

Direkte Lykke!

A Naivist Parody of Old-Time TV Hosted by a Transgressive Woman

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What openings does Norwegian public service television offer for new and different ‘stagings’ or enunciations of the female programme host? What makes an attractive woman host, and what makes a ‘monstrous’ one – and whose finger is on the trigger?

This analysis of the youth entertainment series *Direkte Lykke!*¹ is part of a doctoral project which focuses on how ‘femaleness’ is staged among programme hosts in Norwegian television. The focus rests on women programme hosts who break with the conventions of programme hosting and who transcend conventional gender constructions. In certain programmes – like *Direkte Lykke!* – one may even speak of what seems to be an explicit deconstruction of traditional media representations of women. Interestingly, in this era of keen competition between channels the greatest leeway for experimentation with constructions of femininity among Norwegian channels appears to exist within the national public service broadcaster, Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK) and even more so on NRKs supplementary channel, NRK2. This in a competitive situation where it is important for channels to innovate and to attract strategically important groups of viewers, such as youth, intellectuals and women.

The analysis is based on an interpretation of Anne Kath Hærland’s female enunciation in her role as programme host of *Direkte Lykke!*. A comparison of Hærland’s style in *Direkte Lykke!* with the various conventions for women’s hosting role reveals a number of idiosyncratic and paradoxical features of her enunciation. The analysis pays special attention to sexualization as a visibility strategy as opposed to the politically correct construc-

tion of femininity emanating out of the gender equality discourse. How does this relate to the current trend whereby the male body has become an object of the female gaze?

Finally, I inquire whether the programme host’s playful and seemingly naive personal style may be understood as a naivist strategy for exploring the ‘true’ naivety, viz., the unreflected stereotype of femininity. Since both (postmodern) irony and naivism are characteristic features of Hærland’s enunciation, I ask which of the components of femininity are retained and gain in emphasis as a result of the distancing mechanisms. What, in other words, are the limits of the redefining potential of parody in this case, and which symbols are most vital to the sign play of femininity?

Contemporary Television

Direkte Lykke! is an hour-long entertainment programme on NRK2. It was carried Monday evenings at 9 PM in the Fall 1996 and Spring 1997 seasons. Its intended target audience comprises viewers between the ages of 15 and 25. Central to the legitimacy of public service television in Norway is the offering of special-interest programming to ‘minority groups’ such as youth and intellectuals (Ytreberg 1996:157). NRK2, which came on the air in Fall 1996, was conceived to serve as a targeted supplement to NRK; as such, it has a special ‘duty’ to attract and serve such groups. The goal of ‘winning back’ younger viewers has been paramount for NRK in the mid-1990s (Syvertsen 1997:182).

The form of address in special-interest programmes intended for intellectuals or young people is characterized by an anticipated coincidence of

interest and a community of (sub)cultural knowledge between the text-internal sender and the receiver. Another characteristic of these programmes is that the form of address is distanced, satirical and parodic in relation to the relatively authoritarian or paternalistic forms of address that have traditionally characterized public service television (Ytreberg 1996:162f). Above all, *Direkte Lykke!* parodies numerous genres and forms of address used in Norwegian television over the years.

In other words, the programme is a manifestation or thematization of a conflict between 'old-time' and 'modern' television (Ytreberg 1996:173). The humour 'works' thanks to the sense of intimacy and 'initiation' the programme cultivates among its viewers. In an article on the text strategies used in television vis-à-vis youthful audiences, Espen Ytreberg characterizes youth appeal like this:

The appeal to ... young people is characterised by a form of authority denial, establishing a parodic distance towards the authority of address generally, and towards the traditional authority markers of public service television specifically (Ytreberg 1996:177).

The Concept

Direkte Lykke! may be termed an entertaining talk-show in magazine format. It should be viewed in the context of the central role entertainment and intimacy have come to play in commercial television. In response to the challenge commercial channels represent, NRK has launched a number of new entertainment programmes (Ytreberg 1996:158). *Direkte Lykke!* has the three constitutive elements which media researcher Hanne Bruun (1997:18) sets out for the talk-show: The studio is the main arena, 'the here and now' of the programme. The programme host's function is focal. Anne Kath Hærland's personality (as well as her co-hosts') is a vital element in the programme content – and a key to the success of the show. Hærland's flirtations with the audience (camera) is an important element in her staging of herself.² Third, the interview and its emphasis on personality and 'relationships' is a significant element in the programme. But, as we shall see, it is the parody of these central features which constitutes the 'actual' content and fascination of the programme.

Each programme consists of between thirty and forty segments of varying length. These are take-offs on traditional programme formats: talk-shows,

magazines, roundtable discussions, cultural magazines, music video-clips and quiz shows. The many changes of scene and genre make for a rapid tempo and rhythm. Each programme has a theme, e.g., "youth and drugs and alcohol" (10th February), "youth and morality" (3rd March), "youth and racism" (10th March). A typical programme might consist of a sketch on the overall theme (played by actors portraying a politically correct 'model family'), a dramatic piece on the theme (played by the programme hosts in the studio), discussions, video reportages, interviews with invited guests, short clips in which the individuals involved in the production tell viewers what 'happiness' means to them, video clips with the house band, Kåre & The Cavemen, an animation, *Robin*, and a Swedish comedy series, *Snutarna*. Thus, live, studio-based segments alternate with video recordings throughout.

The programme hosts link the segments together via introductions and 'roundings off'. The linking techniques are several. Although Anne Kath is the main programme host, her colleague, Nils Petter, shoulders most of the linking function, marking the passage from one segment to the next and introducing what is to come. The house band, too, helps mark the transitions and provides continuity musically. All the programmes are structured around these elements, which fosters recognition/ familiarity and gives the programme a definite 'image'.

The 'talk show' and the themes treated are 'artifices' in the sense that the programme hosts *play at* hosting a programme. The entertainment value resides precisely in the take-offs on familiar programme genres and formats. In other words, the programme may be seen as a dramatization of 'making a programme'. In this sense one might also characterize the programme as a live, studio-based sit-com. Each 'episode' in *Direkte Lykke!* is about the relations between the caricaturized characters (programme hosts) and their recurring and familiar frictions and conflicts. The studio itself forms the framework in which the drama takes place. The semblance of reality is greater in *Direkte Lykke!* than in traditional sit-coms inasmuch as the programme hosts appear under their own names, and guests and interviewees appear on account of their status 'in real life'. The comical aspect of the interviews resides in the collision between the playful nature of the programme and the guests' (presumed) expectation of taking part in a 'regular' programme, and the resulting confusion they experience when they are not treated as they expected.

In a theoretical analysis of the talk-show as a genre Bruun notes that the sit-com takes place on the edge of the fictional universe and bears a resemblance to the talk-show in terms of both camera work and style of performance. She notes that the sit-com departs from the accustomed fictional universe in that the leading characters often appear under their own names rather than a role. Take, for example, *Rosanne* or *Ellen* (Bruun 1997:27).

Dramatis Personae

The main programme host and star of *Direkte Lykke!* is Anne Kath Hærland. Anne Kath is an embodiment of the narcissistic personality, political incorrectness and value relativism, not to say cynicism. She is 'the boss' to five male co-hosts, who play caricatures of distinct, more or less 'classic' personality types throughout the series. Wiggo, second-in-command after Anne Kath, is a hippie-type with long, unkempt hair; he is unshaven and wears glasses. He worships the counterculture of the 1970s and is crazy about red wine, candles and old LPs. Erlend plays a student; he wears suspenders and is forever upset with Anne Kath, who doesn't give him the recognition he feels he deserves. He is a 'do-right' and moralist, passionately 'PC'. Wiggo and Anne Kath represent some kind of 'parents' in their relation to Erlend: Anne Kath a harsh, cynical and ruthless 'mother-figure'; Wiggo, a more pedagogically inclined 'Dad'. Nils Petter is a parody of an ever-optimistic and cheerful 'Believer', always looking on the bright side, turning the other cheek, and ready to smooth over whatever friction or discord that may arise. He's a boy with wholesome interests and a "sweet" fiancée. Geir and Tonny are twin-like cousins who speak the same peculiar dialect. Both have long hair, beards and are overweight. They are forever appearing with a clipboard and pencil; their interest in the various themes and interviewees is strictly quantitative. That is to say, they spout figures, weights, statistics on anything and everything that comes up. Geir and Tonny have a 'nerdish' preoccupation with figures and seem to be devoid of metacommunication skills and social graces.

Anne Kath's is a more versatile, complex repertoire. She is snide, commenting and criticizing her colleagues' performance and ideas – albeit on a totally superficial plane. Part of the humor of *Direkte Lykke!* arises out of the naive ardency with which the characters play their roles. It is comical when, for example, Anne Kath plunges into an intense discussion with Erlen, trying to convince him of the

fact that the Lappish people are not savages, but actually have contact with ordinary Norwegians and live in regular houses, or when she tries to enlighten him as to the difference between coffee and cocaine.

A Parody of Television

Distancing is a key concept for our understanding of television today, says Ytreberg (1997). He points to a trend from information toward entertainment and sees in it a rejection of traditional signs of authority, which consequently is open to ridicule. An important precondition for communication based on distancing is a new generation of viewers who lack the respect for the medium their elders once had. Their extensive TV competence, combined with distanced modes of narration, like irony and parody, gives rise to a 'covenant' between narrator and viewer at the expense of the content or the subject of the narration (Ytreberg 1997).

These distanced modes of narration are characteristic of *Direkte Lykke!*. The themes of the programmes are reduced to a backdrop for the programme host's self-staging, and the theme of the programme is 'actually' a parody of the medium. *Direkte Lykke!* follows the recipe for parody, as defined in relation to literature:

... signifying an imitation of works of art with exaggerated (or malplacé) emphasis of the peculiarities of the work or the artist's manner to comic or satirical effect (Aarnes 1977:181).

Direkte Lykke! resembles television genres "to comic, satirical effect", and the parody is especially trained on attitudes, forms of address or "manners" common to the medium. If we proceed further with Aarnes' definition, we find the description fits the programme's approach to its objects quite well:

Some parodies require prior acquaintance with the work in question since the comic effect is largely dependent on the perceived deviations of the imitation from the original. Here we have a number of so-called travesties (literally 'disguises') which represent the august theme or style of the original work dressed in sack-cloth (Burllesque) (Aarnes 1977:181).

In the case of *Direkte Lykke!* the "august theme or style of the original work" is what Ytreberg refers to as "traditional signs of authority", which presumes that viewers are familiar with the original. Young people who have grown up with television

as part of the woodwork make fun of their parents' respect for the medium, its authorities and dominant forms of expression.

Objects and Attitudes

"The 'seventies'" is a frequent theme of the parody in *Direkte Lykke!*. The programme vignette, the houseband, and Wiggo, the superannuated hippie, all refer back to that period.

Following the vignette and presentation of the week's theme, each programme carries a dramatization of the theme in a family setting. The sketch calls to mind, *1/2 7*, a Saturday-night series on NRK in the 1970s. It, too, addressed youthful audiences and discussed current topics in a manner we today would find excessively moralizing. Dramatizations were frequently employed to get the message across. These educational, politically correct 'mini-morality plays' are easy marks for the darts of *Direkte Lykke!*'s humour.

Recent or current programmes which are made fun of include a consumer magazine (*Refleks*), a debate forum (*Til Debatt*), and a documentary series (*Brennpunkt*), all offered on NRK. A cultural magazine on NRK radio, *Kulturnytt* (P2), is also held up to ridicule in a series of 'kangaroo court' reviews of 'Latest Books'. All in all, the parodic style of *Direkte Lykke!* is that of burlesque travesty, in Aarnes' sense of the word.

Each week, the programme ends with an episode of a tongue-in-cheek Swedish detective series, *Snutarna*. It, too, is a humoristic parody of the 'crimi' genre per se, as well as of the 1970s. Yet another expression of *Direkte Lykke!*'s fascination with the period.

The take-offs on genres and conventions take the form of exaggerations and perversions of the forms of address and underlying attitudes typical of television culture. Continuity in magazine programmes is maintained through a hierarchy of discourses, where the programme host links the various segments together to form a unified text by virtue of his/her authority as host, which can be referred to as a 'master discourse' (Ytreberg 1996: 173). The programme hosts in *Direkte Lykke!* perform the linking function, with the 'master discourse' falling to Anne Kath. But the programme is forever 'breaking the rules' as to how a programme should be hosted. For example, it is the privilege of the programme host to speak into the camera, i.e., directly address the viewer, but it is not customary for the host to use that privilege to ridicule or rebut what his or her colleagues say or do. Anne Kath es-

tablishes a close relationship with viewers by looking into the camera and attracting its attention in the middle of a colleague's presentation. She shakes her head, rolls her eyes in disbelief, or uses the opportunity to flirt with the camera in seemingly narcissistic joy over being on camera. She turns some segments over to others on her team, declaring that she's "simply not interested", thinks "it's stupid", or she asks viewers not to send their answers to her because she doesn't care much for quizzes. Comical situations also arise when the programme hosts pretend they don't know how to handle technical apparatus like microphones and cables.

The distanced attitude to authority is expressed in parodies of the stately, paternalistic style that is part of the Norwegian public service broadcasting tradition, and of the intimate contact-seeking style of newer programme formats. Hærland's distancing from the conventions of the programme host role is often manifested in her rejection of the empathetic and receptive attitude that is expected of 'serious' programme hosts. She introduces programme segments in an impatient, indifferent tone of voice as though she were being forced to read what the teleprompter tells her. This attitude is most apparent when Hærland interviews the week's guest. She does this following a standard formula. At the end of each interview, she suddenly calls out to Wiggo, who tosses the guest a bouquet of flowers. She then pronounces with unmistakable finality: "It's been fantastic to have you here, and what are your plans after this?" She parodies the worshipful tone many hosts acquire when talking with stars and individuals who have done amazing things as well as the lengths some programmes go to to find 'extraordinary', 'admirable' or 'crazy' individuals to people their sofas.

Erlend's interviews are parodic, as well. His speciality is to take on guests who represent idealistic organizations – environmentalists, animals rights, etc. The most such guests can hope to say is an occasional "Yes" or "No" in the midst of Erlend's almost incomprehensible harangue on what he thinks of the organization or problem in question. The guest either becomes frustrated, or he/she tries to bear with it and play along with the joke. Some even try, against all odds, to use the opportunity to present their cause to the television audience.

The humour is dependent on the interviewee's taking an authentic position vis-à-vis the interviewer, i.e. playing the straight man. If and when he/she breaks the 'contract' and begins to meta-

communicate with the interviewer, the fun is over. The guests seem naive, i.e., seem not to be aware of the 'contract'; whatever the case, their authenticity and confusion are most convincing. We viewers know the rules of the game and can laugh at the guest's (seeming) innocence. Guests, interviewees and viewers alike are turned into spectators to a media-circus celebrating itself, its power, and its ability to set the agenda. It is this 'logic of the media' which *Direkte Lykke!* exploits and makes fun of. Well-known and highly placed figures are embarrassed when their secrets are revealed in a situation over which they have no control. Such breaks with television protocol are entertaining, and the distancing from authority figures establishes a special rapport with younger viewers.

Female Programme Hosts and Competition

The advent of commercial television has given women greater visibility on television (Skretting 1996; Pedersen 1995). In their role of consumers, women are an important target audience for commercially financed channels; consequently, the channels especially address women in the audience both by featuring women prominently in the programmes they offer and by discussing topics known to be of interest to women: beauty, fashion, health and child-care, etc., romance and relationships (Skretting 1995:5f). It appears that NRK has chosen to meet the competition commercial channels pose by adopting a new target-audience orientation in programme scheduling *and* by featuring women programme hosts who transgress the bounds of some traditional television representations of femininity. NRK's relatively young two-channel system (Fall 1996) may mean that more programmes will specifically address women.

Although 'unique', Anne Kath Hærland is not alone in breaking with convention. Media researcher Kathrine Skretting establishes that whereas feminist film researchers speak of women in traditional Hollywood films as icons, placed before the male gaze, the fact is that women in television have *discursive power*. Programme hosts rank high in the hierarchy of speakers on television (Skretting 1995:3). She notes a difference, however, in the leeway for assertiveness allowed in entertainment and factual programmes. Women are frequent as 'anchors' in news programmes, and many weather forecasters are women. These are presenting roles, where neutrality is the norm. In entertainment programmes, on the other hand, pro-

gramme hosts can be witty; they have an opportunity to display "clear and distinct personalities". Most entertainment programmes on Norwegian television are hosted by men (Skretting 1995:9ff).

Enter a new kind of transgressing female. The first such programme host in Norway was Synnøve Svabø in *Baluba*, a tumultuous, carnival-like entertainment programme aired on NRK in Spring 1996. Besides *Direkte Lykke!*, the Spring and Fall 1997 line-ups featured five other entertainment programmes hosted by women.³ Although not all of them are exactly 'tumultuous', the programmes do indeed allow their hosts a free play of wit and personality (the terms Skretting used with regard to male hosts of entertainment programmes earlier). Thus, women seem to have gained some of the characteristics formerly associated with male programme hosts.

Referring to research showing differences between men's and women's conversational patterns, where men's style of expression is seen to be more hierarchical and control-oriented and women's, more democratic and mutual⁴, Skretting points out that even though the characteristics women's conversation patterns display would seem to be well suited to television, statistics show that women have not had the same success as men in television in the current decade (Skretting 1995:3).

Anne Kath Hærland's style of conversation in *Direkte Lykke!* is hardly "democratic" or "mutual". On the contrary, Skretting's description of men's style fits her much better; Hærland's speech is both "hierarchical and control-oriented". Bossing a stall of five male co-hosts, her role in the 'sit-com', *Direkte Lykke!*, is, one might say, to be arbitrary, authoritarian and cynical. A far cry from the conventional feminine virtues of empathy, feeling and caring. This, together with her star status in the programme and her conscious self-staging as an erotic object, makes her an unconventional woman programme host, indeed.

Kinds of Programme Hosts

Pedersen (1995) defines three categories of women hosts in the prevailing competition between channels in Denmark: *Soaps*, *Pins* and *Burlesques*.

Soaps

The soap opera is an embellishment on the melodrama. Pedersen's term, "soap", which she uses to describe female programme hosts, refers to common themes in soap operas, having to do with the private sphere and emphasizing romance, feelings

and emotional intensity (Pedersen 1995:163ff). In this connection Pedersen refers to the French film theorist Raymond Bellour, who shows how women's faces are used to effect on the screen. Close-ups of women's faces are typically used to display emotional intensity. Consequently, Bellour notes, female figures in classic film are more than erotic objects; they are also backdrops for the projection of emotional intensity (Pedersen 1995:180).

In her analysis of *Damernes magasin*, a women's programme hosted by Camilla Miehe Renard on Danish public service television (DR) in 1991, Pedersen points out the frequency of close-ups and a focus on subjects belonging to the intimate sphere – features typical of soap opera aesthetics. The programme emphasizes feelings which are treated, not as something belonging to the private sphere, but as subjects to be discussed openly (Pedersen 1995: 186). The close-ups of Anne Kath Hærland in *Direkte Lykke!* are a function of her status as a figure endowed with the 'master discourse'. Thus, the frequent use of close-ups has another function besides conveying or underlining emotion. Hærland is spontaneous and playful, but can hardly be said to be either sensitive or particularly emotional – two of the principal ingredients of the soap opera. On the contrary, she eagerly makes fun of emotions and exposes the vicarious motives behind sentimentality. For example, she often confronts her colleague Erlend with the suspicion that he is actually trying to say something else, is lying, or is insincere, i.e., just pretending. Let us consider an example of her cynical self-staging: a sketch in which she 'just happens to' meet Erlend's 'little brother' and fills him in on the real picture, contradicting everything his parents ever taught him – that smoking is bad for his health, that 'negroes' and whites are equals, and so on. In the programme on racism (10th March 1997), she regales him: "Have your Mom and Dad been telling you that all men and women are created equal? What nonsense! I mean, negroes are enormously well-hung, as every girl knows and dreams of, and you're not a negro and you'll never get a girl. And if you do, she'll probably be a pitiful little thing. Just think about that!"

The parody of the programme host's role consists of mimicking the function, but filling it with unconventional content. The role contradicts the conventions of the female programme host as typified in programmes dealing with subjects in the intimate sphere. Indeed, part of Hærland's fascination lies in her blatant indifference, which gives her considerable room for maneuver. *Direkte Lykke!* is emphatically not a parade of emotions. But, in that

case, what function does the camera's constant focus on Hærland's face serve?

Pin-up

The pin-up is the second of Pedersen's three categories of programme hosts. Pin-up signifies the classic staging of the female body as, for example, Laura Mulvey (1975) discusses it in relation to classic film, i.e., an image which especially appeals to the male gaze. Pedersen writes:

It seems as though the female studio host who plays on her 'good looks' and her sexuality has greater leeway for breaking with female stereotypes than women in the more confined role of conveying emotional intensity (Pedersen 1995:189).

Pedersen would appear to perceive a principal difference between being displayed as an erotic object and *displaying oneself* as one; the act of self-staging implies a distancing from object status. In other words, the *distancing or meta-commentary*, expressed in one or another form, introduces a subversive or critical element into what might otherwise be a conventional representation of a woman reduced to passive erotic object. We shall return to this point in relation to sexualization as a visibility strategy.

Hærland behaves and dresses as the star of the show. Her clothing (ultra short-short), make-up and coiffure express an explicitly sexy style. She flirts, but – significantly – hardly ever with her co-hosts or guests. She flirts with the camera. She basks voluptuously in the limelight, smiling into the camera even when she 'should' be paying attention to the goings-on on the show. She stages an erotic game in which she 'lures' the camera to focus attention on herself. Despite the fact that the pin-up – being displayed as an object – indisputably is a stereotyped female role, Hærland's playful, highly self-aware manner creates a distance which allows her to explode the "dumb blonde" stereotype while caricaturizing it. She is not satisfied with being displayed passively as a kind of visual object, but insists on actively catching attention. Thus, she would seem to confirm Pedersen's thesis that women programme hosts who capitalize on their 'looks' can signal a distancing from prevailing stereotypes.

Burlesque

It is this conscious self-staging as meta-commentary which forms the core of Pedersen's third category of female programme host; the burlesque. As Pedersen points out, the burlesque relates to com-

edy and parody, but particularly to shows in which women perform in ways that combine satire and striptease (Pedersen 1995:195).⁵ Close-ups of Hærland often convey deliberate provocations on her part, in which cases her face hardly serves as the kind of iconic image which invites emotion. Her gaze is all too self-aware and manifestly manipulative for that. The traditional distinction between active gaze and passive *icon* is accentuated by her voluptuously narcissistic pleasure (Pedersen 1995:32). Discussing classic cinematographic representations, film theorist Kaja Silverman (1988:1) has shown how the female body, when objectified, can be used to stage oneself narcissistically. This unobliging form of self-pleasure and burlesque exaggeration are cardinal features of Hærland's rendition of the programme host, viz., the wilful, ruthlessly arbitrary 'boss' of the show.

Thus, the programme reproduces television's traditionally staged, paternalistic style of address, while Hærland also draws attention to the artificial nature of femininity as commonly constructed. Her parodic recirculation of signs of female sexuality marks a sharp break with convention.

The scenography in *Direkte Lykke!* also contributes to the artificiality, the 'stagedness', of the programme. It is difficult to orient oneself in relation to the location and spatial extent of the studio. The viewer cannot grasp the structure, just as the various segments and their respective loci – the studio, somewhere on the city streets, in cars and so forth – seem to lack all manner of logic relating to an overarching structure. Instead, the moment, the situation, and the visual sensation are the dominant elements in *Direkte Lykke!*; they are not subordinated to any coherent narration. As others have pointed out, this is fairly typical of the 'postmodern condition' – a situation of ambivalence, shifting surfaces based not on 'reality', but on self-quotation and references to other 'surfaces' (Kaplan 1987; Pedersen 1995:199). The kaleidoscopic structure, in which apparently unrelated items and episodes follow one another pell-mell, is consonant with Hærland's style – it, too, lacking 'coherence and meaning'. Hærland plays with the signs and attributes of power and control. It is the attributes themselves she is interested in, but to signal her dominance rather than to convey meaning.

Sexualization as a Visibility Strategy

Pedersen observes that every channel, every programme in the television landscape is anxious to establish a distinctive 'profile'. Women, Pedersen

argues, assume especial significance as visual emblems, with the budding media masquerade plays on the masquerade of femininity (Pedersen 1995:196). Pedersen makes an interesting observation concerning a number of 'burlesque' female programme hosts when she, referring to the work of film theorist Anne Doane (1984) points out that de-sexualization is not a good strategy for the representation of women. As Doane (1984:80) puts it: "*In a patriarchal society, to desexualize the female body is to deny its very existence.*" Some programme hosts, Pedersen observes, create subject positions for themselves, not despite their being staged as arousing visual objects and sexual creatures, but in fact thanks to it (Pedersen 1995:198). I consider Anne Kath Hærland such a host. In Pedersen's view, the distancing effect of self-irony, playfulness and self-staging plays a crucial role here. (Doane also points out that the ability to distance oneself is important for the female spectator, too, so that she does not over-identify herself with the figure in question, but rather participates in the theatrical aspect of femininity as a construct.)

A recent dissertation from the University of Oslo, *Tegnet på kroppen* [The sign on the body] (1995), also casts some light on this subject. Here, Dorte Marie Søndergaard calls attention to the relatively liberated significations which what she calls "gender-citing practices" can produce. But, she points out, no matter how transcendent or iconoclastic the representation, all such significations must necessarily refer to certain shared conceptions of what gender means: to gain 'recognition' one must first be recognized. If we consider gender as a system of signs, the meaning of which is subject to negotiation, some components of the conventional codes must be retained, otherwise one places oneself outside the pale of the negotiation. Thus, even though Anne Kath Hærland may stage a highly unconventional rendition of femininity, she actively directs attention to the eroticized body. Her sovereignty, her independence of codes and conventions, and her claim to power and control would hardly arouse the same degree of fascination and amusement were she a de-sexualized figure. By retaining signs of femininity, expressed through her sexualized body and its theatrical attitudes, her sexedness becomes a focal point, which both confirms conventional notions of femininity and gives her considerable leeway to deconstruct other traditional elements in the construction of gender.

Gender differentiation is encoded through visible anatomical differences; gender as the aesthetics of appearances. By staging oneself as an erotic

object that is connotative of femininity, i.e., by sexualizing one's body, the woman becomes visible. In the cultural context the anatomical differences between the sexes serve as ostensibly irreducible symbols of all that is natural. This concept of sexual differences is in itself an ideological frontline – or, in any case, open to negotiation. Here an effort is made to collate the proper discourse and meaning of (biological) sex, (social) gender, gender identity and object-choice. Although the anatomical differences within each of the binary categories 'Man' and 'Woman' may be considerable, the genitalia are privileged signs in the field of meaning relating to sex.

Søndergaard uses an objectifying jargon in order to draw attention to the degree to which the sign system of sexuality influences our culture, and to point out how components within the signifying system are changing. She refers, for example, to women as *persons who are marked feminine or persons having feminine body signs*. In her discussion of sexuality she speaks of the *orientation of desire*, desire being directed either toward *opposite-sex persons or same-sex persons*.

Thus, the concept of 'body signs' affords a means to verbalize gender without falling into the fallacy of essentialism. . . The body as sign is a concept which is meant to objectify a phenomenon which is so self-evident as to be virtually invisible to us... This is not to say that men or women are invisible. What we cannot see are the constructions of men and women, i.e., all the things that men and women might be and do, and all that they cannot be and do because they are men and women (Søndergaard 1996:59ff).

The 'Authority Uniforms' of the Sexes

It might seem as though a strategy of de-sexualization – playing down the female body as visual object – might be more consonant with the ideology of equality of the sexes. If women divest themselves of the attributes of the feminine sexual masquerade, it might give them access to the commons, including the regions having a male connotation. How women such as current Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland stage themselves are good examples of a normative 'uniform' for women in high places. Generally speaking, one may say that the closer to the vortex of power, the more uniform and neutralized women's personal

expression. Tordis Borchgrevink interprets the phenomenon in positive terms:

... and the more power [men] have, the more they look alike. Women, on the other hand, are required to dress to express a personality. One can see men's stereotyped dress as a sign of their liberty to be themselves when it suits them. And we can see 'the feminist uniform' as a signal on the part of women that they are allowing themselves that same liberty (Borchgrevink 1994:102f).

The neutral 'authority uniform' or 'feminist uniform', as Borchgrevink calls it, is not a universal standard, but varies in appearance. Søndergaard notes that body, carriage and mastery of ritual are important aspects of social participation in various arenas. Thus, it is a question of one's choice of dramaturgy:

Engineers with big breasts present a disparate, fragmented image. It does not contribute to their credentials for participation in the arena. Engineers with large feet, broad shoulders, deep voices, etc., present a unified image. A serious 'man of science' with a bust line? Does that add up? One's body, carriage and mastery of ritual – these are all factors in the dramaturgical aspect of the actor's ability to establish his/her credentials, perhaps credentials which may qualify him/her for participation at top levels in the hierarchy, in the academic arena (Søndergaard 1996:235).

Theoretically, we might reason that the norm of toning down individual and erotic expression which prevails in the 'corridors of power' might create an arena in which sex/gender would seemingly be of little consequence. This by virtue of the overarching norms of the public sphere, which should not privilege any group and should remain separate from the private and intimate spheres (Pedersen 1997; Habermas 1962/1974).

Eroticization and sexualization are hardly the exclusive privilege of women. It is just that *other*, different meanings connote male attractiveness. Among men, proximity to power, knowledgeability, reliability and authority traditionally produce the erotic effect. Men's occupational identity is largely bound up with their erotic charge: the greater their 'power', the 'sexier' they are. In other words, it is not (only) men's appearance, but their participation in power which constitutes their attraction. In her novel, *Three Guineas* (1938) Virginia Woolf makes fun of the masculine pomp which characterized

bourgeois public servants in England of the 1930s. Every button and stripe was laden with meaning. Women did not have access to the public sphere, and their apparel has traditionally served only two functions: to decorate and to attract attention (Pedersen 1995:193). Lacan proposes a counter-concept to the feminine masquerade, the purpose of which, he presumes, is to compensate for women's lack of phallos.⁶ The counter-concept is the masculine parade, the purpose of which is to disguise the fact that penis is not equivalent to phallos: "*Men dress to demonstrate their power and to disguise their impotence*".⁷

The Feminization of Men

These different, gender-related structures of desire are part of a sluggish cultural process. They do not correspond to or follow the equality discourse. We see, however, that components of masculinity are beginning to transcend the conventional construction inasmuch as men, particularly youth, are taking part in the aestheticization of the body and adopting so-called 'feminine' attributes and traits.

The prime strategy of contemporary youth is to construct identity propositions and a culture which distinguishes itself from that of the preceding (parental) generation. Contemporary youth culture is highly conscious of symbolic meaning and play with signs. A playful nonchalance vis-à-vis authenticity and things natural is expressed, for example, in the 'House' sub-culture's emphasis on the artificial and a freedom of citation which subverts the traditionally romantic aura that surrounds creativity and the Arts. A penchant for illusionism and superficial play are other characteristics. Vinyl, metals and imitation furs are popular attributes of youth culture today.

Men nowadays put more emphasis on their appearance and their sexuality and in doing so approach a traditionally feminine position. The phenomenon has long been apparent in advertising and fashion, where the male body and the male as sex object have been in focus. It is also a popular trend in some urban youth cultures for adolescent boys to dress 'transsexually', use eye-catching accessories and make-up.

In a Nordic study of women programme hosts Swedish sociologist Ulla B. Abrahamsson (1996) identifies a new brand of youthful male programme hosts who are used to heighten channel profiles in Swedish television. By means of a self-ironic homosex-humor they make fun of the traditional virile male role and display themselves in spectacu-

lar, attention-getting attire. Well aware that they are borrowing traditionally feminine characteristics, they comment on the absence of women from entertainment genres (Pedersen 1997). Their appearance is not that of men in the corridors of power. One may well wonder whether the phenomenon is a sign of the times, an expression of changes in society at large. We hear again and again mention of young, unemployed men with little formal education as one of the most vulnerable groups in contemporary society. Given the recent trend toward explicit sexualization/eroticization in this group, the question arises if it might not be a response to their vulnerability and social marginalization. Quite conceivably it may.

The requirement of neutrality and uniformity grows stronger, the closer one comes to 'power'. Femininity – read: traditionally subordinate position – decks itself with tinsel and plays explicitly on sexuality as a form of capital, given the absence of other empowering discourses (Mühleisen 1996).

Thus, we can say that men become visible as subjects by cloaking themselves with power and its attributes. It may be difficult, as we have seen, for a woman to de-sexualize her appearance since doing so means that she will to some extent appear as a 'masculine' subject and thus, if nothing else, lose her heterosexual attractiveness. Visual attraction is an important role females play in television, however. Consequently, with Anne Kath Hærland's self-staging as a case in point, we may suggest that assuming this role in a self-aware, playfully distanced manner can afford a woman considerable leeway as an unconventional programme host.

The Men of Direkte Lykke!

When we consider the versions of masculinity Anne Kath Hærland's male co-hosts represent, it is striking how the parody has virtually obliterated whatever masculine attraction they may possess. Each of them is a 'hopeless case', albeit different. They are totally inept, comic at best. In contrast to Hærland, the men of *Direkte Lykke!* are relatively de-sexualized. Tonny and Geir represent a crypto-homoerotic 'couple'; Nils-Petter is totally absorbed in his 'mousy' fiancée. Erlend suffers from repressed sexuality. Wiggo, the 'withered flower-child', is too 'old' to be attractive in the eyes of young viewers. Thus, all five male programme hosts are more or less sexually defused; more precisely, their respective sexualities connote homoerotic bonding, repression, a prim straightlacedness, and 'old age'. Nor is there the least sugges-

tion of flirtation between Queen Anne Kath and the members of her court. In terms of the conventional configuration, whereby the attractive male positions himself in the aura of power, none of the men of *Direkte Lykke!* is 'worthy' of Hærland's construction of femininity. If anything, Hærland uses her sexuality to embarrass Erlend, who, we are led to believe, is highly inexperienced. In one episode she, to his obvious chagrin, frankly (and in unmistakably graphic terms) questions his manliness. In the programme on sex, Anne Kath drags him along to a therapist-sexologist. The session is most humiliating for Erlend – to Anne Kath's great amusement.

And so *Direkte Lykke!* presents us with a striking contrast: a chorus of de-sexualized or 'neutered' men versus the explicitly sexual Hærland. The men in the programme occupy positions of 'impotence' and thus, judged by conventional criteria, are de-eroticized objects. Hærland's aggressive, patronizing and openly derisive attitude toward them underlines this. Her flirtation is, as mentioned above, directed exclusively toward the camera and the viewer. As a result, by virtue of the kind of sovereignty, power and independence she represents, Hærland is the sole figure capable of arousing viewers' identification. The manifestation of her sexuality renders her an object of desire; the liberties she takes as programme host makes her an attractive subject, whom viewers may identify with.

Sexual, Romantic Confirmation

The staging of gender is focal in our culture. This is because sexuality and romantic love are considered among the most important things in our lives. Thus, it is not surprising that achieving confirmation of oneself as a successful object of others' desire is important.

De-sexualizing the body in relation to the cultural codes for sexuality was, however, a plank in the platform of feminism of the 1970s. In feminists' view, the so-called 'sexual revolution' of the late 1960s had become commercialized, with the result that women became the victims of 'availability' and the re-assertion of 'sexist oppression' and coercion. This perception led to their rejection of the cultural tradition whereby women stage themselves as sexual objects. Some years into the 1980s, the question arose as to whether this rejection of tradition might not constitute a new – this time feminist – norm regarding women's appearance which was equally confining with respect to women's freedom

to express themselves sexually in a cultural context. It was not just a question of reinventing codes of sexuality, femininity and romance. Thus, it became legitimate to recycle and 'quote' codes for femininity, but in new permutations and with new *distancing mechanisms*. As a result, women of the late 1980s and 1990s find it easy to combine a frankly masculine black leather jacket with net stockings and fire engine-red lipstick.

As noted earlier, conventional femininity is signalled through the eroticization/sexualization of the female body. If a woman refrains from this sexualization, she tends to seem pale, her 'subjectness' is neutralized, or she may even connote masculinity. Sexualization of men, on the other hand, conventionally takes place through positioning in relation to power. We have noted that men in the corridors of power are not (yet) free to aestheticize/eroticize their appearance very much, albeit it is currently the fashion among young men to stretch the bounds of the masculine register (Mühleisen 1996). We might venture to posit that women in positions of dominance have to compensate for the degree of 'masculinization' their position implies by being especially attentive to their appearance. This calls to mind an observation Joan Rivière makes in her classic article, "Womanliness as a Masquerade", where she suggests that 'femininity' is something one can don or doff like a mask. Women may adopt this strategy to disguise their 'masculine' position under a veil or façade of femininity. This makes it possible for 'powerful' women to defuse her potentially threatening position vis-à-vis a male subject (Rivière 1986). In an analysis of women rock groups' lyrics, Hillevi Ganetz (1997) sees *heterosexuality* as the prize of the masquerade in Rivière's theory, noting that there are alternate theories as to what the masquerade is hiding. Among postmodern theorists who reject the notion of a feminine essence, the mask hides 'emptiness' rather than the 'masculinity' Rivière – inspired by Freud (1933/1989:162) – posits. Judith Butler, constructivist in the extreme, is unwilling to accept even 'emptiness'; she defines gender as performance, so that gender itself *is/becomes* its own mask with no underlying meaning – not even emptiness.

Anne Kath Hærland, for her part, makes no attempt to hide either her aggressiveness, her competitive spirit or her individuality. On the contrary, she expresses these positions, connotative of masculinity as they may be, explicitly and emphatically. It would seem that the excessive signs of femininity which she so flagrantly indulges in may

in a sense legitimize the position of manipulative power which she occupies in the programme.

“Pretty Women on TV”

It is a delicate balance. Speaking in Oslo at a 1996 conference on “Gender in the Media”, media researcher Kathrine Skretting discussed “pretty women on TV” and problematized the function of ‘decor’ which women commonly serve. In Skretting’s words: “Whereas journalistic competence seems to be a prerequisite, it is not a sufficient qualification for the woman who wants to become a programme host” (Skretting 1996:170). Her comments aroused vehement protests among some female programme hosts.

Thus, it is a question of combining professional/dominant (‘masculine’) and attractive object of desire (‘feminine’) in a legitimate fashion. On the one hand we have the Scylla of being an explicitly erotic visual object, which may undermine one’s professional integrity; on the other the Charybdis of being professional, competent, but ‘un-feminine’. Put somewhat drastically, the conventional poles may be described in terms of being powerful, but sexually unattractive or sexually attractive, but powerless. Both positions are paradoxical; neither invites identification.

That the discussion of women’s appearance is a veritable minefield of opinions is quite apparent: witness the recurrent indictments of advertising, the cosmetics industry and media portrayals of women. Women’s decorative function seems to appear threatening to some in that it is perceived to undercut their professional qualifications and skill. It is not entirely legitimate to say what everyone knows, inasmuch as the official, ‘politically correct’ ideal is that women’s appearance should not be a decisive factor in their careers. Hærland’s emphasis on sexualized signs of femininity may be seen as a comment on this official disavowal of the importance of ‘good looks’ in television.

Hærland’s playful, naivistic and sexualized staging forms a stark contrast to what we generally think of as the “pretty woman” on television. Most of these women – news readers and programme presenters in particular – appear in something approaching a ‘uniform’. Moderation reigns: clothing (the perennial tailored jacket), coiffure, jewelry, make-up are elaborate, but tastefully impersonal (Skretting 1996:172). A sexualized body and playful distancing works as a visibility strategy which both calls attention to traditional elements in the construction of femininity and transcends them.

The ‘Monstrous’ Hærland – *Femme Fatale in Reverse*

It is quite clear today that there is both a collective (equality discourse) and an individually experienced need to stage femininity in ways that are neither weak/helpless or in the position of object. This raises the question of what cultural connotations, collectively recognized images, are available.

Three stereotypes present themselves: First, we have the ‘good’ woman, the madonna figure or angel. Second, there is the professional, the woman of power who has desexualized her body or balances on the neutral, masculine-connotated norm. The third position in our collective repertoire is the powerful/dangerous and sexualized woman: the witch or whore. *Femme fatale* or the *monstrous woman* present themselves as cultural connotations which embrace this third position. Women with power and sexual attraction have shifted, so to speak, from madonna to femme fatale, who indulges in the feminine masquerade in order to conceal her power under a seductive façade. Feminist film theory, following a psychosemiotic approach, has shown how classical film affords the male spectator a view of the female figure which neutralizes her potentially threatening position. In psychoanalytic terms, film narratives alternate between two strategies, both of which take their starting point in the proposition that the image of woman is potentially threatening in that it arouses castration anxiety. The one strategy consists of averting or denying the potential threat by making a *fetish* of the image of the woman as either an idealized or a glamorous figure. The second strategy, the *voyeuristic/sadistic strategy*, consists of punishing the ‘monstrous’ woman (Mulvey 1975). One may say that the (sexually) threatening and powerful woman occupies a *phallic position* in the sense that she desires a male-connoted position of power, which potentially poses a problem, for which classical film has found its own ‘solutions’.

Since making a fetish of the female image serves to dissolve the perception of a ‘lack’ of ‘phallos’ or, in a cultural sense, the lack of power, men who decorate themselves or make a fetish of their bodies wish in a sense to call attention to their ‘lack’ or to the vulnerability of their position. Silverman accuses Freud of an ingeniously constructed projection: He shifts what the male subject cannot tolerate, ‘castration’ or ‘lack’, over to the female subject. According to Freud’s description of the male castration complex, it is through sight that the female subject is established as both different

and inferior. These are mechanisms the male subject uses to assure himself that it is not he, but the other person who is ‘castrated’ (vulnerable, inferior). The male subject demonstrates his symbolic potency by iterating the female subject’s symbolic impotence (Silverman 1988:18). In other words, aspects of the human condition like vulnerability, separation and absence are traditionally projected onto a female position, which comes to assume these connotations. Here we may have the reason why sexualization/aestheticization of men is not very common in or near the seats of ‘power’.

In a discussion of the fetishist strategies of classical film, Anette Kuhn (1995) observes:

... the film makes it clear that to adopt a narcissistic position in relation to the cinematic image is to run the risk of identifying with woman-as-fetish: of identifying, if not with her over-idealisation, certainly – and more commonly, perhaps, in the cinema of the 1980s – with her victimisation and punishment (351).

This line of reasoning runs counter to Pedersen’s and Doane’s conclusion that de-sexualization of the female body is a bad strategy and that the female programme hosts Pedersen refers to assume a subject position, not despite, but rather by virtue of their function as visual objects.

The final episode of *Direkte Lykke!* may be à propos: In the last segment Hærland lashes out at her colleagues, snarling her frustration over having to work with such pitiful individuals, how sick she is of the sight of them. She then pulls out a pistol and shoots them down, one after the other. As noted earlier, Hærland occupies a highly narcissistic, playful position, while she is also the one ‘in control’ and by far the most aggressive figure in the programme. She is, in other words, a ‘monstrous’ female figure. Thus, her murderous foray in the final episode reverses the familiar cinematic formula: it is she who liquidates her disgusting colleagues. She manages to insist on her ‘phallic’ and ‘fetishized’ position and get away with it. The ‘dumb blonde’ defies cinematic convention, exacting her vengeance without being ‘punished’. The ‘phallic’ programme host dramatizes the narrative without being tamed or domesticated, as so often is the fate of femmes fatales after a brief, intoxicating taste of power.

Naivism

Direkte Lykke! is thus above all a parody of ‘old time’, conventional television. The tone of the

parody is playful and seemingly naive rather than intellectual. In a graduate thesis on postmodern film aesthetics, Dag Asbjørnsen (1994) discusses naive perceptions and reactions. Referring to Umberto Eco’s essay, “Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Post-modern Aesthetics” (1985), Asbjørnsen identifies the aesthetics of negativity with modernist aesthetics: a normative aesthetics which applauds breaks with tradition. Consequently, the modernist aesthetic inspires iconoclastic innovation as a means of achieving new insights and understandings of the world around us (Asbjørnsen 1994:62). Among other things, this aesthetic programme implies a break with empathy. Modernism encourages the receiver to penetrate the surface and grasp deeper structures in reality. The postmodern aesthetic may be understood as a new attitude which, alongside the rational, emphasizes sensuality and emotion (Asbjørnsen 1994:23).

One of the distancing techniques in postmodern aesthetics is irony, which, Asbjørnsen asserts, lets empathy and distanced awareness be combined. In line with Asbjørnsen, I interpret naivism as an important mode of expression in *Direkte Lykke!*. As I see it, ‘naivism’ must be understood as a component of postmodern irony, but also as a limitation on the intellectual cynicism inherent in the ironic attitude.

Naivism has been identified as the trend in young people’s culture which has succeeded irony, the hallmark of ‘Generation X’. In March 1997, *Puck*, a young people’s programme on Norwegian television (NRK2), carried a roundtable discussion on ‘naivism’, which one participant characterized as irony in an exaggerated form. The discussion suggests that naivism may in fact be an expression of an ironic attitude toward a (then-predominant) distanced, ironic metalevel and elements of postmodern irony. Inasmuch as the naivist trend has been staged in the context of the marketplace and is therefore subject to the logic of the market, the participants in the *Puck* roundtable agreed on naivism as a more adequate term for the trend than ‘naivité’. Current naivistic expressions may be taken as comments on or explorations of primordial naivité.

Postmodern irony/naivism

One characteristic element in postmodern aesthetics is nostalgia. Asbjørnsen describes the “nostalgic style” in postmodern film

... not as an expression of a longing to go back to [a particular] era, but rather a longing for the mode of sensual experience belonging to that

era: Nostalgia may thus be seen as an expression of our sentimental relation to a mode of experience which is lost to us (Asbjørnsen 1994:34).

Thus, 'nostalgia' allows us to be naive yet maintain a distanced, self-aware position. Asbjørnsen sees this as a postmodernist strategy as we savour the apple, that is, after our original, genuinely naive sense has been lost.

Asbjørnsen goes on to describe postmodern irony as "... *delivering a message while signalling an awareness that the message is a cliché*" (Asbjørnsen 1994:90). That is to say, postmodern irony involves the same kind of 'equivocalness' as parody. In contrast to traditional parody, however, the ironic element here is not expressed at the expense of the original message, and therefore it does not fit the traditional dictionary definition of 'irony' as "the use of words to express . the opposite of the literal meaning" (The New Penguin English Dictionary, 1986) The duality, Asbjørnsen points out, allows one to indulge in naive experiences without risking whatever reputation for intellectual sophistication one may enjoy. Against this background, one may see 'naivism' as the part of postmodern irony or the postmodern mode of expression which emphasizes naive forms of experience and expression more than intellectual distancing mechanisms. We might say that naivism distances itself from those aspects of postmodern irony which retain some of the modern disdain for immediate sensation and pathos.

Naivist Elements in Direkte Lykke!

In an undergraduate thesis, Lindis Hurum (1997) discusses naivist elements in *Direkte Lykke!* and mentions a number of features which may be interpreted in that perspective. The title itself, which might be "Happiness [brought to you] Direct", refers to the fact that the programme is transmitted 'live' (*direkte*), but, in my reading, it also holds the promise of direct, naive access to 'happiness' (*lykke*) Hurum discusses the childish, playful character of the programme's vignette – both Kåre & The Cavemen's music and the visual motifs: jump-roping, cowboys and Indians, playing with a beach ball, etc. References to play, children and childishness recur throughout the programme. Hurum interprets scenes showing Anne Kath Hærland surrounded by children as a sign of identification with, or a desire to be associated with children. To this I might add that such a connotation may express a

desire for the freedom, naively expressed, which children seem to have. Otherwise, she shows no interest in children whatsoever. Her 'emphatic lack of interest' is all too apparent in, for example, her encounters with Erlend's 'little brother'. Her antagonistic behaviour toward him should, I think, be read in the context of Hærland's desire to contradict politically correct norms; it is a part of her 'transgressive' programme – an issue to which I shall return.

Other naivistic elements which Hurum identifies are the animated series, Robin, and Kåre & The Cavemen's decidedly 'retro' repertoire (1960s and 1970s). *Direkte Lykke!* emphasizes direct, immediate sensual experience without mitigating reflection. The recirculation/parodies of past programmes may also be seen in a nostalgic light since – as Hurum also notes – the object of the irony is at once the object of nostalgic affection – as is possible in postmodern irony.

Does Anne Kath stage a naivist form of femininity – and if so, why? Does she use a naivist approach to distance herself from or to explore what is actually naive, namely, a stereotype of femininity lacking perspective or reflection?

Naivist Femininity

In the televised roundtable discussion mentioned earlier, Danish fashion and media scholar Christa Lykke Christensen spoke of the naivist trend as an "aesthetics of understatement", which she associates with the general resurgence of attention to the body, an interest which she sees as a reaction to the fact that people today feel like free-floating signs in our culture. Christensen focused particularly on the trend for young women to stage themselves as little girls wearing undersized sweaters that leave their navels bare, the revival of the teddybear and childish hairstyles like pigtails and ponytails. She points out that staging oneself as a little girl is not the same as being one. The difference is perspective. Furthermore, she points out, young women who indulge in 'little-girl' fashions are sending out signals that their sexuality is not developed as one might expect of a career-oriented, mature woman who takes what she wants in life. She calls the tendency "*an elusive sexuality on the aesthetic plane, a form of auto-eroticism, or a different kind of seduction*" (Christensen in Puck, 16 March 1997).

Christensen speculates that the 'little-girl' fashion trend may be a reaction to the sexual ideal of womanhood. The naivist 'little girl' insists on an undeveloped, pre-pubescent sexuality – a refusal to

come out of her 'little girl's room' – it, too, sexualized. I wonder if this trend may rather be an exploration of the eroticization of young women, understood in the context of naivism as *irony in an exaggerated form*. Seen in this light, a refusal to leave an eroticized child-hood may represent an exploration of the landscape of cultural meanings girls are socialized into. The process of objectifying and trivializing young women, making them cute 'baby-dolls' in pastel-coloured clothes, 'little girl'-hairstyles and (indirectly) inviting them to gain 'recognition' via a narcissistic, mirroring position are part of the construction.

Cultural attitudes toward children are essentially ambivalent, combining a denial of children as erotic beings and a powerful eroticization of the pre-pubescent (female) body. Such ambivalence – a focus on the forbidden – generates erotic fascination. This, then, is the dominant cultural framework into which young girls are introduced. Perhaps the naivist 'little-girl' trend is at once a nostalgic return to the relative 'innocence' of childhood and an exploration of/calling attention to these very same phenomena. It allows girls to indulge in the pleasures of nostalgic recognition by underlining the premises of the sexualized aesthetic of girlhood as well as distancing themselves from the same, via exaggeration.

Hærland's naivist self-staging plays on a more or less vulgar interpretation of (adult) femininity. Seemingly naively, she enacts stereotypes of femininity, centred on woman as visual object. In a sense she lustfully mimics elements in the construction of femininity, as can be done within the framework of the feminine 'masquerade': here, a naivist ironization of 'natural' womanhood. Her exaggeration is at once comic and releasing, vulgar and confusing. The naive style of enactment discounts, namely, the calculation and distance on which the strategy of seduction is based. Coupled with Hærland's unrelenting insistence on being the controlling vortex, calculation is nonetheless the prime ingredient in her naivistic strategy, which plays on ambiguities and presumes knowledgeable 'readers' who are familiar with cultural (sub)codes and trendy references which play dually on distance and fascination.

A Politically Incorrect Rendition?

Hærland stages a kind of politically *incorrect* femininity. Political correctness, "PC", is a term coined by the political Right in American politics. In its original context, the word "correct" was a sarcasm

aimed at political opponents. The difference in Norway – and perhaps Europe – is that here "PC" has become a buzz-word of the so-called 'ironic generation'. The earnest political involvement of '1968' has been succeeded by an ambivalent self-reflexivity, and one may well ask whether the 'PC' accusation is no more than a labelling of 'untrendy' views and standpoints – a kind of reflexive cynicism (Gundersen & Marstein 1995:10-13).

Clearly, *Direkte Lykke!* itself is hardly immune to this kind of finger-pointing. On the other hand, it is an entertaining talk show/sitcom which borrows its meanings and its comic effects both from making fun of PC attitudes, via parodies of what might be called the 'bastion of PC', namely, Norwegian public service broadcasting, and from self-ironic comment. Hærland turns some of the dominant television genres, from the 1970s as well as the present – magazines, 'true confessions'-type talk shows, public affairs debates and reportage, all of which give the illusion of access to 'reality' – upside down. But she also parodies herself, toying as she does with her 'naive' lack of a point of view. *Direkte Lykke!* attaches the 'PC' label not by means of reflexive cynicism, but through mimicking a naive, politically incorrect unconcern (which is in danger of becoming politically correct among young people...) – in sum, a naivistic strategy.

Hærland's calculating naivism, playful exhibitionism and blatant self-centred nonchalance may be taken as a jab at the politically correct brand of femininity posited in the ideology of equality of the sexes. This, I believe, may be a key to the fascination she arouses and to the cult status she seems to attained.

Transgressions

As noted earlier, both the parodic and the naivistic strategies involve a simultaneous fascination with and celebration of what is parodied, or the 'primeval and pure' objects being explored. This raises the question of what this parodic citation leaves us with and may even confirm. Or, more simply, what is 'off limits'? What components may not be made fun of? The answers should tell us something about which components in the construction of femininity are 'privileged' in the present context.

In both the parody of 'old-time TV' and its forms of address and the parody of conventional femininity distancing mechanisms predominate. But these same distancing mechanisms spare some components, thereby giving them renewed effect. Even if I have argued, based on Doane and

Pedersen, that sexualization of the female body can be a strategy for asserting a distinct female subject position, the strategy also involves a risk of a reduction, which would keep Woman in her function as Icon and visual object. Obviously, it can be a difficult balancing act for anyone, and it results in symptoms which elicit diagnoses having little to do with subjective power and burlesque stagings.

Another important dimension or 'limit' is the heterosexual component. Even though Hærland with undisguised disdain avoids all manner of flirtation which might risk her becoming an object, her (distanced) staging nonetheless confirms traditional heterosexual codes for sexualization. In a cultural sense, it appears that Rivière's masquerade operates here to privilege or legitimate heterosexu-

ality. This component is not made the object of parody or naivistic effects. With that the question arises, whether an attractive negotiable position in this case – despite distancing – nonetheless presumes the recirculation/citation of the heterosexual code, i.e., whether femininity is woven into meanings as sexualized image and participant in the hetero-romantic project. As Pedersen (1995:215, 1997:30) points out, postmodernism is ambiguous in this regard.

By retaining this component, which maintains her comprehensible and 'attractive' femininity and allows her to avoid being perceived as a 'monstrous' woman, Hærland shows an innovative potential in relation to several other components relating to the medium and the staging of femininity.

Notes

1. Perhaps "Instant Happiness" or "Happiness [brought to you] Live".
2. Hærland may be seen as a 'creature of television'. She has no background in journalism, but worked as a sound technician for NRK TV before she was offered the job of programme host. Her performance in *Direkte Lykke!* has made her a star.
3. The programmes are *Jakten på det gode liv* with Nadja Hasnaoui (TV2), *Bugge og damene* with Lill Marit Bugge (NRK2), *Dameavdelingen* (NRK), *Bombay Surprise* (NRK, a follow-up to *Direkte Lykke!*), and *Vera og Vera* (NRK).
4. More specifically: Andenæs, E (1994) Språklig konstituering av sosial identitet [The verbal constitution of social identity]. In *Konstituering av kjønn fra antikken til moderne tid*. Oslo: Norges forskningsråd, and Tannen, D (1991) *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. London: Random House.
5. Pedersen refers in turn to Robert C Allen's *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*. Chapel Hill/London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
6. More on the concept of masquerade under the heading, "Sexual, romantic confirmation" below.
7. Jacques Lacan: *Séminaire I: Les Ecrits techniques de Freud*. Paris: Seuil, 1975, as cited in Pedersen (1995). (Translation from the Danish.)

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