

TRACES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN ART AND ADVERTISING: TWO CASE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

The value of art and design in the interpretation and understanding of historical, social, political and economic physiognomy of a civilization, regardless of its national identity, is considered to be very important. This research aims at decoding, analyzing and interpreting the multidimensional and timeless social phenomenon of domestic violence, as well as the social status of women, through the juxtaposition of two carefully selected milestones in the history of art and design (painting, photography, engraving and advertising), which focus not only on Victorian England, but also on the postwar American consumer society. Driven by the selection of characteristic works of art and advertising, we can understand the social and, therefore, the cultural structure of these distinct historical areas in the world map of social evolution. This will help us prove that the characteristics of domestic violence can take the form of a stereotype and this is why they are repeated, almost unchanged, regardless of the historical, social and cultural character of a nation.

Keywords: women, domestic violence, Victorian painting, American advertisements, consumption.

Introduction:

The issue of domestic violence is not but a deeply dark and secret issue, a taboo subject which is governed by a sense of absurdity of not only those who apply and put it into practice, but also those who, silently and without any protest in most cases, experience it. Usually, of course, especially in our time, but in many other periods in the history of mankind, equally absurd is also the way it is addressed both in the narrow context of the family environment and in the wider society which the repressive social mechanisms are integrated into. Notwithstanding that our private lives often seem protected from the classic saying "keep family issues in strict privacy", how many times, in the name of this motto, have despicable and criminal acts been committed within the stereotypical family contexts? Over the centuries, there were countless incidents of women and children who experienced this phenomenon through the sealed walls of the family and, therefore, the social walls. The violence of this kind is diverse, multi-faceted but always painful. It is not representative of either the social class or the economic status of individuals and its samples are found in all societies worldwide regardless of country, race or religious and political beliefs of both perpetrators and victims. For example:

1. Sexual violence in the form of marital rape, sexual slavery, prostitution or forced sterilization,
2. Physical violence in the form of beating, attacking, choking, pushing,
3. Psychological violence in the form of coercion, intimidation, threatening, extortion and degrading treatment.
4. Economic violence in the form of control of the family income, the salary grab, deprivation of food or clothing, prohibition of education or even employment (Gilles, 1997).

As a consequence of the previous viewpoints on this sensational issue from the perspective of art and design, this article attempts to attract your interest in the fact that art itself, in any of its forms, has always been the social, political and cultural mirror image of human action. Art itself, but also some contemporary forms of design, manages through its unique relationship with the human soul to reproduce the cultural and social image of cultures, being different among themselves, across the length and width of the world during all the eras of human progress towards development. Relying on this view and applying the methodology of utilizing primary sources of information, this article primarily intends to demonstrate how, through art, the problem of domestic violence can prove to be an enduring source of problems on the balance of the family institution, because it identifies with failure of adhering to the conditions of equality, freedom and fairness, especially for the female gender in many different historical periods and cultures (Conway, 1987). The first case study concerns the detection of elements of domestic violence through painting, photography and illustration of forms of 'socially unimpaired " Victorian England, to identify characteristics which were hitherto a heinous social problem. The same objective is also defined in the second case study which, however, concerns the way in which the post-war American advertising used to manage one of the greatest examples of modern commercial and consumer culture, the family concept until at least the mid-1970's, i.e. the time when its purely commercial value entered into juxtaposition with its new, informative identity defined by targeted social protection and information. Through the confrontational relationship of these two types of advertising, not only will the true dimension of the diachronic phenomenon of our interest, but also the maturity of modern Western societies of both admitting and effectively combating it, become more visible

The Double Standards In The Ethics of Victorian England:

Speaking about the Victorian period we mean the reign of Victoria (1837-1901) during which there was a dramatic overhaul of the social face of the English nation. It would be certainly odd to

accept that the prevailing notions on morality, ethics and family ties, values important for the healthy structure of a society, took suddenly the shape that every historian is aware of, with the enthronement of Victoria and which ceased to exist after her death. Therefore, the concept about what the structural social fabric of the Victorian era was about or belonged to, as its representative sample regarding its beginning and its termination has always been unclear and undefined (Crowley, 1990). Nevertheless, this historical period is meant to support a range of social values such as of strict morality - especially in what it was related to interpersonal relations – of conservatism, of modesty, of solemnity and resolute commitment to Christian ideals. But, perhaps the most distinctive "virtue" of this unwritten moral manifesto was the "etiquette", a word which, more or less, included many of the above concepts.

Based on all the foregoing facts, both the roles of genders, and the importance of family were redefined. The new world order did clarify the status of women - especially in the emerging middle and upper class - whose role was purely functional, strictly within the context of family life. The house, in the sense of home, was the most important core of configuration of this new ethos and dictated a series of values guided by the wife / mother, being identified with her. Since the natural refuge of the human had a female identity, it had had all the qualities that characterized, under the standards of that era, the female sex: the warmth, fervor, emotion, maternal protection and marital loyalty. However, two other qualities of a woman, having to do with her adherence to the traditional principles in every home, were the passivity and obedience to the wills, wishes and decisions of the dominant male (Forty, 1987). The main objective of spousal / paternal omnipotence was the protection and safety of the family sanctuary where the wife could perform properly her duties, which included not only keeping a peaceful and pleasant atmosphere at home, but also a moral upbringing of children. Therefore, house served as an unpolluted place, away from public view and perhaps as an antidote to it (Nelson, 2007).

On the other hand because of the indescribable suffering and deprivation they experienced, the lower social strata adapted much less to the requirements of this new moral order. Their main, generally of low income, jobs included occupations of workers in the heavy industry, chariots, street vendors, domestic servants and maids, while their usually numerous families were far from representing what was designated as "virtuous and proper", and so it was no wonder that they were the weak link in the golden chain of the socially unimpaired typical Victorian family.

It should be noted however that the abuse of women and children in many cases, was a habitual and silently acceptable practice, both within the bosom of the inferior classes because of alcoholism and poverty, and the superior social strata. In real terms the new moral order of things did not have the unblemished character that others believed it had, since the unhealthy perception of Victorians on family and hierarchy as well as religion, but also the then applied legislation - particularly beneficial to men - allowed the existence of domestic violence. More specifically, the traditionally authoritarian and protective profile of the husband often gave a cause to believe that he was entitled to exercise any form of violence, verbal or physical, in order to bring back to order the members of his family (Caine, 1997). With regard to Christian ideals which should be followed scrupulously by all family members, these included views based on which the wife had to faithfully follow the orders of her husband in order to be considered a virtuous and good Christian. This reinforced the idea of men that if they were not gods themselves, at least they had a divine mandate to control their wives personalities and lives in general in any way, was it fair or unfair. All these issues were covered by the legislative framework of the time under which men had rights to claim, and even possess, under certain conditions, the existing goods of their wives, which included salary, if any, children, and every asset they had had (Hamilton, 2006). All this information refers to the grounds that marital relations in Victorian England, not only were they not governed by the basic principles of fairness and equity, but rather they were only a bit different from the relationship between slave and master.



Figure 1: 'The Family of Queen Victoria', painting by Franz Xaver Winterhalter, 1846.

Painting with themes inspired by the everyday life of Victorians, mostly of the middle class, was, inter alia, an important type of two-dimensional imaging art at least until the late 1870's. Projects of a detailed representational performance on the family attributed in a "photographic" manner family moments of fun, happiness, peace and joy. The main characteristics of these formulations may be regarded as borrowed from the Italian Renaissance during which the popular theme of the Holy Family was the standard of a long-lasting family happiness. The main instigator of social recognition of this new moral order within the family through art itself was Queen Victoria who often commissioned works depicting her with her husband and their children in ideally happy moments. It was no long before the art works on the family upon request by male customers from the middle and upper classes became tradition as their main aim was to keep alive in the course of time their ultimate family pride and to have it over to the next generation (Wood, 1999).

The woman as wife and mother was the key figure in such works of art, while she was often called 'the angel of the house', a phrase whose origin lies in the novel of the author Coventry Patmore: *The Angel in the House: The Betrothal* (1854). This phrase reflects the stereotype of the Victorian wife, which, among other things, should be depicted in a sweet and feminine way, as a counterweight to her weakness and general inferiority to men, but also affectionate and full of understanding for the needs of her family. At the same time when English society was plagued by the threats of the Industrial Revolution, mass marketing, quick profit and the social decline that all involved, the concept of home should be attributed with paintings with strong characteristics of moral refuge with the guardian angel wife / mother. From what we can understand, therefore, all paintings with this theme were typically staged representations of an ostensible family happiness, given that the aspects of the problem of domestic violence were never imprinted and this is why they were considered as a further proof of the hypocritical Victorian ethics.



Figure 2: A photograph portrait of a typical Victorian family. Birmingham, 1889.

The family challenged from within, by physical or verbal violence, the undervalued status of women, the terrifying and, often, fascistic paternal authority over children-possession, was never impressed, nor ever through the big technological miracle of photography. This new achievement which, by the mid-1880's, steadily began to replace painting on issues related to family portraits, also typically staged performances, failed to restore the truth of internal domestic realities, but it helped just to reproduce a sham, false happiness. For example, most statistics / evidence we have on child abuse and mortality, but also on the depreciation of women within the family context, or in environments directly linked to them in the middle and the end of the nineteenth century Victorian England, are not obtained through visual, but through written material (mainly novels, articles and poems).

It is commonly accepted that the tremendous growth of the printing industry in the nineteenth century England was crucial to the success of the most famous novelists. So the great variety of literary works, along with the magazines, newspapers and journals of the time were the basis of the culture of lithography, a technique which faithfully served the very popular art of printed forms illustration during the period of our interest (King and Plunkett, 2005). Most texts, with an apparent freedom of speech, thought and expression, such as novels, poems, reviews, satire, articles or vignettes, were combined with color or black and white illustrations in the form of realistic imaging, sketches, cartoons and caricature enhancing the plot of each text. Through these texts and thus the illustrations that supported them, considerably bitter truths were often expressed about the life, love, work, illness, hatreds and passions of the Victorian. Depending on the text, these illustrations did not depict scenes of violence, anger and tension only in families of lower social strata in which domestic violence was considered a "normal" and frequent practice, but also in the middle and upper classes family environments whose social image was considered blameless. This extensive series of prints is perhaps the most important visual source for the actual magnitude of the Victorian era, though they were often challenged by the "unrealistic statements" they represented, in particular with regard to literature and poetry.



Figures 3, 4: Wood-engraved illustrations in Victorian publications showing instants of domestic violence.

However, even in newspapers and magazines of the time we can find prints which would not hesitate to represent scenes of domestic violence in families of all social classes. This, admittedly, challenging content, was one of the major incentives for the emancipation of the late nineteenth century Victorian women and today it is a trusted resource for research and documentation for scholars in the social conditions of that dark period.

Family And Advertising In The U.S.A. After The Second World War:

Clearly featuring the suppression exploitation of the Victorian England conscience, the representatives of Hollywood tried successfully to incorporate the same family image / social stereotype into their productions, for commercial, mainly, reasons. The American cinema of the interwar period took up its final form partly through the cognitive direction of leaders who, knowing the momentum that the influence exercised by the image of the Victorian happy family life, were able to adapt it to the new social conditions and make it a central theme of many films. This was not, of course, anything else but a successful socio-economic strategy that was naturally also adopted by the domain of consumption, after the Second World War, through the newspaper and magazine advertisements and later through the TV commercials. .

More specifically, after 1950 in the midst of rapid technological developments and the growing of the U.S. economy, a shared sense of the country seemed to show an increasing trend back to traditional principles, as well as the comforts of home and general family life (Sivulka, 1998). Already, however, not only had the American masters of mass production, already realized the importance of promotion of healthy family life but also the strong, in a sense, position of women as homemakers, wives and mothers. This stereotype gathered for psychologists of advertising very important characteristics in the consumer arena, such as the power of choice, the distinction of products, but mostly the financial management of the household income. Hence their main goal was its key "operation" as it represented for several decades the exemplary image of the average American family. In short, the model of a dedicated housewife who sacrificed her personal time to care for her husband, to escort her children to school, to cook, to arrange for cleaning, but also to enjoy with her family the joys of life, was considered as the most popular one and influenced many forms of advertising worldwide.



Figures 5, 6: Magazine advertisements promoting, along with the products, the virtues of the middle-class American family.

It was no long before an abundance of especially print advertisements designed in such a way as to present idealized versions of the mother, as well as dad, siblings and even the junior of the family, flooded the market. This is how a new fictional world order of things emerged for the new generation of Americans who were then trying to cope with these illusive new roles. At about the same time, not only did the television advertising confirm this utopian picture, but it set new coordinates for its use and manipulation by carrying it even to the most remote home of the country, given that by 1960 nearly every house had its own television set (Bednarski, 1995). The concept of myth, perhaps the most significant component of advertising, seemed to take a heavy toll through advertisements that boded or promised a peaceful family life, prosperity, beauty and wealth.

But the great responsibility of advertising on covering, and perhaps on suppressing, the objective conditions of the middle and working class American daily living seemed not to be understood, especially at that time. The reality, at least for the main protagonists of the fictional family happiness in the publications and television, women, seemed harsh and often unfair. The independent and self-contained part of women, especially until the early 1960's, accepted a systematic attack by the ambitious and callous world of advertising, which supported, to their own advantage, the image of the loving mother, loyal wife, but also the image of a housewife unworthy for anything else. The job market seemed closed for most representatives of this artificial stereotype which had been configured to serve only the family. At the same time their individual rights (hobbies, intimate gatherings, tours, education) seemed to stop where this traditional effective obligation began. This "American way of life claimed by ads", which showcased a strong ideological separation of sexes, liked 'mom at home' and 'dad at work', a 'weak mom' and a 'strong dad' which can be translated into 'mom being the victim' and 'dad the abuser' (Friedan, 1963). Therefore, it is no wonder that a very high percentage of cases of domestic violence especially in the middle and working classes and, to a lesser extent the bourgeoisie, was soon revealed. At that time many cases of domestic violence took the legal route without serious effect though, since in many states this offense was still considered as a misdemeanor rather than a felony, while millions of other cases were never brought into light. Being minimum up to that point, divorces were soon increased, without being attributed though to "the use of violence in the context of the family" as the evidence requested was usually insufficient from the part of the victims (Domestic Violence Issues, 1995).

In the late 1960's, after the Declaration of Human Rights in the U.S.A., things began to change as major mobilizations for social equality such as the elimination of racial discrimination and

the feminist movement began to change the lines of the social map not only in this country but in the entire Western world. It was then that the American advertising of previous decades came under sharp criticism been accused not only of cheating women that the household was their ultimate accomplishment in life, but also of "whitewashing" many tragic cases of domestic violence, since its fictional status seemed to remove all the traces of the cruel reality from the mass consumer social consciousness.



Figures 7, 8: Stencil graffiti (left) and magazine advertisement (right) reporting women's abuse and domestic violence, U.S.A., mid 1990's.

Around the mid-1970's several social institutions and organizations emerged their objective being to defend the rights of women and address the growing instances of domestic violence. This resulted in the initiation of a large informative campaign in the form of printed paper advertisements and, later, television commercials which, however, took its final form in the late 1980's. The issue of domestic violence, began then to emerge bare and unconcealed as a despicable form of individual or collective experience, without taboos and fear, eliciting to the surface of the mass conscientious system the up to then spurious image of the "happy family" that was no more an exclusive "privilege" of American society, given that the spread of mass consumption through commercial advertising was already a global phenomenon (McCue, 2008). Advertisements appeared then to acquire a social role, without commercial identity, no purpose and viciousness, with bold revelations about the feelings of fear and shame of the victims of domestic violence, for the phenomenon of abuse itself, for the negation of social prejudice. However, it is an undeniable fact that awareness of such a complex, opaque and intimate, social issue was not an easy task so it had to be promoted discreetly. The first informative promotional projects (printed matter or messages in public spaces) did not illustrate direct scenes of violence, while the photo was not used initially because of its immediacy. Instead, painted pictures, cartoons or graffiti, in conjunction with innovative and awakening texts were considered suitable for the passage of the first message. Later, of course, photography played a significant role in this type of campaign, especially in print (newspapers, magazines), but also in outdoor advertising (posters), while corresponding television spots with their immediacy soon constituted a suitable ground for the promotion of a new social campaign to the public consciousness.

So we observe that both the target and the design of an advertisement have always been the basis on which social stereotypes or situations can be captured and fashioned. In the case of our interest, we find out that ultimately the first purely commercial nature of American advertising has been gradually losing its absolute power in shaping these stereotypes whose characteristics have come to distort and misrepresent the true picture of the structure and function of the average postwar American family. The use of its already acclaimed power for reasons of social awareness is, even

today, the major form of restoration of the multi-dimensional forms of social strain caused by its mythical, utilitarian character; the latter is also due to the profound and radical changes that have taken place in the social world map since then.

Conclusion:

Through this interesting course in art, design and history, seen through the prism of a sociological approach we managed to understand the layout order of the causes of the phenomenon of domestic violence. The common component in both cases of our interest is always the primitive and unequal relationship between the sexes, which also occurs in other eras and cultures, as well as in all social classes. The chauvinistic omnipotence of men which is often confused with obtuse or even noble concepts like security, protection or prudence, in the context of the family, but also the inability of women to overcome their nature as the latter is established in society, are the two poles in the interval of which any form of violence can grow. Art itself may be the mirror of a cruel reality, as simple phenomena of domestic violence are illustrated through it, either as a healthy reaction to what is happening or simply because of the fact that domestic violence is part of the culture of a civilization. On the other hand, art and design prove to us that through their often secretive intention they may constitute an important criterion of disillusionment of the unimpaired family picture in societies with manifestly unsound moral codes.

In any case, domestic violence, unlike other forms of violence in art (wars, revolutions, executions, killings of people) was never an issue widely accepted, as it has always been, secretly or not, seen as a form of utmost cruelty, even by those who applied it. However, in the form of a social message, it has always constituted a form of awakening and assertion of individual rights and freedom.

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