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**Broadcasting the Body:
Affect, Embodiment and
Bodily Excess on Contemporary Television**

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Philosophy in Film and Television Studies,
Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies,
University of Glasgow, September 2010.

(c)Alexia Smit, 6 September 2010.

Abstract

In recent years television has seen a notable increase in evocative images of the human body subject to exploration and manipulation. Taking the increasing viscosity of television's body images as a starting point, the work presented in this thesis asserts the importance of considering television viewing as an embodied experience. Through a focus on displays of the body across a range of television formats this thesis demonstrates the significance and complexity of viewers' affective and embodied engagements with the medium and offers an alternative to accounts of television which are focussed only on the visual, narrative or semiotic aspects of television aesthetics. This work challenges approaches to television which understand the pleasures of looking at the body as simply an exercise in power by considering the role of the body in fostering the sharing of affect, specifically through feelings of intimacy, shame and erotic pleasure.

Additionally, the research presented here accounts for and situates the tendency toward bodily display that I have described in terms of traditional television aesthetics and in relation to conditions within the television industry in the United States and the United Kingdom. Rather than considering the trend toward exposing the body as a divergence from traditional television, this thesis argues that body-oriented television is a distinctly televisual phenomenon, one that implicates the bodies onscreen and the bodies of viewers located in domestic space in its attempts to breach the limitations of the screen, making viewers feel both intimately and viscerally connected to the people, characters and onscreen worlds that television constructs for us.

The methodological approach taken in this thesis is based on close textual analysis informed by a focus on affect and embodiment. This thesis relies on the author's own embodied engagement with televisual texts as well as detailed formal analyses of the programmes themselves. In order to understand the place of explicit body images on television this thesis engages with a broad range of contemporary debates in the field of television studies and with the canon of television studies. This thesis is also deeply informed by writing about affect developed in film studies and studies of reality television.

This thesis is structured around a set of case studies which each explore different dimensions of the trend toward bodily excess across a broad range of genres including reality television, science programming and the drama series. The chapters in this thesis are organised around four tendencies or modes related to traditional television aesthetics: Intimacy, community, public education and melodrama. Each of these case studies examines how the affective body capitalises upon and extends the traditional pleasures of television through an affective appeal to the body.

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I dedicate this thesis to my sister, Olivia. Thank you for watching television with me and for inspiring the insights presented in this thesis.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Television, Bodies and Affect: 'Fleshing Out' Television Studies

In the last ten years my everyday engagements with television have granted me extremely intimate access to other people's bodies. I have been taken on computer-generated journeys into the slimy insides of corpses on *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS, 2000 -). I have cringed as surgeons vigorously stuff breast implants into narrow surgical incisions and winced at close-up shots of fluids seeping out of gaping wounds on a plethora of plastic surgery shows such as *Extreme Makeover* (ABC 2002 - 2007), *Dr. 90210* (E! 2004 -), *Make Me Perfect* (ITV, 2006) and *Cosmetic Surgery Live* (Five, 2004). I have shuddered with the participants on these plastic surgery television shows as they anxiously anticipate their next surgery. Watching *Anatomy for Beginners* (Channel 4, 2005) I have shared a flinching response with the live studio audience as Gunther von Hagens slices open real human corpses. I have delighted in the gruesome detail and stylized displays of corpses, eviscerated bodies and their fluid on 'quality' U.S. cable programmes like *Six Feet Under* (HBO, 2001- 2005), *Dexter* (Showtime, 2005-) and *Nip/Tuck* (FX, 2003 -).

As much as the bodily displays that I have described above allow certain pleasures in *looking* at the body they are also centrally about *feeling*. These images and their related sound tracks interest me for the way in which they complicate standard modes of thinking about how television addresses its audience. When the open wounds, sliced organs and decaying flesh on television aggressively demand and solicit physical responses from the bodies of viewers it is no longer enough to write about these images as popular tropes or sign systems. Such visceral material makes it necessary to discuss television's sounds and images in terms of an *affective* appeal to the body. This thesis examines contemporary television's increased interest in drawing close to human flesh, investigating our most private parts and literally taking viewers under the skin of the characters and subjects on our favourite programmes from 2000 to the present. Through these ventures into the body contemporary television seems to

encourage not just a specular relationship to the images that it presents but also a potentially overwhelming embodied engagement with the suggestive sounds and textures of television's new, and very fleshy, onscreen worlds.

Affect has become a newly popular point of theoretical enquiry across a vast range of disciplines from philosophy, social geography and politics to film and art theory. So intense has been the interest in bodies and embodiment in recent years that Patricia Ticiento Clough has named this particular theoretical shift 'the affective turn.'¹ The currency recently gained by theorists like Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks who argue for the crucial role of affect in producing meaning in cinema suggests a notable gap when it comes to applying such ideas the medium of television². I address this gap by attempting to carve out a space for the body in television studies. I am concerned not only with the body as it appears onscreen as a representation but with the potential responses of the bodies of viewers at home in their sensate and emotional interactions with television, and, most importantly, with the relationship television fosters between bodies on either side of the screen.

A small body of work has explored affect on television in terms of the medium's capacity to arouse strong and ambivalent feeling. Notable amongst these are Mishka Kavka's writing on reality television and intimacy and Kristyn Gorton's work on emotion in television.³ Kristyn Gorton provides a useful overview of theory about emotion and explains how this word could usefully be applied to television. Misha Kavka is one of the few television theorists who expresses an explicit interest in writing about television specifically as *affect*. Kavka describes her work as an approach which 'shift[s] the academic lens from what we can know about television to what we can feel through the TV screen.'⁴ Kavka's focus is on reality television which she explores in relation to the intimacy of television. She also considers how reality television works to cultivate intense, televisually mediated, experiences of feelings such as

¹ Patricia Ticiento Clough, 'Introduction', in Patricia Ticiento Clough and Jean Halley (eds), *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Indiana: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 3.

² Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press 2003); Laura U. Marks *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

³ Misha Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy: Reality Matters* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Kristyn Gorton, *Media Audiences: Television, Meaning and Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

⁴ Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, p. x.

mourning and love that are felt by viewers in the experience of watching and even intensified by the very process of their mediation.⁵ I encountered Kavka's writing fairly late in my own research but I have found that her work chimes productively with my own research. Kavka's work has thus become a vital influence on this thesis, particularly in my first two chapters which deal with reality television. My work differs significantly from Kavka's, however, in my focus on the display of bodies. This interest allows me to apply ideas about affect and intimacy to a very broad range of television genres where Kavka's primary concern is with reality television. As a result of this broader interest in affect and intimacy I pay less attention to questions of realism and mediation than does Kavka. Instead my focus on television's corporeal excesses means that my work is especially concerned with the 'gut' physical reactions of viewers such as disgust and queasiness. But I do not see these physiological responses as simple or one dimensional, rather I aim to demonstrate the variety, complexity and ambivalence of these responses and their role in contributing to meaningful engagement with television. Where television studies has been interested in affect - whether it is writing on melodrama or more recent explorations of reality television - it has been far more invested in thinking about affect in terms of emotions rather than thinking about the sensual or physiological responses of the body. As such this work also requires a degree of 'fleshing out.' The contribution that my approach brings to the field lies in the focussed attention that I pay to bodies and representations of intense physical states that are designed to arouse manifest sensual responses in the bodies of viewers. These physical responses are, however, in no way divorced from the emotional feelings important to Kavka. When I say that these programmes are affective I do not mean they are simply gut-wrenching or revolting. The visceral images of the body on television can be as tender as they are queasy-making, as moving as they are grotesque. They often produce a conflation of the two senses of the word 'feeling' - the tactile or embodied and the emotional. More importantly, television's depictions of the body are intimate to an excessive degree. The camera draws extremely close to human flesh, going inside and under the skin of characters and exploring the body's workings in microscopic detail. For characters within the dramas onscreen and participants in reality television the body provides a point of shared reaction, of intense emotional response which

⁵ Ibid., p.43. and p.104.

aims to make an appeal beyond the screen to implicate the viewer in an experience of affective excess.

My project proceeds from three primary questions. My first concern is to outline and account for the trend that I observe in this thesis. I begin with the question: Why is there such a profusion of explicit images of the human body displayed on contemporary television? I respond to this question by contextualising television's widespread presentation of 'gore' in relation to technological conditions and trends within the industrial climate of the television industry in the United States and the United Kingdom from 2000 to the present. I pay particular attention to John Thornton Caldwell discussion of the visual excess of 1980s television which he explains as a function of market pressure.⁶ Following Caldwell's model I examine how excesses of the body on television function as branding strategies to mark programming out as distinct from other television. I adapt Caldwell's term 'televisuality'⁷ to define this phenomenon as 'tele-affectivity'.

Secondly I aim to examine and understand the nature of the explicit body imagery on these shows in relation to the specificity of television and as distinct from representations of the body in other media such as horror films or fine art. In other words, I ask: how do depictions of naked bodies, blood, or of the interior landscape of the human body fit with the traditional style of television and how might this tendency be understood in terms of television's reception in the intimate, domestic context of the home? Television's manipulation of human flesh has largely been understood in terms of violence, pornography and voyeurism.⁸ My focus on affect, however, allows me to consider a heretofore neglected aspect of these images. I explore the pleasurable engagement facilitated by visceral body images not as a deviation from traditional television,

⁶ John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995) p. 4.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Elizabeth Atwood Gaily, 'Self-made women: cosmetic surgery shows and the construction of female psychopathology', in Dana Heller (ed.), *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 107 - 118; Sue Tait, 'Autoptic vision and the necrophilic imaginary in *CSI*', in *International Journal of Cultural Studies*; 9.45 (2006): pp. 45-62; Elke Weissmann, and Karen Boyle 'Evidence of things unseen: the pornographic aesthetic and the search for truth in *CSI*', in Michael Allen (ed.) *Reading CSI: Crime TV Under the Microscope* (London: I.B. Tauris 2007) pp. 90-102.

but rather as an intensification of television's alignment with values of intimacy, community and public education. I thus revisit ideas about the traditional functions and gratifications of the television institution with the role of affect in mind. My project considers the drive to arouse embodied responses from viewers in relation to television's established role as educator, public service provider and communicator between individuals and between public and private spaces. In this way I show that, while the explicit nature of television gore is a new development, visceral television capitalizes on and further facilitates modes of engagement that have always been characteristic of the television medium.

Finally, television's foregrounding of the physically evocative body provides a starting point for re-examining the ways in which television studies has traditionally understood viewer engagement. The third question I ask is: how might the increased presence of excessive and visceral body on television enable me to test the ways in which ideas about affect can both complicate and enrich the field of television studies?

Taking the sensual provocations of the body as a point of departure I draw widely from a range of disciplines including film studies, psychology, phenomenology and anthropology. My work proceeds from close textual analysis of a diverse set of case studies but, because my interest lies on both sides of the screen, my work is not focussed only on the text. An ethnographic audience study is beyond the scope of this project which is already a large undertaking as it presents detailed analytical work examining a vast breadth of television genres from both the United Kingdom and the United States. Instead of conducting my own audience research I draw on the work of other television scholars in textual analysis, audience studies and surveys of television production and distribution in order to theorise both about the production and reception contexts of television's body images.

The startling range of body-oriented television first came to my attention when I was in South Africa viewing mainly American television. Having moved to the United Kingdom I have noticed that the tendency is even more obvious on British television where gory American imports are paired with the U.K.'s own examples of this trend. Considering the reach of Western cultural production, the changing nature of television viewing, the rise of home viewing and television box sets, online viewing and the international availability of satellite television, I think it is important to examine 'body trauma' television as a global

phenomenon but one which originates primarily in the West, and with particular global force out of the industrial and social climates of the United Kingdom and the United States.

Rather than looking at a discrete television genre, my study examines television's use of the body as an affective device across a range of programming. I have chosen the texts under analysis for a set of shared aesthetic features. All the programmes considered in this study, whether reality television, 'quality' drama or educational programming, foreground interventions into the human body such as surgeries, autopsies or embalming procedures. These shows share a reliance on body images as part of what constitutes the aesthetic 'look' of each show. Another shared feature is the tendency of the camera to draw close to the body. The invasive nature of such imagery is often aided by technologies like microscopic lenses and endoscopic cameras. Although a great deal of emphasis is placed on the power of sight in these programmes, the focus is not just on looking but on *feeling* - on a potentially threatening, overwhelming proximity to the flesh of others. It is my task to understand the role played by this fleshy, affective excess present in drama, educational and reality formats. My focus on the affective properties of the body allows me to draw connections between texts too often considered only within their specific generic address. Studies of high budget 'quality' drama series, for example, generally feature a focus on auteurship and artistic distinction in a way that runs the risk of obscuring certain critical questions about what these formats share with contemporary television aesthetics in general. Reality television is, likewise, often discussed exclusively with regard to questions of mediation and authenticity at the risk of neglecting the aesthetic features that this emergent mode shares with other television formats.

While focussing on the intimacy and sense of connectivity encouraged by 'tele-affective' images my project avoids consigning the bodily excess of contemporary television to empty 'sensationalism' driven solely by market imperatives. Instead this project explores how the body operates as a channel for an affective flow and for the construction of a sense of shared meaning, place and identity. My concern is both with *what* the body means as a sign or trope on our screens and with *how* it facilitates affective communication between bodies on either side of the screen.

This project emerged out of my own pleasurable engagement with television's visceral onscreen worlds and the analyses presented here rely heavily on my own embodied and emotional responses, along with personal anecdotes. I am aware of the limitations of this subjective approach as affective responses to television are bound to be different across a vast viewership whose reactions are informed by different embodied life histories, viewing practices and reception contexts. But this very diversity of response suggests the dangers of writing about affect from a detached and objective point of view. My approach follows a model of analytical enquiry established by theorists like Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks which admits to the personal nature of the responses these theorists describe but which also does not deny the insight and relevance of their own lived bodily responses for understanding the way in which visual media appeals to the body. Sobchack defends this approach thus:

‘...grounding broader social claims in autobiographical and anecdotal experience is not merely a fuzzy and subjective substitute for rigorous and objective analysis but purposefully provides the phenomenological - and embodied - premises for a more processual, expansive and resonant materialist logic..’

Sobchack's description fits well with my own analytical project in this thesis. The case studies presented here should engage the reader in the process by which I have drawn on my own affective engagements to understand the trend that I describe here. Rather than presenting a definitive account my work provides points for expansion and, crucially, while my own personal insights will not ever entirely pin down the exact feelings of other viewers as they watch these shows, my viewing experience is situated in culture and I hope my experiences will resonate with those of other television viewers in ways that are productive for gaining an understanding of the relationship between the television screen and our embodied selves.

Defining affect

In its most general meaning the term ‘affect’ describes the process of producing an influence on an object or body. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* to affect something or someone is to ‘move, touch (in mind or feelings); influence; make a material impression on’ that object or person. I use the term affect to

describe the capacity of a text both to ‘move’ viewers in a physical sense and also to stir their feelings. Affect, in this simple definition, is a stirring of one’s bodily responses or of one’s feelings. While most theorists share this basic understanding of affect, there is a range of different ways in which theorists have interpreted the term. I will focus here on those accounts most appropriate to the study of media texts.

A recurring debate in writing about affect concerns the distinction between the terms ‘affect’ and ‘emotion’. As Misha Kavka points out this distinction is premised on an opposition that is crucial to most accounts of affect: that between affective feeling and conscious thought.⁹ Vivian Sobchack sees affect as ‘prereflective’ and describes how the body responds to onscreen images ‘*without a thought*’.¹⁰ Brian Massumi similarly argues that affect is involuntary or ‘autonomic’ and operates on the body, outside of consciousness. Emotion, on the other hand, has been understood as affect tamed and apprehended by consciousness. It is ‘the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal’.¹¹ Following Massumi, Kavka writes that affect is ‘both more and less than “emotion”, since “affect” covers an entire range of feelings, but before they have been assessed or identified in relation to a particular object or source’.¹²

This distinction is particularly relevant to a discussion of television because it relates to questions of social exchange and private versus communal feelings. Both Massumi and Kavka see affect as a space of potential.¹³ This is because affect happens ‘autonomically’ in the body before it is qualified by language to become an emotion.¹⁴ While affect is feeling, not consciously and linguistically grounded to an object or cause, affects are not ‘objectless’, in Kavka’s estimation, rather they have ‘object-potential’ which is a ‘loose and ever-transformable relation to both object and cause’.¹⁵ Thus Kavka asserts that ‘[a]ffect is a zone of potential emotions’ and it has a ‘*productive*

⁹Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy* p. 29.

¹⁰ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, p. 63 and p. 65.

¹¹ Brian Massumi, ‘The autonomy of affect’, in *Cultural Critique* 31.2 (1995), p. 88.

¹² Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy* p. 29.

¹³ Massumi, ‘The autonomy of affect’, p. 91; Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, p. 31.

¹⁴ Massumi, ‘The autonomy of affect’, p. 91.

¹⁵ Kavka, *Reality Television Affect and Intimacy*, p. 31.

amorphousness.¹⁶ Precisely because of its ‘transformable’, ‘amorphous’ nature Kavka argues that affect is more *social* than emotions which are ‘articulate and self-contained’.¹⁷ Affect, for Kavka, can operate as ‘a cusp between the individual and the collective psyche, that shared pool of feeling whose production and recognition glues individuals into a particular social body.’¹⁸ If, as Kavka argues, affect operates as a social ‘binding agent’ then the lived body is the particularly ‘sticky’ site where affect is registered ‘autonomically’ before it is consciously perceived.¹⁹

Similarly, writing about cinema, Vivian Sobchack recognises the importance of our embodied responses in binding the viewer into a relationship with the onscreen world: ‘Experiencing a movie, not ever merely “seeing” it, my lived body enacts this reversibility in perception and subverts the very notion of *onscreen* and *offscreen* as mutually exclusive sites or subject positions.’²⁰ Sobchack suggests that embodied experience plays a role in the partial dissolution of the spatial and temporal boundaries dividing the offscreen world of viewers from the onscreen world of characters. Representations of the body onscreen, Sobchack argues, are particularly powerful devices for this sense of connection across space and time.²¹

Understanding affect as distinct from emotion can be productive because it allows for an account of the powerful role played by the body’s untamed, pre-personal, pre-linguistic responses in contemporary culture. It also enables one to theorise in a focussed way television’s direct appeal to the body, an appeal that has been heretofore, largely, neglected. In addition, as Kavka has shown, the autonomic, uncontained nature of affect allows us to understand it as a form of social cusp and means of connection. However, enforcing this distinction between emotion and affect too rigidly can also be prohibitive.

Separating affect as ‘pre-reflective’ or unconscious from emotion as culturally circumscribed holds some potential stumbling blocks when it comes to thinking about meaning. Many theorists have critiqued Massumi’s approach as a

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. xi.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

²⁰ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, p. 67.

²¹ Ibid., p. 2.

retreat from the political.²² As Imogen Tyler comments: ‘the danger of embracing the autonomy of affect is precisely that this claim of affect is beyond power and is thus both uncontestible and irresistible.’²³ Kavka’s theory is less vulnerable to this criticism because she theorises amorphous affect as a form of social binding and understands affect as having ‘object potential’. Nonetheless, for my project, maintaining the separation between amorphous affect and emotion makes it very difficult for me to talk about the onscreen bodies that I describe as both points of intimate connection through affective excess as in Kavka’s thinking, while at the same time recognising the affective body as encoded with certain culturally relevant meanings that are communicated with excessive visceral force.

Rather than positing a rigid line of separation between pre-reflective affect and culturally circumscribed emotion I prefer to think of affect and emotion as operating on a fluid line of continuity and I will often use these terms interchangeably. My analyses are sensitive to the way in which sensual provocation interacts with spoken language and signification on television shows to ground (or complicate) meaning in certain distinct ways. Where I distinguish between these two terms I do so for quite different reasons. For my project I use affect to describe both physiological responses (nausea, chills, tactile stimulation, physical disgust, sexual arousal) and internal feelings (love, happiness, anger, shame), whereas emotion simply refers to the latter. Sometimes it is necessary for me to make a distinction between these types of feeling, not so much to suggest that they are separate but to emphasise that the emotional is always related to a physical, embodied affective response. The power of affect lies in the way in which emotions and physiology overlap and resonate with each other.

Furthermore the distinction between sensing and thinking common to affect theory should not necessarily translate into an opposition between sensing and making sense or meaning. It is also important to avoid thinking of film or television spectators as the slaves of pre-reflective bodily meaning-making while granting oneself, as academic commentator, immunity from such affective ‘brainwashing’. Instead I maintain that affective feeling is intimately and

²² See Clare Hemmings ‘Invoking affect: cultural theory and the affective turn’ in *Cultural Studies*, 19.5, (2005), pp. 548-67.

²³ Imogen Tyler ‘Methodological fatigue and the politics of the affective turn,’ *Feminist Media Studies*, 8.1 (2008), p. 88.

inextricably bound up in the way that we all make sense of the world around us and the texts with which we engage. As Vivian Sobchack contends with regard to film, our embodied responses are critically involved in the processes by which we make meaning out of sounds and images. Sobchack writes that ‘the film experience is meaningful *not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies.*’²⁴ The same might be said for television images.

It bears noting that without necessarily using the theory and terminology that is currently in vogue, film and television theorists have been making arguments that relate to affect for many years. This is particularly the case in the work of feminist theorists such as Ien Ang, Christine Gledhill, Christine Geraghty and Linda Williams who have written influential work on melodrama.²⁵ Few, however, have foregrounded the relationships between bodies and affect on television. In my final chapter I will combine arguments about melodrama with a focus on bodies in my discussion of American ‘quality’ television drama.

Finally, most theories of affect maintain that the affective provocations of media are not illusory but in some sense *real*. For this reason these responses have significance and potential political power. Sobchack explains our experience of sensation in cinema as both figurative and literal at the same time. Drawing on Richard Dyer’s description of the somatic effects of film,²⁶ Sobchack describes the cinematic experience of touch and taste as both ‘as if real’, in that it mimics real experience but is experienced at a remove from the actual event and ‘real’ because viewers do have an actual physical experience of sensation in response to the onscreen images.²⁷ Massumi suggests that the power of affect in contemporary politics lies in the faith people place in its ‘matter-of-factness’.²⁸ He argues that the capacity of affect to ‘come second-hand, to switch domains and produce effects across them all, gives it a metafactorial

²⁴ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, p. 60.

²⁵ Ien Ang *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985); Christine Gledhill, ‘The melodramatic field: an investigation’, in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film* (London: BFI, 1987), pp. 3-39.; Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera: a study of prime time soaps* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); Linda Williams ‘Film bodies: gender, genre and excess’, *Film Quarterly* 44.4 (1991), pp. 2-13; and Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom To OJ Simpson* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002).

²⁶ Richard Dyer, ‘Action!’ in *Sight and Sound* 4.10 (1994): pp. 7- 10.

²⁷ Soback, *Carnal Thoughts*, p. 73.

²⁸ Massumi, ‘The autonomy of affect’, p. 107.

ubiquity.²⁹ Affect is a device through which experience and sentiment may be reproduced and felt as real despite the fact that it may come ‘second-hand’. While affecting us in a far less traumatic and more habitual and everyday way, the display, posturing, and exploration of bodies on our hospital dramas, forensic shows and surgery programmes produce responses in our own bodies that are genuinely experienced feelings which shape us as the embodied beings that we are. More importantly, the appearance of bodies in these programmes and the sense of affective connection they encourage, inform and resonate with our feelings of embodied relationship to other people in the home and further afield, influencing our constitution as embodied selves in relation to a social world comprised of other bodies. Because the affective features of television can be felt and registered as real feeling, ‘tele-affectivity’ has a material impact on people’s experience of everyday life and warrants attention for the significance of this impact.

While my analyses are guided by a focus on affect, my chapters primarily concern considering the affective landscape of specific texts rather than constructing theory. Where I make theoretical arguments they emerge out of an analysis of television texts. My work is focussed through a series of case studies and pays detailed attention to certain types of affect that are productive for television. The ideas I have already outlined about the relationships between television and intimacy inform all of my subsequent discussions of affect on television. Following this line of enquiry I examine how emotional intimacy, feelings of empathy and compassion are encouraged by television’s display of the exposed, vulnerable and suffering body. Additionally shame is a key affect which I explore with regard to the excessive intimacy involved in looking at and inside of the bodies of surgical candidates on reality television programmes. It is from detailed attention to the workings of shame out of which I come to critique the application to television of ideas about looking at the body which emphasise distance and power over pleasurable closeness. Taking intimacy, once again, as a starting point, I also explore how the process of learning is presented on television as an exercise in getting pleasurably *close* to the surfaces of objects and bodies (even if this closeness is a mediated one). Ideas about touch and the erotic dimensions of teaching thus inform my analyses of science-based television programmes which have, elsewhere, largely been understood in terms

²⁹ Ibid.

of clinical distance and an objective positivist gaze. Finally I revisit ideas about melodrama as a way of understanding how bodies and their gory excesses might play a role in helping us to feel both emotionally and viscerally close to the characters on drama series.

Affect on the small screen

The specificity of the television medium raises a set of challenges for the application of ideas about affect largely developed for the study of other media, especially theories developed with film in mind. While films are ideally watched in the darkness of a cinema that encourages absorption, television does not demand the same degree of attention. Factors such as television's traditional location in the home, its size and picture quality, its association with distraction and the lack of institutional and social prescriptions on how viewers watch, have to be considered in any account of the terms upon which an embodied engagement with the television image might take place. I argue, however, that these differences, rather than curtailing television's capacity to be affective, may make television more suited than film to an intimate physical engagement between onscreen and offscreen bodies. I pay particular attention to the way in which the privacy, intimacy and everydayness of television make the medium a more comfortable place for looking at other people's body parts.

Because of its domestic reception context television has often been defined as a medium of distraction. John Ellis argues that the distractibility of television audiences means that the television experience lacks the 'intensity' of cinema.³⁰ The potential for distraction in television's domestic setting cannot be easily denied. But the idea that this necessarily makes television experiences less intense, and potentially less affective than cinema, is problematic. Instead of thinking about affect as something that requires the isolation, concentration and darkness of cinema my work considers how affective responses can be born from a continuity between the onscreen world and the domestic spaces into which television is broadcast. My argument is that television studies needs to take seriously the ways in which meaning is located and communicated in the relays of felt contact between sensitive bodies at home and the sticky human flesh viewed onscreen.

³⁰ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London : Routledge, 1982).

Some of our engagements with television can be extremely focussed and intense. When I was teenager no one in our household was allowed to speak or answer the telephone when *ER* (NBC, 1994-2009) was on. My mother, sister and I have had many sessions of communal weeping over the run of this show. Like many box set viewers, I have also spent days in isolation with *Six Feet Under* or *House* (Fox, 2004 -), locked into the mood and texture of these narrative worlds. When recovering from surgery on my face after an accident, my solitary binge-viewing of *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005 -) was particularly intense and linked to my own recent embodied experiences. Amelie Hastie describes an even more intensely invested personal and embodied engagement with medical television as the starting point of her enquiries in 'TV on the Brain' an article in which her consideration of television images of MRI scans is informed by her experience of cancer and brain surgery.³¹ However, I also understand viewer engagement with bodies on our television screens as sometimes characterised by a casual closeness that shifts between attention and distraction but which is always intimate. Such a relationship might be compared to the way that we experience the presence of family, partners and flatmates in our domestic space. Television's close encounters with slick pink organs, the livid flesh of a corpse, the flash of a blade under surgical lights as it slices into human tissue, are not necessarily stand-out moments of awed attention but may form part of a cumulative sense of television's everyday textures. They may slip into and overlap with our daily experience of home, privacy and family. Like the smell of a loved one's hair, the perception of which seems so natural to our everyday existence that it may only be brought to conscious attention when that person is gone, we may take in the sensual pleasures and provocations of the television world in an absent-minded way. There will be viewers who don't engage with television's grotesquery with their full, undivided attention but there is nevertheless a sense in which the sounds and textures of these shows enter into our domestic spaces and impact on our daily experiences.

Karen Lury understands this kind of everyday closeness with the textures of television as an important way in which television articulates 'space' and 'place' for its viewers. Television, she argues, uses sensual cues to make place tangible for the viewer.³² As noted by John Caughie,³³ in Lury's touching

³¹ Amelie Hastie, 'TV on the brain' in *Screen* 50.2 (2009): pp. 261 - 232.

³² Karen Lury, *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Education, 2004), pp. 148-50.

personal description of her family's engagement with *Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway* (ITV, 2002 -) pleasure is bound up in the continuity between the world of television and Lury's home environment. In articulating the sense of 'community' and 'place' constructed by her family's engagement with the show Lury puts emphasis on the way in which the sensual elements of the show resonate in her living room:

It is a place which acts as a temporary embrace, a fantasy of community, where the sensual abundance, the tactile qualities articulated on-screen are echoed briefly at home - another daughter rolls off the sofa in giggles, the youngest slaps the screen in excitement.³⁴

As Lury's account suggests, total absorption in the darkness and isolation of the cinema is not a precondition for a sensual response to the moving image. Lury's comments about texture and sound also illustrate how crucial sensual affect is in constructing an everyday, and often taken-for-granted, sense of continuity between the television screen and the home.

Television's concern with the audience provides an important corrective for approaches to work on affect in cinema which largely still rely on a rather idealised notion of a viewer watching within conditions of perfect isolation and attention fostered by the cinema. An attempt to reformulate an understanding of the affective potential of the cinematic image for television may bring into view some of the assumptions and omissions that are often elided in writing about an embodied engagement with cinema. The level of bodily responsiveness theorised by film theorists like Laura Marks and Vivian Sobchack assumes a certain amount of willingness, on the part of viewers, to be moved and give themselves up to the sensual solicitations of the text. In order to be affected by images in the profound way described by Sobchack and Marks viewers have to be watching them with some degree of absorption. Marks, in one instance, characterises the viewer as someone who 'relinquishes her own sense of separateness from the image - not to know it, but to give herself up to her desire for it.'³⁵ Many television viewers might be reluctant to 'give themselves

³³ John Caughie 'Telephilia and distraction: terms of engagement', in *The Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 3.1, (2006), p. 10.

³⁴ Lury, *Interpreting Television*, p. 185.

³⁵ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 183.

up' to a television image, especially if they are busy unpacking groceries or painting toenails. Such intense and overwhelming descriptions of the affective provocations provided by moving images do not fit comfortably with our often mundane and everyday encounters with the television screen. Thinking about affect in television also points to the possibility that our discussions of affect in cinema may, at times, overestimate the sensual investment that different viewing bodies make in the onscreen image. The ideas of Laura Marks and Vivian Sobchack provided the initial impetus for my attempts to think about embodiment on television and my focus on bodies is very much influenced by their approach to cinema. However, because these theorists do not factor domesticity and intimacy into their accounts in the way that television theorists do, I have found their work difficult to apply to my analyses. Adapting theories of sensual affect to television involves paying more attention to the relationship between the sounds and textures invoked in the onscreen world and the embodied experience of the home.

Christine Geraghty notes that most critical analysis of television focuses on narrative at the expense of a consideration of the audiovisual features of television programmes.³⁶ Reality television, because its images are considered low-grade, has hardly been addressed in terms of sound or image outside of discussion of a simulated sense of realism. This neglect of television's audiovisual capacities, which are part of the grounding for its affective appeal, is arguably one of the key reasons why television has not been considered from the point of view of affect in the way that traditionally audio-visually rich cinema has. I argue, however, that the historically low picture quality of the television image need not necessarily be seen as an obstacle to full affective engagement with television. The size of the cinema screen and the conditions of isolation encouraged in cinema are not conducive to intimacy in the way that a small screen in a living room might be. The close-up shots of other people's bodies that I consider in this thesis, although sometimes gory and grotesque, are more comfortably encountered on the small screen.

A few theorists have touched upon discussions of the body's role in television's tactile and olfactory provocations while undertaking focussed textual analyses of specific types of programming. However, there has been

³⁶ Christine Geraghty, 'Aesthetics and quality in popular television drama', in *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6.1, (2003) p. 33.

little attempt in these discussions to marry observations about the affective nature of television visuals with an over-arching consideration of the sensual and affective properties and pleasures of the television image. Jason Jacobs has undertaken exhaustive work on the ‘body trauma’ that he argues came to characterise hospital dramas in the 1990s.³⁷ Jacobs notes that shows like *Casualty* (BBC 1, 1986 -) and *ER* feature a ‘visualisation of the horrible but routine body trauma’³⁸ and ‘the body in ruins’.³⁹ While Jacobs observes the important role played by images of the body in these shows he does not extend this observation to consider how affect might be productive on television, focussing instead on the narrative and thematic roles of the body in these formats.

A number of theorists writing about *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* have noted the show’s viscosity. Karen Lury comments on the ‘superbly visceral sound effects, which slurp, pound and hiss as the camera seemingly enters the body’ and notes the kinetic pleasures of the ‘*CSI*-shot,’ describing it as like a ‘scientific rollercoaster ride’.⁴⁰ Elke Weissmann similarly notes the ‘privileging of lived, multi-sensed experience that ... lies at the heart of *CSI*’.⁴¹ In Weissmann and Boyle’s 2007 article the theorists account for *CSI*’s bodily excess through a comparison to pornography. In this formulation the provocations of the body are understood in terms of pornography’s drive for ‘truth’ located on the body.⁴² Thus the sticky, gory excess of the show is related to a drive for realism or authenticity. Weissmann and Boyle argue that carnal excess ‘enhances the “*CSI*-shot”’s ability to represent the real, as it suggests that the spectator can feel it and, in a positivist world, it is exactly that ability that makes the experience real’.⁴³ While Weissmann and Boyle link the affective capacities of the onscreen body to the production of a pleasurable feeling of ‘realness’, they thus ultimately understand the pleasures of looking at the body on *CSI* in relation to ideas about knowledge and visual power implied by the comparison to

³⁷ Jason Jacobs, *Body Trauma TV: The New Hospital Dramas*, (London: BFI, 2003).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Lury, *Interpreting Television*, p. 53.

⁴¹ Elke Weissmann, *Crime, the Body and the Truth: Understanding the Shift towards Forensic Science in Television Crime Drama with the CSI-franchise* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2006), p. 228.

⁴² Weissman and Boyle, ‘Evidence of things unseen’, p. 97.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 97.

pornography.⁴⁴ While the connection these theorists make between affect and a sense of authenticity are valid, the comparison is not useful to me as it seems to understand the shows' viscerality as a means to an end (the production of an empowering feeling of certainty) and cuts short broader considerations of how viewers might engage pleasurably with the corporeal excesses on display.

Reality television programmes have also been linked in their viscerality to attempts to produce a felt 'real' through an appeal to the bodies of viewers. Amy West convincingly argues for the importance of the body in producing a sense of the authenticity of emotions and situations on reality television. She writes: '[b]odies both on and in front of the screen become ... a locus of the real as they supply corporeal evidence of being and feeling.'⁴⁵ This argument is well-observed and absolutely appropriate to the processes at play on contemporary television. But this apt observation about realism is just one dimension of the many complex pleasures that the excessive body brings into play on television.

As I have suggested, both reality television and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* have been understood as comparable to pornography in their penetrative carnal and arguably 'obscene' gaze. This is particularly the case in the genre of plastic surgery television.⁴⁶ There are ways in which this comparison can be useful. Karen Lury describes *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* as 'stylistically pornographic' as a way of commenting on the eroticism and excess of the images on this show.⁴⁷ In this account the term is suggestive of the centrality of the body and embodied responses on television. Pornography has also been understood as fundamentally about transgression of the boundaries of acceptability and taste.⁴⁸ In this sense, and especially in so far as it troubles boundaries around public and private intimacy, pornography might be a useful point of comparison for the explicit body images on television⁴⁹. But these features of the television shows that I discuss can be mapped without invoking a term which has distinctly negative connotations.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 97 and 100

⁴⁵ Amy West, *Here and Now: Intimacy, Immediacy and Authenticity in New Zealand's Reality Television* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Auckland, 2006), p. 30.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Elizabeth Atwood Gailly 'Self-made women: cosmetic surgery shows and the construction of female psychopathology' pp. 107 - 118.

⁴⁷ Lury, *Interpreting Television*, p. 53.

⁴⁸ See Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: pornography and the politics of fantasy in America* (Indiana: Duke University Press, 2003) p 166.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 171.

The term is seldom used in the productive way that Lury and Kipnis use it and ultimately the comparison to pornography seems to be invoked to dismiss or condemn certain programming. The term is suggestive of two different disapproving responses. On the one hand it suggests a judgement about taste. Like pornography the television images I examine are excessive and rely on a physical response from the body that aligns them with 'low,' 'mass' culture and cheap titillation.

On the other hand, the term pornography suggests a degree of moral judgement and some measure of discomfort about a relationship between looking and power. John Ellis describes an 'inhibiting moral force' attending the term 'pornography' which can limit more productive discussions of the many and various forms of explicitness in which the body is involved.⁵⁰ This moralism evidences itself in many of the accounts of explicit television that I examine in this thesis. While it can take on a range of forms pornography has widely been associated with gendered violence and a traditionally male position of visual mastery. While the bodies encountered on the television shows I discuss are both male and female, seldom engaged in sexual acts and hardly ever the object of sexual desire in these contexts, the term pornography is still frequently used to imply that there is something *wrong* with looking at the body. The use of the term tends to invoke a discourse in which visibility and looking is aligned with power, certainty, the objectification of the body and, at times, with violence. As Laura U. Marks explains '[p]ornography tends to be defined in terms of visibility - the inscription or confession of the orgasmic body- and an implied will to mastery by the viewer.'⁵¹ While moral discomfort and a critique focussed on mastery is appropriate to much mainstream pornography, this same alignment of visibility with power is, I argue, misplaced when applied to television. This model of analysis explains pleasure (often in the terms used to understand male pleasure in psychoanalytic film theory) without admitting a consideration of empathy, identification or a sharing of the affects represented onscreen.

Comparisons to pornography are problematic as they tend to curtail a full discussion of the pleasures of looking at bodily excess. Instead of trying to understand the particular pleasures offered by images of bodies that we find on television, the pornography paradigm either dismisses the shows in question as

⁵⁰ John Ellis 'Photography/Pornography/Art/Pornography' in *Screen* 21.1 (1980): p.82.

⁵¹ Laura U. Marks *Video Haptics and Erotics* in *Screen*, 39.4 (1998): p.342.

‘trash’ or understands engagement as premised on distance and prurience. This way of thinking about pleasure is, I will argue, not appropriate to the gendered address of most body-oriented television programmes such as plastic surgery shows which often make an explicit appeal to women viewers located in the domestic, and arguably feminised space of the home. I will develop this argument more fully in my case studies of plastic surgery television shows and of forensic television.

As much as the shows that I describe encourage a penetrative gaze at the body, I contend that they also encourage intense affective engagement with characters and participants in a way that complicates ideas about objectification and power. This is not to say that this closeness is necessarily more progressive than the ‘pornographic’ mode of looking widely theorised in discussions of body images. It is simply of a different nature and requires analysis that is sensitive to how such shows make an appeal to the bodily responses of viewers.

It is also worth noting that my emphasis on a bodily sensitivity and the experience of being affected can be aligned with a mode of attention that has traditionally been understood as passive and feminine. In pointing out that the viewing position I describe is one aligned with femininity, I do not intend to reinforce essentialist ideas about gender but rather to indicate how certain ways of engaging with texts have been sidelined in theory or dismissed as ‘trash’ because of their association with a feminised experience of passivity and domesticity. When writing about plastic surgery television in particular, I do refer to the viewing experience as gendered in a certain way but my focus on the gendered address of these shows is part of an attempt to challenge assumptions about female viewership as passive and easily manipulated by focussing on the complexity of responses to these programmes. Most of my case studies, however, examine shows that do not have a specific gendered address but can appeal to men, women, and those in between. Rather than suggesting that the intimate, empathetic and sensitive mode of engagement that I write about is exclusively feminine, I hold that this is a mode of attention that is made possible for all audience members. Indeed, I argue that two of the most excessive and melodramatic of the programmes I discuss are *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter*, shows which might initially appear to be the most masculine of the body oriented television programmes under examination here.

Thesis structure

This thesis is structured around a set of case studies which each proceed from the recognition that there are many levels of engagement operating in television but what is often discounted or omitted from analysis is a consideration of our embodied responses to television and their relation to the intimate, domestic context of television viewing. Each chapter responds to this oversight by foregrounding the increasingly central place of the visceral body in a range of television formats.

The next chapter explains and accounts for television's current interest in exposing the body by considering the trend as a response to the market pressures of the current industrial climate of television production and distribution. It thus offers some answers to the first question that I outlined as a starting point for my enquiry, that of *why* this trend has emerged with such force on our television screens. To demonstrate the breadth and pervasiveness of this tendency on television I examine two television programmes which are vastly different in terms of their relationship to notions of quality: *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* (Five, 2005) a British reality television programme and *Six Feet Under*, a U.S. drama series created by the award winning screenwriter, Alan Ball, for *HBO*. While I take up John Thornton Caldwell's work to describe television's bodily excess as a market-driven phenomenon; this chapter also critiques Caldwell's readiness to dismiss the specificity of television and his tendency to compare changes in television's visual style to cinema. Instead I consider the phenomenon I call 'tele-affectivity' in terms of a continuity with the traditional features of television. I thus begin to answer my second key question, which asks how the trend toward excessive bodily imagery might be understood in relation to the specificity of the television medium.

Continuing this line of enquiry, the chapters that follow are organised around three tendencies or modes related to traditional television aesthetics: community, public education and melodrama. Famously usurping the role of the hearth in the family home, television has traditionally been associated with certain kind of intimate social exchange and an interface between the home and broader public culture. My third chapter focuses on scenes of undressing and emotional unveiling on the reality programmes *Dr. 90210* and *Make Me Perfect* in

order to explore the cultivation of feelings which relate to social exchange and interconnection. I consider the role of care and shame on these programmes in implicating viewers' bodies in a complicated sense of community and social relatedness which animates the viewing experience. This argument is an intervention into prevailing debates on plastic surgery television which tend to explain pleasure through comparisons to pornography, visual pleasure and power instead of in terms of closeness, empathy and connection. Through this critique I begin to offer answers to my third major question, which asks how a foregrounding affect might provide new insights into traditional methods and approaches to analysing television.

My fourth chapter also responds to this question by rethinking the way in which sound and vision have been thought about in television's science shows. Television has strong historical ties with notions of public service and with a responsibility to educate its viewers.⁵² But responses to the recent spate of forensics programmes that take viewers into close contact with the body are marked by discomfort about how grotesquery and sensual excess might compromise the professed learning aims of these shows. My third chapter explores this increased tension between 'sensationalism' and education as a function of 'tele-affectivity'. I explore how television markets its form of education through an emphasis on the experiential, sensual dimensions of the grotesque body. Furthermore I consider how *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, *Bones* (Fox, 2005 -) and *Anatomy for Beginners* celebrate a model of teaching that privileges direct sensory encounter and an erotic exchange between teacher, learner and the body as object of enquiry.

While explorations of melodrama have long been a feature of television studies, my fifth chapter extends television theory's interest in melodrama into new territory. Through an analysis of U.S. dramas *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* this chapter examines how gory excesses of the body perform a melodramatic operation in television drama. I also move the discussion of melodrama outside of the realm of soap opera and traditionally feminine genres to consider how these more 'masculine' and self consciously sophisticated programmes continue televisions' melodramatic tendencies through their employment of bodily excess to align viewers with the feelings of their protagonists.

⁵² This is more the case in the United Kingdom than in the United States of America.

Ultimately, I hope to illustrate how crucial a consideration of bodily affect is to understanding our everyday embodied interactions with the television set. Our affective responses to the bodies of others onscreen may be instantaneous, personal, ambivalent and private in a way that makes them difficult to grasp and take seriously in theory. But the television medium itself has so often been maligned and dismissed for the same kind of transience and for the privacy and domesticity of its reception context. As television theorists have been at pains to demonstrate, these features make television no less worthy of analysis. I will show that the fleshy encounters facilitated by contemporary television inform an important aspect of television's appeal to viewers and contribute to the medium's imbrication in our domestic lives. Where intense engagements with the viscosity of television have often been dismissed either as trashy or as 'feminine' and passive, I take the passivity of being affected to be a productive experience, one which allows viewers to understand and locate our embodied selves in relation to the world around us. The work that follows explores this productive nature of the affective body on contemporary television.

Chapter 2

Tele-affectivity: the Body and the Intensified Intimacy of Contemporary Television

‘Right, well it’s time to go straight to Beverley Hills and find out what’s happening with Patrice’s butt’, announces host Vanessa Feltz on Five’s *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live*. She is standing in front of two layers of video-screen featuring detailed views of the Brazilian butt lift underway ‘live’ in Los Angeles. The studio image dissolves into a close-up on Patrice’s wobbling buttocks as a doctor prods under the skin in the nape of her back with a liposuction cannula. Her anus is covered with a piece of white tape. We are free to stare, with the camera, at Patrice’s flesh as the doctor touches her buttocks and repositions her in various ways in order to demonstrate the work he is doing. The show’s L.A. correspondent, Rhonda Shear, greets her co-hosts and then announces ‘I’m just so excited to be here right now.’

In close-up, the camera tracks along the torso of a recently deceased Mexican gangster called Paco as David Fisher (Michael C. Hall), one of the lead characters on *Six Feet Under*, stitches closed the deep gashes in the man’s chest where it was opened for autopsy.⁵³ As the tracking camera reaches the cadaver’s face, the man’s eyes flitter open. The wakened Paco leans his head up from the slab and examines David’s work, commenting, ‘This is some fucked up way to make a living’. The re-animated corpse then casually asks David how his day has been. As the conversation continues David wipes down the body with embalming fluid. He then carefully pushes aside the cloth that covers the man’s groin in order to wipe the area Paco asks David, jokingly, ‘Hey you checking out my dick?’

Each of the scenes described above features a moment of invasive contact with the body’s private parts. The doctor on *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* touches and prods Patrice’s buttocks enabling Rhonda Shear’s camera team and the viewer uncomfortably close to this spectacle. On *Six Feet Under*, David’s work as an embalmer requires him to handle the corpse’s groin. David’s embarrassment

⁵³ Episode 4, Season 1 of *Six Feet Under*, entitled ‘Familia’.

is physically manifested for us when the corpse animates and comments on the transgressive intimacy of the situation.

I have opened this chapter with descriptions of two dramatically different television shows. *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* is a reality television programme largely aligned with trash culture and gratuitous titillation. *Six Feet Under*, on the other hand, is one of HBO's showcase 'quality' television dramas created by the Oscar-winning screenwriter, Alan Ball. Despite their many differences these programmes have one important feature in common. The human body in both of these shows is at the centre of an excessive intimacy. I have chosen to examine texts so different in their genre and positioning in order to explore the trend toward excessive intimacy that each show exhibits as an aesthetic feature that spans a range of genres and formats on contemporary television.

In both of the above descriptions I have made use of the term 'close-up'. This focus on shot scale is an attempt to point out the tendency to produce a sense of extreme proximity to the bodies of others. The scenes I describe above are excessive not only for the boundary-breaking intimacy they facilitate but for their use of the body as a source of physical discomfort and queasiness. The images of the body on these shows cue sensory responses other than vision and hearing. Such television makes its address not so much to our eyes or to our minds but to the embodied or 'gut' responses of our bodies, facilitating a sense of contact that is, to some extent, physically felt. Notably, the access to the body in the examples I have chosen is quite self-consciously celebrated by the programmes themselves. In *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live*, the immediate, 'live' nature of our close access to the surgical body is foregrounded. In *Six Feet Under* the special effects that make Paco look so unnervingly dead are on display. This moment also evinces a distinct awareness of the sheer novelty of David's interaction with a corpse. In both of these programmes the display of the body is not presented as incidental to the drama or to the information-giving roles of the shows. Instead bodily excess is foregrounded, celebrated and elaborated upon in a self-aware performance of the capacity to grant access and bring viewers close to the body in a way that demands an *affective* response. 'Tele-affectivity' is the name that I give to this phenomenon.

In coining the term 'tele-affectivity' I make an intentional reference to John Thornton Caldwell's influential term 'televisuality.' Caldwell uses this word

to describe a set of aesthetic tendencies prompted by the diversification of viewing options and a turbulent television market in the context of U.S. television production since the late 1980s. Caldwell famously argues that the market conditions of the 1980s caused television to change from being a medium defined primarily by ‘word-based rhetoric and transmission’ to becoming a much more *visual* medium. Caldwell contends that in response to the increasing pressure on producers and broadcasters to distinguish their programming from the general televisual ‘flow’ and to win an audience share from their competitors ‘television has come to flaunt and display style’ and ‘televisuality’ is a ‘self-conscious’, ‘performance of style’.⁵⁴ With the rapid increase in viewing options allowed by new technology, the last decade has seen an intensification of the market crisis that Caldwell has described. At the same time the market has produced new ways of attracting viewers. In addition to foregrounding its videographic features and visual excess I argue that a great deal of recent programming also celebrates a *bodily excess* through a privileged mode of access to the body. The emphasis on the body as an affective site in the late 1990s and 2000s can be understood as a performance which marks out the brand identity of certain programmes. ‘Tele-affectivity’ is a term that allows me to draw together ideas about aesthetics and modes of engagement - in particular, theories about embodiment and affect - with a consideration of the industrial and commercial drives that shape the nature of television programming.

Through an analysis of two very different but equally tele-affective shows which were introduced in my opening examples, I will explore the ways in which Caldwell’s ideas about televisuality provide a useful framework for understanding the visceral features of contemporary television. I understand tele-affectivity as a phenomenon which is similar to and linked with televisuality, and my arguments also support Caldwell’s claims about the market and visual excess. However, I will also consider the shortcomings of Caldwell’s theory and explore how the affective relationships that tele-affective programmes aim to establish with viewers might complicate some of Caldwell’s arguments and assumptions about television style, domestic viewing habits, and the specificity of the television medium. While Caldwell rejects a range of traditional ideas about television in response to aesthetic changes in 1980s television, I suggest that we can understand the exhibitionism of contemporary

⁵⁴ John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality*, p. 4.

‘body’ television in terms of a continuity with certain more traditional elements of television aesthetics.

There are many continuities between the market crisis Caldwell describes in the 1980s and the highly pressurised contemporary television industry. Increased choice has meant even more fierce market competition than existed in the late 1980s and early 1990s when Caldwell was writing about televisuality. Television programming has had to adapt very quickly to cater to an even more fragmented audience. We now view television in a ‘multichannel age’.⁵⁵ At the touch of a remote control, viewers may choose from a vast array of network and cable programmes. Advances in DVD (digital versatile disc) technology and DVR (digital video recording) have produced further challenges to television providers in the quest to secure audiences. Households now have more than one television set or alternative screens, allowing people within a household to watch different programmes at a time.⁵⁶ Significantly, the move from network dominance of the market to a multichannel environment has fractured the television audience and reduced the major networks’ share of audience members. Television viewers are no longer to be thought of as an unindividuated ‘mass’ by broadcasters. While market conditions have increased competition between broadcasters, the ‘niche-ing’ of television that has intensified since the 1980s is part of the motivation for the emergence of specialist television that can be more explicit (often because it is on less regulated cable channels), and that can court novelty in new ways, in a drive to achieve the kind of ‘distinction’ from other programming that Caldwell sees as essential to the rise of televisuality.⁵⁷

In the 1990s many producers seemed to recognise that visceral images of the body might be one way of distinguishing shows from the general broadcasting ‘flow’. The first range of ‘body’ programming emerged in the form of *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990), *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993) and *ER*. With the beginnings of the *CSI* franchise in 2000 and the rise of reality television and HBO style ‘quality’ viewing during the ‘noughties,’ television’s emphasis on the body has burgeoned into an aesthetic tendency that permeates a vast range of television formats. ‘Tele-affectivity’ is particularly important for cable and satellite

⁵⁵ Megan Mullen, *Television in the Multichannel Age: a brief history of cable television* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008) p. 1.

⁵⁶ David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2000), p. 26.

⁵⁷ Caldwell, *Televisuality*, p. 20.

stations which market themselves on their capacity to show explicit material that could not feature on broadcast television. Especially in the American context, graphic, potentially disturbing displays of bodily excess, or images of more 'risqué' surgeries such as sex re-assignment procedures are not considered suitable for regular broadcast. Cable shows like HBO's *Six Feet Under*, FX's *Nip/Tuck*, and Showtime's *Dexter* thrive on the 'shock' appeal of their often disgusting and extreme images of the body.

There are many accounts of the changes to television aesthetics heralded by the 'multi-channel' age but few have considered the rise in grotesque, affective imagery. Critical writing on changes to the television landscape tends to focus on changes to distinct television formats such as 'quality' television and reality TV. Annette Hill explains how struggling networks and emerging competitors have relied on reality television as an inexpensive way to boost ratings.⁵⁸ This genre's low production costs make experimentation and spin-offs much more feasible because the financial risks of a show 'flopping' are lower. From this perspective the syndication of ownership prompted by market deregulation resulted in the production of less television drama and reality programming provided a cheap alternative.⁵⁹ In contrast Janet McCabe and Kim Akass chart the increased importance of notions of 'quality' in contemporary television aesthetics - particularly with regard to American 'quality' drama series.⁶⁰ The 'quality' drama, in these arguments is posited as an effective means by which networks and cable providers alike have been able to brand and market themselves to niche audiences with 'signature' programming.⁶¹ Quality is not just about production values, however, as Akass and McCabe point out in their discussion of swearing and violence on HBO. Controversy and 'boundary pushing' material that has become an important way in which cable providers distinguish their content from that of the networks which are subject to censorship.⁶² While Akass and McCabe do not discuss affect and bodily gore in their accounts of quality television, their recognition of the mandate for

⁵⁸ Annette Hill *Reality TV: Audiences and popular factual television* (New York: Routledge, 2005) pp.6-7.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 6

⁶⁰ Kim Akass and Janet McCabe, 'Sex, swearing and respectability: courting controversy: HBO's original programming and producing quality TV', in Kim Akass and Jane McCabe (eds), *Quality TV: contemporary American television and beyond* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 62 - 78.

⁶¹ Mullen, *Television in the Multichannel Age*, p. 187.

⁶² Akass and McCabe, 'Sex, Swearing and Respectability', p. 68.

controversy and edgy material helps to explain why ‘quality’ television has embraced the excessive body. The idea of tele-affectivity therefore accommodates how both the rise of reality television and the increasing importance of niche programming may have prompted a shift toward explicit body images.

Caldwell’s argument assumes that it is primarily style which facilitates viewer engagement with television after 1980. He writes that ‘In many shows by the mid-1980s style was no longer a bracketed flourish, but was the text of the show’,⁶³ and he comments that channels competed for the attention of viewers through ‘style-markers and distinct looks’.⁶⁴ This may have been the case for 1980s television. However, contemporary ‘body’ shows parade more than visual effects and novel sights. They offer opportunities for an intimate and emotional engagement with the bodies and people onscreen. My use of the word tele-affectivity points to some gaps in Caldwell’s account specifically in terms of thinking about emotion and an affective engagement with television.

A large part of Caldwell’s project in his study of televisuality is to critique traditional ideas about the specific aesthetics of the medium which he sees as standing in the way of a proper consideration of the visual style, excess and cinematic qualities of television after the late 1980s. Caldwell attacks a number of well-accepted ideas and assumptions that have previously characterised the study of television. Firstly Caldwell takes issue with what he describes as ‘glance theory’ or ‘the myth of distraction’ which, he argues, has ‘sidetracked television studies from a fuller understanding of the extreme stylization emergent in television in the 80s.’⁶⁵ In the process Caldwell also critiques television studies’ over-emphasis on the domestic context of television viewing. In a witty turn of phrase, he comments ‘[t]heorists should not jump to theoretical conclusions just because there is an ironing board in the room.’⁶⁶ Instead he asserts that ‘[c]ontrary to glance theory, the committed TV viewer is overtly addressed and ‘asked to start watching’ important televised events.’⁶⁷ However, John Caughie has pointed out that this explicit call to watch might not

⁶³ Caldwell, *Televisuality*, p. 6

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 5

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

be so much an assurance that viewers are not distracted but a response to the distractability of television audiences. He suggests that the ‘ “excessive style”, “excessive narrative” and “televisual exhibitionism,”’⁶⁸ identified by Caldwell are ‘the symptoms of distraction, of a distracted audience in front of a medium defined by interruption whose attention must be captured, lost and recaptured by display.’⁶⁹ While, as Caldwell argues, viewers are not *always* necessarily distracted, they very often may be because the conditions for distraction are built in to the nature of the medium. Caughie’s argument considers how certain aesthetic practices might be considered, not as virtuoso displays of style but as responses to the conditions of television viewing, in this case, the potential for distraction. This critique usefully identifies how Caldwell does not give adequate space to a consideration of the ways in which television’s style and content might need to create a fit with the conditions of home viewing.

While television can be watched in many contexts and spaces, most television is still primarily addressed to a viewership located in the home. Misha Kavka points out that, as the etymology of the word television suggests, the medium has traditionally operated as ‘a means of transmitting a view of a particular scene across distance’.⁷⁰ As such television can be thought of not just a device for constructing stylish visual worlds, but as a way of providing domestically located viewers a mode of access to other spaces and people beyond the home and in turn bringing the outside world in the form of images and sounds into the private space of the home. Television programmes and particularly shows with claims to ‘liveness’ frequently display a self-conscious attempt to celebrate what Anna McCarthy describes as television’s ‘space-binding’ capacity.⁷¹ Yet by focusing his attention on the visual elements of television, Caldwell separates an analysis of television from a discussion of its broadcasting role and reception context. We could understand the excessive call for bodily intimacy that I describe here as device for bridging or compensating for the potential distance and detachment of viewers. Exposing bodies onscreen is an invitation to engage rather than a guarantor of close attention. Thus, while

⁶⁸ John Caughie, ‘Telephilia and Distraction: Terms of Engagement’, *The Journal of British Cinema and Television* 3.1, (2006): 5 - 18, p. 12.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Misha Kavka. *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, p. 8.

⁷¹ Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space* (Indiana: Duke University Press, 2000) p. 15.

I describe the opportunities for closeness offered by 'body-oriented' programming, my analyses must also admit to the space for detached observation, irony and objectification made possible by this form.

Caldwell wants to dissolve what he calls the 'dualism between film and television' in the accounts of cultural theorists.⁷² But Caldwell's arguments about the similarities between film and TV seem to set up another dualism: television style is understood as separate from its role as a broadcast technology that is viewed largely in domestic settings. One might not initially think of gory surgical interventions as uniquely fitted to the context of the 'hearth and home' but as much as the technologies of film and cinema may have transformed to bring the mediums closer together, the difference between film and television is brought into sharp focus when we begin imagining the intimate surgical footage and images of genitalia on shows like *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* being screened on a big cinema screen, for a group of strangers, sitting in a darkened room.

When I screened some of this material in the Glasgow University cinema for my students they all admitted to finding the experience far more uncomfortable than it would have been at home. It emerged from class discussions that watching something intimate (like the insides of someone's stomach, a naked patient) with people with whom you are not close, in the conditions of isolation encouraged by the cinema, was a very uncomfortable experience. We might expect gory images on a cinema screen to seem 'horror' - like. In these television images shock is contained by the domestic context. I am trying to suggest here that the excessive visuals on contemporary body television still support the fairly traditional idea that television is designed for intimacy and a particular kind of close affective engagement that suits the private, familial or intimate social contexts in which it is commonly viewed.

Caldwell also objects to the way in which a potential for distraction and a focus on the domestic environment has lead television viewing to be understood as a feminine experience. He notes that a great deal of television programming is in no way feminine and asserts that the 'hypermasculinist televisual tendencies' that he describes as evident in 1980s television 'have been an important part of television from the start'.⁷³ In contrast to Caldwell's work,

⁷² Caldwell, *Televisuality*, p. 25

⁷³ Ibid., p. 27.

which maintains a great deal of focus on the ‘masculinist’⁷⁴ aspects of television, the tele-affectivity that I am describing is a mode of engagement that has often been discounted or discredited on the grounds of being feminized, in the sense that it entails the passivity of being affected and an excessive emotionalism that is traditionally aligned with the feminine. This does not mean that contemporary television is without ‘masculinist’ elements. Rather I wish to assert the co-presence of a ‘feminine’ mode of engaging emotionally and viscerally with the people and situations onscreen in both women’s television and programmes more directly addressed to a male viewership.

Additionally, Caldwell notes an ‘overstatement’ by theorists of the importance of liveness. This, he argues, has led to the neglect of other aesthetic features of television such as the ‘performance of visual and stylistic excess.’ For Caldwell ‘[t]elevision defines itself now less by its inherent temporality and presentness than by pleasure, style, and commodity’.⁷⁵ However the recent burgeoning of reality television formats, in which we find some of television’s most extreme bodily exposures, suggests that in today’s television the values of ‘pleasure, style and commodity’ are often bound up in its constructed sense of ‘presentness’. This is something I will demonstrate in my close analysis of *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* in which, as the title suggests, liveness is still a prevailing value.

Caldwell’s writing also seems to understand viewing pleasure as a result of style before it is a result of engagement with characters and story. In a discussion of quality television, which he calls ‘boutique programming’,⁷⁶ Caldwell recognises the ways in which stylistic experimentation operates to express the inner emotions of characters on shows like *thirtysomething* (ABC, 1987 - 1991), *Beauty and the Beast* (CBS, 1987 - 1990) and *Quantum Leap* (NBC, 1989 - 1993).⁷⁷ I agree with Caldwell’s argument here and will develop ideas about style and the inner workings of characters later in this chapter. Caldwell rightly observes that while these shows may be clever, they do not display the ‘blank[ness]’ that he associates with postmodernism. Rather, he finds in ‘the apparently decentred postmodernist series,’ *Beauty and the Beast* a ‘traditional

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 334.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.105.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 105 - 110.

subjective centering' and a 'classical dramatic appeal, pathos, empathy'. In *thirtysomething* he finds an 'overdetermined layering of sensitive points of view'⁷⁸ and he argues that these two series along with *Quantum-Leap* 'created overdetermined, emoting centres from which their complicated visual worlds were seen'.⁷⁹ Caldwell seems to find a set of television programmes which contain elements of melodrama within their 'sophisticated' address to their viewership. In a later chapter I will be arguing for the melodramatic role of the body in drama series but at the moment I am interested in the way in which Caldwell curtails his discussion of emotional engagement with televisuality.

Caldwell's focus on the production of TV rather than reception means that the emotional elements of boutique shows are seen as devices to display the sensitivity and authorial intention of an auteur producer/director. The 'emoting centres' found on boutique television 'gave any experiential journey within an episode's plot - no matter how excessive - ample motivation.'⁸⁰ Thus these elements were important for their role in indicating the 'excessive intentionality' of a 'sensitive' artist which in turn 'allowed and justified extreme forms of presentation: time travel, fantasy, daydream, parody'⁸¹ which defined boutique television from more 'low-brow' forms. Here Caldwell sees the narrative and emotional elements of the television series as serving the demands of televisuality. However, in the case of *thirtysomething* and other more recent drama series like *Six Feet Under* it seems as if Caldwell might be approaching the subject matter in a 'topsy-turvy' way. He seems to forget questions about how and why viewers might want to engage with these shows. Presumably, it is not only because they are stylish or directed by somebody 'sensitive' but rather because they are pleurably moving. While these shows might demonstrate stylistic excess, it still seems as if style is a device for dramatising the plot and for revealing aspects of character in an emotionally resonant way. Despite the temptation and plausibility of analysing a show like *Six Feet Under* as an 'auteur show' I am more interested in its performance and production of intimacy through the body.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 109.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 110

Contrary to Caldwell who is eager to question the importance of the apparently inherent distinctions between film and television,⁸² Jeffrey Sconce argues that television has responded to the fierce competition for audience share in the 1980s and 1990s by coming to ‘recognize and better exploit the textual strengths it possessed over other media.’⁸³ Following Sconce we can consider how a focus on the viscosity and a drive for proximity to the fleshy openings and interiors of others can be seen not as a break with traditional television aesthetics but as an excessive extension and celebration of the features that have traditionally *defined* television.

Intimate Television

Kavka argues that from early television history to the present the medium has operated as ‘a *technology of intimacy*’.⁸⁴ For Kavka, television harnesses its broadcasting capacities to produce feelings of presentness and proximity:

By bringing things spatially, temporally and emotionally close, television offers to re-move the viewing subject - not in the sense of informative distancing, but precisely through its opposite, a collapse of distance and time through the production of affective proximity.⁸⁵

Kavka draws on John Hartley’s assertion that ‘TV has become the place where and the means by which...most people have got to know about most other people...’,⁸⁶ to argue that, television functions to produce feelings of intimate contact with the people featured onscreen.⁸⁷ This process involves an affective investment in the television world and she speaks about the medium, specifically in the case of reality television, as having the capacity to ‘bring others emotionally near.’⁸⁸ In this way the television acts as ‘an interlocutor, or intersubjective other, within a particular set of psychological relations with

⁸² Ibid., p. 25

⁸³ Jeffrey Sconce, ‘What if?: charting television’s new textual boundaries’, in Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (eds), *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*. (Bloomington: Duke University Press, 2004) p. 96.

⁸⁴ Kavka, *Reality Television Affect and Intimacy*, p. 20. [Kavka’s emphasis]

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 7

⁸⁶ Hartley cited in Misha Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, p. 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

viewers’.⁸⁹ Extending Hartley’s phrasing Kavka writes that ‘television is all about seeing other people’. Kavka applies these ideas to the analysis of reality television which she sees as the genre most exemplary of television’s drive for intimacy although she intends her arguments about television to be applicable to television in general.⁹⁰

In an opening address given at the ‘Making and Remaking of Classic Television’ conference held at Warwick University, Christine Geraghty used similar language to Kavka, in order to describe certain essential and pleasurable elements of television viewing. Geraghty considers those television moments when we are given ‘people seen more clearly’.⁹¹ Geraghty’s observation is derived from a consideration of early responses to television writing. She describes finding a book in the Glasgow University Library that was published in 1933. While noting that the book ‘*Television Today and Tomorrow*’⁹² is dated and largely irrelevant to contemporary television debates she describes one heading that caught her attention. The heading which reads ‘people easily identified’, introduces a discussion of live footage from a street scene. Geraghty explains that in this description ‘[i]dentification ... involves the faculty of seeing clearly - a driver still in television technology’ and that this process also involves ‘the recognition of their individuality, the signifiers that make them, themselves.’⁹³ Explaining how television might facilitate this kind of recognition she suggested:

It has a documentary flavour but is not confined to documentary. Soap opera, police series, game shows, reality tv, can all offer us people seen more clearly. But we do not necessarily require longevity to establish that; we might do better with criteria like closeness, presentness, the complications of context, the snags that give you a little jolt of recognition.’⁹⁴

It is the values of ‘closeness’ and ‘presentness’ identified here that most chime with the kind of programming I am interested in. To describe the particular relationship to other people (and other bodies) in the specific tele-

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 20

⁹¹ Christine Geraghty, ‘Classic television: a matter of time,’ opening address presented at the ‘Making and Remaking of Classic Television’ symposium, Warwick University 2009 accessed at <http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_114562_en.pdf> [27/04/10], p. 3.

⁹² Sydney A. Mosely and H.J. Barton Chapple, *Television Today and Tomorrow*, C. Third Ed. , (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1933) p. 138.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

affective programming I am examining I would like to adapt Kafka's 'seeing other people' and Geraghty's 'people seen more clearly' to 'people seen more closely (or more intimately)'. This sense of close observation is facilitated, at times, by the sense of presentness and immediacy of reality television but also through an excessive proximity and a certain kind of emotional unveiling that attends moments in which characters and real individuals expose themselves to view or invite us into their bodies.

In a retrospective consideration of his book *TV: The Most Popular Art*, Horace Newcomb revises his list of the essential features of television.⁹⁵ In 1974 he described 'intimacy, continuity, and history'⁹⁶ as the tendencies defining television aesthetics. By 2005, his ideas have changed. Newcomb replaces 'continuity' with 'seriality' and 'history' with 'liminality'.⁹⁷ But, significantly, Newcomb retains intimacy as a value that continues to endure in television aesthetics. He writes:

I maintain that television fiction, news, documentary and recent versions of programming known as 'reality' continue to be fascinated with and reliant on narrative recounting intimate matters in intimate ways. In some instances intimacy has been extraordinarily intensified. We have been made privy to decisions regarding 'marriage,' 'birth,' and 'death,' that could alter lives. We have observed as individuals are ridiculed and embarrassed. We have been allowed to witness alterations of the body, procedures that in many cultures might be considered sacred....⁹⁸

Here Newcomb makes a link between the body and an 'intensification' of intimacy that is crucial for my arguments about bodily intimacy as a continuation or excessive contemporary form of television's traditional features. Newcomb's use of the words 'privy' and 'witness' suggest that pleasure is derived from television's capacity to grant us unique forms of access to other people. One reason for the enduring pervasiveness of television intimacy, is that it corresponds to domestic viewing contexts and private social conditions of watching that remain largely definitive of television viewing despite recent

⁹⁵ Horace Newcomb, *TV: The Most Popular Art* (New York: Anchor, 1974).

⁹⁶ Horace Newcomb, 'Reflections on *TV: The Most Popular Art*' in Gary Edgerton and Brian Rose (eds), *Thinking Outside the Box: a contemporary television genre reader* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2005), pp17 - 36., p.30.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 32.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

media convergences and changes to the apparatus (Indeed intimacy may actually be further intensified by the interactivity that is encouraged by some of these changes).

The onscreen closeness has a correlative in offscreen experiences of viewers who either watch alone where they can unashamedly devote themselves to an intimacy with people onscreen or with family members, partners or close friends. Kavka points out that the terminology in her use of the phrase 'seeing other people,' is an intentional play on the 'non-monogamous overtones' of the term. She thus highlights the differences between the one-to-one relationships between reader and text/author involved in what she describes as 'immersive technologies' and the relations of intimacy and contact with and between people and bodies in the television experience.⁹⁹ She writes about reality television shows as actively encouraging 'intimacy with the group'.¹⁰⁰ This is quite literally the case in viewer engagement with the groups of contestants constructed by reality television scenarios but Kavka is also concerned with the way television constructs a broader sense of community. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's terminology, Kavka describes the production of 'imagined communities'¹⁰¹ through television viewing.

For Kavka this idea is particularly relevant to reality television and formats that stress their 'liveness.' Kavka describes the importance of an 'effect of liveness that coalesces the time of action with the time of viewing' in creating a sense that one is watching television events with a community of viewers.¹⁰² However, long running serials also embrace viewers into the communities they construct onscreen as is evidenced by the significant fan culture around a range of drama shows. *Grey's Anatomy*, *Bones* or *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* are all shows which tend to focus on team activities and communal living arrangements. Rather than relying on the intensity of liveness and immediacy to construct communities, the longevity of these shows arguably builds communities through shared memory and long term engagement with the characters and format. Here another of Newcombe's characteristics of television, 'seriality' also plays a role in constructing intimacy. The central

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, p. 24

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 17. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983, revised. ed. 1991).

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 22.

observation here that will become useful to my writing about both reality television and drama formats is that television viewing of any kind is watched by many and situates the singular viewer in relationship with those in his or her domestic context but also to an imagined community of people who watch and, as Kavka points out, to an imagined group of people who choose not to watch.¹⁰³

I am aware that the ideas I have been describing about ‘seeing people’, closeness and intimacy can sound particularly pleasant and benign when much of the material I will be looking at encourages a kind of gawping, invasive gaze at other people’s bodies and potentially an uncomfortable closeness or a fascination with the revolting or morbid. However, it is important not to see this tendency as contrary to the intimacy of this programming or to the forging of feelings of community. Intimacy can be uncomfortable and invasive. Indeed it is television’s approach to the awkwardness and discomfort of domestic intimacy that I will be exploring in much of my analysis. It is also useful to think of excessive bodies as affectively invested points of shared response. We are encouraged to stare, scrutinise and wince with the people onscreen. We may also find ourselves clasping a partner’s arm at the sight of an image of pain, or joining in a collective exclamation of ‘Ew!’ when watching with a group of people. In these moments we share with others, both onscreen (the hosts or the characters) and offscreen (our friends, the imagined community we see ourselves watching with), an uncomfortable closeness to the body exposed in all its visceral, fleshy dimensions.

All New Cosmetic Surgery Live, the first programme I analyse here, features a stylistic and videographic excess characteristic of televisuality, but also uses the bodies on display as an affectively invested point of communal response, facilitating a feeling of contact and community and celebrating audiovisual technology’s connective capacities. The show also employs intensive close-up images of people exposing themselves to view so that anxieties about self-revelation and the body are combined with a queasy sense of physical over-closeness to the image. *Six Feet Under*, the second, very different programme under analysis also displays and celebrates the visceral body as a distinct style marker but, in addition to this, it uses interactions with the corpse to produce an uncomfortable intimacy, transforming the corpse into an object upon which the boundaries between the public and the private are contested. In both cases

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 48.

there is a slippage between the emotional and physical dimensions of intimacy. The awkwardness of revealing oneself socially resonates with the often sickening feeling of extreme proximity to bodies.

All New Cosmetic Surgery Live: Accessing the body, Getting Intimate

In the dazzlingly-lit studio of *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live*, the hosts Vanessa Feltz and Dr. Jan Adams stare bemusedly at a medium-sized video screen. Fast-paced electronic music thumps in the background and the wall behind the hosts forms another enormous screen featuring images of a live surgery taking place in Beverley Hills. But the focus of the hosts' attention is on the small screen on which is projected a murky low-grade image of fleshy matter. A cut introduces a close-up of this image which comes to occupy the full television screen. The offscreen voice of Vanessa Feltz hesitatingly comments 'I think it's a breast...' The camera pans around the fleshy mound revealing lumps on the skin below it. Somewhat redundantly Dr. Jan announces 'I think what we're looking at here is the breast.' We are returned to medium shot with the hosts in full view as Dr Jan goes on to explain that this is an image of scarring in the breast fold. The image on screen moves every now and then, reminding us that behind the images there is a person revealing themselves to us via live feed. In a somewhat flippant manner the doctor prescribes a surgical solution that involves augmenting the breast and cutting away damaged skin. Vanessa Feltz then makes an appeal to viewers: 'Do keep sending in your body parts', before announcing an advertisement break: 'After the break the most dramatic surgery ever seen on cosmetic surgery live. This woman has lost ten stone in weight. She has her whole body restructured, chopped to pieces, flesh everywhere.' As Feltz speaks the screen is overtaken by a close-up of a woman's abdomen, yellowed by disinfectant and cut open down the middle. A doctor's hand displays an enormous chunk of removed fat and skin to the camera. The host continues 'It's an absolutely extraordinary ordeal. It lasts ten hours. Do not miss it.'

For its sheer visual excess and multi-layered action *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* seems an excellent example of televisuality. The studio is slick, glossy and cluttered with visual information. The multiple screens in the studio space foreground the specularity of the programme and highlight the sheer amount that is to be seen on this show. The many teasers before advertisement

breaks draw attention to the scores of ‘spectacular and unusual’ procedures typically featured in each episode. Like the examples of televisuality described by Caldwell, the aesthetics of *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* are inseparable from commercial interests. For each explicit procedure is also a commodity to be purchased. The show features celebrity surgeons whose ‘expert skills’ are celebrated on each episode and whose practices have benefited greatly from this exposure. *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* sometimes resembles an early morning ‘informercial’ slot, showcasing new surgical procedures, their availability and, at times, the supposed practical necessity of these procedures. In addition, the emphasis on visual excess and ‘never seen-before procedures’¹⁰⁴ allows *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* to maintain a commercial advantage over competitors by distinguishing itself from other shows. But something more than visual excess may be at stake here.

Emphasis is placed not so much on the cinematic or videographic elements of these images as on their fleshy content. The forthcoming surgery that Vanessa Feltz announces is described in visceral terms, advertising the show through the lure of ‘flesh everywhere’ and a body ‘chopped to pieces’. In the ‘text-in-your-body-parts’ feature mobile phone cameras take us extremely close to people’s most private ‘fleshy bits’. The hosts of the show celebrate these bodily exposures via text as ‘our favourite thing’ and describe their responses to the images using terms like ‘delectation’ which suggest a pleasing physical relationship to the flesh. Even the glinting pink and red tones of the studio environment mimic the colours and textures of a wound. The show’s title graphics feature a little scalpel placed under the written text (with only the word ‘live’ placed over the scalpel), hinting at the show’s interest in pain and bodily invasion. *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* features a self-conscious performance of its affective provocations. One might therefore describe it legitimately as ‘tele-affective’ as well as an example of ‘televisuality’.

Just as in Caldwell’s formulation, style plays a crucial role in facilitating the cultural logic of distinction’ that characterises contemporary television, so *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* and similar surgical shows use the potential for shock and extreme sights as a mark of distinction. Like televisuality, tele-affectivity is related to ‘television’s obsession with merchandising and

¹⁰⁴ Five Website feature on *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* accessed at <http://www2.five.tv/home/frameset/?content=11712466&>, [17/05/09].

consumerism.’¹⁰⁵ However, while Caldwell’s arguments do not make much room for considerations of liveness, immediacy and affect, it is precisely through these features that *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* markets itself as a unique viewing experience. *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live*’s mark of distinction from other programming is premised not so much on visual excess as on the creation of a sense of community joined in affective response to the images onscreen. In the same way that televisuality features a performance of style, *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* celebrates its own privileged construction of physical intimacy.

The show’s visual abundance is matched with an intimate direct address to viewers and an appeal for interaction with the programme format. The commercial uses of affect are on obvious display in the ‘text-in-your-body-parts’ feature of the show. This device was built into the marketing and development of the programme from its early stages. The show, which ran for two solid weeks in April 2005, was conceived in consultation with marketers at Endemol as a showcase for new 3G phone technologies.¹⁰⁶ The programme is therefore not only a promotion device for surgery but for communication technology. This show markets the powers both of cellular telephones and television itself as instruments of interpersonal connection.

Cosmetic Surgery Live has been described as ‘a voyeuristic extravaganza’¹⁰⁷ and it certainly has ‘freakshow’ elements but these terms do not fully account for the appeal of this programme as a live, public display of intimate body parts. The processes at play here are not just specular but about contact and closeness. When the image of the studio setting is replaced by a close-up of the murky 3G video images of viewers’ body parts we are moved from a situation that emphasizes depth into an initially indistinct fleshy screen space which threatens to overwhelm in its extreme magnification of bodily detail. We are also allowed to see people in remote locations revealing themselves for our scrutiny. Beyond the trembling murky video image of flesh is a person allowing us access to their most private parts.

¹⁰⁵ Caldwell, *Televisuality*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Five Press Release on Five Website, 2005, accessed at uk.download.yahoo.com/any/fu/livesurgery1.pdf [03/05/09]

¹⁰⁷ British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, *Press Statement*, 2005 accessed at <http://www.baaps.org.uk/content/view/130/62/> [25/04/09].

To extend Kavka's argument about television that brings us 'emotionally near' to others, this example shows us how contemporary television often operates to create a sense of physical proximity and transgressive closeness. The emotional proximity Kavka describes is substituted here by a sense of physical closeness to human flesh. We are allowed to *see people more closely*. In these tele-affective moments referential realism and liveness play a crucial role in facilitating the pleasurable sense of immediate contact with the bodies that form the content of the image. That is, we feel even closer to the body because of an awareness that it is being revealed to us in 'real time'. Here the traditional attribution of liveness as a key aesthetic feature of television is not at odds with but rather essential to a consideration of *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live*'s marketing and branding strategy. A radical kind of intimacy and immediacy is what grants this show its distinction from regular broadcasting.

One might argue that this is not an exercise in getting close but in the *objectification* of the body, particularly when we see the bodies onscreen being labelled as variously defective. The moment in which Dr Jan identifies the images as a breast is marked by a cut from a close-up of the screen to the depth of the studio situation framed in a medium shot of Dr Jan and Vanessa Feltz standing before the screen and we are reminded via this reframing and literal 'distancing' that whatever forms of intensified intimacy it allows, *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* ultimately encourages a deterministic understanding of the body as a defective object requiring surgical manipulation. Certainly the tone of clinical detachment with which Dr Jan discusses the body as medically defective allow us some distance from the image. None-the-less, both Dr Jan and Vanessa Feltz alternate between scientific discourse and dizzy excitement at their 'favourite thing': seeing the images broadcast within the studio or in crossing over 'live' to a 'never-seen-before' procedure. The visual trajectory of the show still seems to insist on taking us *too close* to the body. In addition the emphasis on immediacy and liveness confirm that granting access (to bodies in remote places) and contact is a central drive of the show's aesthetics.

When *Cosmetic Surgery Live* takes us, abruptly, from a one-to-one proximity with flesh onscreen to a kind of scientific objectification and labeling of the body, the body part in question is re-located from a potentially overwhelming intimacy to a more ordered social forum implied by the studio setting. One kind of closeness is succeeded, here, with another. The show

celebrates its hosts' ability to look at the body and offer comments in real time. By immersing us in fleshy details and then moving out into studio space *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* marries our sense of closeness to its body-shots with the show's own more conventional talk-show-like attempts to cultivate a sense of closeness amongst a community of viewers. The viewing community that I describe does not necessarily involve kindness or consensus, but rather a feeling of shared reaction to the body images, that we all view alongside Dr. Jan and Vanessa Feltz. It means gasping, laughing or wincing with the awareness that others are doing so too. The 'text-in-your-body-parts' feature on *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* initially offers viewers the opportunity to engage in a sense of being involved in the image, and an excessive proximity. The move outward also invites viewers into a related constructed community, allowing them to judge the bodies onscreen and their own bodies against the social norms prescribed by the show. The process of objectification and framing also becomes a social process of reacting to bodies together.

Other segments of the programme also encourage discussion and moments in which hosts and guests share their responses to the imagery. The programme is co-presented at points by *Eastenders'* Daniella Westbrook. Westbrook's role is interesting as Vanessa Feltz frequently encourages her to relate the surgeries onscreen to her own experience of reconstructive surgery to her nose. For example when a botched nose job is corrected 'live' in the episode screened on April 21st 2005, the presenters stand in the studio watching the procedure on the big screens all around them. Feltz then turns to Westbrook and says 'Daniella, gosh, I could see you just going with all the feelings.' Westbrook then relays her own experiences of what nasal surgery feels like. Importantly here, the hosts are watching the screens and we watch them watching, reacting and sharing their reactions not just with regards to the medical side of these procedures but in terms of the affective responses they provoke. In the studio after Daniella Westbrook attends a surgery in which excess fat is burned off a woman's arms using a laser she exclaims 'I mean Vanessa, the smell of burning flesh. If I could tell you...it's like rotting flesh.' In another segment from the episode under analysis, L.A. correspondent, Rhonda Shearer describes the tubes of liposuctioned fat in the surgery as 'kinda like tomato soup'. Back in the London studio, Feltz winces noting 'well I wouldn't really like to describe them as soup!' While these hosts aren't always in agreement about the responses that surgical

images provoke for them, they are all engaged in a process of actively watching and communicating their reactions with each other and with us at home.

All New Cosmetic Surgery live is compelling viewing for a felt sense of contact with others and for the opportunity it provides for understanding one's own body in a public forum. Fundamental to its tele-affective appeal is the relationship this show establishes between the bodies of viewers, onscreen bodily images and an imagined community of viewers. Caldwell's ideas help to explain how the trend toward fleshy images on today's television shows might be understood in relation to certain market factors; specifically as a way of creating programme distinction in a multi-channel television era. *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live*'s celebration and foregrounding of its visceral tactile elements, especially its live 3G feed also suggest that immediacy and intimacy are key factors in facilitating the programme distinction that Caldwell attributes only to visual excess. At the centre of this process is the body. It is in television's promise of access to and close contact with the body that we can most clearly see televisual style as tele-affective - with emphasis on the 'tele' of television as a device of connection.

The excessive intimacy and sensual provocation featured on *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* aligns the programme with trash aesthetics. As Laura Grindstaff points out in her discussion of the body in television talk shows, there exists a widespread cultural tendency for bodily control to be aligned with good taste while excesses of the body are understood as trashy.¹⁰⁸ In the case of *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* and many other reality shows like *Extreme Makeover*, *I Want A Famous Face* (MTV 2004 - 2005), and *Dr 90210* (E!, 2004 -) tele-affectivity may be seen as a mark of the culturally low. Is it, then, possible to discuss a 'quality' television show like *Six Feet Under* in the same terms as *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live*? The latter takes a place in a long line of 'trashy', and explicit *Five* (Formerly Channel 5) programmes such as *Compromising Situations* (1998), *Sex and Shopping* (1998) and *Naked Jungle* (2000). *Six Feet Under*, on the other hand, was designed to take the slot of the critically acclaimed drama *The Sopranos* (1999 - 2007) on HBO -one of the first cable channels to start carving out a niche audience of 'sophisticated' and educated

¹⁰⁸ Laura Grindstaff, *The Money Shot: Trash, Class and the Making of TV Talkshows*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) p. 31.

paying viewers. With its slogan ‘It’s not television. It’s HBO’, the channel celebrates the professed gulf between traditional broadcast television and the ‘quality’ available on cable. *Six Feet Under*, which follows the lives of a family who live and work in a funeral parlour, certainly seems designed to court a niche audience with the novelty of its setting and morbid themes. *Six Feet Under* carries a further mark of quality and distinction because it was created by Alan Ball, made famous by his Oscar winning screenplay for *American Beauty*. That this Hollywood figure is responsible for the artistic vision of *Six Feet Under* suggests that the series might have more in common with film than television, confirming Caldwell’s claims that we should not set up ‘a dualism’ between film and television aesthetics. The series certainly distinguishes itself from other television with delicate, artful lighting and a painterly colour palette. David Lavery points out how Alan Ball himself, chose the series opening sequence because he found it ‘so elegant...so cinematic...so unlike TV.’¹⁰⁹

Importantly, the physically grotesque corpse is a central feature distinguishing *Six Feet Under* from other television. The corpses on *Six Feet Under* have the potential to be read as adding ‘cinematic’ values from the horror genre into the format but I want to examine how their operation in this show is more aligned with the aesthetics of television than of horror film. Contrary to Caldwell’s suggestion that television should no longer be understood in terms of the domestic context of viewing, *Six Feet Under* seems to address its audience with concerns relating the family and the domestic everyday, offering unique insights into family life through the insertion of grotesque and fantastical corpses into the family home.

Several theorists have identified the construction of intimacy as a central value in *Six Feet Under*. Joanna di Mattia considers the series in terms of the developing intimacy between the Fisher Brothers Nate (Peter Krause) and David. For di Mattia, the process by which the brothers’ relationship shifts from ‘distance and secrecy to closeness and openness’ is facilitated by the ‘their proximity to women and the feminised space in which they live and work’.¹¹⁰ Kristyn Gorton also describes *Six Feet Under* in terms of intimacy and the

¹⁰⁹ David Lavery ‘“It’s not television, it’s magic realism”: the mundane, the grotesque and the fantastic in *Six Feet Under*’ in Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (eds), *Reading Six Feet Under: TV to die for* (London: IB Taurus, 2005) p.21.

¹¹⁰ Joanna di Mattia, ‘Fisher’s sons: brotherly love and the spaces of male intimacy in *Six Feet Under*’ in Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (eds.), *Reading Six Feet Under: TV to die for* (2005, London: IB Taurus) p. 151.

creation of a feminine space. In a study which considers the role of mother characters on television she considers the death of the family's father in the opening moments of *Six Feet Under* and notes that in this and other series '[t]he death of the patriarch is symbolic in that it marks an explicit engagement with the domestic and further suggestion of the feminisation of television.'¹¹¹

However, neither of these theorists considers how the body of the corpse might figure in this thematic foregrounding of intimacy. In the following analysis I will consider how the visceral and exposed bodies on *Six Feet Under* become invested with tensions around intimacy and privacy. While *Six Feet Under* distinguishes itself from ordinary television through its stylistic and thematic sophistication, it is still ultimately positioned as television, not film. Thus, despite their almost diametrically opposed relationships to claims of quality this allows me to suggest that *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* and *Six Feet Under* use the body in similar ways, as a means of cultivating intimacy.

***Six Feet Under* : Too Close for Comfort**

From a blank white frame, the image of a woman laid in a coffin fades into view. Her arms are crossed over her chest, and she is gently lit from a light emanating from within the casket. A hand enters the frame and tenderly repositions an errant strand of hair. The camera slowly tracks along the arm to reveal Claire Fisher (Lauren Ambrose) staring intently at the body with a camera in hand. She raises the camera and snaps a photo and then one more before looking over her shoulder and hurriedly shutting the lens as her brother comes down the stairs. Later in this episode, ('The Secret' season 2, episode 10) Claire hangs the closely-framed portraits featuring the faces and hands of the deceased up to dry in the dark room at her school. Claire's best friend, Parker McKenna (Marina Black), carefully contemplates the pictures and comments 'They're amazing, it's like each one is somebody lying in bed with you, telling you a little story before you go to sleep...'

Claire's photography is a very obvious way in which *Six Feet Under* comments on its own aesthetics. The act of photography foregrounds looking and Claire's choice of subject marks the corpse as a central object of visual

¹¹¹ Kristyn Gorton, 'Feminising Television: the Mother Role in *Six Feet Under* (HBO 2001 - 2006) and *Brothers and Sisters* (ABC 2006 -), ' in Gorton (ed.), *Media Audiences: Television, Meaning and Emotion* (2009, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) p. 139.

contemplation and as a subject with artistic merit. This is an example of the extreme self-consciousness of the show's televisuality. *Six Feet Under* is an excellent example of what Caldwell describes as 'boutique television' in which an auteur signature and a 'sensitive' style marks programming out for an audience of viewers who consider themselves sophisticated. But, at the same time, the manner in which the characters within this drama relate to the photographs indicates another way in which *Six Feet Under* understands its own creative merits. Instead of commenting on the style, or composition of the photographs, Parker chooses to focus her praise on the relationship that the images establish between the photographed body and the viewer. She describes her feeling of relation to the deceased as like that of a lover, sharing the intimate domestic space of the bed. What makes the effect of the photographs strange and moving is the fact that this familiarity and intimacy is established in relation to a corpse. And, of course, the show itself plays with a similarly unsettling proximity with the dead and a similar slippage between everyday domestic life and morbidity. Furthermore, it is significant that Claire takes these photos in secret so that they stand for a quiet, private encounter as opposed to the public ceremony of the funeral. I will argue that *Six Feet Under* similarly places the corpse at the centre of the characters' intensely private moments, allowing the viewer intimate access to their feelings. But the photos are also disturbing and illicit because they combine intimacy and prettiness with a suggestion of the necrophilic and ghoulish. Through these unsettling features, the bodies in the Fisher family home also express the strangeness and awkwardness of familial intimacy and the negotiations between privacy and openness entailed in everyday family life in a manner designed to resonate with domestic context of television viewing. Rather than providing 'emoting centres' which operate merely as justification for displays of style, *Six Feet Under's* style, along with its display of the body, works to cultivate, explore and intensify intimacy, giving us 'people seen more clearly' and more closely.

Rather than horror, the corpse on *Six Feet Under* more often than not cultivates discomfort, a feeling of being unnervingly close to the body of someone who is now gone. For example in episode 2 of season 5, as David extols the merits of a new embalming fluid he is using on the funeral parlour's latest corpse, Nate bends over the body and asks his brother, 'Do you know who this is?' The man on the slate, Nate explains, is Sam Hoviak who went to high school

with the brothers. David stops what he is doing and quietly contemplates the body. 'Wow' he notes looking down at the man's rotund belly, marked with the cuts and stitches made in the autopsy, 'he got fat.' There is an irreverence in David's words that seems unbefitting of the solemnity usually required when confronting the dead. We are made aware of the unique kind of access that these men have to the insensible bodies of the dead in their vulnerable nakedness. But there is also a tenderness and sad familiarity in David's contemplation of the body. He sighs and, still looking down at the body, comments 'I used to have such a crush on him.' This admission is significant in terms of the developing relationship between the brothers. Having come out during the course of the series, David's acquired openness with his brother is expressed in this tender scene as David shares his personal memories of the dead man on the table. When David leaves to take a phone call Nate is left alone with the body and the young Sam Hoviak appears as a ghostly presence in the scene peering with Nate over the fat, middle-aged body of the man on the table. While his exchange with David, was an unusual moment of openness between the brothers, as Nate converses with the ghostly Hoviak we have insight into a world of Nate's private reminiscences about his wild high-school days and his unspoken feelings about what his life has become. Unlike *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* which (somewhat giddily) celebrates connectivity and contact, *Six Feet Under* uses the corpse to explore the experience of being alone like few other television programmes do, admitting viewers into the most private moments of the show's characters.

Six Feet Under is not only defined by 'televisual' stylistic self-consciousness, but by an effort to produce intimacy and explore its bounds through the figure of the corpse. I will turn now to an analysis of an episode entitled 'Private Life' (Season 1 episode 12) which occurs much earlier in the series, before David has come out. In this episode David Fisher handles the badly-damaged corpse of a young man beaten to death for being gay. Through his interactions with the corpse David confronts his own feelings about his sexuality and his fears of coming out to his mother.

Like every episode of *Six Feet Under*, this one begins with a death. In this case the opening scene features a scene of tender public affection between two gay men, followed by a brutal beating that ends one of the young men's lives. A fade to white signals the death of the character, as it does in every episode, and

title text spells out the victim's name, Marcus Foster Junior, 1978 - 2001. In strong contrast the scene that follows features almost overwhelming warmth and public intimacy. Laughter and cooing sounds emanate from the small sitting room area of the funeral home where new parents Rico (Freddy Rodriguez), who works for the Fishers as an embalmer, and his wife Vanessa (Christina Machado) proudly show off their baby to Nate Fisher (Peter Krause), David's brother and David's mother, Ruth (Frances Conroy). As David enters the passageway, dressed in a stiff suit and carrying a starched set of dry-cleaned clothes over his shoulder he looks stiff and uncomfortable at the sight of this scene of domestic bliss. Vanessa invites him to 'come and look at Augusto', David politely excuses himself but is ultimately persuaded to step into the parlour. Ruth chooses this moment to tell everyone in the room what 'a gassy baby' Nate was. Rico then asks Nate and David when they are going to 'grow up' and make Ruth a 'grandmammy.' Michael C. Hall produces a performance of stiffness and unease that makes it clear that this question is uncomfortable for David, who responds 'Well certainly not before Mr Perlmutter's got some clothes on.' He then lifts the suit up and swiftly exits the scene.

While Rico's heterosexual family life somewhat intrusively enters into the workplace and the Fisher family home in the form of little baby Augusto in this episode, David's sexuality remains unspoken for most of the episode. It is initially only in his private interaction with Marc Foster's disfigured corpse in which we see an expression of David's feelings about his identity. After a harrowing interview with Marc Foster's parents in which the boy's father is unable to utter the word 'gay' the next scene begins, once again, with an image of little Augusto, representing heterosexual openness in a rather unusual environment. Augusto lies on an embalming table while Rico sings to him and changes his nappy. In a striking parallel, Rico lifts the baby off the table just as David heaves the covered corpse of Marc Foster off a gurney and onto the table. The messages implied here are quite obvious, Rico's sexuality is openly celebrated in the gurgling baby that he shamelessly carries around his work environment, whilst Marc Foster represents David's feelings about his sexuality as a heavy, burdensome corpse which remains covered to disguise its horror.

We watch in close up from David's perspective as he unzips the bag which covers Marc. The face emerging from the plastic covering is red with abrasions, swollen, disfigured by broken bones, bruised and lacerated. 'Jesus' David

comments. Rico chimes in with 'Whoah boy', still carrying his gurgling baby and bouncing him up and down, Rico then addresses the body 'okay Cinderella we're going to have to work overtime to get you ready for the ball because men don't make passes at girls with big gashes.' Rico turns laughingly to David, who with quietly restrained anger turns away from him to pick up a pair of gloves. Rico then looks to his baby saying 'its funny right, Daddy's mister funny man.' Upset by these homophobic jibes, David decides to tell Rico (a much more skilled restorer) that he will do the job instead. Pleased to have the day off Rico exits leaving David alone with the body. As the scene closes, David pulls a picture of the boy with his father from his breast pocket and holds it up before the damaged face. Here an image of 'innocent' family life and wholesome appearances is juxtaposed with the brutality marked on the boy's damaged face as a response to his public display of homosexuality.

In the course of the episode, Ruth tries to give David an opportunity to come out to her about his sexuality but he is still unable to talk to her. Later, in the hours spent alone with Marcus's body, David's fantasies animate the body which comes to life and taunts David about his sexuality, manifesting his shame and vulnerability through the image of wounded flesh. The scene opens with a close up of David's hand plunging a cloth into embalming fluid. We then see a medium long shot of David, seated and leaning over Marc's body. He holds Marc's head in his hand as he dabs the young man's face with the fluid. Giggling monstrously in the left hand corner of the frame we see another Marc, clothed and apparently alive but still baring the horrible disfigurement of the corpse's injuries. 'Ghost' does not seem like an adequate word to describe him because this 'fantasy Marc' is so physically manifest in all of his bodily horror that there is nothing ephemeral about him.

Looking at David and the corpse on the table through the one unswollen eye that can still open, Marc makes fun of his own tragic end. David, thinking about his own personal predicament, tries to ask Marc about why he did not come out to his parents, suggesting about Marc's father 'maybe he could have accepted it?' Marc retorts 'He thinks it's my own fault I'm dead.' David and Marc begin arguing, the exchange outwardly expressing David's inner turmoil about his sexuality. David defends his sexuality while Marc taunts him by speaking ideas from the dominant culture and religion that reflect David's internalized shame. As the exchange continues in a shot-reverse-shot pattern, the shot scale

becomes increasingly close as the camera slowly tracks in on each of the characters' faces as they talk, intensifying the emotion and intimacy of the scene. Finally Marc is shown in medium close-up, once again eyeing David out of his one good eye. He says menacingly 'No matter how nice you fix me up I'm still going to hell and you know it, cos you're going there too.' Shot in close-up with the pale body of the corpse just below him in the foreground of the shot, David flinches, looks down at the body and then abruptly gets up from his seat, pulling a sheet over the disfigured face and retreating to the corner of the room to gather himself. The grotesque body in this scene allows for the externalisation of private emotions. The unnerving presence of the body and the strange intimacy with the corpse that David experiences can be likened to the strangeness of facing hidden parts of the self. By making the part of David of which he is most ashamed manifest in brutalised, broken and monstrous human body, *Six Feet Under* allows viewers to be to see David's private identity both more closely and more clearly. The slow tracking in of the camera taking us ever closer to the fearful viscosity of this body, which in turn speaks of David's own self-loathing.

Tortured as he is by the fantasy Marc throughout the episode, it is ultimately his feelings about Marc that prompt David to speak publicly about his sexuality, first in an open confrontation with Rico, and secondly in conversation with his mother. When David rests the restored Marc in his coffin and adjusts his tie he is still haunted by the ghostly figure but when Rico enters the room and begins abusing the 'homos' upstairs who have arrived at the funeral, David announces that he too is 'a homo.' At this revelation it is Rico who becomes uncomfortable, and says 'Don't talk to me about that' once again, activating a reflection on the boundaries around public and private life. David confronts Rico about his very public familial displays with his baby but Rico still refuses to acknowledge David's sexuality, saying 'where I come from, if men need to do that, they don't talk about it.' While this conversation continues the men stand on either side of the room visibly separated by the body in the casket. Here the body, dressed for its public presentation, speaks of the pain and weight of public openness. Finally, after Marc's body - and the shame, heterosexual hatred and horror it represents for David - is buried, David approaches his mother who he finds sleeping in the small family TV room and tells her that he is gay. This is a tense but moving exchange in which Ruth chides David for not telling her sooner.

In the course of the conversation David tells his mother ‘I don’t think you really know me.’ Because of the intimate access we have been given into David’s private ruminations, we the audience can already feel that we ‘know’ David better than Ruth does. David’s dialogue very self-consciously uses images and themes present in the show thus far as he explains his resistance to talking about his sexuality. He says, for example, ‘its like you’ve decided you should know who I am, like you’re willing to see me the way you look at something horrible like a corpse, because it’s your job, your duty. It revolts you but you make yourself bear it.’ Here the affective responses prompted by the corpse are explicitly compared to how David imagines Ruth response to really ‘knowing him’: that is, becoming intimate with David’s private self. Ruth, of course, rejects this characterisation of what knowing David means: ‘you don’t revolt me, I don’t choose which part of you I love like some sort of chicken!’ Again the metaphor is carnal and embodied. These bodily tropes of exposure come to suggest the awkwardness and the vulnerability involved in an emotional proximity to other people. Despite the open acceptance that David gains in this scene, lying in his darkened bedroom that night David is still haunted by Marc. From a close high angle shot, the camera tracks away from David emphasizing his isolation as he kneels in prayer. The closing lines of the prayer, ‘fill this loneliness with your love’, are uttered just before the credits begin to roll. The episode ends not with a display of style but with a carefully observed emotional moment in which we come to ‘see’ or ‘know’ David in a particularly intimate way understanding that ‘coming out’ does not necessarily assuage his intense longing and loneliness or resolve the contradictions with regard to his religious faith.

There is no doubt that the corpses that populate *Six Feet Under* contribute to the visual ‘look’ of the show, injecting elements of gothic horror and surrealism into the domestic everyday of what is otherwise a family melodrama. In addition, this analysis has shown how the creators are able to ‘sensitively’ and ‘artistically’ weave their themes around characters’ interactions with the bodies in a way that displays the skill of the auteur show creator and marks the programming off as ‘quality’. Marc’s body is self-consciously used to express David’s anguish and to stand at the interface between privacy and openness. References to the significance of the corpse for David infuse the dialogue between characters in a highly self-conscious way. However, the appeal of this show lies beyond a recognition of the aesthetic

sophistication of the series. Ultimately this show uses the viscosity of the corpse to bring viewers emotionally close to the characters onscreen, performing and literally embodying the pleasure and pain of intimacy in a unique and unsettling way. It is misguided to consider the appeal of this show's corpses as part of the show's style without being sensitive to the hidden worlds of emotion that they open up for viewers interested in sustained and rewarding engagement with the characters onscreen.

Conclusion

Caldwell's arguments about televisuality allow him to explore and analyse a vast range of genres and formats in relation to one central idea about television style and market pressure. In a similar analytical strategy I have grouped two very different shows under the general descriptor of 'tele-affectivity' in order to show how contemporary displays of the body confirm Caldwell's arguments about excess and market competition, but also to consider where his theory needs to be adapted to account for the pervasiveness of traditional features of television, intimacy, in particular, and the intensification of some other features such as the proximity and immediacy encouraged by reality formats.

I have shown how *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* cultivates a sense of intensified intimacy by mediating an excessive proximity with the bodies of others and I have argued that contrary to Caldwell, the liveness and the immediacy of reality television, along with its focus on the body, are features essential to the show's branding strategy and appeal to viewers. The intimacy I have described in *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* is more physical and invasive than it is emotional. The process of being situated in a forum of critical viewers, watching people expose their genitalia via remote 3G technology suggests this show is invested in negotiating and exploiting the tensions between public and private selfhood through the body. In both shows there is a somewhat perverse exposure and vulnerability. They grant particularly unusual modes of access to other people. We find this in all *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live*'s anonymous bodies, exposing themselves to our gaze and our scrutiny, and in the naked, passive corpses on *Six Feet Under* which are often vulnerable to the gaze of characters on this show. On *Six Feet Under*, a far more restrained show, bodily proximity is not excessive in the way it is on *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live*, nor

is liveness and immediacy necessarily important to the show's fictional address. But, once again, an extraordinary mode of access to the body (embalming) displayed on this show becomes a means through which issues of public and private selfhood are handled at the site of an interface with the body. Moments of tender and self-reflective contact with bodies in the embalming process, and the surreal animation of the body in these scenes provide the opportunity for an intensification of intimacy between viewers and the characters who privately interact with them allowing us to respond to these characters intimately.

In both programmes the sensual experience of getting too close to the body potentially experienced by some as queasiness facilitates the construction of intimacy, not just as emotional bonding or comfort but as something that can be uncomfortable. In both shows intimacy and domesticity is not necessarily about 'cosiness' but about constantly negotiating, in physical and embodied terms, the relationships between oneself and others, and in very private moments the relationship of the self to the self. Each of these programmes displays a fascination with self-scrutiny in relation to other bodies. We witness this in David's self reflection as he interacts with corpses, and the tendency is also implicit in the discourse of 'bettering yourself' on *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live*. Because the intimacy fostered in both cases it is an uncomfortable experience as the result of invasive transgression of boundaries between public and private realms, this intimacy is uniquely suited to television which also operates across the boundary between public and private. This is television that appeals to an individual placed in a community of viewers (both actual and imagined). Exhibitionist, stylish and excessive though they may be, these texts are tele-affective because they also appeal to the affective and emotional responses of viewers, distinguishing themselves not so much through visual style but through the pleasures of access and its associated and intensified relations of intimacy.

Chapter 3

Exposing the Body: Considering Care, Intimacy and Shame on Plastic Surgery Reality Television

Late on a Saturday night I am slouching next to my teenaged sister on my bed watching an episode of *Dr. 90210* on the E! Entertainment Channel. In this episode (Season 4, Episode 7 'Flat and Flatter') the plastic surgeons offer their services to a young woman who has undergone a botched breast reconstruction after a double mastectomy. My sister, Liv, and I watch as, with evident discomfort, the young woman opens her surgical gowns and presents herself for the doctor's inspection. 'Ew! That's actually quite sad. I would get surgery if I had that' Liv says, earnestly. I squirm a little bit with unease at the patient's brave and candid self revelation. I feel intensely aware of my own body and of my sister's physical proximity to me. We continue looking at the girl's scarred breast tissue and misshapen breasts before a cut to interview material in which the subject tearily relates the story of her mother's breast cancer. This is indeed a moving story and I do not want to turn away from the screen even though I am slightly embarrassed to be so entranced by this show. I wait to see how the surgery will go, fearful of missing even one gory exposure or tragic personal revelation. If it was not my little sister sharing these intimate views of the body with me I might feel more exposed and uncomfortable in my viewing but in this moment the intimate nature of the onscreen images seems to reverberate with and inform an experience of sisterly intimacy. When the first incisions are made in surgery my sister grabs on to my arm and puts her head under the covers, popping up every now and then to catch glimpses of the action and giving my arm the odd squeeze at particularly disgusting moments. My gaze remains steadily on the procedure as skin is sliced, old implants are pushed out of the breast cavity, scar tissue is manipulated and skin is sutured back onto the breastplate. The surgery comes to a close and uplifting instrumental music replaces the tense electronic notes that dominated the score during surgery. As Dr. Rey tells the family that everything went well, my own shoulders slump with relief and almost simultaneously my sister's grasp of my arm weakens as she drifts off to sleep. I wait to see the results of the surgery before drifting off myself.

I choose to open my discussion by recounting this personal experience of a loving, intimate moment emerging from a surprising place - in an engagement with an 'extreme' television show that is widely heralded as tawdry and violent fare - because I think it illustrates how certain kinds of pleasure are not accounted for in most of the writing and critical reception of television shows that parade and foreground the body in explicit ways. Viewers of plastic surgery television have largely been characterised along two extremes, understood either as immoral voyeurs revelling in the personal pain of others (especially in accounts influenced by psychoanalysis) or as passive innocents unable to gain critical distance from the material onscreen. But my own engagement with *Dr. 90210* described above was facilitated by an entirely different set of interests and pleasures that are not necessarily premised on voyeurism or visual mastery and that do not preclude the possibility of critical awareness. Firstly, the highly emotive narrative at the centre of the show engaged an interest that was driven by compassion and empathy, a mode of engagement I describe as 'compassionate anticipation'. Secondly, the show allowed me a particularly intimate access and proximity to the body of another person in a way that is not sanctioned in everyday social life. Finally, the programme facilitated a certain experience of social bonding, the intimacy of which was intensified by the explicit scenes onscreen, the emotive register of the programming and the transgressive, potentially shaming mode of looking that *Dr. 90210* encourages. Taking this experience as a starting point, this chapter will reconsider widely accepted and often patronizing ideas about how women relate to plastic surgery television by considering the role of three affective investments that drive engagement with such programming: care, intimacy and shame. The appeal of these three affects, I will argue, needs to be understood in terms of the domestic nature of television viewing.

Rather than focusing primarily on relations of looking and questions of power (as most studies of this genre do), this chapter takes the excessive viscosity and emotionalism of plastic surgery television as the starting point for an alternative account of the pleasures of extreme reality television, one that takes seriously the feelings of compassion, intimacy and shame encouraged by this mode. In the first part of this chapter I examine the role of a compassion grounded in the responsiveness of the body in viewer engagement with these programmes. By mobilising empathy and a responsiveness experienced in the

body these shows transgress normative prohibitions on looking and in the name of care and compassion plastic surgery television allows for an excessively (and threateningly) intimate mode of looking at the body. In this transgressive space extreme reality television also fosters intimacy based on shared experiences of shame, compassion and vulnerability. The second half of this chapter is devoted to an exploration of how the feelings of shame cultivated by extreme reality television provide an unlikely facilitator for the intimacy and the sense of connectivity long associated with the television medium. I will focus my arguments through a study of the aforementioned American show *Dr. 90210* and a similar British show *Make Me Perfect*.

While women's bodies feature most strongly on this format, there are an increasing amount of male subjects being featured on these programmes too. In addition some of the less formulaic and conventional of these programmes feature transgender bodies. While I intend my arguments in this chapter to be applicable to discussions of bodies across the gender spectrum I focus on women's bodies and women viewers in this chapter because my aim is to intervene in debates about the way that female viewers of this feminised and body-oriented genre have been characterised in popular and critical writing.

It should be noted, at this point, that I do not aim to champion these programmes as particularly progressive or feminist in their aims or themes. Rather I intend to pay more attention to the complex ways in which they engage their viewership. The experience that Liv and I share is very much entrenched within a mutual understanding and acceptance of dominant messages about women's bodies and their need for regulation in accordance with normative standards of femininity. While my engagement is complicated by the fact that I am an academic schooled in feminist theory, I still recognize, enjoy and am somewhat seduced by the pleasures and promises offered by this narrative of transformation.

Sarah Banet-Wieser and Laura Portwood-Stacer emphasize the importance of considering the relations of power in which women are allowed to make choices about viewing and consumption, particularly with regard to plastic surgery television with its emphasis on individual agency and transformation.¹¹² Affect is arguably an important feature of the process by which women remain

¹¹² Sarah Banet-Weiser and Laura Portwood-Stacer, 'I just want to be me again!: Beauty pageants, reality television and post-feminism', in *Feminist Theory* 7 (2006), p. 262.

the subjects of patriarchy despite the emphasis on choice, discernment and empowerment in contemporary cultural life. One might argue that Liv and I watch from within what Angela McRobbie describes as the ‘the whole pink and frilly world of affect and emotion within which the girl herself is permitted to “become,”’ a world defined by an ‘intensity of focus on the body and its surfaces’ and ‘endless rituals of sexual differentiation.’¹¹³ Indeed, as will become obvious in my close analyses, *Dr. 90210* and *Make Me Perfect* offer overt messages that are highly problematic from a feminist perspective and reinforce normative ideas about women’s bodies in particularly affective terms suggesting that happiness and empowerment can only be achieved by conforming to normative standards of beauty and femininity. However, I am cautious about suggesting that an emotional and affective engagement does not allow viewers to maintain a critical awareness. As Kristyn Gorton notes in her discussions of emotion and television audiences, intense emotions need not obliterate a viewer’s capacity for critical reasoning.¹¹⁴ But I concede that enjoyment of the affective and emotional pleasures on offer in these formats relies on a certain acceptance of patriarchal ideas. In exchange for these pleasures I temporarily bracket my critical disposition. Instead of dismissing plastic surgery television outright, however, it is still important to consider the mechanisms by which these shows engage women in order to understand the pervasiveness of their appeal and their imbrication into our domestic lives and our social relations with others. It is also important to consider how these texts might open themselves to be used by viewers in surprising and complex ways. While these shows can be seen as anti-feminist and regressive in their explicit messages, I argue that they can be read on more than one level and I want to challenge the idea that our pleasure in watching them is driven entirely by misogyny, cruelty and a desire for visual mastery over the body. Such assumptions are, however, not surprising considering the format’s intense interest in pain, exposure and the display of the body.

Most television make-over shows follow a similar pattern. Dana Heller notes the centrality of transformation on all television noting that ‘narrative

¹¹³ Angela McRobbie [forthcoming] cited in Sarah Banet-Weiser and Laura Portwood-Stacer ‘I just want to be me again!’, pp. 262 - 263.

¹¹⁴ Kristyn Gorton, *Media Audiences: Television, Meaning and Emotion* p. 77.

investment in the extreme transformation of the subject... is nothing new.’¹¹⁵ But Heller observes that, unlike the narratives of transformation featured in a Dickens novel, for example, ‘today’s televisual make-overs emphasise physical change and material service/acquisition as the paths to genuine expression of one’s inner self and better nature.’¹¹⁶ I would like to extend this idea that the process on display is ultimately about a revelation of the ‘person inside’ to suggest another key difference between plastic surgery makeovers and other narratives of transformation. Traditional as this format is, it introduces an interest in exposure - both of self and of the body - that is quite specific to the extreme end of reality television programming. Its narrative line allows transformation through successive instances of exposure; undressing for the doctor, breaking down for the psychologist, lying unconscious whilst one’s skin is sliced and one’s interior opened up to view, suffering intense pain, depression and discomfort onscreen, unwrapping bandages and finally unveiling oneself in front of an audience. The exposure relies on observing the physical signs of extreme affective states - self-loathing, embarrassment, physical pain and finally confidence and happiness.

Dr 90210 and *Make Me Perfect* are two of many in a spate of programmes which came to our screens in the wake of the success of television’s first plastic surgery reality show *Extreme Makeover*. This ABC show gave participants from the public who hated their appearance the chance to have a full surgical makeover - as long as they were willing to go through the embarrassment and agony of this process on camera for thousands of viewers to watch. *Extreme Makeover* has influenced the structure of most plastic surgery television and there is much evidence of its influence on the two programmes I analyse in this chapter. Each episode of *Extreme Makeover* begins with an introduction to the week’s participants (usually there are two featured in each episode). The participants express, in highly emotional terms, their feelings of ugliness and even disfigurement, often connecting this sense of self-consciousness to difficulties with relationships and the unfulfilled desire to be loved. At this stage we see candid, almost diagrammatic, images of the subject’s body in which areas for improvement are labelled with text outlining where surgery is needed.

¹¹⁵ Dana Heller, ‘Introduction: Reading the Makeover’ in Dana Heller (ed.), *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*, (London: I.B. Taurus 2007), p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

After this introduction the subject is separated from their family for their transformation. The participant then meets a range of experts who will act as guides through the transformation process. The most important amongst these meetings is the initial consultation with the surgeon in which the prospective patient is asked to remove his or her clothes before being scrutinised by this expert. We then watch as the subject prepares emotionally for surgery. Psychological counselling sessions provide excellent opportunities for emotional self-revelation and 'breaking down' moments. Images of actual surgery take up little screen time but occur after much build-up and at a climactic point in the show's narration. After the surgery we watch the suffering of heavily bandaged patients as they recover. Finally, after a wardrobe overhaul and hairstyling, the entire spectacle builds up to the 'reveal' moment at the end. The subject's family and friends gather in a room and (having themselves never seen their transformed appearance) the new, improved person displays their new face and body to those most dear to them.

This formula has proved pervasive (with slight modifications) for a range of spin-off shows. *The Swan* (Fox, 2004), for example, features very much the same format, including consultations, psychological counselling sessions, surgery, a period of painful recovery, the ultimate reveal in front of a mirror and a reunion with loved ones. But it modifies this format by pairing two 'ugly ducklings' off against each other each week in a competition to judge who is the 'most transformed.' The winning contestant goes through to a pageant which takes place at the end of the series. MTV's *I Want a Famous Face* (2004 - 2005), adopts the *Extreme Makeover* formula but transforms people's faces to look like their favourite celebrities.

Dr. 90210 which first aired on the E! Entertainment channel in 2004 adopts the central ingredients of *Extreme Makeover*'s winning formula. Like this show, *Dr. 90210* mixes depictions of surgery with fairytale narratives of transformation. It also features regular occasions of undressing, exposure and emotional excess. But the show alters the formula by focussing less on the patient/participants and more on the everyday activities and trials of plastic surgeons. It is through the central surgeon on this show, Dr. Robert Rey, that we are granted access to the personal stories of patients opting for surgery. Each episode generally handles both surgical narratives of patients' transformation and a personal story about Dr. Rey's life. The emotional themes of each story

are often woven together. While it is peppered with other narrative lines concerning Dr. Rey's personal life, the story of the central patients follow a similar trajectory of transformation found in *Extreme Makeover* except that we access the patients via Dr. Rey. This show is interesting for its use of the doctor figure as a device for facilitating and justifying a privileged intimacy with the show's subjects.

The British show which I will analyse here, *Make Me Perfect*, follows the *Extreme Makeover* formula much more closely. *Make Me Perfect* aired on ITV over an intense 15 day period in 2006. During this time the show drew an audience of twenty million people.¹¹⁷ Like its American counterpart, *Make Me Perfect* claims to offer individuals with low self-esteem who 'hate the way they look' the chance to dramatically change their appearance and, in the process, to discover their 'inner selves'. Over the fifteen-day course of the show, fifteen different women are given total body makeovers onscreen. Each show follows quite a traditional narrative trajectory, charting a process of 'transformation'. But physical change is not enough, we are told; participants are also aided by psychologists who help them transform their 'inner selves', and stylists who help them learn to take care of their appearances and dress with confidence. *Make Me Perfect* allows for greater intimacy and anticipation than *Extreme Makeover* by introducing a diary-cam into which subjects report their daily trials and their fears about surgery, saying things like 'take a good look at me, I'm never going to look this way again' into their own personal camera.

Both *Dr. 90210* and *Make Me Perfect* need to be understood in terms of the particular claims to realism made by the reality television mode. It is partly the constructed sense of realism and their displays of real suffering bodies that make the pleasures of shows in this format so ambivalent, embarrassing and difficult to understand. Both programmes tell us that they are real by drawing on documentary devices like interview set-ups, shaky camera-work and abrupt cutting. These shows sell themselves on the special access they have to certain real activities and events. *Make Me Perfect*'s focus is on ordinary women. Unlike most documentary films, this kind of reality television intervenes drastically in the 'real' lives subject to its gaze. Following similar logic to shows like *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2000 - 2010) and *Survivor UK* (ITV, 2001 -) these

¹¹⁷ Natural Enhancement Publicity 'ITV *Make Me Perfect*,' *Natural Enhancement Website*, accessed at <<http://www.natural-enhancement.co.uk/NewsManagement/Story.aspx?ArticleID=199>> [5/11/09], par. 2.

programmes construct elements of the reality they present, stimulating extremes of emotion through an interventionist attitude to the real world beyond the camera's lens. In *Make Me Perfect* this intervention is enacted on a corporeal level as, through the machinations of the show, the body of each episodes participant is radically transformed. Both through its intervention into the women's lives and through scripting and editing *Make Me Perfect* adapts its reality into a very traditional story form. *Dr. 90210* is less expressly interventionist than most plastic surgery television in the *Extreme Makeover* mould. Instead of introducing us directly to ordinary people who the show will transform, *Dr. 90210* uses the surgeon at the centre of the story to grant viewers access to a private world of real people who undergo extreme surgery. *Dr. 90210* is more aligned with the tradition of 'fly on the wall' or vérité style documentary than *Make Me Perfect*. This difference is expressed in the show's often frenetic camerawork. But the show also has soap opera elements as it follows, in often melodramatic fashion, the life-story of a clear 'hero' who returns each week.

Despite a much heavier emphasis on documentary realism and immediacy, *Dr 90210* was actually conceived in response to a fictional television show about plastic surgeons: F/X's provocative drama *Nip/Tuck*. This series paints its flawed surgeon protagonists as corrupt, dangerous and brutal. According to Dr. Rey, *Dr. 90210* was a chance to set the record straight about the work of plastic surgeons.¹¹⁸ On *Dr. 90210* surgeons are presented as caring and responsible people. Unlike the protagonists at the centre of *Nip/Tuck*, Dr. Rey is not Caucasian and he offers a very different, insider's perspective on Latin American culture in the U.S. *Dr. 90210* also features an ethnically diverse range of surgeons within the show, placing non-white Americans at the centre of plastic surgery practice in the U.S. As I shall argue in my fifth chapter, *Nip/Tuck*, in contrast, figures ethnic others, particularly, Latino characters as threatening outsiders to the industry. While the interest in revising the message of a drama series gives *Dr. 90210* some elements of the fictional soap opera, in the sense that the show aims to reveal the 'truth' about plastic surgeons it is perhaps even

¹¹⁸ Robert Rey, interview, on *BeautyInterviews.com* accessed at <<http://beautyinterviews.com/interviews/dr-robert-rey/>> [8 /2/ 2008].

more heavily devoted to presenting itself as authentic, ‘reality’ fare because it has this revisionist ambition.

This is not to say that viewers are entirely taken in by either of the shows’ claims to authenticity. As Annette Hill notes there is a paradox in most viewer responses to reality television: ‘Viewers of reality programming are attracted to various formats because they feature real people’s stories in an entertaining manner. However, they are also distrustful of the authenticity of various reality formats *precisely because* these real people’s stories are presented in an entertaining manner.’¹¹⁹ Biressi and Nunn note that this very uncertainty with regard to realism allows for a degree of the pleasure involved in engaging with the form. They write: ‘Part of the appeal of watching and monitoring a reality TV show then derives from watching and assessing the moments when the television performance cracks and the “inner person” or “real self” is unveiled.’¹²⁰ Viewers are engaged in a process of slippery negotiation in which ‘tropes of “revelation”, truth-telling and exposure’ become key elements of the pleasure on offer.¹²¹ Birressi and Nunn’s ideas begin to suggest that the realism at play in reality television might be less about documentary authenticity and more about facilitating proximity and presence. For Misha Kavka reality shows produce a constructed sense of ‘unmediation’. This unmediation facilitates the affective appeal of these shows by producing the feeling that the people onscreen are *present for us*.¹²² It is the affective and emotional side to the interest in revelation and exposure which I plan to explore in this chapter. When a person ‘cracks’ onscreen, when their intense pain inhibits their ability to perform, or a trembling body seemingly betrays the true feelings of its nervous, embarrassed owner we get *close* to these people, we make judgements and believe that we can understand how they feel. As I have begun to indicate, plastic surgery television relies on bodies (both onscreen and offscreen) to repeatedly produce an intense version of this emotional and affective relationship.

¹¹⁹ Annette Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 58.

¹²⁰ Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation*. (London: Wallflower, 2005). p. 20.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹²² Misha Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, p. 22.

Given the intense interest in exposing the body evidenced in plastic surgery television it is not surprising that in many accounts viewers have been understood as lascivious, voyeurs seeking ‘cheap thrills’ from the pain and suffering of others. This attitude is expressed in comments by Adam Searle, president of the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS) in his description of *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* as a ‘voyeuristic and pornographic extravaganza’.¹²³ Similarly comments from some feminist thinkers on the misogynistic gaze of plastic surgery television suggest a violent, cruel mode of looking. For example in her feminist critique of plastic surgery television Elizabeth Atwood Gaily notes that there are major points of accord between the sexual violence displayed in pornography and the way in which female bodies are ‘probed, painted, suctioned, carved, with surgical implements, and stuffed with foreign objects’ on surgical television.¹²⁴

On the other hand, writing about plastic surgery television has constructed viewers as the passive receivers of the shows problematic messages about beauty and self worth. In these accounts the viewer entranced by these shows is just as pliable and vulnerable as the patients onscreen. Commenting on *The Swan* (Fox 2004 - 2005), Ciar Byrne of the *Independent* writes: ‘a more successful way to exploit female insecurities has not been invented.’¹²⁵ There is a paradox in the way viewer responses are talked about. Often within one article one may find a characterisation of the viewer as both a violator and as a victim. For example, in the abstract for her article entitled ‘The “Subject” of Plastic Surgery Television’ Carol-Anne Tyler writes:

The genre subjects not just doctors and patients but spectators to a repeated assault on the senses as a body shared between them is cut into bloody bits from which a terrible enjoyment is evidently procured. I consider this enjoyment in the context of a critique of the feminist and queer interpretations of plastic surgery, turning to psychoanalytic theory for a more complicated understanding of the

¹²³ Rebecca Smith, ‘Knives out over TV plastic surgery’, in *The Evening Standard*, accessed at <<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-18193082-knives-out-over-tv-plastic-surgery.do>> [18/03/2005].

¹²⁴ Elizabeth Atwood Gaily ‘Self-Made Women,’ p. 107.

¹²⁵ Ciar Byrne, ‘Unreality TV: The Final Frontier’ in *The Independent*, 2005 accessed at <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/unreality-tv-the-final-frontier-515650.html>> [25/5/09], par. 52.

strange (un)becoming self of the multiple “subject” of plastic surgery and its violent gaze (patient, doctor, and spectator).¹²⁶

In Tyler’s account the viewer is aligned in vulnerability and subjection with the patient and, oddly enough, even the doctor is seen as a victim of a visual assault. In this understanding of plastic surgery television viewers experience ‘terrible enjoyment’ while at the same time subject to ‘repeated assault’.

While Adam Searle compares the pleasure of *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* to pornography his key concern is for the viewers who will feel pressured by the unrealistic representations of surgery onscreen to undertake surgical interventions¹²⁷. Similarly, Gaily’s apt critique of plastic surgery shows transformations of participants into ‘fully docile, disciplined subjects’¹²⁸ and her suggestion that these shows place the burden of patriarchal fantasies of female beauty on women¹²⁹ implies a degree of concern that viewers will uncritically take on these values. There is an uncomfortable tension in these accounts between a critique of a traditionally male-aligned pornographic and violent gaze and concerns about a passive, victimised mode of looking attributed to the female viewers for whom these shows are produced.

This tension exposes this genres problematic association with pornography. While pornography is associated with a misogynistic male gaze, plastic surgery television is made for and primarily (although not exclusively) enjoyed by women. In addition, psychoanalytic theories about visual pleasure are premised on conditions of viewing that are very different from the domestic, social and familial spaces in which we conventionally watch television. In such accounts plastic surgery television is seen as an exceptional form of television and analysis is removed from a consideration of how the shows may be positioned in relation to the mundanity and domesticity of ordinary television, a kind of television in which according to Frances Bonner ‘the similarities between the worlds of the programme and the worlds of the viewer are stressed’.¹³⁰ Little space is given in the above accounts to thoughts about how these shows might

¹²⁶ Carol Ann Tyler ‘The “Subject” of Plastic Surgery Television,’ *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association* Oct 12, 2006 accessed at <http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p114657_index.html> [2009/05/24], par. 3.

¹²⁷ Rebecca Smith, *Knives out over TV plastic surgery*, par. 9 - 10.

¹²⁸ Gaily, *Self-Made Women*, p. 118.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Frances Bonner, *Ordinary Television: Analyzing Popular TV* (London: Sage, 2003) p. 44.

actually be viewed; to the place occupied by television in the home, to practices of shared viewing (as in my example) or to television's mediation between public and private spaces. Instead most commentators analyse television images as if they were film images watched in private. This separation of plastic surgery television from regular or normal viewing is not surprising considering the way in which its explicit images might be seen incompatible with the traditional role of television as occupying the position of 'hearth' in the family home.¹³¹ However, while plastic surgery television may not be wholesome, while it distinguishes itself as worthwhile viewing because of its exceptional viscosity, it is still nonetheless 'ordinary' in the sense that it is designed primarily for viewing in domestic spaces and stresses a fit between onscreen and offscreen environments. The address of these programmes is still very much designed for the production of intimacy and for the traditionally feminised space of the home.

Forms of sadistic or voyeuristic pleasure rely on a certain degree of distance between the onscreen image and the object of the gaze. Plastic surgery television, rather than allowing for this contemplative distance between viewing subject and the woman as the object of the gaze, addresses the viewer directly, drawing one into an uncomfortable closeness with the other and actively encouraging empathy for the suffering and insecurities of people onscreen. The social nature of television viewing complicates psychoanalytic models of spectatorship conceived with the darkness and isolation of the film theatre in mind. Focussing on what she defines as the 'intimate-strangers subgenre'¹³² of reality TV, which includes shows like *The Real World* (MTV 1992 -) and *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2000 -), Misha Kavka notes that the 'intimate relations of viewing and display in reality TV always operate within the socius.' Television viewing does not have the one-to-one relationship to the viewer found in cinema and hence reality television 'fails to be about a singular subject in a dyadic relation to the object-cause of desire.'¹³³ Instead Kavka argues that reality television's intimacy produces feelings of shame which short-circuit the potential for voyeuristic or pornographic enjoyment.¹³⁴ The voyeuristic viewer

¹³¹ Roger Silverstone *Television and Everyday Life*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 30.

¹³² Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, p. 89.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

feels ashamed when the object of the gaze becomes a social subject, producing a ‘counter-recognition.’¹³⁵ While the act of voyeurism relies in part on the thrilling possibility of being caught out and potentially shamed by the ‘looking-back’ of the object of the gaze, reality television does not afford the opportunity for this space of anticipation. Kavka explains that because of its intensive cultivation of intimacy, the ‘intimate strangers genre’ of reality television is ‘already inscribed with this relation of “looking-back.”’¹³⁶ The same can be said for plastic surgery television which also insists upon an intimate mode of engagement. I want to extend these ideas about shame further in my discussion of this genre and explore how shame might be an integral part of the pleasures and rewards of this type of television. For now, it simply bares noting that the shows which I analyse here mobilise a direct address to the viewer and acknowledge the presence of an audience rather than allowing for the distance involved in voyeurism. For example about a third of the way into episode 6 of *Make Me Perfect* Ben Shepherd, the show’s host, turns thoughtfully to the camera and asks ‘‘If you’ve ever felt like you couldn’t face yourself in a mirror or if your appearance is affecting your confidence, then you’ll be able to relate to the fifteen women featured in *Make Me Perfect*...’. Later we see a trembling woman, the subject of the episode, Mary Hassan, earnestly confessing her pre-surgery worries to the camera and asking the viewer to relate to her feelings. Because these shows insist that we care about the people onscreen as we stare at them, they short-circuit the potential for pleasure based in visual mastery and at the same time encourage an intensely intimate mode of looking.

Caring

While most critics have looked beyond the overt messages espoused by plastic surgery television and found cruelty and misogyny to be the operative values motivating engagement with this format it is important not to ignore another (more benign) set of emotions that these shows explicitly and actively encourage. The surgical interventions and moments of exposure and vulnerability that we see on plastic surgery television are almost always motivated and justified by a discourse emphasizing care and compassion. A

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

sense of kinship, an embodied responsiveness to others, and a posture of caring are overtly encouraged by both the images and the dialogue on *Dr. 90210* and *Make Me Perfect*. Each of these programmes reserves a central place for carers and nurturers, especially in the roles played by the medical doctors. In some ways, these expert figures might be seen as enacting a fantasy of care, carrying on the tradition of shows like *Dr. Kildare* (NBC, 1961 - 1966) , *Ben Casey* (ABC, 1961 - 1966) and *Marcus Welby* (ABC, 1969 - 1976) literally 'playing doctors and nurses' for their viewers. *Dr. 90210*, for example, features a particular emphasis on Dr. Rey's bedside manner and apparently genuine concern for the welfare of his patients. It is under the auspices of care and nurturing (whatever bizarre and invasive forms this particular version of care takes on) that the surgeons and specialists on these programmes are granted unique modes of access to the body and its interior. We not only look with the doctors and specialists but are encouraged to share their concern for the patients. To return to the viewing experience that I shared with my sister, Liv and I were indeed curious about seeing the body of the woman featured in that episode, but our viewing was also motivated by an emotional engagement with the patient and the doctor's efforts to help her. We were enjoying a process of empathetic engagement and a relay of affect circulating between the onscreen bodies and our own bodies as we shared the experiences of intense emotionalism and the visceral depictions of bodily suffering.

Engagement with the narratives presented on these shows is sustained not only by the lure of the 'reveal' moment at the end. Plastic surgery reality television also trades on the risk and the emotional journey that surgery entails. They actively and explicitly encourage viewers to worry about the welfare of patients, to empathise with their suffering and to continue watching in a stance of concern. Furthermore, visceral images of bodily suffering encourage an embodied responsiveness to onscreen depictions of pain that is potentially pleasurable in its capacity to foster a sense of connectivity between offscreen viewers and the onscreen world. Here it is difficult to negotiate between embodied feelings of compassion and a certain squeamishness that attends images of blood and gore. But as my discussion has suggested, this squeamishness can be understood in terms of embodied empathy and an experience of physical vulnerability that becomes shared.

Voice-overs and pre-advert break teasers give glimpses of the painful procedures to come and pose suspenseful questions about the participants' capacity to cope with the surgeries ahead. For example, just before an advertisement break on episode two of *Make Me Perfect*, the voice over commentary announces 'But the worst is yet to come for Liz when she returns to the place where her insecurities about her body stood staring her in the face.' This commentary is accompanied by a still photograph of Liz and her daughter. A cut then introduces images of Liz's eyes as a surgeon uses a pen to mark out lines for incision during surgery. The commentator asks 'and how will Liz cope when her extreme surgery becomes a reality?' We see a shot of the doctors working on Liz and then a close-up of Liz's heavily bandaged and swollen face after the procedure. She slurs 'I can't even imagine...' before the cut to advertisements. The voice-over encourages us to worry about Liz's operation while the images of pens marking out the lines for incision in surgery and shots of her swollen face give us a glimpse of the pain the woman is about to endure. Importantly it is a combination of images of forthcoming pain and a caring, concerned voice-over that are used to advertise the next segment of the show and sustain viewer attention. Teasers for *Dr. 90210* similarly ask us to continue watching through the promise of suffering. In a pre-show teaser for episode three of series one an elderly woman announces 'I feel scaly. I'm itchy. I feel like I'm a fish' (season 1, episode 3) as the camera rests steadily on her oozing, scabby face after she has undergone a chemical peel procedure. In another teaser a young woman reveals her surgically-dressed, post-operative bottom to the camera announcing 'I'm in a lot of pain' (teaser for season 1, episode 9). This is, however, a relatively safe kind of anxiety. While these two shows adopt the conventions of liveness we know that they are not actually broadcast live. The event has happened but apparently is unfolding now. The reassuring narrative arrangement promised by these formats, particularly to regular viewers familiar with the genre, promises that nothing truly disastrous will be shown.

Given the interest in pain and suffering it is not surprising that the pleasures of this format have been understood in terms of visual violence. However I think it is important to point out the role played by first-person narration in the depictions of pain we watch on these shows. The address is intentionally intimate, encouraging the sense of a direct person-to-person

exchange. We are not distanced from the pain of these subjects but are instead encouraged to empathize with them and to relate these expressions of anguish to our own experiences of pain. The aim seems to be to involve the audience in the affective excess onscreen, not to encourage a position of distance for sadistic pleasure. Importantly the show's address to viewers encourages us to engage in this way, despite any reservations we may have, *because we care* about what is going to happen to the people onscreen. This attitude of caring is encouraged repeatedly by the show hosts' and experts' expressions of concern for their surgical candidates. This is why I have described this mode of engagement as a 'compassionate anticipation.'

Plastic surgery programmes are not the only reality shows which focus on the transgressive intimacy of caring professionals. For example in *What Not to Wear* (BBC 2, 2001 - 2007) hosts, Trinny and Susanna, take a 'hands on' approach to the bodies of their 'victims', often literally grabbing on to their breasts and insisting that the women on their show come to grips with the shape of their own body when choosing clothes. In *Embarrassing Bodies* (Channel 4, 2007) people who have heretofore been too embarrassed to see a doctor about their ailments are encouraged to reveal themselves to the kind and understanding doctors on the show. Finally in *How to Look Good Naked* (Channel 4, 2006 -) the bottom and breast fondling host, Gok Wan, encourages people who hate their bodies to go through a series of undressing rituals culminating in semi-naked parade down a mall catwalk. While *How to Look Good Naked* and *Dr. 90210* might be very different in their approach to body confidence and normative standards of beauty, both programmes are centrally concerned with a discourse of care which permits an intimacy with and exposure of the subject.

Beyond caring and intimacy, the role of these 'expert' figures in plastic surgery seems linked to a broader fascination with shame and embarrassment derived from the body. It would seem that plastic surgery television pushes this fascination to an extreme degree as it focuses on people so overwhelmed with shame that they resort to radical surgery. But why would the negative experience of shame be so celebrated and repeated throughout this format? The obvious answer to this question is that watching shame in another makes one feel better about oneself. Thinking of the programmes in this way assumes a viewing audience that distances themselves from the people involved in the onscreen drama. This kind of amused and self-distancing viewer certainly exists

but does this account for the kind of viewer that these shows seem to actively address? As I have suggested, the programmes themselves constantly make appeals for an empathetic engagement with the suffering onscreen. The payoff at the final ‘reveal’ moment when the subject is magically transformed relies very much on a narrative trajectory which engages empathy with the participant’s self-consciousness earlier on in the format. In addition, shame is not necessarily something that is only experienced onscreen, it is also built in to the experience of watching for the viewer. There is a tension between the process of caring for someone and the drive to undress, expose, slice up and watch their embarrassment on these shows. The frisson between a pleasurable closeness to the body and a transgression of bodily and social boundaries can be experienced as shame.

Shame

Could there be something more to this interest in shame than an attitude of contempt or the construction of a bounded self-hood? Contrary to the idea that the onscreen interest in embarrassment is about separation, I argue that this focus on shamed subjects invigorates the sense of social exchange and interconnectedness produced on plastic surgery television. Of all the affective states, shame is the feeling most connected, in theoretical writing, with the self in its relation to the social. In Silvan Tomkins’ words ‘[s]hame-humiliation is the negative affect linked with love and identification.’¹³⁷ For Tomkins ‘shame is an experience of the self by the self.’¹³⁸ but this reflexive experience of self is founded in the subject’s desire for mutual affinity with other people. While shame is widely considered an unpleasant emotion, Tomkins makes the crucial observation that shame is rooted in positive feelings like interest, love and desire. Shame results when one’s interest or enjoyment is reduced.¹³⁹ For example, shame is experienced when the wish for friendship is not returned by the object of one’s amiable regard, or in an instance more applicable to watching reality television, when something one enjoys doing is met with social sanction or the disapproval of another person.

¹³⁷ Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery Consciousness*, p. 362.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 359.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 353.

The word shame is more appropriate than the word guilt to the television experience. Never in my intense engagement with any of these shows do I consider *doing* anything about my uneasy feelings. As Kristyn Gorton notes, using a study by David Gauntlett and Annette Hill, few viewers ever do anything to ease their discomfort about watching television ¹⁴⁰. For Elspeth Probyn guilt is a subset of shame but it is something that can be resolved by action. She notes that '[g]uilt is triggered in response to specific acts and can be smoothed away by an act of reparation.'¹⁴¹ Shame on the other hand relates to a certain kind of passivity. We generally watch television with a sense of shame related to a negative sense of a lazy, passive self but we do not undertake moral action to resolve the problem.¹⁴² We also watch things on television which might disturb us, make us feel bad for looking or make us feel sorry for the people onscreen but we can seldom resolve these feelings by action. Elspeth Probyn contends that shame, rather than its more active cousin guilt, is the more socially productive emotion. Shame, in Probyn's thinking, because it cannot be resolved and lingers within the self, is more likely to prompt a reflective awareness of oneself in relation to the other people.¹⁴³

Shame has been distinguished in some definitions from embarrassment in so far as embarrassment relies on public exposure whereas shame can be understood as a more private reflection on oneself.¹⁴⁴ We might consider the public shaming of participants on reality television as embarrassment while the term shame better refers to the private and internalised feelings held by viewers at home. However, I also hesitate to adopt these distinctions too readily because separating shame from embarrassment risks diminishing an understanding of the sense in which shame is always social. That is, even when one's shame is not externally expressed or publically revealed, shame requires a consciousness of one's relationship with others. It is an awareness of the potential for social condemnation that animates shame. In Tomkins and Probyn's discussions of

¹⁴⁰ Gorton, *Media Audiences: Television, Meaning and Emotion*, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ Elspeth Probyn, *Blush: Faces of Shame* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 45.

¹⁴² Gorton, *Media Audiences: Television, Meaning and Emotion*, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Probyn, *Blush* p. 45.

¹⁴⁴ Mary K. Babcock and John Sabini 'On differentiating embarrassment from shame' in *European Journal of Social Psychology* 20.2 (2006): p. 2.

shame it becomes very difficult to distinguish from embarrassment in terms of its social nature.

Probyn begins her discussion of the productive nature of shame by thinking about the many opportunities for shame experienced in the early days of falling in love.¹⁴⁵ In this way she illustrates how social an emotion shame is and how intimately it is bound up in our desires to be respected, admired, loved or desired by other people. For Probyn, shame has value in its capacity to reveal to the self what one most values or yearns for. She writes:

...whatever it is that shames you will be something important to you, an essential part of yourself. What makes shame remarkable is that it reveals with precision our values, hopes and aspirations, beyond the generalities of good manners and cultural norms.¹⁴⁶

Almost always these hopes and values have something to do with a desire for affinity with others. Probyn points out that the 'interest' Tomkins writes about 'involves a desire for connection' She continues: 'At a basic level it has to do with our longing for communication, touch, lines of entanglement and reciprocity.'¹⁴⁷ Shame then can be understood as an emotion that activates our sense of the social:

In shame, the feeling and minding and thinking and social body comes alive. It's in this sense that shame is positive and productive, even or especially when it feels bad. The feelings of shame teach us about our relations to others. Shame makes us feel proximity differently, understood as the body's relation to itself, the self to itself...¹⁴⁸

Probyn's ideas about shame's capacity to teach us about how we relate other people and her emphasis on connection, proximity and touch resonate with Kavka's thinking about what television does for its viewers. For Kavka television's defining feature is its capacity to cultivate intimacy across space and time and across public and private space. According to Kavka television should be understood as a device for fostering 'community and contact.' This sense of

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. ix.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. x.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 34 - 35.

contact ultimately contributes to the individual viewer's self-positioning in interpersonal relationships and social life.¹⁴⁹

Probyn's ideas also help us to understand how programming such as plastic surgery television, which tends to make us 'feel bad', might be just as interested in fostering a sense of connectedness and intimacy as other more traditional television fare. Not only does shame potentially perform the 'connective' function of television intimacy that Kavka ascribes to affect in general, shame, for Probyn, strikes at the heart of the self, allowing for a special kind of reflexive self-evaluation. Shame can alert us to our deepest and often our most taboo, interests, enjoyments and longings. It tells us that we *care* and it teaches us what and who we care about. The arguments about shame also tell us something about how the images of exposure and embarrassment that we watch on extreme reality television might have meaning in relation to the people we care about and the lines of touch, connection and intimacy we share with people in our homes.

In Kavka's own arguments most reality television is invested in cultivating an intense intimacy that has the potential to produce shame responses. I am suggesting that the particular sub-genre of reality television under analysis, plastic surgery television, further intensifies that intimacy, using a discourse of care to incite moments of exposure and to justify an intimate gaze at the bodies of others. In both Tomkins' and Probyn's accounts the body is a central site upon which shame is displayed experienced and performed. With this in mind we might see the undressing, touching and opening of the body on plastic surgery reality television as particularly conducive to the production of shame.

Shame that takes perceived bodily inadequacy as its source, is the primary subject matter of *Make Me Perfect* and *Dr. 90210*. Shame is really their explicit area of interest as all the procedures we see onscreen are, to some extent, undertaken in order that one's body be acceptable to other people - that is, so that the body is suitable for fostering and maintaining pleasing relationships of mutual regard with others. Because the body parts needing 'correction' are the source of shame, their display for the doctors and the cameras can be a particularly painful moment of exposure. Plastic surgery shows, therefore, engage us repeatedly in the process of watching shame in others.

¹⁴⁹ Kavka, *Reality television, affect and intimacy*, p, 9.

Tomkins tells us that shame is often contagious and ‘the visual appearance of shame in the other can evoke shame.’ He compares this experience to the process by which a ‘yawn may produce a yawn.’¹⁵⁰ In addition, the shame of another can evoke shame’s cousin guilt for any immorality in the self that may have caused shame in the other (for example looking when one shouldn’t).¹⁵¹ For Tomkins, ‘the readiness with which one individual responds with shame to the shame of another’ is an integral way in which social order is maintained in most groups.¹⁵² The capacity to respond to and ‘read’ shame on the body is hence essential to our function in daily social life. Part of the shame response a viewer might experience when watching *Dr. 90210* is the result of his or her body responding to the bodily signs of shame onscreen. But even if a person does not appear to be consciously shamed themselves, as for example, when a patient is unconscious on the operating table, the sheer nakedness of another person before our eyes can make us ashamed at our own transgressive looking.

Plastic surgery encourages a mode of looking that exceeds the seemingly ‘natural’ prohibitions on looking at others that seems to determine standard behaviour in public. Tomkins explains how prohibitions on looking are the subject of unspoken taboo because of the intimacy that looking entails. For Tomkins intimacy, whatever else it may occasion, always involves ‘the sharing of affect.’¹⁵³ In a long discussion of mutual looking, Tomkins describes the phenomenon as an experience of the transfer of affect between people:

Only through the eyes can a human being express his excitement at another human being, see that this excitement is contagious and responded to in kind by the other, and see that the other is also aware of the excitement in both of them, and aware of their mutual awareness of their mutual excitement.¹⁵⁴

In all societies Tomkins argues ‘there exist constraints on affect and the mutual communication of affect’¹⁵⁵ that sustain this discomfort about looking.

¹⁵⁰ Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery Consciousness*, p. 402.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 403.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 404.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 373.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 386.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

But behind this potential for shame, Tomkins detects a positive desire. He writes:

Since we think any affect inhibition generates a wish to break through affect control, we must assume that there is a universal wish behind the taboo to look and be looked at simultaneously, to be mutually aware of the expression of any and every kind of tabooed affect, including shame.¹⁵⁶

Gazing into a person's eyes (or examining their naked breasts, bottom or belly) on the television screen is not, of course, the same as a face to face interaction. The communication of affect, in this scenario, is one-sided. I can read the emotions of the person onscreen but they cannot see the excitement, happiness or desire written on my face and in my eyes. As Tomkins writes: '[i]t is an incomplete intimacy when one is looked at, without seeing the other, or when one looks at the other without being looked at'¹⁵⁷ - but it is an intimacy nonetheless. The experience of looking is especially intimate when a stranger allows us to view his or her body at a level of nakedness that would not ordinarily be appropriate in public, or when the camera that guides our looking gives extremely close shots, enabling an almost impossible feeling of proximity to the skin and the bleeding, open flesh of another. In addition, if intimacy is conditioned on the sharing of affect then the emotional breakdowns and suffering which are displayed to encourage our empathy are also facilitators of the kind of intimacy that can inspire shame.

This is especially the case in situations of communal viewing. Looking together at something one ordinarily wouldn't - a naked torso or a body in pain, for example - is also a taboo-breaking form of intimacy. Because shame is so contagious, looking at the body in a group scenario can potentially produce intense feelings of shared affective experience. The engagement with *Dr. 90210* that I described at the beginning of this chapter is an example of this. The intimacy I shared with my sister was intensified by a sense of mutual collusion in a shameful form of watching. At the same time shame and the visceral fleshy images onscreen animated the sensitivity of our bodies to each other. My sister's feeble clutching of my hand was much more affectively charged than it would be in other social situations because both of us were made so vulnerable

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 386.

to each other, in our mutual engagement with transgressively intimate views of the flesh. Because shame is so contagious, sharing a practice like this can produce an intense feeling of shared affective experience amongst a group of viewers colluding together in a shared act of transgression.

Even when one is alone, the act of looking too closely is both transgressive and intimate. Because of television's role as broadcaster and intermediary between public and private spaces, its address, according to Kavka, positions the viewer in relation to a broader social sphere rather than producing the conditions of isolated immersion aligned with the cinema.¹⁵⁸ Kavka maintains that in moments of solitary viewing we are still inscribed in the social because of an awareness of the people who are *not watching*.

In the act of watching, the shame of viewers means they are exposed to others (who are deemed not to be watching) and to themselves; in that exposure, snared by the cusp of the reality TV screen, their feelings are literally caught (out) by TV.¹⁵⁹

The experience of feeling this shame, whether alone or watching in a group, is an experience of sensing oneself as connected to the social world whether or not other people are actually present. In the section of analysis that follows I will be describing an experience of solitary engagement with *Dr. 90210* and *Make Me Perfect* but, as I will show, this experience is still informed by my history of social connectedness with others, my awareness of 'those who are not watching' and the desire to feel connected with the people and bodies onscreen which drives my viewing.

It is worth noting that there are two different types of shame that relate to the experience of viewing plastic surgery television. Firstly, a shame that emerges, as in Kavka's writing, from awareness that the viewing material one is watching is 'trashy' or exploitative and avoided by other viewers on these grounds. A second kind of shame is experienced as the result of empathy with and response to the suffering, vulnerable bodies onscreen. Ultimately these two types of shame are related as these shows are, arguably, judged as culturally low in the first place because they activate feelings of shame about looking at the body.

¹⁵⁸ Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, p. 22.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Shame, Silvan Tomkins, points out, is not only experienced inwardly but is registered in the body through involuntary bodily responses like blushing,¹⁶⁰ a hanging of the head¹⁶¹ and nervous laughter.¹⁶² Shame is felt in our bodies as a physical experience and, crucially, our bodies make manifest the physical signs of shaming. In both Tomkins and Probyn's thinking reflexive recognition is made possible by the embodied dimensions of shame¹⁶³ Probyn proposes the idea that shame makes social exchange into a physically-felt experience. She writes :

The importance of emphasizing shame's innateness to our bodies is that shame is charged with its own physiology and... it charges the social: it makes the social natural in the deepest sense of the word. In other words it is felt - and widely it seems, on the skin, in the blush and covering the face - and it organises particular social relations. Shame makes us realise in sometimes visceral ways what Epstein calls 'the affective dimension to the transmission of cultural values.'¹⁶⁴

If shame has this capacity to force an awareness of interpersonal contact as an embodied experience of self in relation to the other, then it can potentially play a crucial role in television's construction of community and connectedness. By prompting shame responses television asks us to feel in relationship to the social nature of the medium. I will now offer more detailed analysis of the role of care and shame in *Dr. 90210* and *Make Me Perfect*. This analysis will rely not only on close attention to the texts but on my own embodied and situated responses to these programmes.

Dr. 90210: Exposing Maria

In episode ten of *Dr. 90210* entitled 'South Central vs. Beverley Hills,' Dr. Rey performs a pro-bono surgery on a poor Hispanic woman introduced as Maria, who has developed an extra pair of breasts beneath her armpits after childbirth. This episode is of particular interest because it features an intensified emphasis on Dr. Rey's role as benevolent carer but at the same time Maria's unusual

¹⁶⁰ Tomkins, *Image, Affect, Consciousness*, p. 359.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* p. 366.

¹⁶³ Tomkins *Image, Affect, Consciousness*, p. 359.; Probyn, *Blush*, p. 28.

¹⁶⁴ Probyn, *Blush*, p. 34.

condition elicits visual curiosity, inviting an invasive gaze. The condition is also the source of extreme embarrassment for Maria, and potentially for the onlooker. Thus, this morally ambivalent television show combines the three affective features I have argued sustain engagement with this kind of programming; an orientation of care is combined with an intimate gaze and an attendant cultivation of shame. We are first introduced to Maria when Dr. Rey visits a pro-bono clinic in the impoverished neighbourhood of South Central, L.A. where he offers his services. In this episode our gaze at Maria's body is motivated by a constant call to feel for and with Maria, to care about her suffering in the way that Dr. Rey apparently does.

Maria's initial consultation with Dr. Rey provides the first chance at a glimpse of Maria's unusual extra breasts. While Maria stands topless, her third and fourth breasts are actually quite difficult to see as they are largely tucked underneath her armpits. While Dr. Rey talks about the procedure, prodding and measuring Maria's body, the camerawork seemingly strains to get close to the extra breasts, navigating around the body in response to the doctor's movements and circling ever closer to the breast and to Maria's face upon which is registered all of the shame and anxiety of this ordeal. Dr. Rey's constant talk about the medical implications of the procedure evidence a denial of the degree to which Maria is embarrassed in her nakedness and vulnerable to our gaze. But this chatter might also be read as the doctor's attempts to neutralise or distract from the uncomfortable intimacy of the situation.

The camera frequently changes positions seeming to strain for a full view of the partially hidden extraneous breast tissue. From a frontal medium shot, we move to a closer shot from behind Maria's shoulder, foregrounding the armpit under which the breast tissue is hidden. Then, once the examination is over the camera achieves an even closer, frontal shot of Maria's chest as she struggles to put her bra on. The camera then tracks out to reveal the discomfort expressed on Maria's face as she grapples with both her bra straps and her spare breasts. The scene closes without us ever getting a full view of Maria's extra breasts but the examination scene exposes Maria in another way, opening up her naked embarrassment and vulnerability to view. The camerawork and editing seems, not only to increase a sense of closeness to the body, but also place a great deal of emphasis on showing the signs of her embarrassment. In addition the quick haphazard documentary style of the camerawork and editing creates a sense of

‘unmediation.’ We see Maria’s fingers twitching in close-up. The camera lingers on her face as her eyes dart nervously around the room and every now and then she gives the camera a sheepish half-smile. Maria’s facial expressions are particularly strained as she struggles with her bra. Again, this vulnerability encourages a sense compassion for Maria, but one that is complicated by the viewers own complicity in Maria’s exposure. This combination - an emphasis on care and compassion and a transgressively close, invasive gaze at the body - provide ideal conditions for producing feelings of shame. The possibility for shame is inherent in the very experience of getting *too* close to the body of another person, but is intensified by the physical display of shame evidenced here on Maria’s body. While this shame response may have a negative aspect, as the most ‘social’ emotion it also potentially increases a sense of connection between the viewer and the onscreen world. To feel complicit in another’s suffering is to feel connected with them in the same ethical universe. This is certainly explains my own experience of looking at Maria, which is at once marked by discomfort and a pleasurable intimacy.

In the build up to the surgery *Dr 90210* encourages concern about Maria and a stance of nervous suspense. While the surgery is discussed as something with undoubtedly positive, ‘life-changing’ results for Maria, the show places a great deal of emphasis on Maria’s smoking habit and the risks it poses for the surgery. Dr. Rey plays the role of wise and concerned counsellor in these matters and the audience is encouraged to share his concern for Maria. Towards the end of their initial consultation Dr. Rey questions Maria about her smoking, speaking in very basic Spanish he warns her not smoke, ‘No fumar’. Then as we continue to watch Maria in the consultation room, Dr. Rey comments in voice-over ‘ My biggest concern with Maria is that she is a big smoker and if she quits now she could be a good candidate for surgery’. A cut introduces a shot of Dr. Rey in his living room addressing the camera with a severe expression on his face as he continues ‘but if she doesn’t quit, she’s gonna have some problems.’ This serious tone soon gives way to an uplifting discussion of the wonderful change that surgery will potentially bring. We see footage of Maria walking with her son toward the small trailer where they live as Dr. Rey says in voice-over ‘I haven’t even touched her yet and her self-concept is already better. It’s amazing what plastic surgery can do in the right hands.’ Here surgery is represented as a

facilitator of care and compassion. Dr. Rey's caring approach to Maria enhances an anxiety over Maria's welfare which generates suspense.

Later in the episode Maria is prepped for surgery. Lying in her surgical gown on the bed for her interview, Maria says in Spanish 'Today, I can't believe that they are going to perform my operation.' She smiles warmly and continues 'I'm very nervous and very hungry.' Dr Rey finds her in the waiting room and, while marking her body for the surgery, he questions her about her smoking. As he asks 'Okay Maria, I hope you stopped smoking like I asked' Maria looks down evasively. We see a close-up of her fingers twitching revealingly and then another headshot in which she seems much more quiet and subdued than she did earlier. This effect is exacerbated by editing and the lingering camera. The shots are composed in such a way as to suggest that Maria is hiding the fact that she has been smoking. To increase the sense of tension and concern, this scene is followed by an interview with another plastic surgeon, Dr. Robert Kotler, about the risks of smoking before surgery. This cultivation of concern and anxiety for Maria increases in the next scene.

A close up of a syringe full of anaesthetic inaugurates the scene of Maria's surgery. The anaesthetist jokingly comments 'she's a very happy lady' as the effects of the anaesthetic start to make Maria giggly. Maria tells Dr. Rey that she puts herself 'in God's hands' and as she asks him if he knows how to pray her speech becomes slurred and she drifts out of consciousness. The spiritual references at the beginning of the surgery are touching because they reveal Maria's inner life. The religious words also highlight the perception of risk involved in undergoing surgery. At the same time Maria's giddiness is another form of exposure. She is revealed in a moment when her defences and social composure are significantly reduced. An intensified intimacy is again at play and I am allowed to feel as if I am witnessing hidden parts of Maria that come out in her drugged state. As Maria's eyes shut the shot scale switches to a close up and we see her face slop to one side as a member of the surgical team places a caring hand below her cheek to cushion the impact. After a few shots of the team preparing for surgery Dr. Rey explains his concerns about Maria's smoking. As he speaks, however, my attention is drawn away from Dr. Rey by the spectacle of Maria's naked body behind him, arms spread out in a Christ-like pose, the surgical lights beaming onto her, and her generous proportions

glistening and yellow with the disinfectant scrub that Dr. Rey is rubbing on to her.

Here Dr. Rey's speech represents the show's explicit construction of an attitude of care while the sight of Maria's body engages us in the gawping thrills of excessive physical intimacy. While in some of the images I have described the compassionate responsiveness of the carer feeds into a visual intimacy, in this instance, the two impulses are clearly in tension. The show is seemingly doing one thing, that is, informing me about surgery and the dangers of smoking when it is actually offering me another kind of pleasure in allowing me to stare beyond Dr. Rey at the exposed body of a stranger who is entirely unconscious. Just as I am starting to feel uneasy about the images, Dr. Rey starts praying for Maria's safe recovery -- another example of care in practice as Dr. Rey responds sensitively to Maria's pre-surgery request. This discordance between the transgressive and embarrassing exposure of Maria's body and Dr. Rey's kind respect for Maria's wishes leaves me feeling ambivalent about this scenario and a little bit ashamed. Perhaps because of my own Catholic background, the religious overtones of the scene arouse in me feelings of moral responsibility which are complicated by my desire to look at Maria's body in this rare moment of complete exposure. This combination of feelings produces my sense of shame.

The first moments of actual surgery feature a great deal of blue fabric around which the camera seems to dance, taking us, in stages, progressively closer to the surgical incision. Finally I see the four breasts poking out of the small gap in the surgical sheeting with which Maria is now covered. But I do not view these breasts completely. The harsh lighting, blurring of the nipples and awkward camera angle obscures my view. As Dr. Rey inflates the implants he has put into Maria's good breasts through her armpit, he comments 'these are very cute, she's going to look adorable, really'. We then see a shot of the newly-inflated perky breasts. Again the warm, casual discourse of the doctor is at odds with the feeling of being too close to Maria's private parts and at odds with the pain and bodily risk suggested by the images. But at no point does my relationship to these images feel like one of power or control. The shots are far too *affecting* for this to be the case. In addition, anxiety about Maria's welfare also short-circuits the potential for the pleasures of voyeurism or titillation.

The feelings of tension increase dramatically as Dr. Rey goes on to the difficult task of removing Maria's extra breast tissue. With this increased anxiety

the camera also moves closer to the skin. We see Dr. Rey lifting the surgical sheeting to reveal one of the extra breasts and then in a close-up so extreme that the goose-pimples in Maria's flesh are visible, Dr. Rey carves into the skin with his scalpel. At the same time the doctor describes the delicacy of the operation, noting how many vital nerves are in the area into which he has to cut. Here the doctor's care and anxiety about his patient is matched by the visuals so that a caring approach allows for more intense and graphic depictions of the surgery. But even here the visceral nature of the imagery exceeds its purpose in illustrating the procedure, instead cultivating what might be described as an affective assault on the eyes. The editing becomes much quicker as the camera changes perspective in dramatic and jarring ways. For example, in one instance a long shot is replaced by a crash zoom into a close-up the wound. The incision itself is a daunting sight - a gaping opening of the yellowed skin, oozing with red fleshy tissue which wobbles at Dr. Rey's touch. Finally Dr. Rey staples the wound shut. This scene is followed by a further ordeal (which I will not describe here) as Maria struggles to wake up from surgery due to her smoking and Dr. Rey must demonstrate heroism in his efforts to maintain composure as he attempts to wake Maria.

The compassionate responsiveness primed in me by the show's discourse of care has opened out into an experience of empathy and embodied sensitivity. When watching the explicit surgical scenes this empathy exacerbates my queasiness and vulnerability to the excesses of the image. Even though I know Maria is unconscious, my body responds to the pain implied by each incision. On some level I also know that Maria will feel this violence when she awakes. On the other hand, there is a pleasurable aspect to these images because they are so fleshy and close. I derive a particular thrill from the views of Maria's body before it is sliced open. Maria's body is especially fascinating because of her unusual breasts. On the one hand this satisfies a general curiosity about what other people look like naked and, more particularly, about Maria's aberrant body, but on the other hand, Maria's undressing and her undignified exposure on the surgical table grant me access to a person seen in ways not normally condoned in public space. Similarly, Maria's evident and physically manifest anxiety in her consultation allows for an intimate affective engagement with her. Her woozy, babbled speech when slipping out of consciousness also allows for a moment in which the subject/patient is caught outside of her performance

of an identity allowing an intimate engagement with the ‘real’ person. Here the show achieves what Kavka has described as the ‘unmediation’ which aids a pleasurable engagement with reality television. That is, the show’s extreme exposure produces a sense of accident or ‘unique’ moment so that I feel like I have direct access to the person onscreen in a unique way.

But the frequent tension between the caring attitude espoused by the doctor and the excessive exposure undertaken by the camera points to another important element of this show’s affective appeal to viewers. For in the process of looking ‘too closely’ and transgressing normative prohibitions on intimacy, my experience of viewing is marked by feelings of shame. This shame is separate from the potential ‘contagion’ of shame I may have ‘caught’ from Maria’s own onscreen shame. It is a feeling that emerges from an awareness of my own transgressive looking and of my body’s responsiveness to other bodies. This shame is important because it highlights my on own embodied positioning in the home and in relation to the other bodies onscreen as well as the bodies that occupy the space around me. I think it is this capacity that gives surgical footage its particular place in reality television’s intensely social use of affect to bridge the divide between the world of home and the public sphere.

Make Me Perfect: Examining Mary

Like many others in this format, *Make Me Perfect* offers itself as a caring and benevolent exercise in helping women to ‘become their real selves.’ Episode six of the fifteen-part series tells the story of Mary Hassan, a middle-aged mother of two who hates her appearance and feels embarrassed in the company of her two beautiful teenage daughters. The episode follows the same formula as the other fifteen in the series. First the show introduces its aims to help women who hate their appearance. Then the ‘problems’ with Mary’s body are illustrated by a series of split-screens which allow us to view Mary’s face and naked (but for a pair of panties) body. While we are encouraged by the visuals to examine Mary a voice-over explains what procedures she is going to have. *Make Me Perfect* (like *Extreme Makeover*) also includes extensive interviews with her family members. Mary visits a psychotherapist to work through her self-consciousness and then undergoes a consultation and undressing before the show’s resident plastic surgeon. After this we watch another period of psychological counselling and

fearful anticipation of the surgery. The show is also constantly hinting forward toward the prospective surgery that is to come. Before each advertisement break, the show's host lists the ordeals Mary has to go through while a fast-paced montage of gory surgical images and cosmetic dentistry flash across the screen. Finally we watch a particularly harrowing surgery in this episode and then follow Mary's painful recovery. Once she has recovered Mary is given new teeth, a new wardrobe, make-up and hairstyling. She then leaves her home in a limousine en route to a party where all her friends and family await her 'reveal' moment. Before greeting her loved ones, Mary must look at her new self in a mirror for the first time. This moment is presented as a highly emotional breakdown before the mirror. Once amongst her friends Mary is shot looking confident and radiant. The show ends with interview footage in which the family and Mary herself celebrate the positive changes to Mary's life.

From the very beginning, *Make Me Perfect* celebrates its procedures as a process of caring and healing. In the title sequence scenes from the run of the series are super-imposed on computer generated graphics that resemble the shards of a broken mirror. As each surgical procedure is shown within the shard of glass, the pieces of the mirror are put together by expert hands wearing white gloves. Each time one piece joins the next, the glass glints brightly. Finally a naked, athletic blonde woman appears in one of the mirrors. She stretches out her arms and 'breaks free,' once more shattering the piece of mirror into many shards. The high-pitched notes of smashing glass symphonize with an upbeat score as she soars off into a gleaming pastel blue background. The title sequence articulates the myth fuelling most surgical make-over TV in no uncertain terms. It suggests that the transformative procedures offered on this show will free the participants from a negative obsession with their appearance as indicated by the shattered mirror. Once these women become 'whole' through a physical transformation and a (less believable) psychological transformation the mirror will not matter anymore. But what interests me is the presence of those 'healing' gloved hands and the emphasis on plastic surgery as a kind of care. This focus on care continues into the shows introductory moments.

'Hello and welcome to *Make Me Perfect*' announces the host, Ben Shepherd, a good-looking, young, white man, whose reassuring demeanour carefully balances sincerity with calm authority. In an intimate address to the viewer, and in a concerned tone, Shepherd tells us that 'All over the UK

thousands of women feel distraught at their physical appearance' so much so that 'they've opted for several highly invasive cosmetic procedures.' At this point a montage of surgical images begins, giving a momentary glimpse of each different procedure as Shepherd mentions it 'with breast augmentations, brow-lifts, tummy tucks, chin implants, liposuction, eye-bag removal and even jaw-shaving.' In this speech, Shepherd employs a discourse about care and transformation to create both excitement and anxiety about the 'catalogue of operations' that will follow. While the show suggests to viewers that we will be allowed unique glimpses at the bodies of others the emotional emphasis, anchored by the voice-over, is on empathy rather than visual power. In this opening address the show also cultivates suspense and anticipation around the extreme nature of the procedures that will follow. This indexing forward to the next worry or painful procedure is a recurring feature of the show's format.

A key device by which this episode elicits empathy and compassion is Mary's 'diarycam' into which she relates her fear and anticipation of surgery, and later, her experience of post surgical pain in most episodes and as here. It is often before advertisement breaks that the diary cam footage appears as a means of creating suspense and sustaining attention over the break. For example in the last few minutes before a break Mary addresses the camera saying: 'I've just had my consultation with Dr Davies. I know exactly what he's going to do now and it's going to be very near. My hands are sweating. I've got butterflies in my stomach. I actually feel sick. My knees are weak and yeah, I'm worried, extremely worried'. In the next sequence we see images of the forthcoming liposuction: pink fatty fluids move through plastic tubes before our eyes. Another shot shows us Mary selecting veneers for her teeth. In voice-over Ben Shepherd asks 'With nerves already kicking in, how will Mary cope with the next ten weeks of highly invasive surgery and cosmetic dentistry that lies ahead?' Then just before a cut to the advertisements a brief segment from Mary's diary gives us a taste of the trauma to come. Mary has bandages under her eyes and her face is swollen and puffy. She says 'I'm feeling so much pain, it's like you don't know what pain is until you've had liposuction.' Mary's address to camera locates us in a present which we are invited to inhabit, sharing Mary's 'now' and engaging with her physical and emotional distress as she lists the physical symptoms of her anxiety. This anticipatory anxiety creates a sense of immediacy, while the emphasis on physical 'symptoms' of anxiety and

experiences of pain encourage an embodied response to Mary. We are constantly being moved forward to the next 'present'; now anxious anticipation; now operation; now post-operation pain.

Having explained how this show mobilises care and anxiety I would like to return now to an image from the beginning of the episode which is particularly indicative of the way in which shame operates on this programme. After Ben Shepherd's introductory address to viewers in episode sixteen, we see a close-up, straight on an image of Mary's face looking imploringly into the camera. Each episode of *Make Me Perfect* begins with an almost diagrammatic display of the week's participant in their underpants. These images function as the 'before shot' that is repeated throughout the programme and which ultimately serves to be juxtaposed with their made-over image. Shepherd's voice over guides our understanding of this image: 'Today's woman is 47-year-old Mary Hassan who is fed up of looking tired and old.' Next we see the screen split into three sections. On the left is a full body view of Mary standing, slouching, and naked except for a pair of underpants against a clinical white backdrop. In this image the camerawork creates the impression that Mary is slowly spinning so that we may be granted greater visual access to all of her body parts. Two smaller screens on the right provide detailed views of parts of Mary's body that are deemed unsatisfactory. The image, in its diagrammatic nature, suggests scientific veracity and a medical solution to her problems. While medicine, on the one hand suggests power, authority and knowledge, it is also a response to sickness and suffering. The vantage point we are granted on Mary's body, which might otherwise be associated with visual power, is called on here in aid of Mary's desperately low self-esteem and in response to the pitiable image of Mary's body. The image is onscreen only for a few seconds before any opportunity for pleasure in an objectifying gaze at Mary's body is cut short by the next shot. We see a very tightly-framed close up on Mary's face as she speaks into camera. Grabbing her jowls with her hands she announces 'this looks ugh!', In a series of jumpcuts, Mary outlines the things she hates about her body. She touches the skin around her eyes 'this...ugly' Another cut follows as she says 'fat' and then 'I don't like looking in the mirror,' 'tired looking.' While Mary is pointing out and labelling parts of herself she does not like, her comments demand empathy and operate to grant viewers an understanding of her extremely low self-esteem. After this personal revelation of self-loathing we cut back to the 'diagrammatic'

images of Mary. This time we see a close-up of Mary's face against a white background. The camera circles around Mary as Ben Shepherd narrates 'She feels so ugly that every family occasion is a nightmare because she feels like the plainest woman there.' An attitude of compassion allows for this intimate gaze and this disarmingly candid image of a naked middle-aged woman but at the same time there seems to be an invitation to gawp at Mary's sagging body and dejected posture in a way that might contradict an orientation of care. Behind all of this of course is an assumed 'norm' of 'prettiness' and that we accept the reading her body as 'unattractive' and not about its achievements. Mary's body has produced two children, it is healthy and lacking any real disfigurement.

For me the experience of watching these 'before' images was akin to accidentally catching my own mother naked - a shameful feeling but one not wholly unpleasant nor one alien to the home environment in which I view this programme. I fix my attention on the soft, flabby skin of her flat, middle-aged bottom because it reminds me of my mother's and it is from a focus on this patch of flesh that my pang of shame emerges. On the one hand I experience the pleasure of this intimacy which chimes with my own tactile memories of my mother while, on the other hand, my sense of sympathy with Mary (both an embodied and an emotional sympathy) gives me a sense of shame.

I feel ashamed for the indignity of Mary's exposure but I am intrigued by this rare moment of access to this person in all her nakedness and vulnerability. At the same time as I feel implicated in the television camera's objectification of Mary I also enjoy the prospect of sharing in reality television's capacity to undress her and draw close to her. My sense of shame, however, ultimately heightens the feeling I have of being close and sharing a universe with Mary.

This response is conditioned by my cultural background, feelings I have about my mother, culturally learned values about respect, an understanding that a woman's body has a currency that man's doesn't and how I view my own body in relation to feelings about aging. While these are very personal, idiosyncratic responses, my experience highlights how feelings of shame can alert us to highly contextual and personal anxieties related to our own place in social life and our embodied relationships to others. When reality television brings people's private parts into public space it produces this need to position one's personal feelings about bodies and others (often learned in the home) in relation to the public sphere. While this will not be the case for all viewers, the intense bodily

exposures on plastic surgery television, because they mediate the conditions of intimate interpersonal encounter, because they show us shame in others and because they make us reflexively aware of our own bodies, offer many opportunities for shame to remind us of our deepest feelings and fears in the realm of the social. It is these moments that I most enjoy in my engagement with reality TV. This is a pleasure not based on power or mastery but in a sense of social contact and heightened affect.

However, the affective experience of shame in these instances is perhaps not productive in the radical way that Probyn imagines it. Instead of enabling a potentially enlightening mutual exchange of affects it encourages us to feel and internalise as shame accepted social values about the body. For example, my personal experience of shame crystallizes a fairly pervasive taboo on the representation of aging women's bodies that are deemed unattractive in mainstream representation. But it also involves me in the process of 'correcting' Mary's 'unacceptable' body. By watching this show, I become complicit in derailing a completely ordinary and healthy woman's body simply because it is not 'pretty'. While I feel this process to be wrong I also find myself feeling unable to challenge it without inhibiting my own pleasure. It is from this that my shame emerges. While this process may be pleasurably 'social' it is also politically problematic.

Conclusion

In the anecdote I related at the opening of this chapter the sense of shame that I describe is one that is shared (or at least, for me, it felt shared). Our mutual act of complicity with *Dr. 90210*'s invasive, transgressive intimacy opened up a strangely pleasing social space for me and my sister. Through the wrought, physically aroused and morally uncertain viewing position they produce, shows like *Dr. 90210* and *Make Me Perfect* create an atmosphere of vulnerability and responsiveness, potentially opening up intimate social exchanges within the home. In the intimate private space and a shared affective experience of both vulnerability and shameful collusion, viewers can enjoy an experience that is fundamentally and pleasurably social.

I have entered into a discussion about questions of shame and compassion to make the claim that shows like *Dr. 90210* and *Make Me Perfect* encourage

surprisingly complex modes of engagement with their viewers. Arguments about this viewing position as characterised merely by voyeurism or victimhood are reductive. Treating the extreme reality television format as an exception from the norm they fail to recognise the importance of intimacy and of the social nature of television medium in the appeal of these shows. Plastic surgery television does not garner and sustain viewer attention merely through the promise of violence, nor through the lure of fairytale transformations, magically realised. Rather it produces an intensified intimacy and an excess of affect that is particularly suited to the intimate, social and domestic conditions of television viewing. This is a format that thrives on an extreme sense of connectivity. The emphasis on care encourages empathy with the subjects that complicates pleasure derived from visual mastery while, at the same time, caring becomes the justification for a transgressive proximity to the body. The self-exposure and emotional unveiling involved in this proximity has the capacity to produce shame responses in the viewer and indeed seem actively centred on shame. But shame here is not an entirely negative affective state, but rather something that makes television's promise to connect viewers with social worlds beyond our living rooms feel manifest and embodied. While I have established that the viewers of these shows are not necessarily sadists and that their mode of engagement is more complicated and interesting than one might initially think, *Dr. 90210* and *Make Me Perfect* are far from progressive. These shows still celebrate and reinforce very problematic ideas about gender and the regulation of female bodies.

Chapter 4

Bodies of Knowledge: Performative and Experiential Models of Pedagogy in Television Science

The digestive tract of a human being, once unravelled from its housing in the body, can extend up to nine metres (thirty feet). This is one of many curious facts about human anatomy that one might come across in a textbook, school lesson or encyclopaedia and gloss over with a passing nod of interest or surprise. In episode three of Gunther von Hagens' four-part televised autopsy programme *Anatomy for Beginners*, this fact is rendered into a startling physical display engaging the 'gut' sensory responses of viewers. Donning his peculiar black fedora hat, Gunther von Hagens removes the digestive tract of a real human cadaver, 'from tongue to anus', while his colleague, Professor Lee, explains the function of each of its organs to the live studio audience who gawp and gasp at the spectacle. The process involves sawing off sections of bone, pulling the mouth out of the cadaver through the back of the skull, scraping out the oesophagus from the chest cavity, cutting loose and unravelling layers of intestines and turning the stomach inside-out to reveal pieces of undigested food. While the procedure might seem violent by its very nature, von Hagens' handling of the body is surprisingly tender and assured. As Prof. Lee explains the functions and names of organs, von Hagens guides us through the sensual experience of dissection explaining the texture, weight and resistance of certain organs and pieces of flesh and bone. Von Hagens' work on the cadaver is intercut with shots of individual audience members sometimes squirming or gaping but often also looking on in quiet contemplation. Through both cutting and frequent tracking the camera navigates the studio space, often circling von Hagens as he works, or moving between von Hagens, Professor Lee, the cadaver, the 'live' nude model, and the audience in such a way as to emphasise the co-presence of all these bodies in a live forum. In addition, long shots of the studio from above the light riggings emphasise the fact that this unusual event is made possible by televisual technology. Finally at the end of this episode, in a display of showmanship akin to circus performances and magic shows, von Hagens assembles his team in a long line and commands them to lift the 9 metres of carefully removed human organs up above their heads. The spectacular image

of the organs held in the air by around 15 people is met with a round of applause from the studio audience.

I begin with this example because it demonstrates the ways in which television celebrates and distinguishes its particular model of teaching and learning from other forms of educational experience. This episode of *Anatomy for Beginners* illustrates a startling contrast between learning that is mediated through written text and learning through experience, albeit an experience mediated by the audiovisual features of television. But what exactly does von Hagens' dissection process add to our understanding that could not be gained from other sources? Controversially, the process is entertaining both in terms of its visceral excess and because of von Hagens' showmanship. What language reduces to a simple 'fact' about the digestive system has been expanded, in *Anatomy for Beginners*, into its broader phenomenological dimensions, revealing the messy, tactile side of medical knowledge. In addition, von Hagens role in the show, and the theatrical construction of the scene in front of a studio audience celebrates the performative elements of pedagogy, dramatizing an exchange between the skilled body of the expert, the body under-examination and the sensible bodies of the audience.

I take the episode described above to be exemplary of a broad trend evident in a range of shows that are either about or for education. On television, learning is understood as experiential, predicated on a privileged audiovisual encounter with the object of study. Especially when the body is under examination, the audiovisual engagement primes other embodied sensory responses to the object allowing an understanding of things like texture, resistance, weight and temperature, as we see in the episode described above. This chapter is concerned less with assessing television's merits as a means of teaching than it is interested in how television stages an affective engagement with the body to celebrate this particular embodied and performative approach to learning and problems of knowledge.

I focus on these issues, firstly, to extend my arguments about 'tele-affectivity'; that is, in order to show how television's representations of education are characterised by a self-conscious display and performance of television's emotional, sensual and affective capacities. Secondly, while in most critical writing a scientific gaze has generally been aligned with the ocular pleasures and power associated with the gaze, a focus on television's version of

learning as a sensory, emotional and performative exchange between bodies can offer an alternative way of understanding the pleasures of looking at the body through the lens of television science.

In line with these aims, I engage with debates on the tension between sensationalist aspects of the magnified, dissected or exposed body in television science and the scientific impulse to reduce and contain this bodily excess. While many have argued that a simplistic positivist view of science as power and detached observation has pride of place on television,¹⁶⁵ I consider how these shows dramatise the struggles of coming to know something, arguing instead that rather than reducing the body and subjecting it to a positivist science these shows make drama out of the problem of sensory excess in traditional learning by staging an erotic encounter with the otherness of the corpse or the damaged body which is then mediated through the body of the expert/teacher.

While the first part of this chapter handles my theoretical discussion, in the second part I undertake case studies of both fictional and non-fictional representations of learning on television. As my theoretical arguments engage heavily with the large bulk of critical work on *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, I begin my analytical section with a brief analysis of this series. I then widen my argument by examining the forensics-based drama series *Bones* to explore a similar but more sensual and emotional construction of learning from the body in this fictional format.¹⁶⁶ Finally, I return to *Anatomy for Beginners* as an example of a factually-based educational programme to find the same emphasis on experiential embodied learning, and performative pedagogy operating in the forum-like, communal space of Gunther von Hagens' anatomy theatre.

In the realm of visual media, television programming, through its association with public service broadcasting, remains much more aligned with ideals of public service and education than cinema. Particularly in Britain, public service broadcasting has traditionally been determined by the mandate set out

¹⁶⁵ See Carl Gardner and Robert M. Young, 'Science on TV: A Critique' in T. Bennet, S. Boyd Bowman, C. Mercer and J. Woolacott (eds), *Popular Television and Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1981) pp 171 - 193; H. M. Collins, 'Certainty and the Public Understanding of Science: Science on Television' in *Social Studies of Science* 17.4 (1987) pp. 689 - 713.

¹⁶⁶ My choice to discuss both fictional and non-fictional examples in this chapter might run the risk of appearing to confuse an actual pronounced intention to educate (as we find in *Anatomy for Beginners*) with a tendency to use educational material in entertainment (as we see in forensic-based television). But I contend that the conflation of entertainment and education is present in both formats and that both, whatever their explicit aims, articulate and valorise the same model of what constitutes education - a model that celebrates the unique capacities of the medium of television.

by John Reith to ‘inform, educate and entertain.’¹⁶⁷ While television’s commitment to public service programming has arguably waned in the multi-channel age of competition and diminished regulation, television schedules are still brimming with programmes which aim, in one way or another, to provide information, or reveal the world through the lens of specialised knowledge. News and current affairs programming is the most obvious example of television’s prevailing role as information-giver but television also features a range of documentaries, semi-educational magazine shows and education specials which market themselves, at least partially, on the learning experience that they offer viewers. In addition, television drama, far more than film drama, is often thematically concerned with teaching and learning, with police and law shows and especially medical/investigative programming like *Prime Suspect* (1991), *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993 - 2003) *ER*, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, *Bones* and *Grey’s Anatomy*, marketing themselves on the access that they allow viewers into privileged worlds of specialist knowledge and skill. The human body has become a particularly fertile terrain for television drama’s thematic concern with esoteric knowledge and the teaching process. Factual programming is no less invested in the body as a site where television can parade its capacity to convey and explain specialist knowledge. In 1998 the BBC series, *The Human Body* invited viewers into a simulated experience of the body’s interior. In the 2000s a host of factual specials on bodily anomalies and questions of medical science came to our screens. Aside from Gunther von Hagens’ shows *Anatomy for Beginners* and *Autopsy: Life and Death* (Channel 4, 2006), and *Autopsy: Emergency Room* (Channel 4, 2007), recent examples include, *Blood and Guts: A History of Surgery* (BBC 4, 2008) and Channel Four’s series of *Bodyshock Specials* (2006 -) which feature titles such as ‘Megatumour’ and ‘The Girl who Cries Blood’. As the sensationalist appeal of some of these titles suggest, the recent impulse to display and explore the body in television science intensifies a tension between education and entertainment that has long plagued television’s claims on a special educational experience. In many journalistic accounts this category of show has been described as ‘edutainment’ a contraction which suggest a certain unease about how the entertaining features of a programme might compromise its role as ‘proper’ education. For example, in an article on ‘edutainment’ video games Zühal Okan worries about ‘how much “edu” and how

¹⁶⁷ Bonner, *Ordinary Television*, p21.

much “tainment””¹⁶⁸ the software should have. Such worries presume that the ‘colourful and fun’¹⁶⁹ side of learning is a threat to more serious educational aims. Debates around Gunther von Hagens’ ‘form of “edutainment””¹⁷⁰ are similarly characterised by concerns about the tension between educational aims and the visual pleasure and visceral thrills offered by the format.

In an article entitled *Scientist or Showman?* Gunther von Hagens is described by Debashis Singh as ‘a fedora-wearing ring master of circus cadavers’.¹⁷¹ A. Miah is similarly concerned with the infringement of entertainment and morbid spectacle on proper learning when she writes:

People are not watching [von Hagens’ autopsies] out of an interest in engaging with broad philosophical concepts about being human...What they are really attracted by is the spectacle of real bodies displayed inside out.¹⁷²

The combination of entertainment and scientific knowledge on television is also cause for damning responses to the representation of forensic science in fictional drama series. In an article entitled ‘*Forensics has become too sexy and I blame CSI*’ Gillian Bowditch interviews forensic scientist, Professor Sue Black, who blames the *CSI franchise*, *Bones* and *Silent Witness* (BBC 1, 1996 -) for ‘trivialising’ and sensationalising the important work that forensic analysts do.¹⁷³ I highlight these critical objections, not to start engaging in a debate about whether such television is more misleading or distracting than educational. Rather I find that these discussions crystallize some of the paradoxes implicit in television’s association with learning.

If it is to distinguish itself from book learning television needs to emphasise its medium-specific capacities to communicate knowledge in a distinct and privileged way. So it is important for television to celebrate how its audiovisual

¹⁶⁸ Zühal Okan, ‘Edutainment: is learning at risk?’ in *British Journal of Educational Technology* 34.3 (2003): p. 262.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 255.

¹⁷⁰ Helen McDonald, ‘Legal bodies: dissecting murderers at Royal College of Surgeons, London, 1800-1832.’ in *Traffic: an Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Journal*, 2, (2003): p. 25.

¹⁷¹ Debashis Singh ‘Scientist or Showman’ in *The British Medical Journal*, 326 (2003): p.468.

¹⁷² A. Miah, ‘The Public Autopsy: Somewhere between art, education, and entertainment’ in *Journal of Medical Ethics* 30 (2004): p. 578 - 579.

¹⁷³ Gillian Bowditch ‘Forensics has become too sexy and I blame CSI’ in *The Times Online*, (June 14, 2009) accessed at <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article6493032.ece>> [24/05/10]., par 1.

technology allows an apparently more direct, experiential relationship to objects of enquiry. Television, first of all, provides proximity to content that viewers might not ordinarily have access to, bringing fascinating curiosities into the home. Surgeries, autopsies, and simulated ventures into the human interior provide particularly curious ways of looking at the bodies of others. Secondly, the sonic and visual elements of television mean that we can learn, not through the second-hand media of text and speech but by directly seeing and hearing the object of interest. Finally, as I have been asserting throughout this thesis, television's audiovisual capacities open themselves to other embodied engagements with the material onscreen as the sights and sounds onscreen cue other senses, giving clues to the texture of flesh or the force of an impact and bringing us intimately close to the bodies of others. Television's parading of this extra-sensory, visceral and indeed sensational model of learning can be understood as an example of what I have elsewhere defined as 'tele-affectivity'. It is a self-conscious display of the medium's capacities to connect viewers with a privileged sensual experience and with an unusual mode of access to other people's flesh and blood. As I will argue later in this chapter, this process also involves an emotional engagement both with the mediating experts on television and with the bodies of the victims and patients.

However, as the reviews cited above suggest, this impulse to display sensory excess is matched by a discomfort about how the pleasurable and entertaining aspects of the experience might compromise the capacity for learning and the accountability of the knowledge we might gain from this experience. To make claims for privileged ways of mediating scientific knowledge television must at once celebrate *and* deny its excessive and affective features. Therefore, such programmes adopt - especially in the verbal utterances of the shows' experts - features of a rationalist, scientific discourse which seeks to explain the excesses of the body. In addition, the more discomforting, ambiguous aspects of the visual and aural display are often accompanied by an overt discourse of scientific positivism which operates to eliminate or reduce problems of interpretation, further justifying television's claims on scientific fact. As Karen Lury points out in her discussion of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, instead of admitting to the complexity of scientific interpretation of bodies and images, television uses the visual and visceral elements of the image to grant authority to their claims for scientific truth:

The contested nature of visual interpretation is never referred to within the programme - the pictures are always (eventually) legible even to the amateur sleuth watching at home. What is obscured here, in our desire to see the evidence in the image, is that seeing itself always involves interpretation and is never a neutral, objective activity.¹⁷⁴

In a sense, such investments of the image with the power to reveal the 'truth' circumvent the potentially troubling opposition between the mind and body that has characterised science since the Enlightenment. Instead the audiovisual elements that television adds to the experience of learning are celebrated not only as entertaining but as the means by which we may access certain kinds of knowledge. Commenting on the (in)famous 'CSI-shot' of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, Lury describes the process of gaining knowledge on this show as something that 'is more than pictured or explained, but felt, as a visual and aural "rush" .' ¹⁷⁵ As Elke Weismann and Karen Boyle go on to argue, this affective experience becomes the grounds for a sense of certainty that is felt in the body of the viewer.¹⁷⁶

In another article on sound in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, Lury relates *CSI*'s positivist emphasis on scientific truth to a 'post-Enlightenment, but pre-modern' vision of science which does not admit the uncertainty introduced by twentieth century science. ¹⁷⁷ This comparison to Enlightenment science is useful because television as a technology of vision and sound which self-consciously stages and parades its capacities to make visible and educate, seems to echo many of the tensions that emerged in the Enlightenment period when people were coming to terms with a vast new range of technologies of vision. In addition, as Martha Gever notes, the idea of combining modern science with entertainment originated in the Enlightenment.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Lury, *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Education, 2005), p49.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁷⁶ Weismann and Boyle, 'Evidence of Things Unseen', p. 97.

¹⁷⁷ Karen Lury, 'CSI and Sound' in Michael Allen (ed.) *Reading CSI: Crime TV Under the Microscope* (London and New York: IB Taurus, 2007) p. 107.

¹⁷⁸ Martha Gever, 'The Spectacle of Crime Digitized: *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and Social Anatomy' in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 8 (2005): p.450.

Truth, Visibility and the Senses in Enlightenment Science

The Enlightenment period has often been seen as synonymous with the subjection of the carnal, visual and unmanageable features of experience to a rational discourse. According to Barbara Stafford the drive for knowledge and demystification of the Enlightenment was manifested in a compulsion to make the invisible visible in a search for ‘truth.’¹⁷⁹ Stafford explains that it was during the Enlightenment that ‘[t]he phenomenal, the manual, the somatic were irrevocably divided from the noumenal, the theoretical, the intellectual’¹⁸⁰ with the latter being privileged over the former. For Stafford, the drive to make visible and the attendant tension between ‘the phenomenal’ and ‘the intellectual’ evidenced in the eighteenth century Enlightenment thinking still informs our relationship to technology in the present.

The eighteenth century, that second ‘age of discovery,’ might well be termed the ‘era of uncovering’. That germinal period forecast our current information-rich and collaborative computer epoch. It impelled us in the direction of a minimization of distance and the collapse of space.¹⁸¹

These comments indicate how much television, as a broadcasting and information-giving device for connecting spaces and people through a simulated visual sense of contact, fits in with the trajectory Stafford describes. The enlightenment emphasis on technologies of visibility as a site of ‘truth’ can be compared, in contemporary times, to television’s display of what Mary Ann Doane describes as a ‘simulated visibility’.¹⁸² Television, she writes, ‘deals in potentially visible entities’ and is concerned with ‘[t]he epistemological endeavour to bring to the surface, to expose, but only at a second remove -- depicting what is not available to sight.’¹⁸³ *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*’s simulated ventures into the body are obvious examples of this tendency. *Bones* too displays this impulse as the show frequently uses simulated three

¹⁷⁹ Barbara Stafford *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press 1991)., p.xvii -xviii.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.5.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁸² Mary Ann, Doane, ‘Information, Crisis, Catastrophe’ in Patricia Mellencamp (ed.). *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. (London: BFI, 1990), p.227.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

dimensional computer images to create visual profiles of victims from their bones. Similarly, although the view is not necessarily ‘simulated’, the drive for making visible what is hidden is at the heart of *Anatomy for Beginners* central aim of opening up of the body to public view as a means of public education.

Comparing contemporary television with an Enlightenment era positivism as Lury and Gever do, means suggesting that, as in the Enlightenment, scientific procedure reduces the visceral dimensions of the image to mathematic and linguistic systems of ordering and understanding. Lury describes a ‘tension between the power of the image and a power over the image’¹⁸⁴ as a central concern of the show. But she argues that ultimately ‘the real frisson of the image (can we believe our eyes?) is contained within a narrative intent on deciphering the images and thus obliterating its power to produce shock or dismay.’¹⁸⁵ *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, with its very formulaic structure and emphasis on the almost magical powers of technology to uncover truth certainly seems to confirm this idea. But I want to suggest that this is not the case for all television. Almost every episode does indeed move us from a confrontation with the corpse and an abject, disruptive sight to the body as incised, analysed and contained evidence. In *Bones* and *Anatomy for Beginners*, the affective, visceral and emotionally disturbing aspects of the body are far less contained than they are in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*.

Even in her discussion of the ‘*CSI*-shot’, however, Lury considers the possibility that ‘[t]he television image is having it both ways.’ She writes:

...the almost pornographic penetration implies intimacy and subjectivity, while at the same time, the point of view of the camera is apparently ‘objective’ as it follows the inanimate objects into the human body as if it were a scientific or medical exhibit.¹⁸⁶

Lury’s approach is instructive because she recognises television’s capacity to handle both of these impulses at once rather than necessarily privileging one over the other. I want to use this idea as a starting point for thinking about how television images of science might at once hold in tension and maximise both these capacities, that is, both the drive for knowledge and the intimate, visceral aspects of the image. More specifically, I want to discuss how the sustained

¹⁸⁴ Lury, *Interpreting Television*., p.50.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 53 - 54.

tension between these features might itself animate the pleasures of such programming. This chapter will pay attention to the physical and intimate engagements demanded by the *process* of gaining knowledge and understanding the body with the help of an expert scientist.

Stafford notes that there were two tendencies at play in the enlightenment drive to ‘make visible, the invisible or hidden’. While the enlightenment was dominated by a positivist inclination to understand and ‘bring to light’ an unruly natural world via linguistic or mathematical systems, this process of making visible through, dissection, a monitoring and cataloguing of the human body and an increased reliance on visual aids, also involved tackling potentially disruptive sensual experiences of world.¹⁸⁷ She argues that the perceptual and imagistic was subordinated to linguistic systems during the Enlightenment ‘precisely because of its pervasiveness.’¹⁸⁸ Similarly, one might argue that the obsession with truth in forensic television is the result of the shows tele-affective need to provide visual and sensory fascination while at the same time making claims to educative science. Stafford goes on to examine what she describes as ‘an alternative model’, charting ‘the contemporaneous history and impact of a performative, participatory, and prelinguistic tradition of experiencing the world?’¹⁸⁹ She finds this element of Enlightenment history emerging with particular force in the *practical* labours of art and medicine. She writes that in these fields:

Individual execution or handling precluded being exclusively wedded to abstract or general principles. This deeply shared awareness of operating within an empirical field of experience - increasingly dominated by, and subtly attuned to, the evidence of individual sight - was demonstrated through a performative interaction between viewer and viewed. The well-wrought responsible performance in art as well as in medicine was simultaneously an aesthetic and an ethical enterprise. It depended, and might depend once more, upon the craftman’s supreme skill, or upon handling practiced conscientiously.¹⁹⁰

This observation is important because it has clear links with the kind of science commonly practiced on our television screens. Almost all of these shows involve a physical handling of the body or of material evidence. As I have

¹⁸⁷ Stafford, *Body Criticism*, p. xvii-xviii

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

suggested they also reserve central place for expert figures who display the kind of ‘well-wrought responsible performance’ that Stafford describes while also negotiating the tensions between empirical experience and abstract principles.

It is easy to see why many critics have argued that a naïve positivist science ultimately contains, justifies and reduces the excesses of the body on television. This seems the obvious conclusion when examining the narrative organisation of such programming which tends to follow the transformation of a messy or abject body into something we can understand and explain. The cold, controlled and objective characterisation of the scientist persona at the centre of *CSI*, *Bones* and *Anatomy for Beginners* seems to suggest a privileging of a scientific detachment from the body. Gunther von Hagens in his austere black fedora has a strangely unemotional response to the dead flesh in his hands (unless he is getting excited about his scientific interest in the nature of the flesh and organs he handles). Similarly Gil Grissom (William Petersen) evinces a collected, solitary and emotionally controlled persona and in *Bones*, the central heroine, Temperance Brennan (Emily Deschanel), has a first name that connotes moderation and control of the body’s impulses. She is indeed characterised as inhumanly distanced from ordinary responses to the sight of human remains.

And yet each of these figures has an especially intuitive understanding of the body and how it should be touched, examined, explored and, indeed, pulled apart. There also seems to be a certain sensory and physical pleasure taken in this kind of work, and as my brief discussion of von Hagens suggests, a tender kind of tactile skill. It is their very emotional control that allows these figures to display this skill, to get so close to corpses so as to be sensitive to details of smell and texture. Moreover, through their work these figures perform and teach a model of bodily posturing that grants access to the sensory secrets of the corpse. In the relationship established between the expert and the viewer/learner, we can find the celebration of what Stafford describes as a ‘corporeal or physiological form of knowing [that] was grounded in handling, in the frank manipulation of materials, and in the pleasures and discoveries of sight.’¹⁹¹ The performances of these teachers, veering between scientific distancing and phenomenological immersion in the sensual experience of material body, seem to dramatise the central tensions at the heart of television

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 43.

science, holding both the educative and the exhibitionistic elements of this programming in delicate balance.

Stafford argues that the Enlightenment division between the intellect and material experience, that still prevails in contemporary times has left a 'void...in our present system of education.'¹⁹² This idea suggests that, however flawed or reductive television science may be, it seems to dramatise a model of learning that is, in some ways, quite radical and interesting. Each of the programmes that I describe in this chapter present us with models of pedagogical practice that centre around physical interactions with the corpse. In *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* more experienced experts like Grissom teach younger colleagues the skills and techniques required for the practice of forensic science. In *Bones* Temperance Brennan guides and schools junior members of her team in the examination of human bones and, in *Anatomy for Beginners*, Gunther von Hagens conducts his autopsies in the style of a lecture before a live studio audience of learners. These representations of teaching allow a space for the viewer to feel like he or she is learning through the process of viewing. But furthermore, these displays of pedagogical practice celebrate a certain style and mode of teaching - one that capitalizes on the affective advantages provided by the audiovisual capacities of television science.

Performative Pedagogy and Experiential Learning

To recall Stafford's complaint, quoted above, in contemporary education there appear to be two elements lacking. First of all there remains a privileging of verbal or linguistic facts over direct experience in education. Secondly there is an increasing disappearance of the performative role of the teacher in schools and universities. I want to argue that the model of teaching celebrated on contemporary television might actually answer to this lack and provide some of the pleasurable aspects of learning that are missing from linguistically-based or more cerebral models of contemporary education.

The first gap, that is, the lack of experiential learning, is founded, as Stafford suggests, on the opposition between vision or feeling and linguistic, written text based knowledge that was established in the era of Enlightenment

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 6.

science and still largely prevails today. However, the increasing use of visual media in the classroom and the emphasis on direct learning through outings and experiments suggests that modes of experiential learning might be having a resurgence of popularity in school education, at least. However, written text-based learning still seems to be privileged while experiential learning is seen as a supplement to this.

While some technologies of vision might aid this approach to education (like the television in the classroom), new technologies also have the capacity to compromise a direct interface with the object of study. Even in training for professions like medicine where demonstration and practical, physical contact seems a necessity, new technology has significantly altered the learning environment. Kitt Shaffer asserts that currently the field of anatomy is ‘at a crossroads.’¹⁹³ The research focus of medicine has already shifted away from ‘gross anatomy to microscopical and ultrastructural anatomy’¹⁹⁴ Technology appears to be moving the process to further levels of abstraction through the development of technologies for learning dissection without having to confront an actual corpse. Virtual dissection technology will use three-dimensional imaging and ‘haptic technology’¹⁹⁵ to reproduce the dissection experience while eliminating some of the disturbing, foul-smelling and morbid experiential aspects of interfacing with a corpse. While certain experiential aspects of learning will remain part of this experience through virtual touch and vision, key elements of the learning experience may also be lost.

Shaffer points out certain essential learning gains from interfacing with actual corpses. Dealing with real cadavers schools physicians in ‘the wide variation in human structure.’ This is something that she argues ‘is difficult to capture in a textbook or atlas.’ Furthermore, practical dissection and microscopy has the capacity to give students a kind of knowledge that is not undertaken directly but enters consciousness peripherally over time:

In performing dissection and light microscopy, students must spend considerable time searching for objects of interest. They learn subliminally about the surrounding tissues or structures while seeking

¹⁹³ Kitt Shaffer, ‘Teaching Anatomy in a Digital World’ in *New England Journal of Medicine* 351.13 (2004): p.1279.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p.1279.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.1280.

a particular nerve, muscle or cell, thus absorbing in passing the overall organization.¹⁹⁶

Finally, as doctors and surgeons, many anatomy students will have to confront their own emotional responses to death, handling the corpse provides a way of coming to terms with this experience.¹⁹⁷

While television is itself a device of technological mediation, it is, paradoxically, these last two features of experiential learning that television seems to celebrate in its own depiction of how learning happens. If we think of Gunther von Hagens' demonstrations, watching a dissection, while it cannot teach us any extra 'facts', may give us a gradually developing 'subliminal' feeling for the look, touch and structure of the human interior. In addition, within the limitations of the medium, both *Anatomy for Beginners* and forensic television dramas seem to offer viewers a sort of schooling in how to handle the emotional and physical problems of getting close to corpses by staging encounters with the body that are navigated by an expert.

This highlights another aspect of education that is at once threatened by new technology and celebrated by television. The performative role of the teacher has been diminished both by the advent of technologies that allow distance learning and by recent concern and discomfort about the abuse of circulating desires in the classroom. Traditional models of education as an embodied and performative experience are being replaced by what McWilliam and Palmer describe as a very 'cerebral'¹⁹⁸ understanding of education as a 'marriage of minds' in virtual space that defies the challenges, limitations and threats posed by the actual bodies traditionally involved in the teaching experience. McWilliam and Palmer's writing suggests that recent advances in technology have intensified the lack of contact-based, experiential learning that Stafford laments. In addition McWilliam writes that 'in recent years...teachers have been *disembodied* by educational jargon that is increasingly dominated by the mutually informing vocabularies of business and cognitive science as well as the dictates of "learning at a distance."¹⁹⁹ The shift to the disembodied teacher

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., pp.1279 - 1280.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 1280.

¹⁹⁸ Erica McWilliam and Patrick Palmer, 'Teaching Tech(no)bodies: Open Learning and Postgraduate Pedagogy' in *Australian Universities' Review*, 38. 2. (1995): p 32.

¹⁹⁹ Erica McWilliam, 'Touchy Subjects: A Risky Inquiry into Pedagogical Pleasure' in *Educational Research Journal*, 22.3 (1996): p. 312.

has certain advantages in terms of the potential for abuse in learning environment. McWilliam and Palmer note that the ‘move to the virtual campus’ that they describe comes with the advantage of sidestepping the relations of physical desire that have the potential to emerge when real bodies interact in a teaching experience. They write ‘In pedagogical terms, the ‘virtual’ space created by technology is also a virtuous space ...devoid of the bodies that could distract the mind.’²⁰⁰

However, McWilliam and Palmer note that the rise of technology doesn’t mean the end of the involvement of the body (and its desires and pleasures) in teaching and learning. Instead, drawing on the work of Zoë Sofia, they point out that the ‘potentialities and pitfalls’ of this technological ‘shake-up’ of teaching methods:

We need to understand how ‘lived bodies’ are situated productively within and through technological systems, and the capacity of academic teaching bodies to be more malleable and permeable (as well as pleased) at the human/technology interface.²⁰¹

While its uses are arguably still intended more for entertainment than education, the emphasis on the body of the teacher in contemporary television science and the interactions between teacher, viscerally realised bodies onscreen and the responsive bodies of viewers might be an example of one such ‘malleable and permeable’ meeting of bodies at the ‘human/technology’ interface.

While the realm of medical/forensic science television might at first appear a distinctly clinical, rational space, there is a strand of erotic pleasure running through the interactions of the scientist figures on these shows with the physically manifest bodies which they examine and with the narratives of desire these bodies may provoke. It is in these interactions that television science fits in with the broad ‘tele-affective’ impulse to encourage a sense of community and intimacy through relationships set-up through and around the viscerally affective body.

Importantly, the erotics of pedagogy need not be conceived of as a one-way interchange between a single teacher and pupil but rather as dynamic circulation of desire and feeling that has the capacity to make people feel

²⁰⁰ McWilliam and Palmer, *Teaching Tech(no)bodies*, p. 32.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 34.

connected. Steven Ungar also argues for pedagogy as a performative and fundamentally erotic experience. To begin his discussion of the erotics of pedagogy he cites the following quote from Roland Barthes:

The space of the seminar is phalansterc, i.e., in a sense, fictive, novelistic. It is only the space of the circulation of the subtle desires, mobile desires; it is within the artifice of a sociality whose consistency is miraculously extenuated, according to a phrase of Nietzsche's: 'the tangle of amorous relations'²⁰²

As Ungar explains, Barthes use of the term 'phalansterc' refers to the utopian communities dreamed up by Charles Fourier.²⁰³ Barthes theorises about the pedagogical encounter, then, as something about which circulates a sense of ideal community which is held together by 'mobile desires', by Nietzsche's 'tangle of amorous relations', in other words, by erotic relationships between the bodies involved in the teaching experience. Ungar goes on to describe teaching as having a great capacity to create intimacy.²⁰⁴

Ungar's discussion of Barthes mirrors some of the terms that are most central to Misha Kavka's understanding of television as a 'technology of intimacy'²⁰⁵ operating to connect people through a sense of 'imagined community'.²⁰⁶ Not only does a performative, erotic model of teaching fit with television's audiovisual features but it also aligns television's traditional association with education with the televisual drive to establish feelings of contact, intimacy and sociality.

However, there is something quite contradictory about television's celebration of a very physical model of teaching in which the co-presence of teacher and students seems a key element. If, as I have argued, pedagogy can be an erotic, embodied encounter, then the actual embodied presence of the teacher is presumably quite an important part of this dynamic. But television's own role in educating viewers is, inescapably, a *mediated* experience. Onscreen teachers are actually distanced from viewers in time and space. Rather than the

²⁰² Roland Barthes cited in Steven Ungar, 'The Professor of Desire' in *Yale French Studies* 63(1982): p. 81.

²⁰³ Steven Ungar, 'The Professor of Desire' in *Yale French Studies* 63 (1982): 81 - 97., p. 82.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 81.

²⁰⁵ Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, p. 20.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

immediacy of touch and contact emphasised on the programmes television viewers' access to onscreen teachers and objects of interest is mediated through the lens of the camera, broadcast for miles and finally locked behind the glass screen of the television set. Television not only lacks the erotic dimension added by the *actual* physical presence of the teacher, it also does not allow the viewer/learner any way of 'answering back' or actively participating in the construction of knowledge. This capacity to respond and reciprocate as learners is also a crucial feature of the erotics of teaching, as defined by Barthes in terms of 'community' and 'mobile desires.'

Paulo Friere's influential work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* critiques traditional models of teaching in which knowledge is simply seen as transmitted from knowing teacher to a patient receptive learner. For Friere such an approach to learning enforces and reproduces structures of power and oppression. Describing this as a 'banking concept of education', in which education 'becomes an act of depositing',²⁰⁷ Friere proposes that to truly empower and transform learners education must involve dialogue. He calls for 'a pedagogy that must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed.'²⁰⁸ Of course, because of the one-way address of television, knowledge cannot really be constructed in an equal dialogue with viewers. The medium is not able to offer this democratic model of learning unless it relies on certain new technologies which allow for interactivity - this seldom occurs on contemporary science programmes.

But *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, *Bones* and *Anatomy for Beginners*, never admit to these limits on the learning experiences that they offer. Instead, in onscreen portrayals of learning, dialogue, exchange and questioning are often foregrounded. In addition, physical contact and co-presence between teacher and learner is an essential feature of all of these shows as learning is orchestrated around the shared encounter with the body. There seems to be a distinct denial of television's lack of presence in these shows. The mediated pedagogy that television is actually supplying is over-written by staged bodily encounters between individuals and bodies onscreen. Compensating for the lack of presence is an excessive viscosity that makes the pedagogical encounter

²⁰⁷ Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York: Continuum, 2007). p. 72

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

feel more manifest for the viewer/learner through an appeal to one's tactile and embodied responses.

There are two models of pedagogy that appear to be in tension on these television shows. On the one hand there is the onscreen performance of the teaching encounter. The diegetic scenes of teaching celebrate a physical, direct, experiential, erotic and dialogic approach to teaching and learning. On the other hand, however, the relationship between the educational experience and the offscreen viewer is necessarily mediated and one-way. These limits are, however, consistently denied through a celebration of audiovisual excess which appeals to feelings of shared affect to make up for the lack of co-presence between the viewer and the pedagogical scenario. However mediated our interfaces with the bodies on these shows may be, I do not wish to deny that they are able to offer a different kind of experience on the body to that offered by written text. These shows engage our visual and aural faculties in a process of understanding the textures, resistance, smell and volume of the bodies onscreen. I will turn now to a consideration of how onscreen models of pedagogical exchange cultivate eroticism through interactions between the expert scientist and the body.

I use the term erotic, not in its contemporary popular understanding, as a word that refers only to the sexual. Nor do I mean the term to connote a sort of gendered violence that it has sometimes been associated with (although in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* we find a thematic concern with elements of both of these more controversial types of erotic power). Rather, following Erica McWilliams' lead, I return to an earlier pre-modern understanding of the erotic. McWilliams is interested in the corporeal aspect of erotics rather than just in its relationship to sex. To show how a different understanding of the erotic might be empowering for feminist enquiry she turns to literary accounts of the ancient *ars erotica*. These accounts stress 'the importance of women as teachers of the act of pleasing the body' to other women.²⁰⁹ In order to instruct other women to pleasure themselves, these teachers involved their own bodies in a practice of 'postural modelling as erotic learning.' Quoting an account by Peter Cryle, McWilliam explains that learning is achieved ' "by generally rehears[ing], and thereby enact[ing], the teaching and learning of erotic 'attitude' as a set of

²⁰⁹ McWilliams *Touchy Subjects*, p. 306.

venereal positions”’.²¹⁰ What interests me about this approach is the importance of the teacher’s bodily posturing as model to be followed by the learner. And indeed McWilliams argues that in contemporary education we should acknowledge the same relationship between bodies operating in the learning experience. She writes:

Through oral, physical and textual ‘performances’ as teachers , we indicate a range of positions in relation to a ‘body’ of disciplinary knowledge. We model knowing by striking a range of scholastic, and even discipline specific poses, through which the learner is mobilised to desire to learn, to reject the seductive power of ignorance.²¹¹

Of course in the television shows with which I am concerned the ‘ “body” of disciplinary knowledge’ is literalised as an actual body, materialising the desired knowledge that binds teacher and learner, encased in a corporeal housing that demands specialist skills for unlocking its secrets. It is from the teacher’s actual tactile engagement with this object that knowledge is unlocked. In addition the camera’s proximity to the body also allows for a mode of looking which, on the one hand, serves to isolate detail in search of objective truth but, on the other hand, offers a visceral tactile experience of the body. While the sight of the body on television is initially disruptive, I want to argue that the teacher’s work on the body transforms ‘body horror’ into a different but still affective relationship to the body in which disgust is replaced by a tactile and olfactory sensitivity to the body’s details. Horror is replaced by a sensuous pleasure in getting close to and coming to know the textures of flesh and bone.

In making this argument I counter the belief that these scientific ventures into and up-close to bodies are simply an exercise in distanced visual mastery. Rather, I suggest, science on television also involves an embodied yielding to the evocations of a body’s textures and volume. Adding to McWilliams’ definition of the erotic as a performative exchange, I would like to consider connections between the erotic and a tactile sensibility.

Tactility is arguably the sense most aligned with eroticism. Laura U. Marks and Cathryn Vasseleu both argue that the arousal of a tactile way of

²¹⁰ Peter Cryle cited in McWilliams, *Touchy Subjects*, p. 307.

²¹¹ McWilliams, *Touchy Subjects*, p. 309.

seeing can be the grounds for an erotic exchange.²¹² Both theorists align the erotic with a troubling of the boundaries between bodies and things. For Marks because '[t]ouch is a sense located on the surface of the skin' and one involving the whole body,²¹³ when certain filmic and video images encourage what she calls a 'haptic' mode of looking they construct 'a bodily relationship between the viewer and the video image'.²¹⁴ From this idea she argues that cinema which involves our tactile senses can construct 'a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image'.²¹⁵ Such an encounter is erotic because of its capacity to 'fray' the boundaries of the self²¹⁶ and allow for a certain immersion in the sensory encounter with otherness.

In contrast to this mode of perception, Marks identifies what she calls optical visibility. This type of seeing can be aligned to the objective position demanded by a scientific gaze: 'The ideal relationship between viewer and optical image tends to be one of mastery, in which the viewer isolates and comprehends the object of vision.'²¹⁷ This might suggest that the scientific, investigative gaze that is definitely at work on scientific-based television programmes could compromise any potential for the tactility of the images to be erotic. However, Marks notes that 'The difference between haptic and optical visibility is a matter of degree.'²¹⁸ Both haptic and optical tendencies are generally present at the same time in one image.²¹⁹ We can see a tension between haptic and optical ways of seeing in Karen Lury's description of the 'CSI-shot' as 'having it both ways' by incorporating a visceral tactile intimacy with a drive for scientific knowledge.

Vasseleu too theorises about the erotic potential of tactility in vision. She writes that '[t]he indeterminacy of the body in touch is the basis of an erotically constituted threshold of immersion in the visual.'²²⁰ Her writing also operates on

²¹² Laura U. Marks 'Video Haptics and Erotics' and Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and touch in Irigaray, Levinas, and Merleau Ponty*, (London: Routledge, 1998.), p.12.

²¹³ Marks, 'Video Haptics and Erotics', p. 332.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 332.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p.338.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 341.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p.332.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Vasseleu., *Textures of Light*. p. 12

a distinction between an objective, masterful mode of vision and a tactile vision which precipitates an embodied sense of immersion and contact with the image.²²¹

In its sensible indeterminacy as both feeling subject and object being affected tactile perception is defined as a loss of objectivity in relation to the infinitude of vision's scope. The distance and space for reflection and insight that comes with vision through the mediation of light is lost as the sense of sight passes to the sense of touch.'²²²

Vasseleu's words are sensitive to the possibility of *movement* between optical and haptic perception that can characterise a persons' engagement with the visual field as 'sight passes to the sense of touch'.²²³ The bodily visuals that we now frequently encounter through our television screen provide the opportunity for both ways of seeing, allowing both for the pleasures of scientific certainty and for an experiential, erotic encounter with tactile, sticky and strange surfaces of unknown bodies. But Vasseleu is also suggesting a loss of focus or insight in this move from sight to touch. This potential loss needs to be guarded against on forensic science television through an emphasis on the regulation of the tactile interfaces between the body of the scientist and the cadaver.

When the sensational onscreen body is an erotic territory through which viewers stand to be lost to immersion in sensual experience, the teacher figure plays a key role as guide. Just as the teachers of *ars erotica*, used their bodily posturing both to grant access to the pleasures of the body and to regulate their excesses, so too does the touch of expert guide our sensory perceptions of television so that all the bodies (teacher, corpse, viewer) are locked into an intimate exchange. While the bodies might be 'gross' and 'oozy', the pleasures of this experience derive from the sense of tactile and erotic relationship between the onscreen and offscreen bodies involved in the experience of teaching and learning as well as from the teacher's capacity to channel our responses from disgust, and abhorrence to tactile pleasure and scientific

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

wonder. In foregrounding and celebrating pedagogical exchanges television celebrates its capacity to present these embodied pleasures.

But is not just a question of education that pre-occupies these shows. Rather the learning encounters presented on forensic television engage viewers in a fundamental problem for science and the pursuit of knowledge in general. They dramatise the tension between a drive for rationality and the material ‘mess’ of experience that affects our senses. These shows, particularly the drama series, figure education in terms of a particular rationality: that of the detective who learns through his senses. Learning is figured as a narrative which proceeds from detailed and sensitive engagement with the raw material of experience and moves toward the imposition of order. This journey, however, can be very much like the narrative trajectory of the classic film noir, in which the detective’s pursuit of truth often guides him deeper into the labyrinthine underworld that he explores. While some shows, such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* regularly restore order through a sensory engagement with the body, on other shows such as *Bones* the trajectory toward the rational containment of affect is more difficult and marked by the disruptiveness of the affective body. I turn now to the analysis of some examples of teaching scenarios on television.

***CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*: Learning to Love Grissom**

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation is perhaps the most famous and successful example of a fictional television show in which the exposure of distressed and mortified human bodies forms the primary focus of the drama. While it has forerunners in *Prime Suspect* (ITV 1991 - 2006), *Silent Witness* (BBC 1, 1996 -) and *The X-Files*, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and its string of franchises, *CSI: Miami* (CBS, 2002 -) and *CSI: NY* (CBS, 2004 -) have been responsible for a significant increase in popular interest in forensic science. This phenomenon has been termed the ‘CSI-effect’ in writing that has attributed a change in jury members’ responses to forensic evidence.²²⁴ The series creator, Anthony E. Zuicker, explicitly encourages the show to be read as more than mere entertainment: ‘We’re educating America and the world for that matter in crime

²²⁴ N.J. Schweitzer and Michael S. Saks, ‘The CSI Effect: Popular Fiction about Forensic Science Affects the Public’s Expectations about Real Forensic Science’ in *Jurimetrics*, 47 (2007): p. 357.

solving.²²⁵ Karen Lury has noted the ways in which the ‘CSI-shot’ is influenced both by the science fiction film, *The Fantastic Voyage* (Fleischer, 1966), and endoscopic public science displays, thus further serving to associate *CSI* with educational media even as it thrills and entertains.²²⁶ In addition to the show’s self-alignment with scientific education *CSI* celebrates the power of science to establish truth. The combination of this visual and visceral excess with a positivist scientific rationalism has led theorists to link the mode of looking on these shows with the pleasures of visual mastery and pornography.

Just as in my last chapter on plastic surgery television found pornography being used as a pervasive term for explaining and sometimes denouncing the pleasures of looking at the body in this format, the model of pornography appears to be a primary way in which the pleasures of *CSI*’s visuals are understood. This is particularly the case with regard to writing on the show’s famous and recurring visual device, the ‘CSI-shot’, in which the camera snap-zooms into provocative and explicit computer generated images (CGI) of the body’s interior ostensibly in order to illustrate and explain the science of what has happened to the deceased. What is interesting for Lury about this tendency is the way in which the experiential and affective nature of the image is used as a form of ‘evidence’ for the scientific claims of the show. She argues that the ‘CSI-shot’ is “stylistically pornographic”²²⁷ regardless of its content because of its penetrative nature and the truth-baring role of its fleshy revelations.²²⁸

Elke Weissmann and Karen Boyle pursue this idea further. They note that, like pornography, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* is aimed at arousing a physical response through a display of the body. This embodied response confirms the authenticity of the experience of truth as it is felt in the body. Like the pornographic money shot, then, the ‘CSI-shots’ operate as ‘bodily confessions’²²⁹ of truth. Following Sue Turnbull,²³⁰ I am wary of the negative connotations implied by the term ‘pornographic’. As an explanation of pleasure from visual

²²⁵ Anthony E. Zuicker, DVD commentary to *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation 1:1 - 1:12*, (Momentum Pictures, 2004).

²²⁶ Lury, *Interpreting Television*, p. 53.

²²⁷ Ibid., p.56.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Weissmann and Boyle, ‘Evidence of Things Unseen’. p. 93.

²³⁰ Sue Turnbull ‘The Hook and the Look: CSI and the Aesthetics of the Television Crime Series’ in Michael Allen (ed.), *Reading CSI: Crime TV Under the Microscope* (London and New York: IB Taurus, 2007) p. 31.

power the term invokes Laura Mulvey's work on the gaze in which the masterful gaze is understood as implicitly male.²³¹ While the view, espoused by the show, that truth can be derived unproblematically from an engagement with bodily evidence is flawed and simplistic, this drive for knowledge through experiential engagement with the body is not necessarily politically problematic in the way that most pornography's gendered gaze at the objectified female body is. Linda Williams' writing critiques most pornography for a phallogentric gaze which seeks visual and visceral evidence of pleasure on the body of the woman but Williams also explores alternative convergences of bodies and ways of looking in the pornographic experience.²³² Extending an homogenising model of pornography to modes of looking at the body in other genres implies a general suspicion of the visual and of sensory responses as the grounds of any form of learning at all. John Ellis notes a 'combination of vagueness and moralism'²³³ in the definition of the word. The danger of this, Ellis notes, is that any kind of 'sexual representation that achieves a certain level of explicitness' can be termed pornographic.²³⁴ In the case of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* the term is applied to images that are indeed explicit but not strictly sexual in content. The moral discomfort that attends pornography made with the aim of arousal, is extended here to suggest a dismissal of any kind of explicit display of the body.

Beyond these objections, I take issue with the idea that the potential for a sense of visual power is the only element that makes this kind of television fascinating and enjoyable. It is my aim to set out some alternate ideas about what is pleasurable about engaging with the learning process as it is staged through the body on *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. Comparisons to pornography do identify a certain intimacy and eroticism operating within the image. However, I would like to discuss these pleasures without necessarily linking them to gendered visual power. Weissmann and Boyle argue that *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* adopts a scientific address 'to provide the viewer with an alibi'²³⁵ for looking at the corpse. Viewers look with the crime scene investigators,

²³¹ Laura Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Visual and Other Pleasures*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, [1975]1989), p. 14 - 26.

²³² Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p.279

²³³ Ellis 'Photography/Pornography/Art/Pornography' p.81.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Weissmann and Boyle, 'Evidence of Things Unseen', p. 90.

through a lens of scientific professionalism. I would like to suggest that actually the pleasure is not entirely implicit in perceiving the body as an object but derives from the experience of 'looking with' and engaging with sensual features of the body through a relationship with the scientist.

It is significant that the first '*CSI*-shot' is initiated in a pedagogical exchange. The contrast between detached, but attentive, observation and an out-of-control response to 'gross' material evidence is powerfully articulated in the series pilot through the interaction between Gil Grissom and the new *CSI* recruit Holly Gribbs (Chandra West). In the distinction between Gribbs and Grissom, *CSI* celebrates a kind of experiential knowledge and physical toughness that cannot be learned from books. In addition Gribbs' relationship with Grissom develops through an encounter with grotesque organic objects, and finally through the corpse. The body mediates a shift in the relationship from Gribbs' initial disgust to a sense of attachment and trust in her teacher.

In this, the pilot episode, identification with the wide-eyed new initiate is encouraged as a way of gently introducing new viewers (who, the producers seem to assume might be equally delicate and queasy) to the curious pieces of bodily evidence and the festering corpses which will become the hallmarks of *CSI*'s grisly aesthetic. We soon learn, however, that Gribbs' squeamish approach will not grant us access to the fascinating bodies at the centre of the show's aesthetic. Grissom's advice and instruction of Gribbs suggests to the viewer another way of posturing themselves in relation to the gore onscreen. Gribbs is to meet an early death at the end of the first episode when she is shot by a criminal who returns to a crime scene while she is at work. Her death is not directly connected to her sensitive nature, but there is a suggestion here that *CSI* work requires a certain unique kind of toughness and control of one's bodily responses without which the CSIs simply will not survive.

We are first introduced to Holly Gribbs, and to her squeamish tendencies, as she enters Grissom's office. The camera tracks her movements from behind the shelves featuring Grissom's well-ordered collection of jarred curiosities at which Gribbs stares with much bewilderment and distaste. The jars are the first sign of Grissom's character. For him, it seems, the scientific order and containment suggested by the jars allows for a certain kind of pleasurable fascination with weird and wonderful physical organisms. The camerawork in this

scene draws on horror movie aesthetics, suggesting the danger that Gribbs is being watched by an unseen being. As Lury has pointed out, Grissom's bizarre office draws on associations with intellectual movie serial killers like Hannibal Lecter.²³⁶ These associations are strengthened by the star persona of William Petersen, who starred as an FBI agent in the first Hannibal Lecter film, *Manhunter* (Mann, 1986). This scene suggests a note of danger in being overcome by disgust. So caught up is Gribbs in this grotesque sights of Grissom's office that she is taken by surprise when Grissom greets her. She visibly jumps back at his 'hello.' The sense of danger in this situation is diffused by Grissom's frank, friendly presence and the humour of the exchange that follows. As they introduce themselves Gribbs sarcastically, and with a wince on her face, says 'Nice office'. Grissom responds good-naturedly as if the comment was a genuine compliment, refusing to acknowledge Gribbs' disgust. Grissom is often made likeable through a use of the humour that derives from his unpredictable responses to things which tend to upset most people. While Grissom feigns ignorance of Gribbs' distaste for his office it becomes clear as the scene continues that Grissom intends to test Gribbs' resilience to disquieting visceral experiences. Immediately after they have been introduced, Grissom asks Gribbs to give him a pint of her blood. We learn later in the episode, when Grissom uses the blood for an experiment, that this was not 'customary for all new hires' as Grissom assures Gribbs at this point in the episode.

When Grissom runs through some general information with Gribbs she retorts 'I just got out of the Academy. I already know this' at which Grissom gives her a knowing smile. Gribbs's foolhardy confidence in her knowledge sets up a distinction between book learning and learning from actual experience 'in the field'. This is one of many instances in which *CSI* celebrates direct experience in a denial of the 'mediated' nature of the show's own brand of learning. Shortly after this exchange Gribbs weakness and vulnerability is highlighted again as she starts to feel light-headed from loss of blood. Grissom nonchalantly offers Gribbs a jar of insects as a remedy for her giddiness and, once more, Gribbs' nose wrinkles up in distaste and she asks with disbelief 'is there a grasshopper in here?' At which point Grissom merrily pops one of the insects into his mouth.

²³⁶ Lury, *Interpreting Television*, p. 47.

Gibbs' delicate sensibilities are most tested when she witnesses her first autopsy. Significantly, it is also in this scene that she begins developing an emotional connection with Grissom who she initially finds revolting and weird. The autopsy scene is introduced in a brief long-shot showing Gil Grissom, Holly Gibbs and Dr. Leever, the pathologist, organised around a steel table which holds a covered corpse. Before the viewer has time to be oriented in the space, Dr Leever pulls the plastic shroud off the corpse in one quick sweep of the arm. A cut to Holly Gibbs's face in close-up reveals her discomfort. She reels back at the smell and covers her mouth with a surgical mask. The ever-observant Grissom, noting her response comments 'You've gotta breathe through your ears Gibbs.'

As the series progresses, it will become common for characters to regularly make verbal remarks on the smell of bodies on *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. This is necessitated by the fact that television cannot directly communicate smells but I think the verbal comments on smell also encourage viewers to rely on characters as sensory guides through experience of the body.²³⁷ This scene from the pilot is one of many instances in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, in which a sensitivity to smell by an uninitiated lay person is juxtaposed to the sensory control evidenced by a CSI. Grissom's odd instruction to 'smell through your ears', furthermore, suggests a willing confusion of hearing with smell as a strategy for controlling the body and creates the impression of a supreme and almost supernatural mastery of the body that is required for forensic work.

Dr Leever asks 'First dead body ma'am?' She nods. It is of course also the viewer's first dead body, at least on this show, and Gibbs is a useful tool for making this potentially unpleasant introduction. Gibbs' nervous anticipation suggests that viewers too should 'gird their loins' for a particularly distressing sight. Gibbs responds to Dr Leever by saying that she is fine and, as she looks down at the corpse, the viewer is also granted a clear view of the body from the lower torso up. The corpse is revealed in a static medium shot. It is bluish and emits a slight ghostly glow under the strong lighting of the room. Darkened veins show through the pale skin and the tissue on the face is limp and distorted by lumps. The man's mouth hangs in a grimace. Gibbs feigns bravery, commenting

²³⁷ An interest in sensory responses carries into the show's merchandising. The *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* board game is called *CSI Senses* and requires players to construct clues by smelling and touching items of evidence that are included in the game.

‘To tell you the truth he looks fake’. From the expression on his face it seems this comment disturbs Grissom whose trained scientific eye knows just how real this body is. In *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* understanding the ‘realness’ of the corpse is connected to interfacing with all its sensual properties. Gribbs does not seem prepared to do this.

As Dr Leever announces that the death was indeed a homicide, Grissom takes the opportunity to explain to Gribbs how they reached this conclusion. Importantly he does so through a physical gesture. Grissom says: ‘You see if the victim had extended his arms like...here, give me your hands I’ll show you...’ He reaches out to Gribbs across the table. Looking nervously back, Gribbs extends her hands. From Gribbs’ face we see a cut to a close-up of the gloved hands meeting over the surgical table. Grissom pulls Gribbs’ hands so that they appear to be mimicking the hold on a gun. He continues: ‘and pushed the trigger with his thumbs like so...’. We see a shot of the two pairs of hands as Grissom pushes Gribbs’ thumbs down. This gesture precipitates the very first ‘*CSI*-shot’. So it is a tactile moment of contact between teacher and student that initiates the plunge into the affective space of the body. As Marks or Vasseleu might suggest, this evocation of tactile senses could be seen as priming a shift from objective distance to subjective, intimate proximity.

The sound of actual gunfire accompanies this gesture supplementing the initial shocking thrust that launches the viewer into the shot of the body. The camera snap-zooms and spirals into the wound cavity, as if following the path of Grissom’s imaginary bullet. Appearing to dissolve flesh, the camera enters the wound itself, taking the viewer very fast into the unfamiliar and the disorienting, slimy, pink recesses of the victim’s body. Sound is very important to the affect of this experience. As the camera appears to penetrate the wound, a second jarring sound gives the aural effect of a bullet wedging itself into flesh. As this second impact of the bullet registers on the soundtrack the camera pulls the viewer out of the body as quickly as it was entered and popping out of the wound as if the camera itself had left the hole. While these powerful sounds and images play out, Grissom’s explanation connects the images to a more scientific context, even as the sound effects and visuals themselves do little to explain the nature of the murder. As much as it may be difficult to say what exactly we learn from this imagery, this experiential thrust into the body is celebrated as essential to Gribbs’ learning experience. The scene is set up much more as a

form of initiation for Grissom than as an exercise in active crime-solving or deduction. She is simply asked to observe, and observing means having to contain and control her bodily responses to the sight of the corpse. The ‘*CSI*-shot’, transforms the body into a dynamic demonstrative tool, whose sensual properties we may grasp (and enjoy) as a way toward understanding. The shooting gesture shared between Grissom and Gribbs’ hands, constructs a strange conflation of both power and passivity - suggesting penetrative force whilst also precipitating Gribbs’ subjection to affective visceral images. While on the one hand signaling power, the gesturing is also a sign of a kind of mimetic sympathy with the hands of another person. Understanding of the crime is gained by physically mimicking the imagined movement of the gunman’s hands. What we have in this sequence is something more than a masterful gaze, the pleasures of which are derived from gaining truth from the body.

It is difficult to tell from whose perspective the ‘*CSI*-shot’ originates. The immediate response might be to suggest that it is intended to be objective; a vision of science divorced from any one character’s subjective position, or we could see it as television celebrating its own privileged, omniscient point of view. However, the affective register of the sounds and images signal a very subjective response. I would like to suggest that the ‘*CSI*-shot’ in this instance, is an intersubjective device, it is precipitated by mutual bodily contact, in the interests of demonstrating a theory. Both Grissom’s intellectual understanding of the event and Gribbs’s shock seem to be conveyed in this image at one and the same time. As Grissom explains his ideas, Gribbs, Grissom, Leever and the viewers at home all seem to share this sensory immersion in the imagined impact on the body. The revolting body is placed at the centre of a relationship between Grissom and Gribbs (and to a lesser extent Leever). Its affective excess binds these figures in the exchange of sensory experience, as Grissom helps Gribbs to control her feelings. This scene also seems to instruct the viewer in the proper way of engaging with and enjoying a scientific exploration of the body.

In this scene the power to explain is situated with the male Grissom, while Gribbs’ is constituted as a body to be affected. This gender dynamic is clearly problematic but the pleasure to be extracted from the scene lies partially in the tender relationship of knowledge sharing between these two characters rather than in Grissom’s power over Gribbs. The ‘*CSI*-shot’ is certainly not always

implicated in such an extreme gendered division of knowledge and power as it is in this scene. It is shared between Sarah Sidle (Jorja Fox) and Catherine Willows (Marg Helenberger) as they work together to visualise the operations of a bomb (Season 1, episode 13 Boom) and in many instances between Grissom and the coroner. Significantly, though the ‘*CSI-shot*’ seems to occur consistently when characters are working together and one is explaining an idea to the other, it generally signals intersubjectivity in the shared engagement with science.

Once Grissom and Dr Leever have finished their demonstration through the spectacular imagery of the ‘*CSI-shot*’ the viewer is returned to standard dramatic space. But before Gibbs, or the viewer, have a moment to catch their breath Dr Leever announces his intention to begin the autopsy. In a shot of the body from Gibbs’ perspective, similar to her first vision of the corpse, Dr Leever begins making his incision. Following this we are shown a close-up of Gibbs, scrunching her nose in distaste. Then another close-up shows us Grissom watching her reaction. The magnified scraping and squelching sounds of the autopsy are laid over these headshots increasing the evocation of physical discomfort. Gibbs eventually has to leave the room saying ‘I’m sorry sir, I can’t take the smell’ as she hurriedly exits. A long-shot displays the two men watching her put her glasses down (forfeiting her ability to see and examine) and run out of the room. Once Gibbs has left, Dr Leever turns to Grissom and comments ‘She is cute’. Grissom raises a disapproving eyebrow at Dr. Leever but says nothing. In the moment of her greatest loss of control, Gibbs is described by a word that both infantilises and sexualises her.

Holly Gibbs’ exit from the room does not signal the end of her troubles. Once she has left the side of her guide and teacher, Grissom, Gibbs gets locked into a cold-storage room full of corpses. The sequence can be seen as a play on the horror genre. This is evident in the suspenseful parallel cutting and tropes of confinement which, along with the presence of the corpse, mimic horror film motifs. Gibbs’ is ultimately set free from the room by Grissom whose presence instantly brings levity and calm to the scene. He hugs her to calm her down and then diffuses her panic with humour when he turns to the cold storage room and shouts at the corpses ‘You Assholes’, which forces, from Gibbs, a small nervous laugh.

The lesson of this sequence is that book learning is not enough to prepare a person for work as a CSI. Rather, direct, first-hand experience is necessary in

order for one to gain the bodily and mental control required for the CSI's very practical interfaces with bodily evidence. Through its content and style *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* celebrates the particular advantages of television as a device for audiovisual, experiential education whilst denying the mediated nature of the experience. Furthermore the learning exchange between Grissom and Gribbs as we view the first 'CSI-shot' tells us something about an undertheorised aspect of this image. The 'CSI-shot' tends to visualise (and add audible detail to) conversations between characters suggesting a shared understanding of what has happened to the body. The viewer is let in on this and is able to gain an experiential guide to the physical processes that the CSI's interaction with the corpse unveils. The experience is always mediated by a scientist and, rather than thinking of this as necessarily an exercise of power, it is helpful to consider the role of the 'CSI-shot' in setting up a pleasing relationship to the expert scientist who mediates our titillating encounter with the flesh. Holly Gribbs is, of course, unable to do this, but long after Gribbs has left the series the viewer continues to be part of the experiential learning scenarios that the show constructs and celebrates. Gribbs' disgust is both a tool by which viewers are encouraged to imagine the sick-making smell of a corpse and a warning about the need to control the body if one is to engage with this sort of material.

The gender politics in this scene are quite evidently problematic. Bodily self-control, scientific knowledge and access to a certain privileged way of looking are the preserve of the men in the room²³⁸. Because Grissom is the most revered scientist on the show, he is represented as the most in control and as the one with the most authority. However it does bear noting that Gribbs' weakness does have its contrast in 'tough' female characters like Sarah Sidle or Catherine Willows. The teaching and knowledge-sharing scenarios on *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* can offer a reverse of the gendered divide of knowledge evidenced in this scene. For example in season 1, episode 14, 'To Have and to Hold' Grissom, who is no expert in identifying bones tries to reconstruct a skeleton. Catherine Willows, recognising the limits of the capabilities of the

²³⁸ Features such as the gendered relations of power and looking along with Grissom's association with horror and mystery found here are, arguably, far more intensified in this Pilot episode than we find in the run of the series. In subsequent episodes Grissom becomes more familiar and hence less mysterious. At the same time the 'strong' female characters, Sarah Sidle and Catherine Willows, become more developed and central to the drama and investigative work on the show.

teams' knowledge, calls in an expert in bone identification, Teri Miller (Pamela Gidley) who also happens to be an old romantic interest of Grissom's. Miller and Grissom share intimate moments as they stand over the bones and Miller corrects Grissom on mistakes he has made in ordering them. While not wishing to discount or 'iron out' the gender issues that arise from *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, I want to point out the importance of a general erotic tendency related to learning and to suggest that while *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* might have problematic constructions of gender, the visualisations of science are themselves not 'guilty' of gendered violence but are rather tools for a shared experiential encounter with the body through science.

This privileging of the male scientist is not pervasive on all forensic television, as we shall see in our discussion of *Bones*. The foregrounding of experiential and performative learning, however, seems to be a consistent trend that becomes even more important where a woman is at the heart of the drama. *Bones*, with its female lead, features what might be described as a more 'feminine' approach to the body. While Temperance Brennan remains controlled and scientific in her professional approach, the show itself privileges the role not only of sensory engagement but of emotional intelligence and a certain kind of spiritualism, when properly directed, in solving crimes.

***Bones*: 'Put[ting] Your Heart in a Box'**

Bones, like *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, is a forensic television drama that features formulaic weekly episodes in which an initially puzzling and disruptive body is scrutinized, handled, managed and studied in such a way as to ultimately provide scientific 'truth' that grants justice to the victim of a murderer. The Fox television show is adapted from the novels of the highly respected forensic anthropologist, Kathy Reichs. Through its association with Reichs, *Bones* celebrates its special capacity to educate viewers and its privileged access to specialist knowledge. Reichs even works as a producer on the show and advises the writers in order to 'keep the science honest.'²³⁹

At the centre of the show is Temperance Brennan, a famous forensic anthropologist who is modelled on some aspects of Reich's career; like Reichs,

²³⁹ Neil Wilkes 'Kathy Reichs (Producer *Bones*)' on *Digital Spy*, 2008, accessed at <<http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/tv/interviews/a130647/kathy-reichs-producer-bones.html>> [28/01/2009], par. 4.

she is both an excellent scientist and a best-selling novelist. The show's marketing material seems to emphasise its central scientist figure's relationship to the body over an interest in dramatic visualisations of science (even though the show certainly features these elements). The Fox website for *Bones* describes the series as 'a darkly amusing procedural with humor, heart and character, inspired by real-life forensic anthropologist Kathy Reichs.'²⁴⁰ The outline of the series continues by celebrating the brilliant Brennan's 'uncanny ability to read clues left behind in victims bodies'²⁴¹ and her 'drive for truth.'²⁴² This suggests that part of the show's fascination is with Reich's own real experience and with the kind of *character* who is able to interact with the bodies of the dead. In addition we are told it is a show 'with heart' about a brilliant scientist and teacher. *Bones* provides an instructive example of how television combines a scientific interest in bodily gore with an emotional intimacy that is driven by the practical labours of an expert teacher.

On *Bones*, Brennan's cataloguing and measurement of human bones is often undertaken in a quest to restore the human identity to a set of remains. While *Bones* still evidences a very distinct quest for 'truth', and like *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, does not question the scientific positivism that drives its conclusions, the idea of truth is not understood so much in terms of power and knowledge but is valued for its human benefit to the families of victims and the memory of the victims themselves. In order for the scientists to conduct this work they must be able to exhibit extra-ordinary control over their emotions. The remains are always represented as unsettling testaments to suffering and death. Brennan's experience in situations of war and genocide has schooled her in an extraordinary bodily and emotional composure and she offers her own posturing and focus on scientific procedure as an example to help the less-experienced colleagues to enable them to get close to the remains and unlock their secrets.

Like the analysts of *CSI: Crime Scene investigation*, Brennan is characterised as emotionally inept and cold. This distinction from other people is highlighted through her interaction with her FBI Agent partner, Special Agent

²⁴⁰ Fox Website Show Information for *Bones*, <www.fox.com/bones/showinfo/> [28/01/2009], Subheading text.

²⁴¹ Ibid., par.1

²⁴² Ibid., par.2

Seely Booth (David Boreanaz). He describes Brennan and her team as ‘squints’ whose narrow scientific focus blocks them off from normal human interaction. Yet, however controlled and composed Brennan might appear, the show derives much of its appeal from the intense emotions beneath the surface of her professional scientific persona, and from her tender, almost shamanic interactions with the bodies of the dead. There is a suggestion of spiritualism in Brennan’s engagements with the body on this show. In addition, despite the emphasis on visual technologies, scientific method and technical skill in Brennan’s teaching, the disruptive body in *Bones* is never entirely contained for her students but rather used to fuel the show’s emotional drama. The process of learning on *Bones* maximises the capacities of television by celebrating experiential learning that can be gained under the guidance of an expert. Furthermore, the intimacy of television is fully exploited in these exchanges as the gaining of knowledge is represented as an emotional and intimate process.

I turn now to an episode (‘The Boy in the Bush’ season 1 episode 4) in which Brennan and her team examine the remains of a very small child and Brennan must advise and coach her associates in the emotional and bodily control required to get close to this body and solve the mystery of the boy’s death. This episode involves partially linked A and B storylines. The main story thread is focussed on solving the mystery of a young boy’s murder while a secondary narrative concerns forensic artist Angela Montenegro (Michaela Conlin) and her crisis of faith in the value of her work and her desire to quit the team at the Jeffersonian Institute [the fictional government-funded research institute where the series is set]. Angela’s career crisis is prompted by the disturbing nature of the child murder handled by the team in the A story. It is up to Temperance Brennan, in this episode, to help the team solve the distressing murder and to give counsel to members of her team who have become distressed by the upsetting nature of the bodies that come through the institute.

In the episodes teaser, before the credit sequence begins, Booth, Brennan and Zach Addy (Eric Millegan), a trainee lab assistant, trawl through an open field behind a mall searching for a body that was allegedly discovered in the field, near the site where rebellious suburban teenagers had been having a party. Zach wears a thermal-vision suit to search for the warmth of the decaying body. This is the first instance in this episode where we see the celebration of special visual technology that grants the scientists sensory access to things

invisible to the human eye. In this case, Zach's goggles literally visualise temperature. Like *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and similar programmes, *Bones* celebrates the power of special technological visual aids to make visible the invisible and to bring evidence to light and in service of law and order. However, these visual devices also unveil unnerving horrors of the body.

As Zach walks through the field in his thermal vision suit we hear dogs howling and Zach says 'I'm picking something up'. We see a shot from his perspective showing the heat patterns on the grassy ground as he moves his gaze across the area. Then recognising this heat as the sign of decomposing flesh, Zach removes his helmet and gasps 'Oh my God'. The corpse is, thus, first made manifest to the eye as a pattern of heat. This might be seen as abstracting from the horror of the image but the process of decomposition and the idea that this causes heat, suggested by the visible red patterns, is also unnerving. It is an example of the way scientific imaging devices can uncover rather than contain horrors of the flesh as Zach's thermal vision soon gives way to a full encounter with the body.

The team of investigators move forward through the grass and, following Zach's instruction, shine a torch into a patch of ground. A cut introduces a close-up of tall grass which Zach pushes aside gravely instructing Booth, 'aim it over here.' We then see a low angle medium long shot of the three figures looking through the gap in the grass. Booth lifts his flashlight and after this suspenseful build-up we finally have an abrupt cut to a close-up of a very tiny boy's decomposing remains. This cut to this potentially shocking sight is punctuated by a loud drumbeat which echoes on eerily after the cut. The fast swivelling motion of Booth's torch before it rests on the body adds further drama to the visual shock of the image. The content of the image is itself provocative. Through the mess of twigs and decaying flesh the small, delicate bones of a child are visible. Their snapped ends and bloodied state show clear signs of violence even to the untrained eye. This image is followed by several jump-cuts accompanied by loud percussive sounds, a flash of light and another loud gong sound which introduce a jump cut to a closer shot of the little head with maggots crawling over the surface. The camera tracks along with the unsteady movement over the little skeleton until a reverse medium shot shows us Zach, Booth and Brennan, all with looks of shock and dismay on their faces. As a teaser for the upcoming episode this segment sets up the small body as a site of mystery, but the intrigue also

gains significance from the emotions often attached to small children. While not every viewer will find this sight disturbing in the same way, the responses of onscreen characters seem an attempt to anchor and direct our affective responses in particular ways. Significantly, the last shot before the credit sequence begins is a reaction shot which generates intrigue not only for the anticipated exploration of the body, but in regard to questions of how the team is going to deal with their shock and dismay at this sight. A scientific drive for truth is combined in *Bones* with human sympathy. Contrary to the argument that television science contains and neutralises the threat of its images, I will show how in this episode of *Bones*, looking at the body remains distressing to characters within diegesis throughout the episode, no matter what scientific processes or visual technologies they subject it to.

Once the body has been removed to the Jeffersonian institute it continues to be disruptive. After the theme tune finishes the episode proper begins with a shot of the remains now cleared from grass, maggots and dirt and laid out on light table for inspection. While the body has been arranged in a more orderly way on the clean, clinical table and removed from the ground, the size and state of the remains is made more disturbingly visible by their clear arrangement on the light table. Large parts of the body are still covered with decomposing skin, while bones protrude from the openings in the tissue. The skull has the hollowed out eyes of a skeleton but pieces of hair remain on the scalp potentially reminding one of the living flesh that once covered the little face.

We hear Temperance Brennan's voice, the tone of which is calm and scientific in startling contrast to the sentiment and empathy demanded by the image of the small remains. Brennan says: 'Before proceeding with maceration any general observations?' The camera tracks upon the short length of the little body as she speaks. The vision of these remains is met with silence from Brennan's colleagues. 'Zach?' Brennan asks. We see her standing with a notebook and pen in hand. The camera then pans up to a fidgeting and anxious Zach who, with some effort, musters the strength to speak: 'Epithelial fusion puts the age at approximately six to ten years, though the stature suggests younger.' As Zach speaks a cut introduces the forensic artist Angela as she puts her hand to her face in dismay. Angela is in the foreground of the shot while behind her a widescreen television screen projects an image of the child's

damaged and decomposing head. This framing allows us to register Angela's dismay in relation to the excessive, visceral aspects of the sight she is witnessing. As much as technologies of imaging and vision are on display in this show, *Bones* also uses these visual devices to dramatise the disruptive and affective potential of the image.

'I concur' says Brennan as we turn to a shot of Brennan and Zach. 'Cause of death?' she continues, unperturbed. Zach hesitates and says with evident strain 'blunt trauma to the chest'. Noting Angela's dismay Brennan walks toward her and the camera tracks her movement so that both women are framed on either side of the television-screen image of the boy's head. 'Are you okay?', she asks.

'He's so small, that's all, go on with your work, I'm okay' Angela replies.

This appearance of this particular corpse in the laboratory precipitates Angela's crisis of faith in the value of her job that is to form a narrative strand throughout the episode. In this particular scene we find a contrast set up between Brennan's cold, even callous, tone of scientific professionalism and Zach and Angela's obvious dismay. While she is concerned for Angela, Brennan refuses to let Zach shy away from facing the body. At first Brennan's approach seems, perhaps, too uncaring. It is as if she simply cannot understand the emotions of her colleagues. As the episode progresses, however, Brennan reveals that her contained behaviour is a strategy that allows her to get close to the details of the body.

Later in the episode we witness a pivotal teaching exchange between Brennan and Zach who are characterized as the show's two most 'squint'-like, and comically emotionally inept characters. Both take language very literally and rely on abstract reasoning and academic research to understand the emotions and behaviours of other people. This insensitivity is the source of a great deal of the show's humour. And yet in this episode, even Zach has trouble overcoming his emotions when trying to examine the small body and Brennan must coach him in strategies for emotional control. In the process the viewer, too is schooled by Brennan's example which allows for a fascinating way of looking at the body.

In an establishing shot very similar to the shot I described in *CSI's* Pilot episode, we see Brennan in long shot behind a set of jars containing strange

animal embryos and other curiosities as she walks into the room where Zach is working. Like *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* the show seems to be upholding a drive for engaging with visual curiosities once they are contained and managed in a certain way. But the revolting nature of the beings in the jar also tell us that, however much we catalogue and contain the grotesqueries of the flesh, they still have a certain affective power that can be both a source of repulsion and of intellectual fascination.

Emerging from behind the jars Brennan addresses Zach who stands working over a barrel at the corner of the room with his back turned to Brennan and the examination table where the tiny remains are laid out. She asks 'You about to clean the bones?' to which he replies 'Yes I'm warming up the boiler now.' He lingers at the window still not turning around to face her. The long-shot adds emphasis to just how small the bones are in relation to other objects in the room. The wide shot scale also focuses our attention on the relationship between Brennan, Zach and the remains as it is articulated by their body language and the placing of figures in the frame. Zach appears to be straining to get as far away from the remains as possible and in the process he is distant from his teacher, unwilling to share his feelings about the work he has to undertake.

We then see a sudden cut from long-shot into a close up on Brennan's face as she realises he is upset. 'Something wrong?' Brennan asks. Zach, framed in medium long-shot, with dark blinds behind him, looks at the body, and walking slightly closer to it and to Brennan, he admits: 'These are the smallest remains I've ever worked on'. In the reverse shot, Brennan is shot once again in close up, framed against a much brighter clinical white backdrop. The differences in shot scale, composition and colour maintain the sense of emotional distance between the Zach and Brennan. She replies in a way that suggests a refusal to acknowledge the emotional point Zach is trying to make 'That is a valid observation, Zach, but it's not helpful to the investigation.' Zach looks back at her and in a clipped, hurt tone replies 'Sorry Dr. Brennan' before turning back to his work. A cut back to long shot again emphasises the space between the figures. While Zach is turned away from the body, Brennan faces it straight on. The body, lying in the centre of the room divides the space between teacher and pupil. From this we have another cut to a close-up of Brennan who

announces, still in very direct and abrupt speech ‘ I was at Waco ...Branch Davidian compound’.

In the reverse shot we see Zach, looking disinterested in what Brennan is saying. The medium long-shot still suggests his emotional distance from her. Zach then walks past her with a tray of equipment. We see her in an even more intimate close-up as she continues to explain her experience ‘... I helped identify children who had been killed in the fire, seventeen of them’. Zach, now framed in a slightly closer shot, looks up at Brennan with interest and moves closer ‘So, you’re saying, I will get used to it?’ he asks and Brennan retorts ‘ No, I’m saying you’ll never get used to it’. She then reverts back to ‘squint’ reasoning in order to explain why: ‘We’re primates, it’s coded into our DNA to protect our young, even from each other’. Zach, now shot in close-up suggesting a more intimate engagement with Brennan, asks if this means he is ‘always going to feel terrible’. Brennan responds with some advice that epitomises her approach to the body.

‘What helps me is to pull back emotionally, just put your heart in a box’. At this Zach returns to his highly rational self and says ‘I am not good with metaphors, Dr. Brennan’. Her next piece of advice is more practically helpful as she tells him ‘Just focus on the details.’ This, Zach says, he thinks he can do. For the first time Zach approaches the body, the camera tracks his movement toward it and comes to rest when it frames Zach and Brennan in medium long shot standing on either side of the body. The intimacy of the scene has grown significantly as Zach finds himself able to relate to his teacher. He is now also able to get close to the body and learn from it as he is able to tell Brennan ‘No trauma to the skull, no compound fractures’. We finally see a close up of Zach as he looks up to Brennan for reassurance and then continues ‘Charlie was not beaten to death or dismembered...’ At this Brennan interjects ‘It helps not to mention the victim by name’. Zach nods and continues the examination noting ‘green stick fractures on the ribs’. As he looks at the body, the camera tracks down following his gaze, taking us close to the body for the first time in the scene. We see the gnarled, fractured ribs, coated in decomposing flesh. As Brennan watches over him, Zach counts the ribs and actually touches the bones. From this close-up of the body we cut to a medium shot of the two scientists leaning toward each other over the body as Zach explains that the ‘sternum is snapped transversally from the tip to the zyphoid’. There is nothing romantic

about this scenario but it is intimate in another way. It celebrates how a kind of intellectual passion brings two people together in a shared experience of science and it is indeed erotic, engaging our sense perceptions, and orchestrating the physical intimacy between the two characters around the body. Brennan continues her questioning: 'Okay so what does that indicate?' We then see Zach in close up as he explains, with some difficulty, the violent impact that must have struck the boy's chest. This is matched by a reverse shot of a calm and reassuring Brennan whose gaze remains steadily on the corpse as she nods her head. This bodily posturing suggests to Zach how he should be standing and looking and we see him willingly adjusting his stance throughout the scene. Brennan then asks Zach 'Are you certain we have learned everything we can from the body at this stage of decomposition'. Zach assures Brennan that he has 'been over everything at least three times'. At this Brennan says in a more serious tone that indicates her awareness of how difficult it will be for her student to follow her instruction 'smell the mouth'.

Finally, Zach looks back at Brennan with trepidation and then reluctantly bends down close to the tiny bones. We see a close shot of Zach's head drawing uncomfortably close to the rotting flesh of the little boy's skull. Brennan's next question tells us how revolting the odour might be as she asks 'Anything behind the typical smells of decomposition'. Zach lifts his head up and tells her that he notices 'some kind of chemical...used to render the boy unconscious?' She nods and asks Zach to 'take samples from the mouth, jaw and (pausing) what's left of the oesophagus'. Brennan's tone and the knowing look she gives Zach shows an awareness of how difficult these tasks will be for him and Zach looks back at her with a reluctant acceptance of the job at hand. She walks toward the door turning to Zach before exiting with the final words of teaching 'Kids make it harder, Zach'. Once Brennan has gone Zach puts his hands down on the table and bows his head over the little body. While he has learned the approach to 'detail' that will allow him to draw close to the body, Zach still finds the process hard, especially, it seems, once his teacher's guiding presence is gone.

Brennan's vast experience allows her to teach Zach, not what we could learn in a book about science, but rather a way of controlling oneself and approaching the body, that can only be learned in practice and through example. Brennan's emphasis on the details does not necessarily abstract the body, rather, it substitutes an 'out of control' emotional response to the

damaged remains, for a *scientific* sensitivity to tactile, visual and olfactory evidence. The body initially stands as an obstacle to communication between Zach and Brennan but through the pedagogical exchange, becomes a shared sensory experience, however difficult, that binds them in a delicate pedagogical relationship. While the emphasis in this scene is on controlling the emotions and paying attention to minute detail, there is, in no sense, a suggestion that scientific method could contain the body's abject and emotionally disturbing features which it seems always need to be negotiated through the posturing of one's body and a focus of the mind.

It is not clear how Brennan knows that there might be an odour on the mouth of the body in this scene but she frequently displays an intuitive knowledge of how to examine bones which must have been garnered from years of experience but at times seems supernatural. While maintaining an Enlightenment interest in 'truth' and uncovering the unseen, *Bones* features hints of a spiritual yearning. The show's scientists seek, not only the 'truth' of science and the law, but an intangible spiritual truth in their quest to give identities to decaying remains. Lury observes a similar tendency in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, noting that along with 'the overt scientific, mechanical and technological aspects' of the show, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* features 'a more covert fascination with the 'erotic and "otherworldly" aspects such as spiritualism and religion.'²⁴³ Lury explains that while Gil Grissom is shown as someone who is not religious he is also 'simultaneously (if contradictorily) presented as a religious figure.'²⁴⁴ For Lury, Grissom's devotion to science as a 'faith', the fatherly role he plays on the series and his attitude to his career as a 'vocation' make Grissom 'priestlike.'²⁴⁵ This is very similar to Brennan's characterisation on *Bones*. While Brennan herself, is an atheist, her anthropological interest in the religious practices of different groups, her choice of clothing which is often influenced by the tribes she has studied and the frequent conversations she has with the Catholic, Booth, about religion lend her the aura of a spiritual figure. This is intensified by her role as a teacher in whom the other scientists put much faith. She is also a figure driven to establish the identities of the dead which gives her priestly role in setting lost spirits to rest.

²⁴³ Lury, 'CSI and Sound' p. 107 - 121.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 118

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

It is significant that in both these programmes, the central teachers, are associated with divine or spiritual experience. The spiritualism encouraged here has similarities to the particular way of approaching knowledge celebrated by television. Religion requires a certain submission of the self to divine experience - this is often expressed or understood in terms of sensory metaphors having 'visions,' 'hearing' the word of god, 'feeling' the presence of spirits. Because of this submission to an experience of the unknown, religion has erotic dimensions. Similarly experiential learning requires a controlled sensory openness and willful submission to otherness and the unknown object.

In Lury's account of *CSI*, spiritualism is connected to the problems of sensory perception and knowledge. Drawing on David Michael Levin's work on hearing, Lury discusses the experience of 'hearkening' as a particular type of hearing or listening in which the 'ego' of the self is removed from the process of hearing, allowing for 'a "tuning in" to the world' and a 'submission'²⁴⁶ of the self. Lury writes 'It is a mode in which we are able to listen in to a spiritual realm and in which we might hear the voices of God, of angels or more simply the dead.'²⁴⁷ For Lury, Grissom's deafness, while obviously limiting his hearing, produces the conditions for a form of 'hearkening'. Lury describes deafness as related, in the series to 'a spiritually inclined or quasi-religious submission to a willed (or in Grissom's case an enforced) silence, to a submission where one must listen without ego and 'hearken'.²⁴⁸ In *Bones* it is also through a relationship to the senses from which spiritual dimension emerges but in this case there is an emphasis on rituals of touch and on a certain kind of controlled sensory openness. The key lesson that Brennan teaches Zach in the scene above is how to open or submit himself, sensually to an experience of body that will bring him knowledge.

Importantly, Lury points out that Grissom's deafness also problematises the scientific positivism and faith in 'the evidence' that characterises the series overall.

Grissom's deafness -a recurring interruption in which he is perhaps forced to 'hearken' to the mysterious spiritual realm - reminds him (and the audience) that it might be a mistake to repress this spiritual

²⁴⁶ Lury, 'CSI and Sound', p. 116.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 118.

aspect and the messy and irrational aspects of both his and others' 'humanity'.²⁴⁹

Thus there is a connection between the 'quasi-religious' elements of this show and problems of knowledge/coming to know which are otherwise denied by the series. *Bones* is similar to *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* as it combines an interest in rigorous scientific enquiry and interfaces with the dead that hint at religious ritual and mysticism. However, in *Bones* there is far less tension between science and the 'messy,' 'irrational' and human. Scientific 'truth' is often aligned with spiritual 'truth' or the truth of someone's human identity. The willing and controlled sensory openness, a certain carefully contained emotional intelligence becomes a fairly uncomplicated (though potentially overwhelming) way of reaching a 'truth' which is understood as having both a scientific and a spiritual dimension.

Bones, like *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, features unrealistic technological manipulation of images. In this episode Angela designs a mass recognition programme to find Charlie's figure in a huge database of mall security camera footage and she also designs software that produces life-like three-dimensional simulations of crimes. One might argue that from the move to a direct encounter with the bones to image manipulation, *Bones* features a comparable move to *CSI's* shift from the 'power of the image to power over the image'. However, the images have an emotional impact that is not contained by the scientists' manipulation of them. When Angela sees Charlie's figure moving through the mall, she struggles to speak and puts her hand to her mouth noting that 'these are the last pictures of this little boy alive'. Later too, in order to find out the weight of the perpetrator, Angela is able to run a set of statistics through the three dimensional simulation machine to recreate the injury to Charlie's sternum. The simulated image, rather than containing and explaining the disturbing elements of the crime, illustrates with the affective force of visual imagery the violent impact on Charlie's body. Brennan, Angela and Booth stand on either side of the illuminated table above which is projected a 3D computer animating the image of the tiny Charlie Sanders. Angela then manipulates the image so that we see Charlie's skeleton laying horizontal to the ground. As the

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 120.

scientists narrate the statistical details of the scene the animation illustrates the impact to Charlie's chest. Angela again has to turn away from the image. Instead of celebrating visual mastery, the visual excess of *Bones* aids an emotional engagement with the story and the characters, and, in particular, with victims.

The visual detail of Angela's simulations would probably be unnecessary in a real crime lab as one might reach the same conclusions about the size of the killer just by doing calculations. The visualisation exists for melodramatic effect. It is also significant that the visualisation allows *all* the characters in the scene to see and share an understanding of the impact to the boy's body. In this way it is similar to the *CSI*-shot which, I have argued, provides a vision of shared understanding between an expert who explains and another person or scientist who follows the explanation. Reaction shots are essential to the drama of this episode and are organised around the troubling body at the centre of the episode. Where the point-of-view shot is essential to identification in cinema, John Caughie considers the reaction shot to be a 'foundational figure'²⁵⁰ for what he describes as television's 'ironic suspensiveness.'²⁵¹ Rather than situating the spectator in the perspective of one character, the reaction shot on television 'disperses knowledge, frequently registering it on the faces of characters whose function may only be to intensify the event, to charge it with the emotional excess which Jane Feuer identifies in primetime melodrama, but without the centred identification of the point-of-view shot: reaction without identification.'²⁵² I will not pursue Caughie's argument about television's ironic suspensiveness here, rather I call up his argument for what it tells us about the way television uses the reaction shot to create a distribution of knowledge which adds emotional intensity to an event. Television thereby situates the individual viewer's response (whether affective or intellectual) within a community of responding bodies tied together by a common encounter with the object of sight. Looking, in *Bones*, is always a communal process that binds characters together. Science is not simply an instrument of power and certainty but is manifested as a literal 'body' of knowledge to be shared in an erotic web of reciprocal looks and feelings involved in the learning process. At the same time

²⁵⁰ John Caughie, 'Playing at Being American: Games and Tactics' in Patricia Mellencamp (ed.), *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p.54

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

different kinds of responses are juxtaposed. For example, in this scene, Brennan's composure is compared to Angela's sensitivity. As we have seen in earlier scenes, Brennan's position is generally the one that is ultimately privileged on the show. This is not to say that scientific rationalism is seen as more important than emotion.

As Brennan's character back story unfolds throughout the series we learn that her interest in identifying bones stems from her personal history as her parents both disappeared when she was a child. In this episode some of this back story is revealed when Brennan engages with Charlie's foster brother Sean, to help solve the murder. In the process, a certain kind of controlled emotional intelligence, gained through experience, is venerated. While images and bodies threaten to overwhelm members of Brennan's team, Brennan herself remains the only one in control of her feelings, yet, it is ultimately Brennan whose surprising emotional sensitivity to Sean, allows her to identify the murderer. Brennan offers to interrogate Sean after Booth's attempts have failed but Booth is reluctant noting that 'people are not your strong point.' Brennan is insistent and Booth eventually concedes to let her interview the boy. The scene begins with a television image of Brennan interviewing Sean. The camera tracks along this screen, and a second television screen to reveal Booth and the child prosecutor watching. The emphasis on visual technology here suggests, not power, but the emotional distance of Booth and his associate from Sean and Brennan. As this very moving scene begins to unfold we enter the space of the interrogation room with Brennan. Her own personal memories of being in the foster care system allow her to engage with Sean in a new way. Through her speech in this scene we gain insight into Brennan's traumatic past and the disappearance of her parents which is the emotional drive behind her quest for 'truth'. The scene ends with Sean hugging Brennan and tearfully whispering the name of the murderer in her ear, much to the surprise of Booth and the child prosecutor watching via television screens. It is ultimately human sympathy that triumphs and provides the primary pleasures of *Bones*.

At the climax of the episode a highly emotive montage both celebrates Brennan's steely self-control and yet still uses the disruptive, upsetting elements of the child's remains to fuel the drama of the sequence. It also ties all the characters in relation to each other through the child's body. The montage features intercutting between the scene of the murderer being arrested as

Brennan looks on, shots of Angela contemplating her art and considering her career options, images of Zach and Hodgins (another lab technician) preparing Charlie's bones for burial, and, finally, as the sequence ends, images of Charlie's foster brothers being reunited with their, and Charlie's, foster mother. To the melancholic vocals of a Starsailor song, we see Booth putting handcuffs on Charlie Sanders' neighbour as Brennan watches with an accusing gaze, confident that justice has been carried out and that her work has achieved something. This dissolves into a shot of a painting featuring the bones of a skeleton and the camera tracks down to a 'missing' picture of Charlie held in Angela's unsteady hand. She lays the missing photo next to her own portrait of Charlie and lifts them both up to her face in contemplation. From this we see a dissolve into an image of Hodgins hand lifting Charlie's lower jawbone out of a Perspex container. His hand trembles as he passes the bone to Zach. The men exchange a meaningful glance. A cut then takes us back to the murderer's arrest as Brennan continues her angry stare. Finally as he is taken away Booth and Brennan look intensely at each other, Booth's expression registers an awareness of how important this moment of justice is for Brennan. A dissolve introduces a shot of Zach, lifting up the jawbone and with an extremely unsteady, shaking hand placing it in a casket with the rest of the remains. He shuts the lid and allows suited men to carry the small casket away. The song on the score reaches a particularly emotional verse. As we hear the lyrics 'my wandering soul, found solace at last' we see the two foster brothers running up to hug their foster mother as Brennan again looks on this time with happiness and Booth looks over their shoulders at Brennan.

The uncontained affective force of the body in *Bones* ultimately performs a melodramatic function as the instigator of emotional excess and as channel for emotional encounters between characters. This is an operation of quality television drama that I will develop in more detail in the next chapter. For now I want to emphasise how the body operates in *Bones* to produce not just the pleasure of pure visual excess, rather it is celebrating the communal, intimate pleasures of looking and learning with the characters we encounter on these shows. While lacking the melodramatic operations of this fictional format, *Anatomy for Beginners* demonstrates the valorisation of similar modes of pleasure, made possible through a teacher's interaction with the body.

‘Seeing for Oneself,’ through Television, Learning Together: *Anatomy for Beginners*

I return now to the example of factually based programming with which I began this chapter. While the non-fictional address of the programme and the explicit focus on educating viewers makes *Anatomy for Beginners* very different from the fictional examples I have analysed so far, the show shares the same model of education, staging an audiovisual encounter with the body which is mediated by the performances of two expert teachers. In addition, the show is equally concerned with pedagogical relationships. In this case, pedagogy is staged through Gunther von Hagens’ and Professor Lee’s engagements with a live studio audience whose reactions are repeatedly foregrounded as von Hagens proceeds with his dissections. In the analysis that follows I will examine the celebration of this particular kind of teaching and the way in which viewers at home are interpellated into von Hagens’ audience in a communal experience of encounter with the body. Furthermore, I argue that this show is like *Bones*, in that rather than subjecting the body to a gaze of mastery, it uses an encounter with flesh to engage viewers both viscerally and emotionally, linking a sensory engagement with the body to ideas about what it means to be human and alive. This concern about existential philosophical and religious ideas about the meaning of life shares echoes some of the spiritual yearning evidenced on *Bones*.

From its opening moments *Anatomy for Beginners* emphasises its status as an educational programme. In a darkened anatomy theatre, before the studio lights are switched on, Gunther von Hagens makes his preliminary address to the viewing public. He walks into shot from the left to be framed in close up. Behind him, a thin white male cadaver is suspended upright. Von Hagens pauses briefly and gives a thoughtful nod to the corpse before turning to address the viewer: ‘A 55 year old man who made an extraordinary wish before he died, that his remains be used, by me, to educate people about human anatomy’. As he starts speaking text appears onscreen identifying him: ‘Dr. Gunther von Hagens, Institute for Plastination.’ This device draws on the conventions of documentary and serves to affirm von Hagens’ authority as medical professional. It also adds to the formal and educational address of the show. While von Hagens is fully lit with standard three-point lighting, the ‘specimen’ is treated with low-key lighting from above. His face is covered in white plaster and his limp flesh

sags slightly like loose clothing. The use of lighting and shot scale creates an intimate atmosphere suggesting a one-on-one rapport between von Hagens and the viewer. Von Hagens' speech continues: 'I met him several times. He was passionate about science and about the enlightenment of lay people. Tonight I will dissect him and unravel the mysteries beneath his skin.'

In this short address von Hagens introduces a number of important aspects of this television show's appeal to viewers. First, he presents us the cadaver or, as he will later call it, his 'specimen' in an intimate and human way. He alludes to the wishes of the deceased and makes clear his own personal relationship with the man. This is an example of von Hagens negotiation between a sensitive understanding of personhood and a scientific interest in dissecting the body as an object. Secondly von Hagens justifies his forthcoming enterprise by alluding to the desire of the man to contribute to the 'enlightenment of lay people'. The man's wishes suggest, not only, that we are justified in looking at his organs but that von Hagens' project is an important one. The statement suggests that we *should* look and, crucially, that in looking we will be enlightened. Thirdly, the segment sets up the theatrical nature of the show that is to come. In the suggestion that Gunther von Hagens is addressing the viewer on a one-to-one basis in the dimmed theatre before the 'show' begins, this segment builds anticipation for the *performance* to come while still establishing the intimacy characteristic of television. Finally, by professing his intention to 'unravel the mysteries beneath [the man's] skin' von Hagens presents his dissection as a kind of odyssey. This idea recurs throughout the course of the show in the use of spatial metaphors to describe the path the anatomists take through the body's interior. But what 'mysteries' are really contained beneath that limp, greying skin?

The answer may lie in von Hagens' own comments published elsewhere. In a paper written in the defence of his plastination process, von Hagens draws on the root meaning of the word autopsy and describes the process as literally a 'seeing for oneself.'²⁵³ Thus von Hagens suggests the importance of a direct sensory relationship between the eye of the viewer and the human body. Like

²⁵³ Gunther von Hagens, 'On Gruesome Corpses, Gestalt Plastinates and Mandatory Interment' in Gunther von Hagens (ed.) *BODY WORLDS: The anatomical exhibition of real human bodies*, Heidelberg: Institute for Plastination, accessed at <<http://www.koerperwelten.de/Downloads/OnGruesomeCorpses.pdf>> pp. 267 [20 December 2009], p. 267.

the *BODY WORLDS* exhibition that von Hagens also created, *Anatomy for Beginners* presents itself as part of a bid to allow members of the public a first-hand perceptual experience of human cadavers (though unlike *BODYWORLDS* this experience is actually mediated through the television screen). This idea fits with the rhetorical positioning of television in public discourse as an informative, immediate and transparent 'window on the world' and it emphasises the special audiovisual features of the medium that allow for this kind of learning.

What makes the live autopsy worth viewing is the way it allows the viewer to explore, through sight and sound, the textures and dimensions of this 'fresh' human interior. The 'mysteries' under the man's skin are indeed the mysteries of an immediate engagement with the bodily interior and with the dead - two areas of investigation most of us are denied access to in daily life. *Anatomy for Beginners* presents a quest not only for an intellectual understanding of the body but also for an education of the senses - something that few other media can achieve in the same way that the moving image can. *Anatomy for Beginners* foregrounds a sensual appraisal of the cadaver with a sensitivity to the complex range of affective responses that this interface provokes. In contrast to the fictional programmes I have discussed, *Anatomy for Beginners* adds another dimension to this 'tele-affective' appeal. The 'live' nature of the studio environment with its resident studio audience is constantly foregrounded, contributing to a sense of immediacy and co-presence and working to construct an apparently 'direct' sensory relationship between the viewer and the objects onscreen. The theatrical sense of presence enhances a connection to the teacher's performance and the community of audience members represented onscreen.

Before von Hagens puts scalpel to flesh we are presented with the first close-up of an audience member. A young girl is framed in profile as she looks through her spectacles and bristles slightly in anticipation. Our curiosity is further drawn in and directed as we see both the film crew and the live studio audience preparing themselves for this potentially revelatory moment. When the slicing begins it actually occurs in a surprisingly brisk manner with von Hagens' explanations guiding our reactions as he proceeds. Von Hagens pulls the first few stitches out of the skin below the corpse's ear revealing sponge-like yellow fat and greasy connective tissue. The close range, chiselling and squishing sounds give a further sense of texture and dimension to the cues provided by the image

track. Slight snapping sounds mark the moments when von Hagens pulls out a stitch and peels back another piece of skin on his journey down the man's arm. This is the perceptual education, the 'seeing for oneself,' that is the special drawing card of *Anatomy for Beginners*. And, indeed, simply looking at von Hagens, cutting open the skin tells me something about the particular thickness, weight and texture of this layer of fat and tissue that is difficult to articulate in words.

The show repeats a pattern of editing that relates the revelation of these interior mysteries to the liveness and hence apparent transparency of the medium. Thus we see close-ups of the body followed by reaction shots from audience members and long shots revealing the scientists at work along with the television crew. The reaction shots reinforce the importance of the act of viewing (and even flinching and cringing) as a form of learning. There are few moments in the show without some narration or explanation from our two guides. The attitudes of the scientists suggest that a quest for learning should be prioritised over any urge to give in to squeamishness. We see von Hagens' struggle to remove a portion of tissue next to the foot. This image is followed directly by a close-up of a woman in the audience visibly flinching, while Prof. Lee calmly continues his explanation of the workings of the skin. In close-up we are shown von Hagens as he cuts the skin off the foot. Lee begins giving some explanation: '...the actual, active portion of the skin is a small growing layer between the fat and connective tissue and the surface...' A loud cutting sound becomes audible. This noise is matched by a cut to a cringing audience member. Still, Lee continues undaunted '...which is what rubs off when we are in the bath. This layer is only a single cell thick'. He pulls a piece of pink tissue out of his pocket. '...probably about a tenth of a millimetre thick and thinner than a piece of tissue paper and ...' In close-up we see Lee tear the paper, '...as easy to tear'.

Lee's comparison is not a scientific explanation that reduces, abstracts or contains the excesses of the body, rather it dramatises the sensorial nature of the knowledge we are getting from the visuals by using mundane tangible examples (tissue paper) and experiences (having a bath). While the images of the corpse in this sequence are likely to generate repulsion related to unbounded human matter, our anchors and guides in this experience, Lee and von Hagens, like Gil Grissom and Temperance Brennan, direct our attention to another way

of responding to the body. They suggest that we concern ourselves with the physical dimensions of the human body as a form of knowledge. While von Hagens cuts the skin off the corpse, Lee relates information about 'our' skins and what the surgeon sees when operating on a live body. The constant drawing of comparisons between 'our' bodies and the bodies onscreen contribute to the show's mode of address which, aided by the forum-like space of the anatomy theatre and editing, incorporates the viewer into a community of responding bodies whose physical reactions are premised on having and feeling through a body.

Just as Grissom and Brennan's comfortable attitudes to dead bodies can be a source of humour, von Hagen's tender pleasure in handling the flesh is both amusing and endearing. Once the skin is loosened from the body von Hagens spends a long time artfully arranging this organ on a display hook. He comments 'We want to put it neatly, you know...' as he speaks the camera reveals, in extreme close-up, a section of skin with a large amount of yellow fat coating it. The tissue wiggles slightly like a jelly as von Hagens and his assistant arrange it. On encountering such an unpalatable sight I found it difficult not to laugh at von Hagens' next comment, that it is 'very important that the specimen looks nice.' But what this moment suggests is the profound pleasure and aesthetic satisfaction von Hagens gets out of looking at and arranging cadavers. With a degree of tenderness and reverence von Hagens celebrates the transformation of the body from waste, as a cadaver, to a useful scientific tool and object of fascination. Thus, from the first major bodily revelation of *Anatomy for Beginners*, the removal of the skin, it is clear how attention has been drawn away from the disturbing, morbid themes and feelings attached to the corpse to an engagement with details like a sense of the fragility of the 'small growing layer' of active skin tissue, the weight of the skin as an organ and the colour of the fat beneath it.

Von Hagens' knowing hands guide our sensory responses, emphasising a passionate attention to the qualities of the organs over emotions such as disgust or fear. In another, even more unnerving, segment, the removal of the brain, von Hagens guides us through the way his own body needs to interface with the cadaver. As he cracks open the skull with a chisel von Hagens cautions: 'I have to be careful and strong at the same time because suddenly it may fall down and then what happens to the brain?' This comment is followed by a cut to an

audience member holding her hand over her mouth as the chiselling sound continues and von Hagens removes the back of the skull. We are given a good view of the exposed brain in close-up from above. Von Hagens points out that ‘the brain has the consistency of fromage [a particularly gelatinous kind of cheese] and when I touch it [he pokes at the brain tissue with his gloved fingers] it is elastic and very soft.’ Just as Temperance Brennan uses a visual metaphor when she tells Zach to ‘put [his] heart in a box,’ so too, does Von Hagens rely on metaphor to make himself understood. Holding the brain, the sleek, jellylike, mound wobbles in von Hagens hands and a small puddle of pink fluid emitted from the organ settles in his palm. Here von Hagens displays a particularly undervalued kind of knowledge - a tactile, physical knowledge of what pressure to put on the skull, what the brain feels like, how to handle the delicate tissue - things that can be written about but are better understood through hands-on experience.

But mere description is not enough to share this sensory knowledge with the audience. The scientists have in fact prepared a fromage to demonstrate what would happen if the brain did fall down. While carrying on a running commentary von Hagens lifts the fromage out of the dish and swiftly thrusts it onto the ground so that it splatters into an inchoate mess on the floor. The pace of his speech increases as he releases the fromage saying ‘and when I drop it down here over two hundred million nerve cells will look like that.’ The spectacle elicits nervous giggles and murmurs from the audience, while a cut to a close up of the ruined fromage allows the viewers to share in their dismay at this depiction of the fragility of the brain. In these moments von Hagens takes on the role of magician and showman, seemingly revelling in his ability to produce a response from the crowd. It is in moments like this that and education of the senses slips easily into sheer visceral entertainment. But the theatrical moments of the show when everybody squeals or applauds together are also important for establishing feelings of community.

Beyond the fascination with experiencing the look, texture and workings of the body, and the erotics of the performative teaching encounter, this show has an emotional appeal and uses the staging and display of the body to produce the wonderment and awe that might be associated with public demonstrations of Renaissance and Enlightenment era scientists. This sense of wonder is quite explicitly encouraged by the opening credits and closing credits of each episode.

After von Hagens' opening address the title sequence of the first episode begins. A classical score featuring soaring string instruments cultivates the sense that an amazing odyssey is beginning. From a red screen, a glowing yellow bleeds out of the centre of the frame. This is followed quickly by a dissolve into a profile of a plastinated face and thereafter by another dissolve into a Renaissance anatomical drawing. This image gives way to a shot of the illuminated cross-sections of the profiles of a young child and adult person facing each other. Behind this shot, an inverted image of skeleton dissolves into view. Next, we see a brief shot of von Hagens walking into theatre followed shortly by a close-up of von Hagens' bespectacled eyes in deep concentration as the dramatic score surges. The sequence continues in a similar fashion transposing three different types of images over each other; Renaissance anatomical drawings, in-studio images of von Hagens and detailed shots of human parts. Arranged as they are, the shots that compose the title sequence suggest a concern with both the origins of life and a haunting by death. The profusion of glowing yellow tones connotes the interior of a womb and the 'light at the end of the tunnel' in death. The images link medical and scientific knowledge to an almost mystical enlightenment, and an epic journey from life to death. Once again there are echoes of a religious or spiritual discourse in this imagery of birth, death, life and journeying.

The show itself makes attempts to organise the dissection through the narrative of a journey. But because of the detailed, labour intensive nature of the work that von Hagens undertakes, and the very complicated explanations Prof. Lee offers us, the show has many moments that seem slow, and boring. The experience of viewing is marked by dips of boredom, and sudden moments of utter disgust, matched with momentary sights that inspire astonishment and wonder along with a few humorous incidents. However at the end of the episode there is an attempt to re-establish the sense of awe set up at the beginning, by reminding viewers that they have been on an amazing journey. Just as the 'Digestion' episode ended with the removal and display of the digestive tract, the first episode comes to a close with the removal of the entire spinal cord from the body and the reconstruction of the interior nervous system 'from brain to toe'. As von Hagens makes final preparations on the spinal cord, Prof. Lee demonstrates on the live studio model, Dennis, the journey of a movement from a thought in the brain to a wiggling of the toe. He announces that he is going to

‘try and give you an idea of the staggering complexity as well as the real beauty of the nerve-fibre network.’

As the studio lights are dimmed and the spinal cord is projected onto Dennis’s back Lee narrates the process by which a thought is turned into simple movement like the wiggling of a toe, he says ‘-a movement which seems inconsequential, which I think you’ll all agree has an amazing complexity behind it.’ After this explanation von Hagens lifts the real, extracted human spinal cord and places it next to the live model to show the length and path of the journey that that a neurological impulse must take through the body to result in the wiggling of a toe. This demonstration combines a kind of sensory experiential awareness of the volume and shape of the organs with the impulse for wonder, much as he did at the end of episode three when raising the digestive tract above the heads of fifteen people. In this case, once again, the display elicits applause and we see reaction shots from members of the audience.

Wonder is the emotion that links together a diverse range of social phenomena such as magic shows, circus performances, religious ceremony and public scientific displays - most especially public dissections. Mary B. Campbell describes wonder as a ‘pleasurable emotion’ and also ‘a relation to knowing that requires the suspension of mastery, certainty, knowingness itself.’²⁵⁴ As a surprising encounter with something new, there is something about wonder that binds people together in shared impulse to react in a disarmed, childlike posture rather than in a position of masterful knowing. In its call to an awed suspension of knowingness, *Anatomy Beginners* constructs a very social space of bodies open to the awe and surprise that may be unpacked from beneath the skin of the cadaver. The performances of von Hagens and Lee inspire an audience laughing, wincing, gasping and marvelling together. *Anatomy for Beginners* certainly muddies the distinction between education and entertainment but it is not about mastery or titillation. Rather by evoking a sensory mode of attention and moments of wonder, the show celebrates the pleasures of an erotic circulation of sensations between teacher and learners and a community bound together in awe of the fantastic mysteries of the body unveiled in dissection.

²⁵⁴ Mary B. Campbell *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cornell University Press. 1999), p. 3.

Conclusion

I have discussed three series with a focus on the role of the body in pedagogical encounters. Looking at the body through the lens of science, in each case, does more than simply give us the pleasures of visual mastery. Instead the encounters with the flesh of the other in these series bind the characters or presenters and the audience together in an emotional exchange, or reciprocal exchange of sensually-based knowledge. In *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, Grissom coaches Gribbs through an unnerving encounter with the body and Gribbs grows in trust and reliance on her teacher while developing a healthy awareness of her own shortcomings. The ‘CSI-shot’ in this instance operates as an intersubjective device, manifesting Grissom’s understanding, Gribbs’ shock and the imagined impact on the victim. In *Bones*, Temperance Brennan’s schooling of her fellow scientist Zach, in the means of approaching the affective body creates an intimate and pleasurable pedagogical encounter which binds the viewer too, into the erotics of teaching. The drive for ‘truth,’ in *Bones*, rather than being aligned with a drive for mastery and power, emerges out of empathy for victims and a reverence for establishing the identity of the dead and even from a degree of humble spiritualism. Finally, in *Anatomy for Beginners* Gunther von Hagens’ tender handling of the corpse encourages an intimate engagement with the body on an experiential level that inspires a narrative marked by surprise, fascination and wonder. The body becomes the centre of a community of affective and embodied responses to the visceral ‘wonders’ uncovered by von Hagens’ knowledgeable hands.

By exploring the sensuous and emotional pleasures of learning with television’s scientists and by suggesting that these pleasures are at home in the very social medium of television, I hope to have offered an alternative to accounts which reduce the pleasures of television’s scientific ventures into the flesh as sensationalist titillation, or as dangerous pornography. While the term ‘sensationalism’ may not account for the complexity of a scientific engagement with the body, television science is nonetheless exhibitionist in its self-conscious display of television’s audiovisual capacities and in its celebration of an experiential mode of learning and of the performative, erotic aspects of teaching. At the same time these programmes deny the limits of the television medium with regard to the physical co-presence of teacher, learner and object

of interest that is lacking from this experience. Standing in for presence is a heightened emphasis on immediacy and affectively excessive visuals.

While different in their formulas, characters and certain themes, *CSI*, *Bones* and *Anatomy for Beginners* share three common features with regard to the ideal model of learning that they establish. Firstly, each foregrounds a tactile, physical evocation of the body as the object of interest and the site of both empirical and emotional truths. Secondly, the interface with the body is guided by a teacher with special practical sensitivities to flesh and bone, whose own emotional and bodily posturing aids the channelling of queasiness, horror and empathy into a sensuous relationship to the body. Finally learning is constructed as a social process which pleasurably entangles the viewer in a community of shared knowledge. Pleasure does not derive from visual mastery so much as from the relays of desire for knowledge, teaching, touching and feeling involved in examining the body in televisual constructions of science.

Chapter 5

White Men with Scalpels: Affect, 'male melodrama,' and Irony in *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter*

Deep red blood splattered against crisp white walls; this is the pervasive visual signature of *Dexter* as screened on the cable channel, Showtime. In a scene from the pilot episode of this programme, the eponymous hero Dexter Morgan (Michael C. Hall) offers donuts to his colleagues in the police department. As the last donut is lifted from the white box Dexter glances down into it and we witness a shot of the empty white space, dusted here and there with white icing sugar. Dexter's thoughts are conveyed in voice over 'Just like me, empty inside.' As the notes of a Cha Cha begin to play on the audiotrack the camera tracks further into the white space at the bottom of the box until an image of a white wall fades into view and thin, sharp trickles of blood run quickly down the frame. A cut in time to the music introduces a shot of a document with a large drop of blood in the left hand corner. The page is printed with red vertical lines which graphically echo the dribbles of blood in the last shot. The pace of the cutting increases in time to the Cha cha and a sequence of rhythmically edited blood spatter patterns follows until the camera begins to pan along a series of photographs featuring splashes and streams of blood sprayed in acts of violence, each splatter suggesting the force and impact of a blade or bullet. A cut to a long shot of Dexter in his office locates this row of photographs as the images decorating his wall. The panning movement of the last sequence is echoed in this shot by the spinning motion of Dexter's office chair as he playfully wheels himself around in it.

These images from *Dexter* are arguably some of the most evocative and violent of all the many body images that abound on contemporary television. But this is also a stylish sequence, loaded with ironic self-awareness and references to high art, particularly abstract expressionist painting and

experimental filmmaking.²⁵⁵ *Dexter* is one of a range of new ‘quality’ drama series which incorporate a particular aesthetic handling of violence and bodily excess into their branding and marketing appeal to viewers. As such *Dexter* is another example of tele-affectivity in which a self-conscious performance of bodily excess is used as a mark of programme distinction. Rather than aligning the show with trash, as is the case in much reality television, or associating the show with a scientific or educational interest, contemporary ‘quality’ television appears to be employing a knowing and carefully stylised violence as a mark of quality. However, in comparison to the other tele-affective shows I have been describing, this type of television seems at once the most visceral and, at times, the least intimate. While the display of blood and gore seems to encourage an immediate and excessive ‘gut’ response from viewers, the stylishness and cleverness of this sequence seems to provide the opportunity for an ironic distance or detachment from the images. Thus far, in my discussion of the body on television I have considered ‘tele-affectivity’ as more than just style; as a tendency that capitalises on television’s capacity for closeness, intimacy and even erotic engagement. How then do I account for the slick, clean, clever, stylish and arguably *clinical* aesthetics of *Dexter* and a range of similar ‘quality’ television shows in terms of this argument? With blood and implicit violence so self-consciously on display as stylistic markers, it is tempting to argue that, like *Dexter* and his donut box, the blood and gore in quality television like this is *empty* of affect, nothing more than a performance of style, intertextual reference and pastiche.

FX’s *Nip/Tuck* is another show that appears to display *Dexter*’s tendency toward a highly stylized physical violence. The show features remarkably explicit depictions of surgery and through this visceral excess *Nip/Tuck* makes a claim on ‘quality’ and celebrates the distinctive nature of its content. The surgical sequences are frequently arranged to music and cut stylishly in time to the songs, operating as visceral, kinetic asides from the more traditional dramatic sequences of the show. In a segment from season 1, episode 3, for example, the lead character, Dr. Sean McNamara’s (Dylan Walsh) surgery is orchestrated to

²⁵⁵ The stark splatters of blood on white surfaces can be compared to the work of abstract expressionist painters such as Robert Motherwell and Franz Kline. The playful rhythmic animation of *Dexter*’s bloodslides in the montage sequence could also be seen as a reference to the work of experimental filmmakers for example, Norman McLaren’s *Begone Dull Care* (1949).

the notes of the Blue Danube. The smooth, gliding movement of the Waltz operates in powerful contrast to the discomfiting images as scalpel slices skin and flesh is scraped out of the abdomen. As the surgery continues the images suggest an increasing dissonance between this music and the growing messiness of the surgery. Shots of Sean's face, deep in concentration, are intercut with images of his hands wiping away increasing amounts of pooling blood. Swabs are strewn around the wound to absorb the excess blood and red streams trail down the patient's sides, dripping onto the surgical sheets. Finally, after yet another shot of Sean's knotted brow, we are granted a close-up view of a piece of removed fatty tissue on the end of Sean's scalpel. As the music reaches its climactic notes, Sean drops the chunk of flesh in a basin of surgical disinfectant. It splash-lands in time to the swelling music.

Again this sequence is artistic: by orchestrating the surgeries to elements of 'high culture' like Waltz music, the show sets its excessive blood and gore up as a kind of dance or performance borrowing aesthetic value from the forms it cannibalizes. Like the sequence from *Dexter*, this is a stylish, self-conscious moment of television parading its visual and visceral capacities. Once again one might be tempted to dismiss these sequences as little more than stylistic excess. In addition because this sequence, like many others from the course of the show, celebrates stylized violence performed on the bodies of women, one might also understand scenes like this as an example of a sadistic or prurient fascination with violence.

However, I would like to suggest a different way of reading the carefully orchestrated surgical montages of *Nip/Tuck* or the patterns of blood on *Dexter*. Style, in each of these instances, combines with a certain affective force of the visuals in such a way as to express something about the characters' inner lives. On *Dexter*, the splatterings of blood that emerge out of the apparent emptiness of Dexter's donut box suggest that Dexter is not as empty as he imagines himself. Beneath his careful performance of friendly composure lurks an incipient violence, what Dexter later comes to call 'his dark passenger'. Similarly, in *Nip/Tuck*, a sense of disorder and despair is expressed through the increasing bloodiness of the surgery that Sean MacNamara undertakes. As we learn through conversations before and after this sequence Sean's life and his marriage is in disarray before he undertakes this surgery. The dissonance between the smoothness of the Waltz and the uncontained blood which wells

and soaks all of Sean's swabs dramatizes a contrast between the control that Sean would like to have and the helplessness he feels.

In effect, I am suggesting that, like the facial close-ups, soaring music and hysterical bodies of traditional women's melodramas, the excess of the body we see on television can operate as a melodramatic heightening. Blood and bodies are highly invested sites evoking excessive visceral and emotional responses to the suffering of the onscreen protagonists. However, this is not straightforward melodrama. It is constantly complicated by the irony and knowingness that are also trademarks of 'quality' television.

This chapter examines how blood and the body, operate as a powerful device of melodramatic heightening in contemporary 'quality' television drama. Considering television drama's grisly imagery as melodramatic excess enables an examination of how gore can be used to cultivate sympathy with certain raced and gendered characters. In particular I am concerned with the way in which white men are constructed as victims in such programming. Both *Dexter* and *Nip/Tuck* foreground the trials of white male protagonists living in the multi-cultural city of Miami (and in later seasons of *Nip/Tuck*, Los Angeles). Both shows are sophisticated, ironic and feature a multi-racial cast of characters representing the diversity of the city's population. However, by considering these shows as melodrama, we can see how alongside the self-awareness and politically correct discourses on the surface of these shows lies a reactionary expression of perceived white male victimhood, that cannot be voiced overtly and must come to the surface through stylized images of blood and gore. While the shows I describe here might intentionally celebrate their difference from ordinary television, the melodramatic investment of blood and bodies with signs of their characters internal suffering suggests that, as in the other 'tele-affective' shows I have examined, *Dexter* and *Nip/Tuck* also use the body as a device for 'seeing people more clearly' and more closely.

To make this argument, the first part of this chapter will combine ideas about affect with work on melodrama by Peter Brooks and Linda Williams.²⁵⁶ I will then move on to consider the relationship between melodramatic excess and irony on these programmes. Finally, I will present case studies of *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* to show how each of these programmes can operate both as knowing,

²⁵⁶ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

ironic texts and as melodramas of race which employ the viscerally exposed body as a site for the melodramatic expression of white male victimhood.

Melodrama

In popular discourse and journalistic writing melodrama is seldom associated with men, nor is it often aligned with 'quality' viewing. Particularly in popular ideas about television, melodrama has been opposed to 'quality' and aligned narrowly with women's television, specifically with daytime soap opera.²⁵⁷ Indeed, in reviews of 'quality' television the term melodrama is frequently applied as a harsh criticism. For example in a review of a range of television shows that she describes, pejoratively, as 'nighttime soaps', Heather Havrilesky asks if the FX network and its most popular show *Nip/Tuck* will 'manage to avoid slipping down that soapy slope into melodrama?'²⁵⁸ Here the programme is criticized through a comparison with the less culturally valued forms of television like the soap opera. But journalistic reviews like this also point out some essential features of quality television programmes. While the programming featured on American pay cable channels like HBO, Showtime and FX, must flatter the intelligence and sophistication of their discerning niche audiences with intertextual references, clever dialogue, irony and with lush, stylish or exceptional visuals, they also make an emotional and affective appeal to viewers. In this emotional appeal that the critics above have described as 'melodramatic' *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* are much more aligned with the traditional, feminised and lower status television programmes from which they otherwise try to distinguish themselves. The pressure for these shows to demonstrate quality and sophistication also means that it becomes important for them to adopt an ironic address which rescues them from being perceived as 'naive melodrama.' This does not however mean that these shows sacrifice a certain kind of pleasure in sensation, emotion and excess associated with the melodramatic mode.

²⁵⁷ Christine Geraghty, 'Aesthetics and Quality in Popular Television Drama,' in *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6.1(2003): p.33.

²⁵⁸ Heather Havrilesky 'Suds and duds' on *Salon.com*, accessed at <<http://dir.salon.com/story/ent/tv/review/2003/10/20/soaps/index1.html>> [24/04/2008], p. 1.

Despite enduring popular dismissal of melodrama a number of theorists such as Peter Brooks, Thomas Elsaesser, Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams have discussed melodrama as a broad mode in Western culture, and have called for a serious consideration of melodramatic 'excess'.²⁵⁹ Linda Williams, in particular, argues that it is through the emotional and affective registers of melodrama that arguments about gender and race have been most persuasively voiced in American culture.²⁶⁰ In the commonsense understanding of melodrama the notion of affect is of crucial importance. Linda Williams describes how melodrama is commonly viewed as 'a seemingly archaic excess of sensation and sentiment, a manipulation of the heartstrings that exceeds the bounds of good taste.'²⁶¹ Thomas Elsaesser finds it useful to consider the meaning of the term melodrama in the 'dictionary sense' as 'a dramatic narrative in which musical accompaniment marks the emotional effects.'²⁶² If we extend the emotional punctuation by *music* to other devices melodrama can be seen as describing the heightened 'ways 'melos' is given to 'drama' by means of lighting, montage, visual rhythm, décor, style of acting, music.'²⁶³ We might see *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* as harnessing the affective potential of gory bodily images as yet another of these devices. The term melodrama describes not only an excessive and sensual appeal to the emotions, but also a certain arrangement of affective devices in relation to meaning. I will highlight two features of the melodramatic mode that will be crucial for my discussion of *Nip/Tuck* as melodrama.

Firstly, melodrama is centrally concerned with displays of suffering and virtue. The affective devices described by Elsaesser are often arranged to convey the sufferings of an innocent protagonist or victim and the trials of heroes. Peter Brooks, in his seminal discussion of the 'melodramatic imagination,' explains melodrama as a response to the conditions of modernity in which traditional structures of meaning were faltering. Brooks focuses his analysis of melodrama on the "classic" French melodrama as it came to be established at the dawn of the nineteenth century - in the aftermath of the

²⁵⁹ Peter, Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*; Thomas Elsaesser, *Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama* in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI, 1987) pp. 43 - 69. Christine Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field: an investigation' in Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. (London: BFI, 1987) pp. 5 - 39.

²⁶⁰ Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, p. 17.

²⁶¹ Ibid, p. 11.

²⁶² Elsaesser, 'Tales of Sound and Fury', p. 50.

²⁶³ Ibid.

Revolution'²⁶⁴ and examines these texts in relation to a sense of crisis and a grasping for meaning that defines modernity.²⁶⁵ In what Brooks describes as a 'post sacred' world melodrama becomes a tool for establishing a sense of truth and moral certainty.²⁶⁶ Brooks writes that '[t]he melodramatic moment of astonishment is a moment of ethical evidence and recognition'²⁶⁷ that produces what he calls a 'moral occult'²⁶⁸ in place of lost systems of meaning.

We might similarly understand the contemporary manifestations of melodrama on television, especially in the excessive and visceral forms that I describe, as associated with a crisis, or at least a perceived crisis in white hegemonic masculinity. *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* can be considered alongside a range of contemporary cultural responses to the growing perception that white masculinity is somehow under siege. David Savran describes this perception as a paranoid and reactionary response amongst white men to relatively recent developments in cultural and political activism such as feminism, multiculturalism and the gay rights movement.²⁶⁹ In the context of contemporary America, where white men still enjoy greater social power than any other group, the sense of white male disempowerment and crisis is something perceived rather than grounded in real social conditions. The melodramatic expression of a 'moral feeling' grounded in the exhibition of suffering and heroism can be seen in relation to the fragmentation of postmodern culture and the decentring of white male subjectivity. Though, as I shall explore in the next section, the resolution of this crisis is complicated by irony and the influence of a playful postmodern sensibility.

Linda Williams extends Brooks' thinking to consider the role melodrama has played in articulating guilt and innocence in relation to questions of race. Williams argues that 'sympathy for another grounded in the manifestation of that person's suffering is arguably a key feature of all melodrama.'²⁷⁰ For

²⁶⁴ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* p. x ii.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. xi.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 15.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 26

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p.5

²⁶⁹ David Savran, 'The Sadomasochist in the Closet: White masculinity and the culture of victimization' in *Differences*. 8.2 (1996): p. 128.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p.16.

Williams melodrama is notable for a combination of ‘pathos and action.’²⁷¹ She relates the displays of suffering, pathos and action so central to melodramatic narratives to a need to establish what she describes as ‘moral legibility’. The sensational features of melodrama, she contends: ‘are the means to something more important: the achievement of a felt good, the merger - perhaps even the compromise - of morality and feeling into empathetically imagined communities forged in the pain and suffering of innocent victims, and in the actions of those who seek to rescue them.’²⁷²

Because of melodrama’s tendency to favour powerless victims, the mode can be used to demonstrate the suffering and thereby the virtue and humanity of people oppressed on the grounds of race.²⁷³ However, this feature, Williams cautions, ‘has not prevented it from being employed by resentful whites whose own sense of powerlessness is dangerously exaggerated by the perception of a black threat to white hegemony.’²⁷⁴ She continues:

Neither an inherently racist nor an antiracist form, melodrama has effectively been utilized to both ends. Its key, however, is not simplistic, ‘black and white’ moral antimonies, but what stands behind them: the quest to forge a viscerally felt moral legibility in the midst of moral confusion and disarray.²⁷⁵

Williams suggests that in a society in which equal rights supposedly prevail, race has become something we can no longer talk about in order that we appear politically correct. For this reason it is necessary to pay attention to the way otherwise unvoiced sentiments about race find expression through the demonstrations of suffering and virtue in the *affective* mode of melodrama.

Williams’ comments bring me to the second major observation about melodrama informing my analysis. For Brooks, melodrama is a ‘text of muteness’²⁷⁶ in which sentiments that cannot be voiced through official or everyday discourse find their expression. Often this process involves the displacement of inner feelings onto what Elssaesser calls ‘“overdetermined”

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁷² Ibid. p. 21.

²⁷³ Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, p. 300

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 56.

objects.²⁷⁷ Melodramas often feature the ‘intensified symbolisation of everyday actions, the heightening of the ordinary gesture and the use of setting and décor so as to reflect the characters’ fetishist fixations.’²⁷⁸ As noted by Peter Brooks these mute feelings often use the body as their mode of expression. He describes how melodrama presents us with ‘a body seized by meaning’²⁷⁹ and notes that in melodrama ‘the use of the body itself, its actions, gestures, its sites of excitation, to represent meanings that may be otherwise unavailable to representation because they are somehow under the bar of repression.’²⁸⁰

For Williams, certain sentiments about race have become officially inexpressible in contemporary culture and this is why melodrama is still the prevailing form through which race is discussed and worked-through in American culture. She writes:

In a post-civil rights and post-affirmative action era, Americans are enjoined to be colour blind, not to notice race. Now that we are supposed to live in an achieved era of equal rights for all, race has joined the category of the officially inexpressible. Mentioning it is considered in bad taste, a cynical ploy ‘playing the race card.’ Increasingly, however, it is within the irrational, fantasmic and paranoid realm of the melodramatic ‘text of muteness’ that race takes on a heightened mode of expressivity as a dialectic of feelings - of sympathy and antipathy - that dare not speak its name.’²⁸¹

In this context, the open expression of the ‘backlash’ feelings of threat to white masculinity by multiculturalism and feminism is no longer acceptable in official or public discourse. Where these sentiments cannot be directly expressed, it is my argument that the bodily viscera revealed in surgery and murder on *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* become the ‘overdetermined objects’ for the ‘mute’ expression of pain and anxiety to ultimately establish a reactionary sense of white male victimhood, where the ‘sophistication’, knowingness and political correctness demanded by this brand of ‘quality television’ would otherwise not admit to the voicing of such sentiments.

The arguments of Williams and Brooks suggest that the melodramatic mode is a system for producing a physically felt identification with the emotions and

²⁷⁷ Elsaesser, ‘Tales of Sound and Fury’, p. 56.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Peter Brooks, ‘Melodrama, Body, Revolution’ in Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, Christine Gledhill (eds), *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen*, (London: BFI. 1994), p.18.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, p. 300.

sensations of characters onscreen. Williams contends that suffering and heroism must be 'viscerally felt' in order for the text to be 'morally legible'. In the use of such terminology, Williams suggests that the viewer's body is affectively engaged by melodrama's address. In a 1991 article 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess,' Williams considers how the depiction of onscreen bodies in melodrama is aimed at producing a physical reaction in the bodies of viewers.²⁸² In her study of what she terms, borrowing from Carol Clover, 'body genres' Williams notes that in horror, women's melodramas and in pornography 'the bodies of women figured on the screen have functioned traditionally as the primary *embodiments* of pleasure, fear and pain'²⁸³ and such films aim to cultivate in a viewer a kind of 'involuntary mimicry' of the sensations pictured onscreen.²⁸⁴ The effectiveness of such films is often measured by the degree to which they are capable of producing these involuntary bodily reactions.²⁸⁵

There are a number of drama series in which the body is invested with emotion, or becomes the site through which character's feelings and relationships are expressed. *Grey's Anatomy* is a good example of this. This show typically climaxes with an emotional surgical montage cut to music. *Bones*, which I discussed in the last chapter, is another example of a television show in which bodily affect intensifies the emotional interactions between characters. However, these much more female-centred and feminised programmes differ from shows like *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* in the fluid and unstrained relationship between professional bodies, especially women's bodies, and the affectively invested medical bodies with which they interact. They are not melodramatic in the way that the male-centred shows I discuss are, because they lack the repression that requires a displaced or 'mute' expression of inner turmoil. As a result the images of the body are less violent and less stylistically excessive than in *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter*.

While melodrama has traditionally been associated with women and is frequently denigrated on these grounds, a number of theorists have made strong cases for the existence of melodramas that articulate particularly masculine

²⁸² Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess' in *Film Quarterly*, 44.4 (1991): pp. 2-13.

²⁸³ Ibid., p.4

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

dilemmas. ‘Melodramas of beset manhood’ is the term that Nina Baym²⁸⁶ uses to describe a general trend in mainstream American literature toward canonising texts that depict struggles by an autonomous (and implicitly male) protagonist against outside forces. As Baym’s terminology suggests melodrama is by no means restricted to ‘women’s genres’ and plays a widespread role in American culture. Similarly, Lynne Joyrich²⁸⁷ notes the presence of melodramatic devices across a range of television texts including cop shows like *Hill Street Blues* (NBC, 1981 - 1987) and *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984 - 1989). Williams comments that ‘nothing is more sensational’ than the ‘rescues, accidents, chases and fight sequences’²⁸⁸ of traditionally masculine action films.

Kenneth Paradis draws on Baym’s phrase ‘melodramas of beset manhood’ in his discussion of hard-boiled detective fiction, noting that in this genre such a struggle for control is dramatised as control *of the body*. He points out that the detective must regulate ‘an unruly desirous body’²⁸⁹ to maintain any hold on his sense of autonomous self. Florence Jacobowitz describes the film noirs of the 1940s as melodrama.²⁹⁰ Jacobowitz in particular applies the term ‘Man’s Melodrama’²⁹¹ to describe films like *The Woman in the Window* (Fritz Lang, 1944) and *Scarlet Street* (Fritz Lang, 1945). As my analyses will show, both *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* feature elements of the classic film noir. Jacobowitz describes the film noir’s expression of white male anxiety as melodramatic because it operates by processes of displacement; ‘by substitute acts, by parallel situations and metaphoric connections.’²⁹² The existential despair and inner violence of the solitary and repressed hard-boiled hero, finds outward expression in the excessive style of the film noir genre. *Dexter* and *Nip/Tuck* take up this tendency and pair it with an increasingly popular televisual impulse toward revealing the body through medical or forensic enquiry. Instead of long shadows

²⁸⁶ Nina Baym, ‘Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors’ in *American Quarterly*, 33.2:(1981): p. 123.

²⁸⁷ Lynn Joyrich ‘All that Television Allows: TV Melodrama, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture’ in *Re-viewing Reception: Television, Gender and Postmodern Culture*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1996). p. 48 - 52.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Kenneth Paradis, ‘Paranoia as Popular Heroism: Hard-boiled Moral Masculinity’ in Paradis (ed.) *Sex Paranoia and Modern Masculinity*, (Albany: State University of New York Press. 2007).p. 105.

²⁹⁰ Florence Jacobowitz, ‘The Man’s Melodrama: *The Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street*’ in Ian Cameron (ed.), *The Movie Book of Film Noir* (London: Studio Vista, 1992) p. 152.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 152.

²⁹² Ibid., p. 155.

and smoke we have surgeries, corpses and blood-splatter. These gory images are employed to express the anxieties of a white masculinity that perceives itself as threatened.

However, the mode of male melodrama extends beyond film noir. Leon Hunt describes male epic films such as *Ben-Hur* (Wyler, US 1959) and *Sparticus* (Kubrick, US, 1960) as ‘male melodrama.’²⁹³ In these examples of ‘male melodrama’ the drama is generated around the control, autonomy and endurance of the male body. Such a dynamic is central to both male epics and the film noir. Hunt argues that the climaxes of male epics are at once emotional and spectacular with the spectacular element involving ‘the body subjected to danger, pain, destruction’ and ‘a celebration of control over the body through the ability to sacrifice it.’²⁹⁴ Similarly in the film noirs of the 1940s the ‘toughness’ of the central protagonist or detective figure was of key importance. Deborah Thomas observes that he needed to exhibit a sense of control ‘antithetical to freely flowing forms of desire.’²⁹⁵ It would seem that the particular nightmare of masculinity evidenced in these male melodramas is expressed through dynamics of control and loss of control over the *body*.

Peter Hutchings, in a consideration of male responses to horror, has argued for the importance of ‘‘masochistic’... or passive elements’²⁹⁶ in the pleasure men derive from horror film viewing. Hutchings notes how ‘the male spectator is capable of shifting back and forth between victim (conventionally feminine) and victimiser (conventionally masculine).’²⁹⁷ His argument is that horror film viewing can be seen as an outlet for men to indulge in ‘subjection’ and ‘having things done to [them]’ where in life they are not granted this opportunity under the conditions of normative masculinity.²⁹⁸ Certainly, *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* open a similar window for indulging in a surrender to affect. *Nip/Tuck* dramatises the struggle to maintain control over the body through the surgeons’, action in the narrative and their toughness, skill and mastery as it is displayed in surgery. But

²⁹³ Leon Hunt, ‘What are Big Boys Made Of?: *Sparticus*, *El Cid* and the Male Epic’ in Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim (eds), *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), p. 8.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81 - 82.

²⁹⁵ Deborah Thomas, ‘How Hollywood Deals with the Deviant Male’ in Ian Cameron (ed.) *The Movie Book of Film Noir* (London: Studio Vista, 1992.) p. 76.

²⁹⁶ Peter Hutchings, ‘You Tarzan’ in Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim (eds), *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men* (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1993), p. 87.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

the show also allows an indulgence in the passive pleasures of ‘being affected’ through the explicit excavations and manipulations enacted on patients’ bodies. Similarly, while Dexter maintains a sense of control by managing both the blood of his victims and the blood in his casework is also in relation to bodies and blood that Dexter experiences his greatest experiences of subjection to affect as his memories of childhood trauma are always expressed in images of flowing red blood.

As Hutchings notes, the voluntary subjection to affect by the already powerful can be read as another way of ‘confirming possession of that power’ by ‘temporarily and in a very circumscribed way ‘feminizing’ the male spectator, horror emphasizes the ‘normality’ of masculinity, thereby reassuring a male spectator.’²⁹⁹ Hutchings, however, does not consider this an adequate account of the horror experience for men. He suggests that the very need for a reconfirmation of power made evident by the demand for such entertainment speaks of a problematic relationship between individual male subjects and the social institutions of patriarchy. Hutchings instead sees the affective excitations of the horror film as a response to the gap between the impossible ideal of masculine control and the real experiences of men.³⁰⁰ Horror films, he argues are pleasurable because they ‘cover-over’ this gap and hide the fact that the spectator’s ‘hold on power is structural and provisional rather than personal’.³⁰¹

Television shows like *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* on the other hand, present a different relationship to affect and control. If it is the work of the horror film to cover over this gap, it is the project of the male melodrama to explore it. Male melodrama, it might be argued, uses affect to reproduce the struggle for corporeal control so central to normative masculinity. It points out, and explores this gap in a paranoid investigation of male subjectivity. It also seems the intention of *Dexter* and *Nip/Tuck* to communicate this struggle across the gender divide so that when viewers, male and female, are affected by the show’s grotesque imagery we are encouraged to engage with this masculine and typically white dilemma producing for viewers ‘viscerally felt’ proof of white male suffering. Furthermore these tensions over bodily control have bearing, not only on questions of gender, but on race. This is the case in both *Nip/Tuck* and

²⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 92.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

Dexter where the threat to white masculine control is often expressed in relation to the bodies of threatening racial others.

Irony and Melodrama

A potential stumbling block for my arguments about race and melodrama in quality television is posed by the heavy irony and self-consciousness of these programmes. Peter Brooks himself sees the melodramatic imagination he describes as opposed to an ironic stance. He asserts that his argument about melodrama could not be applied to the work of writers like 'Flaubert, Maupassant, Becket, Robbe-Grillet, possibly Joyce and Kafka,'³⁰² because their mode or writing is, in Brooks' words, 'radically ironic and anti-metaphorical.'³⁰³ For Brooks, these writers 'set against the ambitions of melodramatism an attitude of deconstructive and stoic materialism, and a language of deflationary suspicion.'³⁰⁴ In this thinking, the sceptical, self-questioning mode of irony is seen as having a dampening or 'deflationary' effect on any melodramatic heightening.

Brooks focuses his analysis of melodrama on the classic French melodramas arising in the period after the Revolution but he acknowledges that the melodramatic mode he describes has 'endured, with modifications and complications, into the 1860s, to be relayed, eventually, by the cinema and then by television.'³⁰⁵ Thus Brooks sees a line of influence from the 'classic' French melodramas he describes to contemporary television. Importantly, however, the melodramatic impulse is not 'relayed' without 'modifications and complications.' Undoubtedly contributing to these complications are the historical and cultural changes that have occurred since the emergence of melodrama as a distinct form. *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* operate in a cultural climate defined by postmodernism whilst, as Brooks articulates, classic melodrama is a distinctly modern form that emerges as a response to a vast set of social changes specific to this period.³⁰⁶

³⁰² Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 198.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., xii

³⁰⁶ Ibid., xi

The cultural work of the modernist period has largely been associated with a sense of crisis.³⁰⁷ Melodrama's investment in making visible a 'moral occult' is intimately linked to an impulse to impose certainty and order on what had increasingly become an experience of the world defined by disorder and fragmentation. Art was offered as a means of, at least symbolically, restoring the 'unity, coherence, and meaning which has been lost in most of modern life.'³⁰⁸ The 'classic' French melodrama that Brooks describes are exemplars both of this sense of crisis and, in their emphasis on moral certainty, of this impulse toward restoring order and 'truth' in a chaotic universe. While postmodern cultural production handles many of the concerns defining the modern period it demonstrates a very different reaction to the loss of unity that modern texts respond to. Postmodernism is defined less by crisis and more by an acceptance of disorder, decentring and chaos. As Mary Klages explains: 'Postmodernism...doesn't lament the idea of fragmentation, provisionality, or incoherence, but rather celebrates that. The world is meaningless? Let's not pretend that art can make meaning; then, let's just play with nonsense.'³⁰⁹ We might argue that rather than articulating a sense of crisis in white male subjectivity, *Dexter* and *Nip/Tuck* are simply two in a range of postmodern texts which tacitly accept postmodernism's chaos, indeterminacy and its decentring of the (white male) subject. The reflexivity, the knowing references to film noir and other genres of male crisis and the stylisation of violence could be seen as examples of self-conscious postmodern play. This irony and playfulness could potentially render these programmes incompatible with the model of melodrama proposed by Brooks.

However, Linda Williams considers melodrama to be a highly durable and 'perpetually modernizing form.'³¹⁰ Borrowing from Henry James' description of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Williams describes melodrama as a 'wonderful leaping fish,' which can adapt itself equally to classicism or realist guises according to changing cinematic conventions.³¹¹ Does this 'wonderful leaping fish' simply disappear or lose its relevance when faced with the apparent

³⁰⁷ Peter Childs, *Modernism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 14.

³⁰⁸ Mary Klages, *Literary theory: a guide for the perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 166.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, p.12.

³¹¹ Ibid.

‘blankness’ of postmodern discourse? Kimberly Chabot Davis opposes the view that postmodernism negates the melodramatic or sentimental features of texts. Instead she defines a mode that she calls ‘sentimental postmodernism’ which, she argues, is the operative mode in most popular contemporary texts.³¹²

the political gestures of these hybrid texts can be linked to their strategic combination of the critical distance enabled by high art and the emotional engagement and identification fostered by popular genres.³¹³

Davis considers this mode in terms of the potential for texts to be politically progressive rather than demonstrating the nihilism and retreat from the political typical of much postmodernism. However, her chief assertion is that the centrality of affect makes these texts political.³¹⁴ There is the possibility that sentimental postmodernism offers, along with self-reflexive features, the possibility for either progressive or regressive pleasure in their mobilisation of affect.

This issue is particularly pertinent for considerations of television. For melodrama has long been seen as an essential aesthetic feature of much television programming, particularly the soap opera but, at the same time, television has also been theorised as a medium defined by a detached, distracted mode of engagement. John Caughie describes the nature of television viewing as providing the possibility for a mode of viewing defined by an ‘ironic imagination’ or what he calls, following Alan Wilde, ‘ironic suspensiveness.’³¹⁵ For Caughie the notion of suspensive irony allows ‘a way of thinking about dissociation and engagement as simultaneous or, at least, temporally connected activities.’³¹⁶ Caughie writes:

Less intensely fascinating in its hold than cinema, television seems to insist continually on an attention to viewing as mental activity and ‘knowingness’ (almost a ‘street-wise’ smartness), rather than to the obedience of interpellation or the affect of the ‘always already.’³¹⁷

³¹² Kimberly Chabot Davis, *Postmodern texts and emotional audiences* (Purdue: Purdue University Press, 2007), p. 2.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³¹⁵ John Caughie, ‘Playing at Being American’ p. 53.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Caughie cautions that television's 'ironic suspensiveness' is not necessarily constructed by the aesthetic features of television texts or by any authorial intention but is rather conditioned by the varied, historically and geographically contingent ways in which television is viewed.³¹⁸ But thinking about this relationship to television can make us more sensitive to the ways in which television texts like *Nip/tuck* and *Dexter* might capitalize on the ironic imagination facilitated by television's viewing conditions. Arguably, this distancing encouraged by the very nature of television viewing, complicates the intensity of its melodramatic potential. Jane Feuer describes melodrama as an essential feature of serialised television; 'What Peter Brooks calls the "everyday connotations" of the term "melodrama" describes almost perfectly the current form-in-dominance on American network television: the continuing serial or soap opera.'³¹⁹ How might we reconcile John Caughie's arguments about ironic suspensiveness with the central place of melodrama within many of television's key serialised texts?

Ien Ang's discussion of soap operas might open a path for thinking through the tension between onscreen melodrama and a tendency for viewers to watch from a position of ironic distance. Ang uses Brooks' thinking to argue for the operation of the melodramatic imagination in *Dallas* (CBS 1978 - 1991). She writes:

...the pleasure of *Dallas* consists in the recognition of ideas that fit in with the viewers' imaginative world. They can 'lose' themselves in *Dallas* because the programme symbolizes a structure of feeling which connects up with one of the ways in which they encounter life.³²⁰

However, in her analysis of letters written by viewers Ang also encounters evidence that these programmes are viewed and enjoyed in an ironic stance and this ironic position is experienced as conditioned on a pleasurable sense of superiority.³²¹ Irony in these instances also becomes a way for viewers to

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Jane Feuer, 'Melodrama, Serial Form, and Television Today' in *Screen* 25.1, (1984) p. 4.

³²⁰ Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. (New York: Methuen 1985) pp.82 -83.

³²¹ Ibid., p. 97.

negotiate between their pleasure and the risk of feeling like the ‘dupe’ of mass culture.³²² For Ang, like Brooks and Caughie, this irony signals a distancing from the emotional excess of the genre. Pleasure is instead gained through ironic play. However some of excerpts from letters Ang includes in her book suggest that these ironic viewers might still be gaining pleasure from the emotional excesses of the text at the same time as adopting an ironic attitude to it.

A letter from a young woman who describes herself as ‘an intelligent young feminist’ explains why she loves *Dallas*:

It releases primitive feelings in me. I go dizzy, hate, love, loathe, feel disgusted, condemn and often dash away a tear...My leisure reading consists ninety percent of feminist books but when I’m watching *Dallas* with my girl friend and Pamela comes down the stairs wearing a low-necked dress, then we shout wildly: just look at that slut, the way she prances around she ought to be called Prancela. Bobby is a decent chap, like my eldest brother and Jock is like my father, so I can hate them intensely too...³²³

This letter itself is written in a knowing, ironic tone and yet what it ironises is the delight of engaging emotionally with the affective excess of *Dallas*. This response suggests the possibility that irony need not eliminate the affective pleasures of melodrama. Instead it seems to give the viewer an excuse to enjoy her emotional over-involvement despite her critical reservations. In addition she is able to enjoy both the emotional excess of *Dallas* and the pleasures of irony at once.

The letter demonstrates the fact that, while in theory we like to think of critical thinking as distinct from emotional engagement, in practice the two need not be mutually exclusive. Anthropologist Purnima Mankekar, for example, found in her fieldwork with Indian women that these ‘women were able to critique televisual discourses at the same time that they intimately engaged them.’³²⁴ Instead of thinking of irony and melodrama as opposed we could think of television as offering itself both to the pleasures of an ironic imagination and inviting the viewer to engage in sympathetic identification with the situations depicted onscreen.

³²² Ibid., p. 96.

³²³ Ibid., p. 100.

³²⁴ Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) p. 24.

Karen Lury imagines a similar possibility in her discussion of contemporary youth television which she argues mobilises a somewhat paradoxical combination of ‘cynicism and enchantment.’³²⁵ She explains how the ‘cynicism’ of youth viewers ‘stems from a deep knowledge of the inauthenticity, the over-use, and the confusing over-abundance of different experiences, products, and practices within contemporary society - something that is both produced and reflexively encountered in many programmes addressed to youth’ while at the same time she acknowledges that these texts still aim to encourage an ‘enchantment that binds [young people] to that society -in programmes that also seduce, encourage, and absorb their young audience.’³²⁶ In Lury’s discussion cynicism accounts for Caughie’s ‘ironic suspensiveness’ without eliminating the possibility of other kinds of pleasurable and indeed passionate engagement implied by the term ‘enchantment’.

While Peter Brooks sees irony as potentially dampening or negating melodrama it might be possible to see irony standing in a different relation to the melodramatic mode. In traditional accounts irony has been understood as primarily a mode of negation. That is, the implied meaning of an ironic statement, once understood, is seen as cancelling or negating the literal meaning that is actually spoken. Rachel Giora offers an alternative to this theory of irony. She argues that ironic expression does not involve the direct cancelling of one sentiment with another.³²⁷ Instead, ‘irony understanding involves processing both the negated and the implicated messages, so that the differences between them may be captured.’³²⁸ Where a speaker could just use direct and literal negative language, using ironic language is a rhetorical choice and can be motivated by a desire to retain both meanings and hold them in comparison. Direct negation rather than the indirect negation of irony, Giora argues, ‘cannot point to the occasionally more desirable state of affairs indicated by the affirmative (literal) phrasing of the ironic utterance’.³²⁹ Irony thus allows us to hold both the literal and indirect/implied meanings in tension. In ironic expression one can both mean and not mean what one literally says. As

³²⁵ Karen Lury, *British Youth Television: Cynicism and Enchantment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001) p. 11.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Rachel Giora ‘On irony and negation’ in *Discourse Processes* 19.2 (1995): p. 239.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

Neill Korobov argues irony ‘achieves a kind of hedging - a “have your cake and eat it too” equivocation that pivots on multiple levels of meaning.’³³⁰ Korobov studies this ironic ambivalence in relation to the way in which white male adolescents define their masculinity in speech.³³¹ He points out that irony’s ‘pivoting’ between literal and implied expression allows young men to simultaneously deny and affirm aspects of hegemonic masculine identity in playful verbal banter. For Korobov the ‘sustainability and adaptability of hegemonic masculinity may very well lie in its ability to be strategically ironized.’³³²

The combination of irony and melodrama on *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* might be understood in terms of this theory of irony. Rather than seeing the deeply ironic address of this programming as ‘cancelling out’ or dampening the melodramatic force of the shows’ excessive visuals it is perhaps possible to see these elements as held in dramatic tension. That is, while the images of blood and gore express feelings of anxiety and crisis, the ironization of this white male crisis does not negate the emotional resonance. Instead irony allows a reactionary expression of white male masculine crisis to be both voiced and denied. The tension between the melodramatic and ironic pleasures of these shows highlights the sense in which white male anxiety cannot be straightforwardly voiced without being simultaneously denied by a ‘sophisticated,’ knowing and politically correct discourse. In a sense, then, white male anxiety on these shows is doubly encoded. It is firstly displaced from direct expression into melodrama’s ‘substitute acts’ of bodily violence and fleshy exposure. Then the melodramatic display of bodily suffering and heroism is ironized by the mechanisms of the programme in a way that allows these sentiments to be expressed without leaving them open to critique. But while irony might encourage a detachment and distancing from the emotional and visceral excesses on display, it does not preclude the opportunity to engage with and enjoy the melodramatic elements of such programming - the opportunity, in Korobov’s words ‘to have your cake and eat it too.’ So perhaps viewers are not asked to feel as close to the images (and bodies) onscreen as they are encouraged to be when watching more

³³⁰ Neill Korobov, ‘Ironizing masculinity: How adolescent boys negotiate hetero-normative dilemmas in conversational interaction.’ In *The Journal of Men’s Studies* 13.2 (2007): p. 227.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

straightforwardly intimate body programmes like *Make Me Perfect*, *Embarrassing Bodies* (Channel 4, 2007 -) or *Grey's Anatomy*. Instead the 'quality' end of tele-affective programming demands an oscillation between the literal and ironic, between excessive emotional involvement and ironic detachment, situating viewers in the pull between what is expressed and its ironization.

***Nip/Tuck*: On the Scalpel's Edge**

A promotional slogan on *Nip/Tuck*'s official website describes the show as 'the scalpels edge of entertainment.'³³³ This phrase sums up *Nip/Tuck*'s dual appeal to viewers. On the one hand the show relies on extreme, graphic surgical content to distinguish itself from other shows but, as this phrase also implies, *Nip/Tuck* presents itself as more 'sophisticated' than other television. In line with an appeal to 'sophisticated' viewers *Nip/Tuck* positions itself as a self-aware commentary on the two troubled white men at the centre of its narrative. A plot summary on the show's official website describes *Nip/Tuck*'s protagonists Sean McNamara and Christian Troy (Julian McMahon) as being 'in full-blown midlife crises as they confront career, family and romance problems.' References to feminism, Freudian psychology and criticisms of contemporary cultural life are as much features of this show's address to viewers as are its raunchy sex scenes and candid 'boundary-pushing' surgical images. An awareness of progressive discourses is introduced economically through the character of Dr. Liz Cruz (Roma Maffia), the anaesthetist, whose ethnicity, feminism and lesbian identity is positioned in sharp distinction to the normative white male heterosexuality of the surgeons. Liz constantly (and with large doses of dry humour) chides Sean and Christian for their sexism and displays of machismo. Sean himself is constantly expressing doubts about his own life-style. Racism and homophobia are often explicitly problematized and denounced. This happens for example in series three when Sean's son Matt begins dating a homophobic white-supremacist (of course, storylines like this do little to critique less overt forms of prejudice).

³³³ Official *Nip/Tuck* Website, 'About Season 1,' 2007 accessed at <<http://www.warnervideo.com/niptuck4/>>, [25/04/08]. par.2.

As much as *Nip/Tuck* harnesses politically correct discourses, its reactionary message can be detected in the way it articulates the suffering of its central protagonists in the face of a range of threatening racial and ethnic 'others' and women with whom they become entangled. The show's major antagonists are either women or ethnically 'other' from Sean and Christian. The drug dealers that torment them in the first series are Columbian; their ruthless major rival, Merrill Bobolit, is Jewish and the show's serial rapist is revealed to be Quentin Costa, a bisexual, Hispanic man without a penis. More striking than the construction of heroes and villains along racial and gendered lines is the way in which Sean and Christian's struggles are dramatized through visceral encounters with the bodies of 'others.' In this first installment of *Nip/Tuck* the central characters, Sean Macnamara and Christian Troy meet, in their Miami office, with a new Columbian client, Silvio Pérez (Geoffrey Rivas) and his brother Alejandro (Raymond Cruz). This meeting incites a series of events which will lead to the near break down of Sean and Christians' practice and ultimately to their entanglement in a very messy murder. Just as in the classic film noir, the detective is initially visited in his office by a client, typically the femme fatale, who incites a downward journey into corrupt criminal worlds, Sean and Christian's meeting with the Pérez brothers is the beginning of a kind of descent which will dramatize the sufferings of the two white male protagonists at the hands of the Hispanic criminals they encounter.

It is Sean who initially encounters Silvio Pérez and his brother in his office. From the outset questions of language and identity in multicultural Miami are foregrounded when Alejandro explains that he is there to translate for Silvio. Sean is uncomfortable with this method of consultation but his comments are met with disdain from Alejandro who chides Sean for not being able to speak Spanish when he lives in South Florida. Sean then calls in his partner Christian who interviews the men in competent Spanish. Christian quickly realises that Pérez is a drug trafficker on the run and, unbeknownst to Sean, Christian negotiates with them to perform the facial reconstruction at a much higher price. After the surgery it is discovered that Pérez is not only a drug trafficker but serial child molester and needs the facial reconstruction to escape from his boss, Escobar Gallardo (Robert LaSardo), whose daughter he has sexually violated. In the course of the episode Sean and Christian find themselves increasingly entangled in the messy world of this criminal group of Columbians.

Ultimately Christian is held captive and tortured by Gallardo while Sean's surgery becomes the site of a very gory murder. I will examine two surgical scenes that feature in this episode in order to consider three main expressive tendencies of this show as a 'male melodrama'. I will examine how a correspondence is set up between the volatile bodies of racial others and a crisis in control. In my analysis of the final surgery I consider how the body of the racial 'other' is rendered, through visceral surgical exposures, as potentially contaminating, threatening and ultimately as 'guilty' for the white male suffering that the show puts on display.

The first full surgery we see on *Nip/Tuck* provides an example of the ways in which surgical sequences serve a melodramatic function on the show. The surgery appears after two scenes which each demonstrate an element contributing to Sean MacNamara's sense of crisis. First, at a scene over the breakfast table he is ridiculed by his family and his Spanish-speaking maid who speak over him in Spanish so that he is isolated from the conversation and humiliated. Following this Sean meets with a poor Hispanic woman who pleads with him to perform pro-bono surgery on her son's severe burns. When he refuses the surgery she is angered and criticizes his greed and the vanity at the heart of the kind of plastic surgery he performs. The camera lingers, in close-up, on Sean's face after she angrily leaves his office. We hear fast-paced, tense instrumentation as Sean contemplates his choice. The music intensifies as the image dissolves into a fast unsteady tracking shot through a window into the room in which Sean and Christian prepare for surgery. The men come to be framed in medium long shot, mirroring each other on either side of the basins in which they scrub their hands. The sound and camerawork suggests tension and instability and this feeling of angst permeates the rest of the sequence. Christian and Sean begin a prickly conversation, which moves from a discussion of Sean's family problems into an aggressive exchange about the nature of their work as surgeons. Sean questions the morality of plastic surgery while Christian defends their work and the value of their practice. Finally Sean leaves the room after indicating curtly that he may want to quit the practice.

The surgeons enter the operating room bristling with tension and the surgery that follows mirrors their feelings of angst. Liz injects the anesthetic into the patient's I.V. tube and comments in her typical sardonic tone 'Hey boys

our patient is comfortably in twilight, ready to be carved up like a Christmas Ham.’ This comment is typical of Liz who is always casting a critical eye on Sean and Christian’s behaviour. Here she suggests that their work is a form of butchery and makes fun of their cavalier approach to surgery (and the associated moral decisions in general). However, the comment also foreshadows some of the dark events that are to follow in the plot as both ham and murder come to play a role in the harrowing set of events surrounding the Latino body that are to emerge as the plot unfolds.

The opening moments of the surgery play out in a style similar to an action sequence or a dual in a Western. Parallel cutting between each of the surgeons dramatizes the preparation for surgery as each doctor snaps on gloves and lets the nurses put on their masks and surgical lamps. Sean declares ‘Lets do it.’ Then in a device that has become commonplace on *Nip/Tuck* as the indication that a surgery is about to begin, Liz presses play on CD player and the opening notes of the Rolling Stones’ ‘Paint it Black’ sound in the surgery. In a handheld movement timed to the opening notes of the song, the camera takes us from Sean’s face to his hand, as he waits for a nurse to place a scalpel in his palm. The speed of the shot is slowed down as Sean curls his fingers around the scalpel. Such a device makes reference to the slowing down of spectacular action in sports footage and action films, except in this case it is the delicate and skilled action of the surgeon’s hand that is being drawn out and celebrated. As the drumbeats of the song begin, the dialogue-based drama between Sean and Christian gives way to kinetic, musical sequence. From this point onwards the men appear almost compulsively driven by the rhythms of the song. The visual excess and montage that follows could be seen as simply a celebration of stylishness typical of Caldwell’s ‘televisuality.’ But the fact that the surgical scenes are so closely associated with music and that the music almost always corresponds the particular emotional mood of the episode, is an important hint that the melodramatic mode is in operation here.

The choice of music, ‘Paint it Black’ by the Rolling Stones is significant, not only for the way it voices Sean and Christian’s rage, but also because the unrelenting beats and diabolical tone of the music create the sense that the mastery and skill of these men is being used in service of evil. The pounding beats paired with rhythmic editing to produce a sense of automatism. Extremely brief close-up shots of Pérez’s face in different stages of the surgery are intercut

with shots of a black screen creating a jarring, mechanical rhythm. The effect mimics the way crime scene photographs and slides are presented on shows like *CSI*, through a flashing effect and the clicking of slides in a projector. Thus an aura of criminality is lent to the sequence. Christian and Sean are literally being drawn into complicity with activities of their patient as they take apart his face. This montage presentation continues with multiple dissolves between extreme close-ups of the minutiae of the surgical transformation. Technology is foregrounded in this montage as the jump-cuts emphasize the movement of hands and instruments around the face. Sean breaks the patient's nose in time with a climactic beat in the song and blood sprays across his mask. False teeth are screwed into Pérez's mouth. The surgeons slice into the skin around his eyes and later cut into the hairline to lift the skin. This violence articulates the undercurrents of emotional rage in this scene but the brutality is also excused by the sense of compulsive automatism that seems to define the men's actions. For each gruesome procedure that the men undertake we see a shot featuring the surgical tools which precedes any shots of the surgeon's faces as they undertake their work. This creates an impression that the tools are guiding the men instead of the men directing their implements. The end of the scene is indicated by a close-up in which we see the surgeon's bloody instruments hurled into a jug of surgical solution. As the instruments land the liquid changes from clear and transparent to bloody-red. This image of the pure liquid turning sanguine is one of many metaphors on this show in which leaking bodily fluids come to suggest contamination.

Black humour and a certain ironic knowingness are quite obvious features of this scene. Liz's commentary about the nature of the surgeons' work and the well known song accompanying the images seem to suggest that the scene is adopting a critical attitude toward the men rather than encouraging identification with them. Indeed the sheer excess and stylization of the scene could be considered comic and draws attention to the show's formal features offering the opportunity for it to be read from a position of critical distance. This tendency can be compared to Paul Willemen's description of the processes at play in the melodramas of Douglas Sirk. For Willemen, Sirk intensifies the stylistic features of melodrama to a point of excess and 'by stylising his treatment of a given narrative, he succeeds in introducing...a distance between the film and its narrative pretext' so that the film style reflects critically on its

ideologically problematic narrative events.³³⁴ But Willemen also understands that these are popular Hollywood films with a mandate to appeal to as many viewers as possible. Thus he thinks of them as having a double address. They may appeal to the emotions of a 'mass audience' while also addressing a knowing, culturally sophisticated viewer.³³⁵ As Jane Feuer explains, 'following Willemen's logic one must conceptualise Sirk films as two films in one.'³³⁶ *Nip/Tuck* is also a popular text aiming to appeal to as many viewers as possible and its address could be considered as similarly doubled. The pleasures on offer are not just those of irony and knowingness. Rather the images and stylised sequences of the show invite viewers to engage viscerally and emotionally with the heightened onscreen action. Unlike Willemen, I am cautious about thinking these two levels of engagement as strictly appealing to two different audiences. Instead of aligning an engagement with melodrama with the naivety of a mass audience and an inability to achieve critical awareness I would suggest that viewers are capable of moving between the two levels of the text, according to the viewers own personal positioning and political views, acknowledging levels of commentary and irony whilst still being able to engage emotionally and physically in the melodramatic pleasures on offer.

While in analysing this first surgery scene my intention was merely to illustrate how the surgical body is melodramatically invested with the feelings of the central surgeons on the show, the climactic closing sequence demonstrates much more clearly the regressive racialised dichotomies of good and evil set up by this show's use of bodies and melodramatic narrative. Before turning to a detailed analysis of this sequence I will briefly outline some plot points necessary to an understanding of the action.

In the course of the episode, Sean realises that Christian has misled him. He quits the practice begins to start up his own business. This decision leads him into an argument with Julia and, as a result, Sean's marriage begins to show signs of falling apart. Christian, meanwhile, discovers that Silvio Pérez is not only a drug dealer, but a child molester. His new, more attractive face allows him to prey on little girls more easily. It is worth noting here that the representation of Pérez, as a child molester rehearses an old melodramatic

³³⁴ Paul Willemen, 'Distanciation and Douglas Sirk' in *Screen* 19.2 (1971): p. 65.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Feuer, 'Melodrama, Serial Form and Television Today', p. 6.

trope: of racially other sexual assailant. Later, when Sean does a post-operative consult with Silvio, he and his brother Alejandro offer Sean 20 000 dollars to liposculpt Silvio's abdomen. Sean, desperate for money for his new practice, accepts. At the same time Christian sets off to do a Botox house-call. This trip is a trap set by the drug lord Escobar Gallardo in order to discover the whereabouts of Silvio Pérez and Christian is held captive at Escobar's residence as Sean prepares for surgery. At this stage the scene is set for the episode's dramatic climax which I detail below.

Before the surgery commences, Silvio's brother Alejandro convinces Sean to let him sit in on it by offering him an extra 5000 dollars. Sean cannot resist this financial reward and in the next shot the camera tracks back from a medium shot of the seated Alejandro to reveal, in a high-angle long shot Sean's new make-shift operating room. In it Liz monitors the anaesthesia and the unconscious Silvio is sprawled out on the operating table as Sean suctions fat from his abdomen. Hollow squelching noises accompany this image. Then the incision is shown in close-up so that we can see, in detail, the cannula moving in and out of Silvio's flesh and yellow fatty fluid seeping from the wound. Sean looks severely at Alejandro and demands that he wear his surgical mask. Alejandro obliges and the camera lingers on him moving down his body as he pulls a gun out of his pocket and conceals it in the surgical robe he is wearing.

From the 'cliffhanger' moment in the previous scene a cut transports us to Escobar Gallardo's residence where Christian is being held captive. This arrangement of suspenseful parallel sequences is typical of the 'pathos and action' and heightened drama of melodrama. Christian is almost naked, sweating and tied to a chair in front of a fire as Escobar interrogates him. Christian's suffering and his displays of endurance are only just beginning. Escobar questions Christian about the side effects of Botox and while doing so pulls off his shirt to reveal a heavily tattooed upper body. This might be read as another example of pain and endurance marked on the body as a sign of toughness (but also as an opportunity for erotic contemplation of the body). This scene is also an interesting example of two racialised bodies at war with each-other. Escobar's tattoos mark him as part of a gang culture that is frequently associated with Latin Americans and low income groups. Escobar wields his body, marked as it is with the particularly racially and socially conditioned imprints of suffering and manhood, against Christian's body. He knocks Christian to the

ground with a punch and reaches for a pile of syringes and then questions Christian about Sean's whereabouts. Christian in his first real display of heroism and loyalty refuses to give Escobar his answer. "I don't know" Christian declares as Escobar brings the needles toward his face. Jabbing four botox needles into Christian's cheek, Escobar retorts 'well know this' amidst Christian's cries of pain. Here Escobar uses Christian's own wealth and status related implements of body modification to torture and disfigure him. Escobar's comment here 'know this' also makes a connection between physical pain and moral certainty.

After this distressing moment we are returned to Sean's liposuction of Silvio Pérez. The globular suctioning sounds continue and the camera tracks back from a medium shot of the patient's abdomen to a high angle shot of the room. In the corner of the frame Alejandro jumps up suddenly. The shot scale moves from long-shot to a close-up on Liz shouting out in shock and then to a close-up of Sean as he tells Alejandro to sit down. Liz, again shot in close-up, looks at Alejandro in dismay then her face is obscured by the gun Alejandro raises into shot. He demands that they wake Silvio up from anaesthesia. Liz screams girlishly. Sean remains composed but proceeds carefully, trying to reason with Alejandro. Liz is forced to do Alejandro's bidding. Silvio's face is revealed in close up as he wakes. His skin is still yellowed and scarred from the recent surgeries. He resembles, somewhat, a Frankenstein's monster as his eyes roll back into his head and he gags on the intubation in his throat.

Alejandro begins talking to Silvio and reveals his intention to kill his brother because he too objects to the man's paedophilic tendencies. But Silvio starts to understand what is going on he grabs in desperation at the cannula in his abdomen, pulling it out and spraying mustard-coloured ooze around the room. Sean struggles to gain control of the instrument and then, in close-ups, we see each of the characters in the room being sprayed with fat; first, Alejandro who ducks away, then Liz who screams as her gown and the wall behind her is blotched with yellow fat. Notably we see a close-up of Sean's hands struggling for the cannula before the shot of him being splattered with fat as he struggles to contain his panic. This associates Sean with self-control and action rather than pure disgust and dismay. Even as he is confronted with this abject of human waste, Sean displays calm resolve and actively tries to regain his command over the scene. He is depicted as suffering but also as active and heroic while Liz, who is usually represented as level headed, is reduced to a screaming damsel in

distress. In the midst of this chaos, Alejandro moves over to the anaesthesia controls with the intention of giving his brother a lethal overdose. When Sean and Liz try to stop him he threatens to shoot Silvio instead.

In the next scene we see Christian being injected with yet more Botox. Escobar gives Christian 'one last chance' to reveal where his partner went. With a needle, Escobar traces a path down Christian's abdomen toward his crotch. He rests the needle here threateningly. The two men stare each other down. Christian still refuses to give up his friend. Escobar presses the needle into Christian's groin - the very seat of his masculine identity. Christian lets out tortured screams while his assailant mimics and mocks his cries. After this extraordinary spectacle of endurance Christian's phone rings and Escobar answers a call from Sean. With typically melodramatic pathos Escobar discovers Sean's location despite all of Christian's bravery. Most melodramas, Linda Williams argues, involve a 'give and take of "too late" and "in the nick of time."' ³³⁷ Through this tendency, Williams argues that melodrama produces a sense either of loss, in the case of 'too late,' or the threat of loss, in the case of 'in the nick of time.' Melodramas, according to Williams, are imbued with 'the sense that something has, as one of our later racial melodramas will put it, "gone with the wind," and the imagination of a loss that implicates readers or audiences is central.' ³³⁸ The suspense and timing of the narrative arrangement becomes an important way in which the text 'implicates' the audience into this feeling of having lost something. ³³⁹ This pattern of suspenseful, parallel action and pathos is very much present in the sequence I have described above. One might argue that viewers are implicated in a sense of loss, when, after viewing and empathizing with all Christian's bravery and pain endured in his refusal to give up his friend's location, Gallardo discovers where Sean is anyway.

This sequence involves drama, suspense and excesses of the body which are heightened to the point of being potentially comical. The squirting liquids and screaming faces featured in the sequence could potentially be read as screwball comedy. As in the surgical sequence that I described earlier with reference to Willemsen's ideas, excessive style and an intensification of its melodramatic features can allow for a distancing from the narrative. While it is

³³⁷ Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, p. 30.

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

³³⁹ Ibid.

possible for the sheer excess of the show's style to call on a more critical engagement with the narrative of racial threat evidenced here, this is not the only way that viewers can enjoy the text. As in the popular melodramas of Sirk, there is still the opportunity for viewers to enjoy and engage emotionally with the melodramatic features of the episode. Engaging with the melodrama on offer here, involves engaging with anxieties about a threatened white masculinity, and a threatening Latino body.

This sequence in which both Sean and Christian lose command of their technology, presents a hysterical expression of white male control compromised by a monstrous 'other.' This crisis is dramatized in the scenes featuring Sean, through queasy-making images of gushing abdominal fat. Significantly it is an unregulated Hispanic body that contaminates Sean's clean surgery, and as the rest of the season will show, casts a dark shadow over his life from this point onward. The sense of contagion is set up, not merely symbolically, but as something that should be viscerally felt. This uncontained, threatening body is rendered in physically revolting terms through the sprayings of yellow goop. Through the relays between Sean, the tools of his trade and the 'raced' body in this scene concerns about money and about racial 'others' are brought into intimate relation. Ultimately, this trauma is endured because Sean and Christian need money that is in hands of Columbian villains. The implication made here is that the 'other' is somehow to blame for the white man's perceived loss of agency, for the decline of patriarchal mastery based on earning power and for various forms of perceived white male economic disempowerment.

Identifying with Sean in this scene involves identifying with the struggle to contain one's immediate bodily responses to the revolting situation depicted onscreen. It is this viscerally felt disgust that intensifies the sense we are given both of the men's suffering and of their feats of self control. The melodramatic pathos and action is economically cultivated here through Sean's interface with Silvio Pérez's body and its sprayings of yellow goop and Christian's display of suffering and bravery. Interestingly, little attention is paid to the pain and distress of Silvio Pérez who must surely be undergoing the most suffering. The show suggests that Silvio Pérez *deserves* to suffer unlike Sean and Christian.

In the denouement that follows Christian and Escobar Gallardo appear in the fat-splattered surgery where Sean, Liz and Alejandro stand speechless considering Silvio's dead body and the messy aftermath of their struggle. Liz

washes her hands of the entire affair and it is up to the surgeons to find a way of concealing or dispensing with this incriminating body. This criminal involvement will haunt the men for at least the rest of the season. Following a scheme conceived by Sean, the men buy a number of hams and strap them to the body. They then feed Silvio Pérez to the alligators in a nearby swamp. This gesture refers back to Liz's snide comment as they began their first surgery on Pérez. As it transpires, Silvio Pérez is literally 'carved up like a Christmas ham'. In consideration of this ending, the remark seems as much a feature of melodramatic structure of heightened symbolism and foreshadowing as it is a clever comment on the violence of plastic surgery as a profession.

Once they've cast the body off they stand on the edge of the swamp and Christian assures Sean that he 'didn't know' Pérez was a child molester and that he could never help someone 'who would hurt our Annie' (here is referring to Sean's daughter). Sean responds 'I need to know that Christian'. The invocation of 'our Annie' here, reminds us of their sense that the purity of Annie and their bonds to the family unit serve as a justification for a certain attitude to threatening racial others. The men resolve to be more ethical in their business practices. As an alligator gores the corpse of this fearful, Hispanic sexual predator—the real monster of the story - our heroes wipe away any signs of the body from the trunk of Sean's car. Christian is distracted by the chomping alligators but Sean demonstrates such professionalism and concentration in this task that Christian admits to being frightened by him. Thus the dark reserves of white male power and control enjoy a temporary triumph in this closing scene. Sean has restored order and washed his hands of that contaminating body, even if such order is only temporary.

Sean and Christian's affiliation with Latin American drug dealers in this episode ultimately serves to construct the men as beset upon heroes whose acts of bravery and endurance mark out their virtue. This heroism is dramatized on the body and through gory affective imagery that appeals to the bodily responses of viewers. Silvio Pérez's body is the source of this episode's revolting gore and it is the white male body that suffers and endures the horrors looming beneath the Hispanic skin. As much as this show may gesture toward political correctness, liberal thinking and feminism and allows itself to be read as a humorous critique of two white men in crisis, on the level of melodrama, *Nip/Tuck's* affective appeals to the heart and the gut dramatise the anxieties of

a 'beset' white masculinity, articulating fears of 'contamination' by and entanglement with racial 'others'. The doubling of melodrama and irony also allows for the 'hedging' that Korobov described so that these anxious reactionary sentiments can be both voiced and denied so that it is possible to enjoy the pleasures of being moved by this bodily melodrama, whilst simultaneously being able to retain a sense of critical distance from the text.

Dexter: Controlling the Chaos

In the pilot episode of Showtime's novel series about a likeable serial killer, we are introduced to Dexter as he drives through Miami at night looking for his next victim. As Dexter's car glides slowly past traffic and restaurants we see the lurid lights of Miami night life and the loud beats of Cuban jazz music reflected in his rear view mirror. The visuals here quite obviously reference Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese, 1976). This reference to *Taxi Driver* is one of many intertextual references to film incorporated into this show. We could read this moment as signifying little more than an attempt to flatter the pop-cultural savvy of *Dexter*'s intended 'quality' audience. However, this reference to *Taxi Driver* also aligns *Dexter* with the tradition of film noir and with a particular expression of white male alienation and repression that ultimately culminates in violent acts. In his noir treatment of *Taxi Driver*, Scorsese uses the tropes of noir to express a post-Vietnam crisis in masculinity. *Dexter*, we might argue, draws on the same construction of alienation and white male suffering to express, in equally melodramatic terms, a reactionary sense of crisis in relation to the position of white men in the multi-cultural city of Miami.

Dexter is notable for its multi-racial cast that is representative of the diversity of Miami's population. For at least the first two series of the show, Dexter is the only white male amongst the chief characters in his police team. He shares his work environment with Debra Morgan (Jennifer Carpenter), his foul-mouthed and tactless foster sister; Vince Masuka (C.S. Lee), the Japanese forensic analyst with a penchant for pornography and an almost uncontrollable need to make lewd comments at inappropriate moments; Angel Batista (David Zayas), the rotund, slurring police sergeant seeking forgiveness from his wife after an affair; Sergeant James Doakes (Eric King), an almost pathologically aggressive and violent black cop and the department head, the ruthless

careerist; Maria LaGuerta (Lauren Vélez), a character whose brazen sexuality is frequently foregrounded on the show. What all these characters have in common, aside from the fact that they are not white men, is the incapacity to contain or control their emotions and desires in public. These characterisations correspond quite clearly to certain well worn racial stereotypes. As much as these somewhat exaggerated stereotypical characterisations are overlaid with irony, they still serve to construct Dexter's whiteness in a particularly interesting way.

In contradistinction to the unrestrained bursts of anger exhibited by Doakes, La Guerrta's inappropriate sexual advances, Debs' verbal assaults, Angel's infidelity and Masuka's lewdness, Dexter is characterised by a steely self-control, rationality, restraint, bodily self-containment and a certain invisibility. These are aspects of the Western construction of white male identity that have traditionally reinforced power and privilege for white men. For Richard Dyer, whiteness maintains its power by a certain kind of invisibility passing itself off not as a race but as 'the human race' while still operating in specifically white interests.³⁴⁰

Dexter can quite convincingly be read as a clever critique of white masculinity as, quite literally, pathological. The show arguably undermines accepted ideas about the normative white masculinity by the aligning of Dexter's rationality, invisibility, cleanliness and bodily control with serial killing. In addition, Dexter's outward identity as a civilised, amiable and neighbourly family man is something that must be consciously performed. As a character he highlights how rather than being natural, white male identity is a performance. Startling white features prominently in the visual 'look' of the series. It might seem that the show is engaged in the process of making whiteness visible and problematic.

However, like *Nip/Tuck*, *Dexter* can be seen as a multi-levelled text. *Dexter* is appealing and indeed novel for the unusual moral positioning of its protagonist. Dexter's vigilante killings create a (questionable) moral order in a world in which the law (represented by his police department) and religion seem ineffectual. Dexter follows the 'code of Harry' a set of rules left behind by his father who trained Dexter to harness his killer instincts in order to protect society from bad killers - those who kill innocent people. This code provides an

³⁴⁰ Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997). p. 2.

ordering device which orders Dexter's moral responses to the world and helps Dexter to manage his dark inclinations. But because it comes down from Harry, Dexter's dad, the system of rules is constructed as an inherited patriarchal burden. This need to harness and contain an inner turmoil is constructed on the show as a form of suffering and heroism. In order for the show to work as well as it does, it must make Dexter's violence relatable and this show engages the embodied responses of viewers to activate our sympathy with Dexter. That is, it uses images of bodily violence to make our moral alignment with Dexter 'viscerally felt'.

As much as it may knowingly critique the normativity of white masculinity, *Dexter* constructs this identity as a position of repression, responsibility and inner suffering. Crisp bright white is always matched with patterns of blood which recur throughout the series and almost always relate to Dexter's repressed inner trauma. In the pilot episode of *Dexter* we learn that the show's unlikely hero collects blood samples from his victims and places them neatly between glass slides. As Dexter slots his latest slide into his collection he remarks in voice-over: 'Blood: sometimes it sets my teeth on edge other times it helps me control the chaos.' As these comments suggest the show operates on oppositions between chaos and order. These oppositions are set up through visceral sounds and images that encourage an embodied engagement with Dexter's battle for control.

A need for control is articulated repeatedly through images of blood-splatter and bloodletting. The sight of blood immediately speaks of that which should be below the surface, welling up out of it. We could see all the displays of blood on the show as standing symbolically for Dexter's internal feelings. But these images of blood splatter are more than symbolic. They imply a violent impact in a shocking way. They allow one to imagine the breaking of the skin and the pressure necessary in a blade hitting an artery for such a spray to be possible. Dexter's work, however, involves looking at these images as information and as patterns with a logical detachment that is the territory of repressed white men. What Dexter does with these images reflects also on the work of being a white man. In order to see these images in this way we, as viewers, also have to contain the immediate responses of our bodies. Both the suffering and violence implied by the images and the process of their repression becomes something viewers experience in a physical way.

In the murder scenes on this show we are engaged in a similar process of rationalisation and containment that is evidenced in Dexter's handling of blood spatter. In each murder scene, Dexter cuts a neat line into his victim's face, siphons off a drop of blood and places it into a slide. Like the blood-splatter this image gives viewers both a troubling image of pain and its pleasurable containment. It is tempting to reduce the range of affective experience generated in these scenes to the pleasures of 'controlling the chaos' but when watching Dexter kill his vulnerable victims we are encouraged to identify both with the physical and psychological suffering of the victim and with Dexter's battle to gain mastery over pain. Throughout the course of the series Dexter is compared to the people he kills. Almost all of Dexter's killings in the first season are of white men very much like himself. It would seem that Dexter is really killing versions of himself over and over again to come to grips with a childhood experience of pain. What we see on *Dexter* are repeated displays of white male vulnerability and physical anguish rendered always in graphic images that appeal to the body. As much as Dexter's interactions with blood are about mastery and control, images of blood also work, melodramatically, to speak of an inner suffering. The significance of blood on *Dexter* is dramatically displayed in a scene from episode 10 of series 1.

In this scene Dexter's rival serial killer, the 'Ice Truck Killer', (who we are to discover is actually Dexter's biological brother), has constructed a murder scene intended to remind Dexter of his traumatic past. Dexter is called to a hotel in which a room has been soaked in blood and sprayed on the walls, bed and furniture. As a blood specialist with reputation for being undeterred by the horror of bloodshed, Dexter is sent first into the scene wearing a protective white suit and mask. Dexter emerges from the elevator into the hotel lobby and walks down the narrow aquamarine-coloured corridor with a confident stride. These hallway images are reminiscent of scenes from Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* especially in terms of the camera's lingering attention to Dexter's progression through the corridor. While this can be read as another of *Dexter's* clever intertextual references, the association between these images and the Kubrick film also pre-empt the horror that is to come as it recalls the famously visceral shots of blood gushing out of the lifts in *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980).

After tracking back with Dexter's movement through the hall, the camera then cuts to a close-up of the door to room 108 from Dexter's point of view. The

camera tracks in toward the door, mimicking Dexter's motion. We then see a close-up of Dexter moving toward the lens until his form blacks out the image. This is followed by a fade-in to the blood-stained back of the door from the interior of the room as the door opens. From Dexter's point of view we see the door opening wider to reveal a room in which a massive river of blood streams across the floor and the bed, chair, curtains and lampshade are all dramatically splattered with blood. On the sound track we hear an amplified heartbeat as the door swings further open. The camera tracks deeper into the room. We then see a close-up of Dexter, gasping through his mask. The desperate cries of a young boy screaming 'mommy' sound on the audio track. This inaugurates a series of fast cuts between images of the room and shots from another scene, ostensibly from Dexter's childhood. We see a boy sitting in a pool of blood, a close-up of a small blood-soaked hand, a little foot perched in the pooling red fluid. Then we see images of the room again and of Dexter trembling. His head wobbles and he begins to fall. He is shot in medium shot as he splash-lands face-first into the blood. A jump cut repeats the falling motion. In a high angle long-shot then we see Dexter in his startling white suit lying in the puddle of red. Graphically the image resembles the blood spatter images that are the object of Dexter's fascination. This scene gives us an insight into the amount of repressed emotion that is invested in blood for Dexter. Blood slides and blood splatter analysis are meaningful as a way of containing and controlling trauma but they also *stand for* Dexter's repressed feelings. Where Dexter is emotionally repressed, rational and calm, his interfaces with blood allow the expression of unspoken emotion.

However, this scene also explains Dexter's relation to blood in terms of a singular, isolated childhood experience. This might appear to problematise the connections I am making between this melodrama, blood and arguments about race. Dexter's brother always stages his crime scenes at significant sites in the Miami landscape, interrupting scenes of wholesomeness and leisure with horror. This murder is carefully staged in a space typical of Miami as a holiday destination. The flashback that Dexter experiences transposes a site of horror onto this otherwise peaceful resort location suggesting a constant criminal threat lurking in the city. The show is not as obviously organised around race as is *Nip/Tuck*. There is a more subtle melodrama of white masculinity at play here but there is still nonetheless the expression of a sense of crisis which is very explicitly related to Dexter's desire to bring order to his environment. Although

Dexter's violence is explained in relation to experiences of childhood trauma, his violence is *justified* in relation to the construction of Miami as a disorderly, messy criminal world of untamed desires. As the series progresses we learn that it was in Miami that Dexter's most traumatic childhood experience took place. Dexter's mother was brutally killed by a group of Hispanic drug dealers. This connection suggests that the trauma we see in the show's splatterings of blood might be linked to an expression of anxiety about a multicultural threat to white security in the Miami cityscape.

Dexter describes himself as a 'very neat monster' and his precision is juxtaposed against the messiness of a criminal city. The chaos that Dexter must control through the manipulation of blood is not only his internal chaos but the disorder of his city. This 'chaos' becomes tangible in the city's bright colours, dirt, clutter, heat and sweat. In opposition to this Dexter's kills impose order. The criminal den is wrapped in plastic, the bodies are neatly sliced and disposed of in black bags.

At certain points, however, Dexter falters in his maintenance of order. Significantly, whilst most of Dexter's victims are white men, like himself when Dexter feels out of control and impotent, these feelings are expressed in his interfaces with victims of different races from his own. In episode 1 of season 2, entitled 'It's Alive' we learn that after killing his brother in the last series, Dexter has been unable to kill for a long time. This is because he is being stalked by the increasingly obsessive and aggressive Sergeant Doakes who is convinced Dexter is 'up to something'. Finally, Dexter escapes Doakes' surveillance and has the opportunity to kill another of the murderers who are typically his prey. In this case he has chosen a blind, black man, called Jimmy Sensio (Glenn Plumber), who poses as a voodoo priest and administers poisons for a fee. While many of Dexter's previous victims have appeared sleazy, unkempt or aligned with a criminal underworld, this particular killer and his accommodations display an extreme manifestation of the filth and mess that Dexter so desperately desires to contain.

The scene begins with a tracking shot along cages of clucking chickens in Sensio's shop. The camera moves on to reveal a dimly-lit room, crammed with bottles and peculiar objects. At the end of the room stands Jimmy Sensio, his eyes are unnervingly white-blue and occupies the cluttered space with a

cigarette jutting out of the corner of his mouth. A rattle of beads signals Dexter's entrance as he pushes aside the hanging bead-door. The two men have a conversation in which Dexter poses as a client, seeking to establish the man's guilt. The headquarters are full of chimeras like beads and curtains and crammed from wall to wall with bottles, lotions and potions with weird animal origins. The soundscape is messy too. We hear the rattling of beads and the clucking of the chickens. Jimmy's voice rattles as he speaks, producing a discomfiting phlegmy sound. This is not just any mess, but one related to the practice of voodoo which is, in turn, aligned with a Haitian racial and national identity. Notably, Dexter's primary antagonist in this season, Doakes, is also a black man with links to Haiti where he undertook his 'Special Ops' work before joining the police force. Hence Dexter's impotence with regard to killing is doubly expressed in relation to black men and Haitian identity.

Once Dexter has offered Sensio a wad of cash in exchange for the promise to make him a death curse, the 'high priest' leads Dexter into a back room even more cluttered than the last. The walls are decorated with voodoo idols, trails of red neon lighting and colourful fairy lights. Here Dexter pierces Sensio's throat with a sedative injection. As Sensio drops to the ground the image fades to black. In the next shot we see the backroom space transformed. Dexter has imposed order on the kill scene. The walls and surfaces are meticulously covered in plastic, and Sensio lies wrapped in tape and plastic on a surgical table at the centre of the space.

We hear Dexter's voice over as he looks over at his victim 'A blind man. Not very sporting, I know but I'm not one to discriminate based on race, gender or ability'. The comment is humorous given the context in which this politically correct language is used. The logic of a discourse conceived to protect minorities from bad treatment, here, in a typically ironic, *Dexter* moment, becomes the justification for murder. In this instance we can see the potential construction of an ironic 'in group' of viewers who recognise the politically correct discourses as a well-worn form of jargon and who might (secretly) delight in this kind of subversion. While this pleasure is ironic, it is by no means progressive.

Jimmy Sensio wakes up with a gruff growl. Dexter cuts into his face to undertake his ritual of collecting blood samples. We see the blood seeping from the wound and Jimmy grunts and cringes revealing a mouth full of rotting teeth. This image of his teeth, compounded by the grunting, makes an appeal to an

embodied sensitivity. Alignment with Dexter is encouraged through his witty voice-over, but Sensio grunts more than he speaks. The grunting noises increase and then Jimmy speaks in a deep gravelly voice, as if possessed.

‘I am the one with the power in his hands’

Dexter looks down at his bound victim noting:

‘That’s not entirely accurate’.

We see a close up of Sensio from Dexter’s perspective, as Dexter flashes the blade over Sensio’s face. Sensio continues:

‘those who believe in me shall be free, alabanza, alabanza...’

Dexter then gives Sensio an annoyed short rap across the face to stop him.

Here Dexter is aligned with a kind of rationality that humorously undercuts Sensio’s mystical beliefs. Again, what is celebrated in this humour is a position of rationality traditionally associated with white men. Importantly, Sensio is much more exposed as a body than is Dexter. We understand Jimmy Sensio in this scene by monitoring bodily signs. He is naked and we sense his distress from the writhing of his helpless flesh against the plastic wrappings, we read the contortions of his face and the gravelly rumbling of his voice. Dexter, on the other hand is characterised by his cool, calm wit. We have an opposition between the calm ‘rational’ power traditionally associated with white masculinity and a sort of savagery that has long been problematically linked to black masculinity. Critically for my purposes, this opposition is staged in visceral terms through the relations established between these two raced bodies. Because Sensio evokes disgust, the scene encourages a pleasurable alignment with his antithesis, the calm rational, detached Dexter. At the same time Dexter’s insane rational detachment and cleanliness is ironised in this scene, there is also something pleasing about Dexter’s position. He undercuts the mysticism that makes Jimmy Sensio frightening and sets out to eliminate the disturbing, messy physicality of this person.

When it is time for Dexter to kill, he falters. As he lifts a large knife above his head the sound of the chickens clucking and rustling is amplified, as if the birds were taunting him. From a medium shot of Dexter standing over Sensio's wriggling body, we see a very tight close up of Dexter's face. First his expression registers a kind of desirous glee or bloodlust but as he lowers the blade his expression changes to one of hesitation. A cut introduces a shot of Jimmy, on the table, his blind eyes staring blankly up in fear. As Dexter thrusts downward, he flinches. The movement is shown through a number of fast cuts between different camera positions on Dexter. The cackling of the chickens continues to increase in volume. At the sound the blade hitting a surface there is a cut away from Dexter and Jimmy to the chickens, lit in startling red neon light. We then see another tight close-up of Dexter looking confused and disappointed. This is followed by a cut to Jimmy in which we can see that Dexter has brought the knife down just to the side of the victim's head. After swearing and muttering to himself, Dexter sets Sensio free with a swift flick of the knife across the plastic noting, somewhat feebly 'Let this be a lesson to you'.

In the next scene we see a high angle shot of Dexter in his boat, where he typically removes the bodies of his victims. This time, the camera tracks slowly down toward Dexter to reveal that he is drinking. The voice-over articulates his thoughts: 'I've always enjoyed my work. It brings order to the chaos, fills me with civic pride...but what was that back there? When I picked up the knife I didn't know who I was. I came here to dump bodies, not beer bottles. Now I'm just a litterbug.' This is another humorous piece of commentary from Dexter in which the traditional responsibilities of good, upstanding citizenship are aligned with his killing. But the raced oppositions between order and cleanliness versus disorder and mess continue into this scene. What's striking is how Dexter's lust for killing is linked to a sense of responsibility, a patriarchal pressure to protect and cleanse his environment.

This failed murder is just the prelude to a longer narrative featuring another failed murder. Once more the potential victim is non-white. He is also connected with Latin American, Miami gang culture. In this case the sense of patriarchal pressure, to protect and to clean up is much greater. It is primarily through Dexter's interest in 'bringing justice' to a little girl who has lost her family, that Dexter's killing is aligned with heroism and with the burden of

patriarchal responsibility. The narrative begins with the discovery of the body of a young Latin American man. Dexter, still shaken from his failure the night before, enters the crime scene and surveys the bloodied flesh of the corpse which lies face-down on the rocks next to a river. It is marked with deep gashes which Dexter notes must have been made with a Machete. We learn that this is the signature weapon of a certain Miami gang. Stepping around the body to take pictures, Dexter accidentally steps in a pool of blood, getting the man's blood on his shoe. Dexter's cleanliness is here contaminated by contact with this murder. The moment recalls the images of Dexter as a child with his foot soaked in blood.

When the victim's mother runs into the scene, pushing through police barricades, it is up to Dexter to catch her in his arms and stop her from touching the body. The woman collapses into Dexter's arms speaking to him in imploring tones but in Spanish so that Dexter must turn to Angel for clarification. Angel explains that the woman is asking Dexter 'to find Little Chino [the alleged killer] and kill him like a dog.' Seconds later a little girl runs up shouting her brother's name. She gazes at the body and then up at Dexter. From a close-up on the little girl's face there is a dissolve into a flashback of Dexter's own face as a child. From this moment Dexter has been charged with a certain responsibility to this pleading mother and damaged child. Or, at least, his violence is rationalised in relation to their suffering and he, very self-consciously, takes on the role of avenging hero. This brand of heroism is experienced and expressed as a burden.

Later, when we see the nefarious 'little Chino' (Matthew Willig) for the first time, the sheer might of the man's body is presented as a lure for Dexter. Like Jimmy Sensio, Chino is constructed as an excessive body to be contained and controlled. Dexter and his sister Deb are seated at a desk in the police department. We hear Doakes' voice offscreen ushering Chino into the room: 'C'mon Chino, right this way.' Spanish guitar music starts playing on the audiotrack as Chino strides into the room in slow motion, dwarfing Doakes and everyone else around him. We see a close-up of Dexter slack-jawed as the camera tracks in on his face and then a slightly closer shot of Chino from a low angle which emphasises his power and bulk. The camera pans with him as he walks. Then there is a cut to another tracking close-up of Dexter's face, as he follows Chino with his eyes. Following Dexter's gaze, the camera then tracks slowly in on the tattoo on Chino's arm. Significantly the tattoo features a big red

sacred heart with stylized drops of red blood patterned down the arm. The attention to this detail suggests a lustful gaze on Dexter's part. The red tattoo with its blood motif speaks to Dexter's bloodlust. It is also a particularly fleshy sign of Chino's guilt (the blood-drops are 'trophies' from previous kills) and hence a justification for Dexter to kill. Debs declares 'fucking beefbus!' while Dexter still gazes desirously after Chino. Dexter's desire is not of a romantic variety; the emphasis on Chino's body in this scene is important as it speaks of Dexter's need to control and contain this out-of-bounds, differently raced body. While Chino is being interrogated the little girl from the previous scene comes in to the police department with her mother. In a brief moment she catches Dexter's eye and stares at him imploringly. Dexter's voice-over is an answer to the beseeching look. He says 'we'll be vindicated soon.'

Dexter finally captures Chino, sedates him and takes him back to Jimmy Sensio's lair. His return to the same environment suggests an emphasis on place and a link between this killing scene and the uncontained 'mess' that Sensio represents. Dexter has once-again wrapped the environment with plastic sheeting and this time he has removed the taunting chickens. Dexter shows evident strain in lifting Chino's body onto the table. The handheld camera moves unsteadily down the fluorescent-lights on the wall and then, almost tremulously, the camera scans over the enormous naked body wrapped in cellophane, moving up to Dexter as he prepares his tools for the kill. We hear Dexter's voice over: 'He wasn't easy to get here, but here he is and here I am, ready, willing...' he lifts the scalpel to Chino's cheek falteringly '...able?' The camera tracks down from a shot of Dexter's face to his trembling instrument, as it rests on Chino's cheek. Dexter slices unevenly spreading the blood messily around with his blade. He mutters and curses, trying to get the blood onto his slide in the usual neat fashion.

Shrill sounds reminiscent of horror movies begin as Chino's eyes blink open. The shot is framed in a close-up which reveals the large and frightening whites of his eyes as he scans the room. Dexter's dose of anaesthetic was clearly not enough to sedate this enormous man. Another close-up shows Chino's powerful, muscular arms pushing against the plastic and tape. As Dexter runs to get a knife and more tape we see yet another shot of Chino's chest and arms forcing their way out of the binding. In close-up a single muscular arm break free and reaches up to grab Dexter's blade from his hand. There is very little

attention to Chino's face in this scene, rather he is constructed as a powerful body. Dexter pushes back against Chino's arm then we see a close-up of another mighty arm breaking free. In medium shot we see the arm pushing Dexter to the ground with an almighty thrust. By the time Dexter is back on his feet he turns to find the room empty. Chino has disappeared into the night. Dexter is shot in the door frame, silhouetted against the blue night sky in an attitude of melancholy and dejection.

In this episode viewers are encouraged to engage with Dexter's desperation and his lust for blood. First we see how Dexter's murderous urge is justified in relation to an innocent little girl and with regard to Dexter's own need to 'restore his world'. Then when Chino walks in, he is constructed as an object of desire in Dexter's gaze. Dexter's failure to contain Chino's blood in his slide reveals Dexter's mastery faltering in the face of an Hispanic threat. Then the 'monster' awakens from anaesthesia, overpowers Dexter and disappears leaving Dexter's desires frustrated, his world unrestored and the little girl's suffering unavenged. Differently 'raced' bodies and their fluids operate as melodramatic devices in this scene and more generally on *Dexter*. Chino represents a threat of racial otherness as that which cannot be controlled. He is both forceful and elusive. He also seems almost impervious to pain. Suffering, on *Dexter* is primarily related to whiteness in the physical violence against Dexter, in Dexter's repeated killing of white men who mirror himself and in his battle to contain his inner turmoil as it is expressed through stylised displays of blood. On *Dexter* blood is an intensely invested site for staging control and the loss of control. It is through Dexter's interfaces with the blood of others that his internal suffering is expressed. In Dexter's repeated staging of white victimhood in visceral evocative terms we are invited to suffer with this embattled white masculinity week after week.

Conclusion

In both *Dexter* and *Nip/Tuck* demonstrations of suffering must emerge obliquely, displaced into these visceral bodily metaphors for two reasons. Firstly, because these victims represent normative white masculinity, which requires a containment and repression of the body and both of these shows dramatise this control as a burden. Secondly, the expression of suffering can be read as a

reactionary perception of threat to normative white masculinity in response to the multiculturalism of South Florida. These sentiments cannot be overtly voiced on television shows that align themselves with sophistication and political correctness. Not only do both of these television shows feature the melodramatic displacement of characters internal feelings onto the bodies, flesh and fluids of others in highly stylised graphic scenes of blood and gore, each of these shows also celebrates white male victimhood and heroism through battles staged on and through the bodies of black and Hispanic characters. Not all surgical candidates (on *Nip/Tuck*) or potential victims (on *Dexter*) are non-white. In fact on both shows there is a predominance of white bodies under the knife. However, climactic crises in control and confidence are frequently depicted through surgical interventions into the bodies of black and Hispanic characters. These bodies are viscerally rendered as excessive and in need of containment. This is achieved, not just symbolically but through an affective appeal to the bodies of viewers. In *Nip/Tuck* we witness the revolting scene in which Silvio Pérez's bodily fat literally sprays out of him as Sean struggles to control and contain the fluid. In *Dexter* Jimmy Sensio, is rendered in terms of dirt and mysticism. He is made physically disgusting through his phlegmy voice and rotting teeth. Little Chino's excessive masculine strength and sheer size marks his body as an excessive threat that Dexter is desperate to contain.

While humour and irony features strongly in each of these texts, and may work to redeem them of any charges of political incorrectness, this does not preclude the possibility for viewers to engage with and be moved by the shows' more reactionary melodramatic sentiments. I have described *Nip/Tuck's* and *Dexter's* graphic imagery as melodramatic, not to dismiss it to the 'culturally low' but rather as a way of articulating the persuasiveness and some of the pleasure offered by such material. While melodrama has traditionally been denigrated for its emotional manipulation -- it is this capacity to move people through the syncopation of theme, emotional register and bodily excitation that make melodrama so pleasurable. This is achieved, *par excellence*, by *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter*.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

I began this thesis with the observation that it has become commonplace to see the human body, exposed, explored and eviscerated on contemporary television programmes. Television's recent fascination with the body and its visceral excess, I have argued, provides a clear indication that television theory needs to be more sensitive to the ways in which the medium appeals to the embodied, affective responses of viewers. Theory, furthermore, needs to consider not just excesses of emotion but the sensual excesses of the body to be found on television; not just visual pleasure but embodied responses to television. The case studies presented in this thesis have all used the body as a starting point for comparing and exploring the affective landscapes of a diverse range of television programmes. I have argued that these programmes use the body in a way that is particularly appropriate to the specific features and capacities of the television medium and its reception contexts. In our living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms we are encouraged by these shows to feel extremely close to other people's bodies in a way that fits with the intimacy of the domestic setting.

In each of the case studies examined here, the body's affective provocations are inextricably tied to the way that these shows market themselves. I have adapted John Thornton Caldwell's term 'televisuality' which describes an aesthetic response to post-network era market pressure in order to characterise the grotesque and visceral appeal of today's bodily exposures on television as 'tele-affectivity.' Caldwell's theory provides a useful model for understanding and explaining the impetus behind a widespread tendency and helps me to account for the phenomenon in terms of the increased competition, specialist branding and niche markets of the television industry in the 2000s. This approach has enabled me to compare some of the most apparently 'base' of cultural texts, alongside some of the most self-aware and knowingly sophisticated television dramas.

However, I have also used the notion of tele-affectivity to critique Caldwell's dismissal of the domesticity of the medium and his attempts to divorce the stylishness and visual excess of post-network era television from

traditional ideas about the specificity of the television medium. Focusing my argument on the intimacy of television I have shown how in both *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live* and *Six Feet Under* the cultivation of intimacy with others, and the production of a sense of closeness (physical or emotional) are at the heart of the appeal that these shows make to viewers. Synthesising the work of television theorists such as Misha Kavka, Christine Geraghty and Horace Newcomb, I have argued that by encouraging intimacy with other people (onscreen and offscreen), celebrating access, proximity and a sense of interpersonal connection, these visceral body programmes should be considered as a continuation of television's traditional modes of address. But intimacy in these programmes is not merely a pleasant and easy experience. Both of the shows in my second chapter, and indeed many that I analyse in the following chapters, evidence an anxiety and a fascination with the discomfort and the work of inhabiting a body and getting close to other bodies, of negotiating boundaries between public and private space and of exposing our most private selves to those most close to us.

Make Me Perfect and *Dr. 90210*, the plastic surgery programmes that I discuss in my third chapter also foreground and celebrate their unique access to and intimacy with the bodies of others, promising privileged views of subjects exposed in their nakedness and glimpses into other people's opened bodily interiors. I have argued however, that engagement with these programmes is not simply driven by prurient fascination, thrill-seeking titillation or a drive for visual mastery over the bodies of others. Rather, by focusing on the cultivation of affect and specifically, care and shame, I have shown how plastic surgery television programmes have a far more complex mode of address to viewers. On the one hand, a discourse of care justifies and facilitates a transgressive intimacy with the bodies of others. On the other hand, the onscreen displays of the embarrassment, undressing and the exposure of subjects animate feelings of shame. Using work on shame by Silvan Tomkins and Elspeth Probyn, I understand the cultivation of this emotion as something 'contagious' that engages viewers in sharing the shame of others as they, in turn, feel shame for watching. Through shame's capacity to initiate acute self-reflection in relation to others, these programmes provide a forum in which viewers can think through their embodied relations to other people. While the feelings aroused by this programme may not always be pleasant, engagement is driven by a desire for feelings of connectivity

with others and by an interest in reflecting on the private and embodied self in relation to a broader social sphere. My approach in this third chapter echoes the argument made about tele-affectivity in my second chapter. While the affective excess of this show can be understood in terms of ‘televisuality,’ as a market driven bid for programme distinction, the affective features of these programmes engage viewers on deeper, more emotional level than a simple display of style, as in Caldwell’s model, instead emphasising intimacy and lines of entanglement with others.

Tele-affectivity also becomes a frame for my understanding of the increased interest in exploring the sticky insides of the body and the morbid flesh of the corpse on television programmes with an investment in science and education. In my fourth chapter I examined two forensics-based drama series *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and *Bones* along with the educational autopsy programme *Anatomy for Beginners* to explore the role of the sensually evocative body in television’s claims to offer a unique educational experience. These shows celebrate television’s audiovisual capacities, emphasising an approach to learning through the sensual experience of the object of interest. This model of learning is typically exemplified by certain expert figures whose bodily posturing, sensory sophistication and composure become examples of a privileged way of gaining knowledge. While television lacks the actual presence to make this type of direct learning possible, the lack is denied and substituted by the excessive viscosity of the morbid bodies on display. A focus on learning as a sensual experience, and on the bodily posturing of the teacher, constructs the learning process as an erotic exchange which, despite the initially clinical appearance and behaviour of television’s forensic scientists, can be marked by surprising tenderness and corporeal sensitivity. The body becomes the site of a kind of intersubjective sensual exchange between the teacher, the onscreen learner and the viewer/learner at home.

Furthermore, my focus on affect in the context of television education forces a rethinking about what it is we really learn from television and how this learning happens. One might dismiss, as many critics have done, *CSI*’s ventures into wounded human flesh, or Gunther von Hagens’ televised dissections as cheap thrills parading under the auspices of genuine educational interest. My analysis is, however, sensitive to the degree to which these programmes provide a certain understanding of the look, texture, volume and shape of bodies, organs

and bones in a way that is not accessible in written text. At the same time the lessons of these shows might be less about anatomy and more about pedagogic relationships, fathoming what it means to be human and learning about how to immerse oneself in a sensory experience of the object of knowledge. In a similar vein, however problematic the overt messages of plastic surgery television programmes may be, the centrality of shame and the focus on the body actually allow for a certain kind of learning about private bodies that is not accessible in many other forums. *All New Cosmetic Surgery Live*, *Dr 90210* and *Make Me Perfect* produce a space of critical self-evaluation in which viewers can consider their own embodiment. It answers questions like 'Am I normal,' or 'Am I okay?' These programmes do, however, answer these questions through a regressive, post-feminist fixation on the post-surgical ideal body whereas other body-oriented shows like *Embarrassing Bodies* (Channel 4, 2007-) or *How to Look Good Naked* (Channel 4, 2006 -) perform the same 'teaching' function in less problematic terms.

Finally, my chapter on the U.S. quality television dramas *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* also proceeds from a consideration of how these shows use the body to market themselves as distinct programme types. Paradoxically while the body has been aligned with trash aesthetics in reality programming, in quality drama a self-aware display of stylised bodily violence becomes a mark of quality. Of all the programmes I have discussed these two shows appear to most confirm to Caldwell's arguments which emphasise style over content or emotional depth. The highly ironic, stylish, intertextual and self-referential way in which the body is displayed on these programmes suggest that their use of the body is different from the other texts I have been describing. Whereas in *Make Me Perfect*, *Bones* or *Six Feet Under* the viscosity of the body translates fairly fluidly into clear emotional registers, this process is more complex in *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter*. There is a tension between the politically correct spoken language on the surface of the text and a use of blood and gore which seems to encourage sympathy for the respective crises of the flawed white male protagonists at the centre of each show. These body images allow viewers a way of getting emotionally close to these otherwise repressed characters and of understanding their internal feelings. Precisely because there is gap between what can be overtly stated and what is expressed through heightened affect and excesses of the body, I have described this tendency as melodrama. Using Peter Brooks' ideas about

melodrama as a 'text of muteness' and Linda Williams' work on race, I have shown how the stylization and musical orchestration of blood, viscera and violence on these programmes is a melodramatic expression of reactionary sentiments about race in the context of an increasingly multicultural American landscape. At the same time the self-conscious use of irony in these programmes might seem to undercut the possibility of the kind of emotional engagement necessary for melodrama. I have argued, however, that irony need not be seen as negating melodrama. Rather the two tendencies may operate alongside each other so that the text may be enjoyed on two levels. The many levels operating within these shows allow viewers to both enjoy and deny the reactionary sentiments expressed in these programmes.

Thinking about affect and the body has proved a productive way of considering how the address of television texts may be doubled, offering different possibilities for pleasurable engagement. My chapter on plastic surgery television suggests a similar doubling. While on the surface the text appears problematically anti-feminist and squarely routed within the dominant ideology, a consideration of affect allows for a thinking through of a range of far more complex uses and pleasures. In *Nip/Tuck* and *Dexter* the doubling works, politically, in the opposite way. These texts seem, on the surface, as subversive critical texts but through their affective register they allow for certain more reactionary pleasures to be voiced. As my case studies have shown, the potential of affect to produce multiple levels of engagement and gratification is significant if we are to fully understand the political implications of television viewing.

I have tried to maintain a nuanced understanding of the many ways in which viewers can potentially engage with and use television. I have also critiqued accounts of the pleasures of these body images which somewhat monolithically, and without a consideration of television's address and context, explain enjoyment in relation to power, visual mastery and dismissive comparisons to pornography. Implicit in this approach is the notion that there is something inherently shameful and wrong about any mode of looking at the body, not just the male gaze at the female body in cinema, as in Laura Mulvey's influential formulation.³⁴¹ By aligning pleasure with pornography and visual mastery, the accounts of both the forensic and plastic surgery television that I

³⁴¹ Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' pp.14 - 26.

examine suggest that the viewer too is guilty of prurient fascination and a kind of ocular violence. While there are many ways in which viewers might be complicit with certain problematic messages of television texts, I object to this particular assumption that there is something wrong or perverse about looking at the body. Another problematic aspect of these approaches is that, drawing on the concepts from psychoanalytic film theory, such writing is not appropriate to a consideration of the specificity of television. Instead of looking at the body in terms of notions of distance and power, I have argued that an account that stresses feelings of intimacy and closeness better explains the way that such programmes might fit with the intimate, familial and domestic context of television viewing.

Thinking of the image in terms of affect has thus allowed me to consider both sides of the screen, the visceral, evocative body rendered onscreen and the sensate body of the viewer. I have thus used the body to theorise about a kind of affective bridging between the television world and viewers' bodies at home. This approach, however, has its limitations. For certain unpredictable factors such as the different environments in which the viewing body is located, the particular practices of viewing and an individual's own embodied life history will always dramatically inflect the viewing experience. The unpredictability of the television audience is a problem that all textual analysis-based approaches to television will encounter but it is a particularly acute issue for theories about embodiment which do extend themselves outside of the text itself to conjecture about the body of the viewer. For this reason I believe there is space for the kind of work on affect that I have done in this thesis to be supplemented by an ethnographic study of actual viewing experiences. Such an undertaking would have its own challenges and limitations. As Kristyn Gorton points out in her book on emotion in television, it is difficult to study intimacy when one's presence as a researcher breaks the spell intimacy which is the subject of the study.³⁴² However, I still believe this would be a fruitful avenue for future study.

The ideas presented in this thesis also stand as a challenge to theories of affect designed for cinema. Where I have stressed the way in which affect is inflected by the physical location of viewers in a certain kind of space and in relation to other bodies, theories of affect in cinema generally idealise this viewing experience as one of perfect isolation and concentration, ignoring the

³⁴² Gorton, *Media Audiences: Television, Meaning and Emotion*, p. 144.

coldness of the cinema, the loud popcorn-munching neighbour or the uproarious laughter that can animate the crowd.

It is my hope that this research can be taken up and developed in other studies of television's affectivity. I have only addressed the U.S. and British contexts where this tendency has been most punctuated and obvious. There are, however, examples of the tendency to expose, examine and explore the body in a range of other national television contexts and this might prove another worthwhile space to develop the ideas I have introduced here. While I have identified a group of body-oriented programmes, the trend I describe seems to have had an effect on genres in which the body is not the primary focus of attention. Cringe-worthy displays of surgery and daunting bodily transformations emerge in diverse and often surprising places. For example in the 2007 television adaptation of Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Cranford* on BBC 1, we witness every gruesome detail of an operation on the broken arm of Jem Hearne. The procedure is undertaken without anaesthetic and viewers are made witness to close-ups of the mangled limb and the sound of the bone snapping in surgery. This strikes me as visceral detail that may have been left out in a literary adaptation produced a decade or two earlier. Like the 'tele-affective' programmes I have discussed in this thesis, *Cranford* seems to be celebrating this affective provocation as part of the audiovisual richness that a television adaptation can bring to the novel. The body plays a very central role in a recent range of supernatural television programmes. The changes that bodies undergo the comic book-style superhero series *Heroes* (2006 - 2010) are rendered in painful detail. We hear, for example, the clicking of the cheerleader, Claire's joints as her self-healing body frequently puts itself back together. In *True Blood* (HBO 2008 -) the interest in blood and bodies that is typical of the vampire genre and its gothic roots, is extended to an excessive degree. In this series vampire blood is used as a drug which heightens the senses and increases the sex drive. Grotesque transformations of the body, explicit sex scenes and violence abounds in this programme. My thesis has not devoted any detailed analysis to hospital dramas, focussing instead on newer developments in television's interest in the body. I do however believe that my work could be effectively applied to an analysis of recent shifts and innovations within this genre. Shows such as *Grey's Anatomy* and *House* deal in increasingly interesting and explicit ways with the injured, sick and surgical body.

I have focussed here on the body because of its obvious relation to embodiment and because of the capacity of body images to arouse sensual responses from viewers. There exists, however, a wealth of television formats which are not necessarily about the body but nonetheless make an appeal to the sensate bodies of viewers and that require both a sensory awareness and emotional sensitivity to be understood and enjoyed. These include the highly popular genre of cooking shows in which drawing on one's sense of taste is as vital as are emotional responses to notions of home and identity as it is experienced through food, travelogue programmes in which people encounter the smells and tastes of foreign places, shows with sexual content, and an abundance of animal programmes in which cute, vulnerable or wounded animal bodies encourage intense affective responses.

All television is watched by embodied viewers whose sensate bodies and emoting hearts should not be ignored in discussions of the television viewing experience. Whether we are wincing at a football player snapping a tendon in a live sports match, thrilling in the sexual tension between our favourite romantic leads, or watching Nigella Lawson cook a sumptuous meal, our bodies are involved in the experience. The programmes I have examined, however, are exceptional for the way in which they capitalise upon the body and its potential to affect us both in physical and emotional terms. Tele-affective programmes celebrate the extreme forms of intimacy produced by an excessively close and even penetrative gaze at the body. These shows have provided an excellent test case for demonstrating how intrinsic affective responses and intimacy are to the pleasures of the television experience but they are also a fascinating phenomenon in their own right.

My analyses of these shows have been inflected by my own personal pleasure. I hope that this dissertation has demonstrated the complexity and indeed the beauty of a tendency that has so often been dismissed as a feature of low culture. These televisual encounters with the flesh are *moving* in the full sense of the word. They grant us the sudden thrill of proximity with the body, they provide a tactile, fleshy space where the physical and emotional vulnerability onscreen overlaps with domestic worlds in which bodies come into close and sometimes uncomfortable contact, they offer a call to immerse oneself in sensual properties of the body in science and teach how to posture our

own body and its responses in order to facilitate this special kind of receptivity. Tele-affectivity allows viewers to experience the text in ambivalent and multi-levelled ways, allowing for the postmodern pleasures of criticism and irony along with the excessive thrills provided by melodramas of the flesh. Ultimately these shows are exceptional for the way in which the literal closeness of the image creates a fit with the closeness and embodied proximity that characterises the domestic sphere further fostering closeness and intimacy as a primary value and pleasure of television.

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