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**Cultural Objects and Creative Interaction:
Radio Drama, Gender and the Listener**

Susan J. Adams

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Sociology

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

May 1991

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ABSTRACT

Cultural Objects and Creative Interaction: Radio Drama, Gender and the Listener

Susan J. Adams

This thesis explores the interaction between audience and cultural products through an empirical study of female and male interaction with radio drama. The subject is treated here as an active and creative participant in the discourse of radio drama.

Combining elements of reception and feminist theory, this thesis investigates how, as media consumers, we receive and interpret, in a sense 'rewrite', meanings. Gender is one of the filters through which this is done.

Two focus groups, one group of women and one group of men, were asked to listen to two CBC radio dramas and take part in a discussion after each. The findings support the hypothesis that this interaction is shaped by gender, i.e., the movement of the interaction varies according to gender. The women interacted immediately on a personal level shifting to a less personal position, while the men began from a less personal position shifting to a more personal interaction. The process of interaction itself was a negotiation filled with contradictions and fluctuations, but illustrating the creative participation of subject in the creation of meaning.

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It is the visual work (cinema, videotape, mural, comic strip, photograph) that is now a part of our memory. Which is quite different, and seems to confirm a hypothesis already ventured, namely that the younger generations have absorbed as elements of their behavior a series of elements filtered through the mass media (and coming, in some cases, from the most impenetrable areas of our century's artistic experimentation). To tell the truth, it isn't even necessary to talk about new generations: If you are barely middle-aged, you will have learned personally the extent to which experience (love, fear, or hope) is filtered through 'already seen' images. (Umberto Eco, 1986: 213-4)

Now I know how Joan of Arc felt when the flames rose to her roman nose and her walkman started to melt. (The Smiths, "Bigmouth Strikes Again", 1986)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

From the early days of radio to the development of television and the ensuing sophistication of present day communication technology, the relationship between subject and media has played an increasingly integral part in everyday life. Various theories have attempted to explain this relationship, from the 'pessimistic mass society' thesis espoused by the Frankfurt School to more recent discursive explorations such as those of the Centre for Mass Communication, at Birmingham, the tendency has been to focus either on the subject or the text. There has been, however, little study of the nature of the interaction that links the subject to the text and vice-versa. Taking the position that the proper realm of exploration is this interaction itself, this thesis explores the creative interaction of subject and text.

Based upon a variation of reception and feminist theory, the objective is to explore the processes whereby subjects become part of the creative process. Through an empirical study of female and male interaction with radio drama, this research examines how subjects deconstruct and reconstruct meanings within the context of their social experience. Using gender as a means of entering this realm, the general hypothesis holds that subjects receive and interpret, in a sense 'rewrite', meanings in the context of many discourses; one of these discourses being gender.

CBC Radio Drama

My interest in radio drama developed from my opportunity to work at the Centre for Broadcasting Studies that houses the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio drama archives. The CBC is Canada's national radio and television network. The following brief history provides a background to radio drama as a medium followed, in turn, by a comparison of radio and television drama highlighting the uniqueness yet similarities of the two media.

In 1936 the CBC replaced the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC) as Canada's nationalized radio service. The CRBC was created in 1932 and was "given the monopoly over Canadian network broadcasting, a monopoly the government reinforced by making the CRBC the national regulatory and license-granting body for commercial radio as well" (Fink, 1981: 228). The CBC succeeded the CRBC in 1936 as a result of re-evaluation of the regulatory and broadcasting functions of the latter. The goal of the CBC throughout the years has been to provide a national service based upon Canadian programming. The CBC is responsible through its Board of Governors to Parliament and via Parliament to the public. With the introduction of television the structure itself began to change, shifting its emphasis to the new medium.

Radio drama is still a part of the CBC today, but in a much diminished role, one which has decreased in import-

ance from the "Golden Age of CBC radio drama in the 1940s and 1950s to its relative decline in the shadow of television drama during the 1960s" (Fink & Jackson, 1987: vii). The drama department of the CRBC, which was later taken over by the CBC, produced a number of Canadian drama series. This provided, "almost the only professional outlet for Canadian dramatists and other people of the Canadian theatre until the 1950s" (Fink, 1981: 230). With the establishment of the CBC there was a marked increase in the number of radio dramas produced.

The 'Golden Age of CBC radio drama' began in the early 1940s, while the war was the main focus of the energies of the CBC, thirty radio drama series not connected to the war continued to be produced across the country (Fink, 1981: 236). With the hiring of Alice Frick as the National Script Editor in 1941, who supported and encouraged the development of radio drama at the CBC, and the work of four major producers, Andrew Allan, Esse W. Ljungh and J. Frank Willis who were brought to Toronto, and Rupert Caplan who continued to work out of Montreal, the Golden Age was well under way (Fink, 1981: 236). The major regional radio drama series such as Halifax Theatre, Montreal Drama and Vancouver Playhouse continued to showcase radio drama across Canada, while two new national series were produced out of Toronto: CBC Stage and CBC Wednesday Night. The CBC Stage series was "a national showcase for the best Canadian dramatic talent in writing, acting and composing, an

acknowledged National Theatre; but it was more than that" (Fink, 1981: 237). The CBC Wednesday Night series concentrated on "a mix of serious drama, music, documentaries and talks, the various elements in each evening's programmes blending harmoniously" (Fink, 1981: 237-8). With the introduction of television in 1952 and the retirement of all four major producers in the 1960s the Golden Age came to a close. By the end of the 'Golden Age', "Canadian radio had lost its near-monopoly of funds, audiences and talent in 1952-3, to television, to the Canadian Council for the Arts and to live theatre, which it had itself spawned" (Fink, 1981: 239).

Channels of Comparison: Radio and Television

In "Semiotics and Television", Ellen Seiter adapts the five channels of communication developed by Christian Metz in his semiotics of the cinema to television. These five channels are: image, written language, voice, music and sound effects. Substituting graphics for written language as one of the channels for television, Seiter compares television to cinema. Developing these channels further so they apply to radio drama allows one to examine the differences and similarities between television and radio drama, (see Table 1 for a breakdown of the channels).

Table 1: Channels of Communication

<u>Television</u>	<u>Radio Drama</u>
Image: principal channel of meaning created for spectator	Voice: principal channel of meaning created for listener
Graphics: clarification of image	Image: created by listener
Voice: } Music: } "Soundtrack" Sound Effects: }	Narrator: clarification of voice Music: } "Soundtrack" Sound Effects: }

The image is the primary unit of television, it is the signifier of meaning. What is seen is governed by visual codes, such as lighting, colour, positioning, etc., that define "both how the images are produced and what is presented" (Seiter, 1987: 25). For example, Seiter notes how the signification of the space shuttle "Challenger" changed after it exploded live on television. The image of the space shuttle no longer signified the "space superiority of the United States of America"; it signified "scientific fallibility and tragic loss of human life" (Seiter, 1987: 30-1). The television image of the "Challenger" was shown over and over again, embedding it in the public eye. This image was modified with the addition of a U.S. flag flying at half-mast in the foreground, attaching the connotation "tragic loss for a noble cause" to the sign "space shuttle" (Seiter, 1987: 31).

The addition of the flag is an example of the use of graphics in television to clarify the meaning of an image. Graphics are used to anchor the text, directing the audience through the images and their meanings. This is most noticeable in news coverage: diagrams and logos appear in small boxes usually in the top right corner of the screen during the newscasters monologue, names and titles appear at the bottom of images to let one know who is speaking and what their status is. Referring to Roland Barthes, Seiter notes that the use of verbal language is "to close down the number of possible meanings the image might have" (1987: 26). This is the role of graphics in television.

Voice, music and sound effects are all components of the soundtrack. The soundtrack also guides the audience through the images, clarifying meanings. The 'laugh track', for example, not only indicates that something is not to be taken seriously, it actually laughs for the audience. The soundtrack is not just a means of clarifying the image; it can stand on its own as a conveyer of meaning: "The soundtrack is so full, so unambiguous that we can understand television just by listening to it" (Seiter, 1987: 26). The soundtrack draws our attention to the images, often viewers are doing other things than watching while the television is on, the soundtrack can bring the viewer running to see what they are missing.

In radio drama the voice is the principal channel of

meaning. It is the spoken word that shapes meanings and how they are interpreted. Radio drama uses sound and voice to convey meaning. The spoken word is the channel through which communication occurs, drawing from their own experiences and those presented in the drama, the listener interacts with the radio drama:

The possibilities for lyrical expression existed by virtue of the capacity of words which could be 'arranged to build emotion-compelling situations', and which the listener could complete from his own experience; also words themselves would stand for physical objects, thus enabling the listener to reconstruct in his own imagination a series of concrete images of (and hence responses to) the real world. (Drakakis, 1981: 19)

Inflections and accents are important devices used to signify meaning. Aside from creating the drama, the voice is a signifier of such characteristics as age, gender, ethnicity, class and emotions. Any images that are present are created in the minds of the listeners. While these images are created by the listener they are created within the constraints of what is being presented. This provides the listener with freedom to create their own images:

Insofar as particular radio plays sought to recreate by suggestion a reality which could be visually apprehended, the activity of visualization took place in the imagination of the listener.
(Drakakis, 1981: 6)

Some radio dramas use a narrator to clarify the meaning of the voices and provide clues for image creation on the part of the audience. The narrator acts as a tour guide to the drama. Like graphics, the narrator provides the listener with

a framework within which they can interpret meanings.

Voice, music and sound effects are all elements of the soundtrack, but unlike television the soundtrack is the only passage of communication. Via the soundtrack, radio not only presents a drama, it is instrumental in shaping the interaction between subject and drama. The soundtrack can convey not only images, but present different frameworks from within which the listener interpretes the drama, frameworks from various discourses are used in radio drama:

While sound effects could be regarded as aural transformations of the film's camera angle and focus, forms such as 'stream of consciousness' found their way from psychology through expressionistic drama,...into radio's rapidly expanding lexicon of terms and structural concepts. (Drakakis, 1981: 7)

This comparison illustrates that the relationship between radio and television is not solely a question of the transforming of techniques to fit a new medium, but concerns questions of the creation of meaning and the role of the subject in this interaction.

The research model (see page 11) displays the elements in the research and their interconnections. The area of exploration is the space between a cultural object and subject. The concern is not with the object or the subject, but the realm of interaction itself. Reception and feminist theories that examine subject-text interaction comprise the theoretical basis for this exploration. Experience and

interpretation, and the interrelations between them, are the locale of that exploration.

The thesis is presented in five chapters. The first chapter consists of an introduction and a comparison of the channels of communication as they apply to radio and television drama.

Chapter two is divided into two parts: 'The Contribution of the Reader/Spectator/Listener' and 'The Gendered Ear'. In Part I theories of reception and perspectives of audience are examined in light of their importance to this research. Part II discusses feminist theories in light of their contribution to the understanding of reception and the production of meaning as mediated by gender.

In chapter three the methodology is presented and the technique of the focus group is discussed. The data collection is described and the structure of the analysis is detailed.

The findings and analysis are presented in chapter four, beginning with a discussion of individual and group differences and ending with a discussion of the overall findings on the nature of the interaction between subject and play. The analysis follows each of these discussions.

In the final chapter, conclusions in terms of gender, the interactive subject and play, the model itself, and their

significance for the theory presented in chapter two are discussed.

Figure 1: The Research Model

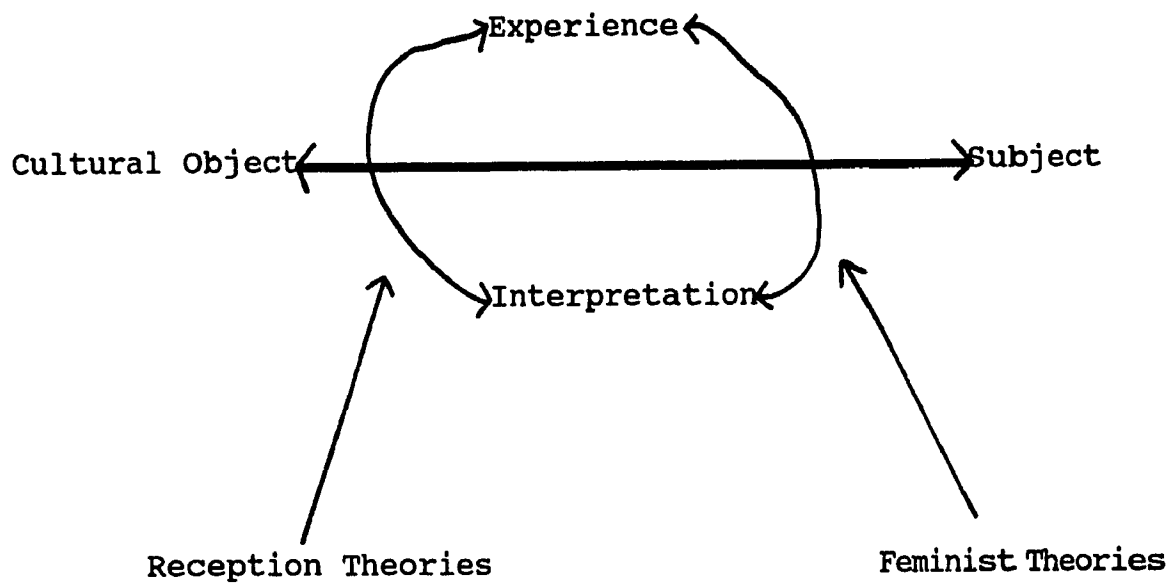


Figure 1 represents the components of the research project with the realm of experience and interpretation occurring in the domain of the interaction between the cultural object and the subject.

CHAPTER TWO

Part I The Contribution of the Reader/Spectator/Listener

The following discussion examines the literature in the area of reception theory and audience studies, and the contributions of each to the understanding of the role of the reader/spectator/listener in the interaction with texts.

Reception theory deals with issues concerning the role of the reader in the construction and deconstruction of meaning. The notion of reader is applied here to all types of readers and all types of texts, i.e., radio drama, film, television programmes etc. The various perspectives on audience are discussed since, although it is the process of interaction and not audience itself that is the object of study, these perspectives influence the way reception and interaction are currently examined.

Theories of Reception: Culture

'Culture' is alluded to throughout this work yet 'culture' can have many definitions and nuances. The use of the term 'culture' here refers to the sense espoused by the social anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Geertz's concept of culture has its roots in the Weberian notion of the nature of man:

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in the webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz, 1973: 5)

Culture is a pattern of symbolic meaning from which humans make sense of their everyday lives. To understand culture is to unravel its meanings and to discover their basis and relevance. Culture has been defined in a multitude of ways polarized primarily around issues of its subjective or objective nature. This conception of culture indicates to Geertz a complete misunderstanding, culture is neither reducible to, " patterned conduct or a frame of mind, or even the two somehow mixed together" (Geertz, 1973: 10). Culture is for Geertz semiotic in nature:

As interwoven systems of construable signs (what, ignoring provincial usages, I would call symbols), culture is not a power something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly -that is thickly- described. (Geertz, 1973: 14)

It is within, therefore, the context of this interpretive culture that the reader and the text meet. During this meeting meanings unravel from the web of signs and symbols.

Theories of Reception: The Active Reader

Reception theory, which stems from literary criticism, attempts to explain the, "confrontation between the reading act and textual structure" (Allen, 1987: 74), by focusing on the role of the reader in literature. This theory has its roots in hermeneutics, i.e., the science or art of interpretation. The reader is viewed as an integral part of the

creation of meaning in the text: "the reader concretizes the literary work" (Eagleton, 1983: 76), bringing the work to life. Reception theory treats the reader as an active and essential element in the text. The reader, "makes implicit connections, fills in the gaps, draws inferences and tests out hunches; and to do this means drawing on a tacit knowledge of the world in general" (Eagleton, 1983: 76). What is being suggested here is that the reader comes with a certain knowledge to the text which will effect her or his interaction with that text. It is this filling in of meaning that connects the text to the realm of the social. In the same way it can be said that any audience brings a set of experiences to its interpretation of a cultural object, such as a radio play. The reader combines elements of the text with her or his experiences to form meaning: "each reading is a performance of meaning" (Allen, 1987: 77). Interpretations are not, however, made by an individual for, as Stanley Fish notes, such interpretations, "are not embedded in language...but inhere in an institutional structure within which one hears utterances as already organized with reference to certain assumed purposes and goals" (1980b: 306). Fish is referring specifically to the circles of a university's literary community, but his point also applies to the larger structures at work on the audience, these being, of course, social structures. The process of interpretation is learned and is constrained by social structures and social contexts.

The acts of reading, writing, watching or listening cannot be separated from their cultural base. John Fowler acknowledges this cultural influence when discussing the novelist's trade:

Selecting the linguistic structures that are available to him for his work of representation, the novelist loses some degree of personal control -the culture's values (including expectations about types of implied author) seep through, infiltrate his utterance, so that personal expression is necessarily qualified by the social meanings which attach to the expressions he chooses. (1977: 80)

Social meanings transcend the individual and the text, therefore the reader is as much a producer of meaning as the writer since s/he is also a "repository of the culture's linguistically-coded values, and has the power to release them from the text" (Fowler, 1977: 80).

Culture provides us with the information or misinformation from which we make sense of our world, and part of this making sense involves interacting with texts of all kinds. We use this information/misinformation to make sense of them as they too are a part of our everyday lives.

Wolfgang Iser discusses the meaning of texts as, "not a definable entity but, if anything, a dynamic happening" (Iser, 1978: 22). For Iser meaning cannot be simply stripped from the text, like his colleagues in the reader-oriented area of reception theory Iser believes that, "works are made to mean through the process of reading" (Allen, 1987: 75). What

becomes important for Iser is the process of reading, not the text in itself. This is crucial to any study of subject and text as it is rooted in the notion of the audience/reader as an active participant in the construction of meaning.

The notion of text as a social process is reinforced by Jacques Leenhardt who believes that, "cultural objects are produced and received according to schema elaborated by collective rather than by individual entities, and that accordingly the 'code' in no way transcends the 'message' at the moment when the latter manifests itself in social reality" (1988: 224). The text and the reader/audience are both social products. The reader/audience works on the text, filling in meanings, making the "connections the text cannot make for us" (Allen, 1987: 80). Leenhardt describes reading as an intellectual and sensory process and outlines two distinct types of reading: professional interpretation and ordinary reading. The professional reader is concerned with making an objective and adequate interpretation of a text while the ordinary reader reads for the sake of reading: "il sait d'emblée que le text signifie pour lui, lecture, et non pas 'en soi'" (Leenhardt, 1980: 44). These distinctions between types of reading illustrate that reading is not uniform. The ordinary reader/listener is the concern of this research. For the ordinary reader there is no dividing line between reading and interpretation.

The work of Michel de Certeau centers on the premise that the subject is an active participant in the consumption of media. He believes that analyses treating the consumer as passive are misguided and misunderstand the role of the consumer. De Certeau asserts that, "the analysis of the images broadcast by television (representation) and of time spent watching television (behavior) should be complemented by a study of what the cultural consumer 'makes' or 'does' during this time and with these images." (1984: xii). De Certeau claims that we cannot understand the role of representations until we can understand the nature of their use by consumers:

The presence and circulation of a representation (taught by preachers, educators, and popularizers as the key to socioeconomic advancement) tells us nothing about what it is for its users. We must first analyse its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization. (de Certeau, 1984: xiii)

The myth of the consumer as mere receptacle ignores the creative character of reading, whether this "reading" is of a book, a television show or a radio drama. The reader does not simply consume, s/he interacts with the text, bringing with him or her a store of knowledge and experiences. De Certeau compares the process of reading to renting:

Reading thus introduces an "art" which is anything but passive. It resembles rather that art whose theory was developed by medieval poets and romancers: an innovation infiltrated into the text and even into the terms of a tradition. Imbricated within the strategies of modernity (which identify

creation with the invention of a personal language, whether cultural or scientific), the procedures of contemporary consumption appear to constitute a subtle art of "renters" who know how to insinuate their countless differences into the dominant text. (de Certeau, 1984: xxii)

This 'renting' of the text remains fixed in the reader's culture for while the reader can retreat from frameworks s/he cannot escape them. For as de Certeau notes: "the fiction of the 'treasury' hidden in the work, a sort of strong-box full of meaning, is obviously not based on the productivity of the reader, but on the social institution that overdetermines his relation with the text." (1984: 171).

The myth of the passive consumer has its foundation in the "efficiency of production" which produces "the ideology of consumption-as-a-receptacle" (de Certeau, 1984: 167). It is by challenging such ideologies that "we may be able to discover creative activity where it has been denied that any exists, and to relativize the exorbitant claim that a certain kind of production (real enough, but not the only kind) can be set out to produce history by "informing" the whole of the country." (de Certeau, 1984: 167). This image of the passive consumer reinforces the position of the elites who produce 'literal meanings'. Professional readers/interpreters are looked to as holding the keys that unlock the secret of the text, while the ordinary reader is seen as having no such ability. Reading is overshadowed by a set of socially created relationships, (critic-layperson; professor-student; producer-

consumer), which shape its power:

The use made of the book by privileged readers constitutes it as a secret of which they are the "true" interpreters. It interposes a frontier between the text and its readers that can be crossed only if one has a passport delivered by these official interpreters, who transform their own readings (which is also a legitimate one) into an orthodox 'literality' that makes other (equally legitimate) readings either heretical (not "in conformity" with the meaning of the text) or insignificant (to be forgotten). From this point of view, "literal" meaning is the index and the result of a social power, that of an elite. (de Certeau, 1984: 171)

Theories of Reception: Discourse

Central to discussions of reception and audience is the concept of discourse. Discourse refers to a 'point of view' or underlying voice that is embodied in a text:

A discourse is a socially produced way of talking or thinking about a topic. It is defined by reference to the area of social experience it makes sense of, to the social location from which that sense is both made, and to the linguistic or signifying system from which that sense is both made and circulated. (Fiske, 1987: 268)

Treating the reader as a creative participant means acknowledging the discourses that they bring to any reading of any text. An individual can bring many discourses with him/her to a text and may use one or numerous 'points of view' to interpret the text. Acknowledging this is not to dismiss the discourse implied by the author, and/or the producer in terms of a media product, the discourse in the text guides the reader and sets limits that bind the reader to the text. As

Fiske notes, while many discourses may be at work in the consciousness of the reader, the text provides a 'potential of meanings' not an infinity of possibilities: "the text does not determine its meaning so much as delimit the arena of the struggle for that meaning by marking the terrain within which its variety of readings can be negotiated." (Fiske, 1987: 269).

The concept of negotiation alludes to the struggle between opposing sides to find some common ground to tie them together. Christine Gledhill uses this notion of negotiation in her discussion of the interaction of spectator and visual text as it avoids an "overly deterministic view of cultural production" (1988: 67). Such a conception of the production of meaning allows for an analysis that acknowledges "a range of determinations, potentially resistant or contradictory, arising from the differential social and cultural constitutions of readers or viewers -by class, gender, race, age, personal history and so on." (Gledhill, 1988: 70). Treating the interaction of spectator and text in terms of negotiation also realizes the fluctuations that occur in the process of constructing and deconstructing meanings. Reading thus becomes a mediation between the meanings inscribed in the text and the meanings that arise from the social experience of the reader.

Treating the reader, spectator or listener as a parti-

cipant in the creation of meaning is essential to any study attempting to examine the relation between subject and cultural object. These theories of reception highlight the mistaken assumption of the passivity of the reader and the need for consideration of a creative, contributing subject in any study concerned with these processes. As Sarah Ruth Kozloff notes: "Narration is a communicative act; to have a narrative, one must have not only a tale, but also a teller and a listener" (1987: 55), this perhaps seems obvious, but it denotes the necessity and the interrelations of each element in the communicative process.

Audience Research Perspectives

The Frankfurt School, originated at The Institute for Social Research, Frankfurt, founded in 1923 with leading members such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and, later on, Habermas, developed the first conceptual framework of mass society in the years between the two World Wars. This framework grew from a concern with the breakdown of modern German society and from a fear of political propaganda generated by powerful individual leaders, (Morley, 1982; Curran et. al., 1982; Bennett, 1986). This conceptual model is known as the 'pessimistic mass society thesis' which is characterized by its emphasis on the "conservative and reconciliatory role of 'mass culture' for the audience" (Morley, 1982: 1). The media are viewed as an all powerful

influence that constitutes a threat "to either the integrity of elite cultural values or the visibility of the political institutions of democracy or both" (Bennett, 1986: 31). This 'pessimistic thesis' treats the audience as gullible receptors who soak up whatever the media throws their way: "The media propelled 'word bullets' that penetrated deep into its inert and passive victims" (Curran et. al., 1982: 12). The scientific measurement of this 'penetration and its effect on the public became the goal of this perspective. There is little if any acknowledgement of the audience as anything but a 'tabula rasa'.

This paints the thought of the school with a broad stroke, there were of course differences among the views of its members, and changes in orientation. Jürgen Habermas, for example, moved into the study of hermeneutics rejecting some of the early theories of the school, moving away from a conception of the audience as passive receptors.

With the relocation of several of the important thinkers of the Frankfurt School to America in the 1930s, a school of thought began to develop in America that challenged this framework of mass society. This school argued against the Frankfurt School's main tenets which they found proposed "too direct and unmediated an impact by media on its audiences; it took too far the thesis that all intermediary social structures between leaders/media and the 'masses' had broken down; it didn't accurately reflect the 'pluralistic' nature of

American society; it was to - put it shortly - sociologically naive" (Morley, 1982: 2). This perspective re-examined the influence of the media and postulated that the public/audience were not simply soaking up whatever the media transmitted, that, on the contrary, people tended to be selective in the messages they picked up from the media and that people made choices about what they exposed themselves to. The audience is treated as controlling the media, that they do indeed have a role in the process:

People, it was argued, manipulated - rather than were manipulated by - the mass media. The empirical demonstration of selective audience behaviour was further reinforced by a number of uses and gratifications studies which argued that audience members are active rather than passive and bring to the media a variety of different needs and uses that influence their responses to the media. (Curran et. al., 1982: 12)

This refutation of the mass society thesis was concerned with the study of the social effects of media. From this refutation came a study by Robert Merton, (Mass Persuasion, 1946) that examined the content and the social effects of war bond broadcasts in America. This work exemplifies the belief of this school that:

the message played a determining role for the character of the responses that were recorded, but argued against the notion that this was the only determination and that it connected to response in a simple cause and effect relationship...that the message cannot adequately be interpreted if it is severed from the cultural context in which it occurred. (Morley, 1982: 4)

'Effects research' has followed one of two paths: "Either it drifted towards market research."...[or]...drifted to more 'honourable' concerns with the media's impact upon democratic procedures, social issues or social policies" (Connell & Mills, 1985: 27). This framework and that of the Frankfurt School share an underlying perspective on the nature of the power and influence of the media; both study media and audience in terms of functions and effects, neither approach deals with social meaning.

Raymond Williams criticizes the sociology of culture, for this fixation with 'cause and effect' studies which negate the complex maze of audience-media relations:

The complex sociology of actual audiences, and of the real conditions of reception and response in these highly variable systems [the cinema audience, the newspaper readership, and the television audience being highly distinct social structures], is overlaid by bourgeois norms of 'cultural producers' and 'the mass public', with the additional effect that the complex sociology of these producers, as managers and agents within capitalist systems, is itself not developed.
(Williams, 1977: 137)

Williams acknowledges the interrelationships that comprise a sociology of culture and which must be addressed if we are to approach an understanding of such relations.

The interpretive paradigm, or cultural studies approach as it is also known, stands in opposition to the Frankfurt school and its refutation in America, for it is concerned with the issue of social meaning. This cultural approach questions the notion of:

a shared and stable system of values among all the members of a society; ...by its assertion that the meaning of a particular action could not be taken for granted, but must be seen as problematic for the actors involved. Interaction was thus conceptualised as a process of interpretation and of 'mutual typification' by and of the actors involved in a given situation" (Morley, 1982: 7).

The difficulty with this paradigm is that it focuses to such an extent on the audience that it distances itself from any conception of institutionalized power or of social relations.

Aspects of this framework were developed by the Centre for Mass Communications Research at Leicester University which combined them with aspects of the 'uses and gratifications approach' while attempting to develop "an analysis of 'the communication process as a whole', studying 'the production process, presentation and media content as well as the reactions of the viewing and reading public'....especially the notion of public communication as a circuit relaying messages from 'the society as source' to 'the society as audience'" (Morley, 1982: 7). The traditional vision of "the process of communication in terms of a circulation circuit or loop....has been criticized for its linearity -sender/message/receiver- for its concentration on the level of message exchange and for the absence of a structured conception of the different moments as a complex structure of relations." (Hall, 1980: 128).

Stuart Hall calls for an understanding of the process of

communication as a "discursive form" (1980: 128). Discourse refers to the 'point of view' or underlying body of thought that shapes any form of communication. Hall, working from within the perspective of the Birmingham Centre for Mass Communications, finds the "value of this approach is that while each of the moments, in articulation, is necessary to the circuit as a whole, no one moment can fully guarantee the next moment with which it is articulated" (Hall, 1980: 129). Hall, in his discussion of television discourse, conceives of the:

consumption or reception of the television message...[as] itself a 'moment' of the production process in its larger sense, though the latter is 'predominant' because it is the 'point of departure for the realization' of the message. Production and reception of the television message are not, therefore, identical, but they are related: they are differentiated moments within the totality formed by the social relations of the communicative process as a whole. (Hall, 1980: 130)

The point of such cultural studies is to examine the underlying messages and sets of relations present in cultural objects, but they are criticized for focusing on the message to the neglect of social relations:

Analysing messages for this sociology, is a kind of surrogate, a sometimes unavoidable expedient, for the real thing, namely, the direct analysis of the web of social relations of productions. (Connell & Mills, 1985: 30)

While this approach can be praised for its attempt at a multi-layered analysis of audience, Martin Allor criticizes it for its limited theoretical perspective which is rooted in

the "problematic of hegemony" (1988: 224). Allor is concerned with the narrow scope critical approaches have taken in the investigation of audience, he refers to the "absurdity of trying to use the question of the audience alone to cover the social processes of mediation and social power within communication studies" (Allor, 1988: 228). Allor champions a reconstructive approach that by situating itself:

around the questions stimulated by the abstraction "audience" would reject a simple realism concerning its object of inquiry. It would recognize that behind the abstractions are different (at times incommensurate) questions concerning the relations among individuals, texts, practices, social organizations, and social power. (Allor, 1988: 230)

Allor is advocating a multidimensional approach to audience research that would reconstruct the place of the audience in terms of a collective of work.

Research into the process of interaction must be based on a perspective that addresses not 'the audience' or 'the text', but the interaction itself. If research is to be multidimensional it must attend to the arena of that multidimensionality. It is not enough to call for a reconstruction of the audience if that means ignoring the site of interaction. It is the interactive process that holds the key to an understanding of the nature of such relations. This is not a negation of the medium of message or the audience for neither can be removed from the process itself. Recognizing our interaction with cultural objects in the realm where it

occurs and where it finds meaning, i.e., the realm of everyday life, will surely provide a better insight into the complexities of such interaction.

In the realm of everyday life meanings are constantly constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. As Pina Lalli asserts, in everyday life:

There are no fixed and unambiguous signposts to help us cross our forest of symbols. In the forest of symbols meanings are interdependent, governed by autonomous rules which cannot be quantified. (1989: 104)

Interpretations are drawn from this daily routine of creating sense of our world. Such interpretations are, as are all events, "the very breathing of what is social: it is repetitive, panting, breathless or calm, as any living breathing may be, according to the contexts and the situations" (Lalli, 1989: 113). Interpretations are based in the common culture of the audience, but this does not mean that any event has only one meaning. As Stuart Hall notes, the same event or code can have a variety of meanings, these codes, "refer signs to 'maps of meaning' into which any culture is classified; and those 'maps of social reality' have the whole range of social meanings, practices, and usages, power and interest 'written in' to them" (1980: 134).

Part II

The Gendered Ear

The reaction of feminism to reception theory, and the attempts of feminist theorists to explore and include the female discourse in subject-text interaction are the topic of the following discussion. Gender is one of the practices that seep through the subject's and the text's cultural filters; gender informs the interaction. The following discussion examines theories concerning the role of gender and ways in which it has been studied in context of subject-text interaction. Gender analysis is an avenue through which one can enter the maze of this interaction.

Feminist theories address issues that concern the position of women in relation to a variety of texts. This is not to say that the position of men is overlooked; indeed feminism provides insight, raises questions and proposes models that can be applied to subject-text interaction in general. The discussion to follow covers three areas: women, the media and the construction of gender; the concept of the 'gaze' that arises from psychoanalytic film theory; and feminist informed 're-reading' of texts.

Women and the Media

The abundance of "women's magazines", "women's television" and "women's radio shows" are evidence of women's

continued targeting in the media. In the 1920s when radio was developing into a powerful medium, women became the prime targets for commercial programming: "women were straightaway singled out, from this commercial point of view, to become the favourite target for mass media messages" (Mattelart, 1986: 63). In her discussion of British housewives and their viewing and listening habits, Dorothy Hobson notes that radio acts not only as a form of companionship, but defines the housewife's everyday timetable, "In terms of the 'structurelessness' of the experience of housework, the time boundaries provided by radio are important in the women's own division of their time" (Hobson, 1980: 105). She also found that the television viewing habits of the sample reflected the "ideology of a masculine and a feminine world of activities and interests and the separation of those gender-specific interests is never more explicitly expressed than in the women's reactions and responses to television programmes" (Hobson, 1980: 109). The women actively choose not to watch news shows, current affairs, documentaries, any programming that they defined as 'male'.

The media not only targeted women as commercial audiences, but relayed messages about their roles and values in society. As Michele Mattelart notes the 'soap opera' has "a twofold function that is in fact unified: to promote the sale of household products, and to integrate the housewife into her function and task by offering romantic gratification" (1986:

64). This is not to suggest that the media has a direct effect on its audience, for as Lorraine Gammon points out, "most media effects research indicates that it operates predominantly to reinforce existing ideas and ideologies underlying 'common sense', rather than directly determining what viewers think." (1988: 26).

It is not just the content of a cultural product that speaks to its audience. One theory suggests that, "the power of the culture industry is also to be found outside the subjects with which it deals, the anecdotes it transmits, which are but foreshadows of its real message. What is not said would then count for more than what is said" (Mattelart, 1986: 72). Time, for example, is a significant element in the construction of programs. Daytime television programming has made it a point to follow a "traditional household timetable" (Mattelart, 1986: 66). Women's role as homemaker and the nature of this work have played a crucial part in the media's determination of the image of women:

The invisibility of women's work and the concealment of the productive value of their housework tasks are of decisive importance in determining the image of them projected by the media and the media's relationship with them....It makes women's work legitimate, not as work but as a duty that forms part of their natural function. (Mattelart, 1986: 66)

The initial concern of feminist theory was with the representations of women and their reinforcement of the position of women in a patriarchal society. This approach

focuses on the counting of the types and frequency of the roles and images presented in popular culture. Content analysis of various texts resulted in a lot of data that is useful in that it illustrates how women are predominantly represented as subordinate to men, and the reinforcement of stereotypes. Unfortunately these analyses do little more, as E. Ann Kaplan points out, "it does not tell us much about how these images are produced ...or about exactly how these images mean, how they "speak" to the female viewer" (1987: 221).

Acknowledgement of this deficiency has led to an examination of the construction of gender in cultural products:

Argument that the proper object of study should instead be the system(s) of representation in which women are produced as a meaningful and different category shifted the emphasis from comparison between images and women to the construction of gender within a given text or set of texts. (Brunsdon, 1987: 84)

Dorothy E. Smith examines gender in terms of its construction within texts in "Femininity as Discourse" (1988) where she discusses the production of 'femininity'. This discourse is actively participated in, for she views 'femininity' as a:

social organization of relations among women and between women and men which is mediated by texts, that is, by the materially fixed forms of printed writing and images. We must not begin by conceiving of women as manipulated by mass media or subject to male power, but recognize when we speak of 'femininity' that we are talking about how women's skills and work enter actively into textually-mediated relations which they do not organize or control. (Smith, 1988: 39)

Smith discusses images in terms of how they contribute to the construction of meaning and how they work to make 'femininity' desirable. This construction of gender is a complexity of practices and skills that attest to the subject as active and that reinforce their own necessity:

The discourse of femininity is a structuring of desire articulating it to objectives (the appearance of her body), means and method established in its media and available as commodities (cosmetics, clothes, hairdressing, etc.). (Smith, 1988: 47)

How then is this construction of gender in texts interpreted by its consumers? Research in this area illuminates the construction of gender (both male¹ and female) in texts but it does not explain why consumers find such pleasure in it. The question of how women can find pleasure in male constructions of what being female means and in images that objectify women for male consumption, has led to the development of a body of work examining the 'male gaze' and more recently the 'female gaze'.

The (Fe)Male Gaze

The theory of the 'gaze' developed from attempts in film theory to explain why the consumer finds pleasure in the images s/he consumes. Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" stimulated much debate in feminism on

¹ Suzanne Moore's article "Here's Looking at You, Kid!" examines the construction of masculinity and the recent changes in it in film and especially in advertising.

the use of a psychoanalytic model in answering such questions.

Mulvey uses psychoanalysis to "discover where and how the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him" (1975: 6). Mulvey states that visual pleasure is derived from three 'looks' that are connected to film: the camera as it films; the audience as it views the film; and the looks at each other that occur between the characters on the screen (Mulvey, 1975: 17). These three looks are structured according to male pleasure, i.e., the objectification of woman. Steeped in Freudian analysis, as Mulvey's approach is, "the male/masculine is active and normative, and there is no way to explain the female/feminine except through this 'norm'" (Byars, 1988: 111). Cinema offers the viewer several possible pleasures in these types of looks. The first type of pleasure offered is scopophilia: the act of looking itself is the source of pleasure. The second type is a look with a narcissistic quality; pleasure comes from identifying with the image presented:

The first scopophilia, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from the identification with the image seen. Thus, in film terms, one implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), the other demands identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like. (Mulvey, 1975; 10)

The only way for women to achieve pleasure from traditional film, that reflects and constructs patriarchy, is in the adoption of the male gaze. Mulvey argues that such pleasure must be challenged if a feminist cinema hopes to break the traditional representation of women.

Mulvey's thesis stands on the ground that:

visual pleasure in Hollywood cinema derives from and reproduces a structure of male looking/female to-be-looked-at-ness (whereby the spectator is invited to identify with a male gaze at an objectified female) which replicates the structure of unequal power relations between men and women. (Gammon & Marshment, 1988: 5).

Based on this position, it is assumed that women must view other women on the screen as objects since they have been co-opted into the male gaze. Mulvey's position denies the existence of a female gaze except in a form that mimics that of the male gaze:

A temporary masculinisation is the only way that Mulvey can offer active pleasure for the women viewer. But the pleasure offered to women by theorists such as Mulvey is linked only with 'enjoying the freedom of action and control over the diegetic world that identification with a male hero provides. (Moore, 1988: 51)

This psychoanalytic theory is based on principles of explanation that stem from Freudian theory that is accused of the subordination of women in the first place. The experiences of women are excluded. Although Mulvey presents us with the possibility of challenging patriarchal cinema through a breaking of cinematic codes and techniques that frame the male gaze, she does not allow for the gaze to be anything but male.

Lorraine Gammon suggests in her research on the now cancelled television show "Cagney and Lacey", that "mainstream genres can facilitate a dominant female gaze and a route whereby feminist meanings can be introduced to disturb the status quo" (1988: 12). It is not simply a product of a show where the two main characters are female but that they are women with access to power. They are police officers, a realm that has traditionally been portrayed in the media as a 'man's world', and the characters are allowed to represent power. The female gaze is used to highlight sexism in the workplace, but more importantly this female gaze is articulated through a "mockery of machismo" (Gammon, 1988: 14). This mockery of machismo, "offers spectators the possibility of identifying with the pleasures of activity without the sort of mastery or voyeurism associated with the male gaze position of classic Hollywood cinema" (Gammon, 1988: 25). Gammon believes that a female gaze, in her case a feminist motivated one, can exist, but is noticeably marginal in mainstream television fare.

Suzanne Moore, in her article "Here's Looking at You, Kid!", criticizes psychoanalytic film theory for ignoring the possibility of resistance to the male gaze, for to present the possibility of resistance is "to say that women can and do look actively and erotically at images of men and other women disrupts the stifling categories of a theory which assumes that such a look is somehow bound to be male" (Moore, 1988:

49). Moore criticizes Mulvey for transferring Freud's concept of the ego and its need to fantasize itself exclusively to masculinity, "thus dramatically limiting the options of the female spectator" (1988: 52). Moore goes on to note that advertisers have already realized that women do actually look differently at things, which has led advertisers to "aim their more obscure 'lifestyle' ads at women, who are able to pick up minute visual details with great ease" (1988: 49). Advertising has also created new representations of masculinity that depend on the existence of a female gaze: the 'New Man' is "tough but tender, masculine but sensitive - he can cry, cuddle babies and best of all buy cosmetics" (Moore, 1988: 45). This gaze is not, however, just the flip side of the male gaze, i.e., the establishment of the objectification of men as well as women, for the female gaze "does not simply replicate a monolithic and masculinised stare, but instead involves a whole variety of looks and glances - an interplay of possibilities" (Moore, 1988: 59).

The fault in Mulvey's thesis lies also in the epistemological realm, i.e., how we know what we know. According to Dorothy Smith, knowledge is based on the male experience. Smith criticizes sociology for basing its concepts and frameworks, that have been constructed to explain all experiences, on male experiences only. She believes that gender differences that have been created from a biological basis in our culture lead women and men to experience the world

differently, yet both these types of experiences have not been included in sociology's attempts to explain society. Mulvey's concept of the gaze arises from the experience of the male viewer and is then passed on to and tailored to fit the female experience without even questioning the nature of that experience.

The debate over Laura Mulvey's article and the appropriateness of the use of psychoanalytic theory to explain the relationship between a cultural object and its viewer has opened up continued discussion on whether women do actually interact with cultural objects differently than men. New approaches to the reading of texts have developed in feminist thought, that attempt to illustrate the existence of difference and how it can be analyzed. This 're-reading' acknowledges that our interaction with texts is messy and complex; and just as there is difference between male and female readings, there are also differences amongst female readings and amongst male readings.

The Re-reading of Texts

Christine Gledhill explains the process of reading texts in terms of negotiation between text and reader. Operating within this framework, she discusses the two-fold task of the feminist 're-reading' of texts as, firstly, to ascertain the nature of a gendered reading, and then to inject into this realm feminist texts that contradict and resist traditional

readings:

In the first place, the critic uses textual and contextual analysis to determine the conditions and possibilities of gendered readings. The critic opens up the negotiations of the text in order to animate the contradictions in play. But the feminist critic is also interested in some readings more than others. She enters into the polemics of negotiation, exploiting textual contradiction to put into circulation readings that draw the text into a female and/or feminist orbit. (Gledhill, 1988:75)

Gledhill addresses these remarks to the feminist critic (a professional reader) in particular, not the non-professional reader. Her re-reading of the film Coma illustrates the potential of such investigations; drawing out feminist and non-feminist elements she reveals the contradictory pleasures of the film for a female spectator. Such 're-readings' are applicable also to the realm of non-professional reading. As Linda Williams suggests, by 're-reading' old texts, we can discover the appeal of traditional film and its stereotypes to women. Williams attempts to pull together the conflicting concepts of repression and reflection which have been used in various forms in the analysis of the representation of women, but more importantly for our purposes she is concerned with the historical positioning of the spectator. She notes that in "reading films in the context of current feminist enlightenment we sometimes ignore the more difficult task of reading the contradictory situation of the historical female spectator" (Williams, 1988: 13). Through her re-reading of

the film Mildred Pierce (Warner Brothers, 1945), Williams illustrates the contradictory meanings that one can draw from a text. This film, on the one hand, reflects the subordinate position of women in 1945 America, and on the other, expressing the ability of women to break out of this position and the complexity of women's everyday life. This analysis suggests that if meanings are contradictory and in flux then the pleasure that women receive from such texts is also contradictory and changing. This is not to presume that there is no repression of women in films like Mildred Pierce but,

only that we should not underestimate the complexity of the female spectator's recognition of the contradictory particularities of her situation. Nor should we assume that these films seduce their specifically gendered viewers into a naive belief in their fate of self-sacrifice, suffering and loss. (Williams, 1988: 29)

Belinda Budge performs a similar re-reading of text, in her analysis of the appeal of Joan Collins' character Alexis Carrington on the now defunct nighttime soap opera Dynasty. Budge challenges the notion that soap operas are sexist nonsense that are only to be studied to illuminate their offensive representations of women. Such a stance refuses to address the notion of pleasure that large numbers of women (and men) received from the show. Attacking such refusals, Budge states:

It would appear that we still think that women watch Dynasty passively, pathetically and unwittingly victims of its deceptive messages. And hence the issue of pleasure, long a problem for feminist cultural politics, remains a problem. In dismissing

the role of Alexis as irrelevant to feminism, the women watching are also dismissed. For the pleasures described above are those of an active audience. (Budge, 1988: 102)

These 're-readings' accentuate the historical and cultural positioning of the spectator. The historical and cultural specificity of the subject consists of many discourses that tangle and overlap at the point of interaction between subject and text. These encounters have an 'interdiscursive'² character:

At the moment of textual encounter other discourses are always at play besides those of the particular text in focus - discourses which depend on other discursive formation, brought into play through the 'subjects' placing in other practices - cultural, educational, institutional. And these other discourses will set some of the terms in which any particular text is engaged and evaluated. (Morley, 1980a: 163)

Psychoanalytic theories do not address this interdiscursiveness, subjects are presented as victims of their unconscious, significance is not attributed to other practices at work. These practices shape the interaction between subject and text:

The meaning(s) of a text will also be constructed differently depending on the discourses (knowledge, prejudices, resistances) brought to bear on the text by the reader. One crucial factor delimiting this will be the repertoire of discourses at the disposal of different audiences. (Morley, 1980a: 171)

One of these discourses being the gender practices at play in

² See "Black Looks" by Jacqui Roach and Petal Felix and "The Color Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers" by Jacqueline Bobo for discussions of the interaction of the discourses of gender and race.

the subjects' world.

Feminist re-readings not only fill in the gaps in our knowledge of women's experiences, but point to past misunderstandings of the role of the female spectator/reader/listener in the construction and deconstruction of textual meanings. The subject is not a bystander but a negotiator of meaning, she is not merely a product of male gazing nor does she slip totally and without resistance into a male way of looking. She mediates contradictions in meanings, accepts some, rejects others and chooses to ignore yet others. The problem with early feminism is that it, like the patriarchy it attacks, treats the female media consumer as passive and susceptible. Re-readings, such as those of Williams, Gledhill and Budge point to the contradictions and fluctuations at play in the realm of such interaction.

Feminist theories of reception re-examine the subject-text relationship in terms of its meaning for women. Such re-examinations have travelled from a concern with representations of 'femaleness' to explorations of this interaction. Bringing the discourse of gender into the fore of such explorations illustrates its usefulness as a key with which one can open the door to the site of negotiation of meaning and experience. Such ventures have relevance not only for women's experience but for a better understanding of all experiences in this negotiation.

Drawing upon the principles of the active subject, negotiation and gendered readings, the investigation is of the interaction itself. To understand this interaction the task is to examine what subjects do while listening. A methodology that enables the researcher to access precisely that area is necessarily one that can provide immediate insight into the processes at work in this realm. Simulating such interaction and recording the subsequent discussion of participants allows an interpretive analysis to be performed that uncovers the social processes that act upon both subject and text, and more importantly for the purposes of this project, the space in between the two: the interaction.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Examining the process of creative audience interaction with cultural objects, such as radio drama, required a methodology that would allow the researcher to reach the audience's discourse and experience at the level of everyday life. The position of this research is that the audience comes with a certain knowledge to any type of text: "le text n'est jamais tout à fait un inconnu pour le lecture,...mais encore tout texte déjà lu fait partie de l'expérience de lecturer d'un nouveau texte" (Leenhardt, 1980: 42). It is not only the experience of all other texts that the audience brings, but all their social experiences and knowledge. It is this store of knowledge and experience that forms the basis for interaction with cultural objects.

The focus group is an accepted though under used technique for collecting such data as it allows one to delve into this realm of experience and interpretation. The focus group permits the researcher to observe the creative interaction of an audience at work. Subjects are able to 'think out loud' and the interaction between subjects illustrates how meanings are shaped and how they differ. The technique was well suited to the research as it gave the researcher a first hand look at the interaction between an audience and a cultural product:

focus groups are basically group interviews, although not in the sense of altercation between the researcher's questions and the research participants' responses. Instead, the reliance is on

interaction within the group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher, who typically takes the role of moderator. (Morgan, 1988: 9-10)

The focus group is an extension of the individual interview, it is fundamentally a group interview, that shares the advantage of the individual interview in recovering information about institutionalized norms and statuses³.

The focus group is used primarily in the field of market research, but it originated in the social sciences. The work of Robert Merton et. al. published in 1956 is, according to David L. Morgan (1988: 11) the earliest example of published research using the focus group technique. Morgan explains the disregard by social scientists of the technique as the result of "Neglect...both by the technique's creators who turned to other pursuits and by its potential users who concentrated on other methods" (1988: 12). The technique flourished in the marketing research industry where it is used in testing product image, success of advertising and, more recently, in political image construction. An early Canadian example of its use is a study conducted by The Brewers Warehousing Company in 1956, which used focus groups to find out information about consumer buying habits, (Blankenship et al, 1985: 49).

³ See Figure 1 in Morris Zelditch, Jr.'s "Some Methodological Problems of Field Studies" in McCall-Simmons, (1969: 17).

Advantages of the Technique

The focus group is a good technique for examining a social 'thing' since it employs social dynamics. It allows the researcher to examine a topic in a social context. This is especially beneficial when dealing with the phenomenon of audience. As Morgan indicates, "the hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group." (1988: 12) The flexibility of the technique lies in the fact that it does not require adherence to a rigid formula of questions and responses while at the same time demanding a controlled discussion of the issues at hand. The principal benefit that the technique brings to this research is that it "will yield a more diversified array of responses and afford a more extended basis both for designing systematic research on the situation in hand and for suggesting interpretations grounded in experience..." (Merton et al, 1956: 135).

The chief use of the technique is in providing the opportunity to learn "about participants' experiences and perspectives" (Morgan, 1988: 25). Furthermore, focus groups are "useful when it comes to investigating what participants think, but they excel at uncovering why participants think as they do." (Morgan, 1988:25). These being the primary goals of this study, focus groups were an exemplary method to employ.

Limitations of the Technique

As with all methods there exist some limitations with this technique. As Merton et. al. (1956) discovered the focus group is less controllable than the individual interview. It requires that the moderator guide the interview when it appears to be getting away from the subject. This requires a certain skill on the part of the moderator. A pre-test provided improvements for the research design and allowed the moderator to practice her role. Another limitation is that if groups vary substantially they are not necessarily comparable. In this case the problem was overcome by focusing on gender differences and by keeping the range of age in the groups small (within twelve years). These disadvantages did not present any major problems in the course of collecting the data. There is also the problem of generalizing from the findings as focus groups tend to be small, large groups are difficult to control. This did not pose problems in this case as the intention was not to make generalizations from the groups to the population. This was an exploratory study with the objective of proposing a model for the study of subject-text interaction.

Discussion Guide (see Appendix V)

The interview schedule was divided into five parts: an introduction, two opening questions and four sets of questions. The goal of the introduction was to make participants

feel comfortable and to encourage them to try to listen to the drama as if they were at home. The opening questions of "What were you thinking about while you were listening to the play?" and "Did you make images of the characters in your head while listening?" were asked to focus participants on what they had just heard and to encourage them to remember what was going through their minds as they were listening. These questions also provided insight into the actual process of listening to a radio drama.

The sets of questions that followed dealt with themes, gender relations and discourse. The questions dealing with themes were asked to generate information on how each participant had interpreted the plays. They also indicated the nature of the participants relation to the play. Asking them if they had learned anything new from the play was a way to extract information about the exchange between subject and text.

The questions concerning gender relations served a two-fold purpose, they provided information not only on interpretation of the plays, but on how gender and notions of gender roles affect one's reading of a text. These questions also provided indications of the basis for responses.

The final set of questions dealt with discourse. These questions were directed at uncovering participant awareness and perception of any points of view or underlying voices that were embodied in the text. They also brought up issues

concerned with the framing of meaning and the nature of interaction.

The Questionnaire (see Appendix VI)

A short questionnaire was handed out after the pre-test to gather data on the participants' experience in the group. Three questions were asked and space was provided for additional comments. Participants were asked if they had felt comfortable in the group, if they had had any difficulty in understanding the plays, and whether or not the experience related to other interactions with media. The questionnaire was designed to provide participants with a forum where they could write down any comments or criticisms that they had perhaps been hesitant to express in front of the group.

Originally the questionnaire was designed to be used in the pre-test only, to measure the usefulness of the technique in accordance with the planned research, i.e., did participants feel at ease to talk, were the plays comprehensible and to test the discussion guide. The information received from the first group demonstrated the usefulness of the questionnaire in evaluating the technique itself, and it was, therefore, decided to distribute it after each group. The findings of the questionnaire and any changes made in the set up of the focus groups after the pre-test are discussed later in this chapter.

Data Collection

Three focus groups were conducted: a pre-test group, consisting of five women⁴; a focus group of five women; and a focus group of six men⁵. Each group was asked to listen to two short C.B.C. radio dramas and discuss each one immediately after it had been played. The radio dramas selected are part of the Hornby Collection Series, produced by Don Mowatt in the Vancouver studios of the CBC. The tapes are stored at The Centre for Broadcasting Studies, Concordia University. The first drama presented was Half An Inch Closer, (14 minutes 38 seconds), written by James Lazarus and broadcast on May 13, 1978. An argument between a married couple in their twenties, concerning the sharing of housework is the focus of this radio drama. The wife interrupts the husband's writing to discuss their relationship, he describes the play he is writing and she convinces him to change the ending. The second play, In The Dark, (12 minutes 9 seconds), written by James O'Leary and broadcast on January 30, 1982 also deals with a heterosexual relationship. This drama centres on the conversation between an unmarried couple during lovemaking that develops into an argument, uncovering hidden conflicts that turn out to be the basis of their relationship. These plays were chosen on the

⁴ See Appendix I

⁵ See Appendices II and III

basis of their length, theme and date of broadcast. Their themes are contemporary presenting an up-to-date dialogue on male-female relations, facilitating a discussion based on everyday issues as opposed to an historical perspective. The short length of the plays enabled the presentation of two plays to each group. This provided the groups with the opportunity to make comparisons. The groups were able to relate without difficulty to the plays due to their contemporary themes. The dramas were also chosen because both dealt with similar themes and issues, they presented two dissimilar contexts, i.e., a non-sexual context and a sexual context. This allowed for each discussion to focus on similar issues but with different emphases.

The pre-test was held two weeks in advance of the focus groups scheduled for the purpose of data collection, this allowed for any necessary modifications. This first group acted as a test of the discussion guide, the selected radio dramas and provided me with an opportunity to practice my skills as moderator⁶. The five women who participated in this pre-test were all sociology students and were already acquainted with me. These women were selected on the basis of their availability and, as students of sociology, I felt that being familiar with social research their feedback would be

⁶ In preparation for my role as moderator I was able to obtain access to several audio tapes of focus groups conducted by a Montreal based research company. These tapes were very useful in my preparation for the groups.

particularly useful to the further development of the project.

All focus groups were audio-taped. The group sessions lasted two hours. The groups were held in a special interview room in the psychology department at Concordia University. The audio facilities are located in an area separated from the interviewing room by an one-way mirror. Dr. John Jackson graciously assisted at each focus group, operating the recording equipment and taking notes. The groups were audio-taped only, as several of the participants expressed objections to the suggestion that they be video taped. Every effort was made to make the subjects feel at ease. Everyone was informed at the time they volunteered that they would be audio-taped, Dr. Jackson was introduced to them beforehand and I assured everyone that pseudonyms would be used in the analysis. I began each focus group by introducing everyone (first name only), and asked them to try to listen to the dramas as if they were at home and had just turned on the radio, and I reminded each group that everyone's opinion was valid and valuable to the project.

At the end of the pre-test group I handed out a short questionnaire⁷. Space was provided for any other comments or suggestions they might have. This questionnaire provided some useful insight into the technique itself and the reactions of the subjects to the group.

⁷ See Appendix VI.

The pre-test was very successful and provided me with some additional questions and changes to the interview schedule⁸. The radio dramas generated a good discussion, filled with both agreement and disagreement. At first two of the participants in the pre-test seemed uncomfortable and shy, but once the others started talking freely and I had encouraged them several times they began to contribute more comfortably. It was also decided to close the curtain on the one-way mirror during the remaining two groups as participants in the pre-test had found it distracting.

The two focus groups that are the source of the actual data were held on the same day. The participants in these groups were neither acquainted with me nor to each other prior to participating. Subjects were recruited primarily by word of mouth and by advertising in the university.

The female group was scheduled first. Six women were scheduled to take part, but one cancelled at the last minute making it impossible to find a replacement. One of the women was late in arriving and so the group started without her. Consequently, she missed part of the first play and had to sit out during the discussion of it. The female focus group was less at ease than the pre-test group or the male group. One subject was particularly nervous at first, but as the discussion proceeded she became more involved. Although it was

⁸ See Appendices IV and V.

difficult to initiate discussion in this group, by the conclusion they had generated interesting and ample data for analysis.

The male focus group, which consisted of six subjects (no cancellations), followed the same procedure as the female group. This group was quite lively and the discussion flowed easily, generating a substantial amount of material.

Role of the Moderator

In my role as the moderator I guided rather than controlled the discussion. My goal was to ensure that all the questions on the interview schedule were addressed, but not to disrupt the flow of the discussion unless it was getting off topic, for moderators "must not be directive or too assertive, but they must also make sure the discussion doesn't get off track" (Berger, 1991: 92). I made sure that everyone had a chance to express their opinions and encouraged the quieter subjects to participate. I allowed disagreements but interceded if they became unproductive or heated. This was not often the case as the groups tended to monitor disagreements themselves.

The Focus Group as Research Tool

The short questionnaire that was distributed to participants at the end of each discussion group provided useful insight on the use of focus groups as a data collecting

method. There were sixteen participants in total, including the pre-test group.

Nine of the sixteen participants did not feel uncomfortable participating in the discussion. Five were uncomfortable initially but said they relaxed as the discussion progressed. Two of the participants were not comfortable at times throughout the entire discussion. One when "topics being discussed seemed personal" and the other because she did not like talking in groups in general.

After the first few seconds of apprehension (due primarily to subjects shyness at being the first to speak) the groups generated discussion freely. The participants who were noticeably quieter responded better when asked a direct question.

Only one of the subjects indicated having some difficulty, not in understanding the plays, but in interpreting them. The rest of the subjects indicated no difficulties in understanding the plays.

The clarity of the plays in terms of what was being said and what was happening in them was one of the criteria for selection. Any problems in understanding the plays on the part of those listening to them would have added to the complexity of the research. This was one of the reasons a pre-test group was conducted.

Nine of the participants responded that the experience did not relate to the way they usually interacted with media.

Two found it unrelated on the basis that they do not listen to radio drama. The remaining seven found the experience different as they were not usually so attentive or critical of media. Six participants did find the experience similar as they make it a point to be critical in their interaction with media (especially television). One of the participants noted that she often discussed what she had seen on television with friends. One participant found the experience both similar and dissimilar to her usual interaction with media. The experience was similar to her interaction with television since the emphasis is often on relationships but dissimilar as radio "allows your mind to create images".

Although it is significant that nine of the sixteen participants found this experience unlike the way they usually interacted with media it was not an unexpected finding. This does not pose a problem for the study as it was voicing their ideas, opinions and understanding of the plays that made this experience unusual not the process of interacting with a cultural object.

Eight of the subjects had no other comments, while five made positive comments on their experience in the focus group. These five found it an interesting and enjoyable experience. Three made the following suggestions: close the curtain on the one-way mirror; the discussion be scheduled for a longer period of time to allow for more in-depth analysis; have mixed groups of men and women; ask more precise questions; and not

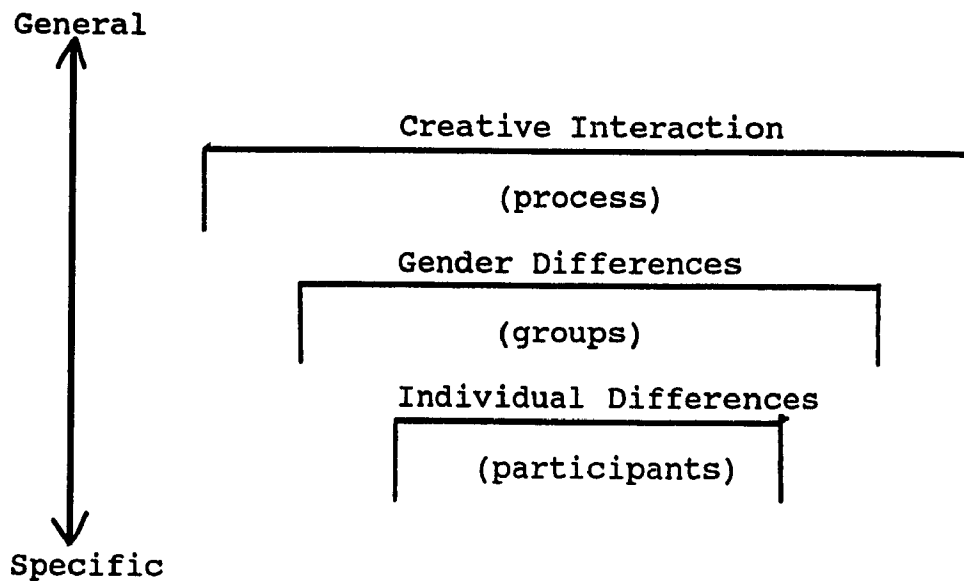
focus on feminist questions so much.

The suggestion that the curtain be closed arose from the pre-test group and was acted upon for the remaining groups. The groups were not mixed as I wanted to be able to compare the groups based on gender. The groups were not asked to focus on feminist questions per se, but the theme of both plays was relationships and gender roles so it was expected that such questions would arise. Questions were intentionally open-ended to allow for the free flow of ideas and comments in the groups. The focus groups were very successful, providing substantial and relevant information.

Method of Analysis

The analysis proceeds in three stages: individual differences; group differences; and the interactive creative process. Figure 2 illustrates the increasing scope of each level of analysis as it shifted from a specific to an increasingly general level of analysis. It should be noted that all generalizations made are within the context of the selected participants. Due to the small number of participants and the exploratory nature of the research no attempt is made to generalize from the focus groups to the general population.

Figure 2: Levels of Analysis



The analysis begins with the individual differences, following the order of the interview schedule. Moving into gender differences the findings are discussed in terms of tendencies, and the indications these tendencies hold for the role of gender in framing our interaction with texts. Finally, the analysis explores the findings in terms of their insight into subject-text interaction itself.

CHAPTER FOUR
Findings and Analysis⁹

Individual Differences

Focus Group I: Female

Play I: Half An Inch Closer

There were two main responses to the question of what the women had been thinking about while they were listening to the play. Karen, Maureen and Sarah immediately mentioned relationships. By this they meant they had been thinking about their own relationships, those of people known to them and relationships in the general sense:

Karen: Relationships...obviously to me that's what that was all about, umh, I guess thinking about my own and listening to them thinking about theirs, thinking about other people's and wondering if those lines are actually common today.

Sarah: I was thinking it was more a common issue in all relationships, where you know, people when they are in an intimate situation they tend to be on the defensive side...

Cathy's initial response differed from the others, she had been evaluating the characters and their situation:

Cathy: Who was right and who was wrong, the whole time I kept thinking, you know as it started off as

⁹ The findings are presented in context of the plays listened to, while there are no fundamental differences between the radio dramas, they are presented separately as a matter of convenience.

a typical nag scene and then there's..you know, I kept thinking they are really portraying women horribly here and this is going to be one of these things and then, you know, and then she was really annoying [laughter] sometimes, but then you know, that's why I just kept thinking like sort of evaluating what they were saying.

At this point Karen and Sarah both added they had also been evaluating the characters and the situation. Maureen was the only one who did not believe she had been evaluating the play.

Several women stated that they had visualized the play. Cathy had made a picture of the apartment where she imaged the couple arguing (even though the play is situated in a house):

Yeah, the apartment, of course it's an apartment not a house [laughter], yeah umh, yeah I, I guess, again the apartment, not them at all, just the apartment.

Maureen had also pictured the setting, but not the characters themselves. Karen had pictured the setting which she referred to as "A pig sty". Karen also remarked that she did not think the characters sounded like people in their twenties: "Something struck me that I didn't think they were as young you said they were, I didn't think they were in their twenties, their voices just didn't portray youth to me [laughter]". This met with agreement from the others.

Three of the women identified an underlying message in the play, while the fourth was unsure. They identified these messages as 'power struggle' and 'communication breakdown'. Maureen and Sarah felt the purpose of the play was to address

a 'communication breakdown, while Karen believed the underlying message was one dealing with a 'power struggle:

Sarah: I thought it was more like an intimate relationship where people try to communicate to each other, you know, more effectively, I find this was a very difficult struggle - then they have a breakdown.

Karen: ..the woman was constantly trying to find a place for herself and fit herself into things, towards the latter half, I sense that the issue, she had switched the issue from herself to themselves as a couple and wanting to try and understand him and his position and his feelings and, and almost relegating it to well, "gee we've come half an inch closer to getting to know each other", but all of this together being somewhat of a power struggle between them rather than a communication issue as the main issue.

Cathy was hesitant to point to any underlying message, she found it difficult to identify any message. She thought one was present, but was not convinced it resembled any of the messages the others had identified:

I feel like I wasn't listening to it or something, but I didn't feel like there was any sort of underlying message, I thought they were saying things as they went along. Like first of all there was, you know, a domestic issue, and then there was like a, you know, like you said, a communication effort and really trying to say, - but I thought the whole time it was obvious except for at the end with, - when she stops and says 'No! Go and take the garbage out", then all of a sudden it seemed to have some sort of underlying meaning, but I haven't sort of thought it through.

At this point all the women agreed that the underlying messages were difficult to ascertain.

None of the women felt they had learned anything new from the play. They had all experienced the situation demonstrated

in the play in some form either in their own lives, through the lives of others or through media. Sarah put it the following way:

Not really, these things you read from articles in classes, you read, you hear from people. I have friends who are married, you know, like you hear it all the time, or your own parents, you just like treat it as experience, sure.

Cathy did admit she had 'relearned ' something from the play to which Karen agreed that the play had reinforced her experiences rather than offered any new learning.

When asked to describe the gender roles presented in the play, three of the women responded that the roles were stereotypical. Sarah felt that the male role was stereotypical but that the female role was "more modern" as it was assertive. Maureen felt that the date of the play may have some influence on her characterization of the gender roles, "...I think possibly in 1978 it was going to do something different, I mean, they were trying to communicate with each other and maybe that wasn't such a typical thing, I found them very traditional roles..". Cathy also made a comment on the role of the writer in determining the characterization of the roles:

It was as if the person who was writing the - it was very - had the roles down to be very stereotypical but actually what they were saying was almost like they were fighting, almost seemed liked two, I don't know how to say it. It's weird when you think about it, yeah, as if they, I mean it was set up in a very stereotypical way but I don't think what they said was very stereotypical.

All the women believed that they were drawing on past experiences in order to interpret the play. They believed that it is this use of experiences that enables one to make any kind of interpretation. Past experiences did not refer only to their own experiences or those of others, but, as Cathy termed it, "vicarious learning":

Cathy: Past experiences and, I don't know, a vicarious learning situation, it's not myself, it's not my own experience, and it's not my past experience, but what I see, or what is on television or you know other people's relationships...

Sarah: ...I think that's possible from other people especially from T.V. from the media all around you and what you read and the school...

When asked if a specific perspective had been present in the play, the women were divided in their responses. Sarah felt that the perspective was balanced, while similarly Maureen felt a neutral perspective had been presented. Karen believed the female's perspective had been presented, "...I got the definite feeling that the woman's perspective, not not as Cathy said we relate to one or another more so, well quite simply I thought it was the woman...". Cathy's reply concerned the nature of a play itself and how we relate to things in general:

Well I guess if you're going to relate to somebody more, I mean, perhaps if you could relate more to the husband you'd probably see that in that perspective, I suppose being female maybe we could relate more to, you know, what she was saying so it sounded like it was from her point of view, but I don't know why, I still think, I don't know, like it's obvious that it was written, do you know what I mean? You can tell that they are characters, even

though they are acting a certain way, you can tell that they are acting, and the underlying theme is whoever wrote it and that is almost where the perspective is. I find you can really tell it's not a casual conversation between two people.

Three of the women believed a man had written the play while Karen was unable to give an answer, but felt the message would differ depending on the gender of the writer. Maureen could not explain why she believed a man had written the play, it was a 'feeling' she had. Sarah believed a man had written the play because, "...most of the dialogue, the way it was, it was the whole setting, the lines that were given, I don't think it really came from a woman writer just the way it was written." She also believed that the gender of the writer makes a difference in how and what is written. Cathy believed a man had written it due to the characterization of the couple: "both characters are like a, caricature, I guess that women would maybe represent themselves in a more positive light than men".

While all the women thought it was wrong to generalize the gender roles in the play to society, two of them admitted that that was probably what they were all doing:

Karen: In essence I think intuitively that's what we've all been doing, is generalizing. I personally don't feel you can generalize just from listening to a play, one couple.

Cathy: I mean it's something familiar to everybody I mean we all can draw something from it and say oh we're that or something and so on, I mean there must be something to generalize from it. I hope not.

All the women agreed that if I had introduced the play differently or explained it in more detail beforehand they would have interpreted the play differently. As Maureen put it, "Well, sure, it puts a different slant on it, obviously then you are looking for something specific, so, attitude or message that's a little different." The women felt they had been left to compile their own framework of interpretation:

Karen: I would have definitely understood it from many different slants, I think I would have been listening for, for very different things. Having not been told I wasn't listening for anything in the beginning until I made up my own mind, 'til I decided what I thought it was all about then I was listening for those things I guess.

Play II In The Dark¹⁰

There were two main responses to the question of what they had been thinking about while listening to this play. Angela and Cathy were struck by the sexual aspect of the play. Both thought that sex had been used here as a method to explore human vulnerability:

Angela: I think the first thing that struck me the hardest was, that even though I didn't hear all of the first play I got the impression that things sort of came together, there's sex in each tape and everything was revolved around having sex and setting up a romantic mood and a sexual encounter.. I think the reason why the writer chose that scenario in both cases is because during a sexual encounter you are sort - you are naked in the literal sense - the intimacy that's going on and any

¹⁰ The fifth woman in the focus group was able to join in the discussion at this point.

insecurities that, you know, lay underneath are suddenly brought forth to the surface, in an intimate situation come out.

Cathy: It's scary, yeah, I know I was right there, I don't know, it's terrible to think about it and those conversations and what you are saying afterwards, you know, I think, I mean having it placed sort of with one making love, or, is perfect because exactly that I mean you are so vulnerable you can't, you're so vulnerable and like so funny at the same time.

Karen, Maureen and Sarah said that they had been thinking about the mind games that were going on in the play. As Sarah remarked:

Oh, I could relate to it too, but since the scripts they were using were more like, more like mind games or just in general games people play with each other just to get at each other in some way and that's really the best time to really hit the person.

At this point in the discussion a debate broke out between Angela and Karen about the sexual setting of the play. Karen felt offended by the use of such a context, "I resent that these plays or this one in particular had such [a] strong link to sex, sexual activities taking place at the time of the fight...I think it is so stereotypical". Angela, on the contrary, found the use of sex interesting as she believed the writer had used it to represent the fragility of human emotions. All the women could relate to it in some personal way, even if it was only, as Maureen commented, "to the situation and not the conversation they were having."

All the women except Cathy had pictured either the characters or the setting while they were listening. Angela

appeared to have created the most detailed picture: "Yeah, it was really vivid in my mind, right down to her long hair, and the white sheets, and him smoking especially him smoking, all that smoke". Maureen had imagined the scene taking place in her own home, "I put them in my home and I'm not sure if I wanted them there [laughter]...I just put them in my own setting, and I pictured the restaurant that he had lunch with Jane".

The women had a harder time deciding whether this play had an underlying message or point. Sarah felt it was presenting sex as a problem solver:

It's sort of like they avoided the conflict issue they never really resolved it, it's like sex is used as the device to sort of, you know, eliminate all the problems or troubles they are having, or disagreements, yeah, it seems, you know what I mean, generally I guess I can see that in some experiences I've had it seems to make sense but, it's just a normal human reaction.

Angela was not certain of the exact message but believed it had something to do with a 'power struggle' between the sexes. Karen felt that while perhaps the message had to do partly with a 'power struggle', the issue was communication, "Perhaps a bit of a power struggle, but I think more so couples wishing the actually the opposite of the extreme of a power struggle, wishing one could communicate better". Cathy saw the message of the play consisting of both elements of communication and power struggle, "...so I don't see it as being sex roles in that situation, in the first situation

yeah, I, I guess I saw it more as a power and as a communication thing and not really to do with sex roles".

Maureen responded to this question of underlying messages by comparing this play with the first one: " Well it was interaction between a couple, I, the first one sort of was more concerned with sex roles and the second one with sex."

The women were more ambiguous about the gender roles. Sarah, Angela, Maureen and Karen referred to them as "realistic", they felt the characters were very believable in terms of gender. Angela also added that she felt the female character, "came across as being somehow superior - probably intellectually superior she seemed to have a good grip of the situation - and was able to illustrate to him how shallow he'd been by being shallow back at him". Cathy believed that the gender roles were not stereotypical as, "he's trying to communicate something I guess a lot of times we don't associate that with being male, like I mean, if he had met some woman and had lunch I mean chances are that they'd never want to talk about it - he wants to talk about marriage she doesn't - and she was I thought callous in her making it trivial, he wanted to say something and normally that's not the stereotype".

There seemed to be some resentment of the female character among the group so I asked them if they had liked the characters. None of the woman particularly liked the female

character, they described her as cold, callous, nasty and a witch. They were not fond of the male character either, (with one exception), but did not show the same sense of outrage toward him. They thought he was at least trying to express himself, but the way he characterized woman later in the play as having dark secrets turned them off, as Angela commented, "...up until that point my image of him was shattered, I thought he was fairly passive until he said woman have 'deep, dark pockets, secrets?'" The one exception being Karen who, liked him because, "he was really vulnerable... something soft about him I liked the way he tried to express himself."

When asked if the play had presented a male or female perspective there was little agreement. Maureen felt at first that a balanced perspective had been presented but then added that it was, "a little more from his perspective because she was just sort of playing with what he was saying and he was, I guess, expressing himself more". Karen also believed that the play had been presented through the male character's perspective, although she was not completely sure:

from his perspective, like I'm not sure I'm right, I question whether I'm right or not, but I think so. What makes me think so is because he, he was the first, I don't know if 'confront the truth' is the right word, but to admit that he had seen Jane therefore it sort of leads you to thinking that he had something important to say.

Cathy and Sarah thought it was written from a woman's viewpoint, Cathy specifically referred to it as a "liberated woman's point of view":

I thought this was a liberated woman's point of view and she, you know, she has every right to go and have a casual relationship and not be you know not have to listen to everything and be gentle and kind and wonderful, you know, like she could just go in and [have] fun, and that it was going to be a relationship like, that maybe she didn't want marriage but that was okay.

Sarah agreed with Cathy that they, "portrayed the woman a bit cruelly, but it, you know, there was this independence and a feeling...I mean there are women who are you know into that at this point, modern lifestyle".

Angela, on the other hand, believed that it could have been anyone's perspective, "I do a lot of writing and I know that we have to take on different perspectives it could have been anyone who wrote that play - it could have been a man who wanted to reveal something to men about men or to women about men". She felt that the play was not biased to one view as the perspective changed throughout.

The women believed that they had not made comparisons between the plays as they were listening, but did feel that both plays were similar, as Maureen commented, "They were both people trying to communicate with each other".

The final issue that the women discussed was their relationship to media in contrast to their experience in the group. All the women referred to listening to radio very positively in comparison with television. They felt it

allowed them to be more creative and imaginative. None of them listened to radio drama on a regular basis. They also felt that listening to radio drama as opposed to watching television required more attention and concentration. They admitted that to some extent the setting made the experience different from how they usually interact with media; they paid closer attention while they listened to the plays:

Karen: I like it it allows, it allows me to set my own parameters of what is going on and T.V. is a set you just, there is no, none of your own creativity all the imagery is there it [radio] requires a greater attention span I think it also allows you to drift you have to be very careful that you pay attention.

Angela: Absolutely, I mean you have a good idea of just what the details are that's why I could visualize her long hair and the sheets, etc., I do it all the time. As far as sitting in front of the T.V. goes it's a prepackaged thing it's just there to make you a passive subject, and if you are not aware of what's going on it can be manipulating. Same thing with a novel it allows you to exercise your mind - not restricted.

Focus Group II: Male

Play I: Half An Inch Closer

The responses to the first question of what they were thinking about while listening to the play were quite diverse. Dave was thinking about the structure of the play rather than the characters:

Well, I thought it was sort of like, the best thing I can compare it to is one of those cereal boxes where you have two kids holding the same package

with them pictured and just being continuously mirrored, sort of the entire thing of him writing a play which is almost mirroring the relationship, that was sort of that compliment and contradiction at the same time.

Tim found himself thinking that the play was "very typical - this is just - could be anyone's house you know, any relationship, conversation". He also picked up on the professions of the characters [artists] and found that although this was a specific trait of the couple their relationship was common place. Andrew found he was distant from the play as he, "was thinking about the garbage that is piling up on my balcony"¹¹, rather than the relationship of the couple in the play. Steven commented that he was thinking about the responsibilities of sharing housework. He felt that it was more than a question of taking out the garbage and picked up on what he described as, "some sort of thematic thing like towards the end they mention the title of the play, you know, "An Inch Closer" to, that's her solution to get one inch closer to being or half an inch, I don't know". Kevin said he thinking what a "real prick" the male character was. Mike found himself wondering why they "...didn't really find out why she was subservient to him or why she wasn't more, a more successful artist".

Only one of the men, Kevin, acknowledged that he had made

¹¹ The play opens with the wife complaining that the husband has not taken out the garbage.

images in his mind as he was listening: "Gees, that took me right home or actually to a friend's flat, to my own situation, I was placing myself in that situation". The rest of the men had not made any such images.

At this point, the discussion turned to the topic of the depiction of gender roles in the play. The discussion became quite energetic as a division broke out amongst the men. Tim, Steven, Kevin and Dave believed the gender roles were interchangeable except for the part of the play that addressed gender specifically, and Kevin went as far as to describe the play as "gender-free" at which point several of the men nodded their heads in agreement. As Tim explained, "because if I had heard the same play with the characters reversed I would still have had the same reaction, and I would have still believed it".

Mike and Steven disagreed with this idea of interchangeable gender roles. Mike thought it was a typical portrayal of white, middle-class gender roles, "somebody concerned about how they're portraying men and women, but, um, more or less typical roles". Steven argued that the roles could not be interchangeable; men and women do indeed have distinct characteristics:

I don't see it that way, I don't! I don't see the roles as interchangeable, I mean I heard the play, I saw, I lived part of it, you know, and I - I'm like that when I - I have a certain way when I do something creative. I, I get really excited then I get really upset afterwards when there's nothing

going on, when I'm not accentuating my creativity any more. And I sense that caring, nurturing that I get from my wife, when I think of it subjectively I don't want to change the roles, I can say 'oh sure fine they could be interchangeable', but personally I don't think they are. I think the sort of attitude about the violent ending to the play was pretty aggressive and I think, you know, I think that men have an aggressive vein in them, you know, and I think it was more her idea to sort of soften the ending of his story.

The next question the group addressed was whether they thought the play had an underlying message or point it was trying to get across to them. Kevin, Tim and Dave thought it had no underlying message that it was just a representation of life:

Kevin: Yeah, the message, I think it would be sort of a mirror kind of, I mean, I'm not even sure what terminology to use, a play that would reflect, like you said [looking at Mike] middle-class views...

Andrew, Mike and Steven, on the other hand, thought that the underlying message had to do with power. As Andrew declared:

the whole issue was power dynamics which doesn't matter whatever the gender were, [they] would be different, but depending on what the genders are the specifics would differ.

Mike believed that this message about power dynamics was illustrated in, "not just what they were dealing with, we all have to deal with these things, but the message was in the way they deal with it." Mike went on to comment that the portrayals were "very safe" he did not doubt that the group, himself included, had assumed that the couple in the play was white and middle-class.

All the men agreed that they could relate to the play. Dave and Mike especially related to the experience of writing, as Dave elaborated, "I write freelance on occasion and when she started mentioning the part about writing and then you get a high, then when you don't write you just wait until the type of high, that really hit home to me." Andrew countered that he related emotionally with the woman and intellectually with the man: "I saw myself in both of them actually at different times, in the sense of - I'm feeling like you're being taken advantage of unconsciously and I know that that was an emotional thing and I know intellectually that I've been him!" Kevin also replied he related in an emotional way except to the, "guilt sort of thing, that's the guilt in there going 'yeah how could you be like that' - but I'm being defensive - 'no it isn't you're oppressing women' going back and forth, certainly an internal conversation". Tim commented that he related more to the struggle itself than to the characters. At this point he contradicted what he had said earlier saying that, "the underlying message I got from this was, was when she said that relationships were about, aren't about endings and I think that's the one line that I think will stick in my mind from this whole thing". Steven added an interesting point concerning the process of interpretation, "That's how you bring it alive, is relating it back to you". This points to the need for a listener to give the text life, to make it

more than just a collection of words, but something that relates to the listeners experience if it is to have meaning. There was general agreement that to understand anything you had to relate it back to your own life experiences.

Only Kevin and Steven felt that they had learned anything new from the play. Steven thought he had learned things about himself:

I dunno, maybe see things about myself that when he said, you know, I'm the one who brings in all the money and you just go out and make your thirty whatever, I looked at myself probably because I make a bit more money and I don't think, I it shouldn't really matter that much, I sort of learned something about myself because I saw myself there and I don't know.

Kevin commented that the idea of 'a glimmer of hope' that was expressed in the play meant something new for him. It was different from the typical fare where, "you have big conflict, resolve the conflict and there you go...".

Tim and Dave felt a balanced perspective had been presented in the play. As Dave expressed it, "it was just like rebounding back and forth, he had the edge at the beginning but then she did, it ending finally with her having the winning point but it was more or less even." Steven and Mike described the perspective presented as male, as Mike stated:

because they dealt a lot more with his experiences his story as a writer, they didn't talk about her, her acting or why acting was important to her, it

was everything was definitely, um, more to do with him then, it revolved around him.

Mike expressed the same sentiments. Andrew was the only one who thought a female perspective was being presented, the only basis he gave for this response was that it was his 'gut reaction'. Kevin was not sure what perspective was being presented and did not want to hazard a guess.

In terms of the gender of the writer, Tim insisted that it was of no consequence, "I don't think it matters, I really don't". Mike disagreed and rebutted that he would be "surprised if it was a female author". The rest of the men did not want to comment on this, they were not sure if it mattered.

All of the men agreed that if I had presented the play to them differently, or in more detail they would have listened to it and interpreted it in another manner. As Kevin commented, "I think we would have filtered through different pieces of information that would have reinforced that, you know, what you had told us would have given us different interpretation". This was met with agreement within the group. They all believed that by my not setting a framework for them they had to rely on their own devices, as Steven neatly summed it up, "No, I think because you didn't say anything we were led to believe it as it unravelled in front of us, we used our own prejudices and stereotypes more".

At this point in the discussion Dave remarked that the couple in the play struck him as being older than their twenties, as I had described them in my introduction, "when I was listening to it I thought they were more in their thirties". Kevin, Andrew and Steven agreed with Dave that although the play was very believable and the characters realistic they just sounded too mature to be in their twenties, they sounded thirty.

Play II: In The Dark

While listening to this play Dave and Andrew were thinking about the male character, they found him to be inexperienced and tried to find reasons for this:

Dave: It seems he's never had that kind of an experience before, where there are certain things you should say that are important otherwise other things that are just trivial which in this case was, it's probably a former girlfriend or something, and [he] decided to make a whole issue out of it, didn't realise - probably never - someone never told him in the past not to do something like that. I found that he never learnt a lesson.

Andrew: I wanted to know what his problem was with this - so why was he so guilty? - that's a question I wanted to know, otherwise why would he have brought it up?

Kevin found himself relating the scenario back to his own life, he especially saw himself reflected in what he termed the male character's 'immaturity'. Steven found himself

puzzling over the characters' relationship and questioning the sincerity of the male character:

Oh, I thought it was, well I thought it was sort of funny that she would mention she had seen Tom, you know, and his reaction to it was sort of the same as hers at the beginning, then he said 'oh, if there's a problem just talk about it, I don't care" and then, but it seemed like he was so, that that wasn't the nature of what he really wanted to say. I got the feeling that he didn't really feel that she should talk about it, that what he was doing was giving himself an excuse to alleviate his guilt...

Mike similarly questioned the reasons why the characters reacted the way they did:

Ah, I was just thinking of the reasons they had for one wanting to get this out in the open and one not really wanting to know...

Tim responded that he had been thinking about the female character and the sexual nature of the play. He did not like her as he felt she was playing mind games with her lover:

Well I think that the lady was really immature because she's the one that played the games saying that she did see her ex, I don't think there is anything wrong with seeing an ex - I related to it but I just, again felt this was typical - I also thought if that was sex they were having they should like go there own separate ways [lots of laughter] I thought that was pretty lame!

Tim and Steven said that they had pictured the characters in their minds. Steven described them as "sitting there talking or laying there, their legs missing".

The discussion then turned to whether the men had picked up any underlying messages or points in the play. Dave believed the message of the play was 'slight' but if there was

any it was learning to "keep your mouth shut at certain times". Mike commented that he did not think it was a question of 'keeping one's mouth shut', but that perhaps the point of the play was that "maybe it was a good thing he opened his mouth, and got to talk this out because maybe it released feelings of guilt that were preventing him from..." Kevin agreed with Mike that the message was not "a lesson teaching tool", but it was rather concerned with "showing more a duality in the personalities", and that the theme here was dealing with problems of communication. Once again Kevin brought up the phrase 'gender-free' to describe the play. Tim responded that he did not find there was any underlying message or point being made in the play, it was just presenting "life, everyday experiences". Steven thought the message of the play was simply that it is "trivial to mention old lovers" but added that perhaps in real life the situation "might not have been as clean and smooth".

The men all thought the gender roles were interchangeable and they agreed with Kevin's description of the play as 'gender-free'. Steven described this notion of interchangeable gender roles in the following way:

I felt the roles were interchangeable, I mean I was trying, I was thinking of that, as the play was going on and each time I'd hear the other voice I thought well, it could be the man it could be the woman.

They all believed that aside from, as Andrew expressed it, "the analogy to their specific sex", the play was gender

neutral. They felt the perspective of the story was balanced. Tim, even though he agreed with this description of the perspective, did feel strongly that both plays had been written by women. He could not say exactly why he thought this except he had 'the feeling' he was correct.

Kevin brought up an interesting point here, he became unsure if the perspective was actually balanced as he talked about the fact that they were all men discussing it. Kevin believed that their maleness was an important factor in determining the nature of the conversation and their interpretation, it effects "what we're willing to admit". Tim joined in the discussion here, agreeing with Kevin but pointing out that the group was not "leaning toward chauvinism". Kevin then remarked that "even this liberated male attitude we've cultivated into the nineties, it's male generated - so it's still - the bias is still there somewhere, in the foundation so I think it's a really difficult question to answer".

This initiated a discussion over whether the male character could be described as a 'liberated male'. Kevin thought that perhaps he was because "he deals with so much guilt that perhaps he is, you know, he deals with society by reverting [to] his male perception". Steven disagreed, he found the character anything but liberated, "I don't think he's the liberated male. I think he's - I thought he was pretty like, ah, selfish, pretty, his attitude was sort of 'me

I want to get this off my chest - I want to alleviate my guilt'". Andrew thought it was a question of what makes liberated males want to be liberated. Dave thought that the male character was not liberated at all as, "he's just thinking about himself throughout the whole thing". Mike described the man as "attempting to be liberated".

When asked to comment on the female character in this play, Dave described her as "more dominant" than the woman in the first play:

The other character almost let herself be pushed around by her husband and so forth, I think he managed to change the subject from the garbage to totally different issues. Let her forget about the garbage until the very end, but in this one she sort of has some intuition to play a game on him...In this one he's weaker in the other one he seems more aggressive, dominant.

Kevin remarked that it was not a question of dominance but security, "I think we are associating dominant and submissive or aggressive, um, with her security. I didn't see dominance in her at all I just thought she was a very, more secure person". Dave concurred that perhaps 'security' was the best way to describe it. Andrew commented that he liked the female and the male characters in both plays. Steven and Mike admired the woman in the second play but did not really dislike any of the characters. Tim had no feelings of like or dislike, he felt he understood them all. The group began to make more comparisons between the two plays at this point. Tim remarked that the second couple could be the same couple

in the first play further on in time or, "even the same night,...there are different roles, everyone has a different role in the bedroom, in the kitchen, in the bath - everything you know - different parts of your life you're different personalities". Andrew found he could relate better to the first play as he found the second play "seemed so stupid". Steven and Tim also felt the first play was more substantial and, as Tim commented, "that the second one seemed that it was just the sexual chemistry...that was, like, the basis of their relationship right then and there". Mike thought the first play had in a way set them up for the second play; they knew what to expect.

All the men stated that they had interacted with the plays in an more intense manner than they normally do with media. They also felt that radio demanded more attention and was itself more stimulating than television. Steven summed their feelings up nicely when he commented:

I think your imagination is a little more stimulated when you're listening to radio because if you're watching television you get the combination of the visual and the auditory and here you sort of have to pre-visualize things or see them in a way that is different then like the movie screen. We've imagined them three-dimensionally, you may imagine them in your mind as colours or something like that. I guess different people visualize things in their minds differently, like on television it's all done for you.

They all believed that radio allowed you to be creative while other forms of media allowed one less freedom, "images

[are] thrown at you". Yet at the same time they all thought they were able to deal with media, specifically television, critically; they were able to avoid being sucked in by its images and messages.

Conclusion

The individual differences that arose from the findings, centered around five points: thoughts while listening; visualization of the plays; presence of messages; the occurrence of learning; and gender roles and relations.

Participants responded in one of two ways to the question of what they had been thinking about while listening to the plays. They had either been thinking about their relationships or those of others that the plays reminded them of, or they had been evaluating the characters. Participants either reflected on relationships or were critical of the characters and the plays. These differences indicate that two types of listening occurred during the plays: reflective listening and/or critical listening. These types were not restricted to one individual or another, as it is evident in the findings that it was possible for individuals to listen in both ways at different times throughout their interaction with the plays.

Some individuals made pictures of the events or the characters in the plays while listening. Those who did visualize the play in some way either made images of the

settings or images of themselves in the situation. The settings imagined were familiar to the participant. Perhaps visualizing the play facilitated their understanding of the play or it is an indication of the tendency of the participants to place the play in a context they can relate to personally, aiding them in their interpretations.

The question of the presence of a message in the plays brought up differences that can be best understood in two ways: cultural products as mere reflections of society or as attempting to affect, even manipulate subjects. Those who did not identify messages tended to see the plays as reflecting life and nothing more, while those who identified messages believed the plays were trying to put across a point to their audiences; trying to make them see certain issues in certain ways.

On the issue of whether the participants had learned anything from the plays, those who believed they had described it as either new or as a 're-learning'. By 're-learning' it was meant that the plays had confirmed what they had already experienced. In a sense the play was a reflection of life but more than that it acted as a reinforcement of participants' experiences, confirming the appropriateness or inappropriateness of past actions. The two men who had learned something new from the plays said it concerned their behaviour. They had realized something about their lives.

Finally, individuals were divided in their opinions as

to the nature of the gender relations in the play. Participants found them present in a stereotypical or a challenging way or not present at all. This difference occurred on a group level more so than on an individual level (the men tended to see the plays as 'gender free') and, therefore, is addressed more extensively in the group differences, but it did occur between individuals also. Those participants who believed the plays were balanced in perspective and that gender roles were not an important element of the plays justified this by describing the roles of the characters as interchangeable. They believed that the lines delivered by the female characters could have been delivered by the male characters and vice-versa without upsetting the reality of the plays.

It is possible to develop from these findings a typology of individual differences which, with further research, has possible applications for the two other levels of interaction: gender and the overall process. The following table illustrates how this typology might be developed:

Table 2 Typology of Individual Differences

Differences	Media's relationship with society	
	Reflective	Manipulative
Activity while listening	Reflecting on relationships	Evaluating characters and plays
Message	Not present	Present
Learning	None or re-learning	New
Gender Relations	Not present	Stereotypical or challenging
Type of Listening	Reflective	Critical

Table 2 illustrates how the differences correspond with the two views of media's relationship with society that were evident in the findings. A reflective view of this relationship, one that sees media as simply reflecting a 'slice of life', was characterized by thinking about relationships while listening, the lack of identification of a message in the plays, no occurrence of new learning, denying the existence of gender relations, and a tendency not to question anything but to reflect on one's own experiences, to listening reflectively. A manipulative view of media's relationship with society, one that sees the media as affecting subjects' opinions and behaviour, was characterized by an evaluation of the characters and the plays while listening, the identification of a message or messages in the plays, the occurrence of

new learning, the identification of gender relations in either a stereotypical or a challenging form, and by questioning, critical listening.

This typology does not represent an attempt to fit participants into one category of the other as it may appear, as the findings indicate that participants moved from one perspective to the other, contradicted themselves and listened to the plays in a combination of the reflective and critical forms. This points to the negotiation that occurred throughout the interaction in the struggle to derive meanings from the plays. The participants were trying to find common ground between the meanings in the text and the meanings arising from their own everyday experiences. This is the core of the meanings that arise from interaction, and from the interaction of the many discourses at work: those inscribed in the text and those inscribed in the participants that intertwine and weave patterns of meanings.

Gender Differences

The individual differences resulted from the different experiences of each of the participants. While these experiences were often similar they were contingent on many factors, for example, ethnicity, class, education, sexuality, religion, etc. The research is limited to exploring one of these factors, gender, but this is not an attempt to negate

the importance of other factors. It would be naive to believe that all the women experienced life identically or that all the men did. It is, however, a reasonable and documented conclusion that females or males would share common experiences with their own gender due to the gender typing that occurs in our Western societies. Gender is the focal point in order to gain insight not only into its role in this process, but to explore the nature of the process itself. We interpret differently because we experience life differently, but simultaneously we share a web of culture.

Play I: Half An Inch Closer

The women tended to be more concerned with the content of the play, specifically the relationship presented in the play, than were the men. The women related to and evaluated the relationship between the characters. They discussed their own relationships and those of people known to them and made value judgments about the characters based on these experiences. The men, on the other hand, tended to focus on the structure of the play and relationships in a more general sense. They did not personalize the content to the same extent as the women; they appeared more detached from the relationship in the play. They tended to focus on the professions of the characters and the dynamics of the play. They made fewer references to their own experiences or to

those of others known to them.

The three women who had described visualizing the play had all done so in terms of the settings. The one man who had created an image of the play while listening had pictured his friends apartment and placed himself in the situation.

The women described the message of the play in terms of communication and power. They discussed this in terms of its meaning for the couple portrayed. In the male group a difference of opinion emerged: three believed that no message existed, that the play was simply reflecting life. The remaining three characterized the message as concerned with 'power dynamics', i.e., each character wanted to control the other. This reference to power differs from that made by the women as these men believed the root of these dynamics did not lie in gender relations, but was intrinsic to human relations. They felt that the same situation could erupt between any two people regardless of gender or the nature of the relationship. They believed that gender may change the specifics of the conversation, but not the situation or the issues themselves. The women discussed power in terms of the specific conditions of the couple and made more references to issues of gender.

The women did not believe they had learned anything new from the play. They had only 'relearned' experiences, i.e., the play had reinforced their past experiences and those experienced through others and/or media. Only two of the men felt they had learned anything from the play, one had found

himself examining his relationship while the other felt he had drawn positively from what he identified as a 'message of hope' in the play.

The men tended to characterize the play as 'gender-free'. They believed that for the most part gender roles had not played a role in the couples' relationship, nor was such an emphasis occurring in the drama. They described the roles as interchangeable, i.e., the male character could have easily delivered the female character's lines and vice versa without disturbing the realistic quality of the play or changing their interpretations. Conversely, the women found that stereotypical gender roles were occurring in the play. They accepted without question the presence of gender roles.

There was little agreement among the women in terms of what perspective was being presented in the play. None of them believed a male perspective was being presented, they tended to favour a view of the perspective as balanced. However, most of the women believed a man had written the play. The women offered no clear explanation of why they had drawn this conclusion, but did make some reference to the message of the play and the way the play was written. Similarly, there was no consensus among the men on this point, but unlike the female group a male perspective was identified. Two of the men described the perspective as male, the basis for this was that they thought the play revolved around the male character to the neglect of the female character. The

men, with one exception, were not sure if the gender of the writer had any relevance to the nature of the play.

Both groups agreed that if I had provided them with a specific framework, i.e., introduced the play from a particular perspective, they would have certainly interpreted the play differently. Any framework I had provided them with would have formed the basis for their understanding of the play. Both groups felt that it had been left up to them to form their own basis of interpretation.

Play II: In The Dark

When asked to describe what they had been thinking about while listening to the second play, the men began to show evidence of a change in their interpretations. They discussed this play in more personal terms. Although there was little similarity in their responses to this question, they seemed to have made a shift from an objective to a subjective interpretation. They were still not as subjective as the women, but they began to reveal more about their own experiences. The women were affected more by the sexual content of this play than was the male group. The women talked about either the sexual context of the play or the 'mind games' that were at work when asked what they had been thinking about whilst listening to the drama.

While listening to the play only two of the men had made pictures in their minds, while four of the women had. These

images had been primarily of the characters themselves and not the setting. This is probably because the sexual emphasis of the play draws attention to the characters predominantly.

The women identified two underlying messages in the play: 'sex as a problem solver'; and 'a power/communication struggle'. The male group was divided, identifying several messages and one man denied that any message was intended.

The men agreed that the roles of the characters were again interchangeable as the play was 'gender neutral'. The women agreed that the gender roles were realistic representations but were divided as to their nature. Three felt they were stereotypical while two described the female role as 'superior' to that of the male character. At this point it became clear that the women felt a certain resentment toward the female character. They tended to see her in a negative fashion. Although they were not particularly fond of the male character, they did not criticize him so harshly. They described the female in negative terms and felt it was inexcusable of her to have acted the way she had, i.e., playing 'mind games', even though the man had initiated this behaviour. This resentment did not surface in the male group, on the contrary, they tended to view the women in a favourable light as they found her to possess a certain strength of character that the woman in the first play had lacked. They instead became caught up in a discussion as to whether the male character was a 'liberated man'.

The women had divergent views over the nature of the perspective presented in the drama. One felt that it could have been anybody's perspective while the remaining women were divided equally between a male and a female perspective as being presented. The men all agreed that a balanced perspective had been presented.

Both groups admitted that they had drawn on their own experiences in order to understand the plays, in fact, both groups believed this was inherent to any interpretation.

In both groups there was a consensus about their interaction with the radio plays in comparison to other media forms. Both groups believed that radio allowed them to be more creative. It allowed them more freedom to develop their own interpretations and imagery. At the same time this increased freedom demanded more concentration on the part of the listener, especially in comparison to television.

Conclusion

The differences between the female group and the male group centered around three issues: content versus structure; degree of personalization of the plays; and characterization of gender roles.

The women were more concerned with what was actually happening in the plays, while the men, at first, were concerned with the structure of the play. This finding appears to support the stereotype that women are more subjective than

men. However, I believe it would be mistaken to take this as evidence only of the stereotyping that exists in our society. The men did show less concern with the content of the plays, but this was only initially, as the discussion proceeded they began to personalize the plays more, although never to the extent of the women. The women also discussed the structure of the play, but were more concerned with the content of the play. The women interacted with the plays by relating them to their own experiences immediately, while the men took longer to do so.

This affirms a difference in the way the groups interacted with the plays. The women interacted on a personal level, moving out to a less personal interaction, while the men began from a less personal position moving into a more personal interaction as the discussion progressed.

Another important difference revolved around the question of gender roles. While there was debate amongst the women as to the nature of the gender roles in the play they accepted their existence. The men, conversely, tended to view the plays as gender free, i.e., no gender roles were present. This 'gender free' stance seemed to arise from a concern of the group that they were 'liberated men'. Given the relative youth of the men it is possible that this is a consequence of their awareness of sexism and their unwillingness to be viewed as supportive of it.

The Creative Interactive Process

There are three distinguishable types of experience that constitute the basis of the participants' interpretations: their own past experiences; the experiences of others; and experiences garnered from the media. Participants drew on these types of experiences to aid in the understanding of the radio dramas. Those experiences utilized by the individual during interaction with media are referred to and treated with as much validity as the other two types of experiences. Interestingly, the participants were aware they were using all three types of experiences in their interaction with the radio dramas:

Cathy: Past experiences, and I don't know a vicarious learning situation, it's not myself, it's not my own experience, and it's not my past experience, but what I see, or what is on television or, you know, other people's relationships

Sarah: ...especially T.V. from the media all around you and what you read and the school...

Steven: That's how you bring it alive, is relating it back to you

Tim: But you also bring it alive with everything obviously we are going to have to base everything on our lives and our experiences that's all we know

References were also made to specific books and television programs. The women referred to two books in their discussion of the second play, these were Our Bodies Our Selves and Secrets. Also one of the women compared the first play to the 'Cleaver Family', as she felt the play was

attempting to represent the perfect family. The men made only one specific reference to media and this came from Dave who compared the husband in the play Half An Inch Closer to Basil Fawlty a character in a BBC situation comedy Fawlty Towers. The use of experiences from media in interpreting illustrates the influence media, especially television, has on our concept of self. Media interactions are part of our store of knowledge and experience, they play an important role in our analysis of other cultural objects. The participants were conscious of this experience and admitted to evaluating the plays in terms of these experiences. Participants were selective in their use of this store of experiences, using specific examples in their discussions.

The participants displayed a high awareness of the process itself and a high level of media literacy. They were not blindly reacting to the plays, they knew how to interact with media. They brought up such issues as the role of the writer, the role of the interviewer, the structure of the play, and the use of voice in the plays. Participants had no trouble relating to the characters in the plays as real people. They discussed them as if they were actual people¹², while at the same time they knew they were indeed characters. The ability to slip into this 'reading' of a play is not unusual, millions of people do this every day whether they

¹² This is also the mark of a good playwright.

are listening to the radio, watching television or at the opera. It is not that the subjects in the group happened to be unusually experienced at this, but that they illustrate the sophistication of our interaction with media.

The participants were aware of the role of the writer and the effects scheduling and my role as interviewer could have on the process:

Tim: See it would be interesting to see if it was 12:30 in the afternoon, it was probably geared towards women who are at home, you know, with the kids maybe, you know, and if it was in the evening I mean it would be a totally different message.... Because I think that makes a total difference, to who the audience is targeted to.

Angela: I do a lot of writing and I know that we have to take on different perspectives it could have been anyone who wrote that play, it could have been a man who wanted to reveal something to men about men or to women about men or...

Tim: ...we'd also be having a different discussion if it was a man chairing this ...

The groups also displayed an awareness of the role of framework. They agreed that the way a cultural object is introduced or the context it is presented in affects the way it is perceived. I had provided them with a little information on the plays: date of broadcast and the radio announcers introduction to the plays; but nothing that professed a strong perspective or provided strict guidelines as to how the plays should be interpreted. They had to create their own framework of interpretations based on, as Steven commented, "our own prejudices and stereotypes".

Both groups stated that the couple in the first play sounded older than in their twenties. The voices of the characters signified an older couple to both groups. This did not disturb their interpretations of the play, but they described the couple as too mature to be in their twenties. The voices used did not signify what they were supposed to signify, but this did not create any real problems in the interpretation, as one participant commented, "That's the only thing that threw me but I forgot about it afterwards." Part of this interaction is the ability of the subject to read signs used by the author to create meaning in the play. The voices had signified the wrong age and this was noticed by the listeners who created an image of the couple as older. They did not reject the portrayals, they just gave them the meaning that they believed was appropriate, i.e., a couple in their thirties.

Evidence of an exchange between the radio plays and the participants lies in their responses to the question of whether they 'learned' anything from the play. While two of the women felt the play had reinforced what they already knew, two of the men believed they had learned something new:

Cathy: ...you've heard of this before it was, you've read excerpts of things similar to this, but I just...relearned...

Steven: ...I sort of learned something about myself because I saw myself...

This indicates that the participants took something from the play, but it does not indicate that they gave something new to the play.

They did provide the play with something new in the form of continuing the narrative. On several occasions they added to the story of the fictitious couples, continuing it beyond the time and setting of the plays:

Dave: It seems he's never had that kind of an experience before,...it's probably a former girlfriend or something, and decided to make a whole issue out of it, didn't realise, probably never, someone never told him in the past not to do something like that...he could have told her the next day at breakfast like, 'I might be going somewhere else for lunch I ran into Jane over here and I don't want to do that again'.

Tim: This could have been actually the same couple just the next week...

Karen: I just assumed it really offended her to have him smoke in the bedroom and where she wanted his attention to be solely focused and on that discussion not on his cigarette or the enjoyment of the cigarette.

Cathy: ..they seemed to forget the whole thing, they seemed to have such a long way to go after that.

The participants filled in gaps in the characters lives, for example, they are given no clues as to the past of these characters or to their smoking habits, yet they make comments on such details as if they know the characters. The plays provide no history of the couples' relationship or information about their futures. The groups created and postulated such information as part of the process of making sense of the

plays.

The interaction between subject and cultural object involved varying levels of creative freedom for the participants. The participants could not stray too far from the radio dramas that provided the script/foundation of his/her interpretation, nor can his/her interpretations stray from their cultural bases. According to the participants this level of freedom varies depending on the cultural object. For example, they all believed that their interaction with radio drama had allowed them more creative freedom than any interaction with television. They saw television as a 'prepackaged' medium, it comes with everything intact, there is little room for creative freedom:

Steven: if you're watching television you get the combination of the visual and the auditory and here you sort of have to pre-visualize things or see them in a way that is different than like the movie screen, we've imagined them three-dimensionally, you may imagine them in your mind as colours or something like that - like on television it's all done for you.

Angela: As far as sitting in front of the T.V. goes you lose your creativity it's there for you it's a prepackaged thing it's just there to make you a passive subject, and you are not aware of what's going on, it can be more manipulating.

Tim: You are just exposed to it before you've even talked, you've even formulated opinions, you see it, you see pictures and images and you figure them out and whether or not they apply to you, you know that's for you to decide or you don't even decide.

Karen: It [radio] allows me to set my own perimeters of what is going on and T.V. is a set you just - there is no, none of your creativity all the imagery is there.

Conclusion

The interaction of the participants with the radio dramas was based on three types of social experiences: personal; those of others; and those experienced through the media. The participants brought these mediated experiences to the interaction, selecting certain experiences to help them make sense of the dramas. Each of these mediated experiences was treated as valid in their interpretations. None of the participants found it strange that media experiences were employed with as much validity as the other two types. These mediated experiences sprung from the social discourses that surrounded the participants - the discourse of being a writer, of being a woman or a man- were integral to the participants mediation of meaning. These experiences were used to fill in gaps, to continue the narrative and to speculate about the motives of the characters; illustrating the creative and interactive happening that occurs when subject and text meet.

The participants were themselves aware of this interaction: raised questions about the role of the writer and their role as listeners. This was particularly evident in their discussion of framework. They believed that their interpretations could have been shaped if I had introduced the plays with a specific perspective in mind. Participants were conscious of the way meanings can be shaped. They thought this was particularly true of television as the power of the

image leaves less room for creative interpretation of the media product. This raises questions about the varying degrees of creative freedom occurring in interaction with different cultural objects.

The voices of the characters in the first play were supposed to represent a couple in their twenties, but failed to signify this to the participants who felt that they sounded like a couple in their thirties. This did not disturb the ability of the participants to interact with the dramas. The participants just adjusted the age of the couple in their minds, agreeing that they were actually a couple in their thirties. A signifier that was incorrect was negotiated to fit a meaning that was acceptable to the participants.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Interaction between subject and text is active and multi-dimensional; the subject is neither overpowered by the text nor is the text by the subject. A complex array of negotiations occur in the arena of interaction. Negotiations of meaning and experience construct and deconstruct the interplay, while they are constrained by the text they are shaped by social relations and institutions, and the discourses that intertwine in the subject's everyday life experience.

At the level of individual differences, subjects were influenced by their perspective on this interaction. The typology, based on five individual differences, illustrates how they aligned with one of two views of the media's relationship with society. Participants with the reflective view see media as performing the role of a mirror to society. Real life is simply reflected in the media. Those with a manipulative view of the media see them as powerful, if not malevolent, influencers of attitudes and behaviour in society. Television was seen as being especially guilty of manipulating its consumers with its emphases on violence, sex and rampant consumerism. The emergence of these two views is suggestive of the emphasis on either subject or text that has dominated audience research perspectives. However, participants did not fit consistently into one or the other of these views, they shifted back and forth throughout the discussion,

contradicting themselves, and struggling to derive meaning from the plays.

John Fiske and Christine Gledhill note that while texts provide a pool of potential meanings, they do not determine what meanings the reading of a text will uncover. This acknowledgement of the flexibility and contradictory nature of negotiation allows for the different social and cultural experiences of listeners. Participants mediated meanings in terms of their own experiences and those inscribed in the plays. The text, the author and the listeners are operating within what Stuart Hall calls 'maps of meanings'. In these maps of meanings are stored the codes, signs, symbols and past experiences that we employ to make sense of the world. The participants bring these maps with them to their interpretations of the plays, while these maps vary they share certain commonalities, such as gender experiences. In the role of interpreter of the discussions, I too am working within a map of meaning (a sociological map) bringing to these specific texts a certain discourse and pool of experiences.

This sociological map of meaning falls into what Michel de Certeau and Christine Gledhill refer to as professional reading. My interpretations of the participants' interpretations are overshadowed by a set of researcher-subject relations. As de Certeau points out, these readings are shaped by power relations which are part of the hierarchy of reading. This raises interesting questions about the dynamics of

researcher-subject intertextuality. For just as the subjects come to the text with a certain knowledge of other texts, images and sounds, the researcher also comes with a certain knowledge.

The gender differences that arose from the analysis indicated a distinction in the movement of this interaction in the two groups. The women immediately related to the plays in a very personal way moving out to a less personal interaction, while the men began from a less personal stance and moved in to a more personal interaction. The women immediately made reference to their own experiences while the men discussed the structure and the quality of the play before becoming more involved in the content and how it referred to their lives. This contrast in the movement of interaction illustrates how gender shapes negotiation. It is not merely a question of the groups starting from different points of interaction and negotiation, it is also a question of how this distinction affects that negotiation. This difference in the movement has implications for the understanding of how readings differ. For women to derive pleasure from texts immersed in the male experience there must exist a certain flexibility in the negotiation, as the research has shown, the nature of the interaction is capable of changing from moment to moment. As Linda Williams illustrates in her re-reading of Mildred Pierce, female spectatorship is a complexity of,

"the contradictory particularities of her situation" (1988:29). This was also true of the male participants, whose discussion and interaction with the plays showed evidence of their particular position, especially in their debate on the 'liberated man'. They did not want to fall into traditional chauvinistic stereotypes; debating the 'liberatedness' and their own liberalness was an attempt to affirm their distance from such stereotypes.

Participants drew on three mediated social experiences in their interaction with the radio dramas: personal, those of others known to them, and media experiences. Using these experiences participants filled in gaps, created meanings, and continued the narratives of the plays. As de Certeau notes the reader does not simply consume a text, s/he interacts with it. These experiences are used, within the constraints of the text, by the participants to evaluate the plays and to interpret them. These experiences also inform any images of the plays that the participants create. These negotiations of meaning are drawn from this pool of experience, media experiences are an integral part of this pool. 'Vicarious learning', as one participant termed those experiences which did not arise from direct personal encounters, are treated with as much validity as direct experiences. This indicates the important role media play in our everyday lives; media experiences are part of the individual's cultural pool of

experiences and shape the creation of meaning from other media products. Meanings stored from other interactions with media are part of this pool. With this in mind, Allor's call for an approach that goes beyond a focus on 'audience' to an examination of the greater social relations that set the context for subject-text relations is substantiated.

Creative freedom on the part of the participants was evident in their continuation of the narrative and their comparisons between radio drama and television. Several subjects hypothesized about the couples' future together or apart as they so deemed it, and even about their pasts. They also believed that radio allowed one to be more imaginative than television, as radio does not provide pre-packaged images for consumption. Raising the question of the power of the image over the spoken word. They chastised television for its monopoly on the senses and its restriction on viewers creativity. Even so, it was evident that they did not simply soak up its messages. They believed that were able to avoid its manipulations because they were conscious of them, even though they had used experiences garnered from television, as well as books, as part of the pool of experiences they used to interpret the plays.

The problem with the voices of the characters in the first play not sounding like a couple in their twenties, as they were described, was negotiated to fit the age participants found more acceptable: participants simply decided that

the couple were actually in their thirties. Contradicting the perspective of consumers as mere receptors, and affirming the creative interaction of subjects with the plays.

The focus group proved to be an effective technique in the gathering of data. The focus groups allowed access to the realm of interaction. The groups presented the opportunity for guided yet flexible discussions. The interaction between the participants stimulated the quieter subjects to join in, and proved to be a relaxed rather than tense setting for the subjects. The groups yielded an array of responses that were grounded in participants everyday life experiences. The group setting encouraged debate uncovering the different perspectives and discourses that were present in the participants' interaction with the plays. Feedback from the participants, written and verbal, indicated that their experiences in the focus groups had been on the whole positive, indeed they had enjoyed the opportunity to discuss and debate experiences and opinions.

Participants rewrote meanings in the context of their everyday experiences and the discourses that inform them. Gender is one discourse that plays a role in these interpretations not only in terms of the stereotyping that occurs in our society, but in the process of interaction itself. With a better understanding of the process of this interaction we can

better understand the relationship between subjects and texts, and all its nuances. We are neither sponges that soak up all that is spewed out nor are we completely free from the influences of media. We are active participants in the construction of cultural products. In examining such relations we must acknowledge the dimensions of the realm and the negotiations that compile it. For in a society that is increasingly media orientated we must not forget the participants themselves.

In the end the text is incomplete until it has been read, listened to or watched.

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Appendices

Appendix I	Pre-test Focus Group Participants
Appendix II	Female Focus Group Participants
Appendix III	Male Focus Group Participants
Appendix IV	Pre-test Interview Schedule
Appendix V	Focus Group Interview Schedule
Appendix VI	Questionnaire

Appendix I

Pre-test Focus Group Participants

Mary

Age: 25 years

Occupation: Student

Patricia

Age: 24 years

Occupation: Student

Sandra

Age: 20 years

Occupation: Student

Jane

Age: 28 years

Occupation: Student

Anne

Age: 29 years

Occupation: Student

Appendix II

Female Focus Group Participants

Angela

Age: 23 years

Occupation: Student

Karen

Age: 32 years

Occupation: Travel Agent

Maureen

Age: 26 years

Occupation: Office work

Cathy

Age: 31 years

Occupation: Student

Sarah

Age: 20 years

Occupation: Student

Appendix III

Male Focus Group Participants

Steven

Age: 27 years

Occupation: Photographer

Kevin

Age: 25 years

Occupation: Student

Dave

Age 23 years

Occupation: Office work

Tim

Age: 24 years

Occupation: Part-time student/Part-time waiter

Andrew

Age: 23 years

Occupation: Freelance writer

Mike

Age: 20 years

Occupation: Student

Appendix IV

Pre-test Interview Schedule

Introduction: Introduce plays and group; briefly tell them what the process is; ask them to listen to the play as if they had just turned the radio on at home.

Plays: DO NOT TELL THEM WHO WROTE THE PLAYS!!

We will be listening to two short plays; the first is called Half An Inch Closer, (14mins 38 secs), broadcast on the CBC May 13 1978; the second play is called In The Dark, (12mins 9secs), broadcast January 30, 1982.

(Remember to address everyone in the group; everyone's contribution is important to the study; no such thing as a right or wrong interpretation.)

Opening: What were you thinking about while you were listening to the play?

Themes

Part 1. What do you think the play is about? Does it have a specific message or point to make? Discuss this point and what makes you pick this out, how does it make this point?

Gender Relations

Part 2. How would you describe the gender roles presented in the play? Traditional, radical, not obvious...? How did the characters strike you? Why? How would you describe the relationship in the play? Keep prompting as to why they answer the way they do. How do you relate to the characters? Did you relate to any of the characters? Who and why?

Discourse of the Play

Part 3. Through whose eyes is the story told? What makes you answer this way? Is it realistic? Do you think the play was written by a man or a woman, why, would it make a difference? Do you think the story would have been told differently if it had been written by a woman/man? Why?

Comment on any of the techniques used in the play - did they achieve their desired effect?

The first play Half An Inch Closer was written by John Lazurus and the second play, In The Dark was written by James O'Leary.

Hand out questionnaire

Appendix V

Focus Group Interview Schedule

Introduction: Introduce plays and group; briefly tell them what the process is; ask them to listen to the play as if they had just turned the radio on at home.

Plays: DO NOT TELL THEM WHO WROTE THE PLAYS!!

We will be listening to two short plays; the first is called Half An Inch Closer, (14mins 38 secs), broadcast on the CBC May 13 1978; the second play is called In The Dark, (12mins 9secs), broadcast January 30, 1982.

(Remember to address everyone in the group; everyone's contribution is important to the study; no such thing as a right or wrong interpretation.)

Opening: What were you thinking about while you were listening to the play? Did you make images of the characters in your head while you were listening to the play?

Themes

Part 1. What do you think the play is about? Does it have a specific message or point to make? Discuss this point and what makes you pick this out, how does it make this point? Did you learn anything new from this play?

Gender Relations

Part 2. How would you describe the gender roles presented in the play? Traditional, radical, not obvious...? How did the characters strike you? Why? How would you describe the relationship in the play? Keep prompting as to why they answer the way they do. How do you relate to the characters? Did you relate to any of the characters? Who and why? Are you drawing on any of your past experiences to help you interpret the play?

Discourse of the Play

Part 3. Through whose eyes is the story told? What makes you answer this way? Is it realistic? Do you think the play was written by a man or a woman, why, would it make a difference? Do you think the story would have been told differently if it had been written by a woman/man? Why? Do you think it is possible to make generalizations from the play? Frameworks, if I had set the scene for you, do you think you would have listened to the play differently, would it have been easier to discuss? Refer to other media. Continuation of the narrative, do they want to know what happens to the couple?

The first play Half An Inch Closer was written by John Lazurus and the second play, In The Dark was written by James O'Leary.

Appendix VI

Questionnaire

1. Did you feel uncomfortable participating in the discussion? Please explain.

2. Did you find it difficult to understand the plays? Please explain.

3. Do you feel this exercise relates to the way you normally interact with media? Why?

4. Other comments:

Thanks again.