

TV'S LOCAL: THE EXIGENCY OF GENDER IN MEDIA RESEARCH

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The author argues that television analysis must take into account the ways in which daytime television positions women in the home. It is argued that the viewing of daytime television talkshows produces gendered and local interpretations.

Il est argumenté que l'analyse de la consommation de la télévision doit comprendre les façons dont les téléspectatrices se sont positionnées en tant que femmes à la maison. De plus, l'auteur vise les façons spécifiques dont les 'talkshows' construisent un lieu autour des femmes.

The brilliance of [the television show] USA Today is [its] neighborliness, not to say its folksiness (Tom Carson *The Village Voice*, Oct. 11, 1988).

[T]elevision is most grisly in its colonisation of individual consciousness (Arthur Kroker, 1985: 45).

It is axiomatic to say that television takes place in the home. But like most commonsensical ideas, this statement conceals the specificities of tv's place in the home while it stitches together larger notions about what constitutes home viewing. Contained within this articulation of home and television are certain commonly held conceptions about who watches what and when. The very equation of 'home' and 'television' belies relations between genre and gender which then come to be expressed as another banality: daytime tv is women's stuff. Now, underlying these truisms, I think that we can begin to see something akin to what Meaghan Morris has called gendered "spatio-temporal operations" (1988: 2). In other words, women watching at home at a certain time is already an historically constructed situation that plays along axes of gender. In this paper I want to shift the statement 'television in the home' and say that

television is local (that it is experienced at definite temporal and spatial sites), and that tv creates a locale (that it constructs certain sites). I will use the distinction between local and locale to think about the different ways in which television is inserted into an already gendered everyday. I will, therefore, use the term 'locale' to designate the naturalized and hence ideological arrangements in which we live.

To use another theoretical abstraction to explain the distinction between locale and local, let me introduce the figure of the 'already-there' to capture both Althusser's insistence on the ways in which ideology works to produce an "always-already" or interpellated relations to reality, and the more experiential aspect of 'being there'. In other words, the 'already-there' picks up on what Lawrence Grossberg has described as the ideological nature of what you see when you open your eyes in the morning; the familiar world about you¹. I'll try to disturb the very 'heimlich', 'familiar', or 'homelike' activity of watching daytime tv. Notions of gender are, of course, already at work within these discourses of home and family. In using the term 'locale' I want to emphasize the ways in which television takes up and articulates certain aspects of gendered places and tv genre.

As one case in point, I'll look at a segment of the daytime talk-show, *Oprah Winfrey*. While there is not the time here to do justice to the complexities of daytime talk-shows in general, nor of a programme such as *Oprah Winfrey*, in particular, I will argue that analysis of this genre must go beyond discrete analyses of textual systems. As yet, talk-shows have not commanded the kind of critical interest that they merit. This genre constitutes, however, a particularly rich site for feminist media analysis, as it engages key problematics within feminist theory. In the case of *Oprah Winfrey*, we have a tremendously popular show hosted by a woman which draws upon women's participation in various ways: women seem to constitute the majority of the 'live-audience', many women phone into the program, and, in spite of some recent demographic shifts, women still represent a significant percentage of the show's home audience. While Oprah deals with the usual range of talk-show topics, the social problems aired quite often centre on issues of particular interest to women (from rape to 'shopaholics' to Oprah's remarkable, and often remarked upon, weight-loss). Oprah Winfrey is also of prime interest to feminist criticism because of the ways in which the program stitches together autobiographical descriptions of the experiences of both the host and her audiences. While this public airing of the personal is a long way away from sixties' consciousness-raising, there is here what Judith Mayne has called "the echo-effect" of feminism (1988: 43). As Angela McRobbie has argued, "Feminism forces us to locate our own autobiographies and our experience inside the questions we might want to ask . . ." (1982: 52). McRobbie here raises important hesitations about the ways in which the 'personal is political' obscures the power relations of research practices. It would, however, be wrong to think that the attraction to the autobiographical is only recognized by feminists and that it does not equally circulate in popular genres. The problematic becomes, therefore, a question of how feminist media analysis can open up the different operations of talk-shows and, in McRobbie's words, "make talk walk" (ibid.: 57).

The idea that television takes place in social settings is, as I said, not new. As the 'captive audience' in the home, women and children were among the favoured targets in much of the dominant paradigm's media research (Gitlin, 1978). The position of television in the home may have prompted research on the effects of content and then genre but the objects of these studies tended to be seen as vulnerable half-subjects. Even as researchers wondered what people did with media, the underlying concern tended to be what the media did to women and children. While cultural studies research on encoding and decoding does centre on class as a key determinant, differential decoding according to gender remains "a serious absence" (David Morley, 1980: 26)². However, the larger questions of how gender restructures television's possible meanings is not quite resolved by Morley's own gesture to the "housewife" as viewer" (ibid.). Morley's hypothesis that housewives decode "in line with . . . the media's 'consumerist' presentation", again places women as the housewife in the never-never land "outside the wage labour economy . . . and in the family" (ibid.). One hears here the familiar discourse that equates 'consumerism' with passivity, and hence a reinscription of the familiar feminine/masculine, passive/active dichotomies.

While it is not the object of this paper to provide a synthesis of television research, what I do want to suggest is that questions about decoding must also take into account television's construction of locale. Within some television criticism the experience of watching television tends to be focused on diegetical machinations, to the occlusion of the historical discourses that shape how we understand television (both within the home and theoretically). For very pragmatic and political reasons, feminist television criticism has tended to concentrate on narrative genres that are taken as particularly of interest to women: notably soap operas. This emphasis is both understandable and important, and feminist analyses have raised the intricacies of women's use of a much denigrated form. However, the genre of soap operas has been taken by some critics as representing an archetypal feminine narrative, or "feminist aesthetic", in John Fiske's words. This hypostatization of one supposedly 'feminine' form imposes a rather rigid mode of analysis. The types of conclusion reached valorized rather general notions of resistance (Fiske, 1987; Modleski, 1982; 1983; Kaplan, 1987) and can be seen as a direct result of the material analyzed, and the methods of analysis used. Thus, arguments about 'gendered television' often proceed from the instance of soap-watching to make large claims about women's use of television: Fiske, for example, argues that "soap opera narratives consistently validate . . . feminine principles as a source of legitimate pleasure within and against patriarchy" (1987: 187). While the move to analyze a genre that has been condescendingly categorized as women's 'escape', or addiction, was one necessary moment in feminist-inspired television critique, it tends to close down as much as it reveals. We now need to ask other questions about women watching. To Jane Gallop's statement that "the very idea of the mother (and the woman) as outside culture, society and politics is an essential component of patriarchy" (1987: 322), I'll add that television also places women inside culture in very particular ways.

Living with Television

In analytically approaching non-narrative genres, we can admit the liabilities of soap opera analysis. Furthermore, the specific focus of this mode of criticism should warn us against applying one research paradigm onto an incompatible object. In other words, the legacy of psychoanalytic film theory tends to obscure the specific operations of different genres outside of the classical Hollywood paradigm. The construction of a feminine sensibility within the confines of a particular psychological model can also lose sight of the specificities of women watching at home. I therefore want to go back to a less narrowly tailored approach to tv and consider the possibilities of Raymond Williams' analysis of television. Williams' *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* is admittedly somewhat marked by the passage of time, and his own bewilderment in the face of American television. However, Williams does offer some key theoretical tools for approaching television's wider impact and affect. Williams takes up the common-place idea that "television has altered our world" (1975: 11). As he unravels this statement, Williams identifies two camps of technological critique: technological determinism and symptomatic technology (ibid.: 13). Within the former, statements about television are based in a conception of "technology [as] a self-acting force which creates new ways of life"; the latter sees "technology [as] a self-acting force which provides materials for new ways of life" (ibid.). Williams sees both of these discourses on technology as ultimately insufficient: "Each view can then be seen to depend on the isolation of technology" (ibid.: 14).

Following Williams, this isolation of the technology of television dramatically reduces the possibility of understanding television's history and uses, and curtails examination of television as "a social complex of a new and central kind" (ibid.: 31). To extend Williams, we could also say that the underlying isolation of the technology in much current writing on television deflects attention away from the ways in which television, as a social complex, continues to articulate women and the home in quite particular ways. One of Williams' key words for describing the complex of broadcasting is that of 'flow'. I'll argue that 'flow' can be used to specify the gendering particularities of television, but first, let's listen to Williams' explanation of flow:

The difference in broadcasting is not only that . . . events or events resembling them, are available inside the home, by the operation of a switch. It is that the real programme that is offered is a 'sequence' or set of alternative sequences of these and other similar events, which are then available in a single dimension and in a single operation (1975: 87).

In specifying the total flow of television, Williams points to the articulation of events, of advertising and programming narratives, and this all within 'a single dimension'. To my mind, the concept of flow is vital to re-placing the televisual experience in its place, in the home. Flow thus works analytically against much of the isolation of tv within television criticism. As Williams further says, ". . . though the items may be various the television experience has in some important ways

unified them. . . . In all these ways, and in their essential combination, this is the flow of meanings and values of a specific culture" (1975: 95). In other words, the televisual flow articulates several crucial factors involved in the experience of watching television: the ways in which disparate programs bleed into each other (the 'intertextuality' of tv); the ways in which television unifies disparate aspects of everyday life as it comes to define meanings and values. A feminist use of this term, however, can go beyond Williams and specify the ways in which gender is also reconstructed in the non-textual aspect of television's flow. More particularly, I think that flow can be used to reveal the gendered space and meanings of afternoon tv talk-shows. To begin to examine this possibility, I'll raise the following as an example.

A 1948 ad in *House Beautiful* picked up and played on women's different relation to the tv set: "Most men want only an adequate screen. But women alone with the thing in the house all day, have to eye it as a piece of furniture" (cited in Spigel, 1988: 38). The pragmatic tone of this advertisement evokes the individual manoeuvres necessitated by television's insertion into homelife; it reminds us of the myriad of minute detail and change entailed by the arrival of the set in the home. This advertisement is, therefore, an apt example of the historical discourses that evolved around and with television. Williams identifies the gradual emergence of discourses which solidified around technological innovations:

The earlier period of public technology, best exemplified by the railways and city lighting, was being replaced by a kind of technology for which no satisfactory name has yet been found: that which served an at once mobile and home-centred way of living: a form of mobile privatisation (ibid.: 26).

Here Williams raises the historical articulation of apparently conflicting discourses (increasing centralization of the workplace with increasing decentralization of the home) as key to both critical and popular conceptions of television. Williams' insight allows for a more nuanced conception of the ways in which the development of television co-exists with a changing economic and affective order. Williams does not, however, specify how the rise of the separate and discrete family unit affected women. However, we can take the concept of 'mobile privatisation' to consider how women came to be placed outside the economic order and inside with the television set. Without resorting to causal or conspiracy models to explain women's exile in suburbia, we can appreciate that the discourses of mobile privatisation did in fact need her in the home. With the emergence of a 'separable family' due to industrial reorganization there is, as Williams terms it, "the need and the form of a new kind of 'communication': news from 'outside'" (ibid.: 27). As the home becomes estranged from centres of production, it takes on a new role:

the centre of dramatic interest was now for the first time the family home, but men and women stared from its windows, or waited anxiously for messages, to learn about forces, 'out there', which would determine the conditions of their lives (ibid.).

It is into this setting then that television is inserted. It is also women who most 'anxiously wait' using television to peer out into the world. Moreover, as Lynn Spigel has shown, it was women who decided on the position of that window. Spigel studied the popular discourses of the time and found that:

these discourses which spoke of the placement of a chair, or the design of a television set in a room, begin to suggest the details of everyday existence into which television inserted itself (ibid.: 41).

It is, therefore, difficult to consider television in isolation from the social discourses of its time, and even more so to talk about the significance of television without raising the early ways in which women were central to the meaning of 'television in the home'. In conjunction with a new economic formation, a new social communication complex made sense of television, women and the home. This social complex then can be seen as centring on and constructing a certain configuration: a locale. The phenomenon that Williams calls mobile privatisation depends on women being in the home as it simultaneously situates possible modes of experience. As the home becomes a separate and identifiable locale, local experiences come to be determined. Betty Friedan's early classic, *The Feminine Mystique*, first pointed to women's experiences within the newly constructed locale of suburbia. As Friedan argued, their existence was marked by frustration and isolation: "Each suburban wife struggled with it alone . . . [asking herself] 'Is this all?'" (1963: 11). The forlorn question of 'is this all?' is therefore a local response to the social locale of home, reproduction and unpaid labour.

Living in Locale

At this point I want to differentiate between physical and discursive arrangements: separate homes, television, women; and the possible experiences that emerge with these arrangements. The physical and experiential aspects of television are often confused; for example, Herbert Zetl has said that "Live television . . . lives off the instantaneousness and uncertainty of the moment very much the way we do in actual life" (cited in Feuer, 1983: 13). As Jane Feuer's critique of this position makes clear, there are problems here: "to equate 'live' television with 'real life' is to ignore all those determinations standing between the 'event' and our perception of it" (Feuer, *ibid.*). While her critique of television essentialism is valid, in contradistinction to Feuer's argument I want to differentiate the 'event' of television that is produced by historical discourses, from the individuated experiences of it. In using the concept of locale I'll consider the economic, discursive and institutional practices that define television as a particular event within a constructed setting. In this way the idea of 'locale' can be used to analyze the naturalized arena of television reception. Locale therefore specifies the connection of place, setting, and events. Emerging economic and political discourses channeled and allowed for a particular type of family arrangement; these discourses constructed an historically specific locale. Locales, then, have historically allowed for, or made possible, certain types of experience.

The theoretical use of this term, *locale*, calls our attention to residual discourses that inform commonly held notions about television reception. The concept of *locale* reminds us of the historical discourses that place women in relation to television. As Spigel discovered in her study, "television advertisements in women's home magazines . . . attempted to negotiate this conflict between women's domestic isolation and their integration into social life" (Spigel, *ibid.*: 22). *Locale*, therefore, describes the discursive and non-discursive setting that offered the promise of a 'social life' within a situation of 'domestic isolation'. Television *per se* did not increase women's isolation in the home but it did articulate domestic isolation with a particular construction of the 'social'. Television therefore displaced women's discontent as it rearticulated women's work in the home as 'natural'. Local expressions of unhappiness were deflected by tv's reassuring creation of a *locale*.

Thus we can say that *locale* specifies particular arrangements of discourses and practices while 'the local' indicates the experiences within these arrangements. These local experiences are influenced but not overdetermined by *locale(s)*. The local, therefore, represents potential and momentary experiences of contradiction or pleasure. As a conjunctural moment, the local emphasizes the spacio-temporal specificities of television as a practice; daytime tv occurs in a particular time and space that have conventionally been taken as 'feminine'. In paying attention to the local we must recognise that *locales* are never hermetic, their articulation is never complete. As Spigel puts it, women "recognized the discrepancy between the everyday experience of domestic isolation perpetuated by television, and the imaginary experiences of social integration which television programming constructed" (*ibid.*: 21). The local arises from and describes the experiential aspect of particular arrangements. This local experience of the intercalation of discourses, structures and practices is similar to and extends Williams' concept of 'the structure of feeling'. Following Williams we can say that mobile privatisation introduced a new calculus of the economy, insitutions of the family and home, and communication; moving beyond him we can locate the ways in which women and television are articulated together. This *locale* produces 'a way of life'. The local then is the 'feeling' part of the structure of feeling, it is in Williams' words, "the particular *living result* of all the elements in the general organisation" (Williams, 1961: 48, [emphasis mine]). In other words, *locale* is the horizon against which the experience of the local is measured and felt.

In distinction to *locale*, the local is the realm of possible interpretations and experiences. In semiotic terms this could be called the 'excess'. The local however differs from the notion of surplus meaning in that it is not restricted to one's relation to textual systems. The local then allows for a variety of meanings and experiences created through the conjuncture of textual and extra-textual operations. As an analytic term, the local indicates those site specific experiential moments that are produced through the articulation of television's past (the traces of mobile privatisation and its insertion in the home), the textual system of the programme, and women's understanding of their positioning.

Oprah Winfrey: The Locale of Daytime TV

There are a number of elements that render *Oprah Winfrey* particularly interesting for feminist analyses of television. The personage of Oprah herself first comes to mind. She has, indeed, claimed a number of 'firsts': the first black woman to have a syndicated talk show; the first person to challenge Phil Donahue's corner on the daytime talk show circuit; the first black to own her own tv and film studios; one of the first television celebrities to approach painful subjects from child abuse to obesity with her own autobiographical experiences (her weight is an on-air 'in-joke' and to date she has lost 58 pounds). Her show is marked by her presence as a black woman; and racist and sexist discourses are, if not always directly confronted, at least obliquely worked over. The format of the show itself is live-to-tape, a residual mode of production now mainly used in quiz and talk shows and some sportscasts. This form, however, is particularly significant in the creation of locale. Each hour-long episode focuses upon one general issue and features several guests who have experienced the 'issue' at first hand. After they have given their 'testimonials', a number of 'experts' are invited to comment. At this time, Oprah tours the audience, questioning members and receiving telephone calls from the television audience. The actual situation of the show is therefore set up as first a dialogue between Oprah and the guest (who is often a 'victim' or at least an 'experiential body'), followed by conversation between Oprah and audience member, guest and audience, expert and Oprah, and so on. This basically triangular form: Oprah, guest, audience; is given a fourth dimension as disembodied television audience members speak (Oprah normally looks up to the studio ceiling when she receives a call, adding to the extra-dimensional effect). In this way a certain locale is set up; the studio is the site of a fairly regulated event. The flow of each episode reinforces a structural locale and the segmentation remains fairly constant: Oprah and guest, expert and guests, Oprah and audience. The degree to which locale is an accomplished construct can be seen in the ways in which local disruptions can disturb this accomplishment. In an episode dealing with skinheads, a neo-Nazi called blacks 'monkeys'; Oprah asked if that included her. The skinhead replied yes and offensively told her to keep her hands off him. This potentially disruptive moment was curtailed as Oprah cut to a commercial. The regulated locale was finally restored as the skinheads were thrown out. That this occurred during a commercial break serves to show the ways in which locale can be protected from the uncertainties of the local.

While the live studio aspect of this programme is important, I now want to turn to how it plays out at home. I'll consider a small segment of one show, roughly ten minutes in length. It should be emphasized here that I make no pretense of doing an in-depth textual critique, nor even of complete analysis of *Oprah Winfrey*. I want to use this segment to work through the theoretical relevance of the concepts of locale and local. In so doing I hope to explore one possible mode of approaching the apparatus of daytime television talk shows.

While this segment is difficult and upsetting, it is representative of the type of issues dealt with on the show. The leading issue deals with criminals that have committed crimes after being inadvertently released, or released on parole. The first guest is a woman who has been very recently raped in the Chicago subway by a man freed from jail through a bureaucratic error. This young black woman is identified by caption as "Angela Raped by Freed Criminal". I will briefly describe this segment and then raise the ways in which a locale is constructed and how the local may operate. The show opens with a taped simulation of the area where the rape occurred, over which Oprah gives the details of the assault. We then move into the studio where 'Angela' sits with Oprah. As 'Angela' recites the stages leading up to and including the rape itself, Oprah prompts, gives conversational cues, and adds or insists on specific details of location: "it happened about a block from where we are in the studio". The camera focuses on 'Angela' but also constantly cuts to Oprah and to the audience. In this way a triangle is quickly set up with a dialogue manoeuvre (camera back and forth between two of the three parties) operating within the three points. This movement then serves to punctuate certain key aspects of 'Angela's' testimony: 'Angela' says, "I'm not that good a judge of character . . . I didn't think anything about any attack" and the camera cuts to audience members. There then follows four commercials, to which I'll return in a moment. When we return to the studio, 'Angela' continues with her very close description of the rape on the subway platform. Again there are cuts to the audience, and gasps from the audience as 'Angela' recounts how by-standers watched but did not help her. This becomes a focal point as Oprah repeats it to the consternation of the audience. The fact of the rape's proximity is again emphasized as Oprah says, "this is two weeks ago in Chicago". The testimony ends with 'Angela' asking "what defence do we have?" in response to Oprah's question of how she now feels. Oprah then wishes her luck and comments on the quality of the lawyer representing 'Angela' in the upcoming trial. Theme music; and we cut to four more advertisements.

Watching the Flow

From this description we can see that a certain pattern emerges. This pattern or flow structures the programme and defines a particular locale. This locale is constructed through the studio's physical arrangements: the guests and Oprah sit facing and slightly above the audience; and segmentation: the show is blocked out into three movements. I want now to look at the flow that is created for the television viewer. Here, the camera is obviously important; it is through the camera movements and editing that the locale is solidified for the television audience. During the ten minute segment I describe, there are fifteen cuts to the audience and while the guest is the central focus, the camera moves to Oprah twenty-nine times. The result of these various cuts is a sense of cohesiveness and even 'dialogue'. As previously mentioned, the three point set-up of Oprah, guest and audience, actually plays out as a series of dyadic moves: between Oprah and audience, Oprah and guest. The old adage of television being a 'reactive medium' here is strongly played out. The shots of the audience and their gasps render an already horrific situation, closer and more

'human'. Their astonishment that people looked on and did not help 'Angela', combined with close-ups of concerned faces, reinforces the sense that this is a potentially supportive and cohesive group. This in turn builds upon the physical arrangements of the studio to project a strong sense of locale.

At home, however, the flow is constructed with the significant addition of the commercials. While the television audience's presence is built into the programme through the studio's construction of locale and the phone-in voices of people at home, these ads significantly shift the flow. Halfway through 'Angela's' description, the commercial break features four ads: 1) "Polytel record of Abba's greatest hits; 2) ad for store, "Zayre's", where a frantic woman pushes a shopping cart up and down the aisles; 3) "MacDonald" salads, camera follows lone woman; 4) a board-game, "Secrets" which features couples recounting sexual exploits while the captions, "You're lying" or "its true" appear in bubbles over their heads. The commercial break at the end of 'Angela's' testimony features four more ads: 1) two women asking 'does she really?' of another woman ("Clairol" hair dye); 2) Bill Cosby playing child psychologist for "Jello" puddings; 3) PSA: smoke detectors; 4) a woman operates a tv remote control wand and makes a man appear ("Diet Pepsi"). While I do not want to suggest that the audience would conscientiously watch all the ads, I do contend that **these ads rearticulate the total flow, and hence understanding, of the programme.** In a way, these ads are even quite comforting after the horrendous testimony we have just heard. It shouldn't be forgotten that the segment described emphasized that a rape had just happened, near here. While the 'here' in question is Chicago, the locale of the show works precisely to make us feel that we are there. More importantly, it should not be glossed over that rape is a constant, though perhaps underlying, reality for women. I watched the ads in order to 'bring me' down, to move me into the 'real' world.

Now, of course, we are dealing with at least three levels of 'reality' here: the familiar real world of consumption, the true tale of a rape, and the actual situation of women and television at home. And it is here that the concept of flow is crucial. Flow constructs the locale of the studio; it creates a particular contextualization at home of what is being watched. The familiar world of ads is part of that flow, and as they comfort they also construct a particular locale dependent on programme, home and women watching. It is here that a local structure of feeling connects with the locale constituted by the flow. Locally at home the manifest content of the segment, rape, elicits a particular chain of feelings: fear, anger, disbelief, caution, sympathy, empathy, etc.. With the addition of the commercials, however, the flow rearticulates the overall meaning of the segment. The commercials bring us back to our homes while they break into that chain of possible experiential meanings. One of the most horrifying and potential situations for women, rape, is articulated with mundane images of women and home: mad housewives in the supermarket; competition over hair colour; lonely young women conjuring up strange hunks to share their diet drinks. The potential local disruption created by the subject matter is in this way rendered 'heimlich' and familiar. The experiential moment is captured within a

reassuring locale and the injustice of rape as a crime against all women is deflected. The local understanding and experience of this episode could conceivably lead to political articulations: to a wider comprehension of violence and rape as societal or structural, not only individual. However, this connection is disarticulated (and disarmed) by the overall television flow. The status quo is therefore reconstructed through the condensation and articulation of the real story of the rape, the locale constituted through the flow of daytime tv talk shows, and the local that is constructed in watching at home.

Conclusion: "A Theory is Always Local"
(Deleuze, 1977: 205)

Taking from Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze (1977) we can talk about theories as tool-boxes. This metaphor is particularly apt for any discussion of television, women, and the domestic sphere. As Deleuze points out, a theory must be useful; it should as Marcel Proust said of his books, be "treated as a pair of glasses directed to the outside" (ibid.: 208). TV in the home needs to be seen through differently adjusted glasses. The ways in which television operates in society is in any case far too complex for one method, for one tool, or for a meta-level 'theorie d'ensemble'. Furthermore, there is no one entrance into television's affectivity; television cannot be seen as solely textual, nor is it a fixed entity with clearly designated and worrisome effects on 'weaker' members of society. In abandoning the search for the perfect entrance into television's meaning, I want to consider how tv works locally: to envision locality and television as deeply interconnected, neither fully determining the other. In trying to comprehend the statement, 'television is local', I have begun to theorize the ways in which local configurations are always interpenetrated with discourses on gender, on the home, on society, on power. Ultimately, of course, I am questioning what counts (as knowledge) in our society. In defining and using the terms local and locale, I want to open up that which is so near to us that we are unaware of its different operations and movements. Thus the innocent practice of watching television at home turns out to be as finely layered as an onion, and as Clifford Geertz reminded us, onions have no centre. While there is no essential meaning of television in the home, together the home and television give us particular knowledges about what we consider local. In investigating the ways in which locales are constructed and re-constructed around us, we can approach one aspect of television's apparatus. Shifting the focus from the purely textual aspects of television, we can begin to see the non-discursive and embodied ways in which tv interacts with the home. In conjunction with locale, the concept of the local allows us to recognise those momentary instances of experience (of ourselves, of our situations, of our times) that both arise from and sometimes escape the contours of locale. Taken together, these terms allow glimpses of where we live and who we are.

NOTES

1. Lecture given by Lawrence Grossberg, Concordia University, March, 1988.
2. Morley's *Family Television* (1983) continues this line of inquiry but avoids the historical construction of gender within the home. Any consideration of television viewing is, however, indebted to his theoretical moves.

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