to the audience of The Mistress. Hence, the concept of the Skilled Viewer was achieved by careful selection from each model of elements which were not merely apparently relevant, but which simultaneously corresponded with the aims of the other two theories, and with the overall philosophy of this study.

Using Fish's 'Informed Reader' as a base, the Skilled Viewer is a model of the audience wherein the viewer is contextualised and granted interpretive expertise. Selected from film and television theory were the espousal of the psychoanalytic principles of looking, the analogy of the film-image to the mirror-image, and Chodorow's advocacy of the centrality of women and the significance of upbringing, family, and social position on the development of the

psyche. The feminist theorists' insistence that the audience are social beings and their reservations about images of women determining specific reactions were significant contributions. Television audience researchers such as Hobson and Morley were influential on the central location of the research subject within the theory design. It was reader response theory, where the emphasis is on the reader rather than on the text, which suggested a comparable way of shifting the attention from the televisual text to the viewer. The analysis of audience response proceeded in five stages. First of all, it was classified under four main subject areas generated by the audience. Secondly, the categorisation process of Uses and Gratifications theory was put into practice, following which response was described within a framework of explanation never before pursued. Thirdly, it was characterised by the 'interpretive strategies' which generated it, which, fourthly, implied their source 'interpretive repertoires'. The fifth stage was the speculative application of Chodorowian theory, adopted by both film theory and reader response theory, to venture underlying reasons for certain response. Thus, a systematic model with sound theoretical principles would direct the investigation of the Skilled Viewer.

The Skilled Viewer is a theoretical concept which incorporates learned interpretive custom, and internalised social experience. The Skilled Viewer is a social being who may be male or female, their viewing experience being

structured by their position in society and by their gender, and by a common understanding of that social and gendered position. The Skilled Viewer understands and uses the language of the visual text. The Skilled Viewer understands the conventions associated with television broadcasting, production, and programme construction. The Skilled Viewer actively views television for a variety of reasons.

The Skilled Viewer was conceptualised specifically for this study but it could be applied to other studies of the visual media. The model of the Skilled Viewer encompasses the social nature of the viewing experience, and a notion of viewing competence. It is a model which was realised by repeated testing on the concrete audience. This resulted in a number of modifications so that their response was explained on their terms from their point of view.

Developing an appropriate theoretical model was by no means a simple task. Each model which contributed to the conceptual framework had evolved within its own distinct academic discipline, subject to the demands peculiar to its original field of research, and was already well-defined in its aims. The amalgamation of three such discrete, although relevant theories was accompanied at all times by a certain tension, and not infrequently by confusion. To clarify my own aims, I had constantly to re-examine firstly my reasons for using each theory at all, and secondly, why specific elements would be valuable. In reporting terms, I have

endeavoured to explain throughout the account how my own position as researcher related to events, and was taken into consideration. In methodological terms, the principles and procedures adopted were constantly modified so that the investigation of the Skilled Viewer was compatible with the theoretical aims.

### Investigating the Skilled Viewer

One aim of this thesis was to apply a feminist perspective via both theoretical and methodological approaches. Using van Zoonen's treatise, I examined the three feminist approaches: radical, liberal, and socialist feminism. Radical and liberal feminism were not pertinent because their basic assumptions determined that to be effective the one was obliged to work outside and against patriarchy, the other to conform to patriarchal regulation. Socialist feminism struggles for change by pointing up the anomalies and inequalities and suggesting workable alternatives. Its relevance was that its success depends on working within and against patriarchy. None of the feminisms account for the non-feminist or aberrant feminist and so I adopted van Zoonen's own perspective, which integrates socialist feminism with a cultural studies approach. The fundamental principles underlying the methodology thus corresponded to the theoretical model to include social contextualisation along with audience interpretive custom and competence.

Two issues needed to be addressed: the place of the feminist researcher, and considerations of methodological criteria. First of all, it was important to clarify how I as a researcher perceived my research subjects and my relationship to them? Categories of 'we', 'us', 'them' had to be made explicit. Brunsdon suggests that there are three types of researcher/researched relationships, determined by the researcher's initial approach to the subjects. The first is the 'transparent,' where 'we', researcher and researched, are all 'women' whose common gender experience results in shared interpretive convention. Secondly, the 'hegemonic' approach is where 'we', the researchers, are 'feminists', our womanhood subordinate to our political outlook, and 'them' the researched are 'women', it mattering little to the researcher whether they may also be feminist. Thirdly, the 'fragmented' approach is where the researcher acknowledges her own feminist interpretation comparing it with that of other women who may or may not be feminist. In accounting terms, the 'fragmented' approach may be autobiographical or ethnographic. This study falls into the tradition of the 'fragmented' ethnographic approach. This approach accommodated the investigation in the Skilled Viewer most appropriately. The 'transparent' approach could not account for variations of competence, and the 'hegemonic' approach privileged the researcher's interpretation. Neither would correspond with a theoretical model which aimed to explore differences as well as similarities, and which prioritised the viewing experience.

The 'fragmented' relationship places the researcher and researched on an equal footing. It allows for interpretive competence and social factors other than gender to be investigated. In addition, the ethnographic account of such an approach had been validated by Radway.

Validity took precedence over generalisability and replicability as the key methodological criterion. Merely because findings cannot be extrapolated to account for women's response on a more general basis, or that research cannot be duplicated in absolute terms, should not undermine the conclusions reached here. This project is a valid piece of work which gives women a voice. It reports that voice as precisely and fairly as possible. Radway and Willis demonstrated that familiarity with subjects can produce in-depth data of quality. They furnished the grounds for the validity of the intimate nature of qualitative data collection, the justification for which was confirmed by feminist sociological work on interview techniques.

Qualitative research methods were used because they permit a discussion to develop and generate in-depth responses. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research methods do not insist on statistical representativeness; I could select all female subjects who were not obliged to be a definitive representative sample. Rather than define subjects via their socio-economic status, which necessarily locates them in relationship to men, they could be described

in terms of their own perception of themselves. This included how they perceived themselves in terms of social class (although their perceived and their actual social class categories are compared in Appendix VI). The principle of using qualitative research methods was sound. The rationale which prompted their use was not as methodologically justified as it could have been. In hindsight, I acknowledge that in attempting to avoid the perceived pitfalls of one form of audience research I did instead fall into the trap of opting for one method at the expense of the other. The decision to use qualitative methods was as much influenced by the fashion in cultural studies in the early and mid-1980s as it was by a genuine belief that it would evince the type of and quality of data required and a 'desire for more understanding of the human experience'<sup>16</sup>. The former associated only negative connotations such as

a preoccupation with quantitative procedures, assumptions about the nature of reality, and a societal tendency to believe in numbers<sup>17</sup>.

This resulted in my being over conscious of the emphasis on numbers, determined at all costs to avoid that certain convention where volume of numbers beguiles and distracts the researcher from their original aim, so that they 'mistake rigour for understanding'<sup>18</sup>. Conceiving of no justification for an increase in numbers for their own sake I was deceived into acknowledging no value at all in incorporating quantitative methods. This decision now appears misguided for it inevitably carried its own costs.

The technique known as methodological triangulation would seem to offer a more comprehensive approach to data gathering. This is

a research strategy in which different methods are employed for data gathering and analysis around a single object of study.<sup>19</sup>

The use of more than one method of eliciting data offers opportunities on the one hand to 'uncover unexpected dimensions of the area of inquiry'<sup>20</sup> and, on the other, 'allow[s] for more confidence in the conclusions of qualitative studies'<sup>21</sup>. To this end, the use of quantitative methods by the application of questionnaires would have been likely to add substance to this study. A questionnaire could have been distributed before their discussions to the audience participants. This could be succeeded by a second survey of a much larger sample of women viewers following the discussions, the questions having been framed by those priorities identified in the qualitative analysis. It would have strengthened the methodological process by approaching the data from a different angle and added to the findings by providing statistical data to support the conclusions from the qualitative analysis. Time constraints would still have proved problematic. But, the additional data gained from incorporating quantitative methods would have proved sufficiently worthwhile to justify an extension of the research project.

76 people altogether took part: 14 individual women, nine groups of women, and five 'control' male individuals.

Although subjects were not chosen on a statistically representative basis, I did attempt to include as many women as possible from diverse backgrounds and with varying experiences. Subjects were selected via the 'snowball' technique. I knew to some extent most of the individual subjects, and at least one member of all but one of the groups. Those whom I hadn't approached on my own initiative were suggested by other interviewees. I expected that by using such subjects that the discussion process would not prove too nerveracking and that our ease in each other(s)' company would remove any negative effects brought about by the immediate discussion context. Despite a small control of five individual male viewers being set up, it was invalidated when their number was reduced to three. In retrospect, the original number of five men seems inadequate to gauge similarities and differences with the views of 71 women; its reduction to three made a convincing comparison even less sound or satisfactory.

My principle motivation for using individuals and groups was because it had never been done before. Hobson had interviewed individual women; Morley had interviewed groups; Willis had interviewed one group of schoolboys; Radway had interviewed one 'interpretive community' of women. This study would be the first of its kind to research into socially contextualised individuals and groups. By researching both individuals and groups I believed that the richness of data would be enhanced, and that comparisons of

their immediate social context and its influence on response could be monitored.

At the time this research was undertaken there was no academic literature on the advantages/disadvantages associated with group interviewing. Since its conclusion I have discovered works by Hedges and Krueger which cover just this subject. Hedges contended that group interviewing is only advantageous when the social context is important, and when the response is required to provide clarification and explanation. As both these points corresponded with the aims of this study, the use of groups could be justified in Hedges' terms. Problems relate to time constraints preventing follow-up interviews with individuals, dominant group members, discomfort of group members, assuming one to speak for all and the potential sabotage of the discussion producing untypical response. Krueger also recommended investigation of a variety of groups because of membership diversity and that group dynamics operate variously. Other issues concern the number of groups to be used, the optimum number of members in a group, and the wisdom of selecting existing groups.

Examination of group discussions here showed all these points were pertinent to some extent. By using individual subjects as well as groups I had built into the methodological framework a balance of response. There were dominant speakers in some groups, but this did not seem to

affect others airing their points of view. There was one group member who was observably uncomfortable, but without a video facility to monitor this situation how problematic an issue it is is difficult to prove. If follow-up interviews with individuals could have been undertaken it is likely both issues would have been resolved, as would the risk of taking one group member's word for that of all of them. By selecting existing groups who met on a regular basis and who were constituted for a variety reasons Hedges' fear point and Krueger's warning could be virtually disregarded. In this study, contrary to the original plan to use 15 groups, only nine were eventually interviewed. I was somewhat concerned that this number would be considered too low by other researchers. Hedges prescription that the optimum number of groups be between four and 12 and my own experience of dealing with the data, confirmed the numbers used as appropriate. Where the numbers in the groups exceeded Hedges' advice that they be constituted of no more than ten members and ideally of only six or seven, the quality of the discussion did appear to be affected. Hedges contended that the whole point of talking to a group is because their very existence is as a unit of interaction where members are subject to group influences. In contrast, Krueger argued that the familiarity within pre-existing groups precludes their use for research purposes because it constrains response. I disagree with Krueger. In this case I deliberately used not only existing groups, but several with which I already had contact. The reasons were to speed

up the data collection by reducing introductory anxiety and embarrassment and, especially, to facilitate access to in-depth data. To use a number of groups consisting of people who had little to do with each other never mind to do with me would have been pointless. It would have been unlikely to have furnished equivalent intimacy of discussion and, in consequence, ease of and depth of response.

Explaining the nature and conduct of the discussions pointed up and clarified the immediate interview context. Although I had justified selecting subjects already known to me, inevitably our former relationships must impinge on the discussion, and so influence the findings. Some subjects were a little anxious, or on occasion a discussion was abruptly interrupted by one or other of us bursting into laughter as we became conscious of the "falseness" of the situation. I attempted to resolve these problems or at least defuse them by establishing a relationship of trust with the research subjects. By reporting the 'context of actions'<sup>22</sup> as closely as possible I hoped to establish a relationship of trust with the reader.

Each discussion was tape-recorded, transcribed, categorised and analysed. The process was very lengthy. I had expected to be confronted with problems when I reached the interpretation stage, to do with differences of understanding between myself and the research subjects. No background reading had alerted me to the potential problems

of meaning entailed in the categorisation process. They began as soon as I had transcribed the discussions, with the length and density of data. Its material volume and the sheer physical space required in the first instance to examine and classify it were daunting. A desk was far too small, a kitchen table not much better. I felt overwhelmed by paper. I eventually sorted and picked my way through piles of transcripts and related quotes on a floor. I had not been forewarned about the feelings of confusion when confronted by such mass of data. Nor did I realise until I experienced it how rapidly I should become distanced from the audience in analysis. Once I had categorised the data, focusing solely on the printed word of the transcripts appeared seductively easy, much easier than concerning myself with those who had produced the data. I was constantly having to introduce strategies to bring the audience back into the research frame.

This is no mere anecdotal report of how I felt at the time. These aspects: the mass of paperwork and the feelings it inspired, and the isolation from the audience caused a central predicament of meaning. The first two issues had two effects. In operational terms, the concrete data was difficult to handle. In psychological terms, it **felt** impossible to cope with. Both factors demanded that the evidence to be analysed be reduced to manageable proportions. An operational dilemma and a crisis of confidence thus caused a problem of validity as I had to

work out which data should be categorised. The adoption of the Uses and Gratifications system of ordering the data appeared to provide a procedural way out.

Having taken the decision to use Uses and Gratifications to classify the data, I didn't know exactly how to apply it. No-one had written about the precise methods of categorisation, about which procedures would make the data 'qualify as information ... rather than noise'<sup>23</sup>. The simplest way would have been to label each response with its corresponding Uses and Gratifications description, but that wouldn't have been audience-led analysis. It would have been Uses and Gratifications-led. At this stage I realised my remoteness from the viewers who had generated the response. I had to rediscover the audience. By rereading the transcripts whilst simultaneously listening to the tapes I was able to identify the four principal areas of discussion: Carla Lane, Stars and Characters, Representations of Women, and Conventions. The tapes also furnished the emotion/tone/mood of the expression. Only when I had defined the four key topic areas did I systematise the data via Uses and Gratifications (see Appendices V and VII).

At all stages, issues of meaning relating to methodological principle and procedure arose. My principles of subject selection differed from Radway. She had recruited an 'interpretive community' of romance readers. I was investigating socially constituted women who were television

viewers. The concept of 'interpretive community' was inappropriate here. I adopted the concept of 'interpretive repertoire' because its principles incorporated the notion of social experience and interpretive expertise. It was compatible with the Skilled Viewer. It also worked unproblematically with the notion of 'interpretive strategy'. I was faced with a further question of meaning when I opted to use Chodorow's theories. Two problems pertained. Her theories were psychoanalytically based. Former application of Chodorow had been to the text. Radway's study had begun with the reader but ended with the text of the 'ideal' and 'failed' romance. My intention was to apply Chodorow to the audience response without psychoanalytic training. My justification was twofold. In principle, Chodorow had provided television studies insight into and aided the research into the female viewer. However, procedurally, her theories would only be applied speculatively, experimentally. I should always make it clear that that was the case.

All selections of case studies are open to criticism because of the necessarily arbitrary element involved. How propitious the selection proves to be is not discovered until the research is under way. Although initially regarding the novelty of a new series as an advantage, in the event it proved the opposite. Even though viewers approached The Mistress with much the same assumptions and expectations as myself, the focus of discussions was

constrained by it not being funny. Inevitably, responses to do with comedy and humour proved negative. In hindsight, I suggest that a sitcom already established as funny would have proved a source more likely to fulfil such expectations and provide humorous response.

### Findings

Responses from the women in the audience of The Mistress pertained to interrelating issues of identification, realism, aesthetic criticism, and personal values. Viewers most commonly approached the text with 'interpretive strategies' which expressed current priorities. The 'interpretive strategies' were informed by 'interpretive repertoires' developed via social experiences.

### Identification, Stars and Images of Women

Identification was integrally bound up with 'stars' and an interest in images of women. Dyer's notion of 'stars' aided explanations of the identification process. Mulvey's theory of the female spectator suggested certain relationships between the viewer and her image. A speculative use of Chodorow provided insight into some reasons for response.

The notion of 'stars' with the interplay of 'star', 'social type', and 'star image', offered explanations for ways in which viewers related to Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher.

Although Dyer developed his work on 'stars' in the area of film, it was a relevant concept to investigate, as 'stars' and the characters they depicted were very important to many women in the audience of The Mistress. Ellis claimed that the notion of 'stars' relied on the distance of the visual image from the cinema spectator. It was not applicable to tv performers, the familiarity of television precluding the remoteness required for the perception of stardom. The audience response here, however, prompted further investigation. It suggested that, with some adjustment of focus, the notion of 'stars' could apply to television also, and that the audience played an active role in the maintenance of the 'star image'.

On examination, it was demonstrated that the material conditions of watching a film in a cinema and those of watching a television programme in the home influence the audience perception of the stars. The cinema spectator enters the film star's 'world', where the star is always at a distance, and separate. The relationship of the spectator to the film 'star image' rests on an appreciation of the star's special distinctiveness. The domestic place/use of television brings the television star into the viewer's 'world'/home encouraging perceptions of intimacy. The relationship of the viewer to the television 'star image' depends on an understanding of the star's super-ordinariness. Response here demonstrated that recognition of the 'social type' on which the notion of the actresses'

'star image' was based was very significant. As social beings themselves, viewers repeatedly discussed the ways in which the actresses' 'star images' 'promoted' and 'publicised' them in their (public) private lives as identifiable 'social types', and how they had regularly portrayed certain 'social types' in their professional acting careers.

Dyer argued that the construction of the 'star image' depends on a positive attitude from the audience. Evidence from this study shows that the preservation of the 'star image' relies ultimately on a more active contribution from the audience. I should argue that a dialectical relationship exists between the star and the audience, concerning the giving and withholding of loyalty. The continuing success of the 'star image' rests on its credibility with the audience. The audience perception of the star via their 'star image' sustains their loyalty; in turn their loyalty nourishes the 'star image'. Many women in the audience in this study expressed a great deal of faith in Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher, expecting them to play parts with which they would wish to identify, and with which they would be able to identify. Refusing to allow their disappointment with the roles to become disillusionment with the stars, they cast about to excuse the stars for their dissatisfaction. In so doing, they confirmed their own pre-existing personal values in relation to the actresses. However, although constancy remained intact, perceptions of the stars were shaken. The

fictional 'social types' did not match expectations of the 'social types' Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher were perceived to represent in society as promoted by the 'star images'. Disappointment with the characters encouraged many viewers to reassess their opinions about the stars. In this instance it did not result in a withdrawal of allegiance. Any future investment of faith, however, would be held in reserve. These reactions imply that a 'star image' is much more reliant on audience perception than may at first appear to be the case. It's successful continuance depends not only on exposure via 'promotion', 'publicity', 'television programmes', and 'criticism/commentaries', but also on active and consistent support from the audience.

Viewers were fascinated by the 'stars' in The Mistress. I suggest that as Skilled Viewers, their interest was fuelled by the intense television focus on the performer-as-personality in the 1980s via the "chat show". This reinforced a showbusiness tradition which exalted players as though they were particularly riveting people when often reverence should have been restricted to the fact that they could play well. When The Mistress was televised in 1985, Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher were publicly known for more than their professional acting success. They were "famous for being well-known", from the 'promotion' of those aspects of their lives outside acting which they deliberately chose the viewing public to know, and from the 'publicity' relating to other facets of their lives which they may or

may not have colluded in advertising. The audience of The Mistress was presented not only with two accomplished and successful actresses, but also with their associated celebrity. The crux of the matter is upon what that celebrity was built and how it contributed to their 'star images'. Both women were (are) self-motivated "doers" and had achieved remarkable success. Both had played a variety of roles over many years, were in great demand by producers and public alike. They were examples of contemporary women who through hard work, talent and skill had gained success and respect. Their 'star images' skewed the focus to highlight certain aspects of their non-acting lives rather than their acting achievements. The interests extra to their acting which they chose to promote, and which were most often seized upon for publicity purposes, were invariably those which authenticated historically established ideas of womanhood. I suggest that in terms of 'star image', the notion of fetishism is relevant here. Mulvey argued that image of woman in mainstream film is fetishised by the soft focus lighting and close-up shots, accentuating the passivity of the image as opposed to her physical skill or intellect. Correspondingly, the same applies to the 'star images' of conventional, mainstream stars<sup>24</sup>. Only those aspects which are non-threatening to the patriarchal male are positively selected for the 'star image'. First of all, the 'stars' are part of **showbusiness**. Their job is to-be-looked-at. Secondly, the part of the actresses' personalities which are celebrated are deliberately put "on

show"; they are those bits of persona we the public are allowed "to see". Thirdly, because fetishism is exactly that: the fascination with a part as representative of the whole. It works by selecting a harmless, passive part to represent, and to reduce the threat of, a potentially active whole. Despite any collusion by either actress and regardless of the reasons for it, only those aspects of their personalities which showed them as pretty and subservient to men/the family were foregrounded.

Response from several viewers in this study demonstrated that the fetishised construction of the 'star images' encouraged them to identify with the images of women on the screen in terms of exhibitionism. Although the title, The Mistress, led the audience to expect to concentrate on a female protagonist, the action centred on the husband/lover going from one woman to the other. The two female characters were continually presented as "in wait". Any activity displayed by the mistress or the wife was caused either directly or indirectly by him. They constantly projected anxiety due to his presence/absence or potential presence/absence. Viewers who couldn't/wouldn't identify with the images of women complained that identification was precluded by the characters' idealised beauty and their lack of control over their activity. For those who were predisposed to identify with the images of women, such visual presentation, textual structure, and narrative (in)action encouraged pleasures of narcissism and

exhibitionism. The theories of pleasure for the female spectator developed by Mulvey, de Lauretis, Williams, et al, go some but not all the way to explain how such feelings were induced. As a viewer, the woman in the audience of The Mistress was invited to identify with the active protagonist. In this series this was the man; as a woman she found such identification with the action difficult. Any identification with the "hero" that she was able to achieve was doubly frustrated because he moved between two women. The significance of the one central male character was in what he was doing rather than what he looked like. What the female characters did was incidental. They were significant in how they looked, fetishised by a concentration on their surface and passive appearance. Narcissism and exhibitionism are probably easier experiences within the comfort of one's own home, which is where most viewers generally encounter the tv image. The familiarity and intimacy of the television star, and the viewers' knowledge of their control over the viewing experience provides a safe environment to indulge the 'furtive pleasure' ([H]) of narcissism and, consequently, the further pleasure of a certain displaced exhibitionism. Thus, developing Mulvey's ideas, the women in the audience in this study were deterred from identifying with the action and encouraged to identify with the inert female image. The way the images of women were set up seduced many a female viewer into looking at them from the male point of view, as would the male voyeur. Because images of women are also reflections of herself, the voyeurism of

the female viewer in these circumstances must become integrally associated with narcissism, with a fascination with looking at herself. The pleasure of looking conflates with the experience of being looked at as voyeurism and narcissism merge to promote exhibitionism, and the female viewer relates to the image in such a way that she desires to be in its place. By relating to the image, she ultimately identifies with what distinguishes it as an image, with its to-be-looked-at-ness. This looking experience reinforces her lived experience and becomes a learning experience. It confirms that it is 'natural' for women in social life to be there to be looked at rather than to do, which she internalises as a desire to be desired. Her own desire is only recognised as an activator of male desire, rather than as an active, vital and fundamental component of female sexuality.

Viewers did not, however, relate to the stars and images of women solely on these terms. They engaged with them as 'types' also. The selection of 'social types' on which the 'star images' were based were agreed to be appropriate. Viewers also appreciated that no matter how talented were the actresses, the 'social types' they represented were essentially partial and necessarily constrained the development of the characters. They anticipated that the characters were doomed at the outset, their futures being determined by their typicality. Responses concurred with Haskell that women in film were rarely seen in their own

right but more often than not in (romantic) relationship to men and 'subsidiary to the action'<sup>25</sup>. The looks of both actresses were an important factor in how they as 'social types' were perceived. Most viewers, whether they liked them as actresses or not, expressed disappointment that such conventionally beautiful stars had been selected. Those in the audience who desired to have similar looks to the stars also recognised this as wishful thinking. Others utterly and furiously refused either the desire, or its likelihood, passions growing very high in outraged rejection. In turn, this affected their perception of the series' realism, and triggered debates about the importance of female beauty. Certain viewers did identify, or wished to identify with them exactly because of the types represented. Significantly, for those who did wish to identify with the stars it was never the modern career women of social life that appealed to them, but always their 'star image' as represented by the conventionally beautiful image cast in the traditional mould of 'woman'. The actual person whose presence constituted the image was a minor consideration. The women in this study invariably referred to the characters of Maxine and Helen as Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher. They gossiped about what they knew of the actresses' private lives and mentioned their acting histories. But the actual identification process rejected any 'real-life' dimension. The labels, "Felicity Kendal" and "Jane Asher" ceased to indicate concrete people. They were terms of reference for the 'star images'. Their engagement was with

the 'star images' embodied by the electronic images of beautiful women on the television screen.

The same viewers could simultaneously wish to identify with the stars whilst acknowledging that these aspirations were unrealistic. They pointed out that the series was a fictional construction, that the characters were implausible, that the actresses' perfect looks had as much to do with make-up and lighting as with natural beauty and that they were indeed attempting to identify with a mythical ideal. They knew this. Their often wry and ironic comments pointed up their conscious recognition that they were striving to emulate fantasy. Nevertheless, they seemed unable to prevent themselves yearning to be 'typically', 'ideally' beautiful and, crucially, to be perceived by others to be so.

This explanation fails to cover the whole story. As noted above, those women in the audience who expressed a wish to identify with the images of women in The Mistress were forever conscious that they were "chasing rainbows". They regularly showed themselves sensible to the fact that they were indulging their own fantasy as part of the enjoyment of the whole experience of the fictional construction. Film theory with its emphasis on the ideological determinism of the image has some relevance, for 'any form of pleasure is constructed and functions in a specific social and historical context'<sup>26</sup>. It matters not how ruefully or in how

little measure that these women wanted to be regarded as a man's 'ideal woman'. That they responded to the images of women in such a way at all is evidence of socialisation within the particular ideological structure of patriarchy. Nor is it to deny that many women are preoccupied, whether they choose to admit it or not, with their own and others' appearance. It is to suggest that women are not necessarily interminably trapped in/by these yearnings. These viewers seemed very able to immerse themselves with enjoyment in this process of identification, but then come out on the other side seemingly unscathed, quite aware of what they had done and why they had done it. They were, in effect, using the dilemma into which the film theorists would place them for their own ends. They identified with the passive images of women on the screen because they could indulge a notion of non-responsibility. The images of women presented in The Mistress had no "choice"; they could not make decisions because they were dependent on the husband/lover's word, agreement, attendance. All they effectually did was look beautiful. It is likely that the women in the audience thought: If only life were like that? This is not a statement - **emphatically**, this is not a statement against the right of choice, nor is it to say that women are against having choices, or exercising choices. It is to state that, although having no choice means no power, having choice does not necessarily empower. It gives potential, but not automatic, authority. Essential constituents of choice are accountability, obligation, duty, the principles which drive

most women in their everyday life anyway. Ultimately, choice means taking on responsibility. Sometimes it may be desirable to relinquish the fact of responsibility by indulging in the fantasy of no, or displaced, responsibility. In their everyday social existence most women would acknowledge that daily important decisions and choices must be made for life to continue safely and satisfactorily. It is not always comfortable making those decisions. It is reasonable to suggest that when some women switch on tv fiction they want to leave their daily cares behind to become absorbed in a world where the only predicaments are romantic ones; money, family, or work problems just don't exist. Being beautiful is all that is required. It suggests that although their socialisation and experience of traditional representations of women may indeed limit their responses to the text, yet these women were able to gain something positive from it. For half an hour they could "pretend" to be beautiful, to be desired, and that they didn't have to worry about anything else. Thus, the film theorists' claim that passive images do nothing for the struggle of women to gain power in society fails to consider all the options. Some women in the audience may indeed gain useful, renewing, experiences from escaping into the passivity of the image.

It is dangerous to pursue this line of argument too rigidly. It ignores the genuine and important frustrations with such images revealed by other women in the audience and indeed

also expressed by those who wished to be like the images of women. Even those who identified with the wife and the mistress in The Mistress and enjoyed the way both their roles and their physical appearances were represented, were unhappy that they were portrayed as such all the time. It also overlooks the temptation for women in the audience to indulge in the self-pity associated with identifying with the powerless, which is effectively what the female images in The Mistress represented. Images which only encourage such negative feelings are ultimately destructive and need to be at least interspersed, if not replaced, with counterparts which allow women to reflect on themselves as active participants in society. There were viewers who were frustrated that only the girlish nature of the mistress and the domestic concerns of the wife were selected for portrayal. Their irritation with the characters as presented caused them to opt for a refocusing of the situation. They cried out for a concentration on the working interests and commitments of the mistress, and that the wife should do something (anything) other than sit at home and clean the house with her maid whilst awaiting her husband's return.

#### Realism, Priorities, Interpretive Expertise

Responses showed that the women in the audience of The Mistress constantly operated critical expertise, whilst consistently seeking to confirm personal values. Anticipations and hopes expressing interrelated wishes

concerning identification and realism accorded with Ang's conclusion that realism is significant in terms of audience pleasure. Identification depended on recognition and plausibility. Realism was appreciated either as 'emotional realism' or as 'empirical realism'. I concluded that audience enjoyment depended to a greater or lesser extent on one or more of four aspects of realism. First of all, personal experience influenced perceptions of and evaluation of realism. Identification with the characters in the series and with the lifestyles they portrayed depended on viewers' own personal experiences and/or their perceptions of realism. Secondly, identification with characters presumed acknowledgement that the series was realistic. Thirdly, perceptions of realism determined varying degrees of pleasure for different people. Fourthly, comparing fiction with reality and evaluating reality's fictional portrayal was significant in terms of enjoyment.

These factors determined the anticipations and/or hopes with which viewers approached the text. With respect to The Mistress specifically, they approached it armed with certain expectations framed by their family and social relationships and their knowledge of the conventions of Carla Lane's comedies. These expectations demanded that The Mistress relate in general to their everyday experience. It should also touch on particular experience. It should collude with rather than test their own social knowledge, follow established conventions of Carla Lane sitcoms and supply

certain kinds of satisfactions. They watched The Mistress not merely in order to choose fiction over "fact". If that were so, any television fiction would be selected, as opposed to any television news, current affairs, or documentary programme. They did not wish to have their emotions drained by intense drama. They did anticipate, and desire to be "touched" by the irony which foregrounds the closeness of laughter and tears. They did not wish to have their thought processes tried by complex characters, and complicated or confusing plots. They did wish to pause, to smile, and to reflect. The nature of response was emotional and/or intellectual, informed by personal and shared experience. The relationship of viewers to the text was multi-dimensional and under constant negotiation. All viewers had in common their standpoint of women living in the north of England in the 1980s. Their relationship with the text depended on a variety of personal, domestic, and social experiences which had influenced their expectations. These they expressed via a diversity of 'interpretive strategies', fostered by a number of 'interpretive repertoires'. No single "preferred 'interpretive strategy'" could be identified. Most viewers shared several ways of understanding and enjoying the text.

Those women who could identify with the characters approached The Mistress with anticipations of and hopes for escapism into fictional fun. Some others found identification impossible, rejecting the 'emotional realism'

of the characters' experience and denying the 'empirical realism' they perceived the series to reflect. Others wished to identify with them but couldn't for conflicting reasons. The 'emotional realism' was either far too close or far too distant from their own experience.

The majority of women in the audience perceived The Mistress to be targeted at a female audience and that it would appeal more to women than to men. All agreed that the text 'positioned' them as conventional and heterosexual woman. They had all expected to be so positioned. Their experiences of this 'position' varied as, consequently, did their appreciation of the series. Although all could draw on their experience as Skilled Viewers in 1980s Britain, their personal experiences and values encouraged variation of response. For most, their anticipations of the series and the characters were confused because the clues they perceived in the title and title sequence related so little to the programme which followed. For some, the feminine 'look' of the series was sufficient to keep them watching. Although social circumstances and social attitudes differed, their response was expressed via an 'interpretive strategy' of learned 'good taste'. Other viewers who approached The Mistress with anticipations and hopes relating to the text as a source of light entertainment rather than as realistic representation also found the setting an acceptable distraction. Yet others understood the element of 'good taste' but operated 'interpretive strategies' quite opposite

to those above, seeking rather to denigrate the typicality portrayed. To those whose first priority was 'emotional realism' the settings and the 'look' of the programme merely antagonised them. Arguing that the series depicted a middle class-ness to which they could not relate, they identified rather with an 'interpretive repertoire' learned from their shared social experience of living in the north of England. Their 'interpretive strategy' derided what they perceived to be the middle class textual address. Even some viewers who, in socio-economic terms, would be classified as middle class responded in a way which prioritised their attachment to and esteem for the north of England over their social class description. The 'interpretive strategy' they deployed confirmed personal values relating to beliefs about northern superiority perceived to be absent from the series.

I had originally assumed that regional origin would influence response. I had planned to research into female viewers' response on Merseyside, in Sheffield and in London. This assumption was based on my own lived experience. I was brought up on Merseyside, and have lived for a large part of my adult life in Sheffield. I have a number of contacts in London. Particularly with respect to comedy and humour, I had observed that my reactions and understandings often differed from those of friends brought up elsewhere. I presumed this to be associated with conflicting cultural conditioning we had experienced as children. The London discussions failed to materialise and The Mistress was

relatively unfunny. Thus, I decided not to use regional origin to describe the research subjects. I was, therefore, quite astonished when a veritable unity of northern-ness was expressed. This was not harmony based on regional origin. Not all viewers in this study were born and brought up in the north. Its essence was their common experience of living in the north of England in the 1980s. Concerned that my own northern-ness may have influenced such response, I interrogated the transcripts again. On examination I could determine no active influence on response brought about by my northern identity. On the contrary, I suggest that had I not been northern much of this type of response would have been suppressed for fear of offending me.

For most women in the audience, how they perceived and assessed the realism of The Mistress affected their response to its textual address. Their interpretations were influenced by priorities formed via such lived experience. The priorities with which they approached the text were as much informed by their structural position in society as by personal experience. For two reasons I had taken the decision to commit viewers' "official" social class status to an appendix. The first was because socio-economic categorisations are based on men's work. The second was because a number of viewers' perceptions of their social class status was at variance with their "official" class description in socio-economic terms. Appendix VI records also their perceived social class position and my own

opinions why any differences occurred. In hindsight, their "official" social class position was significant in terms of response. Although, on examination it was shown that albeit associated, response was not determined by social class. It was by no means exclusively, or even principally, a class issue in the accepted, traditional terms of sociological research. For many women in the audience of The Mistress notions of social class were integrally bound up with regional identification. Viewers generally perceived the series to promote positive value judgements about the south-east of England and, by exclusion, negative value judgements about the north of England. They reacted to this perception by celebrating northern-ness and its representation as realistic, the under-dog, to be defended. As Ang suggested, they searched for 'emotional realism' with which they could identify, evaluated the 'genuineness'<sup>27</sup> of the characters and found it lacking. They derided the south-east and/as middle class-ness and its portrayal as implausible, patronising, to be rejected. These judgements expressed an alienation from the series and emanated from viewers who officially belonged to both socio-economic classes. The M A Film Studies Students and the Young Lesbians were probably the most voluble in this respect. Although both these groups perceived themselves to be working class, in socio-economic terms the former would be categorised as middle class. A number of other (official) working class viewers expressed similar opinions, associating working class positively with the north of England and middle class negatively with the

prosperous south east. But some viewers, whose middle class self-description accorded with their official socio-economic classification, also objected to the overtones of middle class-ness in the series. So, if this was merely a class issue, there was something decidedly odd here, middle class viewers protesting about the middle class-ness of a series. Analysis showed that working class viewers conflated the north and working class with good, the south-east and middle class with bad. Middle class viewers subordinated the significance of their social class to their regional identification. Although not extolling working class-ness *per se*, they identified with a form of regionalism which championed a northern identity constituted of positive values of common sense, "down to earth-ness", "you've got to be tough to live in the north". They condemned The Mistress for promoting less acceptable, less "worthy", negative values associated with materiality, a trivial lifestyle, the "soft south". Whether their self-perceptions accorded with their socio-economic descriptions or not, they articulated their social class positions in terms of a sort of regional defensiveness. The findings here differ from those of Andrea Press, whose study, 'Class and Gender in the Hegemonic Process'<sup>28</sup> revealed that the more middle class the tv characters were perceived to be the more pleasure the working class women in the audience gained from them. Her working class women viewers were attracted by the fantasy, by the perceived difference between themselves and the tv characters. Escapism was their principle enjoyment. Her

middle class viewers gained pleasure from recognising a realistic reflection of their social reality. The women in the audience of The Mistress did not respond in the same strictly social class terms. Influences of formal social class positioning were integrally bound up with shared understandings of what it means to live in the north of England. Anger and indignation at the portrayal of middle class-ness derived from a perceived attack on a sense of self realised via their regional identity. Their opinions corresponded to those in the Dallas study. They were

characterised not only by a positive and self-assured tone, but also by a large measure of fury, annoyance and indignation. These people seem[ed] not just to dislike Dallas/[The Mistress]: they get terribly worked up by it.<sup>29</sup>

Their "official" social class status was an associated supporting or subordinate issue. Thus, to explain these responses solely in terms of social class would be reductionist. As well as subordinating gender experience, it would also fail to take account of this additional complex issue of regionalism. As Ang and Hermes suggest in their discussion of audience response to soap opera, it would be to use a 'sociological perspective ... as [a] facilitating device'<sup>30</sup> to make the task of categorisation of a massive amount of data easier for the researcher. The associated 'creeping essentialism'<sup>31</sup> would tend to determine 'explanatory closure'<sup>32</sup>, encouraging all explanation of audience response to be in social class terms. It would fail to account for variety of response between women of the same social class, or for differences within/complexity of any

one response. Social class differences should not be denied, nor should the influence of class position on response be discounted. However, social class 'never contains a social subject's identity'<sup>33</sup>. In a given historical context, it is only one amongst many 'structuring principle[s] for experience'<sup>34</sup>. This was repeatedly borne out in this study where audience response could not be explained solely either by class or by region. Nor was it shared gender experience which persuaded viewers to respond thus. In traditional sociological research terms, the 'us'/'them' power relations in society are signified by working class/middle class categorisations. In much feminist theory they are ordered by gender divisions of men/women. In this study, no-one forgot her lived experience as a woman whose social reality is governed by patriarchal society. The debates around images of women and the representation of women's roles illustrated their interest in seeing a realistic reflection and positive portrayal of women. Here, it was by an identification with the "north" versus the "south" whereby society's power structures were acknowledged, class position was realised and class stance articulated. Distinctions between experiences of working class/middle class women converged into a northern solidarity.

The women in this study drew on 'interpretive repertoires' relating to their experiences as Skilled Viewers living in 1980s Britain who understood conventions not only of images of women but also of celebrity status. They operated

'interpretive strategies' which expressed certain anticipations and hopes that Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher would appear in parts which would reflect a positive idea of modern woman. The roles the actresses played confounded their anticipations, whilst at the same time fulfilling those of other viewers who had expected no more. The hopes-expressed by both sets of viewers that these actresses should have been able to determine a more satisfactory representation were equally unfulfilled. Viewers who did like the actresses exercised 'interpretive strategies' drawn from 'interpretive repertoires' learnt as tv-viewers-as-critics to censure the production, or the writing; to criticise anything or anyone other than the actresses. Their own judgement in wishing to identify with the stars and their personal values associated with such identification went unchallenged. Others who drew on the same 'interpretive repertoire' totally repudiated any identification with either Felicity Kendal or Jane Asher to operate an 'interpretive strategy' which specifically blamed the actresses for a disappointing portrayal. Correspondingly, their preconceived value-judgements remained intact. Other viewers conformed to Budge's proposal and drew on an 'interpretive repertoire' associated with shared lived experience to adopt an 'interpretive strategy' which drew attention to and ridiculed their idealised representation. Even those who perceived an 'emotional realism' with which they wished to identify often evaluated their pleasure as had Ang's viewers of Dallas, 'with mockery and irony'<sup>35</sup>.

Equivalent priorities were revealed when on the expectations of Carla Lane were expressed by similar 'interpretive strategies' and 'interpretive repertoires'. The following speculations are tentatively offered to suggest ways of understanding the relationships of some viewers to the female stars and to the writer. In terms of role models and as images of 'woman', the television stars were perceived to be admirable women and valued others within viewers' own lives. Thus, disappointment was not expressed by rejecting the stars nor by changing or challenging their own personal values, but by imputing other features of the production. Carla Lane's focus on domesticity, romance and family relationships played a large part in attracting the female viewers. With reference, therefore, to Lacan, Metz and Chodorow, the relationship of the women in the audience to the female stars and to Carla Lane paralleled that of the mother/daughter relationship. The women identified with the 'ideal' images of woman in The Mistress by conflating the televisual 'ideal' image with their internalised image of the 'ideal' mother. They identified with Carla Lane as with the nurturing mother. The female viewer seeks her self-image in the image of women on the television. She also associates her first idea of the ideal of female beauty with her mother. Her identification is not automatically with a substitute self-image alone. It embodies also a subconscious memory of, and yearning for, the pre-Oedipus phase before the child perceives herself to exist separately from her mother and the surrounding environment. She still

understands herself as connected to her mother. It is a longing for the return to this initial state of loving 'connectedness'. In her constant search for and affirmation of 'connectedness', she transfers/further entrusts this association to the visual representation of woman. Her identification with her mother as the central female on whom to pattern her life becomes mirrored by her esteem for the publicly authorised valued other women on the screen. It seems likely that viewers' identification with the images of women in the series had as much to do with a projection of their longing to be looked after as it did with the pursuit of 'ideal' physical appearance and appeal. These suggestions are in direct contrast to those of Tania Modleski, who in Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women<sup>36</sup> conceptualised the female viewer of soap operas as the ideal mother who possesses the wisdom and emotional capacity to identify with all female images on offer. The response of one group of viewers in this study, the Sewing Class, responded to Maxine's casual announcement that she wanted to have Luke's baby, accorded with Modleski. They were affronted that motherhood should be taken so lightly. Their response reflected priorities concerning a desire to remain central within and connected to growing families.

My explanations are experimental. Both mine and Modleski's are partial. They incline towards the assumption that the relationship to a text by the women in the audience is singularly straightforward, relying solely on the seeking of

the maternal bond, one way or the other. It is not. Interpretation of a text, or elements of a text, is by no means a direct, linear connection of text-audience-'interpretive strategy'-interpretation. Expectation guides the process. Elements are expected in the text and the audience expects to select a particular 'interpretive strategy' to engage with them. Thus, expectations of identifying with either the characters or the stars led viewers to a first choice 'interpretive strategy' which would achieve successful identification. The exact opposite applied to those whose expectations induced them to disdain identification with the images of women. Those women in the audience whose expectations concerned entertainment and escapism were fulfilled and found it relatively easy to enjoy the text via this first choice 'interpretive strategy'. Those whose anticipations and hopes of identification were directed by 'emotional realism' or 'empirical realism' were in a dilemma. Some reacted negatively due to notions of aesthetic criticism. They didn't like the presentation; they thought the production was poor. Others perceived their personal values to be under attack. Unlike those who sought entertainment and found identification easy, the priorities of these latter viewers obliged them to reject an instinctive identification based on expectation. They reached instead for 'interpretive strategies' which would make sense of their actual perceptions of the text. This did not always mean that they abandoned hope of future identification with Felicity Kendal

or Jane Asher, or with Carla Lane characters. The certainty of identification had been questioned. Their anticipations had been modified. It implied that the 'interpretive strategy' which facilitates successful identification was in this instance set to one side. Other 'interpretive strategies' from the same 'interpretive repertoire' were, therefore, tested. If/when they failed, further 'interpretive repertoires' were plumbed for 'interpretive strategies' which would adequately express their relationship(s) to the text.

#### The Text/Audience Relationship(s)

Response in this study demonstrated that viewers were not passive receivers but active seekers of assorted pleasures. They were by no means wholly at the mercy of the text as past film theory based on textual analysis may suggest. Although the images of women in the series were a key concern to the majority of viewers, they did not determine one exclusive way in which all the women in the audience would respond. Nor did the audience appear to create or invent the text along their own lines, as some of the reader-response theorists would advocate.

A criticism of pluralism cannot be made from the findings here. There was no exclusive response to The Mistress, but a number of similar ways of engaging with the text were revealed. There were variations enough to discount

tautology. The 'interpretive strategies' most often deployed were those which confirmed viewers' already established points of view, the 'interpretive repertoire' from which they derived suggesting priorities informed by commonly recognised lived experiences. Expectation, characterised as anticipation and hope played a significant part in determining viewers' approaches to the text.

Issues of identification, realism, aesthetic criticism, and personal values affected the success of the textual address and the ways in which viewers experienced their positioning by the text. I concluded that the pleasures/displeasures gained by the women in the audience of The Mistress resulted in three text/audience relationships. These were defined as: complicity, compromise, or exclusion. Complicity describes the relationship of those women in the audience whose approval was on the whole won by the series. They colluded in the textual address, identified with the characters and/or the stars, enjoyed it as entertainment, and either thought it was realistic or didn't mind whether it was realistic or not. Compromise refers to those viewers who could not wholeheartedly embrace the values they perceived the series to promote, but were inclined to shelve any personal principles which may have been breached until the end of the episode/series. Exclusion characterises the rejection demonstrated by a number of women in the audience of The Mistress whose personal values proved so contrary to

those they perceived in the series that they could only eschew the text altogether.

### Evaluation

The value of an eclectic model guided by a feminist perspective is that, whilst making use of aspects of other approaches, it avoids being restricted by the rules which frame them. Although traditional paradigms of research proved inadequate for this study, the constraints which negate the exclusive use of an established theoretical model also equip it with certain in-built advantages. The often rigid framework inevitably acts as a control, providing direction and regulating the investigation from the outset. Because an eclectic approach borrows from other research models, it is obliged to develop its own theoretical structure, methodology and regulatory mechanisms, rather than rely on the tried and tested. Accordingly, considerable care was taken in the research design here, first of all, to ensure that it was relevant and practicable, and secondly, to justify its adoption. Researchers using those other approaches do take care but, I suggest, that the onus upon the researcher developing a new theoretical framework is heavier. It is even more important to be absolutely certain and clear about the content, the methods and the rationale of the study. This is worthwhile, but it is a complex and time consuming process. Although being original and innovative is exciting, the responsibility of designing a

research model and then using it for the first time lends much more of a personal risk to the study overall.

This study has proved that it can be done. By taking three established theories of film and television theory, reader response theory, and Uses and Gratifications theory, and carefully borrowing from each only those aspects not merely genuinely justifiable as relevant to the aims and objectives of this project, but as compatible also, an appropriate, workable, theoretical model was designed. Via this framework I realised the concept of the Skilled Viewer. The result was that, for the first time, the living, active, socially located, female viewer who possesses considerable interpretive expertise, was conceptualised.

This research put the theory to the test by applying it to the responses of concrete female viewers in the social world. Where previous film and television theorists had only hypothesised about relationships of looking from the construction of the text, I have been able to suggest their verification from viewers' reactions. Audience response in this study suggested that, further to Mulvey's theory of pleasure for the female spectator depending on narcissism, exhibitionism is also an option. Investigation of viewers' interest in Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher prompted an analysis of Dyer's concept of 'stars'. I maintained that with a slight change of orientation, 'stars' could be applied to television also. Arguing that disappointment with

a 'star' invokes in the viewer a conflict of internalised personal values and pre-existing loyalty for the performer, I proposed that the audience contribution to the 'star image' is ultimately responsible for its continued success. My analysis of the way in which 'promotion' and 'publicity' worked in respect of Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher demonstrated that the audience and the media may be more at odds in relation to the 'star image' than Dyer implied. Responses here reinforced Haskell's proposals that patriarchal constraints may restrict articulate expression about images of women by the women in the audience. I examined Ellis' arguments on textual address in respect to the women in the audience of The Mistress and found them to be sound. Response of viewers in this study accorded with Morley's conclusion that as well as social position, gender, family and domestic circumstances influence viewing behaviour and, consequently, the text/audience relationship. Viewers' responses here relating to realism corresponded to a great extent with Ang's study of viewers of Dallas. By speculating, albeit experimentally, that Chodorow's theories may help explain actual as well as theoretical audience response, I was occasionally able to offer further reasons for certain responses. Where Modleski's use of Chodorow suggested that female viewers are addressed and take the position of the 'ideal mother', I argued that whilst some may, others take the contrary position and relate to the text by searching for the 'ideal mother'.

The methodological model developed here put into practice the socialist feminist/cultural studies approach described by van Zoonen. It also exemplified Brundson's 'fragmented' approach to the research subjects. Although strongly influenced by predecessors such as Morley, Hobson, Willis, and Radway, this study is broader. Where they focused respectively on groups, individuals, one group, or one 'interpretive community', my research concentrated on socially constituted individual women and groups of women. This has never been done before. Most of my research subjects were known to me. Supported by feminist sociological views of interviewing, by being consistently clear and precise in the foregrounding of my own presence and feelings, and by submitting an ethnographic account of the study, I was able to justify such subject selection. I found that my preferred methods did not prove as problematic as advisors were wont to warn me at the outset.

My methodological procedures tested a number of Fish's arguments developed in reader response theory. Fish's notion of 'interpretive community' was not generally applicable here. Viewers in this study were approached as social beings whose common experience of socially constituted groups was assumed to be a major influence on their interpretation. The term 'interpretive repertoire' was adopted because of its incorporation of lived experience above and beyond interpretive convention. Fish's 'interpretive strategies' could be related to a number of 'interpretive repertoires'

perceived to be principally associated with lived experience and common social understandings rather than with customs of interpretation. The audience response in this study corresponded with Fish's proposals. It pointed up both comparable and conflicting opinions about the text, not only between groups, group members, and individuals, but also within viewers, depending on the choice of 'interpretive strategy' and its source 'interpretive repertoire'. Notable also was that separate viewers or groups of viewers would call on the same 'interpretive repertoire' yet often adopt different 'interpretive strategies'. Fish's proposal that one reader may apply different 'interpretive strategies' when discussing/thinking about a text at separate points in time was borne out. Examination of the relationships between 'interpretive repertoires' and 'interpretive strategies' revealed that priorities current at the specific textual encounter that was the viewing of The Mistress most evidently related to the seeking of personal values and the operation of critical expertise.

Mindful of Iser's criticisms, I was careful to examine the 'interpretive strategies' and their sources with respect to the conflicting potentials of pluralism and tautology, and could conclude that methodological rigour prevents either being inevitable. I contended that it was important to describe the nature of the audience response as emotional and/or intellectual, as well as recording the words used. Thus, along with my application of Bleich's advice to

register response as 'response' and 'interpretation', I was able, to some extent, to detail its complexity.

Being ever conscious of such complexity, I developed a systematic procedure to gain access to the data via five successive stages. Response was initially sorted into four audience-led subject areas and then the Uses and Gratifications categorisations, amended and adapted specifically for this research, were put into practice to classify the data into more detail. The ordering of data via the Uses and Gratifications accorded with McQuail's assertion that people do 'use' the media for specific purposes. Following my investigation into the work in Uses and Gratifications theory on expectation, I designed an original framework of expectation in order further to define responses. They were described in terms of anticipations and hopes expressed/fulfilled. Once this was achieved, I identified the 'interpretive strategies' appropriate to each response, and suggested the 'interpretive repertoires' which generated them, informed by a shared reality of experiences. This technique of access proved a valuable way of gaining insight into the audience response. The (very speculative) application of Chodorowian theory revealed influences relating to the importance of the mother/daughter relationship which may have framed certain response.

Not all the reasons for all the responses can possibly have been accounted for. The model of the audience used here was

formulated specifically to allow in-depth interview discussions, and to analyse the data elicited from them from the audience point of view as fairly as possible. However, as with all theories, at a certain stage of the research its framework ceases to be a facilitating one. The aims and demands which motivated its design become instead constraints which discourage the examination of data which may not wholly correspond with its original purpose, or fit within its conceptual boundaries. To a certain extent this problem has been defused by a constant monitoring process, subsequently registered in the account. All theories, however, oblige a reduction of what is potential to what they can comfortably handle by their own self-imposed restrictions. This is neither to advocate theoretical "over-compliance" in order to accommodate all potentially relevant data, nor rigid inflexibility in order to focus on a narrow selection. This study is an original, multi-disciplinary approach to audience response. It is neither a theoretical compromise, nor is it theoretically uncompromising. It must, however, be acknowledged that, valid though this analysis of the response of female viewers to The Mistress is, it is also and inevitably, partial.

Despite the above constraints, I conclude the following. Female television viewers can and do take up a number of positions in relation to a television text such as The Mistress. The women in the audience in this study, although linked by the common constraints of the ideological

structure of patriarchy in 1980s Britain, experienced their positioning diversely. They responded in terms of complicity, compromise or exclusion, depending on the priorities with which they approached the text. Some responses were associated with an identification with the stars and/or with the passivity of the images of women presented to them. Others revealed considerable resistance to such representations and demanded change. Most significant was that the majority of viewers exhibited a consistent awareness of what they were doing and why they were doing it. They articulated what they perceived the text to be offering and were quite clear about their own approach to it. The female viewers of The Mistress **used** the text for their own ends. They monitored and analysed their use. Their relationships with the text were largely based on their expectations of it. They derived considerable enjoyment from discussing their relationships with the text. Indeed, the data collection for this study was particularly enjoyable for me. My research subjects demonstrated an astonishing capacity to draw as much pleasure from the series and/or the ensuing discussion as they possibly could without compromising their personal integrity.

There are three major findings. First of all, the concept of the Skilled Viewer can comprehensively account for the response of the audience. Its emphasis on activity and choice reveals the interpretive expertise of the audience. Its insistence on social contextualisation reveals the

underlying influences on interpretive custom. Secondly, by incorporating the active, social audience, the Skilled Viewer legitimates its voice. Thirdly, by sanctioning the centrality of the female viewer, the Skilled Viewer convincingly empowers the women in the audience.

### Consequences

This study furthers research into the audience in four ways: theoretically, conceptually, methodologically and empirically.

The theory of the Skilled Viewer was designed from components of three pre-existing theories. The investigation of the Skilled Viewer resulted in the linking of concepts separately developed within one established theory. I have shown via audience response here that Dyer's work on 'stars' and Mulvey's work on 'looking' are integrally connected in the process of identification. Responses in this study concurred with Ang's work on realism. The women in the audience of The Mistress demonstrated that perceptions of realism govern ability and/or desire to engage with the process of identification.

Chodorow had only previously been used as textual analysis. By applying her theories experimentally to the responses of the women in the audience of The Mistress, I challenged former findings from textual research. Response in this

study showed that the taking up of the position of 'ideal mother' by viewers was not predetermined. Relationships with the text are not so straightforward. As women's lives are multi-dimensional, so too are their potential relationships with the text.

I confirmed that text/audience relationships are complex and in continual negotiation. They are as much dependent on experiences of pleasure as they are on meaning. Understanding a text is not enough. The enjoyment which comes from the perceived meaning determines the text/audience relationship. Engagement with the text was not linear. The 'interpretive strategies' with which viewers approached the text were multi-layered and derived from 'interpretive repertoires' formed via lived experience. I defined three text/audience relationships from response in this study: complicity, compromise and exclusion.

Fish's 'Informed Reader' was taken as a base for the concept of the Skilled Viewer. The preferred methods of subject selection and the requirement of social contextualisation demanded that response be accounted for by more complex means than interpretive convention. I substituted the concept of 'interpretive repertoire' for that of 'interpretive community' to accommodate these principles. This did not compromise the use of 'interpretive strategy'. It added avenues of explanation.

I advanced the work in the 'gratifications' area of Uses and Gratifications theory by developing a framework of expectation to describe audience response. The labels, anticipations/hopes-expressed and anticipations/hopes-fulfilled did not wholly fulfil my own anticipations and hopes. Their specificity constrained the findings. The explanations they offered were not as satisfactory or as theoretically adequate as I had assumed they would be. The limitations of the framework pointed up the complexity of response. My research contributes to and furthers knowledge in this area.

The findings here add to those of 'context' studies, such as Morley's work on the family. The 'context of actions' was consistently monitored and registered. Respondents' social contextualisation was a major consideration when exploring interpretation. Responses showed that their lived social experience influenced the way in which viewers encountered the text. Their priorities directed their 'interpretive strategies'.

I tested the concept of 'activity'. I demonstrated that 'activity' incorporated how the women in the audience engaged with the text. For instance, I suggested that exhibitionism is a way some women have of actively enjoying the passivity of images of women. Others associated 'activity' with strength and control and actively rejected the images because of the lack of 'activity' they reflected.

I revealed that the components of attention and involvement are governed by the priorities viewers bring to the text and influence the ultimate text/audience relationship.

I tested Ellis' notion that sounds hook viewers into a programme. This could not be determined. The sounds which provoked most response here were the laughtrack and the theme tune. Most viewers found the laughtrack an intrusion. It pointed up and contrasted with their personal values. No-one could recall the theme tune to The Mistress. They valued sharing the pleasure of those theme tunes they did recall by singing them together. No-one else has considered sounds in television audience response before.

This research illustrated how problems of meaning are not restricted to the interpretation stage, but are present throughout. My guiding principle was that the study should be audience-led. I discovered that, although designed for audience research, for Uses and Gratifications to be audience-led it must be carefully monitored. Response should not be allocated to categories. Categories must be applied to response. I developed a five stage process of examining response. This systematised the data analysis in a way nobody else had done. It explained the route I took to reveal explanations. It clarified exactly how and why conclusions about response were reached. It contributes to methodological practice.

I adopted an ethnographic accounting procedure. It pointed up inadequacies in previous research. Explanations of response were considerably more comprehensive than other studies in the area. For instance, Ang's study of Dallas was dependent on viewers responding via a newspaper article she had placed. Thus, she could not account for any influences on viewers' response from the 'context of actions' or social contextualisation. Explanation of responses from the women in the audience of The Mistress were firmly grounded in their lived experience.

The ethnographic account reported my research subjects as social beings. The reflexivity entailed in its use, and my feminist 'fragmented' approach, pointed up my own existence not only as a researcher present during the discussions, but as a social being. It challenged the findings of text-based research. It illustrated how the dynamics of relationships with others, as well as with the text, produce meanings and pleasure which contribute to the text/audience relationship. It demonstrated that the joy of text is enhanced by sharing.

The social contextualisation of the audience in other research in this area has reported response which is influenced by gender experience and/or by social class positioning. Response from viewers of The Mistress showed that regional identity can be a powerful determinant on appreciation. Nobody else has demonstrated this.

When I began this research there was little work undertaken on the female viewer of television. Although more work has been undertaken since the inception of this study, none have been as broad. No-one else has examined both individuals and groups of women.

No-one else has investigated the concrete audience of a sitcom. Researchers into female audiences of television have concerned themselves with soap opera, as if women don't watch anything else. This is the first study of its kind.

My investigation into the Skilled Viewers who were the women in the audience of The Mistress tested a carefully constructed, multi-disciplinary theoretical model via a rigorous methodological approach. It proved effective.

This is an original, workable, valid piece of research. It tests theories of the text on the concrete audience. It adds to 'context' studies. It presents original findings and challenges those of other researchers. It contributes to and advances work in the field of audience research.

#### NOTES

1. Easthope, Anthony and McGowan, Kate: Critical and Cultural Theory: A Reader [Open University Press, 1992] (p133).
2. Ang and Hermes op. cit. (p316).
3. Ibid (p316).

4. ' "Don't treat us like we're so stupid and naïve":  
Toward an ethnography of soap opera viewers' in  
Seiter et al (eds) op. cit. (p244).
5. [Sage, 1986].
6. Ibid (p62).
7. Ibid (p68).
8. Seiter et al op. cit. (p243).
9. Ibid (p242).
10. Ibid (p242).
11. 'Communication and context: ethnographic  
perspectives on the media audience' in Jensen and  
Jankowski op. cit. (p154).
12. Ibid (p154).
13. Morley [1986] op. cit.
14. Kirk and Miller op. cit. (p68).
15. McQuail [1987] op. cit. (p234).
16. Krueger op. cit. (p21).
17. Ibid (p21).
18. Morley, David: 'Interpreting Television: The  
Nationwide Audience', in Morley, David [1992] op.  
cit. (p174).
19. Jankowski and Wester op. cit. (p62).
20. Ibid (p63).
21. Ibid (p63).
22. Morley and Silverstone op. cit. (p154).
23. Kirk and Miller op. cit. (p68).
24. I stress the 'conventional' 'star image' here. The  
'star image' of a contemporary star such as  
Madonna would challenge the patriarchal  
convention.
25. Haskell op. cit. (p273).
26. Ang op. cit. (p19).
27. Ibid. (50)

28. In Media, Culture and Society Vol 11, No 2 [1989], pp229-252.
29. Ang op. cit. (p97).
30. Ang and Hermes op. cit. (p313).
31. Ibid (p313).
32. Ibid (p313).
33. Ibid (p314).
34. Ibid (p314).
35. Ang op. cit. (p96).
36. [1982] op. cit.

## APPENDIX I

Figures 6a, 7a, 8a record those discussions which were originally arranged but for a variety of reasons were either cancelled or not transcribed.

Fig. 6a Individual Discussions Cancelled/Not Transcribed:

	<u>Age</u>	<u>Marital/ Family Status</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>(Paid) Work Status</u>	<u>Nation- ality/ Racial Origin/ Colour</u>	<u>Sexual Orient- ation</u>
N	40	cohab- iting (div- orced)	2 x u/10	office super- visor	B/E/W	hetero- sexual

[Cancelled. Reason: illness of interviewee].

O	24	cohab- iting	none	sales assist- ant	B/E/W	hetero- sexual
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[Not Transcribed: Reason: recording too poor to transcribe].

Fig. 7a Group Discussions Cancelled

	<u>Group</u>	<u>Number in Group</u>	<u>Reason</u>
10	Council Estate Housewives	5	Initial contact keen to take part but unable to sustain enthus- iasm of others;
11	Afro-Caribbean friends	4	Ditto;
12	Asian Community Workers	5	Ditto;
13	Teenage school girls	4	Ditto;
14	Sales assistants	4	2 cancelled due to illness, so others cancelled also;
15	Nurses	5	Unable to arrange discussion to suit shiftwork.

Fig. 8a Male Discussions Cancelled/Not Transcribed:

	<u>Age</u>	<u>Marital/ Family Status</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>(Paid) Work Status</u>	<u>Nation- ality/ Racial Origin/ Colour</u>	<u>Sexual Orient- ation</u>
Dm.	44	cohab- iting (div- orced)	1xteen 1xu/10	office manager	B/E/W	hetero- sexual

[Cancelled. Reason: Illness of subject].

Em.	62	married	2xmarried	retired	B/E/W	hetero- sexual
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[Not transcribed. Reason: Failure of tape recorder].

APPENDIX II

In order to ensure that every discussion included a common range of areas, the following issues/areas of discussion were introduced to or raised by all research subjects.

Television viewing

Regularity of viewing.

Favourite programmes.

The 'look' of programmes.

Sounds in programmes.

What makes you laugh on television?

Sitcoms

Appeal of sitcoms in general.

Regularity of viewing sitcoms.

Favourite sitcoms.

Knowledge of sitcoms.

The Mistress

Appeal of the series in general.

Comparison with Carla Lane's previous series?

The quality of Carla Lane's writing.

The stars and the characters they played.

The representation of work in Lane's sitcoms.

Representations of Women

In general on television; in particular in The Mistress

APPENDIX IIIKey to Transcripts

, or .	Natural, often grammatical pauses, within fluent speech;
..	Short pauses which interrupt natural flow of speech;
...	Indicates repetition omitted. For instance, I have a habit of repeating myself every time I pose a question. So I may ask: Do you .. do you .. do you think that a similar sitcom would work with roles reversed? But this is transcribed as: ... Do you think that a similar sitcom would work with roles reversed?;
.. ... ..	Indicates words and/or filled pauses omitted in transcript within main text because they confuse the sense of the quotation;
(pause)	Longer, noticeable pause of several seconds;
(inaudible)	Words not transcribed because they are inaudible;
(unintelligible)	Words not transcribed because although audible on tape I could not make sense of them;
:	Is used to indicate a speaker's change in tone when either they quote someone else, or articulate a thought which has occurred.
Brackets (word) within a quote	Refer to articulations by the speaker other than speech when, for instance, an interviewee laughs in the midst of saying something this is indicated as: (laughs);
Brackets .. ([2] words) ..	Refer to interruptions by subjects in a group other than the original speaker.
Brackets .. (<Int> words) ..	Refer to interruptions made by myself, the interviewer.

Brackets [word]	e.g.	Refers to an insertion which makes the written transcription clearer although its meaning may be obvious in the audio-recording. For instance, a viewer is talking about Felicity Kendal, whose name they have already mentioned but is not quoted in the extract here, the name is inserted; or when a viewer refers to someone as "She ..." but it is not immediately clear in the extract who "she" is, the name is inserted.
Initials followed by description in bracket J---		When a subject refers by name to someone such as, say, their husband, the initial expresses the name, the description describes the relationship.

There are a number of problems relating to the reporting of speech. Firstly, when put into print the spontaneity of speech is removed. In conversation, it is obvious that ideas are flowing both concurrently and consecutively. On the page they can appear incongruous and disparate, often implying that even the most articulate and "officially grammatical" of speakers are at best distracted, at worst pretty stupid. Research which records actual speech frequently appears to pass both implicit and explicit judgement on its "correctness", not so much on what is said, but on how it is expressed.

Heeding Walkerdine's<sup>1</sup> advice, several steps were taken to reduce these problems. First of all, the use of dots and **(pause)** as detailed above are retained to remind the reader of the speaker(s)' spontaneous and unrehearsed response. Secondly, the '[sic]' has been used sparingly and carefully. '[sic]' is an explicit comment by an analyst on a speaker. By noting specifics it imposes that analyst's own values on to the speakers' use of language. For instance, when quoting from authors who use 'he' as a generalisation for people rather than 'he/she', 's/he', or 'they', I have consistently noted this with [sic] to let readers know that this sexist use of language is that of the original author. It is indeed an imposition of my own values, not because I believe this use to be grammatically incorrect because, according to prescriptive grammar it would be quite proper, but, rather, because I don't believe it to be correct in terms of justice. I am not prepared to accept that I and the rest of the female half of the human race should be subsumed within "he". '[sic]' is occasionally used here within the extracts of interviewees' speech. It is not intended as a comment on the correctness of their use of language. It is not used to comment on grammatical "errors" or dialectical divergence unless the particular dialectical use is unlikely to be understood by all readers. It is not used, for instance,

when Yorkshire speakers omit the definite article, assuming that the reader appreciates that that is part of a normal Yorkshire speech pattern. It is used following a Yorkshire speaker's use of a dialectical word such as, say, "tret", in case the reader is not aware that this is a dialectical alternative for "treated". The sparing use of '[sic]' is intended as clarification rather than value-judgement, to let the reader know that, for instance, when a viewer says 'student audience', that this was a slip of the tongue, being in the context of a discussion on the "studio" audience; or, that 'Surburbiton' was not a typing error, but had been said in place of Surbiton. (Linguistically, the connotations of such a slip are interesting as this viewer was discussing the conventional settings of sitcoms and it is fair to say that Surbiton has come to stand for "boring, prosperous, south-eastern suburb"). Where speakers used words that don't "officially" exist, or that they have adapted from existing words, as long as they need no explanation to clarify sense I have left them as they were originally said, presuming the reader will first of all give credit to the meaning the speaker intended and, secondly, that they appreciate that these are not my typing/spelling errors.

Each transcript is preceded by a description of the subject(s), plus any field notes pertinent to the discussion.

#### NOTES

1. Op. cit.

APPENDIX IV

Transcripts

Group Transcript

GROUP INTERVIEW No 1      Babysitting Circle

21 January 1985

The Babysitting Circle are a group of four white women in their late 20s/early 30s. They all live on the same modern (newly built) owner/occupier housing estate in Waterthorpe, a suburb to the South East of Sheffield. They came together initially to share babysitting duties, and subsequently became friends. All are married, all have young children at the baby or toddler stage. All their husbands have managerial/professional jobs. One woman is a doctor of medicine and works at a local clinic once or twice a week; none of the others are in paid work. Three of the four have degrees, and all were in paid work in positions of responsibility before their children were born.

Prior to the interview I had met two members of the **Babysitting Circle**. I had known [1] for five years, first as a work colleague and subsequently as a friend. I had met [3] one time previously when she and [1] had been members of another group of young mothers who had come together to discuss the tv drama/documentary Threads.

The discussion took place after the viewing of **Episode One** of The Mistress in the living room of [1]'s house, a large room with a low ceiling. The discussion lasted approximately 25 minutes. The recording was of good quality and clear.

Whilst viewing the episode, the group constantly made comments about the appearance of Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher, such as:

[1] [Ref. Felicity Kendal] It's obscene  
being a size eight at her age.

- <Int> ... Do you like situation comedies anyway and would you watch them normally?
- [2] Carla Lane's, yeah.
- <Int> Why Carla Lane's in particular?
- [2] Because I think hers are more intelligent than .. others I've seen.
- <Int> How do you mean?
- (Pause)
- [2] I think she goes into the sort of .. the psyche of people in greater depth than say, things like Terry and June or ... I don't know, any other situation comedies .. ... .. she seems to probe more into women's minds, and be funny at the same time.
- [1] I actually watch very little tv, but the television .. the programmes I actually choose to watch, quite a few happen to be .. ... .. her comedies. I just enjoy it, it's my kind of humour, I can relate to it.
- <Int> Did anybody see any of her last series .. ... .. it was called Leaving?
- (General assent)
- [1] Yes, because I watched it, and I thought it was .. well, it was so superb I can't remember anything about it, but at the time I enjoyed it .. ... .. did she do Solo as well?
- <Int> Mm. Mm, what did you think of Solo?
- [1] Excellent, because he was a hunk, he was absolutely amazing.
- [2] Did you like him? I thought he was a real wet, I couldn't stand him, got on my nerves.
- [1] Well, I think, I look at him ...
- <Int> Do you ... like the part Felicity Kendal plays?
- [1] Yes, I think I like her ..

[2] Yes, I like ..

[3] I think she makes a lot of them .. ([2] Yes) .. I think .. ([2] Yes) .. in themselves they're perhaps not that good, but she sort of brings ..

.. .... ..

<Int> Do you think that your knowledge of ..  
... .. the actual .. actors or actresses  
contributes to your enjoyment?

[3] Yes, I think so.

[4] Yes, I think so, because in that I ..  
only really recognised Jane Asher and  
Felicity Kendal .. ... .. and I enjoyed  
their parts, it's going to take ... a  
while getting to know the ... male  
figures.

<Int> Yes, yes.

[1] What I find interesting ... about this  
in comparison to Butterflies, which I  
love and I've actually watched twice,  
you know .. (General assent) .. the  
repeats as well, was Ria, who was the ..  
the airy-fairy .. the bit of the  
neurotic personality .. ... .. but he  
was the .. staid one in the affair, you  
know, he never wavered. But in this one,  
it's a complete role reversal, it's  
Helen who's .. ... .. the staid one, and  
he's the one who panics and flummox  
[sic] and .. he gets his plans all mixed  
up .. ([4] Yes.) .. and he can't cope  
with the situation.

[2] Both the women are strong in this,  
aren't they? ... The man's .. seen to be  
a bit weaker, I think, in this one. I  
mean, both Helen ... and, er .. what's  
her name, Max, is it? .. ([3] Yes,  
Maxine.) .. ... .. despite sort of being  
a bit fluffy, she's a strong woman,  
whereas he's a sort of ... weaker  
character .. ... .. than both of  
them.

<Int> What did you think .. when you first  
heard of The Mistress .. of a situation  
comedy coming up, what did you actually  
anticipate it to be? I mean, obviously  
you'd know it was about a mistress

..(Laughter.) .. but .. you know ... did it attract you .. the title?

[3] Curiosity, yes, because I mean, in itself it sounds a bit stereotyped, The Mistress, you know, sort of: there is going to be a married couple and there is going to be a mistress .. (<Int> Yes.) .. what variation on a theme are they going to produce? .. ... .. so ..

[1] .. But I think, knowing that Felicity Kendal is in it, you know it's going to be quite good fun .. ([3] That's it, yes ..) .. and it's not sordid .. ([3] Just wonder how she's going to contribute.) .. or .. you know .. it's got ... that sort of element, but it's not sort of .. all grotty.

[2] I was interested to see how they'd present it, because ... knowing she was in it .. I was thinking: well, is it going to be the mistress seen as the scarlet woman who causes man's downfall, or, you know, what angle are they going to take? .. (General assent) .. and they seem to have landed on the side of women as strength rather than women as a sort of evil conniving, you know .. leading men down the path ..

[1] It's quite frivolous, isn't it? ([2] Yes, yes.) .. I mean, there she is, made up and turned out in that sort of .. little pink number and a pink bow in her hair, she's sort .. she's a bit girlish in places isn't she really?

<Int> ... Do you find their .. ... .. clothes and their looks, both of Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher .. ... .. do they give you pleasure, do they give you enjoyment?

[2] Jane Asher's a bit boring, I think.

[4] A bit, yeah, she's a .. bit .. dowdy.

[2] Dull.

(Laughter)

.. ... ..

- [1] But then she isn't .. ... .. playing the major role, is she, so ..
- [4] She's .. yes, supposed to be playing herself down ..
- <Int> That's right ... well I presume she will .. become ..
- [2] Well yes .. ... .. the mistress is the frilly dresser, isn't she? .. (General assent) .. whereas Jane Asher's the sort of .. smart .. elegant ..
- [3] Yes, yes, well she dressed well, but she's not sort of .. ... .. very obvious, yeah.
- [2] .. ... .. No, she's not obvious, understated.
- <Int> What did you think about the .. dialogue? Did you actually find the comedy as funny as other situation comedies?
- [2] No.
- <Int> Again, I know .. ([4] No.).. it's difficult to actually say, on a first.. thing ..([4] That's right.) .. because you've got to get used to the characters.
- [4] I don't know .. ([1] A few good lines ..) .. they all seem to come .. ([2] Pity they're not funny ..) .. at once .. ([2] Yeah.) .. in blocks, and then .. you've got a .. phase where it wasn't ..
- [2] A bit contrived, I thought .. ([4] .. I thought the beginning was a bit dead, really.) .. a little bit contrived.
- <Int> What other things about the .. about the whole way it was filmed and what you actually saw in it, did you find either interesting or enjoyable? .. ... .. I'll tell you what I mean, for instance .. ... .. I like Butterflies .. ([2] Mm.) .. but the actual character of Ria drove me round the bend .. and I couldn't understand why.

- [2] Oh yeah, you feel like saying ... for God's sake, go and do a degree or something ..
- <Int> .. .... And I couldn't understand why I liked the programme, and I thought about it, and to me, it was like a sort of pinky golden glow, when I thought of that programme .. ([3] Mm.) .. and it was the whole look of it, and ... there were other things as well, but that was how I thought of the whole thing.
- [3] Yes, there was a lovely house, and it was the park, and it was the .. (<Int> Mm.) .. it was the ..
- [2] .. It was a middle class fantasy, isn't it? .. ([3] Yes.) .. I mean, you know, your husband's a dentist ..
- (General agreement)
- [1] .. There's these two sons in the middle, you know .. ([3] That's it, yes.) .. simply can't help knocking off all these girls, I mean, if that's sort of, you know .. almost the ideal ..
- [3] As a sideline, they were the main .. they were very interesting too ..
- [1] Yes.
- (General agreement.)
- <Int> Did you find the action in this episode of The Mistress ... plausible ... or implausible, or realistic ... as much as comedy can be?
- .. ....
- [3] There are bits and pieces that were a bit incongruous, you know.
- [2] .. I thought the wife .. you know, I mean, the way he was behaving like: Are you all right, darling, and sort of .. maybe she was keeping it to herself, but I would have thought ..
- [3] I would have gone: Click, wrrr ... .. she would go: (snaps fingers) Hang on a minute, you know, what's going on here? I mean .. perhaps she knows anyway ...

we've yet to find out honestly, but ... a bit contrived, I felt they were trying too hard at times .. to be you know ... to be real and .. by trying too hard they were sort of, er .. messing it up a bit, I thought.

<Int> What about their names, what do you think of their names? (Pause) Do they mean anything to you?

[2] Helen sounds sort of dependable ...

[3] Thank you. [[3]'s name is Helen].

(Laughter)

[2] Sorry ... no personal .. no, it just sounds sort of calm and .. Maxy sounds a bit ... frivolous .. ([4] A bit .. yes ..) (General assent) .. sounds a bit frivolous, doesn't it?

[4] I've forgotten what his name is now.

[2] Luke. Luke's biblical, I mean, God .. (Laughter) .. ... .. I don't know what they picked Luke for, I must admit.

<Int> And the music, what did you think of the music? Can you remember the music?

[2] No.

[3] No.

<Int> .. Because I didn't until I saw it again, you know. It's sort of, er ..

[3] ... I remember it but I couldn't .. ([2] Classical.) .. Classical.

[4] It's very .. yes.

<Int> It's very Mozarty, you know.

[4] That's right, yeah.

[1] It's because of when they started, I went out (unintelligible) .. (<Int> Mm.) .. and it was that sort of .. the Victorian .. (<Int> Mm.) .. because at first I thought: Oh, I---'s [husband] got the wrong programme ..

<Int> Mm. ... How did the ... title sequence strike you with all the pictures of the ..([1] The sort of portraits and ..) .. Edwardian women?

[2] Were we .. er, meant to assume they were all mistresses of one kind or another, I suppose?

<Int> Suppose so ..

[2] Because her picture came on at the end, didn't it?

[4] Yeah ..

[2] Well I .. a bit posey ..

[3] ... Significance was wasted .. ([1] I think there's a ..) .. on me, I'm afraid ..

(General assent)

.. ....

[1] I don't think it was actually appropriate ... to the comedy in the way it was .. portrayed.

<Int> Can you remember the music of any other situation comedies?

[1] Butterflies.

[3] Butterflies.

[2] Liver Birds, I always remember that one.

(General agreement)

<Int> I don't.

(All sing Butterflies' theme tune.)

[4] That's right, yeah.

[2] You should remember that.

<Int> I know, that's why I was ..

(Laughter)

[1] Well that was many years ago, I'm amazed, God ..

[3] And The Good Life and To The Manor Born  
I remember those ones .. ([2] Yeah.) ..  
... .. It's not many really. When you  
think of the number that are on  
television ..

[1] Actually, do you know, I haven't really  
sat down and thought about situation  
comedies before, but just .. you know,  
a few of us mentioning titles, they're  
the one programmes [sic] that I watch ..  
... .. because I rarely ever watch  
anything .. ... .. I tend to be ..

<Int> They seem to be ..([1] .. because I ..  
just ..) .. very popular with women.

[1] Yes.

(Pause)

[1] I wonder why?

<Int> Don't know really.

(Pause)

[1] It must be because ..

[2] Well, women like to laugh, don't they?

.. ... ..

[1] Yes, I think if I'm actually going to  
sit down in front of the television I  
want to enjoy myself.

[2] Yes.

[3] Yes. I mean, watching a documentary ..  
([2] I think men tend to go more for  
documentaries ..) .. I 've got to be  
really interested in it ..

[1] Yes, and I sometimes think: Oh, well, I  
just can't be bothered ..

[4] Yes, it's got to be something ..

[3] It is just too heavy .. I need to sort  
of unwind a bit .. having looked after  
a child all day .. God, I've .. had  
enough .. ... .. just want something to  
take me away from my er .. mundane  
existence.

[4] Yeah.

<Int> So, you wouldn't actually like ... a situation comedy about your life, for instance?

[3] It's not a comedy most of the time ..

<Int> It's not funny ..

(Laughter)

[2] I don't know, I think there's a lot of scope for humour ... in, you know, the day to day life of a housewife, I think there is, I mean ..

[3] I don't think you can run a sitcom on it though, can you?

[2] I don't .. I'm not saying that I spend all day laughing, you know, I don't. I think there's a lot of scope for humour, I mean, there are funny things that happen. Er, it would be a bit boring, probably, for most women who do it, because they don't want to watch what they do all day, you know, I mean .. ..  
.. but in that .. Ria, that .. ..  
Butterflies, I mean that's a lot of it is what most, you know .. ([4] That's right) ([1] .. it's going to supermarkets ..) .. shopping, going to the supermarket ..

[3] Oh, I don't burn puddings and make a mess .. reset tables on top of unset tables and things ..

[2] Well, I shared your view of her, I used to think: Well, get off your backside, do something with your life, but, if she had have done there would have been no programme, you know .. (<Int> Oh, that's right, yes.) ([4] Yes, yes.) .. so in a way, you forgive that ..

[3] .. But there are lots of women like her, and you can understand that that is a situation .. ([2] Yeah, there's lots of women who ..) .. that a lot of women are in.

[2] Exactly.

<Int> .. And as somebody said the other day to me, she had such incredible .. depth where it mattered anyway .. ([2] Yes, yes.) .. ... .. or where women think it matters, you know, when it came to actual relationships .. ... .. that was the important part but it did .. you know, she did just drive me round the bend, .. ... ..

[2] But why cook every day for your husband and grown-up kids, you know .. that's just, er .. very .. ([1] That was her very existence, wasn't it? ..) .. that was her raison d'être, isn't it? .. ([1] Yes, only ..) .. coming home to cook lunch .. (General assent) .. or try to cook lunch.

[3] Yes.

(Laughter)

<Int> .. ... .. I don't know whether there will be any, but .. ... .. how do you think .. children figure in situation comedies? ... I mean, a lot of situation comedies are about families, but there aren't an awful lot where there are children in them.

(Pause)

(Laughter)

[2] A bit distracting, I think .. ... ..

[3] The only ones I can think of are American ones which .. ... .. you can't really sort of compare them with British ..

<Int> .. because I think in British ones there's only adult children, aren't there? .. If you see what I mean.

[2] Yes, yes.

[3] Yes, the Butterflies type children. .. ... .. There's that one .. ([1] .. ... .. I can't really think of many ..) .. Different Strokes, that sort of thing.

.. ... ..

[1] Do you remember years ago .. ... ..  
Wendy Craig and Not in Front of the  
Children? .. (<Int> That's right.) ..  
but that was years gone, and I can't  
really remember a great deal about it.

[2] Oh ... yes I forget that one, yes.

<Int> That was pre-Butterflies, wasn't it?

[1] Yes. Oh, yes, it was a long long time  
ago, and I think that was the haphazard  
household .. ... .. she had very young  
children, I can't really .. remember any  
more about it.

.. ... ..

[2] What's that Hywel Bennett one, there was  
a baby in that, wasn't there?

<Int> Oh, yes, isn't that ..

[4] Oh, yes.

[1] Oh yes ... .. on Channel 4 ..

<Int> Oh ..

[4] ... The baby never actually appeared,  
though, did it?

[2] Well it was always crying upstairs,  
wasn't it? .. ([4] That was about it,  
wasn't it?) .. the girl always had to go  
.. ([1] Never materialised.) .. what was  
it called that, it was one name wasn't  
it. Erm, like Sweeney or ...

<Int> Shelley.

[4] Shelley, that's right.

[2] Shelley, that's it, right.

<Int> Like Sweeney.

(Laughter)

[2] Well, it sort of begins with S, ends  
with Y.

<Int> .. ... .. Which do you think is more  
appealing, to actually see situation  
comedy about women, or about men, and  
the only one I can think specifically

about men at the moment is, er, Last of the Summer Wine, and I realise that is about old men.

[2] (Unintelligible) about different places, from the place setting .. ... .. the age when it was .. it was supposed to be fairly modern, but it sort of harked back so much .. ... .. it's a different type of comedy .. ... .. you're looking at a different part of the country altogether ... there's not the middle class of people from the south .. ... .. You see, I don't find that funny, I mean ... do you like Last of the Summer Wine?

[3] Yes, but not .. ([1] I didn't used to but I've actually ..) .. not hilariously, there are some .. er .. ([1] .. I've grown to .. yes.) .. some witty observances in it, but I don't find them sort of, you know .. roll about laughing.

[1] Well ... I wouldn't say that I actually .. ... .. find it more humorous, you know ..

[4] .. I can watch one-off .. ([3] They're all repeats ..) .. but I couldn't sit down and watch every one.

[2] No.

[3] They're all repeats (unintelligible) anyway, you know.

(Laughter)

<Int> When you watch situation comedy, do you tend to follow it .. ... .. ([2] Yes.) .. to put aside the half-hour that your particular favourite .. ([2] Yes.) .. situation comedy is on?

[2] Yeah.

[1] I try to ..

[4] Depends then on which ..

[3] .. I mean, I don't get terribly upset ..

<Int> Well, I mean, if you can, you know.

[4] .. you enjoy it, mm.

- <Int> Mm.
- [2] With .. ... .. the high quality ones like Butterflies, yes ... I would.
- [1] Because I used to .. it was the highlight of my week to watch Butterflies.
- [4] Yeah.
- (General assent)
- [2] ... Or sort of video it and whatever, but .. ... .. that's a highlight of my viewing week, yeah.
- <Int> ... What did you think of the other characters in Butterflies?
- [2] All very good .. ([3] Oh, I think ..) .. all excellent .. ([3] .. they're superb, yes.)
- [1] They're amazing, they're so .. simply superb, I mean ..
- [4] Yes.
- [2] The char was the best, what was her name?
- [1] The charlady, yes.(<Int> Mm, yes.) I thought .. no ..(<Int> Ruby.) .. Yes. The person I .. I disliked most was, erm, Leo .. was it? ..
- [2] Oh, I liked Leo, I fancied him, actually.
- [1] Oh I didn't, oh, I thought he was all mouth. Absolute wet.
- <Int> Who's Leo?
- [2] He's the, er, bit on the side.
- [1] ... Was he called Neill?
- [4] Oh ..
- [3] No ..
- <Int> Leonard .. Leonard.
- [3] Leonard.

- [2] Leonard.
- [1] Yes .. well I didn't like him at all.
- [4] Yes, he annoyed me a bit, mm.
- [1] No, he just really .. got my goat ..  
([2] Oh, I liked him. I liked the chauffeur.) .. thoroughly disliked him. I preferred the sons better .. ([3] Oh, the chauffeur was very good ..) .. I thought the sons were superb. .. ([4] And Ben, I .. ) ... I used to say .. ([3] Yes, I .. did like him.) .. if only N--- [son] could grow up to be half of what they were .. too spirited .. ([4] Yeah.) ([2] On the dole.) .. *joie de vivre*.

(Laughter)

- [1] Yes, I thought they were great, I don't care ..
- [4] They were, yeah.
- <Int> What did you think of the other people? .. the other characters in The Mistress that we've not actually discussed? There's the .. ... .. I think she must be an au pair .. or the char, or whatever she is .. she's either foreign or she's stupid ..

[3] Jo.

[2] Puerto Rican, I should imagine.

<Int> ... And there was the .. Maxine's friend, Jenny, and there was Luke's friend in the office, whose name I don't recall.

[2] It didn't strike me as being very real, .. ... .. they were the contrived part [sic] about it, you know, they both had a friend they could talk to .. ([3] Mm.) .. didn't seem very real.

[3] ... Well I don't know, Luke's friend was a sort of .. what? .. a rebound board, wasn't he? He was .. nothing, you know .. office wimp.

(General agreement)

- [2] Not very .. not very .. sort of strong character, no.
- [3] Her friend was probably the most implausible one of the lot .. I thought, and she was just .. (<Int> Why?) .. She was just .. too much there, and available, and .. (<Int> Mm.) ([2] Drop everything, and I'll look after you ..) .. I had an affair with a married man too, and .. too much in common .. ([4] Yeah.) .. and too able to look after the pets, you know, sort of .. ([2] Yes.) .. I mean, for somebody to be able to sort of recite straight off what she's just been told about the animals, well it was .. well, she could see it all, she just (unintelligible) say: the rabbit food, the budgie food, the .. oh sorry, the singing finch food, the .. cat food, etcetera. .. (<Int> Yeah.) .. I thought it was a bit .. just .. too much .. organised .. ([2] Mm.) .. People aren't like that.
- [2] No ... that's the contrived bit to me.
- <Int> How did you feel about all of the animals in Maxine's .. flat or house, or whatever?
- [3] It was too clean ..
- [1] Well it ... was part of her lifestyle, it was just the ..
- [4] It didn't fit in with her flat .. ([2] Replacing the man which she really wanted.) .. or the .. whatever she lived in there, but er ..
- [1] I know, but she was a trendy little .. trendy little what? .. Don't know, but ..
- [2] Yeah, and that's a bit over-trendy ..
- [4] Well I would have expected someone who had all of those animals to have been in a mess inside as well.
- [3] It was an enormous place as well. .. ([4] Yeah.) .. It was an enormous place and there were stairs going upstairs and there was still this enormous, er,

living area, and there was obviously a dining area and a kitchen behind ..

[1] I'm moving in tomorrow. .. (<Int> Yeah.)  
.. Pets and all, it was superb.

<Int> Yeah.

[2] I think they were meant to be, I don't know, perhaps I'm reading too much into it, sort of symbolic of the affection she wanted to bestow on him. I don't think she's happy being a mistress, you know, and I think .. (<Int> Mm.) .. you know, some women are quite happy to be mistresses and sort of be kept, or whatever, and .. live with their animals .. ([3] But she needs some permanence ..) .. but she wants him .. ([1] Yes, I .. yes, I think you're probably right.) .. you know, she does seem to want him so .. as she can't have him, she has the rabbits, and .. ([4] .. her animals ..) .. I don't know ..

<Int> How do you feel ... about ... her relationship? ... She was saying ... the cons against the relationship ... with ... Luke was the deceit, and not being able to ... be seen with him, and .. I can't remember the others .. and the pros were ... well, she loved the agony of it ..

[4] Yeah.

[2] Do you know, it's probably very true. I think it's ..

[1] Oh, 'cause ... .. she was portrayed as being quite a dramatic person .. who probably thrived on the agony ... you know, the excitement and the build-up and the back to where he's gone, you know, two months later.

[2] Well .. ... .. I think most women .. well I don't know, most women, I was speaking for myself ... you like drama, I like, sort of .. the occasional dramatic event, and you can't really have that without some kind of agonising or agony, and .. I think that's probably what she's trying to say, that she .. you know ... she likes excitement in her life and excitement included, sort of

suffering .. ([1] Yes.) .. and she's prepared to have both .. ([1] .. put some hard work in ..) .. ... .. because they both came together.

[1] Harking back to ... the fact that you mentioned children in situation comedy .. when I actually think about it, if the children were sort of included as .. not the main character but ... as quite important parts and they were young children, I don't think it could have the same .. same appeal, I don't think they could .. 'cause if he was with children and bald, you know ... perhaps he wouldn't be as likely to be popping off .. 'cause his mistress would have cared and so I think it would lose all its appeal, and its .. its, it's pretty near ..

[3] ... You would be cast more in the baddie role, wouldn't you? .. ([1] Yes.) .. that he's actually deserting his wife .. ([1] Yes.) .. and children.

[4] And children, yeah.

[1] Yes, but at the moment he's, you know .. ([2] He's just dallying, isn't he?) .. his wife is still very well kept .. ([3] ... She's quite capable .. of looking after herself anyway ..) .. and she's got this beautiful house, and she .. yes, yes .. ([3] Yes.) .. ... .. because his children could actually spoil the angle ..

<Int> Mm. I can't get over the way they both .. I mean you can cope with Jane Asher looking good because she .. in a sense is a bit like, er Ria .. ([2] Mm.) .. but ... she's a housewife that doesn't seem to do very much, but Felicity Kendal ... supposed to work all day ..

[2] .. has a full time job ([4] Yeah.) .. and who cleans her house there .. I don't see any char around.

<Int> How many people do you see who've worked in a flower shop all day .. looking that good?

[1] She wears very well, doesn't she? .. ((Laughter)) .. All these .. all you see

are all these men, all these boyfriends  
.. she looks terrific on it.

.. . . .

<Int> Do you think the part that Jane Asher plays .. . . . do you think she suits the part from her .. sort of past acting career .. that .. that you know of?

[2] Well ... yeah, she always .. well, whenever I've seen her she's never been neurotic or out of control ... so I'm sure ... she's admirably suited for this sort of elegant, cool, calm, collected wife, you know. ... I don't know how it's going to unfold, I mean, presumably she'll have some sort of emotional outburst when she .. . . . if she does find out, I don't know, I don't know what the series will do ..

[1] How long is the series and how many ..

<Int> Six weeks.

[1] Six weeks ..

<Int> But apparently they've planned .. ([1] Quite a short run ..) .. a second series already. At least I think it's six weeks. I'm telling everybody it's six weeks, so I presume it is, with it being the first series. (Pause) As I was saying, though ... they've either planned or they've actually started on production of the second series, so they must be expecting it to go well .. ([1] Mm.) .. When you were talking about *Solo* before, was the appeal of that mainly the man in it, for you?

[1] No, I don't think so, it was the flat, it (unintelligible) a wicker chair, and she had a pussy cat on her knee, and her mum kept popping in for coffee but going away, you know, at the appropriate moments, which is really nice, you know ..

.. . . .

[3] I thought her mother was the best part in that ..

[2] ... She had a terrific lover at one point, I don't ..

[1] Yes, yes.

(Laughter).

<Int> How do you think of the characters .. the women characters in Carla Lane .. series compared to women characters in other series ... the only .. er .. woman protagonist I can actually think of I .. ... .. I'm not thinking of Penelope Keith now, actually, either, but I was thinking of, erm, Maureen Lipman in Agony.

[2] I loved that, I thought that was excellent. .. ... .. Do you mean comparing Maureen Lipman with .. ... .. Carla Lane's heroines?

<Int> Yes, as regards realism and as regards appeal.

[2] ... Agony, I think she was much more real than anything .. I've seen Felicity Kendal do, I mean, I'm not saying hers aren't real, but ... Maureen Lipman was .. you know she was ... no pretence, no artifice, no .. you know, she was .. ... .. totally one hundred per cent realistic, I thought, in her role .. whereas Felicity Kendal ... she's a terrific actress and I .. I'm sure, you know, women are like that, but .. ([1] I've met them.) .. there's a bit .. little bit of sort of .. she's a bit too .. I don't know what the word is .. ([1] Sweetie sweetie ..) .. sweetie, yeah, she's .. ([3] You sound like the (unintelligible) advert ..) .. she's a bit too: Aren't men wonderful, you know .. ([1] Yeah.) .. and I .. sort of think, well all right, some are, you know, some aren't, I mean she's .. I don't know if you watched on Terry Wogan I was sickened by the way she was sort of sycophantic, you know, sucking up to Terry Wogan, saying .. ([4] Yes, she was rather ..) .. you poor dear, all these people who criticise you, poor darling, you know, I think men are wonderful, I want .. oh do me a favour, you know, I just got a bit .. I suppose it's, you know .. having seen her in that, I'm a

bit more critical, you know, than I used to be .. . . .

<Int> When ... you see the people who star in situation comedies, you see the women, why do you think they are chosen for the parts?

[2] Because they're good-looking, partially .. . . .

<Int> So you think they're chosen to appeal to men?

[1] I always ... associate Felicity Kendal and Hannah Gordon, in some respects, because I see them both .. .. as sort of .. ([4] They're both very ..) .. quite .. quite small .. ([4] .. soft and gentle ..) .. and petite and gentle ..([4] .. aren't they, yes.) .. and I think there's something .. I don't know .. very vulnerable about them, or, you know ..

[2] They're very womanly .. ([1] Yes.) .. I suppose, and it's an awful, sort of, sexist thing to say anyway, but ... they're what, I suppose, men like to think of women as being and some women perhaps would like to see themselves as, I think it's .. ([1] Very good looking and very witty, and ... quite intelligent, you know, and all that sort of thing ..) .. independent, I think you could call it, they're all .. ([1] .. but sort of, trendy doormats, too.) .. ... .. yes.

<Int> So, it's as much an appeal to women as to men, do you think .. parts like that?

(Pause)

[2] I don't know, I don't know whether men ..

[4] Er, I think they appeal ... more to women than to men .. ([2] More to women, yeah ..) .. I don't know why, but .. just .. ([2] Yes.) .. I know my husband wouldn't sit down and watch Felicity Kendal every week.

<Int> No, mine wouldn't either.

(Pause)

[4] He watched quite a lot of Butterflies ..  
... .. but .. I think it was the teenage  
sons .. ([2] The Good Life .. that he ..  
... .. that appealed to ..

[2] 'Cause it was always .. I never saw a  
bad Butterflies, I mean, all the  
characters in that were .. ([4] Mm.) ..  
all perfectly chosen .. all superbly  
acted, you know .. ([3] Mm.) .. there  
was no flaw in that at all, I don't  
think .. ([4] There wasn't ..) .. there  
was nothing .. ([4] No ..) .. even  
sometimes the script was a bit, you  
know, slightly dull, but even then,  
because the actors were all perfectly  
chosen and all did their jobs superbly  
well .. ... .. it was just worth  
watching for a sort of piece of ...  
perfection really ..

<Int> Mm, so even those actors that .. we  
didn't really know previously, I mean  
like the two sons .. ([2] Mm.) ...  
fulfilled the roles they had so well  
that .. it was worthwhile?

[2] Yes.

<Int> Well, I think .. I think that's .. I  
think we'll call that a day.

END OF RECORDING

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Individual Transcript

FEMALE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW [A]

17 January 1985

[A] is a white woman in her late thirties. She left school at 16, but four years ago she enrolled as a mature student to take a degree at Sheffield City Polytechnic, where she graduated last year. She is divorced and lives as a single parent with her 14 year old son and 12 year old daughter, in a council flat, converted from a large house, in Nether Edge, a predominantly middle class and student area of Sheffield to the west of the city centre.

[A] is unemployed, but heavily involved in various voluntary tenant associations and housing projects. She is passionately interested in everything to do with Sheffield and its people.

I first met [A] four years ago as we were fellow students. She has become a good friend.

The discussion took place after the viewing of Episode One of The Mistress in [A]'s lounge, a large room with a high ceiling. [A]'s daughter, J--- joined us to watch The Mistress and then left the room when our taped discussion began. The discussion was recorded on a cassette tape recorder. The recording was of good quality and clear. The discussion lasted approximately 40 minutes.

Whilst viewing The Mistress [A] made regular comments about the actresses' physical appearance, such as:

[A] [Ref. Jane Asher] Nobody's as skinny as that.

[Ref. Felicity Kendal] She's just a chocolate box beauty.

<Int> Basically, I want to know if it hadn't clashed with something that you would have watched, would you have watched that situation comedy if I hadn't asked you to?

[A] ... Well .. it would have all depended, whether .. would have certainly watched, I would perhaps come in half way through it because I'd have watched Treasure Hunt definitely ... if it hadn't clashed with Treasure Hunt then we probably would because J--- [12 year old daughter] likes watching it - or likes watching Felicity Kendal because she likes Solo.

<Int> Do you like situation comedies yourself?

[A] Er .. some.

<Int> What about Carla Lane ones in particular .. like Butterflies and so on?

[A] Well I love Butterflies ... but I didn't see that so .. quite as much as a situation comedy as ... just a series ... that was .. well it was funny incidentally .. it was a much more serious and thoughtful look at a situation.

<Int> Mm, it was only by the way though, that .. yeah.

[A] Yes. Yes, and there was the irony, and the ... and that sort of thing that made it funny. It was not .. I didn't see it ... as being .. it was exploration of an idea rather than a set-up situation.

<Int> Did you see ... what did you think of Solo?

[A] I thought that was terrible .. I thought she was a .. I suppose because I'm on my own ... and therefore direct experience of what she was supposed to be doing .. I thought she was abysmal .. I thought she was .. she was weak .. I just didn't like it at all, I couldn't relate to her as a single woman at all ... it was all to do with falling back on men all the time, and seeing men as some kind of crutch rather than as .. as people .. ... .. I didn't like Solo at all.

<Int> In Butterflies, how did you think .. of the relationship of the characters there? I mean the fact that the series worked better, I think ... shows that most people found it more interesting, but .. how did you think that the relationship between the ... men and Ria, because Ria was really the only woman in that series except .. ([A] Yeah).. for her .. cleaning woman.

[A] ... There seemed to be much greater complexity ... Ria was .. ... .. I find it difficult to say what the difference was, but I ... felt that she was much more real. Much more. .. There was much more depth to the character ... she was fallible, I suppose, because .. there seemed to be less .. well it was just generally more real. .. ... .. She had far more .. ... .. well things ... didn't work out .. they weren't predictable, I don't think .. ... .. that her relationship with .. what was his name .. Leonard .. that fellah .. ... .. it was .. I don't know, I don't think .. something to do with Wendy Craig that acted. I mean, she had different persona from Felicity Kendal ... I think Felicity Kendal's femininity is ... exploited rather than explored .. (<Int> Oh, yes.) .. ... and I see nothing wrong with ... with her ... femininity, or anybody .. any woman's femininity. It's just the way it's ... used.

<Int> No, I think that's really interesting, because I mean I agree with about the exploited, I've not thought about the ... explored and that's right, because there's ..

[A] Oh, I mean this is something I think about a lot because I ... when I think about my own .. when I think of myself as a feminist ... I will .. ... .. not at the same ... time deny my own femininity. .. ... .. And it's a question of how does a feminist .. come to terms with that .. ... .. and .. I see it as .. in practical terms, when I'm in a rela .. when I am in a situation with a man .. where that situation is one that could be between any two people .. ... .. where it's

something you're discussing, negotiating or whatever, then you are strictly two people, and if the man uses his masculinity in order to .. ... .. negotiate the situation then ... I will retaliate ... probably in like kind. I will become equally aggressive .. ... .. and I see that as ... being wrong ... by the same token, I must never ... exploit my own femininity within that kind of situation.

<Int> So do you think that the ... characters in Solo are .. actually ... you say they're portrayed unreally [sic], or she is portrayed .. Gemma? Is it Gemma?

[A] I thnk so, something like that.

<Int> Well, something trendy.

(Laughter)

[A] I'm really dissap .. no, anyway ..

(Laughter)

<Int> No, it's all right, you know, do say.

[A] I was just going to say .. ... .. this latest thing's rather spoiled my theory about the other woman's always called Helen [[A]'s own name], because it's the other way round this time .. (<Int> Yes.) .. 'cause all ... the sort of ... I don't know, all the other women, all the third parties in these triangles, particularly in radio plays and books, all sort of strong women who have affairs with men and sort of come out comparatively unscathed .. (<Int> Sort of cool women.) .. Oh, yes, they're always called Helen, you see ..

<Int> I wonder if Helen goes with cool?

(Laughter)

[A] I don't really know.

<Int> So, the names in this, there's Helen, the wife, and there's .. I think it's Maxine.

[A] Maxine, yes. Yes, I think .. yes, I mean we always associate names with things, although Maxine can be terribly cool.

<Int> Yeah, well ... I always think of Maxine as sort of fluffy ..([A] Oh.) .. but then I knew somebody called Maxine who ... did exploit her own ... femininity .. and I think that has a lot to do with it, hasn't it, if you know somebody? ... In this programme .. ... .. or in any of them .. Felicity Kendal's in .. do you think that she exploits her femininity or that the character asks for it, or both? .. (Pause) .. I'm not sure whether that's answerable, actually.

[A] No, it's a bit like the chicken and the egg, isn't it? .. (<Int> Mm.) .. You see, I mean ..

<Int> I mean, do you think she is chosen deliberately to be the fluffy type?

[A] Oh, I think so, because .. but .. ... .. I think she's chosen for men rather than for women. .. .. Felicity Kendal the person I have no objections to .. ... .. but the characters she's played in these two Carla Lane series I find .. I'm not happy with this one .. having been in both those situations .. ... .. both as the wife, although .. yeah, yes, as the wife, both knowing and not knowing .. ... .. and as .. well, I would ... never be anybody's mistress.

(Laughter)

<Int> Yes, well it's an unfortunate term, really ..

[A] Yeah, I mean I actually object to the title .. (<Int> Yes.) .. because I think ... it's the .. well, I just don't like it all ... although it could be used as a pun .. is she a mistress of her own destiny, as much as his mistress? It's a bit .. (<Int> Oh, I never thought of that.) .. ... .. it is possible to take it two ways .. (<Int> Yes.) .. but even ..

<Int> Particularly with Carla Lane, because she's quite subtle, isn't she .. ([A] Yes.).. as regards a lot of stuff?

[A] But .. I still don't like the title, but I think it's something to do with Carla Lane liking the single word titles .. that applies to Solo.

<Int> What was the music like to this, can you remember? I can't.

[A] No .. no I like .. now I loved the music to Solo.

<Int> I can't even remember it.

[A] It was all ... piano music, was it Chopin? But it was all classical music .. (<Int> Yes.) .. and I liked it, and that's it .. I liked Butterflies because they used a lot of classical music in that.

<Int> What did you like about Ria?

[A] Oh, I don't know, because she was fallible, I suppose, because ... she was constantly .. having to wrestle with her own conscience, and ... to .. wrestle with the fact that .. life was a series of compromises, and I don't necessarily think that they were essentially female compromises, I think ... that her husband and her two sons ... and .. Leonard, they all ... it was all about ... compromise .. ... .. but trying to make a satisfactory compromise, because nothing is ever perfect, I mean .. much as she tried to cook perfectly, it just never worked out, and her own sons .. I mean, there was the whole thing about the elder one .. Adam .. realising that she was ... had got another relationship outside the marriage, and being able to cope with it .. even though that actually affected the relationship between the mother and the son .. and the other one having to come to terms with the fact that even though he wanted .. that that girl was going to have his baby .. (<Int> That's right.) .. he had to cope with all that. .. (<Int> Yes.) .. Now I know this .. this thing is also about .. compromise .. but ... it's all ... far too set up, far too .. I mean the sets are so unrealistic for a start .. ... .. and that always puts me off, because they can't actually .. I mean,

people do live like that, but not ...  
not very many people ..

<Int> Well, I mean, we were saying, weren't we, when it was actually on, about ... how the houses are always absolutely gorgeous .. ([A] Yes.).. there's never any dirt.

[A] You see, ever since I've lived here, almost .. there's been a woman who lives round the corner ... in a .. I think she lives in a terraced house .. ... .. and I think she works as a barmaid at a pub in town and, well, she comes home on the bus, and her husband meets her off the bus, and he's ... walking the dog .. ... .. every Thursday .. and it used to be every Wednesday ... at three o'clock, a car pulls up outside here, and she gets out, and she goes home. She's had ... it's not one affair she's had, it's several, and that's her routine .. and ... you know, I mean, it takes one to know one, but .. (<Int> Yes.) (Laughter) .. but ... she must live with that all the time, she must .. and that's the reality ... and I think there's ... you see, I mean, the ... whole business about her .. she went into it knowing as well what she was getting herself into ... I think they should actually be exploring that, rather than ... well maybe it will, I don't know, but .. I understand her when she's .. screaming against the deceit, the .. ... .. uncertainty of the arrangements .. ... .. because any arrangements that get messed about always make .. you know, can make you angry anyway, it doesn't have to be .. (<Int> Yes.) .. that kind of thing .. (<Int> Yes.) .. and I understand that completely, and I also know from my own experience how .. awful it is to feel that the man doesn't have the courage of his convictions, and that's something I don't know .. I don't think there's an easy answer to that either, because .. at ... one and the same time as a woman, you're actually betraying another woman .. ... .. and that's very .. well you have to cope with that yourself, so you must recognise .. the problems it creates for the man, and I suppose .. it would be the same .. you know .. in any triangle

.. but .. to actually .. harangue .. the person .. ... .. it's such a whining and wingeing .. ... .. in a sense, I .. I mean .. I don't know .. I think ... it's actually a misery that you have to cope with .. by yourself .. because .. I think ... any woman, or I suppose, any man that goes into a relationship that already exists is fooling themselves if they're thinking they're going to do any ... other than have ... odd good moments.

<Int> So when ... they actually portray the fact that every time they meet, in a sense, the tension of the actual relationship gets the better of them, you think that is ... sort of unrealistic enough not to be enjoyable?

[A] Well ... it's unrealistic ... it's not necessarily ... unrealistic of real life situations, but I think it's unrealistic in terms of expectations of the characters. ... .. but then maybe, if you were to have a series which said: ... look how much fun an extra-marital affair can be, if .. the people involved are prepared to ... see it in that way .. (<Int> They'd have an awful lot of letters to ..) .. Absolutely. .. (<Int> Yes.) .. and ... there is another thing .. I mean I don't believe, anyway, that ... two people .. can be totally faithful to one another throughout their lives ... I mean not just .. not particularly in a physical sense .. ... .. but that it's actually important to explore your feelings with other people ... and that ... the other side of it is that then allows you to explore your feeling about ... the person who .. would allow the husband to explore his feelings about his wife .. ... .. and perhaps become more positive .. I mean .. ... .. there is a role for somebody outside the marriage, if they can be sensitive to it ... but ... it's a very, very difficult thing to do, and I don't know that you could actually portray it on television. I think .. I just wish .. that they'd perhaps .. picked a different sort of character, you see, Maureen Lipman in that .. that thing that she does .. (<Int> Mm. Agony.) .. Yes. .. (<Int> Yes.) .. now there, I

haven't seen it very much, but I've come across it a couple of times and I know ... that it's a slightly different .. ... .. situation, but there it actually tries to confront .. the problems of ... maintaining relationships with several people at one time .. ... .. I just think this is all too neat.

<Int> ... What do you think .. I can't remember his name .. ([A] The fellah.).. the fellah, what do you think of him? Casting.

[A] I don't like him. I don't like him, I don't .. it's partly to with ... he's not my type .. (<Int> Yeah.) .. so, I mean that ... but .. I don't know, I think ... it's just .. he seems a typical male, who just wants somebody .. he wants the best of all possible worlds.

<Int> When you actually knew that this series was called The Mistress, what did you ... what would you have liked it to have been like, and what did you actually expect it to be like, and how did it fulfil .. you know, which did it fulfil?

[A] Well, I think it was like I expected it to be .. having seen the Carla Lane Felicity Kendal team in the last thing .. ... .. so, that didn't surprise me. I mean, as far as I'm concerned ... it's Solo gone semi-Solo, almost .. (<Int> Yes. ... .. Solo extending.) .. Yeah ... it's a sort of ... then she's actually got herself reasonably together now, but then ... I don't know ... I would have liked it to be much wittier, because that's my kind of humour .. much sharper.

<Int> Even though ... Butterflies wasn't sharp?

[A] No .. no .. but it was .. I suppose it was poignant, if you .. ... .. want to think of a word, and that has ..

<Int> Yeah, actually, Butterflies has been described as .. a series of little plays, rather than .. ([A] Yeah.).. a situation comedy.

[A] And it was ... poignancy has a certain edge to it. .. (<Int> Yes.) .. Now I don't ... see this in the same league at all, it's not ..

<Int> ... When you knew Felicity Kendal was in it, and you knew that she was playing the title role, did you know exactly what ... kind of character she would play?

[A] Oh, I think so.

<Int> How about Jane Asher?

[A] Well, I like Jane Asher ... for all sorts of reasons, partly because she can make amazing cakes, which .. (laughter) .. and she's married to Gerald Scarfe, which .. you know .. I mean .. [raises eyebrows in appreciation and winks] (Laughter) .. so I do ... but I ... like her ... she's also .. an intelligent and sensitive woman ... I would like to see more of her .. I would have actually have liked them .. I mean presumably they are going to ... explore her more because they wouldn't have got somebody like Jane Asher in to play the wife unless ... she was going to .. (<Int> Yes.) .. she's not going to be used as a foil, I wouldn't imagine.

<Int> I shouldn't have thought so, actually, I mean in a sense it is difficult to discuss after ... one thing .. ([A] Yes.).. when we don't .. when we've not seen .. ([A] No.).. the characters develop, or whether they develop.

[A] ... And I think she had the best line about: I don't whine to you about my mortgage, so don't talk to me about your overheads .. (<Int> Wonderful.) .. I thought, you know, I must remember that one, and that was .. that was the best line in the whole play, it was ... in much the same way as I always thought in The Good Life, Margot had the best lines .. (<Int> Oh, yeah.) .. I mean ... when they first began to develop her character, was the time when she was paying her rates, and she's saying: I will pay for so-and-so and so-and-so but I'm not paying for the others because they don't bloody work .. (Laughter) ..

Well ... she didn't say that, but ... I mean I identify with strong women, and therefore when I come across someone like Felicity Kendal .. wavering .. (<Int> Yes.) .. all the time .. I find it difficult .. (<Int> Instead of confronting ..) .. yes, yes. ... Because .. I mean, when he says to her you got yourself .. you know ... it took two of us, you knew what you were letting yourself in for, he's right. The problem is that .. it can be used as .. a getout .. ... .. for all ... the men.

<Int> Mm. What about the way the women look, in all of the .. situation comedies which we .. talked about?

[A] Well ..

<Int> I mean, I know we said ... about the houses, you know ... do any normal houses look that good, you know, but what about the way the women look?

[A] Well ... I think ... well they are good clothes horses anyway, aren't they, Jane Asher and Felicity Kendal, so I mean, they've got that going for them anyway ... they could put anything on them and look all right.

<Int> Mm. That's right. Well, they're both skinny for a start, aren't they?

[A] Yeah. ... But having said that I'm .. certainly from the point of view .. of .. I don't like the word mistress, but ... the other woman, other women always look nice when ... they're playing the role of the other woman because .. (<Int> That's right.) .. because that's what ... that's the only time .. well I'm not saying they always look nice, but they always .. (<Int> To keep the bloke they've got to, yeah.) .. Well, I don't know that it's necessarily keeping ... quite that so much as the time you spend together is so little, and therefore in a way so precious, although I don't like that word, so important, that ... I think you're more likely to make the effort .. ... .. because it's part of the importance of the thing. Now ... that's where the wife loses out .. ... .. and that's where .. (<Int>

Because she's seen in the rubber gloves and ..) .. Yeah. .. (<Int> Yeah.) .. Yeah, and ... it's not possible, and ... nor is it right that the wife should ... although .. I mean, I suppose it's ... stereotyping roles again, and that's ... that was one of the things I noticed was ... it's not really an exploration of .. the situation of women, I know .. and I don't really think it's an exploration of the role of women today, particularly. I don't ... they could've explored ... they could've done the same thing in Victorian times. .. ... .. or .. any time ... those women aren't ... 1980s women in particular. They've got all the trappings of 1980s, but I don't think the positions that they appear to be adopting .. (<Int> Yes.) .. as being .. (<Int> Yes.) .. particularly 1980s

<Int> With you saying that, what did you think of the actual sequence, where it showed all the .. ... .. portraits of women?

[A] Oh, I thought that definitely set the agenda. ... And ... I didn't like it at all. ... They're all passive and beautiful and lying about .. and .. you know .. I mean .. from the point of view of ... a male viewer, I would have thought it fulfilled .. all their .. all the things they've ... dreamed about ... and they would ... identify with the man, I mean, he's in this terrible dilemma, because he's trying to keep two women happy ... but's all done at a very sort of .. fairly sort .. it's all very fluffy and lighthearted and they'd be able to say: oh God yes, that's happened to me and all, but joke about it ..

<Int> ... Do you think women could joke about it?

[A] Oh yes, oh yes, I mean I could tell you some tales that are funny now, but ..

(Laughter)

<Int> Not until we're switched off.

(Laughter)

[A] Yes, I mean of course ... you've got to be able to ... retain your sense of

humour ... not just for the sake of the situation but for the sake of your .. yourself, with or without the situation, but ... yes, yes ... I mean, it is funny, but .. it doesn't ask .. that men .. think about .. what they're doing, you see men from .. the .. I mean, the picture's sort of saying to men: this is what mistresses are about, this ... you know ... it's a long-standing profession is being a mistress .. ... .. and so they, I mean they've grown up with ideas of what it's about. .. ... .. And the series doesn't appear to be questioning .. ... .. their views then at all. It's confirming it.

<Int> Do you think it's aimed at a male audience, then?

(Pause)

[A] Well ... I don't know, I would think it probably also appeals to a certain sort of female audience, who ... I don't know, all I can say is that I, personally, can't identify with it, partly because of ... the sort of social trappings that she's got .. the wife's a different thing altogether ... I could cope with that, if I thought that ... her character was going to .. have some real depth to it ... but I don't think it is, it's just a vehicle for Felicity Kendal to explore .. ... .. to .. well to exploit .. her own femininity ... but I mean .. yes, I suppose it will ... some women will like it, and they're not necessarily wrong. I just .. it's just not for me, I don't think, at all. You see, J--- [daughter] likes it .. ... .. because J's attracted .. by the trappings .. (<Int> That's right, because she ..) .. and by .. (<Int> .. she actually mentioned the home, didn't she? ..) .. Yes. .. (<Int> ... and the way it looked.) .. yes, so she liked .. those are the kind of things she likes looking at, there's nothing wrong with looking at those .. ... .. but she .. I mean ... she can't, I mean, she can't begin to ... understand ... what's going on .. ... .. behind it all, because ... she's far too young, but ... no, I'm still not very impressed at all .. I wouldn't ... out of choice watch it

again. I might watch it in two or three weeks time to see if it had got better ..

<Int> To see how it had developed, yes.

[A] ... But I would like to see ... if the Jane Asher character actually confronts the situation, and says things like: I know what's going on, and I can.. understand how it can happen, but ... just because I know and can understand, doesn't mean to say that you have approval, or hundred per cent support, or that I'm even going to walk out on you .. ... .. it's just it's a situation, and it has to be faced up to by all of us.

<Int> What did you think of the other .. characters in it? I mean ... the two main women are fairly famous actresses. ... the man I mean we don't .. really ... in a sense we don't know, because I mean I don't recall him from anything else, I've probably seen him .. ([A] I recognise his face ..) .. I do, but I can't think, can't ... actually relate him to anything .. ([A] No.).. whereas I can relate the others to .. ([A] Yeah.).. specifics .. ([A] Yeah.) .. or types, at least .. ([A] Yeah... What did you think of .. Maxine's friend .. and Helen's .. er au pair, I think?

[A] ... Well, the woman pushing the Hoover was ... portrayed as being a bit thick ... but not even in the way that ... the woman in Butterflies was. I mean, the woman in Butterflies only ever said one line at most, and they were always absolutely spot on .. (<Int> Mm. Streetwise.) .. Yes, definitely ... and this one is sort ... obviously is going to play a ... similar role, but, in that saying: oh, it must be really terrible .. ... .. it's not ... it lacks ... there's no incision in it at all .. ... .. so, I mean, say that's just .. that's a sort of a .. well, I don't know, I didn't reckon much to that, and the other woman, I thought that a deliberate foil or straight to Felicity Kendal in a sense, she ... certainly in terms of Felicity Kendal she was overweight.

<Int> Mind you, I should think anybody in terms of Jane Asher would be overweight. .. ([A] Yes.) .. (Laughter) I feel overweight with Jane Asher.

(Laughter)

[A] ... But I mean it seems to me to be quite deliberate. I can't believe that that is not anything other than deliberate. ... Still portrayed as being totally feminine ... to the point of sitting around painting her nails. Ok, she's obviously very capable, and probably a little more .. mm .. streetwise, I suppose, that Felicity Kendal's .. ... .. character, but ... yeah, I mean, ... she's going to play the: well, you know of course you can come and cry on my shoulder but I've told you, you know .. she's going to be the one that's saying to her: you've got to sock it to him .. ... .. but .. ... .. that's what I see her ... role as, not as any attempt to ... explore her as a woman .. I mean, I know she's only a minor character, but I don't see why they could .. those two aspects couldn't have been incorporated in one single character.

<Int> Yes. Yes.

(Pause)

<Int> What do you think about the way .. subjects in situation comedies ... that centre on women, which is mainly Carla Lane, I think there's .... probably only Agony .. I mean ... there's a few more very recently, like there's Moving House now, with ... Penelope Keith, and ... To The Manor Born with Penelope Keith .. ... .. but even so, all the ones centring around women rather than around men, what do you think of the actual subjects used, the ... subject matter? .. (Pause) .. I mean like, for instance ... this one's called The Mistress .. ([A] Yes.) .. Butterflies is about, you know .. ([A] Yeah.).. another ..

[A] Well .. ... .. there's nothing wrong with exploring .. what women think and feel ... as I say, I think in Butterflies, it was much .. there was

much more ... a much greater attempt to actually explore the real relationships between males and females .. ... .. much more, in terms of husbands and wives and lovers and sons. And therefore, it actually asks men to think about their role in the situation.

<Int> Do you think that can be done in a series .. say, for instance, like this one, like The Mistress, where it's predominantly women, rather than predominantly men, like in Butterflies?

[A] No, I don't ... I don't really think it can ... certainly in this .. mistress thing ... the man's role .. appears to be the link between the two women. ... I mean it's early days, it's difficult to say. It doesn't look to me as though it's going to actually say to male viewers: ... this could be you .. we're asking you to think about ... what effect you're having on these women ... which is what I think Butterflies did. .. ... .. viewers could ... see .. ... .. that the male characters in that .. had a real effect ... and that you could identify with them because .. nothing ever really was right or wrong ..

<Int> Yes, because all the characters had several dimensions, didn't they?

[A] Yeah ... they all tried .. ... .. and like Ria with the cooking, she tried but it never worked out, you know ..

<Int> Which I think, actually came out of the first series, didn't it ... I mean, I know it all .. did develop over two or three series, but I think, the first series we found out about them all, actually .. ([A] Yes.).. in that.

[A] Yes, and ... I really did feel that .. they were real people .. ... .. you could have met them anywhere. .. ... .. I mean ... the boys seemed to me to be .. the sort of .. kids that .. I mean, my own son is growing into .. ... .. or any of the ones at college.

<Int> What do you think about Ria's looks .. ... .. or the way she looks .. in it, because, I mean, you couldn't honestly

say that Wendy Craig was your ... fashionably attractive woman .. ([A] No.)..like you could with Jane Asher and Felicity Kendal.

[A] Yeah. Well I think that was part of it, I think .. ... .. whilst it was obvious that it was ... her playing the role .. ... .. it was in a sense a vehicle for her ... I think it's probably .. say, something about her acting ability as well. ... She did represent something that I saw as being very real, which was somewhere in between my mother .. ... .. and .. oh, I suppose, married women of my own age that I know .. ... .. because ... she's nearer my age .. portraying somebody nearer my age ... than my mother, obviously, but ... the maternal part of her .. ... .. which of course was ... quite clear, and ... yes, the way she dressed and the way she actually walked round with this shopping bag .. ... .. yes, she was much more real, and it was only occasionally that I ..

<Int> And yet she's .. ... .. quite scatty, wasn't she?

(Pause)

[A] Yes .. but .. not to the point of where she couldn't actually cope with a lot of situations ... it was the preoccupations that made her scatty, rather than the reality of ... her actual existence ... I mean, I see her ... her lack of ability to cook as something she was actually born with ... rather than saying anything about her personality, I think it's actually a defect in the way she was put together ... but ... when it came to coping with ... the problems of ... the emotional upheavals ... within the home .. ... .. or whatever ... she seemed to me to be able to ... cope very well with the roles.

<Int> Mm. ... I don't know whether ... there will be any introduced, but do you think there ... would be any .. enriching, if there's such a word, of .. this new series, if there were children involved .. in the marriage?

(Pause)

[A] ... Sort of muddies the waters a bit, doesn't it? ... I don't know, I don't think they're actually necessary, because .. as far as I'm concerned .. it's not ... about marital responsibilities .. or parental responsibilities, it's about responsibilities to human ... one human being to another .. ... .. and therefore the introduction of children would simply add another sort of ... another sugary dimension and I think there's quite sufficient sugar .. ... .. we don't need to ... exploit the ... problems of ... children ... within a ... marriage that could be .. at least, going through a bad patch. ... Certainly not in this series. I think it ...it could be done ... in the way that it was done in Butterflies, and it could have ... been younger children in Butterflies .. ... .. and it would have still worked, it would have still said something about trying to be a wife .. a person in your own right .. ... .. and a mother .. ... .. But not .. this, no ... they would be awfully ... no.

<Int> ... Do you think any of these characters will actually be funny to people? I mean the characters as such ... I know .. we both said that it's the dialogue, in a sense, that ... makes things witty, or the way it's put across, and that Jane Asher actually had the funniest line, but ... do you think for instance, that any other characters .. are going to be .. the funny character, or the ones people will want to switch on to watch, the ones people will find most pleasurable?

(Pause)

[A] ... I don't know, I think that the only ... one that could is one of the minor characters, and that's ... this fellah in the office .. and his role is the same as the ... role for .. (<Int> Yeah.) ... that friend of Felicity Kendal whatever her name's supposed to be ... he could ... be funny, by making .. cutting comments .. ... .. but ... it's a very minor role .. ... .. I think Jane Asher has the greatest .. I mean, we've seen very little of her really, we

haven't seen her standing centre stage, and .. .. haranguing .. .. saying: come on, what's this all about, like Felicity Kendal has already done at great length ... I would ... hope that ... I would like Jane Asher's part to become more significant than Felicity Kendal's .. .. so that ... I mean, provided that it was done in the way that I said earlier, about saying: I know something's going on, and we've got to face up to this. We've got to be realistic about it ... but .. I don't know .. as I say I shall watch it in two or three weeks time, and if I think Jane Asher's role is developing, I might .. .. watch it, just to see Felicity Kendal's .. .. character get down.

<Int> ... Can I interview you again, in a few weeks' time?

[A] Yes.

<Int> ... I think it would be quite interesting to interview people a couple of times over a series, because .. ([A] Yes.).. of developing things. I mean, it might develop so that everybody hates every character .. you know, or something like that, and doesn't want to watch it, and you have to force them, with drink, or something.

(Laughter)

[A] Oh, no, no, no, you won't have to do that, no.

<Int> But I think it would be quite interesting to speak to a few people .. ([A] Yes.).. a few times about it, you know .. ([A] Yes.).. because apparently there's another series actually on the cards, a second series ...

END OF RECORDING

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N.B. The follow-up discussion planned never materialised as we were unable to arrange a mutually convenient time.

APPENDIX V

Fig.9

Adapted and Amended Uses and Gratifications Categories[a] Personal Identity:<a1> **Finding reinforcement for personal values:**

e.g. A programme, or a role portrayed in a programme, confirms beliefs and values already held by the viewer, such as, say, the sanctity of marriage, or equal rights for women.

<a2> **Finding models of behaviour:**

e.g. A viewer perceives the type of behaviour of a character, or in a programme in general, to be appropriate and/or worthy of emulating, such as, the controlled reactions of Helen, the wife in The Mistress. This category also covers the type of language used in programmes, and the ways in which the characters speak.

\*1 <a3> **Identifying with the roles portrayed by valued others in the media:**

e.g. A viewer either considers herself already to be like, or wishes to be like the type of person characterised in a programme, such as Ria, the frustrated housewife in Butterflies.

\*2 <a4> **Identifying with valued others in the media as media personalities:**

e.g. The viewer wishes to be like the media personality portraying the part. This can cover physical looks when, for instance, a viewer wishes to look like Felicity Kendal. It also includes the wish to be as cool and capable as, say, a viewer perceives Jane Asher to be from information she has gained from magazine articles, publicity handouts, or tv interviews.

<a5> **Gaining insight into oneself:**

e.g. Realisation that in 'real-life' situations similar to those portrayed in a programme, the viewer would/would not act in a similar fashion, would/would not be able to cope, etc.

\*1 and \*2: These two subcategories were developed from one of McQuail's subcategories: 'Identifying with valued others in the media'. It was split into two because viewers of The Mistress consistently displayed a distinctly separate

interest in the role portrayed, as well as in the personality portraying it.

[b] Integration and Social Interaction:

<b1> **Gaining insight into circumstances of others/social empathy:**

e.g. Seeing how other people live, exemplified as much by tv fiction as by social documentaries.

\*3 <b2> **Identifying with others in the media and gaining a sense of belonging:**

e.g. When a viewer recognises fictional predicaments as representative of those in 'real-life' and consequently acknowledges that the person portraying the character dealing with those predicaments is sharing the same cultural universe.

\*4 <b3> **Identifying with other viewers and gaining a sense of belonging:**

e.g. Sharing viewing experiences generates a sense of membership of an in-group of viewers, who, although sharing the same cultural universe as the people on screen, are at one and the same time distinct from them. They acknowledge themselves as viewers and perceive the performers as almost separate phenomena: "us viewers", "them performers".

<b4> **Having a substitute for real-life companionship:**

e.g. When a viewer invests care and interest in the fate of fictional characters **as though they are** real people. This is not to say that they truly believe the characters are real people, but that they have regard for them, and talk about them as if they are real. Particular instances of this subcategory have been found amongst viewers of tv soap opera<sup>1</sup>.

<b5> **Finding a basis for conversation:**

e.g. Gossiping about artistes and/or characters was a useful common point of reference in viewers' conversations.

<b6> **Helping to carry out social roles:**

e.g. Seeing certain role behaviour on television can help viewers understand the expectations of similar roles in real life. This is a subcategory

distinct from <a2> which is more to do with the **type of person** the viewer wishes to be seen to be, the way their actions typify their character, e.g. how the viewer perceives the ideal woman should behave. <b6> points up the **role** as opposed to the person, e.g. the wife, or the mother, or the employer, rather than the woman in the role.

**\*3** and **\*4**: These subcategories replace two of McQuail's subcategories: 'Identifying with others and gaining a sense of belonging', and: 'Enabling one to connect with family, friends, and society'. With respect to **\*3**, it was necessary to detail an identification with people in the media as so many of the viewers in this study expressed feelings of belonging to the same world as those on screen. McQuail's second subcategory was changed to that of **\*4** because the viewers of The Mistress insisted on identifying with other viewers and taking the position of "us-viewers" against "them-performers". This suggested a stronger, more deliberate feeling than the 'connection' described by McQuail. The subcategory was altered to express these particular feelings as closely and precisely as possible.

[c] Entertainment:

<c1> **Escaping, or being diverted, from problems:**

e.g. When a programme:

... offers ... a fantasy world which is attractive in itself, and which the viewers can temporarily occupy.<sup>2</sup>

<c2> **Relaxing:**

e.g. When a viewer regards watching tv as restful, i.e. as a change from work, duty or obligation.

<c3> **Getting intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment:**

e.g. When a viewer gains pleasure from the look of a programme, or from, say, the fashions and/or locations depicted. This subcategory also covers the appreciation of humour, and the operation of critical evaluation.

<c4> **Filling time:**

e.g. Watching one tv programme whilst waiting for another one to come on, or watching television until it is time to do something else, etc.

**\*5 <c5> Ritual:**

e.g. Viewing that has become a pleasurable habit, i.e. when viewers make statements such as: "I look forward to each episode", or "I plan my life around such and such a series", or "I never miss a series".

**\*6 <c6> Prediction:**

e.g. A very specific form of enjoyment expressed by viewers of The Mistress was working out what would happen next, and watching to see if their predictions came true. This was a phenomenon also noted in research into viewers of soap opera<sup>3</sup>.

**<c7> Emotional release:**

e.g. When the audience responds to a character's situation, or an artiste's performance by, for instance, laughter, anger, tears, or gasps of fear.

**<c8> Sexual arousal:**

e.g. When a viewer finds one or all of the character[s], artiste[s], situation[s], or subject matter in/of a programme sexually stimulating.

**\*5 and \*6:** These are additional subcategories generated by viewers who had particular habits of viewing. **\*5** incorporates those viewers who stated "I make a point of watching all the Carla Lane series", or, when discussing tv programmes in general: "I watch both episodes of EastEnders in the week, and then the omnibus on a Sunday." **\*6** is associated with **\*5** as it too refers to viewers who view on a planned basis, but it is also distinct from it as these viewers view for a specific purpose other than the comfort of ritual habit. They view in order to predict plots and storylines, to verify their predictions or to compare and evaluate them with the outcomes in the series.

[d] Information:

**<d1> Finding out about relevant events and conditions in immediate surroundings, society, and the world:**

e.g. Particularly from news and current affairs programmes.

**<d2> Seeking advice on practical matters or opinions and decision choices:**

e.g. When "agony aunts", or other "experts" on various subjects such as, say, gardening, finance, etc., are interviewed, or present their own

programmes. This subcategory can also cover tv fiction, where the viewer sees characters beset by problems and learns appropriate ways of dealing with them from the actions the characters take. To a certain extent this subcategory is associated with subcategory <b6> in that it is to do with "how things should be done". <b6> refers to role behaviour in general. <d2> is more specific; it deals with particular situations that crop up, offering specific coping mechanisms.

<d3> **Satisfying curiosity and general interest:**

e.g. Documentaries may reveal facts about people in general, and chat shows about people in particular. This subcategory also caters for the viewer whose interest has been sufficiently stimulated by a programme, whether it be from a factual or a fictional basis, to find out more about its subject matter.

<d4> **Learning, self-education:**

e.g. Particularly from quiz programmes, news, and documentaries, but also from fictional programmes. With respect to news and current affairs programmes this subcategory is associated with <d3>. With respect to tv fiction, it relates to the role behaviour discussed under <b6> and the coping behaviour in <d2>.

<d5> **Gaining a sense of security through knowledge:**

e.g. Viewers who keep abreast of current news items, particularly those to do with perceived enemies of "their" world (e.g. in this study this would be the Western world), may consider themselves more secure than those who live or have lived up until recent times in ignorance of mass media news, merely because of their extra knowledge. (Alternatively, others who also keep up to date with mass media news may feel more insecure through their knowledge as opposed to a state of "blissful" ignorance).

**NOTES**

1. e.g. Hobson op. cit. Hobson found that although viewers talked about the characters in Crossroads 'as though they were real people', they were conscious that they were not real, that they were fictional constructs. An example she gives to

demonstrate this is that when viewers wrote to the characters, they wrote to them at the Crossroads Motel, but the address was always 'care of ATV Studios'. c.f. also Ang [1985] op. cit. Ang found that although her respondents were interested in the realism of the fictional reality, they were always conscious of the actors playing the fictional parts.

2. McQuail, Blumler, and Brown op. cit. (p156).
3. c.f. Montgomerie op. cit. Montgomerie shows that pleasures associated with prediction were some of the major reasons viewers gave for watching EastEnders.

APPENDIX VI"Official" and Perceived Social Class ClassificationsSocial Class: Individuals

In socio-economic terms, the 13 female interviewees could be broadly divided into eight middle class and five working class women. The women's self descriptions relating to their social class positions did not always correspond to the socio-economic status which would "officially" have been allocated to them. Some women who described themselves as working class would, in socio-economic terms, be broadly categorised as middle class, and vice versa. There were five discrepancies between the "official" social class and the women's own self descriptions. Three working class women perceived themselves to be middle class. Two middle class women perceived themselves to be working class. *Fig.10* charts the differences.

The first column of *Fig.10* describes the women's individual social/domestic circumstances, from which details the broad socio-economic categorisations in the second column have been formed. In "official" social class terms, it is women's economic relation to men that determines their socio-economic status. Thus, where the women were married or co-habiting, *Fig.10* lists their husband/partner's occupation rather than their own. The third column records the women's own perceptions of their social class position. The fourth column gives the reasons I perceived to underly any discrepancies between the "official" social class label and the women's self-descriptions/perceptions. These reasons were formulated from what the women said in the recorded discussions as well as from their own descriptions of themselves and their social/domestic circumstances.

Fig.10

	Description / Circumstances	Socio- Economic Category	Self Perception of Social Class	Perceived Reason for Discrepancy
A	Divorced/lone parent/unemployed- no income other than state benefits	Working class	Middle class	Identifies with middle class upbringing (father- manager) rather than with current working class circum- stances
B	Retired widow of Civil Service Manager/pension	Middle class	Middle class	n/a
C	Divorced/Social Worker/Salaried	Middle class	Middle class	n/a

D	Divorced/unemployed- no income other than state benefits	Working class	Middle class	Identifies with middle class upbringing (father- manager) rather than with current working class circum- stances
E	Single/Radio Producer/salaried	Middle class	Working class	Identifies with working class upbringing (father- printer) rather than with current middle class circum- stances/rejects middle class association with the management of capitalism, identifying politically with working class struggle
F	Married/husband- insurance broker/ salaried	Middle class	Middle class	n/a
G	Single/Radio Producer/salaried	Middle class	Working class	Describes everyone in paid work as "working class"
H	Married/husband- teacher/salaried	Middle class	Middle class	n/a
I	Daughter/mother- unemployed/lone parent/no income other than state benefits	Working class	Working class	n/a
J	Married/husband- Probation Service/ salaried	Middle class	Middle class	n/a
K	Married/husband waged-store keeper	Working class	Middle class	Identifies with middle class social prospects rather than with working class up- bringing (father-factory worker)
L	Cohabiting/ partner-Police Sergeant/salaried	Middle class	Middle class	n/a
M	Married/husband- joiner/waged	Working class	Working class	n/a

### Social Class: Groups

Because the groups in this study were not selected on a specific socio-economic representational basis, it was more difficult to describe them as several consisted of both middle and working class members.

From the information available, *Fig 11* categorises the groups in socio-economic terms by their majority members. Of

the nine groups interviewed six could be described as being "officially" middle class, and three as "officially" working class. The group perception of the MA Film Studies Group was the only one which appeared to be at odds with their "official" categorisation.

Fig.11

	Group	Socio-economic category	Group perception of social class	Perceived reason for discrepancy
1	Babysitting Circle/6 xmarried/husbands- managerial or professional	Middle class	Middle class	n/a
2	Women's Guild/ 8xmarried or widowed/husbands- managerial or professional	Middle class	Middle class	n/a
3	Community Centre Workers/5xmarried, 1 co-habiting/all husbands and 1 partner-managerial or professional/1 husband-factory worker	Middle class (majority)	Middle class (majority)	n/a
4	Nursery/First School Teachers/12xmarried/ husbands-managerial or professional/2x single/1 father- factory worker/1 father-unemployed	Middle class (majority)	Middle class (majority)	n/a
5	Young Lesbians/ 3xsingle living in parental home/1x single living alone/4xco-habiting with Lesbian partner/2xfathers -managerial/1- plumber/2-factory workers/2-unem- ployed/1 absent, mother-cleaner	Working class (majority)	Working class (majority)	n/a
6	Sewing Class/4x married/2xhusbands- retired/2-factory workers	Working class	Working class	n/a
7	Friendship group/1x cohabiting/partner- teacher/1xsingle mother living with parents and baby/ father unemployed	Middle class/ Working class	Middle class/ Working class	n/a
8	M A Film Studies Students/1x married/husband- professional/5x single, 4xfathers- managerial or professional, 1- factory worker	Middle class (majority)	Working class	Identification with political "struggle" of working class rather than middle class upbringing
9	Family & Friendship Group/3xmarried/2x husbands-post office workers, 1- factory worker	Working class	Working class	n/a

APPENDIX VIISummary of Uses and Gratifications Categories Applied

Within the four subject areas of Carla Lane, Conventions, Stars and Characters, and Representations of Women, Uses and Gratifications categories were applied as follows:

Carla Lane

The women in the audience were fascinated with Carla Lane, the writer of The Mistress. They were interested in the type of character she was wont to write, the themes and issues she writes about, the series' realism, and the standard of her writing.

Categories <a1>, 'Finding reinforcement for personal values' and <a2>, 'Finding Models of Behaviour' demonstrated how female viewers appreciated Lane's tradition of placing a woman centre stage, and giving a voice to women's concerns and preoccupations. The same two categories, <a1> and <a2>, were applicable to the way viewers perceived Carla Lane's comedies to point up themes and issues close to their own hearts; how she highlighted the ideal romance against a background of everyday domestic practicality, for instance. Responses showed that many felt that their real life experience of wishing for romance but accepting reality was well represented. Viewers also discussed the merits and demerits of The Mistress, comparing fiction with fact, and predicting the likely outcome of the characters and the series, whilst drawing on their memories of past Carla Lane sitcoms such as The Liver Birds and Butterflies. These responses were attributed to three categories: <c3>, 'Gaining intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment', <c6>, 'Prediction' and <b5>, 'Finding a basis for conversation'. The consistently high quality of Lane's writing was a major issue. Category <c3> once again came into play to classify the way in which the audience 'gained intrinsic aesthetic and cultural enjoyment'.

Conventions

All the other topics discussed appeared to be informed by viewers' knowledge and understanding of the conventions associated with situation comedy. Three types of convention were covered: Broadcasting, content and form.

Broadcasting conventions of schedule and length enabled viewers to plan their viewing in advance. Response was categorised under Categories <c5>, 'Ritual', <c2>, 'Relaxing' and <c1>, 'Escaping or being diverted from problems'.

Under Conventions of Content were the subheadings: characterisation, setting, subject matter, and plot.

The response to conventions of characterisation was postponed until the later debate in the section: Conventions of Form/Textual address. Category <c3> 'Gaining intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment' showed how viewers understood the necessity of 'types' being used in sitcom in general, and how Carla Lane usually opted for the 'social type' rather than the stereotype.

Categories <c3>, 'Gaining intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment' and <c6>, 'Prediction' best describe the audience response to the authenticity of and the expectation of a typical Carla Lane setting as upmarket and tasteful, and located in the south-east of England. Included here also were the audience comments on the way in which they perceived Lane to discriminate against the northern/working class in favour of south-eastern/middle class locations. Their specific reaction fell into Category <b1>, 'Gaining insight into circumstances of others/social empathy' mainly because many of the viewers felt no social empathy whatsoever for the middle class characters in their middle class settings. Category <b1>, also described the delight of some of the older viewers in the interiors of the sets. They were fascinated with "how the other half live", as well as revelling in the fantasy of the perfect home, as defined by Category <c1>, 'Escaping, or being diverted, from problems'.

Category <a1>, 'Finding reinforcement for personal values' illustrated how audiences accepted, or objected to the choice of adultery as the subject matter for a comedy programme. Categories <c3>, 'Gaining intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment' and <c6>, 'Prediction', revealed the audience's evaluation of the way the subject matter was treated, remarking on intricacies such as comedic convention and speculating on the possible development of the series.

The primary response to plot was an appreciation of the major-minor characters. Categories <c3>, 'Gaining intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment' and Category <c6>, 'Prediction' most suitably described audience awareness of characters as plot-devices.

Conventions of Form covered response to technical practice, title and title sequence, performance, laughtrack and textual address.

Category <c3>, 'Gaining intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment' accounted for the response to the technical practice when viewers commented on the production techniques of the series.

<c3> also applied to reactions to the title and title sequence. Category <c6>, 'Prediction' showed how the title

and title sequence either meant little or nothing, or misled, many of the women in the audience, confusing their expectations.

<c3> most appropriately described response to the traditions of performance in tv sitcom. Viewers noted types of movement, direction, facial expression, and delivery of lines.

The inclusion of a laughtrack in the recorded televisual text provoked several types of response. Categories <a1>, 'Finding reinforcement for personal values' <b2>, 'Identifying with others in the media and gaining a sense of belonging' and <c3>, 'Gaining intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment' illustrated how the women in the audience felt patronised by this convention. Its lack of accord with their own appreciation made them feel excluded from 'others in the media', and encouraged them to be negatively critical.

With respect to the textual address of The Mistress, response was divided into three areas. The first, remarks on the perceived target audience, were classified under Category <b3>, 'Identifying with other viewers and gaining a sense of belonging', most of the women agreeing that the target audience was women. When they discussed why they thought the target audience was women, criticisms were more diverse. Category <c3>, 'Gaining intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment' was applied to remarks which varied from enjoying the programme and being glad it was so "feminine" to disliking it in the extreme and feeling resentful of male producers. The perceived social class of the series was a key issue. Most women found the middle class-ness of the series irksome. Their own lived experience was either marginalised or excluded because the fictional representation did not relate to the lifestyles portrayed. Their response came under four categories. The first was <b2>, 'Identifying with others in the media and gaining a sense of belonging', fundamentally because most couldn't. The second was <b3>, 'Identifying with other viewers and gaining a sense of belonging', because they felt that other viewers must feel the same way as they did. The third was <a3>, 'Identifying with the roles portrayed by valued others in the media', because most could barely relate to them at all. The fourth was <c1>, 'Escaping, or being diverted, from problems', because only a few could do so. Others were reminded of them, the fantasy on the screen serving only to point up reality.

### Stars and Characters

The Stars and Characters were the most popular subject area for discussion. In The Mistress audience, interest was mainly drawn not by the characters themselves but by the two female stars who portrayed the mistress and the wife.

Category <a4>, 'Identifying with valued others in the media as media personalities' describes how viewers related to or rejected the 'social type' and 'star image' associated with the personal celebrity of Felicity Kendal and Jane Asher. Category <c3>, 'Gaining intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment' encompassed the critical skills demonstrated when the audience talked about the artistes' performance.

In Butterflies and The Liver Birds, it was the fictional characters who were the principal attraction. The most appropriate Categories for audience response were <a3> 'Identifying with the roles portrayed by valued others in the media', and <a4> 'Finding Models of Behaviour', both of which also classified the negative reaction of many viewers to the roles in The Mistress.

The audience derived a great deal of enjoyment from the actual act of discussing the artistes, their response falling into several categories: <b1> 'Gaining insight into circumstances of others/social empathy'; <b2> 'Identifying with others in the media and gaining a sense of belonging'; <b3> 'Identifying with other viewers and gaining a sense of belonging'; and <b5> 'Finding a basis for conversation'.

#### Representation of Women

Most significant here were opinions of the importance attributed to women's physical appearance in society in general, and how they related to the images of women on television generally and in The Mistress in particular.

Categories <a1>, 'Finding reinforcement for personal values', and <a5>, 'Gaining insight into oneself' illustrate the ways in which viewers sought to identify, or not, with their representations on screen. Category <a7>, 'Emotional Release' helped describe viewers' feelings towards the visual images as well as their opinions of them. Category <c8> 'Sexual Arousal' acknowledges the sex-appeal of the actresses to the Young Lesbian group, whilst raising the question: do heterosexual women experience sexual arousal from images of other women?

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