

## Television in the Family Circle

**N**icholas Ray's 1955 film, *Rebel without a Cause*, contains a highly melodramatic moment in which family members are unable to patch together the rift among them. The teenage son, Jim, returns home after the famous sequence in which he races his car to the edge of a cliff, only to witness the death of his competitor. Jim looks at his father asleep in front of the television set, and then he lies down on a sofa. From Jim's upside-down point of view on the sofa, the camera cuts to his shrewish mother who appears at the top of the stairwell. In a 180-degree spin, the camera flip-flops on the image of the mother, mimicking the way Jim sees her descending the stairs. This highly stylized shot jolts us out of the illusory realism of the scene, a disruption that continues as the camera reveals a television screen emitting a menacing blue static. As the camera lingers on the TV set, Jim confesses his guilt. Moments later, when his mother demands that he not go to the police, Jim begs his henpecked father to take his side. Finally, with seemingly murderous intentions, Jim chokes him. The camera pans across the TV set, its bluish static heightening the sense of family discord. With its "bad reception," television serves as a rhetorical figure for the loss of communication between family members. In fact, as Jim's father admits early in the scene, he was not even aware of his son's whereabouts during this fateful night, but instead had learned of the incident through an outside authority, the television newscast.

As this classic scene illustrates, in postwar years the television set became a central figure in representations of family relationships. The introduction of the machine into the home meant that family members needed to come to terms with the presence of a communication medium that might transform older modes of family interaction. The popular media published reports and advice from social critics and social scientists who were studying the effects of television on family relationships. The media also published pictorial representations of domestic life that showed people how television might—or might not—fit into the dynamics of their own domestic lives. Most significantly, like the scene from *Rebel without a Cause*, the media discourses were organized around ideas of family harmony and discord.

Indeed, contradictions between unity and division were central to

representations of television during the period of its installation. Television was the great family minstrel that promised to bring Mom, Dad, and the kids together; at the same time, it had to be carefully controlled so that it harmonized with the separate gender roles and social functions of individual family members. This meant that the contradiction between unity and division was not a simple binary opposition; it was not a matter of either/or but rather both at once. Television was supposed to bring the family together but still allow for social and sexual divisions in the home. In fact, the attempt to maintain a balance between these two ideals was a central tension at work in popular discourses on television and the family.

### The Family United

In 1954, *McCall's* magazine coined the term "togetherness." The appearance of this term between the covers of a woman's magazine is significant not only because it shows the importance attached to family unity during the postwar years, but also because this phrase is symptomatic of discourses aimed at the housewife. Home magazines primarily discussed family life in language organized around spatial imagery of proximity, distance, isolation, and integration. In fact, the spatial organization of the home was presented as a set of scientific laws through which family relationships could be calculated and controlled. Topics ranging from childrearing to sexuality were discussed in spatial terms, and solutions to domestic problems were overwhelmingly spatial: if you are nervous, make yourself a quiet sitting corner far away from the central living area of the home. If your children are cranky, let them play in the yard. If your husband is bored at the office, turn your garage into a workshop where he'll recall the joys of his boyhood. It was primarily within the context of this spatial problem that television was discussed. The central question was, "Where should you put the television set?" This problem was tackled throughout the period, formulated and reformulated, solved and recast. In the process the television set became an integral part of the domestic environment depicted in the magazines.

At the simplest level, there was the question of the proper room for television. In 1949, *Better Homes and Gardens* asked, "Where does the receiver go?" It listed options including the living room, game room, or "some strategic spot where you can see it from the living room, dining room and kitchen."<sup>1</sup> At this point, however, the photographs of model rooms usually did not include television sets as part of the interior decor. On the few occasions when sets did appear, they were placed either in the basement or in the living room. By 1951, the television set traveled more freely through the household spaces depicted in the magazines. It appeared in the basement, living room, bedroom, kitchen, fun room,

converted garage, sitting-sleeping room, music room, and even the "TV room." Furthermore, not only the room, but the exact location in the room, had to be considered for its possible use as a TV zone.

As the television set moved into the center of family life, other household fixtures traditionally associated with domestic bliss had to make room for it. Typically, the magazines presented the television set as the new family hearth through which love and affection might be rekindled.<sup>2</sup> In 1951, when *American Home* first displayed a television set on its cover photograph, it employed the conventionalized iconography of a model living room organized around the fireplace, but this time a television set was built into the mantelpiece. Even more radically, the television was shown to replace the fireplace altogether, as the magazines showed readers how television could function as the center of family attention. So common had this substitution become that by 1954 *House Beautiful* was presenting its readers with "another example of how the TV set is taking the place of the fireplace as the focal point around which to arrange the seating in the room."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most extreme example of this kind of substitution is the tradition at some broadcast stations of burning Yule logs on the television screen each Christmas Eve, a practice that originated in the 1950s.

More typically, the television set took the place of the piano.<sup>4</sup> In *American Home*, for instance, the appearance of the television set correlates significantly with the vanishing piano. While in 1948 the baby grand piano typically held a dominant place in model living rooms, over the years it gradually receded to the point where it was usually shown to be an upright model located in marginal areas such as basements. Meanwhile, the television set moved into the primary living spaces of model rooms where its stylish cabinets meshed with and enhanced the interior decor. The new "entertainment centers," comprised of a radio, television, and phonograph, often made the piano entirely obsolete. In 1953, *Better Homes and Gardens* suggested as much when it displayed a television set in a "built-in music corner" that "replaces the piano," now moved into the basement.<sup>5</sup> In that same year, in a special issue entitled "Music and Home Entertainment," *House Beautiful* focused on radio, television, and phonographs, asking readers, "Do You Really Need a Piano?"<sup>6</sup> One woman, writing to *TV World* columnist Kathi Norris, answered the question in no uncertain terms:

Dear Kathi:

Since we got our television set, we've had to change the arrangement of furniture in our living room, and we just can't keep the piano. I need new pictures, but can't afford to buy them with the expense of television, so I was wondering if I

might somehow find somebody who would trade me a picture or two for a perfectly good piano.<sup>7</sup>

This woman and, I suspect, others like her were beginning to think of television as a replacement for the traditional fixtures of family life.<sup>8</sup>

As the magazines continued to depict the set in the center of family activity, television seemed to become a natural part of domestic space. By the early 1950s, floor plans included a space for television in the home's structural layout, and television sets were increasingly depicted as everyday, commonplace objects that any family might hope to own. Indeed, the magazines included television as a staple home fixture before most Americans could even receive a television signal, much less consider purchasing the expensive item. The media discourses did not so much reflect social reality; instead, they preceded it. The home magazines helped to construct television as a household object, one that belonged in the family space. More surprisingly, however, in the span of roughly four years, television itself became the central figure in images of the American home; it became the cultural symbol par excellence of family life.

Television, it was said, would bring the family ever closer, an expression which, in itself a spatial metaphor, was continually repeated in a wide range of popular media—not only women's magazines, but also general magazines, men's magazines, and on the airwaves. In its capacity as unifying agent, television fit well with the more general postwar hopes for a return to family values. It was seen as a kind of household cement that promised to reassemble the splintered lives of families who had been separated during the war. It was also meant to reinforce the new suburban family unit, which had left most of its extended family and friends behind in the city.

The emergence of the term "family room" in the postwar period is a perfect example of the importance attached to organizing household spaces around ideals of family togetherness. First coined in George Nelson and Henry Wright's *Tomorrow's House: A Complete Guide for the Home-Builder* (1946), the family room encapsulated a popular ideal throughout the period. Nelson and Wright, who alternatively called the family room "the room without a name," suggested the possible social functions of this new household space:

Could the room without a name be evidence of a growing desire to provide a framework within which the members of a family will be better equipped to enjoy each other on the basis of mutual respect and affection? Might it thus indicate a deep-seated urge to reassert the validity of the family by providing a better design for living? We should very much like to think so, and if there is any truth in this assumption, our search for a name is ended—we should simply call it the 'family room.'<sup>9</sup>

This notion of domestic cohesion was integral to the design for living put forward in the home magazines that popularized the family room in the years to come. It was also integral to the role of the television set, which was often pictured in the family rooms of the magazines' model homes. In 1950, *Better Homes and Gardens* literally merged television with the family room, telling readers to design a new double-purpose area, the "family-television room."<sup>10</sup>

But one needn't build a new room in order to bring the family together around the television set; kitchens, living rooms, and dining rooms would do just as well. What was needed was a particular attitude, a sense of closeness that permeated the room. Photographs, particularly in advertisements, graphically depicted the idea of the family circle with television viewers grouped around the television set in semicircle patterns.

As Roland Marchand has shown with respect to advertising in the 1920s and 1930s, the family circle was a prominent pictorial strategy for the promotion of household goods. The pictures always suggested that all members of the family were present, and since they were often shot in soft-focus or contained dreamy mists, there was a romantic haze around the family unit. Sometimes artists even drew concentric circles around the family, or else an arc of light evoked the theme. According to Marchand, the visual cliché of the family circle referred back to Victorian notions about domestic havens, implying that the home was secure and stable. The advertisements suggested a democratic model of family life, one in which all members shared in consumer decisions—although, as Marchand suggests, to some extent the father remained a dominant figure in the pictorial composition. In this romanticized imagery, modern fixtures were easily assimilated into the family space:

The products of modern technology, including radios and phonographs, were comfortably accommodated within the hallowed circle. Whatever pressures and complexities modernity might bring, these images implied, the family at home would preserve an undaunted harmony and security. In an age of anxieties about family relationships and centrifugal social forces, this visual cliché was no social mirror; rather, it was a reassuring pictorial convention.<sup>11</sup>

Much like the advertisements for radio and the phonograph, advertisements for television made ample use of this reassuring pictorial convention—especially in the years immediately following the war when advertisers were in the midst of their reconversion campaigns, channeling the country back from the wartime pressures of personal sacrifice and domestic upheaval to a peacetime economy based on consumer-

ism and family values. The advertisements suggested that television would serve as a catalyst for the return to a world of domestic love and affection—a world that must have been quite different from the actual experiences of returning GIs and their new families in the chaotic years of readjustment to civilian life.

The transition from wartime to postwar life thus resulted in a set of ideological and social contradictions concerning the construction of gender and the family unit. The image of compassionate families that advertisers offered the public might well have been intended to serve the "therapeutic" function that both Roland Marchand and T. J. Jackson Lears have ascribed to advertising in general. The illustrations of do-



Family members circle around the console in a 1949 RCA advertisement.

mestic bliss and consumer prosperity presented a soothing alternative to the tensions of postwar life.<sup>23</sup> Government building policies and veteran mortgage loans sanctioned the materialization of these advertising images by giving middle-class families a chance to buy into the "good life" of ranch-style cottages and consumer durables. Even so, both the advertising images and the homes themselves were built on the shaky foundations of social upheavals and cultural conflicts that were never completely resolved. The family circle ads, like suburbia itself, were only a temporary consumer solution to a set of complicated political, economic, and social problems.

In the case of television, these kind of advertisements almost always showed the product in the center of the family group. While soft-focus or dreamy mists were sometimes used, the manufacturers' claims for picture clarity and good reception seem to have necessitated the use of sharp focus and high contrast, which better connoted these product attributes. The product-as-center motif not only suggested the familial qualities of the set, but also implied a mode of use: the ads suggested television be watched by a family audience.

A 1951 advertisement for Crosley's "family theatre television" is a particularly striking example. As is typical in these kinds of ads, the copy details the technical qualities of the set, but the accompanying illustration gives familial meanings to the modern technology. The picture in this case is composed as a *mise-en-abyme*; in the center of the page a

large drawing of the outer frame of a television screen contains a sharp focus photograph of a family watching television. Family members are dispersed on sofas on three sides of a room, while a little boy, with arms stretched out in the air, sits in the middle of the room. All eyes are glued to the television set, which appears in the center lower portion of the frame, in fact barely visible to the reader. According to the logic of this composition, the central fascination for the reader is not the actual product, which is pictured only in minuscule proportions on the lower margin of the page, but rather its ability to bring the family together around it. The ad's *mise-en-abyme* structure suggests that the Crosley console literally contains the domestic scene, thereby promising not just a television set but an ideal reflection of the family, joined together by the new commodity.<sup>24</sup>

Even families that were not welcomed into the middle-class melting pot of postwar suburbia were promised that the dream of domestic bliss would come true through the purchase of a television set. *Ebony* continually ran advertisements that displayed African-Americans in middle-class living rooms, enjoying an evening of television. Many of these ads were strikingly similar to those used in white consumer magazines—although often the advertisers portrayed black families watching programs that featured black actors.<sup>25</sup> Despite this iconographic substitution, the message was clearly one transmitted by a culture industry catering to the middle-class suburban ideal. Nuclear families living in single-family homes would engage in intensely private social relations through the luxury of television.

Such advertisements appeared in a general climate of postwar expectations about television's ability to draw families closer together. In *The Age of Television* (1956), Leo Bogart summarized a wide range of audience studies on the new medium that showed numerous Americans believed television would revive domestic life. Summarizing the findings, Bogart concluded that social scientific surveys "agree completely that television has had the effect of keeping the family at home more than formerly."<sup>26</sup> One respondent from a Southern California survey boasted that his "family now stays home all the time and watches the same programs. [We] turn it on at 3 P.M. and watch until 10 P.M. We never go anywhere."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, studies indicated that people believed television strengthened family ties. A 1949 survey of an eastern city found that long-term TV owners expressed "an awareness of an enhanced family solidarity."<sup>28</sup> In a 1951 study of Atlanta families, one respondent said, "It keeps us together more," and another commented, "It makes a closer family circle." Some women even saw television as a cure for marital problems. One housewife claimed, "My husband is very restless; now he relaxes at home." Another woman confided, "My husband

and I get along a lot better. We don't argue so much. It's wonderful for couples who have been married ten years or more. . . . Before television, my husband would come in and go to bed. Now we spend some time together."<sup>29</sup> A study of mass-produced suburbs (including Levittown, Long Island, and Park Forest, Illinois) found similar patterns as women expressed their confidence that television was "bringing the romance back." One woman even reported, "Until we got that TV set, I thought my husband had forgotten how to neck."<sup>30</sup>

Typically also, television was considered a remedy for problem children. During the 1950s, juvenile delinquency emerged as a central topic of public debate. Women's magazines and child psychologists such as Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose *Baby and Childcare* had sold a million copies by 1951, gave an endless stream of advice to mothers on ways to prevent their children from becoming antisocial and emotionally impaired. Not only was childrearing literature big business, but the state had taken a special interest in the topic of disturbed youth, using agencies such as the Continuing Committee on the Prevention and Control of Delinquency and the Children's Bureau to monitor juvenile crimes.<sup>31</sup> Against this backdrop, audience research showed that parents believed television would keep their children off the streets. A mother from the Southern California survey claimed, "Our boy was always watching television, so we got him a set just to keep him home."<sup>32</sup> A mother from the Atlanta study stated, "We are closer together. We find our entertainment at home. Donna and her boyfriend sit here instead of going out now."<sup>33</sup> Such sentiments were popularized in a *Better Homes and Gardens* survey in which parents repeatedly mentioned television's ability to unify the family. One parent even suggested a new reason for keeping up with the Joneses. She said, "It [television] keeps the children home. Not that we have had that problem too much, but we could see it coming because nearly everyone had a set before we weakened."<sup>34</sup>

### Trouble in Paradise

The ideal of family togetherness that television came to signify was, like all cultural fantasies, accompanied by repressed anxieties that often resurfaced in the popular texts of the period. Even if television was often said to bring the family together in the home, popular media also expressed tensions about its role in domestic affairs. Television's inclusion in the home was dependent upon its ability to rid itself of what *House Beautiful* called its "unfamiliar aspect."<sup>35</sup>

At a time when household modernization was a key concern, women's magazines continually examined the relationship between the family and the machine. The magazines were undecided on this subject, at times accepting, at times rejecting the effects of mechanization. On the

one hand, they offered their female readers technological fantasy worlds that promised to reduce the time and energy devoted to household chores. Dream kitchens, which had been displayed by women's magazines since the 1920s, resembled Technicolor spectacles found on the cinema screen, only here the bold primary colors depicted a woman's Shangri-la of electric gizmos and sleek linoleum surfaces. Just in case this pictorial display of technological commodity fetishism was not enough, the magazines didactically reminded their readers of the need to "be up to date." In 1951, *House Beautiful* provided a list of "changes and improvements that arrived [after the war] as predicted." Included were such labor-saving devices as the dishwasher and garbage grinder, but also leisure-enhancing machines, most notably television. In that same year, *House Beautiful* included a quiz entitled "How Contemporary is Your Life?" Most of the fifty-eight questions had to do with the degree to which the home was equipped with "modern" appliances, and the magazine warned its readers that if "you score less than forty . . . you are depriving yourself of too many contemporary advantages." Owning a television set was a must, according to this modernity exam.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas in the prewar and war years a fully mechanized household would have been presented in the popular press as a futuristic fantasy, in the postwar years it appeared that tomorrow had arrived. Moreover, living without an array of machines meant that you were anachronistic, unable to keep pace with tomorrow. Still, this rampant consumerism and its attendant "machine aesthetic" had a dark underside from which the new household technologies and mechanized lifestyles appeared in a much less flattering light.

As numerous cultural historians have shown, since the 1800s American thinkers have exhibited a profound ambivalence toward technology. The idea that people would become prisoners to machines, sacrifice romance for scientific utopias, or trade the beauty of nature for the poisonous fruits of industrialization were central themes for novelists such as Mark Twain, Edward Bellamy, and Henry David Thoreau.<sup>37</sup> With increasing class antagonism and urban strife, this ambivalence grew stronger in the twentieth century, and it was exhibited both in intellectual circles and in popular culture venues. As we saw in chapter 1, such sentiments were not only symptomatic of large-scale political fears about industrialization and the urban milieu: they were also expressed in terms of the micropolitics of everyday life and the increasing mechanization of the middle-class household. Machines provided leisure, comfort, and the possibility of progress, but they also suggested an end to nature and the "natural" order of things both at home and in civic life. By the 1930s, when the American industrial society seemed finally to have collapsed, people were caught between their faith that the wheels of tech-

nological progress would transport them out of misery and their bitter resentment toward the mechanized world that had let them down. As Susman has observed, at the same time that Americans were celebrating the technological future in the "Land of Tomorrow" at the 1939 New York World's Fair, the Gallup Poll revealed that most people nevertheless believed technological development caused the unemployment of the Great Depression.<sup>38</sup>

The home magazines of the postwar era adopted this ambivalence toward machines, scrutinizing each step forward in household technology for its possible side effects. *House Beautiful*, the same magazine that tested its readers on their modernity quotients, just as often warned of the dismal future in store for the residents of the mechanized household. In 1951, the magazine asked if the "houses we live in . . . accustom us . . . to feel more at home in surroundings where everything suggests only machines . . . that do as they are told and could never have known either joy or desire." And if so, there is an overwhelming threat that "man is nothing but a machine . . . [who] can be 'conditioned' to do and to want whatever his masters decide."<sup>39</sup> The threat of the "machine man," couched in the rhetoric of behavioralism, gave rise to a host of statements on the relationship between television and the family. Would the television set become the master and the family its willing subject? The adage of the day became, "Don't let the television set dominate you!"

The idea of "technology out of control" was constantly repeated as the language of horror and science fiction invaded discussions of everyday life. The television set was often likened to a monster that threatened to wreak havoc on the family. *Business Week* called television the "New Cyclops," while *American Mercury* referred to it as the "Giant in the Living Room," a kind of supernatural child who might turn against his master at any moment. The essay proclaimed, "The giant . . . has arrived. He was a mere pip-squeak yesterday, and didn't even exist the day before, but like a genie released from a magic bottle in *The Arabian Nights*, he now looms big as life over our heads."<sup>40</sup> As such statements suggest, television posed the intimidating possibility that private citizens in their own homes might be rendered powerless in the face of a new and curious machine.

The threatening aspects of television technology might have been related to its use as a surveillance and reconnaissance weapon during World War II. To some degree, the public was aware of this because television's aircraft and military applications had been discussed in popular literature since the 1930s, and after the war, men's magazines such as *Popular Science* and *Popular Mechanics* continued to present articles on television's wartime uses.<sup>41</sup> Such links between television and World War II sharply contradicted, however, the images of television and do-

mestic bliss that were put forward after the war. It seems plausible that television's military applications created doubts about its ability to enter the home. In fact, television's effect on culture was sometimes discussed in the context of warfare and atomic weaponry. Words such as "invasion" and "battle" were often employed in criticisms of the new medium, and a popular assumption was that television would cause cancer by transmitting waves of radiation. Later in 1961, when FCC Chairman Newton Minow chided the broadcast industry in his famous "vast wasteland" speech, he too used the imagery of atomic warfare to suggest the powerful effects that television might have on the public. Minow claimed:

Ours has been called the jet age, the atomic age, the space age. It is also, I submit, the television age. And just as history will decide whether the leaders of today's world employed the atom to destroy the world or rebuild it for mankind's benefit, so will history decide whether today's broadcasters employed their powerful voice to enrich the people or debase them.<sup>42</sup>

Although popular discourses suggested that television technology was out of control, they also provided soothing antidotes to this fear of machines. In 1953, the Zenith Corporation found a way to master the beast, promising consumers, "We keep them [television sets] in a cage until they're right for you." A large photograph at the top of the page showed a zoo cage that contained a Zenith scientist testing the inner components of the receiver. On the bottom of the page was the finely constructed Kensington console model, artfully integrated into a living room setting. As this advertisement so well suggests, the unfamiliar technology could be domesticated by making the set into a piece of glamorous furniture.<sup>43</sup> Stromberg-Carlson advertised its console model with "hand painted Chinese legend on ivory, red, or ebony lacquer," while Sparton television claimed that it was hand crafted by "trained cabinet makers who can turn a fine piece of wood into a masterpiece."<sup>44</sup>

Also typically, the home magazines suggested that television be made to mesh with the room's overall decorative style. As *House Beautiful* told its readers in 1949, "Remember that television can be easily tailored to match the character of your room."<sup>45</sup> Perhaps a testimony to the contradictory character of postwar domesticity, the two most popular styles were Contemporary and Early American design.<sup>46</sup> The constant associations drawn between television and contemporary living, as well as its most basic box-like form, gave the television set a privileged place in the modern style. The home magazines often displayed model rooms composed of simple geometric shapes where the television set seemed to be a natural addition. Conversely, the new machine was often thought to clash with Early American decor. Out of step with the evocation of a

colonial past, the set had to be carefully blended into the overall decorative scheme. In 1955, *American Home* placed a receiver on an Early American table that supposedly established a "rapport between Colonial decor and television." In that same year, Zenith advertised its Colonial cabinet by suggesting, "Early American Charm and present day entertainment are a happy blending in this 21 inch console."<sup>47</sup> More typically, however, when it came to colonial decor, the television set was shown to be an unrelenting eyesore. The home magazines often resorted to a kind of "decorative repression" in which the set was placed in a remote corner of the Early American room or else entirely hidden from view.

In fact, this design strategy extended beyond the specific case of Colonial decor. More generally, the decorative attempt to master the machine meant the literal *camouflage* of the set. In 1951, *American Home* suggested that "television needn't change a room" so long as it was made to "retire at your command." Among the suggestions were hinged panels "faced with dummy book backs so that no one would suspect, when they are closed, that this period room lives a double life with TV." In 1953, *House Beautiful* placed a television set into a cocktail table from which it "rises for use or disappears from sight by simply pushing a button." Even the component parts had to be hidden from view. In 1953, *American Home* and *Popular Science* each displayed an indoor antenna fashioned to look like a sailboat.<sup>48</sup>

The attempts to render the television set invisible are especially interesting in the light of critical and popular memory accounts that argue that the television set was a privileged figure of conspicuous consumption and class status for postwar Americans. A basic assumption in the literature on television, this argument can be found in standard histories as well as theoretical accounts like Jean Baudrillard's *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, in which he discusses television's value as a sign of class status in lower- and middle-class living rooms.<sup>49</sup> The early attempt to hide the receiver complicates such assumptions because it suggests the visual pleasure of interior decor was at odds with the display of wealth in the home. This popular fascination with hiding the receiver should remind us that the accumulation of commodities in the home might also have had attached to it a degree of shame. The kind of commodity exhibitionism that Thorstein Veblen first identified in 1899 could have been tempered by a contradictory impulse to inhibit the new commodity. Such "commodity inhibitionism" can itself be explained by television's class status during the postwar period. From the point of view of upper-class standards, by the 1950s television might well have been less a status symbol than a sign of "bad taste." Although television had been a rich person's toy in the 1930s and 1940s, its rapid dissemination

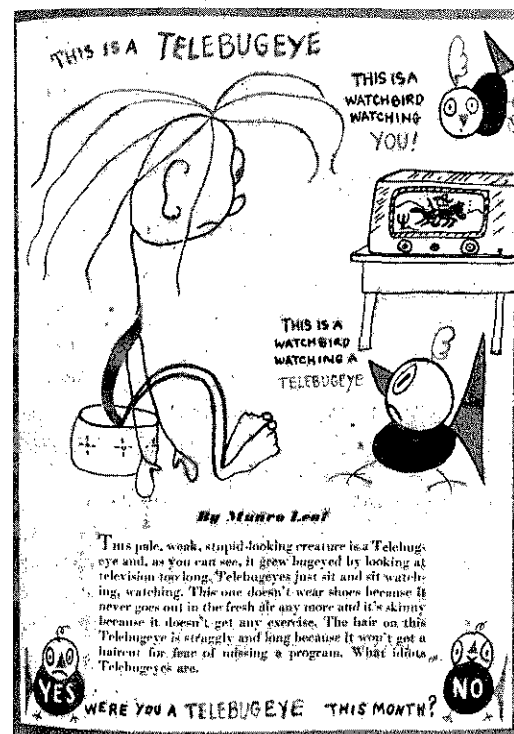
to the middle and even lower classes after 1948 transformed it into a poor person's luxury. Since middle-class home magazines often reflected upper-class tastes, their decorative suggestions on hiding the television set might have been offered in the context of upper-class prejudices against television.

In addition to offering decorative solutions to the fear of machines, the magazines often associated television with nature. Literally placing the "machine in the garden," popular magazines showed how plants and floral arrangements could transform an ordinary set into a thing of beauty.<sup>50</sup> Anthropomorphism was another popular strategy. In 1951, *House Beautiful* declared that "television has become a member of the family," and *American Home* explained ways to "welcome" television "into the family circle."<sup>51</sup> More generally, the magazines described television as a "newborn baby," a "family friend," a "nurse," a "teacher," and a "family pet" (a symbol that, as we have seen, had previously proven its success when the Victor phonograph company adopted the image of a fox terrier for its corporate logo). As the domesticated animal, television obeyed its master and became a benevolent playmate for children as well as a faithful companion for adults. A 1952 advertisement for Emerson shows a typical scenario. The immanent pet-like quality of the television set emanates from the screen where a child and her poodle are pictured. Meanwhile, the advertising copy conjures up notions of master-servant relations, reminding consumers, again and again, that the set will be a "dependable" machine.<sup>52</sup>

Even if anthropomorphism helped to relieve tensions about television technology, the media continued to express doubts. The idea of "technology out of control" was turned around and reformulated. Now it was viewers who had lost control of themselves. Considering television's negative effects on the family, Bogart claimed in *The Age of Television* that "the bulk of the disadvantages listed by the TV owners reflect their inability to control themselves once the set has been installed in the house."<sup>53</sup> At least at the level of popular discourse, Bogart's suggestions are particularly accurate. The media attributed a wide range of human failures to television, failures that were typically linked to problems of family discord.

### Seducing the Innocent

More than any other group, children were singled out as the victims of the new pied piper. Indeed, even while critics praised television as a source of domestic unity and benevolent socialization, they also worried about its harmful effects, particularly its encouragement of passive and addictive behavior. In 1951, *Better Homes and Gardens* complained that the medium's "synthetic entertainment" produced a child who was



"Telebugeye" afflicts the young in this cartoon from a 1950 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal*.

"glued to television."<sup>54</sup> Worse still, the new addiction would reverse good habits of hygiene, nutrition, and decorum, causing physical, mental, and social disorders. A cartoon in a 1950 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal* suggests a typical scenario. The magazine showed a little girl slumped on an ottoman and suffering from a new disease called "telebugeye." According to the caption, the child was a "pale, weak, stupid looking creature" who grew "bugeyed" from sitting and watching television for too long.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps responding to these concerns, some advertisements presented children spectators in scenes that associated television with the "higher arts," and some even implied that children would cultivate artistic talents by watching television. In 1951, General Electric showed a little girl, dressed in a tutu, imitating an on-screen ballerina, while Truetone showed a little boy learning to play the saxophone by watching a professional horn player on television.<sup>56</sup>

As the popular wisdom often suggested, the child's passive addiction to television might itself lead to the opposite effect of increased aggression. These discussions followed in the wake of critical and social scien-



tific theories of the 1930s and 1940s that suggested that mass media injects ideas and behavior into passive individuals. Adopting this "hypodermic model" of media effects, the magazines circulated horror stories about youngsters who imitated television violence. In 1955, *Newsweek* reported on young Frank Stretch, an eleven-year-old from Ventura, California, who had become so entranced by a television western that "with one shot of his trusty BB gun [he] demolished both villain and picture tube."<sup>57</sup> Similar stories circulated about a nine-year-old who proposed killing his teacher with a box of poisoned chocolates, a six-year-old who asked his father for real bullets because his sister didn't die when he shot her with his gun, and a seven-year-old who put ground glass in the family's lamb stew—all, of course, after witnessing murders on television.<sup>58</sup> In reaction to the popular furor, as early as 1950 the Television Broadcasters' Association hired a public relations firm to write pro-television press releases that suggested the more positive types of programming that television had to offer.<sup>59</sup>

Of course, the controversy surrounding television was simply a new skirmish in a much older battle to define what constituted appropriate children's entertainment. Such controversies can be traced back to the turn of the century when reformers, most notably Anthony Comstock, sought to regulate the content of dime novels.<sup>60</sup> Similar battles were waged when middle-class reformers of the early 1900s debated film's impact on American youth, and later these reform discourses were given scientific credence with the publication of the Payne Fund Studies in 1933. Broadcasting became the subject of public scrutiny in that same year when a group of mothers from Scarsdale, New York, began voicing their objections to radio programs that they considered to be harmful to children. The public outcry was taken up in special interest magazines—especially the *Christian Century*, *Commonweal*, *New Republic*, *Outlook*, *Nation*, and *Saturday Review*.<sup>61</sup> In all cases, childhood was conceived as a time of innocence, and the child a blank slate upon whom might be imprinted the evils of an overly aggressive and sexualized adult culture. In her work on *Peter Pan*, Jacqueline Rose has argued that the image of presexual childhood innocence has less to do with how children actually experience their youth than it does with how adults choose to conceptualize that experience. The figure of the innocent child serves to facilitate a nostalgic adult fantasy of a perfect past in which social, sexual, economic, and political complexities fade into the background.<sup>62</sup>

In the postwar years, the urge to preserve childhood innocence helped to justify and reinforce the nuclear family as a central institution and mode of social experience. Parents were given the delicate job of balancing the dividends and deficits of the ever-expanding consumer culture. On the one hand, they had to supply their youngsters with the

fruits of a new commodity society—suburban homes, wondrous toys, new technologies, glamorous vacations, and so forth. Early schooling in the good life would ensure that children continued on a life trajectory of social mobility based on the acquisition of objects. On the other hand, parents had to protect children from the more insidious aspects of the consumer wonderland, making sure that they internalized the ability to tell the difference between authentic culture and synthetic commercial pleasures. According to Helen Muir, editor of the *Miami Herald's* children's books section, there was a difference between the "real needs and desires of children" and "the superimposed synthetic so-called needs which are not needs but cravings."<sup>63</sup> In this context, mass media provided parents with a particularly apt target. More than twenty years before Marie Winn called television "the plug-in drug," Muir and others likened mass media to marijuana and other narcotics that offered children a momentary high rather than the eternal pleasures of real art.

**A House Divided**

In a home where patriarchal authority was undermined, television threatened to drive a wedge between family members. Social scientists

argued that even while families might be brought together around the set, this spatial proximity did not necessarily translate into better family relations. As Eleanor MacCoby observed in her study of families in Cambridge, Massachusetts, "There is very little interaction among family members when they watch TV together, and the amount of time family members spend together exclusive of TV is reduced, so it is doubtful whether TV brings the family together in any psychological sense."<sup>107</sup>

Popular periodicals presented exaggerated versions of family division, often suggesting that television would send family members into separate worlds of pleasure and thus sever family ties, particularly at the dinner table. In 1950, Jack Gould wrote, "Mealtime is an event out of the ordinary for the television parent; for the child it may just be out." In that same year a cartoon in *Better Homes and Gardens* showed parents seated at the dining room table while their children sat in the living room, glued to the television set. Speaking from the point of view of the exasperated mother, the caption read, "All right, that does it! Harry, call up the television store and tell them to send a truck right over!" In 1953, *TV Guide* suggested a humorous solution to the problem in a cartoon that showed a family seated around a dining room table with a large television set built into the middle of it. The caption read, "Your kids won't have to leave the table to watch their favorite programs if you have the Diney model."<sup>108</sup>

Even more alarming than the mealtime problem, television threatened to cause disputes between siblings and between mates. As *House Beautiful* suggested in 1950, "Your wife wants to see *Philco Playhouse* and you don't. So you look too, or are driven from the room."<sup>109</sup> Similarly in 1954, *Popular Science* asked, "Is it hard to balance your checkbook or read while the kids are watching TV? Ever want to see the fights when your wife is chatting with a friend?"<sup>110</sup> Perhaps the most frustrated of all was the well-known critic and radio personality Goodman Ace, who wrote a satirical essay on the subject in 1953, "A Man's TV Set Is His Castle." The irony of this title was quickly apparent as Ace drew a rather unromantic picture of his life with television:

The big television networks, fighting as they do for the elusive high rating, are little concerned with the crumbling of a man's home. Programs are indiscriminately placed in direct opposition one to the other, regardless of domestic consequence.

That she [his wife] likes Ann Sothern and I much prefer Wally Cox opposite Miss Sothern is of little import to the executive vice presidents in charge of programming. . . . Perry Como sings for our supper while I wonder where John Cameron Swayze is hopscotching for headlines on the competitive

network. When I should be at ringside for a Wednesday night fight, I'm watching 'This Is Your Life.'

The critic concluded with a tip for the prospective TV consumer: "Don't be misled by advertisements announcing the large 24-inch screens. Buy two 12-inch screens. And don't think of it as losing your eyesight but rather as gaining a wife."<sup>111</sup>

Harmony gave way to a system of differences in which domestic space and family members in domestic space were divided along sexual and social lines. The ideal of family togetherness was achieved through the seemingly contradictory principle of separation; private rooms devoted to individual family members ensured peaceful relationships among residents. Thus, the social division of space was not simply the inverse of family unity; rather, it was a point on a continuum that stressed ideals of domestic cohesion. Even the family room itself was conceived in these terms. In fact, when coining the phrase, Nelson and Wright claimed, "By frankly developing a room which is 'entirely public' . . . privacy is made possible. Because there's an 'extra room,' the other living space can really be enjoyed in peace and quiet."<sup>112</sup>

This ideology of divided space was based on Victorian aesthetics of housing design and corresponding social distinctions entailed by family life. As we saw in chapter 1, the middle-class homes of Victorian America embodied the conflicting urge for family unity and division within their architectural layout. Since the homes were often quite spacious, it was possible to have rooms devoted to intimate family gatherings (such as the back parlor), social occasions (such as the front parlor), as well as rooms wholly given over to separate family members. By the 1950s, the typical four-and-one-half room dwellings of middle-class suburbia were clearly not large enough to support entirely the Victorian ideals of socio-spatial hierarchies. Still, popular home manuals of the postwar period placed a premium on keeping these spatial distinctions in order, and they presented their readers with a model of space derived in part from the Victorian experience.

The act of watching television came to be a central concern in the discourse on divided spaces as the magazines showed readers pictures of rambling homes with special rooms designed exclusively for watching television. Sets were placed in children's playrooms or bedrooms, away from the central spaces of the home. In 1951, *House Beautiful* had even more elaborate plans. A fun room built adjacent to the home and equipped with television gave a teenage daughter a "place for her friends." For the parents it meant "peace of mind because teenagers are away from [the] house but still at home."<sup>113</sup>

It seems likely that most readers in their cramped suburban homes

did not follow these suggestions. A 1954 national survey showed that 85 percent of the respondents kept their sets in the living room, so that the space for TV was the central, common living area in the home.<sup>114</sup> Perhaps recognizing the practical realities of their readers, the magazines also suggested ways to maintain the aesthetics of divided spaces in the small home. While it might not have been possible to have a room of one's own for television viewing, there were alternate methods by which to approximate the ideal. Rooms could be designed in such a way so that they functioned both as viewing areas and as centers for other activities. In this sense, television fit into a more general functionalist discourse in which household spaces were supposed to be made "multi-purposeful." In 1951, *Better Homes and Gardens* spoke of a "recreation area of the living room" that was "put to good use as the small fry enjoy a television show."<sup>115</sup> At other times such areas were referred to specifically as "television areas." While in many cases the television area was marked off by furniture arrangements or architectural structures such as alcoves, at other times the sign of division was concretized in an object form—the room divider.

In some cases the television receiver was actually built into the room divider so that television literally became a divisive object in the home. In 1953, for example, *Better Homes and Gardens* displayed a "living-dining area divider" that was placed behind a sofa. Extending beyond the sofa, its right end housed a television set. As the illustration showed, this TV/room divider created a private viewing area for children.<sup>116</sup> In 1955, one room-divider company saw the promotional logic in this scenario, showing mothers how Modernfold Doors would keep children spectators at a safe distance. The ad depicts a mother sitting at one end of a room, while her child and television set are separated off by the folding wall. Suggesting itself as an object of dispute, the television set works to support the call for the room divider—here stated as "that tiresome game of 'Who gets the living room.'" Moreover, since room dividers like this one were typically collapsible, they were the perfect negotiation between ideals of unity and division. They allowed parents to be apart from their children, but the "fold-back" walls also provided easy access to family togetherness.<sup>117</sup>

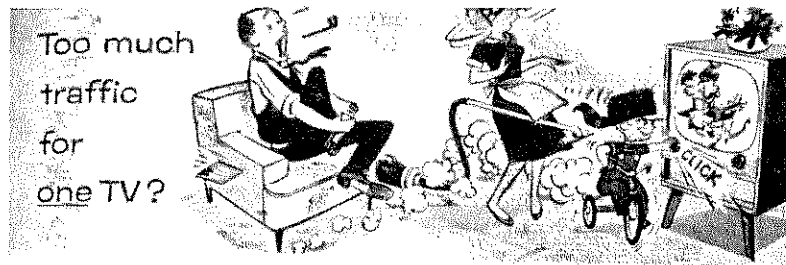
The swiveling television was another popular way to mediate ideals of unity and division. In 1953, *Ladies' Home Journal* described how John and Lucille Bradford solved the viewing problem in their home by placing a large console set on a rotating platform that was hinged to the doorway separating the living room from the play porch. Lucille told the magazine, "The beauty of this idea . . . is that the whole family can watch programs together in the living room, or the children can watch

their own special cowboy programs from the play porch without interfering with grownups' conversation."<sup>118</sup>

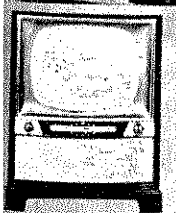
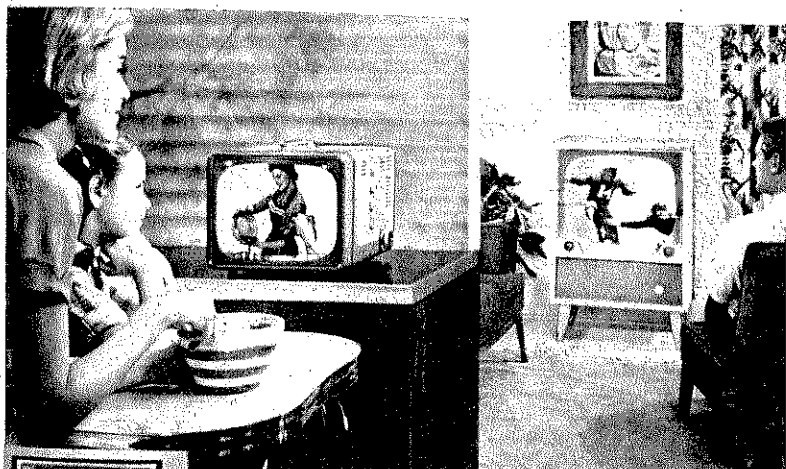
This sociosexual division of space was also presented in advertisements for television sets. In 1955, General Electric showed how its portable television set could mediate family tensions. On the top of the page a cartoon depicts a family besieged by television as Mother frantically attempts to vacuum up the mess created by her young son who, sitting on his tricycle, changes the channel on the television console. Father, sitting on an easy chair in front of the set, is so perturbed by the goings-on that his pipe flies out of his mouth. The solution to this problem is provided further down on the page where two photographs are juxtaposed. The photograph on the right side of the page depicts Mother and Daughter in the kitchen where they watch a cooking program on a portable TV while the photograph on the left side of the page shows Father watching football on the living room console. This "split-screen" layout was particularly suited to GE's sales message, the purchase of a second television set. The copy reads: "When Dad wants to watch the game . . . Mom and Sis, the cooking show . . . there's too much traffic for one TV to handle."<sup>119</sup>

The depiction of divided families wasn't simply a clever marketing strategy; rather, it was a well-entrenched pictorial convention. Indeed, by 1952, advertisements in the home magazines increasingly depicted family members enjoying television alone or else in subgroups. At least in the case of these ads, it appears that the cultural meanings that were circulated about television changed somewhat over the course of the early years of installation. While television was primarily shown to be an integrating activity in the first few years of diffusion, in the 1950s it came to be equally (or perhaps even more) associated with social differences and segregation among family members.<sup>120</sup>

It is, however, important to remember that the contradiction between family unity and division was just that—a contradiction, a site of ideological tension, and not just a clear-cut set of opposing choices. In this light, we might understand a number of advertisements that attempted to negotiate such tensions by evoking ideas of unity and division at the same time. These ads pictured family members watching television in private, but the image on the television screen contained a kind of surrogate family. A 1953 ad for Sentinel TV shows a husband and wife gently embracing as they watch their brand new television set on Christmas Eve. The pleasure entailed by watching television is associated more with the couple's romantic life than with their parental duties. However, the televised image contains two children, apparently singing Christmas carols. Thus, the advertisement shows that parents can enjoy



Now... see what you want to see with new G-E TV from \$99.95



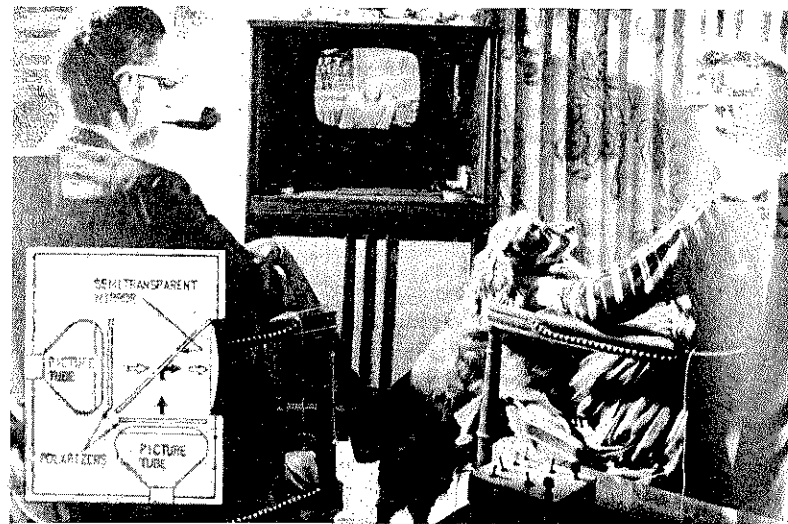
NEW! G-E 24-inch TV. Shows you the biggest picture ever in a TV. 24-inch picture. Take it home for \$99.95. In the country. American-made. Private. Low price - from \$99.95.

NEW! G-E 24-inch TV. Shows you the biggest picture ever in a TV. 24-inch picture. Take it home for \$99.95. In the country. American-made. Private. Low price - from \$99.95.

When Dad says, "Watch the game," Mom and Sis, the two who share a TV, can watch for one TV. It's called the G-E 24-inch TV. Shows you the biggest picture ever in a TV. 24-inch picture. Take it home for \$99.95. In the country. American-made. Private. Low price - from \$99.95.

Progress is Our Most Important Product  
**GENERAL ELECTRIC**

In this 1955 advertisement, General Electric promises family harmony through separation. (Courtesy General Electric.)



The DuMont Duoscope promotes togetherness through division.

a romantic night of television apart from their own children. But it still sustains the central importance of the family scene because it literally *represents* the absent children by making them into an image on the screen. Moreover, the advertisement attaches a certain amount of guilt to the couple's intimate night of television, their use of television as a medium for romantic rather than familial enjoyment. The idea of guilty pleasure is suggested by the inclusion of two "real" children who appear to be voyeurs, clandestinely looking onto the scene of their parents' pleasure. Dressed in pajamas, the youngsters peek out from a corner of the room, apparently sneaking out of bed to take a look at the new television set, while the grownups remain unaware of their presence.<sup>121</sup>

The tensions between opposing ideals of unity and division were also expressed in material form. Manufacturers offered technological "gizmos" that allowed families to be alone and together at the same time. In 1954, *Popular Science* displayed a new device that parents could use to silence the set while their children watched. As the magazine explained, "NOBODY IS BOTHERED if the children want to see a rootin'-tootin' Western when Dad and Mother want to read, write or talk. Earphones let the youngsters hear every shot, but the silence is wonderful."<sup>122</sup> DuMont had an even better idea with its "Duoscope" set. This elaborate construction was composed of two receivers housed in a television cabinet, with two chassis, two control panels, and two picture

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tubes that were mounted at right angles. Through polarization and the superimposition of two broadcast images, the set allowed two viewers to watch different programs at the same time. Thus, as the article suggested, a husband and wife equipped with polarized glasses were able to watch television together but still retain their private pleasures.<sup>123</sup>

While the Duoscope never caught on, the basic problem of unity and division continued. The attempt to balance ideals of family harmony and social difference often led to bizarre solutions, but it also resulted in everyday viewing patterns that were presented as functional and normal procedures for using television. Popular discourses tried to tame the beast, suggesting ways to maintain traditional modes of family behavior and still allow for social change. They devised intricate plans for resistance and accommodation to the new machine, and in so doing they helped construct a new cultural form.

116. *Better Homes and Gardens*, June 1953, p. 126.
117. *American Home*, September 1955, p. 17.
118. Nancy Crawford, "Young Home Builders," *Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1953, p. 182.
119. *Better Homes and Gardens*, October 1955, p. 139.
120. For examples of advertisements depicting divided families, see *Better Homes and Gardens*, November 1953, p. 40; *Better Homes and Gardens*, December 1952, p. 30; *American Home*, November 1951, p. 10.
121. *American Home*, December 1953, p. 84.
122. Phil Hiner, "Television As You Like It," *Popular Science*, May 1954, pp. 216-18. A similar device was marketed by Philco.
123. "Two-Headed TV Set Displays Different Shows at Once," *Popular Science*, March 1954, p. 156.

### Chapter Three

1. This stove was mentioned in *Sponsor*, 4 June 1951, p. 19. It was also illustrated and discussed in *Popular Science*, May 1952, p. 132. The *Popular Science* reference is interesting because this men's magazine did not discuss the TV component of the stove as a vehicle for leisure, but rather showed how "a housewife can follow telecast cooking instructions step-by-step on the TV set built into this electric oven." Perhaps in this way, the magazine allayed men's fears that their wives would use the new technology for diversion as opposed to useful labor.
2. Nancy Folbre, "Exploitation Comes Home: A Critique of the Marxist Theory of Family Labour," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 6 (1982), pp. 317-29.
3. Henri Lefebvre, foreword, *Critique de la Vie Quotidienne* (Paris, L'Arche, 1958), reprinted in *Communication and Class Struggle*, ed. Armond Mattelart and Seth Siegelau, trans. Mary C. Axtmann (New York: International General, 1979), p. 136.
4. See David Morley, *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (London: Comedia, 1986); and Ann Gray, "Behind Closed Doors: Video Recorders in the Home," *Boxed In: Women and Television*, ed. H. Baehr and G. Dyer (New York: Pandora, 1987), pp. 38-54.
5. Tania Modleski, "The Rhythms of Reception: Daytime Television and Women's Work," *Regarding Television*, pp. 67-75. See also the fourth chapter in Modleski, *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Methuen, 1984).
6. Nick Browne, "The Political Economy of the Television (Super) Text," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9 (3) (Summer 1984), p. 176.
7. William Boddy, "The Rhetoric and Economic Roots of the American Broadcasting Industry," *Cinetacts* 6 (2) (Spring 1979), pp. 37-54.
8. William Boddy, "The Shining Centre of the Home: Ontologies of Television in the 'Golden Age,'" *Television in Transition*, ed. Phillip Drummond and Richard Paterson (London: British Film Institute, 1985), pp. 125-33.
9. For a detailed analysis of the rise and fall of the DuMont Network, see Gary Newton Hess, *An Historical Study of the DuMont Television Network* (New York: Arno Press, 1979).
10. Cited in "DuMont Expansion Continues," *Radio Daily*, 12 April 1949, p. 23. See also "DuMont Skeds 7 A.M. to 11 P.M.," *Variety*, 22 September 1948, p. 34; "Daytime Tele As Profit Maker," *Variety*, 27 October 1948, pp. 25, 33; "Round-Clock Schedule Here to Stay As DuMont Programming Makes Good," *Variety*, 10 November 1948, pp. 29, 38.

11. Cited in "Daytime Video: DuMont Plans Afternoon Programming," *Broadcasting-Telecasting*, 28 November 1949, p. 3. See also "WTTG Gives Washington Regular Daytime Video with New Program Setup," *Variety*, 19 January 1949, p. 30; "Video Schedule on Co-Ax Time," *Variety*, 12 January 1949, p. 27; "DuMont's 'Mother' Goes Network in Daytime Spread," *Variety*, 27 November 1949, p. 27.
12. "ABC, CBS, NBC Cold to Full Daytime Schedule; DuMont to Go It Alone," *Variety*, 6 October 1948, p. 27.
13. "CBS All-Day TV Programming," *Variety*, 26 January 1949, p. 34; "Video Schedule on Co-Ax Time," *Variety*, 12 January 1949, p. 27; "WNBT, N.Y., Swinging into Line as Daytime Video Airing Gains Momentum," *Variety*, 19 January 1949, p. 24; Bob Stahl, "WNBT Daytime Preem Has Hausfrau Pull but Is Otherwise Below Par," *Variety*, 9 February 1949, p. 34; "Full CBS Airing Soon," *Variety*, 2 March 1949, p. 29; "Kathi Norris Switch to WNBT Cues Daytime Expansion for Flagship," *Variety*, 1 March 1950, p. 31.
14. Cited in "Daytime TV," *Broadcasting-Telecasting*, 11 December 1950, p. 74.
15. *Sponsor*, 4 June 1951, p. 19.
16. *Newsweek*, 24 September 1951, p. 56.
17. *Televiser*, September 1951, p. 20.
18. In the early 1950s, many of the shows were sustaining vehicles—that is, programs that were aired in order to attract and maintain audiences, but that had no sponsors.
19. "DuMont Skeds 7 A.M. to 11 P.M.," *Variety*, 22 September 1948, p. 25.
20. "Pat 'N' Johnny," *Variety*, 1 March 1950, p. 35. This example bears interesting connections to Rick Altman's more general theoretical arguments about the aesthetics of sound on television. Altman argues that television uses sound to signal moments of interest, claiming that, "the sound track serves better than the image itself the parts of the image that are sufficiently spectacular to merit closer attention on the part of the intermittent viewer." See Altman, "Television/Sound," *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 47.
21. Robert C. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).
22. See "Daytime Video: DuMont Plans Afternoon Program" and "DuMont Daytime 'Shoppers' Series Starts," *Broadcasting-Telecasting*, 12 December 1949, p. 5.
23. As I discuss in chapter 5, some variety programs included fifteen minute sitcoms and soap operas.
24. "TV's 'Stars in the Afternoon,'" *Variety*, 3 October 1951, p. 29.
25. "Women's Magazine of the Air," *Variety*, 9 March 1949, p. 33; "Women's Page," *Variety*, 1 June 1949, p. 34.
26. NBC had particular problems securing sponsors and, especially during 1951 and 1952, many of its shows were sustaining programs. So critical had this problem become that in fall of 1952 NBC temporarily cut back its schedule, giving afternoon hours back to affiliates. Affiliates, however, complained that this put them at a competitive disadvantage with CBS affiliates. See "NBC-TV's 'What's the Use?' Slant May Give Daytime Back to Affiliates," *Variety*, 3 September 1952, p. 20; "Daytime TV—No. 1 Dilemma," *Variety*, 24 September 1952, pp. 1, 56; "NBC-TV to Focus Prime Attention on Daytime Schedule," *Variety*, 24 December 1952, p. 22; "NBC—TV Affiliates In Flareup," *Variety*, 6 May 1953, p. 23.
27. Weaver's concept was adopted by CBS executives who in 1952 instituted the "12 plan" that gave sponsors a discount for buying twelve participations during the daytime schedule. "Day TV Impact," *Broadcasting*, 3 November 1952, p. 73; Bob Stahl, "CBS-TV's Answer to 'Today,'" *Variety*, 12 November 1952, pp. 23, 58.

28. John H. Porter, memo to TV network salesmen, 11 June 1954, NBC Records, Box 183: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

29. George Rosen, "Garroway 'Today' Off to Boff Start As Revolutionary News Concept," *Variety*, 16 January 1952, p. 29.

30. Joe Meyers and Bob Graff, cited in William R. McAndrew, confidential memo to John K. Herbert, 23 March 1953, NBC Records, Box 370: Folder 22, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

31. *Daytime Availabilities: Program Descriptions and Estimates*, 1 June 1954, NBC Records, Box 183: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

32. "Early Morning Inserts Get WNBTV Dress-Up," *Variety*, 13 August 1952, p. 26.

33. "For the Girls at Home," *Newsweek*, 15 March 1954, p. 92, NBC's advertising campaign for *Home* was unprecedented for daytime programming promotion, costing \$976,029.00 in print, on-air promotion, outdoor advertising, and novelty gimmicks. See Jacob A. Evans, letter to Charles Barry, 28 January 1954, NBC Records, Box 369: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

34. Jacob A. Evans, letter to Charles Barry, 28 January 1954, NBC Records, Box 369: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

35. In a promotional report, NBC boasted that on *Today's* first broadcast, Kiplinger received 20,000 requests for a free copy of the magazine. Matthew J. Culligan, sales letter, 27 January 1953, NBC Records, Box 378: Folder 9, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

36. The report cited here was commentary for a slide presentation given by Coffin to about fifty researchers from ad agencies and manufacturing companies in the New York area. *Commentary for Television's Daytime Profile: Buying Habits and Characteristics of the Audience*, 10 June 1954, NBC Records, Box 183: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison. For the actual survey, see W. R. Simmons and Associates Research, Inc., *Television's Daytime Profile: Buying Habits and Characteristics of the Audience*, 15 September 1954, NBC Records, Box 183: Folder 8, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison. A short booklet reviewing the findings was sent to all prospective advertisers; *Television's Daytime Profile: An Intimate Portrait of the Ideal Market for Most Advertisers*, 1 September 1954, NBC Records, Box 183: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison. For NBC's exploitation of the survey, see also Ed Vane, letter to Mr. Edward A. Antonili, 7 December 1954, NBC Records, Box 183: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison; Hugh M. Bellville, Jr., letter to Robert Sarnoff, 27 July 1954, NBC Records, Box 183: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison; Thomas Coffin, letter to H. M. Beville, Jr., 21 July 1954, NBC Records, Box 183: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison. The survey also made headlines in numerous trade journals, newspapers, and magazines. For press coverage, see NBC's *clipping file*, NBC Records, Box 183: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

37. Edward Stasheff, *The Television Program: Its Writing, Direction, and Production* (New York: A. A. Wyn, 1951), p. 47.

38. Consumer spectacles were further achieved through rear-screen projection, an "aerial" camera that captured action with a "telescoping arm," and mechanical devices such as a weather machine that adorned products in a mist of rain, fog, sleet, or hail. *Daytime Availabilities: Program Descriptions and Cost Estimates*, 1 June 1954, NBC Records, Box 183: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

39. Charles C. Barry, memos to Richard Pinkham, 2 March 1954, 3 March 1954, and 4 March 1954, NBC Records, Box 369: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

40. Franklin Sisson, *Thirty Television Talks* (New York, n.p., 1955), p. 144. Cited in Giraud Chester and Garnet R. Garrison, *Television and Radio* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), p. 414.

41. Caroline Burke, memo to Ted Mills, 20 November 1953, NBC Records, Box 377: Folder 6, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison; Arlene Francis, cited in Earl Wilson, *The NBC Book of Stars* (New York: Pocket Books, 1957), p. 92.

42. Cited in Wilson, *The NBC Book*, p. 94.

43. Sylvester L. Weaver, memo to Harry Bannister, 10 October 1952, NBC Records, Box 378: Folder 9, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

44. Joe Meyers, cited in William R. McAndrew, confidential memo to John K. Herbert, 23 March 1953, NBC Records, Box 370: Folder 22, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

45. A. A. Schechter, "'Today' As An Experiment Bodes Encouraging Manana," *Variety*, 16 July 1952, p. 46. NBC also advertised *Today* by claiming that "people are actually changing their living habits to watch 'Today.'" See *Sponsor*, 25 February 1952, pp. 44-45.

46. *Daytime Availabilities: Program Descriptions and Cost Estimates*, 1 June 1954, NBC Records, Box 183: Folder 5, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison.

47. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 217-51.

48. *Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1955, p. 130. See also *Ladies' Home Journal*, February 1955, p. 95; *Good Housekeeping*, July 1955, p. 135.

49. *The New Yorker*, 3 June 1950, p. 22.

50. Crosby, "What's Television Going to Do to Your Life?" *House Beautiful*, February 1950, p. 125.

51. *American Home*, October 1955, p. 14.

52. Walter Adams and E. A. Hungerford, Jr., "Television: Buying and Installing It Is Fun; These Ideas Will Help," *Better Homes and Gardens*, September 1949, p. 38; *American Home*, December 1954, p. 39.

53. *American Home*, May 1955, p. 138. The cartoon was part of an advertisement for the *Yellow Pages*.

54. *House Beautiful*, June 1952, p. 59.

55. W. W. Ward, "Is It Time To Buy Television?" *House Beautiful*, October 1948, p. 220.

56. *Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1953, p. 148.

57. "The Wonderful Anti-Statics," *House Beautiful*, January 1955, p. 89; *Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1948, p. 90.

58. Gertrude Brassard, "For Early Tea and Late TV," *American Home*, July 1952, p. 88.

59. In August 1949, for example, *House Beautiful* suggested that a swiveling cabinet would allow women to "move the screen, not the audience" (p. 69). Although portable sets were not heavily marketed in the early 1950s, they were sometimes presented as the ideal solution to the problem of moving the heavy console set.

60. *House Beautiful*, May 1952, p. 138.

61. Wright, *Building the Dream*, p. 172.



62. *House Beautiful*, June 1951, p. 121.
63. Vivian Grigsby Bender, "Please a Dining Room!" *American Home*, September 1951, p. 27.
64. *Better Homes and Gardens*, December 1952, p. 144; *Better Homes and Gardens*, February 1953, p. 169; see also *American Home*, September 1953, p. 102.
65. *House Beautiful*, November 1948, p. 5.
66. Edith Ramsay, "How to Stretch a Day," *American Home*, September 1949, p. 66; *House Beautiful*, December 1950, p. 77.
67. *American Home*, February 1954, p. 32.
68. *House Beautiful*, November 1954, p. 158. For additional examples, see *American Home*, November 1953, p. 60; *Better Homes and Gardens*, December 1951, p. 7; *TV Guide*, 18 December 1953, p. 18.
69. *Better Homes and Gardens*, October 1952, p. 177.
70. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16 (3) (1975), pp. 6-18. Since the publication of Mulvey's article, numerous feminists—including Mulvey—have theorized ways that women might find subjective pleasures in classical cinema, and feminists have also challenged the idea that pleasure in the cinema is organized entirely around scenarios of "male" desire. For a bibliography on this literature and a forum on contemporary views on female spectatorship in the cinema, see *Camera Obscura* 20-21 (May-September 1989).
71. W. W. Ward, "Is It Time to Buy Television?" *House Beautiful*, October 1948, p. 172.
72. *House Beautiful*, May 1955, p. 131.
73. *Better Homes and Gardens*, October 1953, p. 151. There is one exception to this rule of male body posture, which I have found in the fashionable men's magazine *Esquire*. While *Esquire* depicted the slovenly male viewer, it also showed men how to watch television in fashion by wearing clothes tailored specifically for TV viewing. In these cases, the male body was relaxed, and the men still smoked and drank liquor, but they were posed in more aesthetically appealing ways. See "Town-Talk Tables and Television," *Esquire*, January 1951, pp. 92-93; and "Easy Does It Leisure Wear," *Esquire*, November 1953, p. 74. The figure of the fashionable male television viewer was taken up by at least one male clothing company, The Rose Brothers, who advertised their men's wear by showing well-dressed men watching television and by promising, "You Can Tele-Wise Man by His Surrewill Suit." See *Colliers*, 1 October 1949, p. 54.
74. Robert M. Jones, "Privacy Is Worth All That It Costs," *Better Homes and Gardens*, March 1952, p. 57.
75. This is not to say that television was the only domestic machine to disrupt representations of gender. Roland Marchand, for example, has argued that advertisements for radio sets and phonographs reversed traditional pictorial conventions for the depiction of men and women. Family-circle ads typically showed husbands seated while their wives were perched on the arm of the chair or sofa. In most of the ads for radios and phonographs in his sample, the opposite is true. Marchand argues that "in the presence of culturally uplifting music, the woman more often gained the right of reposed concentration while the (more technologically inclined) man stood prepared to change the records or adjust the radio dials." See *Advertising the American Dream*, pp. 252-53. When applied to television, Marchand's analysis of radio does not seem to adhere since men were often shown seated and blatantly unable to control the technology.
76. I am borrowing Natalie Zemon Davis's phrase with which she describes how women in preindustrial France were able to invert gender hierarchies during carnival festivities and even, at times, in everyday life. See "Women On Top," *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 124-51.

77. *Popular Science*, May 1954, p. 177; *Esquire*, March 1951, p. 10; Jack O'Brien, "Offsides in Sports," *Esquire*, November 1953, p. 24.
78. Marsh, *Suburban Lives*, p. 82.
79. Greenbie, *Leisure for Living*, p. 210. Greenbie, in fact, presented a quite contradictory account of mechanization in the home, at times seeing it as the man's ally, at other times claiming that modern machines actually took away male authority.
80. "Home is for Husbands Too," *Esquire*, June 1951, p. 88.
81. In addition, companies that produced home-improvement products and workshop tools continually used television sets in their illustrations of remodeled rooms. Typically here, the Masonite Corporation promoted its do-it-yourself paneling in an advertisement that displayed a television set in a "male room" just for Dad. See *Better Homes and Gardens*, August 1951, p. 110. For similar ads, see *American Home*, June 1955, p. 3; *Better Homes and Gardens*, February 1953, p. 195; *American Home*, November 1952, p. 105. It should be noted that some of these ads also showed women doing the remodeling work.
82. "From Readers' Albums of Television Photos," *Popular Science*, December 1950, p. 166. See also "TV's Images Can Be Photographed," *Popular Science*, August 1950, pp. 184-85; R. P. Stevenson, "How You Can Photograph the Fights Via Television," *Popular Science*, February 1951, pp. 214-16.

#### Chapter Four

- Gary Simpson, cited in William I. Kaufman, ed., *How to Direct for Television* (New York: Hastings House, 1955), p. 13.
- S. C. Gilfillan, "The Future Home Theater," *The Independent*, 17 October 1912, pp. 836-91.
- Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 393.
- In 1954, *Fortune* magazine estimated that over the course of the past decade, nine million people had moved to suburban towns across the nation. Cited in Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, p. 238. Jackson also shows that much of this migration to suburbia had to do with the fact that building in the postwar years was heavily concentrated in suburban areas. The Bureau of Labor Statistics survey of 1946-47 determined that at least 62 percent of residential construction took place in the suburbs.
- For example, in *Crabgrass Frontier* Jackson argues that "the single-family tract house—post-World War II style—whatever its aesthetic failings, offered growing families a private haven in a heartless world" (p. 244). Often this "haven in a heartless world" logic sees television as the cultural indicator of the return to Victorian domestic ideals. In *The American Family Home*, Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., argues that "many families conceded that the television, by bringing entertainment into the home, strengthened a sense of family cohesiveness and self-interest. . . . Almost without thinking, middle-class suburbanites took the protected-home vision of the nineteenth-century reformers and turned it into their central preoccupation" (p. 31). Clark does acknowledge that the new suburbanites held to "an implicit ideal of community" and often became active in civic affairs. While he recognizes this interest in community at the level of social activity, he maintains that the haven model for the home persisted at the ideological level. My argument, on the other hand, maintains that the ideology of suburbanization was not merely a return to the nineteenth-century ideal; instead, it contained within it the terms of the contradiction between community involvement and domestic privacy. In other words, the ideal was that one could be alone in one's home, but still be attached to the community.