The Subject of Television:

A methodology of subject-oriented textual analysis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis approaches televisual texts and the scholarly practice of textual analysis via the politics of subjectivity. Because subjects are formed in symbolic and representational systems that pre-exist them, subjectivity is an inherently political phenomenon, bound up in questions of power relations and meaning. Televisual texts, it is argued, form part of these representational systems; however, texts can also be understood as being created in the viewing encounter, as subjects imbue objects in their field of vision with meaning. This mutual indebtedness of subject and text indicates that textual analysis can also be seen as an inherently politicised form of scholarship.

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Foucauldian poststructuralism, this thesis begins by arguing that images, gazes, and visual experience are both beholden to and constitutive of subjectivity. The key themes from this discussion of subjectivity – visual history, spectatorship, intersubjectivity – are then proposed as key questions for an approach to televisual textual analysis called subject-oriented textual analysis. This approach provides opportunities for textual analysis distinct from psychoanalytic film theory, which cannot be imported wholesale to television, reception studies, or modes of cultural studies that use texts to diagnose social phenomena, having texts "stand in" for audiences. Situated within media studies' recent "return to the text," this approach therefore treats texts as ends in themselves while maintaining the political commitments of subjectivity and cultural studies.

Subject-oriented textual analysis understands both texts and subjects as produced via processes of meaning-making, as subjects draw on already existing scopic regimes to make visual phenomena meaningful. Textual analysis that understands textual meaning as indebted to processes of subjectivity therefore must engage with questions of power relations, gazes and spectatorship, the history of visual culture, materiality, and intersubjectivity. Such meanings, moreover, are form and content-specific, so a subject-oriented textual analysis requires textual analysis with sensitivity to form and the ways in which televisual meanings are specifically televisual.

The approach developed in this thesis is therefore one that examines televisual texts but takes as its primary focus processes of subjectivity. In order to demonstrate the usefulness of such an approach the bulk of the thesis is devoted to four case studies, covering makeover television, Australian tabloid current affairs television, and the dramatic narrative television series *The Wire* and *Treme*. In addition to psychoanalysis, Foucauldian theory, and television studies, these case studies critically engage with a wide range of cultural and political theory including postcolonial theories of the other, neoliberalism, the public sphere, emotions and empathy research, trauma and tourism studies, and the Levinasian ethics of the face.

Drawing on these domains of enquiry, the subject-oriented textual analysis developed in this thesis contributes original analyses of television texts to the field of television studies and provides fresh insights to the study of mediated and political subjectivities.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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Jessica Edwards

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In memory of Jo, Grandad, and Bella.

1

INTRODUCTION: THE SUBJECT OF TELEVISION

Introduction

The media, argues Murray Goot, has "never been central to the teaching of politics in Australia or high on the political science research agenda."[1] Still less has textual research on dramatic and everyday television been an explicit project in the field of political science, due to the focus on factors ranging from elections and party politics to international relations and welfare economics. Nevertheless, media texts – particularly televisual texts – are a daily fact of people's lives, increasing in sophistication and reach to the point where some critics characterise parts of the current media landscape as a new "golden age" of television.[2]

The political significance of television has been emphasised and explored by theorists such as John Keane and Sally Young in Australia and John Zaller and Peter Dahlgren internationally.[3] In these theorists' work, media is understood as critically relevant to political science, democracy, and citizenship. At the same time, there has been a concerted effort by some to broaden conceptions of the political to include, for instance, the forms of social and structural power indicated by feminist analyses of public and private life. Following feminist political scientists such as Carole Pateman, Carol Johnson argues that political science, particularly as it is undertaken in Australia, continues to be limited by too-narrow a definition of the political, resulting not only in the exclusion of academics within institutions, but also a constriction of the research possibilities of the field itself.[4]

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1 Murray Goot (2009). "Political Communication in the Media." *The Australian Study of Politics.* Ed. R.A.W. Rhodes. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 173-185

2 Amy Damico and Sara E. Quay (2016). *21st Century TV Dramas: Exploring The New Golden Age*. Santa Barbara: Praeger

3 See for instance: John Keane (2013). *Democracy and Media Decadence.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP; Sally Young (2011). *How Australia Decides: Election Reporting and the Media.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP; John Zaller (2003). "A New Standard of News Quality: Burglar Alarms for the Monitorial Citizen." *Political Communication*. 20 (2), pp. 109-130; Peter Dahlgren (2009). *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication, and Democracy.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP

4 Carol Johnson (2014). "Hard Heads and Soft Hearts: The Gendering of Australian Political Science."

In contrast, closely related fields such as cultural studies and media and communications studies typically deploy a broader definition of politics, understanding cultural and everyday life as intimately connected to political life.[5] Cultural artefacts, the media, and television therefore potentially contain great significance for political scientists and theorists of social and political power. However, characterising that significance with rigour and nuance has been an ongoing challenge to textual studies within these fields. Even the field of television studies, which regularly makes strong arguments for the political significance of televisual texts particularly via the strand of identity politics, can struggle to provide suitable methodologies of textual analysis, and explanations of a text's political activity.

This thesis therefore proposes a methodology of 'subject-oriented textual analysis.' This approach to texts is inherently political because it deploys the category of the subject as an organising and productive factor in texts themselves. Subjectivity as a philosophical concept indicates theoretical approaches to personhood as lived experience in structures of power. Subjectivity is a "primary category of social, cultural, psychological, historical, and political analysis," connecting the political and the social, the economic and the cultural, the social and the individual.[6]

The subject-oriented textual analysis proposed herein understands both texts and subjects as produced through processes of meaning-making, as subjects draw upon already existing scopic regimes to make texts, their worlds, and themselves meaningful. Subjects, that is to say, produce texts in their fields of vision by making visual phenomena meaningful; however, subjects are also beholden to a visual culture that precedes them, and cannot make texts meaningful without being made themselves. Textual analysis that understands textual meaning as indebted to processes of subjectivity must engage with questions of power relations, gazes, the history and workings of visual culture, materiality and intersubjectivity.

Australian Feminist Studies: Special Issue on Gendered Excellence in the Social Sciences. 29 (80), pp. 121-136

5 See for instance: Andrew Milner and Jeff Browitt (2002). *Contemporary Cultural Theory.* Sydney: Allen and Unwin; Simon During (1993). "Introduction." *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Simon During. London: Routledge. See, for instance, Toby Miller (1993). *The Well-Tempered Self: Citizenship, Culture, and the Postmodern Subject*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press

6 Lisa Blackman, John Cromby, Derek Hook, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Valerie Walkerdine (2008). "Creating Subjectivities." *Subjectivity* 22, p. 1

These questions are inherently political, as they deal with intersections of power and human experience. This draws upon and complements psychoanalytic and cultural studies conceptions of meaning as intricately dependent on historicised social and symbolic structures and ways of being. As the emphasis on visual culture might imply, such textual meanings are moreover form-specific, so a subject-oriented textual analysis requires textual analysis with sensitivity to form and the ways in which televisual meanings are specifically *televisual.*

This approach, as part two of this thesis demonstrates, can deliver nuanced, novel, and significant readings of televisual texts that link visuality and politics to subjectivity. To this end, despite engaging with a broad array of disciplines and fields, and examining a rather broad generic array of media texts, this thesis has a narrow focus, zooming in on meaning-making in the subject-text encounter. Such a narrow focus allows simultaneous discussion of the disparate genres of makeover television, tabloid current affairs television, and high prestige dramatic narrative television.

As a methodology of textual analysis, this thesis does not engage in audience research, ethnographies, surveys or paratextual research on fan communities. Television studies as a field and as an approach to texts, it is argued in chapter three, must be able to *deal with texts themselves*. The question of whether it is the cultural studies' or television studies' 'job' to incorporate ethnographic audience research has been an ongoing source of discussion in over two decades of scholarship, with Sonia Livingstone, for instance, arguing that audience studies is best conceived of as a distinct field of research.[7] More to the point, for the purposes of this thesis it is the motivation and methods of textual analysis, rather than audience studies, that are at stake.

Despite its rhetorical recourse to the experience of the viewer, this thesis is not, therefore, a work of reception studies, fan studies, or audience research, but an acknowledgement of what Maurice Merleau-Ponty sets up as his initial phenomenological position: that seeing is an act of creation.[8] If sensory access to world is mediated by sign systems and meaning

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7 Sonia Livingstone (1998). "Audience Research at the Crossroads." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 1 (2), pp. 195-217. See, for more, Roger Silverstone (1994). *Television and Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge, chapter 6; John Tulloch (2000). *Watching Television Audiences*. New York: Oxford UP; John Corner (1999). *Critical Ideas in Television Studies.* New York: Oxford UP

8 Norman. K. Denzin (1995). *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze.* London: Sage, p. 44

systems, then gazing and reading are constitutive of objects; and if subjects are formed through entry into and use of language and sign systems, then gazing and reading are constitutive of subjects as well. This holds true for the sensory experience of cultural texts, and more specifically television shows. This thesis understands viewing subjects as meaning-making subjects, who create texts in their fields of vision and who are, simultaneously, made in that making.

This thesis therefore examines televisual texts, but takes the subject as its primary object of analysis. It argues that when processes of subjectivity in response to images are the critical moment of analysis, politics is always already there, in the relations of power that circumscribe available meanings and ways of knowing the world, and generate[9] subjects within them. As such, this thesis carries a strong argument for the political significance of textual analysis as an academic project. Sign-systems (which from an alternate perspective we might call discursive systems of knowledge/power) contain epistemological legacies and boundaries and set the terms by which subjects are able to know and produce themselves. Some of the (highly contentious) charges laid at the feet of television studies – that it has too insignificant an object of study, that it is too frivolous, too apolitical, too unrigorous, too fractured – can thus be stymied when our attention is directed again to subjectivity.

Ultimately, the purpose of this thesis is – through its discussions of makeover television and aestheticised subjects, tabloid current affairs television and communal subjects, and narrative drama and raced subjects and others – to illustrate the usefulness and applicability of a subject-focused approach to televisual textual analysis. This is of relevance to both political and television studies. Most significantly, chapters four and five argue for a more nuanced approach to ordinary, ephemeral television, that involves close analysis of its forms and not simply assumptions about its ideological content; and chapters six and seven, for new ways of theorising how televisual texts might interrupt the traditional power differentials of the subject-other relationship.

Part One: Visuality, Political Subjectivities, and Textual Analysis

[9] The word generated reoccurs regularly throughout the thesis, and is used with intent, to direct our attention to the way that the subject becomes through processes that are spontaneous and reflexive, mechanical and directed, contingent and predetermined.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part creates a space and outlines a need for the work of this thesis through an examination of, in chapter two, approaches to the visual or scopic subject, and, in chapter three, approaches to the televisual object. The second part contains four case studies exploring the potential applications and usefulness of this approach.

Part one locates gaps in current research in the politics of subjectivity as well as television studies. The subject, as outlined in chapter two, is held to be useful in addressing current debates in television studies over the difficulty and purpose of textual analysis. Television studies and cultural studies theorists such as Julie D'Acci and Toby Miller call for a turn away from texts towards audiences, economics, and circuits of production and reception. This thesis therefore comes at a time when both established and new television scholars are questioning the usefulness of traditional ways of conducting television studies, and, indeed, the point of the field itself.[10] At the same time, proponents of textual analysis call for more attention to televisual form, and for ways to theorise texts with precision and specificity. The 2013 book *Television, Aesthetics and Style*, for instance, bills itself as countering a dearth of scholarship on the critically underexplored and "curiously absent" realm of television style and form.[11]

Political and aesthetic analyses are not, of course, mutually exclusive. If we are, as Stuart Hall argues, cultural subjects – that is, subjects made in culture that exists prior to us – we have a stake in what that culture is, how we consciously and unconsciously engage with it, and how it might produce us. As Miller notes, subjectivities – and their dislocation from once-stable truths and social, political, and metaphysical structures – have become an increasingly prominent object of study since the collapse of grand narratives.[12] Subjectivities in the wake of this collapse are varied, but, this thesis argues, are most productively and usefully studied in conjunction with cultural systems of knowledge, including cultural texts. Such scholarship generally falls under the rubric of cultural studies, a term that can be

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[10] See for example "In Focus" section of *Cinema Journal* 45 (1) (2005); Julie D'Acci (2004). "Cultural Studies, Television Studies and the Crisis in the Humanities." *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition.* Eds. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson. Durham: Duke UP, pp. 418-446; Sarah Cardwell (2008). "Television Aesthetics." *Critical Studies in Television.* 1 (1), pp. 72-80; Ron Becker (2012). "Cultural Studies, TV Studies, & Empathy." *Antenna.* Retrieved from <http://blog.commarts.wisc.edu/2012/12/03/cultural-studies-tv-studies-empathy/>. Last accessed 21 September 2016

[11] Steven Peacock and Jason Jacobs (eds.) *Television, Aesthetics and Style* Bloomsburg: London p. 1

[12] Miller, *Well-Tempered Self,* pp. 92-94

applied to a wide body of work and which encompasses disparate approaches to the text-society relationship, but all of which take a politically relevant relationship between social forces, cultural texts, and social individuals as a starting point. Cultural texts are therefore seen as a fertile ground for investigating the microprocesses of culture, the moments and movements of discourse that generate and utilise symbolic social meanings.

Political science as a field thus has a stake in the subjectivities formed in popular culture such as television, and in how those subjectivities are theorised and formulated. While for much of human experience enquiries into human subjectivity have been the domain of religion, science and philosophy (especially Continental), the politicising of identity in the 19th and 20th centuries has led to engagement with cultural texts as crucial sites of self-formation and regulation, where identities are "socially valued, interrogated and replicated" through reading and criticism.[13] This is of urgent political and ethical concern, across all kinds of media.[14] Rather than tracing an academic history of the subject,[15] however, this thesis outlines a very specific picture of the subject, focusing on the ways cultural texts, signs, and images are variously implicated in its formation.

Part one therefore draws on Lacanian and Foucauldian theory to discuss the relationship between subjects, signs, and meaning. Reading a text, here, is not a neutral revelation or discovery of meaning. Meaning is created in the act; furthermore, as chapters two and three argue, it is in the activity of reading, in the meaning-making process of viewing, that subjects are created. Such meanings are, of course, made available through textual form and content produced and read in a particular time and place, as subjectivity is lived experience within structures of power. Subjects do not exist outside of or prior to these structures of power. They operate not only at the formal level of the state, but also through devolved networks, systems of knowledge and discourse that, in a Foucauldian view, make particular ways of being available; or, in a Lacanian view, create subjects on their entry into the symbolic order.

These systems of power, knowledge, and language create the conditions for meaningful interaction with the world and other subjects; for individuals to be recognised, understood,

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[13] David Hall (2004). *Subjectivity.* New York: Routledge, p. 5

[14] Miller, *Well-Tempered Self*, p. 92

[15] For such read Hall, *Subjectivity,* or Lisa Blackman, John Cromby, Derek Hook, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Valerie Walkerdine (2008). "Creating Subjectivities." *Subjectivity* 22, pp. 1-27

and rationally incorporated into a citizenry, or a cultural category such as “woman” or “sane” or “trashy.” Power, here, is not just restrictive of a subject's actions, but plays a fundamental role in the production of the subject. It is in this dual circumscribing and enabling that the broad definition of politics as ‘the action of power,’ indicated at the beginning of this chapter, is at its most elemental. This is not to posit some kind of truth about contemporary Western subjectivity – or the author as a critic who can delve down to find the essential truth of our being and age – but to develop ways of understanding the relationships between contingent subjects and televisual texts; television being, of course, a significant part of the daily lives of individuals, families, and communities.

Subjectivities emerge in response to multiple forces at work in the social sphere, rather than being purely self-generated or willed, or solely the result of religious or economic systems. Part one of this thesis locates such forces as a facet of wider networks of power/knowledge and the culture and shared codes, categories, and understandings that express themselves in public and private spaces, family and work organisation, and cultural texts. Television, in its varied forms and reception contexts, is likewise implicated in the creation and distribution of both general (community-wide) and specific (individual) understandings of the self and society.

It is not unusual to study subjectivity in response to fine-art still images or filmic moving images. Indeed, the case study chapters of part two draw extensively on cultural studies, film studies, art history, and more. Nor is it unusual to rely on a psychoanalytic conception of subjectivity in such analysis; the journal *Screen,* for instance, devoted a decade to the psychoanalytic interpretation of film, and one of the most influential works of film writing is Laura Mulvey's psychoanalytic essay on female subjectivity and the male gaze.[16] Nevertheless, despite it being part of everyday life for over sixty years, scholars have been less inclined to apply this frame of reference to television;[17] perhaps because, as chapter two demonstrates, television's formal properties and contexts are radically different from film. Chapter two makes it clear that subject-oriented approaches to film, such as psychoanalytic

[16] Melanie Bell (2010). “Fifty Years of Screen, 1959-2009.” *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 7 (3), p. 479

[17] Corner’s *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, for instance, has no index entry for psychoanalysis, Freud, or Lacan; nor does *The Television Studies Reader* contain more than a passing mention of psychoanalysis. Robert C Allen and Annette Hill (Eds.) (2004). *The Television Studies Reader.* London: Routledge

film theory cannot be imported wholesale to television. The texts at stake in television studies require methods of textual analysis developed in response to the medium's unique and plural forms and workings.[18]

A form of textual analysis that is oriented towards subjectivity, it is argued in part one, fundamentally understands representation and televisation of fictional and non-fictional lives not as a mirror, mask, or illusion, but a mode of action utilising a complex set of discourses that include and exclude ways of knowing and being. Television requires viewers with sophisticated indexical and iconic skills, who can decode and make meaningful the purposed but polysemic semiotics of the moving image, where it is accompanied by sound, structure, narrative, a place in the schedule, and a place amongst extra-diegetic texts.[19]

Television has historically occupied a low place in cultural hierarchies, and as a (mostly) mass broadcast medium it was often the perceived *impact* of television that gained attention, rather than the complexities of its forms and meanings.[20] Ambivalence over television's artistic and cultural purpose[21] is reflected in corresponding assumptions about televisual form: for instance, as chapter five shows, concerns over representation in tabloid current affairs television do not always reflect the operations of its images. In contrast, this thesis's insistence on the primacy and specificity of the image-subject relationship positions it in some of the leading contemporary debates in the fields of subjectivity and visual studies. W. J. T. Mitchell calls this the pictorial and spectatorial turn, a

> postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurality... This problem presses us inescapably now, with unprecedented force, on every level

[18] Sarah Cardwell challenges scholars to interrogate their use of the word "medium" in reference to television; such usage, she argues, can elide the artistic and aesthetic properties of television in favour of allying it to the more communication-focused mass "Media." This thesis strongly agrees with Cardwell that television studies would benefit from a) purposeful and specific attention to televisuality as a complex and diverse aesthetic quality, and b) resistance towards overly broad, narrow, or sedimented characterisations of 'televisioness.' Nevertheless, because it remains the dominant term used in the field, this thesis generally defaults to "medium" as a general descriptor of television's material and phenomenological status. Sarah Cardwell (2014). "Television Amongst Friends: Medium, Art, Media." *Critical Studies in Television* 9 (3), pp. 6-21

[19] Miller, *The Well-Tempered Self,* p. 58

[20] Corner, *Critical Ideas,* p. 4; Tonny Krinjen and Irene C. Meijer (2005). "The Moral Imagination in Primetime Television." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8 (3), p. 354

[21] Lynn Spigel (2004). "Introduction." *Television after TV: Essays on a medium in transition.* Eds Jan. Olsson and Lynn Spigel. Durham: Duke UP, p. 18

of culture.[22]

The two chapters of part one are therefore dedicated to exploring this 'problem' of the subject and visuality with respect to television.

Chapter Two: Lacan and Foucault: subjectivity, visuality, and power

Chapter two investigates semiotic-psychoanalytic and Foucauldian approaches to the subject. These both, it is argued, understand subjectivity as indebted to sign systems and systems of visuality or ways of seeing. Both also locate gazes in spaces other than the subject. Chapter two, therefore, through a selective examination of these theories of the subject, establishes sign systems and spectatorship as generative factors in the subject, and makes a case for the need to study visuality. This lays the groundwork for the discussion of the productivity of the subject-text relationship in chapter three, and indicates the central processes of subjectivity at stake going forward.

Psychoanalysis brings to the study of texts and culture a focus on the generative capacity of language, and the text-subject relationship. Jacques Lacan's work in particular is utilised extensively within film and art theory, as certain of his metaphors (such as the screen of signs) and processes of subject-formation (such as the mirror stage), resonate strongly with visual culture. In this framework, texts are expressions of or links to an underlying psychic structure, positioning subjects within a larger symbolic order. If it is the "symbolic order which is constitutive of the subject,"[23] and makes the world and the self intelligible, then a study of subjectivity and culture requires a study of image, form and technique, and a redescription of the exchange between subject and object as something fluid and contingent.[24]

This is politically significant because our apparently experiential and instinctive understanding of the self and the world is directed and shaped by forces we have no direct control over. Sign and meaning systems such as language, myth and visual signifiers exist prior to us and provide the terms by which we can possibly know ourselves. The question of subjectivity, then, is productive, and enmeshed in power relations, and this thesis is a

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22 W. J. T. Mitchell (1994). *Picture Theory.* Chicago: Chicago UP, p. 16

23 Jacques Lacan (1972). "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter." *Yale French Studies* 48, pp. 39-72.

24 Michael Ann Holly (1996). *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, p. 11

contribution to work in subjectivity studies that attempts to describe and explain them.

The second half of this chapter pushes further into a political space by examining Michel Foucault's connections between epistemologies, ways of knowing, gazes, and power relations. Subjects, it is argued, are beholden to epistemologies that draw on and shape visual culture. Furthermore these power relations are often organised scopically, and locate the gaze in places external to the subject.

As such, a methodology of textual analysis that understands textual meaning as indebted to processes of subjectivity must engage with texts via interrogations of power relations, gazes and spectatorship, meanings emerging from the history of visual culture, materiality, and intersubjectivity. There are, of course, differences between written language and an image.[25] Most obviously, media experience is at once phenomenological and symbolic, and incorporated into our public and private lives and identities in often surprising ways. Texts are not simply facts. Givens (that is, irreducible sensory experience), Emmanuel Levinas says, become signified in relation to *other* absent givens:

> …this solid rectangular opacity becomes a book only in carrying my thought to other givens....the author who writes, the readers who read, the bookshelves that hold, etc. All these terms are announced without being given in the solid rectangular opacity.[26]

To make sense of these signifiers – to make visual experience intelligible – takes on what Edward Said describes as an urgent compulsion. Meaningfulness, he says, is a nondivisible aspect of visual experience, as we are always compelled *away* from the ugliness and incomprehensibleness of meaninglessness.[27]

This leads to a fundamental understanding of a *text* as "an organisation of language, codes and signifying practices generally designed to produce meanings" and a reading or viewing-subject as constituted by a wider cultural and social history, as well as *"in the act of reading."*[28] In this intersection of epistemology and ontology we see the dual nature of

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[25] Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (1999). "What is Visual Culture?" *Visual Culture: The Reader.* Eds. Jessica Evans & Start Hall. London: Sage Publications, p. 7

[26] Emmanuel Levinas (2003 [1972]), *Humanism of the Other.* Trans. Nidra Poller. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, p. 9

[27] Edward W. Said (1983). *The World, The Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, p. 41

[28] E. Ann Kaplan (1990). "From Plato's Cave to Freud's Screen." *Psychoanalysis and Cinema.* Ed E. Ann Kaplan. New York: Routledge, p. 11 (emphasis added)

subjectivity, which is both "the subject [as] a subject to itself, an 'I'"[29] as well as "the experience of being subjected."[30] As shall be seen, both movements – towards and away from the *I* as a locus of power – are crucial to the approach to the televisual image, which is, crudely, both an effect of the subject and affects the subject.

Despite its strong Foucauldian influence, television studies has tended to sideline the role of the 'loquacious gaze' in the formation of viewing subjects. Similarly, despite the enormous influence of psychoanalytic theory in film studies, television studies has struggled to find a useful place for conjoining psychoanalytic conceptions of the subject, and television as an apparatus and as an instance of media. This is not particularly surprising: while psychoanalytic film theory provides a precedent for investigating subjects and images, the fundamental assumptions of this theory do not translate easily to television; nor do its underpinning conceptions of the unconscious marry easily to the prototypical concerns of television studies.

Indeed, this thesis also avoids strong reliance on a theory of the unconscious, and to be clear, it is not argued that these theoretical backgrounds are compatible. Most obviously, Foucauldian theory regards psychoanalysis as one of the sciences that structure and create subjectivities, rather than neutrally revealing them. However, following Butler in *Giving an Account of Oneself,* the aim here is not theoretical synthesis but the "eclectic use" of philosophers and critical theories,[31] in order to establish the significance and relevance of the mechanisms used herein.

This chapter therefore locates the thesis in an interdisciplinary project of studying the relationship between subjectivity, politics and texts. By applying this theory to televisual texts, it fills gaps in the politics of subjectivity. Locating the visual at the heart of subjectivity also serves to fill a gap in television studies, as the next chapter demonstrates.

Chapter Three: Television studies and textual meaning

Chapter three co-locates this thesis in the field of television studies, and establishes a

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29 Regina Gagnier (1991). *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain 1832-1920.* Cary, NC: Oxford UP, p. 8

30 Blackman *et al,* "Creating Subjectivities," p. 6

31 Judith Butler (2005). *Giving an Account of Oneself.* New York: Fordham UP, p. 21

'textual' gap in subject-focused research. It first examines approaches in the field to the text-subject relationship, focusing on cultural studies. Early influential explorations of television in a cultural studies mode, such as Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding paradigm, highlighted the social context of texts and the cyclical and contingent nature of meaning, and led to an explosion of both textual and ethnographic or audience research. This form of cultural studies has valuably influenced television studies to examine texts as sites in which social phenomena and power imbalances can be analysed; however, the complexities of the subject-text relationship, and questions posed by audience-oriented scholars, continue to challenge textual researchers on the politicisation and mechanisms of their work. These issues have lead some scholars to call for a turn away from texts, while at the same time others are calling for a return to the text. This latter group however can also at times struggle to articulate a text or approach that has political weight. Introducing the category of the subject as outlined in chapter two, complements this work by irreducibly linking aesthetic textual analysis to politics.

The second half of this chapter therefore also discusses form and methodology. Television is a slippery, complex socio-cultural apparatus and can be characterised as a technology, a series of texts, a mode of representation, and an industry.[32] The nebulousness of its form, its rapid evolution and instability as a critical object, and the varying approaches available to researchers has led to tension in the field over the correct object of study. Where television, poorly defined, is itself the object of research, we can overemphasise questions of its influence or political and cultural effects; the net effect is a loss.[33] On the other hand, televisual texts are sometimes seen as politically irrelevant, in comparison to the need to study how 'actual' viewers 'actually watch' television. There is therefore still room in the field for new insights into the relationships between texts, subjects, cultural forces, and technology.

Toby Miller divides television studies into categories according to the orientation of the research: towards or away from the text or audience, or towards or away from production or reception. His essay "Turn off TV Studies!" is deliberately polemical and reductionist, but

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[32] This thesis acknowledges the relationship of the state and private enterprise in television production. Mediated culture is indebted at all stages of its production, transmission, and reception to institutions with vested interests. Nevertheless this thesis is primarily a text-based analysis. This thesis will talk less about the state and more about governance as a way of enacting managed knowledge.

[33] Corner, *Critical Ideas*, pp. 4-5, 91

typical of approaches to schematising the field as a whole.[34] Similarly, discursive or essentially ideological content analysis can be reduced to the identification of good and bad representations, or good or bad ideologies. Texts accrue meanings that often appear to be relatively easy to 'nail down.' But there is a danger in written criticism of the moving image, argues Ron Burnett, when criticism seems able to find "the answer" to the "riddle" of a distorted frame or series of frames, "finding a key to link discontinuous and achronic audio-visual phenomena."[35] Television shows and genres that appear to be stable and easily interrogatable can reveal, as part two's case studies demonstrate, tensions within and between texts and subjects.

Chapter three therefore draws on the conception of the subject as outlined in chapter two, developing an understanding of the viewing encounter in which the art object and the subject legislate the scope of the other's meaning and creation. Meaning, that is, turns on a subject's insertion of herself into a pre-existing system of signs that permits both herself and the text to be intelligible. Put simply, here, reading is a mutual genesis of both subject and text.

The methodology proposed – approaching texts as the object of study, with the understanding that that very text is indebted to the key processes of subjectivity as outlined in chapter two – has two key advantages. Firstly, it is inherently political. Secondly, it requires attention to televisual texts *as televisual* rather than through the lens of film or other art. The second half of this chapter therefore briefly expands upon the picture of the subject outlined in chapter two and the proposed methodology by drawing on theories of visual culture. As will be seen in part two, this methodology requires textual analysis that locates dynamics of power and gazes. It calls upon a history of visual culture, requiring images be contextualised in order to read their meanings. It requires grappling with materiality and identity categories. It also, critically, requires an accounting of intersubjectivity. As an exercise in textual analysis, form is also shown to be critically important.

The chapter finally and briefly indicates some of the uniquely televisual aspects that must be grappled with in televisual textual research. As this thesis understands visual culture as a

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[34] See, for instance, Horace Newcomb (2000). "Television and the Present Climate of Criticism." *Television: The Critical View.* Oxford: Oxford UP, pp. 1-16

[35] Ron Burnett (1995). *Cultures of Vision: Images, Media and the Imaginary.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, pp. 77-80

set of signifying practices, creating meaningful links between concept and object, it must operate in the particular as well as the general. Television is a complex and often postmodern sign system including reflexivity, polysemy, intertextuality, and pastiche. It is unique in terms of mass media (while borrowing the features of other forms) and made up of interconnected dimensions of production, transmission, reception, and text.[36]

Subjects engage with images and cultural texts as part of a larger landscape of power structures and ways of seeing. However, as was noted earlier, this thesis is not a work of reception studies or ethnographic research. Its focus is on the subject and the praxis of the image. The subject is a theoretical one (or perhaps, less objectively, an imagined self). Understanding the *audience* of much textual studies as a *meaning-making subject* makes possible the alternate forms of analysis and conclusions found herein; it provides fresh perspectives on the relationship between discourse and subject, and alternative academic frameworks for such seemingly settled genres as tabloid journalism.

Part Two: Case Studies

Theory must be useful and provide useful results. Much of this thesis is given over to demonstrating the usefulness of subject-oriented textual analysis. As textual analysis, the focus is on televisual images: how an image makes interpretive demands of a subject at the same time as she creates it in her field of vision through those very demands. The contingency of texts might imply that it is risky to offer just one reading: are there not, after all, a great number of readings available for any one text? Certainly at no point does the thesis claim that the readings herein are the *only* possible readings; however shared visual culture in a particular time and place does help to make moderately stable meanings – indeed, as chapter two argues, it is the very condition of intersubjective communication. At all times, it is worth emphasising the hypotheticality of this subject, the plurality of response, and the contingency of this project entire: sensitivity to the meaning-making encounter "does not exhaust the individual subject,"[37] and does not deny the possibilities of alternate readings; indeed, encourages them. Chapters six and seven, for instance, both analyse similar texts in terms of how they construct a white viewing-subject, but the key questions and frameworks

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[36] Corner, *Critical Ideas*, pp. 4, 15

[37] Stephen Heath (1977 (Summer)). "Film Performance." *Cine-Tracts 2* 1 (2), p. 14

(in chapter six, empathic intersubjectivities, and in chapter seven, colonial spectatorship) produce different results.

The bulk of this thesis – chapters four to seven – provides examples of research projects that draw upon different strands of television studies, cultural studies, and subjectivity theory in order to demonstrate the relevance and significance of subject-oriented textual analysis. Throughout, contributions to the politics of subjectivity, television studies, and other relevant debates are highlighted, and the ways in which these chapters add to existing research on the particular shows and genres in question.

The texts and genres chosen for these case studies were picked primarily for their potential to comment directly on processes of subjectivity and identity construction. In particular, they were chosen to challenge the methodology's ability to discuss subjectivity in relation to the individual (makeover television), the community (tabloid current affairs television) and the other (*The Wire* and *Treme*). These case studies were also chosen to demonstrate the methodology's usefulness to research on texts from varied production and reception contexts: factual and fictional, highbrow and lowbrow, well-researched and under-researched, broadcast high-viewership and narrowcast low-viewership.[38]

These disparate examples also generate diverse insights into the construction of meanings and subjectivities.[39] It is rare for a single-author work on television to cover such varied genres and programs, as the field typically balkanises via textual genre and broadcast region. This thesis attempts to recuperate such apparent incoherence as a strength. That the argument can be maintained and demonstrated over such seemingly unconnected programs, genres and modes of television demonstrates the fruitfulness of subject-oriented textual analysis.[40] As

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[38] While David Simon was involved in creating both *The Wire* and *Treme* (the latter with Eric Overmyer, who was also a consulting producer on the fourth season of *The Wire*), as chapters six and seven explain, the uncommon and innovative representational and industrial nature of these programs is considered particularly relevant to addressing issues of subject-other relations, and meanings around race and visuality.

[39] For similar approaches in different cultural spheres see Ien Ang (1985), *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, Methuel; and Carol Johnson (2005). "Narratives of Identity: Denying empathy in conservative discourses on race, gender and sexuality." *Theory and Society* 34, pp. 37-61

[40] During the writing of this thesis streaming services exploded into prominence in the televisual landscape. While it was outside of the scope of this thesis to delve into such new(ish) media, future research on the meanings of streaming reception (as opposed to broadcast reception) and the spectatorial dynamics of streaming could greatly inform a subject-oriented approach to streaming texts.

well, these case studies show that the methodology can produce substantial and distinct analysis not only from markedly different texts but also from texts that share the same creator and network, and similar narrative and representational concerns. The two case studies of chapters six and seven, that is, begin in the same place of attention to raced subject-other relations, but focus on different textual elements and theoretical frameworks to produce significant and diverse contributions to current scholarship.

The textual analysis in these chapters includes stills from the shows under discussion. It is worth acknowledging at the outset that stills taken out of context cannot perfectly embody theory; the image is always too wild for that. Nevertheless, these stills are intended to supplement the analysis, and to stand in for the audio-visual experience of watching television. It is hoped these images will prompt recollection of personal experience in the reader, particularly in more ubiquitous and familiar genres of makeover television and current affairs television (not to mention the "required reading" status of *The Wire*).

Chapter Four: Makeover Television and Visible Subjects

Chapter four builds on and partially contradicts current scholarship on makeover television – specifically, makeover television that makes over people. This genre is typically understood to be the new frontier of anti-feminist neoliberal governmentality, calling upon subjects to discipline themselves in intersecting fields of class, gender, and taste, all of which are rendered visible on subjects' bodies. Much scholarship on makeover-television casts it as a "profoundly toxic" symptom of neoliberalism, particularly with regards to women, perpetuating damaging visual dogmas surrounding appropriate and successful femininity. In this scholarship, the subjects "at risk" are multiple: the participant subjects of the show, the viewing subjects, and the more generalised subjects of commodity neoliberalism.

In focusing on questions of subject-production, power relations and the gaze in textual analysis, this chapter examines how such subjects are summoned into being – how they are, in fact, *made visible to the gaze.* In both the texts and the scholarship around it, dynamics of lack and presence, visibility and invisibility are seen as crucial to the operations of makeovers. In figuring subjects as individuals who must make authentic selves visible, makeover television constructs a moral requirement of visual transformation.

There are, it is argued, two primary makeover operations in shows such as *10 Years Younger In 10 Days* (Australia, 7 Network, 2009): transforming the surface in order to transform an inner self characterised by lack; and transforming the surface in order to reveal a more authentic inner self. In both cases, it is what is accessible to the gaze that is revelatory and constitutive of subjects. In making makeover images and narratives meaningful, materiality is displaced, in the televisual image, to a visual register. This chapter further discusses how makeover television develops its own uniquely televisual optics of normalisation and encourages viewing-subjects and participant-subjects to align their ways of seeing with makeover experts.

Finally, this chapter closes on a discussion of the crucial before-and-after image, with its inherent contradictions, backwards chronologies, and palimpsests. This image troubles, it is argued, both scholarly and within-the-show narratives of subjects-as-projects-of-(neoliberal) improvement.[41] Attention to subjects and meaning-making in the viewing encounter can therefore disrupt the conventional understanding of what makeover television 'does,' and calls scholars to clarify more precisely in their work on television who the subjects at stake are, and how they are generated.

Chapter Five: Tabloid current affairs and subjective identities

Chapter five brings together the visual, verbal and aural in an examination of narrative and genre. Like chapter four, its focus is on an ordinary, everyday, fleeting form of television that is rarely rewatched or archived; namely, two Australia tabloid current affairs shows, the "toxic twins"[42] *Today Tonight* (7 Network, 1995-present) and *A Current Affair* (9 Network, 1988-present). This genre of contemporary tabloid current affairs television attracts mostly opprobrium from general and academic media critics for the often conservative, consumerist, and sensationalist messages found in its segments. Such messages are certainly concerning; however, this chapter argues that the shows themselves have been severely undertheorised, which is particularly curious considering they hold such a pronounced place in Australian public culture. This chapter is therefore a significant contribution to studies of Australian media.

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[41] Scholarship, unsurprisingly, typically tends to condemn instead of valorise this narrative, but it rarely denies its existence.

[42] Craig Mathieson (2014). "Last tabloid news show standing." *The Sydney Morning Herald.* 23 June 2014

Through an examination of the ways in which these shows legislate available meanings and subject-positions, the subject-oriented textual analysis undertaken in this chapter identifies an exceptionally strong narrative of public service that often requires little content or ideological consistency, repeatedly contradicting itself across segments and episodes. Where the previous chapter's attention to processes of subjectivity highlighted the presence of subjects as they appeared on screen, this chapter, in its focus on how the text summons into being a particular viewing subject, highlights the ways in which viewing subjects are called upon to make cultural categories such as 'working-class' or 'dole bludger' meaningful within an almost schizophrenically shifting framework of public service information.

This chapter first discusses the reception contexts, aesthetics, and narratives of *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight.* These textual features draw on identity categories we might expect to be stable for viewing-subjects, and social groups at large, while at the same time emptying them (such as 'battler,' which could be whoever the segment's narrative decides to cast as an underdog) or rendering them variably good or evil (are doctors shifty or helpful?). These deeply politicised identity categories are highly relevant to cultural studies and Australian political studies, and this chapter contributes to their examination and elaboration, as well as current literature on the public sphere.

Attention to processes of subjectivity in textual analysis of these shows further reveals the modes of communal address deployed, and the forceful ways in which it constructs viewing subjects as singular masses, shifting *I* to *us* and then predetermining what *we* care about. This complicates a picture of viewers of *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight* as victims of "bad" television, and aligns more closely with poststructural ideas of contingent and chaotic subjects. Close attention to the ways in which subjects make televisual images meaningful, and the ways in which those images dictate meanings, can therefore generate fresh perspectives on intersubjective belonging.

Chapter Six: **The Wire***, the Other, and empathic subjects*

As subjectivity theory argues, any conception of the subject must be able to account for intersubjective relationships and subject-other relations. The final two chapters of this thesis therefore delve further into the relationship between the subject and the other in their

discussion of race in narrative "quality" drama television. The (racialised) categories of other found in chapters six and seven are always preceded, it is argued, by a system of visuality that constructs the viewing-subject as an empty, neutral space – white, colonist, cerebral, ideal – in opposition to raced bodies on screen. That is, socio-political systems that structure "economic, political and everyday life punitively [and] inhumanely" along racial lines have support in the symbolic register: "visual markers – such as skin colour, embodiment, and gendered attributes – represent, influence or determine the status of human beings."[43]

Subject-focused textual analysis therefore demands recognition of the ways in which television is implicated in constructing visual epistemologies of race. Chapter six thus begins with a discussion of how the legacies of visual systems constrain or deny empathic connection to subordinated groups. Empathy, which is an intersubjective affective response that retains the other in its alterity without subsuming them into the self, is a useful critical concept in studies of otherness and subject-other relations, less for its pedagogical utility and more for its productive, intersubjective capacities. As we are also called to examine form, this chapter links *The Wire*'s (US, HBO, 2002-2008) visual strategies of representational authenticity to epistemologies of being that permit empathic meaning-making with categories of person – black, drug-addict, murderer – that are typically denied.

This chapter therefore contributes to scholarship on race, intersubjectivity, and textual analysis, as well as adding to a growing body of work on the critically applauded show *The Wire*. This show has been heralded as a radical step forward in both narrative television and black American representation, assisted by HBO's unique industrial and technological history and its cultivated air of prestige and transgression. In its production context and its televisual form, it is argued, *The Wire* contains sustained claims for its own representational authenticity, and stakes out new complex and contextualised "ways of knowing" the other and of intersubjective connection.

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[43] Sasha Torres (1998). "Introduction." *Living Colour: Race and Television in the United States*. Ed. Sasha Torres. Durham: Duke UP, p. 2; Janet Borgerson and Jonathan Schroeder (2008). "Building an Ethics of Visual Representation: Contesting Epistemic Closure in Marketing Communication." *Cutting-Edge Issues in Business Ethics: Continental Challenges to Tradition and Practice*. Eds Mollie Painter-Moreland and Patricia Werhane. Chicago: Springer, p. 97

Chapter Seven: Treme, *colonial gazes, and the face of the Other*

After further engagement with the visual history of colonialism and racialised scopic regimes, chapter seven returns its attention to subjectivity and visuality via the gaze and spectatorship in its textual analysis of *Treme* (US, HBO, 2010-2013), another show from the makers of *The Wire*. *Treme* repeatedly raises questions around gazes that intersect with visual legacies of colonialism and racism, the simplest and most powerful being: who gets to look*?* Gazing, postcolonial theories of the subject teach, is never neutral or inextricable from power structures and other-relations. Subject-oriented textual analysis of *Treme* reveals an insider/outsider dynamic that positions viewing-subjects as tourists, travellers to a New Orleans that does not particularly desire such a gaze in the first place.

In linking postcolonial scholarship and television studies, this chapter therefore significantly contributes to current work on race, culture, and everyday life. Questions of spectatorship are as much a critical event and problem for subjectivity as interpretation or reading.[44] It is important to investigate the encounter between dominant and subordinate groups, but scholarship that links postcolonialism, visual culture, and contemporary art typically take as their focus visual art and cinema.[45] Television is a much rarer object of study, but this chapter's textual analysis produces a strong argument for the ethical and political consequence of gazes between, and at, bodies, particularly raced ones, in a televisual or artistic context. Subjects cannot escape the power relations that form them and dictate the ways in which they are permitted to move through the world.

The desire to protect one's own and one's culture's unintelligibility to outsiders emerges in both the format of the show, with its dense and meandering and minutia-focused narratives, and the characters in the show, who unabashedly stare back at invading tourists. Indeed, the potency of returned gazes is emphasised in two sequences of *Treme* that this chapter examines in closer detail. It cannot be assumed that returned gazes are a blanket signifier of resistance; what is required is specific attention to their televisual form, and the meanings

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[44] Norman Bryson (1988). "The Gaze in the Expanded Field." *Vision and Visuality.* Ed. Hal Foster. Seattle: Bay Press. pp. 86-108; Michele Aaron (2007). *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking On.* London: Wallflower; Therese Davis (2004). *The Face on Screen.* Bristol: Intellect

[45] Sherene Razack (1998). *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 3. Mostly photography and colonial art (see below), or film: Lola Young (1996). *Fear of the Dark: 'race', gender and sexuality in the cinema.* London: Routledge; E. Ann Kaplan (1997). *Looking for the Other*. New York: Routledge; Hamid Nacify and Teshome H. Gabriel (Eds.) (1993). *Consuming the Other.* Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers

and subjects that emerge around them.

Throughout this thesis is the repeated assertion of the political significance of subject-oriented textual analysis, and it is this chapter that finally highlights a necessary corollary: ethics, and the spectre and spectacle of suffering. The final part of this chapter therefore draws on Emmanuel Levinas to interpret how one final televisual gaze might create subjects: the returned gaze of the character Daymo, who stares through the fourth wall, back at the viewing-subject. The radical alterity of his face in a televisual context demands, it is argued, an ethical response. Subject-oriented textual analysis therefore contributes to the politics of subjectivity as well as to television studies, giving insight into processes of meaning-making that may make possible an 'epistemological break,' and fresh praxis and forms of subjectivity.[46]

Conclusion

Textual analysis, this thesis demonstrates, is not separate to or uninterested in the concerns of politics broadly conceived. The original contributions these chapters of subject-oriented textual analysis make to the fields of politics of subjectivity, television studies, Australian media, affect, and postcolonialism, amongst other issues, further demonstrate the usefulness and fruitfulness of the methodology. The question of subjectivity, as a lived experience within power and symbolic structures, and as a way of interrogating and understanding human experience in a particular time and place, remains an ever-pressing issue. Where such issues intersect with culture, an approach to televisual texts that prioritises form while maintaining political purpose becomes increasingly useful.

[46] Miller, *Well-Tempered Self*, p. xxii

Part One

Theoretical Background:

Visuality, Political Subjectivities, and Textual Analysis

2

SUBJECTS AND VISUALITY: LACAN AND FOUCAULT

Introduction

Any research that attempts to link subjectivity and images (such as psychoanalytic theory, discussed later in this chapter, or cultural studies, discussed in chapter three) must first clarify the kind of subject at stake. What "the subject" is understood to be will direct mechanisms and methodologies of research. With that in mind, this chapter draws a picture of the subject beholden to sign systems and visual regimes of meaning to make phenomenal experience of the world (including texts) meaningful. This prompts a methodology of textual analysis that requires attention to televisual form, visual history, gazes, power relations, and intersubjectivity.

This chapter selectively draws out those elements of semiotic-psychoanalytic and power/knowledge approaches to subjectivity that foreground opticality in sign-subject and text-subject relationships. Both approaches, it will be seen, prioritise the generative capacities of the sign or text; which is to say, both approaches conceive of the subject as constructed by or positioned by the sign or text. Furthermore both indicate that this "activeness" of signs and texts exists by virtue of extant cultural and social networks of signification through which meaning is made possible. Subjects and texts, here, exist because of what-has-come-before, be it understood as the symbolic order, or discursive networks of power/knowledge. Because these systems are not of the subject's choosing, pre-existing her, subjectivity here is politicised, and vested in power relations. What is crucial here is *process*: specifically, processes of subject-formation in response to the image. As this chapter and the next argue, television studies contains gaps in this area.

Similarly, both Lacanian semiotic-psychoanalytic and Foucauldian approaches make use of

concepts of the gaze and spectatorship in subject-formation: albeit, of course, with different framings and to different purpose. Again, this is not a typical theoretical background for television studies. However, expanding the scope and power of the eye beyond the subject, and investing the gaze in spaces and actors that *look back at* the subject calls us to recognise the subject's dependency on the sign, on systems of spectatorship and visuality that render phenomena intelligible, and in turn render subjects intelligible.

The politics of subjectivity therefore would seem to be particularly useful for textual analysis. Indeed, the prominence of psychoanalytic film theory indicates that there is much value in understanding texts and subjects as interdependent. However, psychoanalytic approaches to textual subjects can be avoidant of television, particularly outside of the foundational psychoanalytic concerns over sexual difference and spectatorship[1] – and, it must be said, nor does television studies draw strongly from this pool of theory: neither Freud nor Lacan make an appearance in the index of the notable compendiums *The Television Studies Reader* or *Television After TV.*[2] Foucault, on the other hand, makes regular appearances in cultural studies and television scholarship; however the scopic bent of his work is typically confined to processes of surveillance and normalisation, and his conception of discourse is generally used to construct or identify on-screen representations of cultural identities and groups.[3]

The next chapter argues that this risks a turn away from televisual texts themselves. At the same time, both Lacanian and Foucauldian approaches to media – which, it must be admitted, were hardly developed with televisual textual analysis in mind – struggle with the uniqueness and instability of the television screen (conceived of economically, technologically, symbolically, and metaphorically). Attention to how subjects are formed through relations of visuality, it is argued in this chapter and the next, requires a close accounting of the specificities of the image in question, and provides fresh opportunities for

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1 See, for instance, Annette Kuhn (1999). "Women's Genres: Melodrama, Soap Opera, and Theory." *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader.* Ed. Sue Thornham. New York: New York UP, pp. 146-156

2 Robert C Allen and Annette Hill (Eds.) (2004). *The Television Studies Reader* London: Routledge; Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Eds.) (2004). *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*. Durham: Duke UP

3 See, for instance, Gareth Palmer (2003). *Discipline and Liberty*. Manchester: Manchester UP; Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (2007). "A Perfect Lie: Visual (Dis)Pleasures and Policing Femininity in Nip/Tuck." *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled.* Ed. Dana Heller. London: IB Taurus, pp. 119-132; Anna McCarthy (2007). "Reality Television: A Neoliberal Theatre of Suffering." *Social Text* 25 (Winter), pp. 17-41; Laurie Oulette and James Hay (2008). "Makeover Television, Governmentality and the Good Citizen." *Continuum* 22, pp. 471-484

textual analysis in such a slippery and diverse medium as television.

The first section of this chapter discusses psychoanalytic approaches to signs and images. "Psychoanalytic theory" of course consists of a great number of extensive and complex bodies of work; here, however, only two key Lacanian intersections of psychoanalysis and semiotics are elaborated upon: the symbolic order, which exists beyond the subject, and the screen of signs, which mediates visual access to the world. This section also discusses psychoanalytic film theory, a precedent for a subject-oriented approach to texts, before concluding that there exist fundamental difficulties with importing such theory wholesale across to televisual texts. Nevertheless the ideas of contingent subjects formed through the play of signs, and the screen of signs as a figure for existing in the eye of the world, remain compelling structural supports for a subject-oriented approach to television texts.

The second section of this chapter engages with Foucauldian epistemologies of signs and power relations to conceive of televisual texts as structuring and positioning forces enmeshed in channels of lateral, networked power. The appeal of Foucauldian poststructuralism is in its clearly politicised subjectivities, and this situates the thesis in the wider political field indicated in the previous chapter, concerned with interrogating the links between power, texts and subjectivity. This approach to the subject understands media images not as symptoms of institutions or reflective of realities "out there" but as part of ongoing active processes of subject-generation through epistemological and discursive framings. Finally, the chapter examines gazing, spectatorship, and power relations to argue that external gazes construct subjects once again via processes of visibility and legibility, depending on pre-existing sign systems to make subjects intelligible.

It is the category of the subject, as Foucault himself acknowledged, that is the essential "point of convergence" between Lacan and Foucault.[4] Nevertheless, despite the commonalities indicated herein, this thesis does not suggest that these two approaches to the "problem of the subject" are fundamentally compatible or essentially the same.[5] Nor does this chapter

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[4] Toby Miller (1993). *The Well-Tempered Self.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, p. xv

[5] Michel Foucault and Duccio Trombadori (2002). "Interview with Michel Foucault." *Power: Essential Writings of Foucault 1954-1984 Vol 3.* Ed. James D. Faubion. New York: The New Press, p. 251. Of course this study is far from the first to strategically deploy Lacan alongside Foucault. See for example Norman K. Denzin (1995). *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze.* Sage: London; Michael Ann Holly (1996). *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image.* Ithaca: Cornell UP; Norman Bryson (1988). "The Gaze in the Expanded Field." *Vision and Visuality.* Ed. Hal Foster. Seattle:

attempt to outline a "psychoanalytic theory of television" or equivalent; instead, key frameworks and concepts are drawn from Lacanian and Foucauldian theories of subjectivity to argue that textual analysis in television studies can be usefully supplemented with a theory of the subject; and in the opposite direction, that theories of the subject can be fruitfully supplemented by the unique challenges of television as an object of study. The key themes of this chapter therefore become the key questions of the subject-oriented methodology discussed in chapter three: visual history, power relations, spectatorship, and gazes. As the case studies of part two of this thesis demonstrate, a subject-oriented approach to television provides novel and useful analyses of even such picked-over genres as makeover television and crime television.

Psychoanalytic approaches to the image and subjectivity

Subjects generated in the symbolic order

Moving through the world is to enter into systems of signification, and it is in everyday life that meanings emerge from signifying processes. Reading texts, the world, and each other is a fundamental practice of everyday life, and it is these signifying processes, rather than a rigid set of ego-transcendent rules, that the scholar must examine if she wants to examine the subject. This is because it is in these signifying processes where subjects are made intelligible; where they are, in essence, made.[6]

The generative capacity of sign systems such as language is a foundational premise of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which draws strongly from semiotic theory. Christian Metz notes that:

> There is always a moment after the obvious observation that it is man who makes the symbol when it is also clear that the symbol makes man: this is one of the great lessons of psychoanalysis, anthropology, and linguistics.[7]

Bay Press. pp. 86-108; W. J. T. Mitchell (1994). *Picture Theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation.* Chicago: Chicago UP; Kelly Oliver (1998). *Subjectivity Without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield; Henry Krips (2010). "The Politics of the Gaze: Foucault, Lacan and Zizek." *Culture Unbound 2.* 91-102. Notably, much of this work is in the field of visual culture studies and semiotics, instead of television studies or political science.

6 Julia Kristeva (1986). "The System and the Speaking Subject." *The Kristeva Reader.* Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia UP, pp. 25, 28

7 Christian Metz (1982). *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema.* London: McMillan Press. p. 20

In order to develop beyond the initial observations of structural linguistics, in which the meaning of signs comes from the binary play of difference within a closed system, semiotics is compelled to introduce the 'third category' of the subject.[8] Indeed, for Emile Beneviste, subjects have no existence outside of the speech acts that construct them, and must be "constantly reconstructed through discourse – through conversation, literature, film, television, painting, photography, etc."[9]

Not only does shifting focus from *langue* to *parole* require attention to the speaking subject, but signifying systems must always, via Roland Barthes, implicate the wider cultural field of mythology and ideology. Concepts of sign and signifier are thus transitioned from a direct denotive relationship to a more connotive relationship that implicates each signifier in a web of endlessly deferred meaning.[10] Televisual images, this thesis argues throughout, do not simply exist 'as themselves.' Chapter four, for instance, examines the before-and-after shot of makeover television, a very familiar image that would nevertheless be essentially illegible without its dependence upon, amongst other things: Western modes of left-right reading; neoliberal teleologies of progress; neoliberal dictates of self-care; patriarchal conceptions of femininity; third-wave feminist conceptions of empowerment; the aesthetic markers of classed taste; a viewer capable of situating the image in its narrative and inter-textual context; and more.

At this point of complexity and inter-reliance, argues Kaja Silverman, sign systems become aligned with a concept of the symbolic order.[11] Within Lacanian psychoanalysis, the symbolic order indicates the social realm that makes possible intersubjective relations, as well as engagement with cultural and textual phenomena.[12] Crucially, entering into the symbolic order is the originary moment of the subject, with language mediating "even the earliest of the subject's identifications."[13] Because acts of understanding, experience, conscious thought, speech, and looking require a continual internalisation and reactivation

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8 Kaja Silverman (1983). *The Subject of Semiotics.* Oxford: Oxford UP. p. 42

9 Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics*, p. 199; David Hall (2004). *Subjectivity*, New York: Routledge, p. 100

10 Roland Barthes (2002 [1977]). "Rhetoric of the Image." *The Visual Culture Reader.* Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. London: Routledge, pp 136-138

11 Indeed, Silverman argues that psychoanalysis is so dependent on sign systems that it can be thought of as simply a branch of semiotics. Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics*, p. 42. Nevertheless this thesis generally defaults to *sign-system* instead of *symbolic order*, so as to maintain distance from deeper Lacanian psychic structures of the unconscious.

12 Holly, *Past Looking,* p. 176

13 Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics*, p. 194

of the symbolic order and require an *I* who listens, looks, and speaks, the interpretation and use of signs is an act of subject-generation.

Initial entry into the symbolic order is prompted by a visual experience: the mirror stage. This moment (or phase) is specular, predicated upon an internalisation of an (illusory) image of the body, which the infant confuses with the self. This *meconnaissance* (misrecognition) of the mirror stage illustrates the precariousness of the subject's self-understanding: the subject thinks of itself as unitary, but this is a fundamental misconstrual, says Lacan, of how the entry into the symbolic order has required its castration and the subsuming of desire. In fact the subject is fractured and split, and the "I" referent is only in illusion the "I" that speaks, because intelligibility gained through entry into the symbolic is at the cost of partitioning the unconscious.[14]

The mirror-stage is a threshold: of inner and outer worlds, "physical and psychic, material and immaterial;"[15] but also, of course, between seeing and being seen. The mirror stage therefore splits the subject from itself, but also papers over the trauma of that split, allowing a subject to identify and speak from a position of an "I" that does not in fact exist. The beguiling specularity of the mirror stage has led to its use in psychoanalytic film theory both as a literal configuration of the text-subject relationship and as a more figurative illustration of how identification might occur. In this field, the mirror stage draws much of its potency from the Freudian-Lacanian understanding of perception throughout life as "anchored in the misperception – in the denial – of one's own castration."[16] However, this thesis draws less on the dynamics of the unconscious and sexual difference. As will be seen below, this conception of the unconscious is foundational to psychoanalytic film theory but in its focus on television, this thesis prefers to emphasise the theme of the symbolic order as constructive of subjects at all stages of life. Subjectivity, here, is both contingent on and beholden to the symbolic order, which is necessary for meaningful scopic and intersubjective access to the phenomenal world.

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[14] Jacques Lacan (1977). *Ecrits: A Selection.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, pp. 4-6; Mary Ann Doane (1999). "Dark continents: epistemologies of racial and sexual difference in psychoanalysis and cinema." *Visual Culture: the Reader*. Ed. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. London: Sage, p. 454

[15] Oliver, *Subjectivity Without Subjects,* p. 154

[16] Shoshana Felman (1988). "Lacan's Psychoanalysis, or the Figure in the Screen." *October* 45, p. 103

The symbolic order does not belong to subjects

As language is greater than any one person, it follows that not only does entry into the symbolic order create subjects, it creates them on someone else's terms. Becoming a subject therefore requires making the external internal, and bringing the outside into the self. The symbolic order, that is, is fundamentally alienatory: it is *someone else's* tongue that we speak with.[17] This language – the (m)Other's tongue – dictates how and what it is possible to understand and make use of, exists prior to us, and remains outside of our domain.[18] Without direct access to the referent (or the unconscious) we are never as unified, stable or coherent as we pretend that we are in order for everyday life and communication to work.[19] The symbolic order, therefore, divides us internally; but, crucially, it also joins us, creating the possibility for meaningful interactions with other subjects and with the world.

Lacan characterises that which is not of the symbolic order as the *real*, as beyond symbol and understanding.[20] The symbolic order organises the real into *reality*, and the real cannot insert itself into comprehension without calling itself into a position within the symbolic order. This is, in a sense, a phenomenological argument, in which elements of the real cannot "expose themselves, each for itself, directly visible, signifying from themselves" but in which signifiers are always already signifying from the world.[21] In interrupting access to the "real world," the symbolic order ensures that subjects' encounters with cultural phenomena such as media texts exist only by virtue of pre-existing systems of signs and signification, outside of which meaning is impossible.

The Lacanian subject "constitutes itself through speaking...[but] is always simultaneously spoken. It inherits its language and desires from the Other, and its identity and history are culturally written before it is even born."[22] Subjects are therefore of the moment, but always in the context of prior structures: as subjects, as spectators, we are at once *sui generis* and

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17 Jacques Lacan (1979 [1977]). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. Middlesex: Penguin, p. 205; Bruce Fink (1995). *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance.* Princeton: Princeton UP, p. 7

18 Lisa Blackman, John Cromby, Derek Hook, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Valerie Walkerdine (2008). "Creating Subjectivities." *Subjectivity* 22, p. 3

19 Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1992). "Psychoanalysis, Film and Television." *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled.* Ed. Robert C. Allen. New York: Routledge, p. 209

20 He also describes an Imaginary register, which is the ego's identification with a unitary self. Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, p. 84

21 Emmanuel Levinas (2003 [1972]). *Humanism of the Other.* Trans. Nidra Poller. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, pp. 112-113

22 Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics*, p. 199

foregone conclusions. Spoken by structure, but speaking in the instant: this tension calls us to understand subjectivity as always both fundamentally indebted to extant sign systems, as well as generated in moments of speaking or meaning-making.

Signs, screens and gazes: producing subjects

Spoken language is, it has been noted, a system of signs; but many theorists would go further to claim that art-objects, visual codes, and indeed all visual experience is similarly implicated in webs of elements that signify only in relation to one another, anchored in each "utterance" experientially, by the eye and the subject. Vision, argues Martin Jay, is the pre-eminent sense of the modern era,[23] but as was discussed above, vision gives no direct or ultimate access to truth or the Real. Gazing at an art object provides no possibility of actually touching the substance of what is depicted. A photograph or a film is no transparent window into the world beyond but is instead an opaque system of signs, reliant upon previous utterances, previous ways of seeing, and previous rules about what seeing even is.[24]

There exists then a system of visuality that precedes subjects that, in the words of Norman Bryson, "saw the world before I did"[25] and that, also, sees me. In *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* Lacan recounts the experience of, when he was a young intellectual, going fishing and being mocked by the men who have spent their lives on the water: "*Do you see that can?*" asked Petit-Jean. "*Do you? Well it doesn't see you!*" This comment discomfited Lacan, who was made suddenly aware of his status as an object of the gaze of not just his fellow humans but the sardine can itself and ultimately all points of light.[26]

Lacan figures this as a universal gaze that gazes *at* the subject; as the subject looks back into the world, so that subjects are always objects in an outside gaze. It is a gaze that pre-exists subjects, rendering them "beings to be looked at in the spectacle of the world."[27] But these gazes are not naked and clear, revealing the Real to the gazing subject, or a stable unified

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23 Martin Jay (1988). *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique.* London: Routledge, p. 3

24 Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics* p. 6; Holly, *Past Looking*, pp. 21, 141; Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field," p. 93

25 Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field," p. 92

26 Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts,* p. 95 (emphasis original)

27 Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 75

subject to a gazing world. Inserted between the world's gaze (in which the subject is pinpointed as an object) and the object pinpointed by the subject's own gaze is a screen of signs. For Lacan, the screen of signs is a system of visuality that mediates, catches, and traps; a communal organisation and regulation of retinal phenomena that intervenes between the subject and the world at large.[28] The screen of signs therefore makes meaningful gazing possible, both at the subject and from the subject. This indicates that analyses of subjectivity ought to pay attention to the direction of not just the subject's gaze but also external ones, which, as chapters four and seven argue, project through the screen of signs onto subjects.

The wider cultural field, Barthes reminds us, is implicated in every symbolic exchange. Vision, and encounters with art objects, are not neutral or internal, but socially constructed, "consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena."[29] Images on television or film screens have only a presumptive relationship to the "truth" of the world and of ourselves. When gazing at an art object, argues W. J. T. Mitchell, the observer is in turn an object for the gaze of the picture, as "the image greets or hails or addresses us...takes the beholder into the game, enfolds the observer as an object for the 'gaze' of the picture."[30] Being seen is taking its effect inside the self.

As subjects trying to recognise ourselves and find meaning in these screens, we must remember that to screen is to veil as well as to exhibit.[31] We exist under the eye of the universal gaze; but it is in the stains and scotoma of the *screen* that we are constituted; it is the *screen* that limits and engenders within those limits. Lacan's screen of signs, then, does not make exuberant and infinite meanings out of objects in the subject's visual field, but selects and weights meanings, and makes certain kinds of meaning possible at the expense of others.[32] This means, according to Silverman, that it is "at the site of the cultural representations through which we see and are seen that the political struggle should be waged."[33] That is, the critical concerns directing a subject-oriented approach to textual research – gazes, power, sign-systems, visuality and spectatorship, intersubjective

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28 Bryson, "Gaze in Expanded Field,", pp. 91, 92
29 Bryson, "Gaze in Expanded Field," p. 92
30 Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 75
31 Jan Baetens (2006). "Screen Narratives." *Literature-Film Quarterly* 31:1, p. 3
32 It should be noted that this is not a co-location of the Lacanian screen and the television screen: the text, playing on the television screen, is the object of sight, and the screen of signs is what makes its visual data meaningful.
33 Kaja Silverman (1989). "Fassbinder and Lacan." *Camera Obscura* 7:1 19*,* p. 78

experience and communication – are also inherently political.

Psychoanalytic film theory: a precedent for studying subjects and images

As psychoanalysis developed alongside the invention and expansion of cinema it was perhaps inevitable that the two would be linked. The extensive body of psychoanalytic film theory indicates that textual research is of great interest to theorists of subjectivity.[34] The below brief discussion of psychoanalytic film theory, however, demonstrates that many of its fundamental propositions cannot be imported wholesale to television viewing. At least with respect to television, it is argued, textual analysis ought to concentrate on processes of meaning-making instead of finding identifications between the camera and the eye, or breaking texts down into mechanistic effects of the psyche.

In contrast to earlier film theory, which was predicated on the assumption that the camera could access reality (even if it subsequently mediated it), film theory emerging out of psychoanalytic theory follows the Lacanian reversal: the sign, here, is not the shadow of the thing but the thing itself, and all else is displaced to the inaccessible order of the Real.[35] Nevertheless, E. Ann Kaplan points out that theorists generally make use of just parts of Lacanian theory, in particular:

> the mirror phase, the distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, the notion of the unconscious as 'structured like a language', and the constitution of the subject as 'split' at the moment of entry into language, which is also an entry into lack/desire.[36]

Scholars also brought in semiotics, deconstruction and structuralism and married them to an Althusserian understanding of subject-formation in ideology.[37] This selective consolidation and deployment of theory has created a remarkably stable approach to film texts, that

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34 It has become less common in contemporary mainstream film theory, which is more reliant upon Bordwellian textual analysis; nevertheless its legacy is still felt in, for instance, the assumptive correlation between the point-of-view shot and the spectator's subjectivity.

35 Paula Murphy (2005). “Psychoanalysis and Film Theory Part One.” *Kritikos* 2, <http://intertheory.org/psychoanalysis.htm> accessed 27 September 2016

36 E. Ann Kaplan (1990). “From Plato's Cave to Freud's Screen.” *Psychoanalysis and Cinema.* Ed. E. Ann Kaplan. New York: Routledge, p. 9

37 Kaplan, “From Plato's Cave,” p. 9

prioritises the relationship between text and spectator through an examination and taxonomy of the ways in which cinema texts activate, reflect, or coerce particular psychic processes. The prioritisation of the *matter* and *activeness* of cinema images is crucial, and despite the critiques below this thesis follows psychoanalytic film theory in its insistence on the activeness of the text.

Lacanian psychic structures, it was noted, are foundational to psychoanalytic film theory. For Metz, for instance, Lacanian processes such as *meconnaissance,* in which the mirror that "alienates man in his own reflection and makes him the double of his double...desire as a pure effect of lack and endless pursuit.... All this is undoubtedly reactivated by the play of that *other mirror*, the cinema screen."[38] Processes of identification, recognition and the unconscious are the primary links between viewer and text, and castration the primary metaphor for the break between representation and the real.[39]

As split subjects, so the argument goes, we are in need of external objects to identify with: anything that promises closure (such as narrative) or wholeness and mastery (such as the figure of a film star). By rendering its own apparatus – its own 'means of projection,' its 'authorial voice' – invisible through the apparent naturalness and distraction of classical cinema's form, subjects feel they have gained ownership of this vision. Subsequently, they identify with the 'cinematic gaze,' and the implicit ideologies of its discourse. Indeed, the camera is identified with the eye, and viewing subjects experience a *jouissance,* a feeling of pleasure that masks the subject's fundamental division from itself.[40]

If the unconscious is formed by repression, then dreams are the "royal road to the unconscious," and films are symbolic expressions of desire and power. Unity is to associate oneself with the unconscious.[41] Films are (often)[42] seen in the darkened cave of the cinema, in which images combine and flow in order to evoke strong emotion in viewers outside of the censor of our waking mind. The cinematic signifier is figured as a mirror in which the spectator is absent; instead, the spectator is a voyeur, pursuing lost objects amid the dynamics

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38 Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier,* p. 4

39 Katherine Thomson-Jones (2008). *Aesthetics and Film*. London: Continuum, p. 114, 115; Kaja Silverman (1999). "Lost Objects and Mistaken Subjects." *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Sue Thornham. New York: New York UP, p. 100

40 Kaja Silverman (1993). "What is a Camera." *Discourse* 15 (3), p. 4

41 Flitterman-Lewis, "Psychoanalysis, Film, and Television," p. 207

42 Particularly during the years in which this theory developed.

of lack and desire.[43] In replicating the space and function of dreaming, cinema texts are seen as a repository of cultural anxieties – an expression of a culture's repressed desires and obsessions that could not otherwise be aired.[44] Critics with the right decoding tools are thus able to decode and expose these desires. The critic's reading banks on what the naïve viewer does not know, surmising that texts work on viewers in ways viewers do not understand.[45]

One can imagine different ways that cinema could "look"; however, the apparent givenness of mainstream cinema's form and its apparently natural and obvious reflection or map of how we see is expressed in the theory of the cinematic mechanism. The cinematic mechanism is the combination of aesthetic and industrial techniques that are deployed to convey narrative or aesthetic meaning. Films, argue psychoanalytic film theorists, particularly mainstream narrative films, have developed to work in tandem with the "mental machinery" of the spectator's psyche; which in turn over years of watching films has generated a mirror schema for consuming them.[46] Particular modes of conveying meaning become more prevalent as we learn to decode them more efficiently.[47] The spectator here is an "*artificial construct*, produced and activated by the cinematic apparatus," by the fictive effect of text; furthermore as an empty construct, anyone can occupy the position.[48] Unlike in the original foundational mirror, the spectator's own body is the only thing that is *not* seen in the cinematic screen.[49] Yet, argues Metz, this forces the spectator to identify with that constructed gaze.

The above account is, of course, simplified, and omits much.[50] However, it may be noted that the processes of subjectivity central to psychoanalytic film analysis rely (unsurprisingly) much more on theories of the unconscious, the split self, and sexual difference, than the elements of Lacanian psychoanalysis discussed earlier in the chapter. In the ensuing

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43 Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier,* pp. 46, 59

44 Sue Thornham and Tony Purvis (2005). *Television Drama: Theories and Identities.* Palgrave MacMillan, p. 98

45 Rob Burnett (1995). *Cultures of Vision.* Bloomington: Indiana UP*,* p. 104

46 Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier,* p. 7

47 It must be emphasised that this is not natural and neutral; not only complex ideological wars over signs but also technological, economic and other forces have shaped what our ideas of proper and easy cinematic form look like. Investigating this non-neutrality requires attention to visual history, power relations, form, intersubjectivity, and more, and informs the works of textual analysis in part two.

48 Flitterman-Lewis, "Psychoanalysis, Film, and Television," p. 212, emphasis original

49 Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier,* p. 45; Flitterman-Lewis, "Psychoanalysis, Film, and Television," p. 213

50 For more thorough accounts see Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier;* Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics;* Flitterman-Lewis*, "*Psychoanalysis, Film, and Television."

discussion of televisual processes of subjectivity, this thesis will draw less upon the idea of visual texts as expressions of unconscious repressed desire (experienced in a cave-like dreamspace), and more on the idea of meaning-making as impossible without systems of visuality that exceed subjects; an optical and political process involving complex and bidirectional gazes.

This is partly because television is significantly different from cinema technologically, contextually, industrially, and in its form. If sign systems are constitutive of subjects it is critical to examine how those signs appear and on which screens: for instance, the sign-systems of television are often chaotic, unresolved, metatextual, interlinked, and polysemic in ways that filmic "apparatus" not. This thesis relies upon a strong productive link between form and subject; while concepts and mechanisms developed in the study of visual art and cinema are essential for grappling with television texts, they ought not be transposed uncritically to television, and new concepts are required to account for the unique attributes of television.

We can set up several oppositions that are useful for highlighting the differences between television and cinema. The cinema space itself, in its architecture, its lighting, and the projection of light onto the screen, are likened in film theory to Plato's simile of the Cave, in which projections are mistaken for the Real. In comparison, television is domestic, competing with other screens and activities. It is ordinary, everyday, and often unremarkable.[51] Films are generally single two-hour units (or thereabouts), providing the sense of mastery and closure Metz noted, whereas television relies upon seriality and constant broadcast availability; indeed Beverle Houston characterises television as a place where desire is endlessly reformulated in a constant deferral of resolution.[52] Certainly, of course, diversity exists within the mediums; for instance, cinema contains serialised texts such as *The Thin Man* and Andy Hardy films of classic Hollywood; or more recently, the *7-Up* films, and the Marvel Cinematic Universe; on the other side, scholars tend to praise shows such as *The Wire* and *The Sopranos* (US, HBO, 1999-2007) for the ways they resist closure and certainty. Such internal diversity, of course, only makes form- and medium-

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[51] Certainly films are *on* television and the advent of home viewing technologies makes cinema viewing more everyday. Classic psychoanalytic film theory developed out of the encounter with film in the theatre.

[52] Beverle Houston (1984). "Viewing Television: The Metaspsychology of Endless Consumption." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 9:3, p. 184

specific analytic methods more of an imperative.

Many of cinema's techniques and form carry over to television: for instance, it would be unusual to find a televisual text that broke the 180-degree rule, which dictates camera placement and editing in order to make it easily read that two characters are looking at and speaking to each other. Standard dramatic television in particular owes much to the techniques of cinema that have become increasingly codified since its early days.[53] Still, as the patterns of sponsorship and the prominence of variety show and news programming might indicate, early television was as much the vulgar lovechild of radio as it was cinema.[54] "It is important to emphasise," argues Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, that "cinema and television are two completely distinct media; as textual systems, and in the manner in which we engage with them as viewers, film and television are profoundly different."[55]

Psychoanalytic film theory does, however, thoroughly demonstrate that it is possible to do textual analysis with the subject in mind. Unsurprisingly, translation to television often reiterates psychoanalytic concerns with the unconscious and repression. Sue Thornham and Tony Purvis, for instance, argue for the importance of psychoanalytic theory's emphasis on text-subject relationship, casting it primarily in terms of identification and unconscious anxieties. Noting crime television narratives' moves towards closure and coherency, they draw attention to the way desire, repression and anxiety erupt, disrupt and render uncanny the familiar and stable.[56] This form of analysis involves searching for identifications between characters and viewers, locating Oedipal structures, and elaborating upon fantasies.[57] Similarly, Flitterman-Lewis's application of psychoanalytic theory to television relies on finding primary and secondary identifications in a sequence of a soap opera.[58]

We may be sceptical of the fundamental proposition of psychoanalytic film theory, whereby cinematic images and experience replay, reinforce and reinstate the processes of lack and desire that are understood as constituting subjects via their unconscious, in more or less

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53 David Bordwell (2013). "How Motion Pictures Became the Movies." *David Bordwell's Website on Cinema.* Video lecture. <http://davidbordwell.net/video/movielecture.php> last accessed 27th September 2016

54 Or other influences such as the theatre hall and film montage; see Fredric Jameson on Eisenstein. Fredric Jameson (1997 [1992]). *Signatures of the Visible.* New York: Routledge, p. 212

55 Flitterman-Lewis "Psychoanalysis, Film, and Television," p. 203

56 Thornham and Purvis, "Television Drama," p. 101

57 Thornham and Purvis, "Television Drama," pp. 103-110

58 Fitterman-Lewis, "Psychoanalysis, Film, and Television," pp. 225-238

mechanistic ways. Jane Gaines, for instance, rebukes some of the excesses of psychoanalytic film theory, and calls for film studies to overcome the idea of the entry into language as fundamentally determinant, rendering viewers the psychic shadows of textual operations. This requires, she argues, a "shift from the text which produced subjects to the subjects who produced texts;"[59] in contrast, this thesis takes a more central position, with a commitment to analysing subjects as produced through visual culture and screens, which retain the stains of the system of visuality that precede it, and allows "not one narrative that is constructed, but several...a multiplicity of possible spatial relationships within the visual field."[60] This thesis therefore diverges significantly from several of the premises and methods of psychoanalytic film theory. It is not unconscious identification with the camera's gaze that this thesis figures as the heart of the text-subject relationship, but processes of meaning-making.

The next chapter explores the specificities of televisual form further as a preface for part two of the thesis. To sum up, while psychoanalytic film theory's methodologies and core processes do understand subjects as being created through processes of visuality and spectatorship, the theory can ill-fit television as a medium. In contrast, the first part of this chapter has identified sign systems and the symbolic order as critical to both meaning-making and subjective being and interaction with the world. As the preceding section indicates, the subject-oriented approach to televisual texts advocated by this thesis is therefore less invested in locating Oedipal structures or identifications as a method of analysis. Instead, it directs attention to the gazes, processes of visuality, and scopic regimes that make up the screen that is inserted between our eye and the world: that makes both self and text intelligible. It is these elements of semiotic-psychoanalytic theory, more than structures of the psyche or unconscious identification, that are used to support this thesis's approach to subject-oriented textual analysis.

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59 Jane Gaines (1988). "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory." *Screen* 29 (4), p. 15

60 Baetens, "Screen Narratives," p. 6

Epistemology and Visuality

Power and pre-existing sign systems

The next section of this chapter explores similar themes of opticality and signs in a brief survey of relevant aspects of Foucauldian theories of the subject. Although most of this theory was established with respect to institutional medical-penal-academic discourse and practice, it can be (and has been) extended to cultural texts, including, of course, televisual texts, fictional and factual. In applying this theory to the study of popular culture, echoes of the visual continue to appear in the metaphorics of power/knowledge, as well as processes of internalising the external. This is a shift in focus from acknowledging the action of sign-systems to methods for analysing the creation, makeup and power dynamics *of* the system of signs. This section therefore also emphasises subjectivity as always-already politicised. It characterises the visual field as marked by epistemologies that structure subjectivities. Furthermore, it characterises spectatorship as a phenomenon that flows along lines of power, ordering subjects' bodies and rendering them knowable and work-on-able. Ultimately, this section establishes that methodologically, for a subject-oriented textual analysis, researchers must ask questions about power-relations, gazes, materiality, and intersubjectivity.

Not only are we not in control of what has preceded us, but we are subject to it, and implicated in its power relations. This is the dual sense of subjectivity: that of experiencing the self as a subject of knowledge and that of being subject to power.[61] Being produced 'in the eye of the world,' therefore, is not neutral, but is intimately tied up with questions of power. The subject of this thesis is, once again, an explicitly politicised one. If culture, as one aspect of these pre-existing systems, is also a site of "noncoercive adherence"[62] to hegemonic norms, then the challenge for textual studies is to specify the nature of the subject-text relationship.

This is discussed in greater detail in chapter three. For now, it is important to note that individuals live under conditions not of their own making; therefore, the terms by which we make sense of experience and of the world are not of our own making.[63] Knowledge, here,

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[61] Michel Foucault (1982). "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 8:4, p. 781

[62] Miller, *Well-Tempered Self*, p. 93

[63] Stuart Hall (1977). "Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect'." *Mass Communication in Society.* Eds. James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott. Open University Press, p. 320

is not limited to organised fields of inquiry such as science and technology. It also indicates the field of possibilities by which individuals in a social context ‘know’ themselves and their social organisation. Knowledge transforms subjects into objects and back again; in this transformation, argues Foucault, is a “mutual genesis.”[64]

Crucially, power is therefore not simply a repressive top-down apparatus of control by a centralised ruling body. It structures the field of possibilities, making some more available than others, and is productive of “reality, domains of objects, institutions of language, rituals of truth...it creates new objects of knowledge, accumulates new bodies of information.”[65] As was indicated in chapter one, this thesis, in situating itself within the politics of subjectivity, does not intend to indicate the power relations of traditional political science such as international relations or state action, but the laterally networked power relations that structure the fields of being of subjects.

The very idea of truth is indebted to practices of communication and operations of this form of power, particularly as it is allied to knowledges, and rules about what discourse counts as knowledge. That is, the truths we tell about human nature and social organisation are not objective descriptions of some exterior reality but are instead constructed and productive. The ways and arenas in which these knowledges are expressed, transmitted and used are similarly epistemological actors or events in themselves. As in the previous discussion of psychoanalysis, sign systems, language, and culture are deeply implicated in the shift from phenomenal experience to meaning-imbued “reality.” Nikolas Rose writes,

> At certain historical moments, particular issues or problems are constructed in certain ways—as melancholia or depression, as hysteria or post-traumatic syndrome, as cowardice or shell-shock—only through the possibilities available within language: words, vocabularies, the grammars of explanation and causation, the narratives of life events that it provides. Language makes only certain ways of being human describable, and in so doing makes only certain ways of living possible.[66]

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[64] Miller, *Well-Tempered Self*, p. xv

[65] John Tagg (1999). “Evidence, Truth and Order: Photographic records and the growth of the state.” *Visual Culture: the Reader.* Eds Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. London: Sage, p. 262

[66] Nikolas Rose (1997). “Assembling the Modern Self.” *Rewriting the Self: Histories From the Renaissance to the Present*. Ed. Roy Porter. London: Routledge, p. 238

Subjectivity in the postmodern era is an experience that "categorises the subject, marks him by his own identity, attaches to him his own identity, imposes a lew of truth upon him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise in him."[67] Looking at the subject under conditions of postmodernity, we must devolve and relocate the dynamics and operations of power into micro-processes that operate within subjects, between subjects and institutions, and between subjects and epistemologies of representation. Subjectivity therefore relates not to something essential about an individual but is in itself a transformative relation, as the subject is constituted as an object for himself through ways of knowing tied to structures of power. Because this is a historically specific subjectification, the Foucauldian project is often one of genealogy, tracing the fields of knowledge and practice that constitute the modern subject.[68] When applied to textual analysis it has similar aims, locating texts as discursive events that work on viewing subjects, and tracing representations back to the knowledge/power structures and institutions that privilege certain representations at the expense of others.

Representations and power

A textual analysis that draws on Foucauldian conceptions of the subject must have ways of identifying this activeness of the text and locating the operations of epistemological power operating within it. Says Foucault of painting,

> [it] is not a pure vision that must then be transcribed into the materiality of space; nor is it a naked gesture whose silent and eternally empty meanings must be freed from subsequent interpretations. It is shot through—and independently of scientific knowledge and philosophical themes—with the positivity of a knowledge.[69]

Representations, images and concepts impose themselves as structures; they are lived, and their principal mediator is language. Whenever a sign is present, ideology is present too.[70] Culture, in this view, is a crucial site of analysis and even intervention, as processes of signification and power/knowledge operate in the often intimate and always personal contexts of reading, viewing and listening to a work of art and/or mass media.

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67 Foucault, "The Subject and Power," p. 781

68 Hall, *Subjectivity*, p. 92

69 Michel Foucault (1989 [1969]). *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* Trans. A. M. Sheridan. London: Routledge, p. 214

70 Hall, "Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect'," p. 326

Utterances within these cultural systems conform to discursive rules, to "a particular vocabulary and grammar that permits the making of choices only by its own rules."[71] As the articulation of systems of knowledge/power, discourse provides the very language we use to "tell the truth about ourselves."[72] As such, it is productive, but always at a cost: like a picture frame or a television camera, discourse excludes more than it includes. There is no ahistorical, objective position, and we cannot identify truths about ourselves outside of the socially constructed rules that govern what we understand as truth. These conditions are made available to us from without, through cultural and political systems, including television.

All knowledge, here, is "fictional" in that it has no relation to an eternal, external truth.[73] At any one time there are dominant and subordinate ways of knowing; analysis and genealogies of present "truths" and the sites where they are played out are needed to understand how they are productive of subjects. Culture is a site of these truths, and visual culture does more than just distribute them. Its codes and formal properties construct them. As Lee Grieveson reminds us, screens in liberal societies do not merely "*represent* aspects of governance: they form part of the structures of knowledge and power, and enact models of selfhood and conduct that participate in the production of liberal subjects."[74] A segment of *A Current Affair*, for instance, that depicts single mothers as welfare frauds, is not simply a reflection of this narrative in wider society but an instance of it, drawing on and (re)creating codes and signs that have larger import.

It is through visual culture's narratives and through the framings of ideology and discourse that subjects are rendered knowable – readable, intelligible – to themselves and others. Such structures drain into the "gestures, actions, discourses and practical knowledge of everyday lives."[75] Politically, television is important as it provides contexts, referents and tools to decipher the modes of knowing that, many such as Theresa Ebert argue, reproduce the status quo, foreclosing alternative and potentially more emancipatory modes of being.[76] Texts that

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71 Miller, *Well-Tempered Self*, p. xiv
72 Foucault in Judith Butler (2005). *Giving an Account of Oneself.* New York: Fordham UP, p. 121
73 Blackman *et al*, p. 6
74 Lee Grieveson (2009). "On governmentality and screens." *Screen* 50:1, p. 187
75 Tagg, "Evidence, Truth, and Order." p. 250
76 Teresa Ebert (1988). "The Romance of Patriarchy: Ideology, Subjectivity, and Postmodern Feminist Cultural Theory." *Cultural Critique* 10, p. 22

deal with identity categories defined along lines of class, age, race, gender, sexuality, ability, nationality, and other points of difference, are significant as containers and constructors of meaning about ways of being that are implicated in power relations and social structures.[77] Indeed, analysing representations of cultural categories is a significant strand of television studies' strategies and aims of textual analysis, and as such will be discussed further in chapter three.

The argument has political weight because we have a vested interest in – or at least political commitment to – widening the possibilities of becoming in order to reduce suppression of and discrimination against non-mainstream or subordinated categories of people. Representation is an epistemological act, and textual analysis is a politically significant labour. Janet Borgerson and Jonathan Schroeder, for instance, identify systems of visual representation in advertising and marketing that limit epistemic possibilities and horizons of being, through photographic and textual stereotypes that shorthand cultural groups into *kinds* of people for the purpose of selling commodities.[78]

One way to combat epistemic closure, they suggest, is by expanding epistemic regimes via long-form storytelling; that is, exploring the potential television has to combat entrenched problems in representation. In chapters six and seven, these entrenched issues of representation are discussed with respect to race (specifically, black Americans), with a focus on how ways of knowing and subject-production in the viewing encounter create more or less limited or racist subjectivities.

As in the previous section, intelligibility is a useful concept because it captures the sense in which signs and texts require conditions for being read before they *can* be read. The task at hand is not, therefore, to discover and directly map representations in texts to real practice in the world, but instead to understand the production of the paradigms and systems of representation that make our environment and practices intelligible.[79] In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault reminds us about the dependency of texts and culture-objects when he

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[77] Thornham and Purvis, *Television Drama*, p. 49

[78] Janet Borgerson and Jonathan Schroeder (2008). "Building an Ethics of Visual Representation: Contesting Epistemic Closure in Marketing Communication." *Cutting-Edge Issues in Business Ethics: Continental Challenges to Tradition and Practice*. Eds. Mollie Painter-Moreland and Patricia Werhane. Chicago: Springer, pp. 87-108

[79] Ebert, "The Romance of Patriarchy," p. 54

argues that texts do not exist solely within themselves; they exist rather in relation to networks of other texts, discourses, and institutions: "[t]he frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences."[80] A subject-oriented textual analysis will therefore ask questions about visual culture and representational histories and legacies, analysing how televisual form legislates certain meanings over others, and locating the structures of power that have constrained and enabled certain meanings.

Cultural texts render people and the world representable and knowable, in their bodies and roles and habitus; they cohere disparate knowledges and fragmented subjects, and reflect back a relatable and understandable mode of being. Media contains premises that constantly refer to dominant definitions, representing, refracting, or resisting contemporaneous structures of power; hence, structuring every event they signify.[81] This is how we can come to, for instance, Stuart Hall's assertion that the media (specifically cinema, but we are justified in generalising here) can constitute subjects, as identity is constituted not outside, but within representation.[82]

Texts are an epistemological event, and involve processes of subject-creation. As in the previous section on psychoanalysis, sign-systems in Foucauldian theory carry a potency that affects subjects and texts, without which both would be unintelligible. This section therefore sets up the methodological approach of part two of this thesis by indicating that a subject-oriented textual analysis will address issues of power relations, and meanings that carry epistemological weight. Creating meaning therefore is to insert oneself into relations of power that pre-exist one. This is, it shall be seen, often a visual or optical process.

Bodies and the power of sight

The phenomenal world is normalised, organised, and made intelligible through visual systems of knowledge/power, particularly those visual-scientific-descriptory systems that allow visual comparisons and rules of deviance.[83] As in the previous section, for Foucauldian

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80 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 23

81 Hall, "Culture, Media, and the 'Ideological Effect'," pp. 343, 344

82 Stuart Hall (1989). "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation." *Frameworks* 36, p. 80

83 Nikolas Rose (1989). *Governing the Soul.* London: Routledge, p. 136

poststructuralism, looking is not a simple, neutral act, but an active and productive one; it is also, moreover, multiple: as power works laterally, it is not only held by figures of authority. Subjects must also take on the role of looking back at themselves, and producing themselves.

Foucault's theories of viewing relations – most apparent in his analysis of penality and Bentham's Panopticon – are influential in visual culture studies and media studies.[84] Visuality here is significant because it is through surveillance and visual inspection of others and the self that subjects order and align themselves with normative injunctions – or, of course, resist normalisation. Indicated here is a bi-directionality to the gaze that makes subjects *subjects*. Some circumstances make this very clear to us: in Velasquez's painting *Las Meninas,* in which we are faced with an array of figures gazing back at us, Foucault argues that

> …this slender line of reciprocal visibility embraces a whole complex network of uncertainties, exchanges, and feints....we do not know who we are. Seen, or seeing?...As soon as they place the spectator in their field of gaze, the painter's eyes seize hold of him, force him to enter the picture, assign him a place at once privileged and inescapable.[85]

The gaze out of the image "signals from within that the viewer outside the picture is seen and in turn it acknowledges the state of being seen."[86] Gazing is, once again, productive.

In contrast to the earlier discussion of psychoanalysis, the gaze here is explicitly a site of power relations, a line along which power flows, as the "eye of power" is dispersed throughout the micro-operations and techniques of power within society. In producing themselves as subjects within society, subjects must internalise the "eye of power" and in effect become it, gazing at others.[87] Interrogating gazes and the power relations implicated in them, therefore, is a critical part of subject-oriented textual analysis: chapter four, for instance, discusses the high value placed upon care of the self as a moral practice in makeover television, in which care of the self occurs via both expert gazes and a self-gaze, as well as an active, productive self-knowledge.

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[84] Paula Amad (2013). "Visual Riposte: Looking Back at the Return of the Gaze as Postcolonial Theory's Gift to Film Studies." *Cinema Journal* 52:3 (Spring), p. 50

[85] Michel Foucault (1994 [1966]). *The Order of Things.* Trans. Robert Hurley. Vintage, pp. 4-5

[86] Svetlana Alpers (1983). "Interpretation without Representation, or, the Viewing of *Las Meninas*." *Representations* 1, p. 32

[87] Denzin, *The Cinematic Society,* pp. 46-47

While gazing might appear to be relatively innocuous, the bodies and behaviours of subjects are at stake. Some actors, such as the emblematic character of the guard (and devolved constructions such as the teacher) have the authority and responsibility to gaze with impunity. Subjects under the gaze or potential gaze of authority are required to behave at all times as if that gaze were active, even when it may not be.[88] In order to participate socially and appropriately subjects must generate and hold that external gaze themselves; to take that gaze inside and redirect it. In this way, visuality becomes a sphere of human existence that realises signs and knowledge/power corporeally.

Our vision of ourselves post-Foucault, argues John O'Neill, "derives from an autopsical finitude grounded in the clinical optic that has opened the dark interior of the human body to mankind's own practices of pleasure and suffering."[89] Even material bodies are discursive events, then, and an individual's body exists within power relations that "invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs."[90] Under these conditions, the body becomes itself a representation, a "visible ground upon which to imagine and map human identity in its specific relation to social and cultural practices and institutions."[91] This is a Foucauldian notion of the body, which figures it as the site of "an infinitely complex network of micro-powers"; crucially, knowledge of the body is much wider than, although it includes, scientific knowledge of its functioning.[92]

Inserted into these pre-existing discursive and knowledge/power systems, human bodies, mediated or not, are skinned by a multiplicity of signs to be read. As was indicated above, reading and meaning-making are key processes. In order to be actors and acted upon, subjects must be intelligible and recognisable – even abnormalities can only be conceptualised (and subsequently worked upon) as part of a system of recognition,

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88 Michel Foucault (1991 [1975]). *Discipline and Punish*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin pp. 171-172. Chapter six, for instance, discusses how the show *The Wire* recreates the feeling of always being surveilled; we see multiple screens on our screen as characters move through security installations within institutions; we also regularly see the central "projects" quartet of characters invert the layout of the Panopticon, as they sit on their orange couch in the wide open space between buildings, surrounded on all sides by dark impenetrable windows, and, of course, by the long-range surveillance and wire-taps of the police force. Such surveillance forces drug dealers to develop complex institutional organisation and communication methods, and produces resistant identities (an iconic shot of one character throwing a rock at the television screen/surveillance camera, breaking it, features in every credits sequence).

89 John O'Neill (1995). "Foucault's Optics: The (in)vision of mortality and modernity." *Visual Culture*. Ed: Chris Jencks. London: Routledge, p. 190

90 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* p. 25

91 Richard Leppert (1996). *Art and the Committed Eye.* Boulder: Westview Press, p. 112

92 Alan Sheridan (1980). *Foucault: The Will To Truth.* London: Tavistock, p. 137

categorisation and rehabilitation. For instance, medical fields – including psychoanalysis – developed visual techniques that turn the body into a visual field that can be taxonomied and rigorously examined.[93] This is a "loquacious gaze," much like the gaze at the television, that doesn't just read, but actively renders the surface of the gazed-at body an externalisation of psychological and physiological pathologies.[94]

Bodies are texts, on and off the screen; are classed, gendered, raced, and more; they are the locus of invested wider power relations, and worked upon socially, economically, publicly, and privately.[95] Therefore power operates (usually subtly, but often not, as in the case of incarceration) to transform and train the embodied subject.[96] Embodied subjects are constantly at work, "creating and recreating cultural, political and personal categories [such as race and gender] we use in our efforts to define who we are."[97] Existing as a visual, and mostly commercial medium, television prioritises the body as a carrier of meaning, a series of cues for the viewer to understand the narrative and embedded purpose of the program. As materiality and corporeality are ongoing concerns of contemporary subjectivity studies,[98] subject-oriented textual analysis must also find ways to investigate the body, therefore, and materiality, without substituting texts for imagined or real subjects; that is, without abandoning texts as the primary object of analysis. Such an understanding of the relationship between subjectivity and visuality is used, for instance, in chapter four's discussion of makeover television and visual regimes of femininity and self-orientation.

The above section establishes a way of figuring subjectivity that draws less on a theory of the unconscious and instead emphasises epistemology, textuality, bodies, power, and gazes. These are, therefore, the key themes used in the subject-oriented textual analysis of subsequent chapters. In the same way that we are called upon to acknowledge the "simultaneous emergence and mutual shaping" of both screen and sign, where "the screen is necessary for the very acknowledgement of the sign, and the sign has no existence whatsoever outside its relations with other elements within the screen and with the screen's

93 Rose, *Governing the Soul*, pp. 135-137
94 Foucault in O'Neill, "Foucault's Optics," p. 194; it must be noted that the medical gaze, here, encompasses other senses of hearing and touch.
95 Sheridan, *Foucault: The Will To Truth,* p. 91; Tagg, "Evidence, Truth, and Order," p. 250
96 Palmer, *Discipline and Liberty,* p. 6; Foucault, "The Means of Correct Training," p. 190
97 Burnett, *Cultures of Vision,* p. 7
98 Burnett, *Cultures of Vision,* p. 9; Blackman *et al*, "Creating Subjectivities," p. 19

surface,"[99] neither screen nor sign exists without a consciousness to recognise them. Looking and reading are "a matter of subjective evaluation of emergent networks of framed visuality becoming signs on a screen...A way of looking becomes a way of thinking."[100] As was noted in the first section of this chapter subjects do not approach finite and ahistorical texts as pre-existing or pre-formed individuals, the result of economic or biological or ecclesiastic forces, having thereby an ordered response; instead, it is the "semiotic, psychic and ideological processes themselves," prompted by the encounter with the text, that creates both text and subject.[101]

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated significant correspondences between a Lacanian concept of the subject and a Foucauldian one. Both, it was argued, locate gazes in spaces other than subject, and mark it as productive. Whether it is the gaze of the world looking back at the subject, rendering the subject an object stained by the screen of signs, and thus intelligible, or whether it is the gaze of power/knowledge, constructing subjects through visual regulation of their behaviours and self-knowledge, gazes are significant to the politics of subjectivity. Subjects' gazes out at the world construct texts and the world; but there is a bi-directionality to the gaze that subjects also cannot escape, implicating them in forces outside of their control.

Signs, here, are not simply stable and coherent, ready to be found, examined and decoded, but have an activity. For Foucault, they are epistemological events, allied to knowledge and power in networks of other signs, discourses and practices. For Lacan, the collection of signs – oral, visual, mythological – that make up the symbolic order conditions the subject's entry into meaningful communication and interaction with the world. Both, therefore, acknowledge dependency on signs to make world and self intelligible.

The next chapter makes a case for how this picture of the subject can be applied to televisual textual analysis. The work of media theorists such as Raymond Williams has emphasised the prominence of popular culture as a "site of signs through which unconscious identifications

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99 Baetens, "Screen Narratives," p. 4
100 Baetens, "Screen Narratives," p. 5
101 Blackman *et al*, "Creating Subjectivities," p. 3

are made."[102] The section on Foucault in this chapter also hinted at the work of cultural studies theorists, which connect texts and subjects' social existences. Television, for such theorists, is an important site of investigation because of its pervasiveness, its holistic insertion into our everyday routines and imaginary, its role in "personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical and social" realms of life.[103] However, while cultural studies provides a precedent for theorising the relationship between subjects and texts, its targeting of unjust social phenomena can at times cast audiences (real or imagined) or "society" as its ultimate objects of analysis. As such it risks rendering texts the shadow of subjects, or vice versa.

In contrast, this thesis holds that as the "beholder activates the sign," she is also activated by it.[104] This 'mutual genesis' is central to how this thesis conceives of the subject-text relationship. Such an emphasis echoes the preoccupations of psychoanalytic film theory, which also prioritises the activeness of signs and the importance of processes of subjectivity as fundamental of textual analysis. However, as subsequent chapters demonstrate, this thesis departs from many of the causal and theoretical explanations of psychoanalytic film theory. Instead, the subject-oriented textual analysis herein will take on the key themes discussed above and prioritise them in its practice of textual research. Visual history, gazes, power relations, intersubjectivity, materiality, and processes of meaning-making are all identified as crucial points of analysis.

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[102] Blackman *et al*, p. 6

[103] Adrienne L. McLean (2000). "Media Effects: Marshall McLuhan, Television Culture, and *The X-Files*. *Television: The Critical Perspectives.* Ed Horace Newcomb. Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 254. See also Paddy Scannell (1996). *Radio, Television, and Modern Life: A Phenomenological Approach.* Oxford: Blackwell

[104] Baetens, "Screen Narratives," p. 7

3

SUBJECTS, MEANINGS, AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS IN TELEVISION STUDIES

Introduction

If sign-systems mediate access to the world, then the ways in which textual researchers conceive of texts, meanings and viewing subjects is politically significant. The previous chapter outlined a picture of the subject whose indebtedness to sign-systems and systems of visuality inserted her into pre-existing power relations, but this is not the only way of describing a link between televisual[1] texts and political subjectivities. Below, this chapter outlines two more: first, briefly, it discusses mass communications research and the idea of meaning or content as effect. This theory brings television into the political sphere, but its transmission model of effects is too unsophisticated to provide useful explanations of the text-subject relationship.

Second, and at greater length, this chapter discusses various cultural studies' conceptions of representations and subjects. This field provides, as did the discussion of psychoanalytic film theory in the previous chapter, a strong precedent for studying the relationship between texts and subjects, and has contributed insights into the dynamics of society and representation that are extensively drawn upon in this thesis. However, it will be argued here that, because of the socio-cultural priorities of cultural studies, the mechanisms (such as media representations being a "way of knowing" about the world) and methodologies used for this kind of analysis can turn scholarly attention away from texts themselves, and can lack sufficiently nuanced approaches to televisual form and meaning.

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[1] John Caldwell uses the word *televisual* to describe a unique visual-ontological historical shift in the visual regime of television, such as hyperkinetic editing patterns, "excessive style," a particularly American economic and technological context, and more. Caldwell (1995). *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television.* New Brunswick: New Jersey. This thesis, however, uses 'televisual' as a more general adjectival form.

Furthermore, a recent call from within television studies to 'return to the text' is somewhat limited in its capacity to conceive of subjects as a relevant political category. To be political, textual analysis must have to be able to grapple with interconnected theories of viewers, reception contexts, and social power relations. To be clear, however, the project of this thesis is to develop a methodology of textual analysis, not ethnographic and audience research.

Having established a need for textual analysis of televisual images that has political motives and mechanisms for targeting subject-object relationships, the second part of this chapter proposes the subject-focused methodology of textual analysis that will be used in part two's case studies. Such a methodology foregrounds what Toby Miller suggests is the central political figure forwarded under postmodernity and the destabilisation of traditional knowledge structures and values: the subject.[2] Drawing on the previous chapter's outline of a subject whose meaning-making activities create both texts and subjects themselves, this methodology consists of analysing texts along specific vectors of inquiry: that is, raising questions of power relations, gazes and spectatorship, a history of visual culture, materiality and bodies, and intersubjectivity through an examination of how meaning emerges from televisual images.

Such an approach has the advantage of remaining politicised *through* a nuanced approach to form. This contributes usefully to both television studies and the politics of subjectivity, as part two of this thesis demonstrates. As a preface to those case studies, the chapter finishes by introducing some of the central unique aspects of televisual form that challenge and must be dealt with, by any televisual textual analysis research.

Approaching textual meaning in television studies is to negotiate one's way through several critical ventures, formative in the field both methodologically and genealogically, and all concerned to a greater or lesser extent with the ways social power and meanings are activated and embedded in a cultural artefact, or the industry and economy that produces it.[3] Positioned as it is between social sciences and the humanities, television studies textual research will

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[2] Toby Miller (1993). *The Well-Tempered Self: Citizenship, Culture and the Postmodern Subject.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press. p. 92

[3] One of the things television studies is usually *not* is training in production; that is, communications at university. Despite the efforts of some television scholars to incorporate industry and nuts-and-bolts technology into the field there often remains a theoretical/vocational division, one that this thesis does not challenge.

generally aim to link textual representations to socio-cultural trends within the medium or society itself.[4] This link provides space for a wide scope of research aiming to discover the meanings television texts have for viewers in wider structures of power inequality and social disenfranchisement, with broad orientations either towards the text or towards audiences.

The rise of semiotic theory and, subsequently, British Cultural Studies marked a point at which researchers could not continue to understand texts as autonomous or complete outside of a relationship with a viewer – a "discovery," Roger Silverstone notes wryly, that had been made with respect to literature decades before.[5] Indeed, the initial embracing of television as a form of "low culture" led to specific interest in television audiences and viewing practices, and television studies has strong cross-disciplinary ties to audience research and fan studies research.[6] As this chapter argues below, however, theories of the text in television studies that conceive of viewers as audiences instead of as subjects, can lead to a critical under-examination of subjects and visuality. Visuality, the previous chapter argued, is a productive process or phenomenon, and it is useful to conceive of subjects as existing in the eye of the world even as they generate the objects in their fields of vision. This involves describing or rehabilitating the productive – that is, generative – and non-determinative or essentialising relationship between subject and text.

This thesis thus attempts to contribute to work in televisual textual research that resists reducing viewing subjects to effect or shadow, or texts in turn to pre-loaded signifiers of cultural phenomena. Similarly, it resists presupposing a stable relationship between meaning, the subject, and the signified. The goal of meaning-focused research outlined herein is not, therefore, to discover the "true" meanings of a text – such would be impossible – or even to find out how the viewer or audience *uses* meaning: research with this agenda is outside the scope of the textual focus of this study. Instead, this thesis uses meaning as a way of indicating the productive and generative forces at work in the encounter with the image; an

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[4] For example, Jason Mittell's *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture.* connects social and industrial change to generic shifts ((2004) New York: Routledge); similarly, the collection *TV Goes To Hell: An Unofficial Roadmap of Supernatural* contains chapters on the show's metafictional narrative strategies and its constructions of rural masculinity ((2011). Eds. Stacey Abbott and David Lavery. Toronto: ECW Press). Moreover, there is of course non-textual research within the field that focuses far more firmly on the social and economic aspects of television as public/private apparatus and media phenomenon. See, for instance, Anna McCarthy (2004). "Television While You Wait." *The Television Studies Reader.* Eds. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill. London: Routledge, pp. 494-508

[5] Roger Silverstone (1994). *Television and Everyday Life.* New York: Routledge, p.143

[6] Charlotte Brunsdon (2008). "Is Television Studies History?" *Cinema Journal* 47 (3), pp. 128-130, 133

encounter, the previous chapter argued, in which the subject creates a meaningful text out of visual phenomena, and is herself created, in a network of sign systems that pre-exist her. The approach to textual meaning used herein, therefore, requires a political concept of the subject as outlined in the previous chapter, in which the art object and the subject legislate the scope of the other's meaning, and in which gazes, visual history, and power are all critical to understanding how texts can be active in this way.

To support such an approach to textual analysis, this chapter draws from art history and visual culture studies, two fields that have rarely been utilised by television studies, to describe the interaction and inseparability of the subject and art object. Because it understands both viewing subjects and textual objects as beholden to pre-existing regimes of visuality and spectatorship, subject-oriented textual analysis has the dual advantage, for the purposes of this thesis, of treating texts as objects of analysis in their own right, while maintaining socio-political commitments.

Mass Communications: Meaning as Effect

Rising scholarly interest in television as a mediator of communication has of course been concurrent with its increasing entrenchment in peoples' homes since the 1950s. Television, taken as a whole, was and sometimes still is seen as cheap and damaging.[7] For those who suppose the image's apparent "direct and transformative route into the consciousness," television is of particular concern, lurking as it does in every household.[8] While this picture of television is far from dominant in contemporary television and media studies, the concept of television as a mass-medium that affects audiences and influences individuals on a large scale still underlies social policy and political and popular discussion. It is worth therefore briefly examining how this theory links textual meaning, viewers, and politics. By relocating existing social anxieties over, for instance, violence, sexuality and children, into the televisual experience, this conception of television as an object with the power *to do to* the viewer renders the viewing subject a vulnerable, receptive individual whose psyche and

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7 Alan McKee (2005). *The Public Sphere: an Introduction.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p. 105; Robert C. Allen (2004). "Frequently Asked Questions." *The Television Studies Reader.* Ed. R. C. Allen and Annette Hill, London: Routledge, pp. 3-4. See for instance, Alan Casty (Ed.) (1968). *Mass Media and Mass Man*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. See also chapter five of this thesis.

8 Ron Burnett (1995). *Cultures of Vision: Images, Media and the Imaginary.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, p. 9

behaviour are liable to be malformed by the wrong kind of content.

This is a one-directional, transmission-based model of meaning, which emphasises authorial intent over the contingency of reception, and has little room for any conception of the subject as outlined in chapter two. Beginning with the proposition that content *is* meaning, textual analysis is reduced to typologies of social concerns. Meaning, here, becomes an effect (typically a bad one), and we are left with a viewer-subject who uncritically assimilates and replicates ideology and behaviour viewed onscreen. The assumption being that television is a powerful transmitter of negative messages, the question then devolves to, *how* powerful? The subject, who is discrete and coherent, comes to the text, which is discrete and coherent, and emerges more or less changed.[9]

Traditional mass communications research intersects with the goals of traditional political science by fixating on the subject *qua* citizen and the dissemination of truth in the public sphere.[10] Historically, the public sphere has been reserved for ostensibly self-reflexive and neutral discourse. Its purpose and messages seem self-evident and intelligible, but its apparent transparency disguises the way it is gendered, classed and raced: it is in the public sphere where differing sets of conventions, buttressed by social, economic, political, and cultural processes, try to "fix meaning in a particular way."[11] When the public sphere is conflated with media texts themselves, anxiety shifts from specific concerns over discourse and ideology to a generalised concern over the appropriateness and value of popular culture, a term that is itself politicised in public/private highbrow/lowbrow debates.[12]

This entails a lack of sensitivity to televisual form and textual analysis. Televisual images become, here, simply a site of rectification and regulation. Public policy and production guidelines and intentions are intended to combat negative meaning-effects in the public sphere, in a Habermasian concern over improperly socialised citizen-subjects. The redetermination of television as a useful tool of the public sphere can be seen in the stated mission of John Reith's reorganisation of public broadcasting in the United Kingdom, or in

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9 John Corner (1999). *Critical Ideas in Television Studies.* Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 6

10 Murray Goot (2009). "Political Communication in the Media," R.A.W. Rhodes (ed), *The Australian Study of Politics,* pp. 173-185; Andrew Milner and Jeff Browitt (2002). *Contemporary Cultural Theory.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, p. 210

11 Burnett, *Cultures of Vision,* p. 47

12 McKee, *The Public Sphere;* Eric O. Clarke (2000). *Virtuous Vice: Homoeroticism in the Public Sphere*. Durham: Duke UP

the creation of the PBS in the United States. Underpinning these public service broadcasters is an attempt to proliferate the kind of televisual meanings and social knowledges that create good citizens, focused on rationality instead of emotion.[13]

Clearly, the definitions of text, meaning and subject used in research have consequences for political analysis and praxis. This initial grappling with televisual meanings casts them as discrete, legible, universal, and embedded in the text; subjects similarly exist outside of the text, coherently and passively. Television lies at one end of a simplified and unidirectional subject/object relation, and analysis of and investigation into meanings is to evaluate their positive or negative outcome and intervene, rectifying through critique or public policy.

Effects research (particularly on sex and violence) is no longer prominent in contemporary media scholarship. However, the idea that the meaning of a text is discreet, coherent and pre-exists the subject, and that the subject-object encounter turns meaning into (negative) effect, lingers – as we shall see in chapters four and five on makeover television and tabloid journalism – in both popular and academic discourse. In these genres of television, so the argument sometimes goes, the meanings of televisual texts have negative effects on their viewers, creating bad feminist-subjects and bad citizen-subjects. Indeed, the "problem of effect" remains a dominant theme in public policy, public discussion, and even in the media's discussion of itself.[14] While the transmission model of media/audience interaction would have it that televisual meanings are unambiguous, and that we respond to pre-formed meanings in more or less static ways, a more nuanced analysis of televisual meaning and spectatorship as developed below allows us to understand texts and subjects as implicated in some kind of transformative or politically significant relationship without reducing content to effects.

Cultural Studies: A Precedent for Studying Television, Texts and

[13] Laurie Ouellette (1999). "TV Viewing as Good Citizenship? Political Rationality, Enlightened Democracy, and PBS". *Cultural Studies* 13 (1), 62-90; Graeme Burton (2000). *Talking Television.* London: Arnold, p. 51; Miller, *Well-Tempered Self*, p. 136

[14] See, for instance, the October 17 2013 Fox News Health discussion of televised zombies. Manny Alvarez (2013). "America's obsession with 'The Walking Dead' is hurting our society." *Fox News* Retrieved from <http://www.foxnews.com/health/2013/10/17/dr-manny-america-obsession-with-zombies-is-hurting-our-society> last accessed 29 September 2016

Subjects

Cultural studies: representations and society

Cultural studies is a field that attempts to do just that, and this section explores how cultural studies conceives of texts as expressive of social phenomena. As the project of this thesis is to investigate specifically *textual* research, this section of the chapter challenges the applicability and mechanisms of some cultural studies research, particularly where it has intersected with television studies. At times, it will be argued, this can lead to research towards audiences and away from texts, even where the text is the ostensible object of study. In response, some scholars are calling for clarity through a return to form – or, conversely, a move towards audiences.

Nevertheless, this thesis aligns closely with the typical cultural studies understanding of culture as not neutral or ahistorical but as expressive of social organisation at a particular time and place; it can be seen, therefore, as supplementing the broad sphere of cultural studies analyses of representations and socio-political issues, and the precedent the field sets for connecting texts and subjects is explored below. Furthermore in its discussion of meaning as beholden to visual culture, representation, and sign systems, this thesis draws strongly upon cultural studies investigations into representational legacies such the meaning of black bodies on television.

In scholarship it has become increasingly difficult to deny the interdependence of textual meaning and social meaning. Textual meanings support and are supported by social relations and frameworks and must be understood as indivisible from the social and historical structures of industrialised society.[15] Culture is historically specific because it is both a "form of human knowledge" and a consequence of human labour: it is "materialised in production [and] embodied in social organisation," and advanced, preserved and transmitted horizontally and vertically, through time. Raymond Williams, therefore, writes of culture and the cultural studies project as

> the description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour.

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[15] John Fiske (1992). "British Cultural Studies and Television." In R. C. Allen (ed.), *Channels of Discourse Reassembled.* London: Routledge, pp. 284-285

> The analysis of culture... is the clarification of meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture.[16]

Instead of regarding cultural artefacts as more-or-less direct expressions of class consciousness, cultural studies views the representational shift, which begins when humans reproduce nature, as the moment when our connection to nature becomes "socially mediated."[17] It is taken for granted that television – as a mass medium, as a series of art-objects, and as a way of viewing – is simultaneously a form of culture, an instance in culture, a mediated expression of a society's shared culture (thus revealing something "real" or "true" about it), and a mode of cultural production. Textual meanings are therefore relevant to those who wish to study human organisation, and textual analysis a clear option for cultural studies investigations into "a particular way of life."

Cultural studies brings both the operations of sign systems as well as the operations of state and institutional power to bear on the subject. The intimacy and confluence of society, being, culture, and text has been and remains an extremely productive and influential mode of scholarship and many authors note the debt television studies has to various modes of cultural studies.[18] Whatever the processes of this social mediation are, we are to understand them as historically constructed, distinct, and expressive of forms of social life.[19]

Therefore cultural artefacts are not independent or autonomous of material life but *of* it.[20] Power relations extant in social structures and lived reality must have *some kind of* relationship to cultural productions and describing this relationship is the fundamental

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16 Raymond Williams (1974). *Television.* London: Routledge, p. 57

17 Stuart Hall (1977). "Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect'." *Mass Communication in Society.* Eds James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott. Open University Press. p. 315

18 See for instance Lynn Spigel (2004). "Introduction." *Television after TV: Essays on a medium in transition.* Eds Jan. Olsson & Lynn Spigel. Durham: Duke UP, p. 8; Corner, *Critical Ideas,* p.8; Fiske, "British Cultural Studies and Television"; Julie D'Acci (2004). "Cultural Studies, Television Studies and the Crisis in the Humanities." *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition.* Eds. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson. Durham: Duke UP, pp. 418-446; Charlotte Brunsdon (2000). "What is the "Television" of Television Studies?" *Television: The Critical Perspectives.* Ed. Horace Newcomb. Oxford: Oxford UP, 609-628; Burton, *Talking Television*; Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch (2000). "Television as a Cultural Forum." *Television: The Critical View.* Ed. Horace Newcomb. Oxford: Oxford UP, pp. 561-573; Mark Stewart (2012). "A New Model for understanding Television in the 21st Century." *Television FTW* paper given at What Is TV conference, 3/3/2012, published as a blog entry. Retrieved from <http://televisionftw.wordpress.com/2012/03/09/what-is-tv-paper-a-new-model-for-understanding-the-television-industry-in-the-twenty-first-century/> last accessed 29 September 2016

19 Simon Watney (1999). "On the institutions of photography." *Visual Culture: the Reader*. Eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. London: Sage, pp. 142, 143. Despite the field's historical debt to Marxism, class is only one of the categories shorthanded as constitutive of individual, alongside race, gender, sexuality, ability, et cetera.

20 Hall, "Culture, Media, and the 'Ideological Effect," pp. 316-318

project of cultural studies, which is part of a wider mission of investigating power and subjection. Textual meanings therefore are not neutral or democratic, and "*some* voices and opinions exhibit greater weight, resonance, and defining and limiting power."[21] Furthermore, these voices (usually) support dominant or hegemonic ideologies through creating symbolic forms and embedding representation with particular codes that indicate the intended or preferred reading.[22] Texts, it must be emphasised, have political significance.

Despite cultural studies' attention to semiotics, media texts and the meanings generated and circulated within and around them, the emphasis here is not aesthetic but political, rendering culture "a site where dominant groups attempt to naturalise meanings."[23] To understand television as a complex system for representing the world allows redirecting ways of reading visual culture from truth-analysis to analysis of possibilities of struggle, and research that questions the positions of the viewer and television socially and politically.[24] This goal influences the aims and methods of textual analysis. While this thesis agrees that texts are relevant politically, it is worth therefore unpicking how cultural studies conceives of the text-subject relationship.

Content analysis and the use of texts

For cultural studies theorists, texts do not just neutrally indicate something about social organisation, but also work to construct it, shaping and positioning subjects in response to ideology.[25] Textual meanings "work on" audiences by generating "social knowledge" through the media. The representations and discourses of cultural texts can shape subjects through, in the words of Stuart Hall,

> the provision and the selective construction of *social knowledge*, of social imagery, through which we perceive the 'worlds,' the 'lived realities' of others, and imaginarily construct their lives and ours into some intelligible 'world-of-the-whole,' some 'lived totality.'[26]

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[21] Hall, "Culture, Media, and the 'Ideological Effect," p. 342 (original emphasis)

[22] Hall, "Culture, Media, and the 'Ideological Effect," p. 343

[23] Fiske, "British Cultural Studies," p. 285

[24] John Tagg (1999). "Evidence, Truth and Order: Photographic Records and the Growth of the State." *Visual Culture: the Reader.* Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. London: Sage, p. 265; Allen, "Frequently Asked Questions," p. 8

[25] The Althusserian ideological interpellation or "hail" by a text was instrumental in early cultural studies but has been subsequently modified into more nuanced descriptions of a text's operations.

[26] Hall, "Culture, Media, and the 'Ideological Effect,'" pp. 340-341

For cultural studies, the representations that mediate real-world phenomena are also that which allow subjects to "make sense" of social experience.[27] Subjects receive or decode mediated meanings and incorporate them, more or less, into their understanding of and interaction with the world at large.

Content analysis coming out of cultural studies developed theories and methodologies of active subjects and resistant viewing practices, and explicitly understood viewers as subjects indebted to pre-existing social structures and power relations.[28] This focus on social structures in the text, and viewing contexts, is influential in television studies. Production and reception are two major themes in television studies research, developed as its formative fields reacted against and influenced each other, typically attempting with greater or lesser success to reject established assumptions about the power of the media and its effects on audiences, or, emphasising or diminishing the importance of the text.[29]

This approach can lead to describing textual meaning as held in tension between producers and receivers. Hall's encoding/decoding model, for instance, is a schema for what happens when an ideologically situated viewer meets an ideologically productive text; here production investments attempt to encode an intended reading and viewers decode according to the ideological perspective with which they came to the text. Viewers respond to television images in one of three ways: in accord with their intended meaning, producing a dominant reading; from a perspective at tension with dominant ideologies, negotiating a meaning; or, oppositionally, purposefully resisting the intended meanings and reading according to his or her own desires.[30] In this understanding of textual meaning, decodings will inevitably reflect the audience's social conditions, but a great range of decodings are available within the hegemonic framework.

Hall's encoding/decoding model of meaning-making calls us to the interpretive moment, to examine the result of textual ideologies meeting viewer positions. Research that is invested in examining how viewers might decode textual meanings owes a great debt to Hall's project.

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27 Watney, "On the institutions of photography," p. 143

28 Lisa Blackman, John Cromby, Derek Hook, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Valerie Walkerdine (2008). "Creating Subjectivities." *Subjectivity* 22, pp. 3, 6

29 Milner and Browitt, *Contemporary Cultural Theory,* p. 49; Burton, *Talking Television,* p. 4-5

30 Stuart Hall (1993). "Encoding, Decoding." *The Cultural Studies Reader.* Ed. Simon During, pp. 507-517; Fiske, "British Cultural Studies," p. 292

Encoding/decoding has of course been deconstructed, criticised and re-imagined over the years[31] but the approaches that stem from it often retain its sense of phase-based meaning, in which meanings are embedded in the production phase, and extracted, more or less intact according to the position of the viewer, in the reception phase.[32]

This sketching of the audience-producer-society-text relationship, as influential as it was, redirected cultural studies towards viewer "practice[s] of *interpretive work,*" with Hall envisioning "a new and exciting phase of audience research opening up."[33] As a significant departure from the textual focus dominant in the UK at the time, this prompted a great deal of ethnographic and empirical research aimed at testing the univocality of texts.[34]

The field has since occasionally struggled with ambiguity over the essential object of its research. Brunt, for instance, criticises this framework for not being reception-focused enough, always looping back to the text: the researcher, hoping to understand what texts mean for audiences, examines the text for a preferred meaning, seeks out an audience to confirm or deny it, and then comes back to the text to "check off" responses.[35] Despite this, with its emphasis on locating the ways in which viewers' social knowledges, experience, and behaviours incorporate or resist particular representations and representational strategies, this approach can, ironically, de-privilege textual analysis. David Morley's autocritique of his audience research, for instance, acknowledges that a concept such as 'preferred reading' "runs the risk of reducing the text to the mere vehicle of a banal substantive proposition that can then be labelled as 'ideological.'"[36]

While the political tension lies "in" the sign or text, the focus is on real or imagined viewers.

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31 Rosalind Brunt (1999). "Engaging with the Popular: Audiences for Mass Culture and What to Say About Them." *Cultural Studies.* Ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A Treichler. New York: Routledge, p. 70; indeed, Hall himself continued to refine his approach to communication and representation outside of encoding/decoding, developing and expanding theories of articulation and Foucauldian discourse. See, for instance, Stuart Hall (1992). "The West and The Rest: Discourse and Power." *Formations of Modernity*. Eds. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 275-332

32 Corner, *Critical Ideas,* pp. 83-84

33 Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," pp. 514, 510 emphasis original

34 John Tulloch (2000). *Watching Television Audiences.* London: Arnold, p. 179; Fiske, "British Cultural Studies," p. 199; Corner, *Critical Ideas,* p. 84. David Morley and Ien Ang are the classic progenitors here: see David Morley (1980). *The Nationwide Audience.* London: BFI and Ien Ang (1985). *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination.* Methuel

35 Brunt, "Engaging with the Popular," p. 73

36 Morley in Tulloch, *Watching Television Audiences,* p. 189

If representations implicate ideology then ideological analysis of textual meaning will often incorporate semiological analysis, as researchers attempt to discover ‘deeper’ meanings underneath the televised signs, exposing the workings of hegemonic power structures and diagnosing social ills. Cultural studies' explicit project of intervention[37] thus can run the risk of rendering texts simply “sites” in which social phenomena are articulated.[38]

The danger under this model of cultural analysis is that it too-often can become a project whereby the fragmentation of the text into categories of signified such as *woman* or *Asian*, can allow an auditor to measure a text's meaning-value against a yardstick of progressiveness or diversity.[39] The cultural text here hails the viewer, and it is the scholar-critic that is able to break circuit between ideology and viewer.[40] Because culture tends to correspond to a society's particular interests and values, contemporary but historically formed,[41] the cultural studies scholar can interrogate cultural texts to discover the “endlessly unknowable quintessence” of what appears to be simultaneously a monolithic and plural entity, the cultural identity of the subject.[42]

The underlying assumption of such cultural studies approaches is that a typical reading of television is a negotiated one, as we are none of us perfect creatures of ideology.[43] But we must be careful to not consider the text as merely the “expression of a dominant ideology” that exerts “considerable control” over its reading, “negotiated” or “resisted” by viewers.[44] Jason Mittell regards the emphasis on imagined or real decoding “unfortunate” and calls for more attention to televisual form as foundational to ideological analysis.[45] One way of achieving this, it is argued in this thesis, is to develop a way of doing textual analysis that retains the political purpose of cultural studies while directing attention back to the systems of visuality that shape both text and subject.

Instead of understanding meaning as phase-based and chronological, being inserted or

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37 Josh Shepperd (2014). “Julie D'Acci on the Emergent Qualities of Sublimating Circuits.” *Antenna* Retrieved from <http://blog.commarts.wisc.edu/2014/02/18/julie-dacci-on-the-emergent-qualities-of-sublimating-circuits/> last accessed 29 September 2016
38 Mittell, *Genre and Television,* p. 124
39 Miller, *Well-Tempered Self*, p. 66
40 Miller, *Well-Tempered Self*, p. 62
41 Williams, *Television*, p. 68
42 Miller, *Well-Tempered Self*, p. 128
43 Fiske, “British Cultural Studies,” p. 298, 317
44 Fiske in Tony Wilson (1993). *Watching Television.* Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 79
45 Mittell, *Genre and Television*, p. 121

withdrawn at particular moments in the production-reception chain, emerging more or less intact, which we can then orient ourselves towards or away from or resist as the scholar prefers, this thesis regards meaning as simultaneously productive of subjects and texts. As was established in the previous chapter, subjects make the phenomenal world meaningful via pre-existing sign systems. Meaning is dynamic and of-the-moment, indebted to active visualities of subject and text; furthermore, meaning-making is productive, "both an *interpretation* and a *performance*."[46]

Texts versus audiences

Some cultural studies approaches can struggle with reconciling production and reception's engagement with meaning, as meaning becomes now imposed, now contingent, now intended or embedded, now resistant or unconscious. Such work is often critiqued for being "unrealistic in their attribution of active, involved and pluralistic readings of television and film to an audience that is actually quite passive."[47] But actual audiences remain challenging to analyse empirically or ethnographically; and indeed are as slippery to define as television itself. How does a study of invested audiences such as fans relate to a broader conception of audience? Do texts 'position' viewers or do viewers make free use of texts? All viewers and all texts, at all times? If audiences are 'active' instead being of the passive effects of texts, in what way, specifically, are they active? Are audiences "a collection of individuals or only operative as a collective group"?[48]

At this stage, textual analysis must account for the viewer, either as a real individual, an imagined individual, or a function of the text. If textual analysis is simply about interpreting (that is, as scholars, *writing*) meanings by speculating about producer intentions and viewer (non-)resistance, then textual analysis runs into significant credibility issues:

> If audiences can read a text in a number of ways, then what is the validity and relevance of one textual interpretation [amongst many]? If [analysts] offer this interpretation as conclusive or definitive, they are also in danger of falling into the trap of prescribing a 'universal reader' [or] unknowingly imply[ing] a certain

[46] Eco in Wilson, *Watching Television*, p. 71

[47] Corner, *Critical Ideas*, p. 82; Scott R. Olson (2004). "Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency." *The Television Studies Reader*. Eds. Robert. C. Allen and Annette Hill. London: Routledge, p. 123; Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, p. 143-144

[48] Mittell, *Genre and Television,* p. 95; see also Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*

> section of the audience would read it this way. However, without any audience research or empirical evidence to back up these assumptions, textual analysis is simply a matter of guesswork – offering unfounded opinions and possibly misleading interpretations on behalf of an audience who is not allowed to speak for itself.[49]

Any methodology of textual analysis must account for this "problem" of meaning and the viewer. Without specific strategies for interrogating textual meaning in a socio-political context, textual analysis can run the risk of rendering audiences "shadows" of textual knowledges about human organisation and social being. In contrast, the approach proposed in this thesis denies ultimate reference to a 'real viewer' or a 'universal viewer,' and also resists the co-location of textual meaning and socio-political meaning. Subject-oriented textual analysis does not require signs to stand in for cultural subjects 'out there' but understands texts in and of themselves as a function of the meaning-making subject. It therefore does not presume to speak for an audience, but to offer a model of textual analysis that takes subjectivity (as discussed in chapter three) as an organising principle.

The second half of this chapter explores this approach in more depth. However, it is worth discussing another area of textual meaning in cultural and television studies; that which prioritises not "what the media *do to* people, but what people *do with* the media."[50] Researchers here argue for a turn towards audience and ethnographic research in order to find out precisely what texts actually *do* mean for audiences. This broad group of approaches invests power in the reception context. It includes more mechanistic psychological (albeit rarely psychoanalytic[51]) explanations of televisual meaning as well as explanations of viewing that require active subjects who freely choose and identify with textual and meta- or paratextual[52] meanings both during the textual encounter and afterwards, or who use texts as modes of community-making. [53]

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[49] Glen Creeber (2006). "The Joy of Text?: Television and Textual Analysis." *Critical Studies in Television* 1 (1), p. 82 (emphasis added)

[50] Corner, *Critical Ideas*, p. 82

[51] See for instance Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1992). "Psychoanalysis, Film and Television." *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled.* Ed. Robert C. Allen. New York: Routledge for a psychoanalytic textual analysis of soap operas.

[52] The most typical example being meanings around fans and fandoms. See, for instance, John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins (1995). *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek.* London: Routledge; the online journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* accessible at <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/index>

[53] Fiske, "British Cultural Studies," p. 300

Where those studies look at texts, textual meaning is less about textual content and more about what emotional or analytic experience the text as an object has for its audience (however that audience is conceived). So, for instance, polysemy is a property of the text insofar as it indicates different audience segments. By the 1980s, scholars focusing on texts, audiences, and representations developed ideas of active audiences, resistant to the seductive nature of the codes and meanings of the image. Far from being unwitting "passive dupes" of transmission-model effects or of televised ideologies, made for the masses by an elite, active audiences make purposeful use of television programs to manage and engage with their emotional lives and identities, as well as the world around them.[54]

Toby Miller is critical of versions of television studies where the project has been to celebrate individualist, reception-oriented pleasure/use writing in the UK and US that does not engage with globalisation of media, media ownership, and other political-industrial forces. Television studies, in this view, has become too complacent, content to uncritically and unempirically embrace viewers' personal relationships with texts.[55] How audience researchers pre-theorise the activity or passivity of an audience is a further source of conflict within the field, and lies outside the scope of this thesis.[56] However, it is worth reiterating that the aim of this thesis is not to discredit or replace such audience research but to contribute to understandings of textual meaning and the ways in which television operates, that may be readily complemented by other approaches in the field including audience studies.

To return to the idea of the viewer in *textual* research therefore, mechanisms of influence must be accounted for. In the United States especially, work in the emerging field of television studies took the form of identity politics, and feminist, queer, and race scholars' political critiques of society and the media. The meanings of television shows became part of the struggle for subordinated groups to speak on their own behalf; they also became part of the struggle to domesticate difference.[57] Viewers, in this paradigm, are subjects caught up

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54 Burton, *Talking Television*, p. 215; Blackman *et al*, "Creating Subjectivities," p. 4; Allen, "Frequently Asked Questions," p. 7-9

55 Toby Miller (2005). "Turn off TV Studies!" *Cinema Journal* 32 (4), 98-101

56 See, for more on this, Silverstone's *Television and Everyday Life* (chapter six), Corner's *Critical Ideas* and Brunt, "Engaging with the audience," for particularly thoughtful discussions.

57 See, for instance, Ron Becker (2006). *Gay TV and Straight America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP; Graham Murdock (1999). "Rights and Representations: Public Discourse and Cultural Citizenship." *Television and Common Knowledge.* Ed. Jostein Gripsrud. London: Routledge; Spigel, "Introduction;" Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis (1992). *Enlightened Racism:* The Cosby Show, *Audiences, and the Myth of*

in the 'social effect' (however that is understood) of television, their being folded into politicised cultural categories such as race, gender, and sexuality. Television as a representational apparatus is therefore seen to play a significant role in giving viewers "a sense of who and what they are," and televisual texts "have active roles in shaping the ways TV viewers think about themselves and feel about themselves and their worlds."[58]

Television studies can therefore also contain echoes of a continuing anxiety over the media's effects on the subject, and the kinds of television that activate the wrong kinds of meaning, which create the wrong kinds of subjects. Its influence can be seen in the way that identity politics conceives of the link between negative representations of identity categories and 'ways of knowing' individuals in the 'real world.' Acknowledging that images have a politics is "not intended to imply mechanistic ideological effects, but rather to acknowledge the text as the site where discourses which articulate particular interests, agendas and fantasies are proffered."[59] Certainly this involves textual analysis, or at the very least content analysis. Politically, texts are useful for illustrating and diagnosing social conditions: as just one of the microprocesses and techniques of power that generate and position subjects. As such texts can be, in the words of Sarah Cardwell, "used" to study something else.[60]

The ultimate object of analysis therefore is the 'audience' or 'society.' Certainly, when we understand televisual texts as a site where imagined audience-subjects "visualise, externalise and project out desires, test out our feelings, and ultimately negotiate selfhood," this is a critical frame of analysis![61] Once again, however, such analysis runs counter to the project of this thesis: this form of research, where audiences are the ultimate object but are analysed *through* the text, can run the risk of supplanting media effects with media ideology, once again reducing audiences to 'shadows' because there is no way to empirically measure the

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the American Dream. Boulder: Westview Press. A recent example is the critical and popular reactions to casting practices that favour white actors. See for example Amanda Hess (2016). "Asian American Actors are Fighting for Visibility. They Will Not Be Ignored." *The New York Times* 25 May 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/movies/asian-american-actors-are-fighting-for-visibility-they-will-not-be-ignored.html> last accessed 29 September 2016

58 Julie D'Acci (2004). "Television, Representation and Gender." *The Television Studies Reader.* Eds. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill. London: Routledge. p.374

59 Sue Tait (2006). "Autopic vision and the necrophilic imaginary in CSI." *International Journal of Cultural Studies,* p. 47

60 Sarah Cardwell (2006). "Television Aesthetics." *Critical Studies in Television* 1 (1), p. 72

61 Giovani Porfido. (2009). "Queering the Small Screen: Homosexuality and Televisual Citizenship in Spectacular Societies." *Sexualities* 12, p. 167

cognitive processes of ideology.[62]

Of course, if television representations are responsible for circulating norms about what particular categories of person are like, and have the capability to make subordinated groups feel either a sense of belonging or estrangement, then it is the duty of television studies to deconstruct the apparent naturalism of these representations and advocate for new ways of knowing. Indeed, the case study chapters below, particularly chapters six and seven, similarly search for such disruptions to inherited and damaging visual regimes. Television studies of this strand has been integral to identifying problematic representations, especially of subordinated class, gender, race and sexuality groups, and this thesis draws upon such work in later chapters. Nevertheless, these debates can make it difficult to know how to do cultural studies, or even what the object of analysis is: meaning, texts, subjectivity, audiences, structures of power, 'the culture,' or something else.

As was seen above, encoding/decoding is one strategy to regularise and formalise analysis; another is to "map out" the processes of the encounter between socialised subject and cultural text into a "circuit of culture." Julie D'Acci traces the attempts of cultural theorists to create models by which the critic can "define the field's object of study" and which can operate as a guide for study and designing research questions.[63] D'Acci's circuit model locates four interconnected sites of analysis: production, reception, socio-historical context, and the cultural artefact itself, with the researcher/receiver included in the circuit. These sites mark out a "convergence of discursive practices, which...are themselves convergences of meaning and matter....They also involve... the subjective dimensions of affect and unconscious processes."[64] While this would seem to merge well with the project of this thesis, D'Acci concludes that any model of analysis must encourage a "turn away from over-emphasis on textual interpretations or textual meanings," in order to rescue television studies and the humanities at large from its fragmentation and lack of rigour without losing its interdisciplinarity and theoretical openness.[65]

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[62] Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life,* p. 138
[63] D'Acci, "Cultural Studies," p. 424
[64] D'Acci, "Cultural Studies," p. 433
[65] D'Acci, "Cultural Studies," p. 431

The return to form

As was noted above, there have been several calls from within the fields of cultural studies and television studies to renew scholarly focus on the audience. Nevertheless, television studies must have *some* way of dealing with texts (or, in D'Acci's model, the "cultural artefact"), not least because it is love of texts that often brings scholars to the field in the first place.[66] Charlotte Brunsdon notes that

> [t]he ambition to encompass the whole of the "circuit of communication" (production, text, and reception), which has been an ideal for, particularly, cultural studies-influenced television scholarship, becomes not only unachievable (and it was always almost impossible outside theory), but difficult to conceptualise outside very narrow frameworks.[67]

Even within the circuit methodology, the text looms as an object whose very textuality must be grappled with somehow. This is complicated by the large range of texts, localities, production contexts, and theoretical paradigms available to researchers.

Even granting then that textual analysis is only one labour within the field of television studies, it is worth continuing to question how and why we do it, and work towards developing methods of textual analysis that are rigorous and versatile, and have both politics and an emphasis on form as foundational. This latter element is critical because television is not a simple mode of textuality; it displays a wide range of forms, including drama, comedy, children's entertainment, news, and more, and analytic response must be flexible to multidisciplinary approaches, research goals, and nuances of form, context, and meaning. This is a strength, it is argued below, of the method of subject-oriented textual analysis proposed herein, and all these properties and more are engaged with in the studies of part two.

Samuel Weber laments that much television studies is unsatisfying because it does not deal with the specificities of television's form; his attempt to account for television's difference from other mediums and its internal heterogeneities, however, still breaks the form down into production, transmission and reception phases, which we have seen is problematic.[68]

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66 Creeby, "The Joy of the Text."

67 Brunsdon, "Is Television Studies History?" p. 132

68 Samuel Weber (1996). "Television: Set and Screen." *Mass Mediauras.* Ed. Alan Cholodenko. Stanford: Stanford UP, p. 108-110. Robert C. Allen similarly notes the lack of textual analysis in comparison to the

Similarly, John Caldwell points to a startling lack of attention to form in television studies, citing two reasons: the emphasis on sociological and political meanings and representations, and the cultural understanding of television as aesthetically lower.[69] Of course, following the democratisations of cultural studies, cultural artefacts deemed worthless according to a traditional matrix of cultural value have much to tell us; and indeed, the last ten years has seen an "aesthetic turn" in television and media studies and an increased attention to its form.[70]

The aesthetic turn as advocated by Sarah Cardwell and others makes the case that television studies can usefully return to "a sustained and committed investigation of [a] programme's aesthetic qualities," and allies with the project of this thesis in many ways, not least:

> ...[r]ecognition that the field needs more textual criticism and a stronger understanding of what 'close textual analysis' means... [and] an interest in conceptual and philosophical questions that arise from attention to specific television texts.[71]

This is a return to form, however, that springs from philosophical aesthetics, and diverges from the focus of this thesis in crucial ways. Its questions end up targeting issues of aesthetic evaluation and judgement, aesthetic experience, and a canon: David Thorburn, for instance, is deeply concerned about what happens when television has poor aesthetic value: when it "laps[es] into incoherence or easy stereotypes or mechanical formulas of plot and character."[72] As chapters four and five demonstrate there is much of value to be learned even from the operations of "bad" texts, and textual analysis researchers could usefully reach beyond considerations of aesthetic quality or judgement.

Lynne Joyrich also notes the aesthetic turn as a recent movement within television studies, as scholars move "'inside' TV", encouraged by the advent of textual archives and

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focus on texts in cinema studies: Allen, "Frequently Asked Questions," p. 20

69 John Caldwell (1995). *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television*. New Jersey: Rutgers UP. John Caldwell (1993). "Televisuality as a Semiotic Machine: Emerging Paradigms in Low Theory." *Cinema Journal* 32 (4), pp. 24-48. Despite this, Caldwell seems to assume that a text's "artistic and intellectual integrity" is needed before it is worth can undertaking close analysis.

70 See eg: Cardwell, "Television Aesthetics;" Mittell, *Genre and Television;* Ted Nannicelli (2012). "Ontology, intentionality and television aesthetics." *Screen* 53 (2), pp. 164-179; Steven Peacock and Jason Jacobs (eds.) (2013). *Television, Aesthetics and Style.* Bloomsburg: London; a series of blog posts media and cultural studies blog *Antenna* (Department of Communication Arts, University of Wisconsin-Madison) accessible at <http://blog.commarts.wisc.edu/category/columns/the-aesthetic-turn/>

71 Cardwell, "Television Aesthetics," pp. 74, 72

72 Thorburn in Cardwell, "Television Aesthetics," p. 78

legitimators such as DVD box sets. Despite being designed to tackle television *as* television, such an approach, she argues, risks missing the way television

> exists precisely at the intersection of inside and outside, aesthetics and politics, communication and commerce, public and private, old and new, continuity and discontinuity, distinction and dispersal, mass and individual, and thus the way that TV necessarily impacts (and is impacted by) such social categories as gender, race, sexuality, and nationality that too are formed at exactly those intersections. [73]

Television studies, that is, continues to require a mechanism for retaining political commitments at the core of its analyses, even where that analysis is primarily aesthetic. Ted Nannicelli acknowledges this when he calls for a push beyond the standard philosophical aesthetic issues into broader theoretical linkages such as "the definition of art, the ontology of art, art and the imagination, art and knowledge, and art and ethics."[74] The connections between art and knowledge and art and ethics are certainly politically relevant, as both chapters two and seven demonstrate; moreover, as shall be seen below, this thesis draws strongly from visual culture theorists that interrogate the phenomenon and philosophy of art experience.

Finding a rigorous theoretical way to maintain political commitments *while* doing textual analysis, it has been seen, can be a struggle. It requires an approach that understands media images as inseparable from perception and cognitive activity, that does not render viewers shadows of the text through a kind of "textual formalism,"[75] nor texts themselves irrelevant to that perceptive and cognitive activity. This also requires a shift from viewers or audiences towards viewing-subjects or spectating subjects: W. J. T. Mitchell rejects, therefore, any form of textual analysis that returns to theories of mimesis, reflection, or "a renewed metaphysics of pictatorial 'presence'"; textual analysis must grapple, he says, with the

> rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality. It [requires] the realisation that *spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of

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73 Lynne Joyrich (2015). "Haphazard Archive: The Epistemological, Aesthetic, and Political Contradictions of US Television." *E-Media Studies* 4 (10). Retrieved from < http://journals.dartmouth.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Journals.woa/1/xmlpage/4/article/451> last accessed 30 September 2016

74 Nannicelli, "Ontology, intentionality and television aesthetics," p. 164

75 Burnett, *Cultures of Vision,* p. 126

reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc).[76]

Similarly, Michelle Aaron argues that textual analysis as a mode of research requires developing forms of spectatorship that do not rely on identification or mastery; that do not render spectators the "false author of the image."[77] Through its emphasis on spectatorship as a key process of subjectivity, this thesis contributes to filling this gap in visual culture studies.

To approach the relationship between television and its viewers with subjectivity, spectatorship, and meaning-making in mind does not mean to embrace meaning as the end-point of research: to uncover the "truth" of a text, or of an individual's or group's meaning-making and ending there. It is important to deny fixed textual meanings, to refuse the temptation to seek ultimate referents, while still retaining a method of politicising images. This thesis suggests that understanding texts as an optical phenomenon, constituted in processes of meaning-making, can incorporate form and aesthetic as central to the transformational potential of television without reducing texts to the highbrow-quality/lowbrow-trash dyad, or avoiding form altogether. For instance, Kackman's analysis of *Lost* (US, ABC, 2004-2010) explicitly avoids aesthetic analysis, lest he "partake in a game for the accrual of cultural capital;"[78] while on the other hand, Glen Creeber's essay advocating textual analysis holds that rigorous textual analysis has some unnamed benefit for the subject without ever elaborating upon how that might happen, and what kind of subject is involved anyway.[79]

How then to account for or analyse texts without allowing the textual to stand in for "a predictable arrangement of meanings that in effect act to constrain conflict and change"?[80] In art and literature theory, while a traditional authorial-intentionalist view would have it that the receiver is positioned in a subordinate relation to a sender 'behind' the work of art, and an interpretationist model reverses the power of these positions, Michael Ann Holly argues

[76] W. J. T. Mitchell (1994). *Picture Theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation.* Chicago: Chicago UP, p. 16

[77] Michele Aaron (2007). *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking On*. London: Wallflower, p. 18

[78] Dasgupta paraphrasing Kackman in Sudeep Dasgupta (2012). "Policing the People: Television Studies and the Problem of 'Quality.'" *European Journal of Media Studies* 1 (Spring). Retrieved from <http://www.necsus-ejms.org/policing-the-people-television-studies-and-the-problem-of-quality-by-sudeep-dasgupta/> Last accessed 29th September 2016

[79] Creeber, "The Joy of the Text?" p. 85; Nannicelli, "Ontology, intentionality and television aesthetics."

[80] Burnett, *Cultures of Vision,* p. 109

that there is a constant mobility between the poles of subject and object.[81] Similarly, Barthes argues that interpretive work is always writing, always an appropriation, "a forcing of the work to fit the interpreter;" in this, the interpreter is also altered. That is, the connection we make between the image and the language we use to read/write it is in fact "the picture itself."[82] As chapter two discussed, to draw on the symbolic order to make visual phenomena meaningful is to produce oneself; texts, that is, produce subjects *as* subjects produce texts.

Holly argues that the philosophy of art has long required an examination of the seemingly binary opposition between subject/looker and object/art. What is it we do when we look at pictures, she asks, and what do they do to us? What is the relationship between images and representation?[83] There is, of course, no unmediated access to phenomena *through* images and the language we use to read them. In this sense, to read an image is to write it, as subjects cannot use language without implicating themselves in the endless play of meaning.

The subject-oriented approach to textual analysis proposed below, therefore, attempts to keep both text and spectator 'alive' in analysis, so that politics and form are intertwined. This is not, it must be stated again, a methodology for ethnographic or reception research, but a contribution towards the "subject gap" in textual analysis.

Subject-Oriented Textual Analysis

Images, screens and subjects

Subject-oriented textual analysis requires attention to processes of meaning-making and visual history, which is where texts and subjects are produced. It also requires attention to the key questions of subjectivity as outlined in chapter two, such as gazes, power relations, intersubjectivity, and materiality. The benefit, it was argued, is that politics becomes indivisible from textual analysis. It also highlights form and requires textual analysis to be active, continually questioning the meanings that return subjects to texts. A methodology of textual analysis that pays attention to the critical observations of subjectivity theory therefore

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[81] Michael Ann Holly (1996). *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, pp. 11-12

[82] Roland Barthes (1985). *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation.* Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, p. 150

[83] Holly, *Past Looking,* pp. 12-15

also generates work on viewing relations, power relations, the screen, and the symbolic order.

Meaning, it was argued above, "does not reside in any absolute sense within in the text itself."[84] Nevertheless, images have a kind of power that resists their common characterisation as passive.[85] It is not simply that a painting can made us feel something about, for instance, the status of workers, that we might otherwise understand from reading a treatise. A shared visual culture of a particular time and place organises visual information, base retinal data, into "socially agreed descriptions of an intelligible world."[86] With this understanding of subjectivity and visuality, subject-oriented textual analysis thus avoids what Nannicelli describes as the "problem" of "flux" – that is, poststructural formulations of texts as being "produced by 'readers' and infinitely postponing 'the signified' [thus having] identities that are wholly indeterminate." Such a conception of contingent texts, he argues, is implausible, given that "intersubjective access to the same 'text' appears possible."[87] However, the approach outlined herein gives an explanation: viewers (granting commonalities of time, place, and/or culture), are all drawing from a similar symbolic pool to make meanings.

The visual field, argues Norman Bryson, "is one of meanings, not just shapes," that constitute a grammar, a complex system of verbal and visual discourses, as socially constructed as we are.[88] Italian Renaissance paintings, for example, are characterised by a marked and rigid perspectivalism, a monocular view that creates its own spectator and positions them as the "organising principle" of the painting.[89] This rationalising, a-temporal, scientific vision replicates and reinstates Renaissance values of harmony, flow and balance, as an expression of a desire to order the world coherently, objectively, geometrically, and scientifically; to render a subjective viewpoint objective.[90] In the empiricism of its rigid and universal control of the visual field, Renaissance painting legislates the processes of meaning-making, positioning subjects as they make visual phenomena intelligible.

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84 Robert C. Allen (1992). "Audience-Oriented Criticism and Television." *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled.* Ed. Robert C. Allen. London: Routledge. p. 102

85 Holly, *Past Looking,* p. 11

86 Norman Bryson (1988). "The Gaze in the Expanded Field." *Vision and Visuality.* Ed. Hal Foster. Seattle: Bay Press, p. 91

87 Nannicelli, "Ontology, intentionality and television aesthetics," p. 168-169

88 Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field," p. 107

89 Holly, *Past Looking,* p. 77

90 Holly, *Past Looking,* pp. 49, 103

There are of course differences between the labour of art history and the labour of television studies, just as there are between film studies and television studies. Any glancing approach to textual studies must account for (as has been repeatedly argued herein) specificities of form. Television contains identifiable scopic, verbal and aural regimes and discourses, which legislate how we approach its texts. Television producers cannot make things in a vacuum, expecting them to have no meaning for audiences, and indeed, production-side processes and investments are ceaselessly active; they are where, despite the vagaries of reception, the producers' intentions, technologies, budgets and processes "inevitably serve to set limits, classify, emphasise, exclude, and build in ways which form the basis for much subsequent activity."[91] Whatever emphasis we may want to give reception and consumption, production demands consideration, argues John Corner, because it is seen as "*the* moment of formation."[92]At the same time, however, investments on the production side are meaningless without a spectator-subject to make those produced texts meaningful. Textual meaning can only exist where a viewer has the aesthetic and epistemological cultural capacities and resources to generate *a* meaning, let alone competing meanings.

A focus on subjectivity balances the determinative and emancipatory forces in texts and subjects. Neither is the shadow of the other, but are implicated in processes of mutual genesis: it is the processes of text and subject woven through the symbolic order, rather than individual representations or unknowable "actual" viewers, that holds the productive power. That is, both text and subject are dependent on sign-systems to make the world and the self visible, to enter into an intersubjective realm of human communication; and as the previous chapter indicated, we can think of this system of visuality that exists between the subject and the world onscreen as a screen of signs, that mediates, catches and traps the light that subjects see by.[93]

While the subject experiences herself as the centre and originator of vision, she is de-centred, implicated into a web of signifiers that pre-exist her.[94] Images are not able to communicate code or meaning without a consciousness that demands "categories and explanation."[95] Here

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[91] Corner, *Critical Ideas*, p. 71
[92] Corner, *Critical Ideas*, p. 71
[93] Bryson, "Gaze in the Expanded Field," p. 91
[94] Bryson, "Gaze in the Expanded Field," pp. 87, 94
[95] Burnett, *Cultures of Vision,* p. 28

is the "rich creativity at the heart of cognition," a process that draws from larger signifying webs to produce images and meanings, artists and artists' intents, texts, and often deeply personal, consequential relationships between subject and object.[96] In this sense, the image gazes back at a viewing subject who is *always already* situated and unknowable, an embodied, interpretive machine, and under the gaze of the image is repositioned and remade.

Creating texts, creating subjects: meaning as a mechanism of subject-creation

This demands therefore that researchers have some conception of what a subject is when they posit a viewer; that is, to answer the question: what processes of subjectivity will be targeted in the approach to the text? There are, as was noted in chapter two, many ways of defining and constructing subjectivity as an object of knowledge. For a subject-oriented textual analysis to be useful, it must be specific about what kind of subjects are at stake. Chapter two therefore outlined a picture of subjectivity as beholden to visual regimes and spectatorship. There is, it was argued, a relationship between the text and the visual experience that is phenomenological and of-the-moment, and burdened with expected and unexpected cultural and individual histories. This is a move away from determinism and locates politics at the heart of textual analysis, as meaning-making cannot avoid a political deployment of the subject.

This is not, as Brunt notes of some cultural studies, an occasion to check off the truth-value of assumed meanings of texts against real-world audiences. It is the acknowledgment that researchers must account for viewing-subjects without allowing viewers to be substituted for the 'meanings' of texts. Practically, this requires in textual analysis continual return to processes of meaning-making, and the problems of subjectivity and spectatorship outlined in chapter two. The key themes of that chapter are the key questions, therefore, of subject-oriented textual analysis as undertaken in this thesis: how are wider systems of visuality and power relations emergent in the image? What forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity do these images facilitate or restrict? What epistemological consequences to they have, and how do they position bodies? What viewing relations do they require in order to be meaningful

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[96] Burnett, *Cultures of Vision,* p. 28. This further calls us to investigate the extent to which produced, projected intentionality figures in art and subjectivity.. Chapter five discusses this further with respect to tabloid current affairs television.

and intelligible? What spectator-positions? How are viewing-subjects gazed at by these images, and made meaningful themselves?

'Meaning,' chapter two argued, results from and refers to connections made by subjects between perceptual phenomena and an inherited corpus of sign systems. These connections are fundamentally indebted to the history of visual culture in a particular time and place, systematised as a set of rules and codes that allow a viewer to interpret narrative, aesthetic, genre, character, and other textual features.[97] These inferences can be as microscopic as those governing understanding of formal properties such as camera movements and edits. They can also be more complex, such as genre or socio-political meaning, as registers of meaning expand to all layers, from indexical to part of a wider symbolic system. Meaning-making via scopic processes therefore is "the intrusion of the symbolic into the field of vision," and seeing is taking inside oneself the gaze of the world; seeing with the (m)Other's eye, just as one speaks with the (m)Other's tongue.[98]

Meanings are not natural and do not naturally flow from visual experience. As Lynne Joyrich suggests with respect to images and narratives of sexuality, texts' meanings are an issue not simply of knowledge but of epistemology and spectatorship.[99] Meanings are conflictual, culturally situated, and "constructed out of diverse contradictions and contrarieties."[100] Visual experience exists only by virtue of context, and there is always another referent.[101] This drawing-together is rapid and improvised, with imposed links, and gaps that are repressed in order to create a coherent whole. There is always an excess that remains unaccounted for, the "eruption of meanings," argues Ron Burnett, "upon which we have to exercise restraint, into which we have to project structure and generate discourse, but from which much more is drawn and created than is 'present'"[102]

A sign system is a "network of elements that signify only in relation to each other" – but

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[97] Edward Branigan (1981). "The Spectator and Film Space." *Screen* 22 (1), p. 68. Hall uses denotation and connotation, but in their more general instead of linguistic theory senses. Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," p. 512

[98] Silverman, "What is a Camera?" p. 12

[99] Lynne Joyrich (2001). "Epistemology of the Console." *Critical Inquiry* 27 (3), pp. 439-467

[100] Teresa Ebert (1988). "The Romance of Patriarchy: Ideology, Subjectivity, and Postmodern Feminist Cultural Theory." *Cultural Critique* 10, pp. 22-23

[101] Maurice Merleu-Ponty (1996 [1965]). *Phenomenology of Perception.* Trans. Colin Smith. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p. 4

[102] Burnett, *Cultures of Vision*, p. 10

they are anchored experientially by the eye and the subject.[103] The act of viewing generates an "I" who "becomes the subject that does the text's thinking,"[104] but never in isolation. The process of reading is doubly and ceaselessly productive. It is not only the text that is created when spectators make a text *mean;* in drawing on or inserting themselves into sign-systems, subjects also produce themselves. The televisual subject, therefore, is created in the attribution of meaning to visual phenomena. The image-encounter is thus a subject-encounter.

A subject-focused textual analysis will also be a close textual analysis and it must be, as has been argued, responsive to form. As well as being specific about the processes of subjectivity at stake, researchers must also grapple with the nature of television as an object of analysis, in a way that understands these images as distinctly *televisual*. Studies of television that account for these factors will also, therefore, contribute to wider visual culture and media research.

The object of television

One of the enduring difficulties of television studies is the slipperiness of its object of study.[105] The concept of "television" is fraught with paradoxes and ambivalencies; it is both material (a unit of technology; a piece of furniture or a DVD box set) and immaterial (transmission, streaming, extemporaneous visual experience). It is both global and very specifically, experientially, local. It is public and private, singular and collective.[106] It also has scale:

> [t]elevision looks very different, depending on whether one's level of analysis is the microlevel of the network's terminal point—the screen, a particular viewing object or collectivity—or the standard, centralising transmissions that appear on its face.[107]

In this thesis, which focuses on visual experience at the interface of the screen (understood as the literal and the Lacanian screen), televisual meaning-making is nevertheless intended

[103] Kaja Silverman (1983). *The Subject of Semiotics.* Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 6
[104] Holly, *Past Looking,* p. 208
[105] Sarah Cardwell (2014). "Television Amongst Friends: Medium, Art, Media." *Critical Studies in Television* 9 (3), pp. 8-9, 13
[106] Anna McCarthy (2001). "From Screen to Site: Television's Material Culture, and Its Place." *October* 98 (Autumn), p. 101
[107] McCarthy, "Screen to Site," p. 95

to capture a sense of moving between micro and macro, as subjects are always encountering images in interlinked systems of which they have greater or lesser knowledge: systems of technology and industry, such as networks; systems of signification; and socio-political systems. Meaning-making is irreducible from these, as subjects cannot view a text that is somehow 'outside' these contexts, all of which impact televisual meanings and spectatorship.

Theorists have developed several ways of conceptualising the heterogeneity and semiotic complexity of television, and the singularity of its forms. Unlike a book, film or work of visual art, (broadcast) television is transmitted continuously, *en masse*, and can be accessed at any time by any person with a set.[108] This continuity is considered an essential aspect of its form by many; Raymond Williams, for instance, famously characterised television as flow. This is a description of television not experienced as a piece of furniture, or a series of discreet programs, but as a fluid experience that moved between programs, advertisements and channels without disconnect or incoherence.[109]

Despite the fact that "flow" is itself partly an aesthetic concept, it has been criticised for its lack of specific engagement with aesthetics; where 'flow' takes on an ontological status that elides the existence and particularities of specific texts. Thus more recently, as television studies shifts towards more program/episode/genre-oriented analysis, attempts have been made to update this model. For instance to one of fragments, segments, or "leakiness", or to one that mitigates the dystopian echoes of a never-ending universal "flow."[110] While this thesis agrees that the character of the apparatus must be engaged with, attempts to describe the medium in totality seem destined to be incomplete or rapidly outdated.

Instead, both specificity and generality are required: that is, the pinpoint of the text, and its latitudinal and longitudinal contexts. "As with the analysis of all art," argues Stanley Cavell, "involvement requires above all concentrated study: minimally, the close observation of texts in order to support the claims and judgement we may wish to make about them."[111] The return to aesthetics and texts advocated by Cardwell, Geraghty, Jacobs, Mittell, Nannicelli

[108] And any person with an internet connection (and a Netflix account) can access non-broadcast television on demand.
[109] Williams, *Television,* pp. 86-97
[110] Corner, *Critical Ideas*, pp. 60-61
[111] Cavell quoted in Cardwell, "Television Aesthetics," p. 73

and others[112] calls for ways of theorising all elements of the televisual image, industry, and apparatus. This also reduces the risk of treating moving pictures as a series of frames "from which meaning can be extracted or collapsed."[113] Textual analysis in television studies therefore requires specific strategies demanded by the medium's unique formal properties.

The 'text' of textual analysis, therefore, is never *just* the text. Even while the case studies of part two of this thesis limit themselves to relatively discreet individual texts (understood as shows, episodes, and segments) or genres, they still undertake extensive exploration of textual features that cannot be said to sit solely inside the image, such as the way in which scheduling shapes tabloid current affairs television. This chapter therefore finishes with a brief outline of some of these other attributes of the medium which will become relevant for the subsequent discussion of televisual meaning-making.

While analytic methods can be borrowed across mediums, they cannot be imported wholesale. Television is ubiquitous and dominant in the cultural imagination, as "the pre-eminent information and narrative technology of the world."[114] Television is hybrid, with its "combination of film's visuality and print culture's seriality."[115] Like film, it is audio-visual, moving, edited, and scored; many production and acting personnel cross the line between the two, and likewise, film and television share spaces in the programming schedule. Like the internet, it contains many different kinds of factual and non-factual content, with a scale that is vast and expandable, competing for attention with other screens and with other texts that are simultaneously viewable only a tap away. Like books, comics, and radio plays, it can convey serial and complex narratives over a long period of real-time, and is consumed mostly in the home.[116] Unlike any other medium, it is (in many instances), continuously and unavoidably interrupted by commercials.

This technological, industrial, and generic complexity requires specific and contextually-sensitive analysis. With respect to narrative, for instance, Sarah Kozloff argues that textual

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[112] Cardwell, "Television Aesthetics"; Mittell, *Genre and Television;* Nannicelli, "Ontology, intentionality, and television aesthetics," p. 164

[113] Burnett, *Cultures of Vision,* p. 80

[114] Jeffrey Sconce (2004), "What if? Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries." *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition.* Eds. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson. Durham: Duke University Press, p 94; Corner, *Critical Ideas*, p. 87

[115] Leigh Claire La Berge (2010). "Capitalist Realism and Serial Form: The Fifth Season of The Wire." *Criticism* 52 (3/4), p. 547

[116] Corner, *Critical Ideas,* p. 24-26

analysis of television must also include schedule as a function or determiner of narrative, as well as the more traditional narratological elements of plot (what happens) and form (how it is told).[117] Television as a medium contains many different narrative forms, some of which (such as soap operas) are marked by non-closure and others by ongoing serial change (premium drama, for instance) or a continual return to the same (classic sitcom form, news programming).

Corner calls for increased attention to the kinds of narratives in television and how they function,[119] and indeed, a focus on how texts operate *as* televisual texts is central to the project of this thesis, which understands meaning-making as indivisible from the narrative structures that house, shape, and are shaped by the image. Narrative, in this sense,[120] is a chronological and imaginative process, organising and linking events in relation to one another. As was discussed above, this demand for meaning in contingent and polysemous texts is a reflection of the greater compulsion away from meaninglessness and towards concordance: Paul Ricoeur, for instance, describes narrative as essential to the very experience of identity and subjectivity.[121]

A subject-oriented textual analysis will therefore also give attention to the ways in which narrative in texts makes meaning possible. In terms of textual analysis, and the project of this thesis, narrative as a textual concept or tool of analysis therefore must indicate something other than 'plot' or 'story.' Chapter four, for instance, discusses the way in which makeover television's images and meanings are indivisible from a narrative of improvement. Once again, these meanings are not neutral and ahistorical but are socially and historically constructed, and have social and political character: specific texts, theorists such as Barthes remind us, also exist in the context of wider cultural myths and narratives;[122] similarly, narratives of the past are as much about rendering the present intelligible.[123]

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[117] Sarah Kozloff (1992). *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled.* Ed. Robert C Allen. London: Routledge, p. 69

[119] Corner, *Critical Ideas,* p. 59

[120] For a summary discussion of the varied usages of narrative in textual analysis see Thornham and Purvis, *Television Drama*, pp. 29-44, and Corner, *Critical Ideas,* pp. 47-59

[121] Paul Ricoeur (1992). *Oneself as Another.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 141. For Freud and Lacan, of course, narrative also plays a central role in organising the psyche and in psychoanalytic practice.

[122] Corner, *Critical Ideas*, p. 50

[123] Thornham and Purvis, *Television Drama,* p. 30

Narrative therefore also indicates intertextual networks of mediation, transformation, meanings, and associations. Indeed, the above-discussed metaphors of flow, fragments, segmentation, leakiness all highlight the interconnectedness and interruptions of televisual texts. Televisual experience is mutable and ongoing, and is also changing and diversifying. Contemporary media studies must, for instance, find ways to cope with the current media landscape's plethora of offline and online time-shifting viewing options.[125] Television for much of its life was unique in its ability to capture a "sense of newness [and] liveness,"[126] but even this does not recognise the increasing variety of broadcast, time-shifted, and subscription programming and reception contexts, or even the old Sunday night movie.

Images are received always in a larger context of broadcasting and technology in which relevant considerations include the contrast, sharpness, clarity and dimensions of the image; its editing and shot sequences; its place in the schedule and its relationships to other televisual texts; its difference to other audio-visual mediums such as film; and the place and time of its reception. These formal techniques of media production are taught in textbooks and in film schools, and are deeply familiar to the habitual viewer, appearing to map intuitively to visual and aural perception. As a representational system then, television is diverse and unpredictable, and methods of textual analysis capable of confronting texts with specificity and sensitivity are essential.

Television and films are being watched in increasingly diverse ways though varied technologies, in varied places. This thesis does not attempt to develop a theory of reception for each of those viewing modes, but instead emphasises the need for the incorporation of situated viewing into meaning-making. As was argued earlier, textual analysis benefits from specificity of not only text but of viewing contexts. While this thesis is oriented towards the text instead of audiences or ethnographic audience research, it ought to be clear that textual analysis is always going to involve certain reception contexts, which, as chapter five's discussion of the scheduling of tabloid current affairs demonstrates, is indivisible from

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[125] Fiske, "British Cultural Studies," p. 303; see also Corner, *Critical Ideas,* p. 69; Brunsdon, "What is the 'Television' of Television Studies?" p. 621. It is outside the scope of this thesis to take on some of the more disparate forms that lay claim to being a kind of television or part of television: for example webseries, advertisements, or sports; also in need of further research is the ontological status of television as viewed in public venues, or on handheld devices. However, the methodology outlined here is intended to be adaptable to these kinds of open-ended or non-episodic texts and forms of textual spectatorship.

[126] Sue Thornham and Tony Purvis (2005). *Television Drama: Theories and Identities.* Palgrave MacMillan, p. 6

meaning-making.

Scheduling, for instance, is television's response to rhythms of our culture.[127] At the same time it dictates that rhythm, as interlocking systems of technology and industry divide up space and time across hours, days, weeks, months and years.[128] In the 1950s, networks worked to educate viewers (mainly women) not only in commodities, but also in how to watch television, making a concerted effort to change domestic habits.[129] It is a sign system therefore that is ubiquitous enough to carry a strong sense of naturalness and it appears in domestic situations (and, increasingly, non-domestic situations) merged with the rhythms of everyday life. In this way, Sonia Livingstone sees television as transforming the traditional public/private boundary, where the domestic setting is site of mediated publicness.[130]

Technology has a non-neutral ideological status, in the way it is used to create texts, and the way it changes reception contexts. New technologies alter our audio-visual landscape. For instance, Anna McCarthy notes that "TV's commercial emergence coincides with the 'golden age' of Fordism, and television advertising was crucial for the rise of the national brand economy within which the Fordist wage contract took shape."[131] Technology impacts our habitus, our behaviours, and our spending. Television is also an industrial product, with channel brand identities, product placement, concretised genres. Programs are waves in a wider televisual sea. These channels, genres and brands, are discursively constructed in a political/industrial context, and implicated in hierarchical cultural categories and power relations.[132] This awareness is brought to the encounter with the image. In this way, technologies and institutions of production, transmission and reception are productive of a televisual subject.

Much of what makes up the corpus of televisual texts, as well as the way in which the industry is organised, is of course dictated by economics. Programming is divided by format into saleable categories such as reality television, procedurals, news, and sitcoms. There is

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127 Burton, *Talking Television,* p. 56

128 As we watch over editions, episodes, seasons, and series.

129 Lynn Spigel (2000). "Women's Work." *Television: Critical Views.* Ed. Horace Newcomb. Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 83

130 Sonia Livingstone (1999). "Mediated Knowledge: recognition of the familiar, discovery of the new." *Television and Common Knowledge.* Ed. Jostein Gripsrud. London: Routledge, p. 99; Jane Feuer (1992). "Genre Study." *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled.* Ed. Robert C Allen. London: Routledge, p. 8

131 McCarthy, "From Screen to Site", p. 96

132 See, for instance, Mittell, *Genre and Television.*

constant replication of particular elements identified by network and studio executives (rightly or wrongly) as profitable. Production is not a static moment in the past, but remains ceaselessly active in the encounter with the televisual texts; deviations from the standard commercial model, for instance, are texts marked by that very deviation. For example, chapters six and seven engage with the "house style" of HBO. As developed through programming such as *Oz* (US, 1997-2003)*, The Sopranos, Sex and the City* (US, 1998-2004)*, The Wire,* and *Deadwood* (US, 2004-2006), this house style or brand displayed complex, heightened storytelling and a claim to realism that often had more to do with a "rawness" of language and violence than narrative events or shooting style.[133] As a premium network, HBO is not subject to US government regulations about obscenity and so is free to depict nudity, sexuality, violence and profanity.[134] It has successfully turned this lack of restrictions into a brand. HBO's slogan, "It's not TV, It's HBO" is of course a lie: HBO *is* television, but the white noise of the channel ident that opens each episode frames the reception of the text. The images seen thereafter carry the "Quality Television" gloss of auteurism, serialised and complex narrative, three-dimensional characters, deep themes, and expensive production style. [135]

For commercial television, advertising revenue is the most influential factor in programming and content decisions.[136] Mimi White argues that the lack of "extreme" positions in television is a purposeful move by producers to enable as wide a range of audience identification as possible.[137] Critics and scholars remain concerned over the lack of diversity in media conglomerates and the continuing drive for profit maximisation, arguing that "content becomes ever more uniform and spaces available to articulate dissent are being reduced." As shall be seen in chapter five, the news media is a significant locus of this anxiety.

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133 Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (2007). "Sex, Swearing, and Respectability." *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond.* Eds. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass. London: IB Taurus, pp. 62-76

134 Tait, "The HBO-ification of Genre."

135 Dean DeFino (2016). *The HBO Effect*. New York: Bloomsbury, pp. 5-7. See Sarah Cardwell (2007). "Is Quality Television Any Good?" *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond.* Eds. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass. London: IB Taurus, pp. 19-34 for more detailed discussion on Quality as a generic marker in the US and UK.

136 Lesley Henderson (2007). *Social Issues in Television Fiction.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, p. 168; in some countries such as the United States, commercial television funding comes from channel or cable subscriptions, shifting economic and programming models from mass to niche.

137 Mimi White (1992). "Ideological Analysis." *Channels of Discourse Reassembled.* Ed. Robert C. Allen. New York: Routledge, p. 190

Whether defined as flow or something else, the aesthetic experience of television is manifold. Acknowledging this, not all theories of television argue for specific analysis of texts: for Houston, for instance, the meta-structure of television trumps any meanings generated from texts: meaning is a byproduct of the medium's economics, just "a distraction from its endless representation of the sign, of lack, of difference."[138] While this thesis examines only a narrow band of visual style, and is limited to texts from Australia and the United States, as shall be seen in part two, it must still rely on complex visual histories and analysis to describe and analyse the subject-object encounter.

Conclusion

This chapter called for methods for conceiving of the subject's relationship to signs and texts in a way that was sensitive to the scopic and political natures of subjectivity. It has also been argued above that this is could be a useful mode of analysis for television studies, which as a field is marked by a tension between how best to study texts and/or audiences with clarity and rigour, while maintaining political commitments and mechanisms.

The subject-oriented textual analysis proposed in this chapter acknowledges that meanings are form-specific, and that television texts require analysis sensitive to form and the ways in which meanings are specifically *televisual.* Because subject-oriented textual analysis requires that scholars define and explain the forms of subjectivity used in analysis, chapter two drew a picture of subjects as formed through processes of visuality and spectatorship. The chapter drew upon Foucauldian and Lacanian accounts of subjects as beholden to sign-systems that made visual experience and the experience of subjectivity intelligible and meaningful. Key themes were: gazes both from and towards the subject; visuality and ways of knowing and being present to the eye; visual history; materiality; knowledge and epistemology; and intersubjectivity.

Part one of this thesis has therefore demonstrated a space for subject-oriented textual analysis. Subjectivity, it was argued, is fundamentally a political phenomenon, indebted to structures of meaning that pre-exist the subject. Televisual spectatorship is a matter of

[138] Beverle Houston (1984). "Viewing Television: The Metaspsychology of Endless Consumption." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 9:3, p. 185

meaning-making, as subjects enable texts to mean, generating themselves as spectator-subjects. A subject-oriented approach therefore has two key advantages for textual analysis: a necessary return to texts and textual form, and an inherent politicisation.

The four chapters of part two will undertake subject-oriented textual analysis of four different texts, demonstrating the usefulness of the approach and the contributions it can make to the politics of subjectivity, television studies, and other debates. Each chapter draws on different aspects of visual history, spectatorship and subjectivity, outlining different networks of meaning. Subsequent chapters therefore utilise the work of many different authors, who employ many different approaches, to come at the televisual subject in her encounter with the various texts treated here. These chapters weave varying research methods and objects into a consistent approach to the subject, required by the brute mass of signifiers and signifieds coming to bear on the televisual encounter from all sides, that we could not examine without attention paid to them each in their own domain.

Part Two:

Case Studies

4

MAKEOVER TELEVISION AND THE VISIBLE SUBJECT

Introduction

Part two of this thesis is dedicated to exploring the usefulness of subject-oriented textual analysis through four case studies. The problem of textual analysis, as discussed in the previous chapter, is to keep it simultaneously focused on the form and content of the actual text, and politicised, sensitive to processes of subjectivity without reducing texts to "stand-ins" for an imagined audience. Close textual analysis of makeover television is therefore a good starting point, as it is a highly politicised genre that owes much to neoliberal forms of subjectivity, in which a (usually female) subject's appearance is remodelled through a televisual narrative of betterment. The below analysis, which highlights processes of visuality, spectatorship, and subject-formation, therefore contributes to current scholarship on makeover television in particular as well as more general debates on the nature of gendered neoliberal subjectivities.

Makeover television intervenes in the lives of subjects,

> mobilising resources to help ordinary people overcome problems in relation to: children (*Supernanny*), pets (*The Dog Whisperer*), sexuality (*Sex Inspectors*), unemployment (*Starting Over*), addiction (*Intervention*), hygiene (*How Clean is Your House?*), health and fitness (*Honey, We're Killing the Kids*), safety and security (*It Takes a Thief*), and finance (*Suze Orman*).[1]

Laurie Ouellette and James Hay's extraordinary and yet incomplete and outdated list demonstrates the way in which this mode of interventionist lifestyle television folds all aspects of lived experience – work, family, spending, home, eating, feeling – into a narrative

[1] Laurie Ouellette and James Hay (2008). "Makeover Television, Governmentality and the Good Citizen." *Continuum* 22 (4), p. 475

of choice and taste. Nothing, it would appear, exists outside of the representative capacity of lifestyle television. *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (US, Bravo, 2003-2007), for instance, suggests that one is not truly made over until one has been transformed in the interconnected fields of dress, grooming, food, home environment, and social interaction.

Little wonder then that makeover television is a regular object of television studies' and feminist analysis. Indeed, feminist cultural studies and television studies calls scholars to take seriously gendered genres and programs that sit at the bottom of taste hierarchies.[2] In taking it seriously, such scholarship often casts makeover television as a "profoundly toxic" symptom of neoliberalism, a genre that demonstrates *par excellence* "neoliberalism's recuperation of feminism," "promis[ing] to make women look better while making us feel worse."[3] Makeovers are, however, in their televisual form, a concept riddled with contradiction and paradox: they are extreme but ordinary, embodied but discursive, radical but conservative, authentic but constructed, empowering but victimising; and more.[4] These binaries indicate a strong tension between the narrative force of authentic realisation and an obviously constructed content. In a slippage between text and subject that illustrates the difficulty of drawing the borders of televisual subjectivity, and the need to be specific and rigorous, these oppositions appear to apply to both the programs themselves and the subjects they create, be they the discursive, theoretical subject 'of neoliberalism,' the participant-subject, the viewing-subject, or all three.

These subjects are revealed to us – in makeover texts, but also in scholarship – through the rhetoric and strategies of lack and presence; or more germanely for this thesis, through the dynamics of visibility and invisibility, and processes of making-visible. In most shows, that is, a conservative or traditional gender identity is made visible on the body of the participant-subject through radical intervention. This chapter surveys, first, the current literature's understanding of the genre and the way it constructs the subject, and, second, the standard televisual structure of the makeover episode. It returns repeatedly to the way in which this visuality, and the very conditions for being seen, read, and made meaningful, take social

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[2] Brenda R. Weber in Lynne Joyrich, Misha Kavka, and Brenda R. Weber (2015). "Project Reality TV: Preshow Special." *Camera Obscura* 88 30 (1), p. 6

[3] Estella Tinknell (2011). "Scourging the Abject Body: Ten Years Younger and Fragmented Feminism under Neoliberalism." *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity.* Eds. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan. p. 83

[4] We might also include: singular but universalisable; familiar but alienatory; flexible but stable, natural but interventionist.

form and character – are, indeed, implicated in the genesis of the subject as she participates in the show, as she watches the show, and as she exists in society.

That the gaze is constitutive of subjectivity was argued extensively in chapters two and three, and questions of spectatorship and the directionality of gazes were put forward as a central concern of subject-oriented textual analysis. Here, we encounter the gaze and visuality again in at least three forms, all interconnected, and capable of being characterised by the Foucauldian theory discussed in chapter two: the evaluative and rationalising gaze of the expert; the gaze-upon-the-self required to render the self a subject; and the disciplinary, normalising gaze activated through surveillance. All of these makeover gazes, it is generally argued, are in service of neoliberal discourses of the self-producing, commodified subject. Current scholarship, then, interrogates the ways makeover television constructs its participants as gendered neoliberal subjects, as a way of understanding what neoliberal subjectivity and femininity out 'in the world' *means*, generalising these lessons to neoliberal subjects as well as the implied viewer herself.

Such scholarship is drawn upon in this chapter. Its observations are wide-ranging and important, and do much to describe and clarify, in Raymond Williams' words, the "meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture."[5] Nevertheless, as we saw in chapter three, there is also room for the textual analysis advocated in this thesis, which is designed to treat texts as an end in themselves, while maintaining political commitments regarding subjectivity; such an approach complicates standard accounts of makeover television as a venue in which the neoliberal project of the self is expressed and pressed upon viewers.

The first half of this chapter, therefore, examines the way in which contemporary analysis situates makeover television – as part of the wider phenomenon of lifestyle television – in the context of neoliberal social organisation that produces subjects "encouraged to recognise themselves as existing within an imperfect world of indeterminacy, which, like themselves, must constantly be worked on."[6] Analysis of subjectivity is therefore focused on the subject seen on screen, and assumed to translate through the screen via normalising discourse and

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[5] Raymond Williams (1974). *Television.* London: Routledge, p. 57

[6] Toby Miller (1993). *The Well-Tempered Self: Citizenship, Culture and the Postmodern Subject.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, p. xiv

processes of governmentality. As a participant-subject produces herself as a made-over subject, these knowledges are also internalised, apparently, by the viewing subject, who consequently learns lessons about what to wear, or who acquiesces to the normalisation of cosmetic surgery.

Attention to processes of visuality and spectatorship reveals that two narratives of the subject emerge both in scholarship and in the programs themselves: a) the subject who disciplines her exterior in order to transform an inner self characterised by lack; and b) the subject who transforms her appearance in order to better represent a true, authentic inner self. In both of these narratives, what is accessible to the gaze – that is, the exterior of people's bodies – is given primacy as the site of the actual makeover. As was noted in chapter two, materiality and the substance of bodies is of concern to the politics of subjectivity. This chapter therefore also contributes to feminist scholarship that examines the ways in which bodies are rendered texts. Closing on a discussion of palimpsest as a key visual metaphor, this chapter shows how even the corporeal violence of extreme makeovers is subsumed into the primacy of the surface, as the workings of surgery become something to read *under* the aestheticised skin.

After highlighting these contradictory but complementary pictures of the makeover subject, the chapter uses examples drawn from shows such as *10 Years Younger In 10 Days* (Australia, 7 Network, 2009) and *Trinny and Susannah's Australian Makeover Mission* (Australia/UK, Lifestyle, 2011) to examine these pictures' production within the uniquely televisual narratives of makeover shows, and how they might subsequently 'project out' to the body of the viewing subject.[7] Part one of this thesis activated the site of the Lacanian screen as a place of subject-construction, putting the before-and-after image of makeover television in the eye of the viewer, and the viewer in the eye of the before-and-after image. The contradictions of makeover television, it is argued, and its various strategies of making-visible, remain in the before-and-after image as a trace or palimpsest; making this image meaningful produces a viewing subject with the potential to trouble straightforward accounts of the neoliberal subject of makeover television.

To be clear, this is not an attempt to void or even fundamentally contradict the general trend of understanding makeover and lifestyle television as a significant expression of or moment

[7] Certainly there is room for (and a need for) ethnographic research here. That is, however, outside of the scope of this thesis.

in the construction of gendered neoliberal subjectivities, and the bodies of those subjects. Undoubtedly the meanings that coalesce around makeover images are implicated in neoliberal and feminist negotiations of value and use.[8] Instead, orienting itself towards televisual subjects, this chapter asks: what does it mean for something to *be made visible* in a televisual context? As viewing-subjects and participant-subjects gaze at each other through the before-and-after shot, what kind of subjects are being produced in the moment? And how does the text as a *televisual* text contribute to the production of meanings?

In this way this chapter locates and traces the televisual moments, movements and discourses that construct the human subject as a finite project, as knowing and knowable, as ordered and orderable, before turning to the moments when this project is destabilised. It is at the moments when the narrative apparatus works hardest to naturalise a conception of the self that its construction is most visible; the screen, with its lingering traces and scotoma, intervenes, and the subject, in being called to make the before-and-after image meaningful, creates the image, and is implicated herself in its instabilities.

The Interior and Exterior of Makeover Subjects

Producing neoliberal women

The first section of this chapter discusses the identification of makeover television as a gendered neoliberal phenomenon. Reality television, notes Lynne Joyrich, may well "demand a feminist analysis even more than other forms of TV" because it traffics so heavily in issues central to feminist analysis: performativity, surveillance, gazes, the public/private divide, and competition between women.[9] Participant-subjects of makeover television are encouraged to become the *right* kind of neoliberal woman through a reflexive project of the self that prioritises commodified lifestyles and external transformation. For television and feminist scholars, the idea of the makeover as a transformative project of the self, regardless of what kind of program it appears in, speaks to concerns in wider culture around neoliberal femininities. Estella Tinknell, in the collection *New Femininities: Feminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity,* which devotes its first section to the "makeover paradigm," embarks upon

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8 Even viewer affect in response to watching makeover television in the domestic sphere is reconfigured as a place of neoliberal subject creation; see Rachel Moseley (2000). "Makeover Takeover on British Television." *Screen* 41 (3), pp. 299-314

9 Lynne Joyrich in Joyrich *et al*,"Project Reality TV," p. 5

a strong critique of the neoliberal tragedy that plays out on women's bodies and selves in cosmetic surgery shows.[10]

Issues of class, gender, taste, and lifestyle and life choices are all active in makeover television. In a different collection on lifestyle television, Gareth Palmer links the makeover genre to the re-emergence of classed anxieties around taste in the wake of increased consumer spending, the bombardment of advertising, and other identifiers of neoliberal consumer culture.[11] Similarly, Tania Lewis argues that the generic surge of lifestyle television is linked to the rise of symbolic culture in the West in which issues of belonging and difference, category, class and culture become increasingly linked to a neoliberal conception of 'lifestyle,' a narrative of the self that positions purchasing choices within a stylised, aspirational identity.[12]

Lifestyle shows tend to feature ordinary people and homes, and take as their object everyday topics like home improvement, cooking, budgeting, and personal upkeep. A turn-of-the-century boom developed the genre further, bringing in the competitive/game format, with, for instance, Australian formats *Changing Rooms Australia* (9 Network, 1995-2003) and *The Block Australia* (9 Network, 2003-present) joining magazine and advice institutions such as *Better Homes and Gardens* (Australia, 7 Network, 1996-present).[13] Rather than embracing the hyperreality of shows such as *The Hills* (US, MTV, 2006-2010) or *Duck Dynasty* (US, A&E, 2012-present), lifestyle television – a kindlier, gentler genre that has made media personalities such as Dr. Harry Cooper into the nation's friend – links pedagogy, everyday life, and aspirational commodity purchases to a vision of the subject as always active in producing a better life for herself.

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10 Tinknell, "Scourging," pp. 83-94

11 Gareth Palmer (2008). "Introduction: the habit of scrutiny." *Exposing Lifestyle Television*. Ed. Gareth Palmer. Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 3

12 Tania Lewis (2008). *Smart Living: lifestyle media and popular expertise.* New York: Peter Lang.

13 As with every genre, lifestyle television is subject to the rise-and-fall of fashion, as shows about personal makeovers vs. home-based lifestyle vs. cooking ebb and wane. In the last ten years singing/performance and cooking genres saw a resurgence in Australian broadcast television, eclipsing standard makeover shows. However as this thesis is in its final stages of being written, *The Biggest Loser, Bringing Sexy Back,* and other competitive makeover shows such as *The Block* and *House Rules,* all remain popular, demonstrating that the make-over is still a significant mode of reality television. The pay-tv channel Lifestyle also has an entire sub-channel, Lifestyle *you*, dedicated to makeovers and personal and home style tips. Furthermore, makeovers remain a standard feature of genres such as morning television; see, for instance, *The Today Show*'s (Channel 9) "ambush makeovers" at <http://www.today.com/style/more/ambush-makeover> (last accessed 30 September 2016).

This way of theorising the concept of lifestyle (and the subject qua consumer and commodified life narratives) is narrower than the way the word is used in common conversation, or the politically volatile characterisation of, for example, LGBTQI identities/lives as a 'lifestyle.' This concept of lifestyle emphasises reflexivity, agency and creation in everyday life, a self-work that operates in prescribed networks of meanings about identity, femininity, commodities, and life paths. These meanings are formulated intersubjectively in everyday life, as well as in mediated culture: advertising, magazines, fictional television and film, and reality television. Reality television can be understood then as a node of the neoliberal subject, a subject-position only available at this point in time,[14] as representation and re-presentation become increasingly essential to what Anthony Giddens calls the "reflexive project of the self."[15]

The modern neoliberal subject exists, apparently, outside of passé cultural categories of class, which are replaced with discourses of freedom and choice; in this construction, "the self is a site of endless options, choice, consumption and transformation,"[16] fitting perfectly into a capitalist vision of the subject as "autonomous, self-regulating [and] self-actualising."[17] In a neoliberal context, which ostensibly has upward mobility as the goal of social policy and identity politics, reality television proposes "the makeover (rather than state assistance) as the key to social mobility, stability, and civic empowerment."[18] The ways in which this mode of viewing is formulated in media locations such as television is therefore of high political concern.

In the context of countries such as Australia, the US, and the UK, makeover television is implicated in the "governing logic of our time," which demands neoliberal citizens govern and remake themselves, with television increasingly co-opted into the "imperative to make

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[14] Helen Powell and Sylvie Prasad (2010). "'As Seen on TV' The Celebrity Expert: How Taste is Shaped by Lifestyle Media." *Cultural Politics* 6 (1), p. 111

[15] Anthony Giddens (1991). *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age.* Cambridge: Polity Press. See also Alison Hearn (2008). "Insecure: Narratives and economies of the branded self in transformation television." *Continuum* 22 (4), pp. 495-504, on competitive reality television and branded selves.

[16] Lewis, *Smart Living,* pp. 5, 8

[17] Maggie Andrews and Fan Carter (2008). "'Who Let the Dogs Out?' Pets, Parenting and the Ethics of Lifestyle Programming." *Exposing Lifestyle Television.* Ed. Gareth Palmer. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing. p. 44; See also Angela McRobbie (2004). "Notes on 'What Not To Wear'" and post-feminist symbolic violence." *The Sociological Review* 52, p. 100

[18] Anna McCarthy (2007). "Reality Television: a Neoliberal Theatre of Suffering." *Social Text* 25 (4 (Winter)), p. 17

and remake ourselves as citizens into the fabric of everyday life."[19] Some theorists are more critical than others of this tendency: for instance, Angela McRobbie's self-styled polemic sees participants in makeovers as "willing victim[s]" exposing themselves in readiness of improvement.[20] Drawing on the last several decades of work by Foucault, Nikolas Rose, Toby Miller, and others on the ways the neoliberal subject makes him- or herself ready for redisposal and use, most theorists see lifestyle television as characterising a postmodern era of the project of the self, an occasion and prompter of "everyday discourses of citizenship."[21] This is the "biopolitical logic of modernity [wherein the] bodies and lives of others—fat women with crooked teeth, not-yet-democratic-enough Iraqis" are known, by their appearance, to be "always already in need of a makeover."[22] This idea of subjects existing in a state of lack or deficiency is returned to below.

As Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff note, writing on neoliberalism and governmentality often go hand in hand.[23] Governmentality is overwhelmingly used as a lens through which to understand and critique lifestyle and makeover television, usually with reference to cultural categories of class and gender.[24] Makeover television, argues Gay Hawkins, exists at the forefront of a trend in which television increasingly concerns itself with providing information about the care and management of the self. Here, in the interplay between the oughts of televised moral discourse and infotainment's quotidian lessons of self-care lies the constant thought and action upon the self, the "relation between subjectivity and subjection," that is governmentality.[25] In this understanding, makeover television teaches the viewer to be self-conscious, transforming her gaze and body, and rendering her viewing an activated project of the self. That is, the meanings of makeover images are held to be a message about the viewing-subject's lack. Crucially, in makeover television this governmentality is held to

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19 Oullette and Hay, "Makeover Television," p. 472

20 McRobbie, "Notes on What Not to Wear," p. 100

21 McCarthy, "Reality Television," p. 17

22 Joanna Zylinska (2007). "Of Swans and Ugly Ducklings: Bioethics between Humans, Animals, and Machines." *Configurations* 15 (2 (Spring)), p. 142

23 Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (2011). "Introduction." *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity.* Eds. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 8

24 See for example Elizabeth Atwood Gailey (2007). "Self-Made Women: Cosmetic Surgery Shows and the Construction of Female Psychopathology." *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*. Ed. Dana Heller. London: IB Taurus, pp. 107-118; Palmer, "Introduction*,"* on governance and cultural categories; Lewis, *Smart Living,* on governance and expertise; special themed issue of *Continuum*, 22:4 (2008) on governance and makeover television; McCarthy, "Reality Television," on governance and neoliberal citizenship.

25 Gay Hawkins (2001). "The Ethics of Television." *International Cultural Studies* 4 (4), pp. 412, 417

also affect audiences, particularly female audiences, through a series of visual processes and performances that play out on the bodies of participant-subjects, in which the exterior of subjects' bodies stand in for their interior transformation.

Participant-subjects' bodies therefore 'stand in' for all subjects, in both the show's and academia's construction of makeover subjects; this is assisted by makeover television's commitment to a picture of a 'universal' neoliberal individual outside of cultural categories of class, ethnicity, or location, who has free access to limitless choice and consumption.[26] There is no room for the participant-subject to express the complexity of her lived reality in terms of class, race, or gender,[27] or time or economic resources.[28] Instead, difference is subsumed into a pluralism that re-informs an essentialist vision of, particularly, gender – women are all at heart the same, whether they have to feed the kids when they get home from work or not, or whether they have a pear-shaped or apple-shaped body. Subjectivity, then, is both singular, distinguishable through commodity purchases, and universal.

Scholarship on makeover television extracts these lessons about neoliberal social organisation and what it requires of its subjects from the ways in which makeover television treats its participant-subjects. In recognising herself as a deficient woman, and transforming herself, the participant-subject of makeover television 'acts out' the processes of normalisation as a demonstration to the viewer; in this labour of the self, she is understood to stand in for a more generalised picture of the neoliberal subject. As well as being a generalisation within the show, this non-specificity bleeds through the boundaries of the program, as participant-subject, the viewing audience, and the 'subject of gendered neoliberal discourse' become functionally and rhetorically the same subject.[29]

Spectator-subjects: looking back at oneself

Standing in for both the viewer and 'the neoliberal subject,' the participant-subject of makeover television is constructed by several gazes. The gaze of the viewing-subject is dealt with in the second half of this chapter. What is more often analysed in makeover television

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26 Lewis, *Smart Living* p. 5

27 Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (2008). "Bad Citizens: the Class Politics of Lifestyle Television." *Exposing Lifestyle Television.* Ed. Gareth Palmer. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 16-24

28 Tracey Jensen (2010). "'What kind of mum are you at the moment?': Supernanny and the psychologising of classed embodiment." *Subjectivity* 3 (2), p. 180

29 See for example Gailey, "Self-Made Women."

is the gaze of the subject at herself, and the gaze of the expert. These two assessing, objectifying gazes constitute the surface of the subject's body as the site of evaluation and transformation, and render *visuality* the dominant mode of subject-production. To be visible, in makeover television, is to be intelligible, to be made meaningful through entry into neoliberal scopic regimes. The 'modern project of the self' discussed above is therefore one of reconciling the inner and outer, and reducing incoherency and increasing utility by working on the exterior. Corporeality is not abandoned, but aestheticised.

In a cultural-visual context that renders women's bodies as sites of otherness – as something *to be seen* and through that seeing, *understood*,[30] – it is little wonder that their bodies have become hypercommodified and "[available] as an object of evaluative gaze."[31] The female body is always in a state of "essential and immutable pathology," and as locus of identity and marker of usefulness (in terms of health, emotional well-being, age, and appearance) is permanently flawed and in need of work.[32] In makeover television, participant-subjects are encouraged to look at themselves from a stranger's perspective; to view themselves as incomplete, imperfect and lacking in significant ways, and, in doing so, come under obligation to make themselves available for dissection and reconstruction according to expert opinion.

Crucially, self-scrutiny is the foundational step in being responsible *to* the self,[33] in understanding the requirement of being an appropriate, disciplined subject; it is therefore a responsibility *of* the self, and it takes form in such varied arenas as parenting,[34] moving through public space,[35] and eating.[36] This is the advent of the increasingly "somatic self," the citizen-individual who governs oneself and is governed by transformations of the flesh: state and professional discourses of health, health promotion and risk management are central to the new biopolitics of the citizen-subject; as are mass media and everyday discourses of exercise, dieting, fitness and self-transformation. "Personal reconstruction" is

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[30] Anthea Callen (2002). "Ideal Masculinities: An Anatomy of Power." *The Visual Culture Reader.* Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. London: Routledge, pp. 603-616

[31] Tinknell, "Scourging the Abject Body," p. 85

[32] Tinknell, "Scourging the Abject Body," p. 84; Julie Doyle and Irmi Karl (2008). "Shame on You: Cosmetic Surgery and Class Transformation in 10 Years Younger." *Exposing Lifestyle Television.* Ed. Gareth Palmer. Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 90

[33] Palmer, "Introduction," p. 7

[34] Jensen, "What kind of mum?" pp. 170-192; Andrews and Carter, "'Who let the dogs out?" pp. 39-48

[35] Gareth Palmer (2003). *Discipline and Liberty: Television and Governance.* Manchester: Manchester UP.

[36] Cressida J. Heyes (2007). *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics and Normalized Bodies.* Oxford: Oxford UP, pp. 63-88

emphasised, and achieved by "acting on the body in the name of a fitness that is simultaneously corporeal and psychological."[37] For Foucault, the care of the self is a "true social practice" and first requires – coinciding with the development of particular knowledges such as medical knowledge – that one recognise oneself as feeble and subsequently in need of intervention.[38]

The idea that we must 'take care of ourselves' by working on or cultivating ourselves can be traced back to antiquity, but it shifts in meaning over time and across cultures, and is expressed in particular "procedures, practices and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected and taught."[39] As a social practice, the care of the self becomes implicated in the truth games of social, cultural and political regimes of knowledge/power. One knows *how* to pay attention to the self and the *reason* for doing so through dominant understandings of the self, ethics, and knowledge. As understood in current scholarship on makeover television, the genre is a modern version of a text such as Artemidorus's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which we discover clues as to what does and doesn't accord to nature, and how to care for ourselves. In makeover television, what is natural and right is established through visual signifiers of class, age, gender, and taste. Makeover television therefore acts as a distributive mechanism and domain of ethics and knowledges about how to manage the self through disciplining one's exterior.

Furthermore, the idea that "you must look at yourself, you must turn your eyes on yourself, you must never be out of your sight, you must always have yourself in sight" is not simply an observational or descriptive command but a *teleological* one, one in which we must also keep before our eyes "that towards which we are striving."[40] To gaze back at oneself, Foucault reminds us, is to involve oneself in a project of becoming. Thus, gazing back at the self – to critique or assess or even simply to *read* – involves internalised understandings of what people *should* look like, and to identify the lacks present in the self. In this way, gazes depend on the visual histories and symbols of subjectivity.

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[37] Nikolas Rose (2001). "The Politics of Life Itself." *Theory Culture Society* 18 (6), p. 18

[38] Michel Foucault (1986). *The Care of the Self: Vol III of the History of Sexuality.* Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, pp. 51, 57

[39] Michel Foucault (1994 [1966]). *The Order of Things.* Trans. Robert Hurley. Vintage Books, pp. 44-45; see also pp. 43, 239

[40] Michel Foucault (2001). *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982.* Trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Picador, pp. 217, 222

Makeover television therefore not only shows a participant-subject *doing* this gazing and transforming, but also, of course, reproduces dominant discourses of the self that contain edicts about how one ought to look. Normalising techniques and gazes make it just as easy to spot anomalies in the self as in the body politic; the participant-subject of a makeover show must therefore simultaneously internalise the need to identify with particular modes of the self, and produce that understanding in a process of externalisation or making-visible.

A participant-subject is known to be 'not good enough' through her habitus, body, self-image, and behaviours, all of which are positioned as deviance, and a barrier to happiness and success. Understanding this, she must agree that she needs to be rescued through the application of 'universal' aesthetic rules. This practicality and increased efficiency of goal-achieving combines with the apparent explosion of choice in consumer society and the reflexivity of the psy-sciences to create a moral imperative. If she *can* be (aesthetically) better, then she has a *responsibility* to. This moral requirement does not emerge solely from the moralistic tone taken by lifestyle experts (who use classed and gendered terms such as "tart" and talk to pre-madeover subjects with language such as "We saw these beautiful gardens...and then we saw *you;* really masculine and black")[41] but the demand by neoliberalism that subjects organise themselves appropriately. Disciplining the exterior becomes a working-upon of the interior, so that women with low self-esteem and difficulty finding work can labour on their appearance and transform their inner selves as well as their lives.

Self-gaze and self-transformation, in makeover television, are therefore implicated in a visual regime and logic in which the exterior stands in for the interior, and in which the exterior *must* be disciplined in order to create the right kind of subject. Similarly, the participant-subject stands in for other subjects, as *through* her makeover television provides a narrative of the produced self, a reassuring intervention into the chaos and contingency of contemporary capitalism. As was argued in chapter two, subjects are legible through sign-systems and norms that (to re-purpose Judith Butler) "exceed every dyadic encounter" of recognition, be it between two subjects or the subject and herself.[42]

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[41] Trinny and Susannah speaking to an eventual makeover participant on *Trinny and Susannah's Australian Makeover Mission* (2011). Season 1, episode 2. The Lifestyle Channel.

[42] Judith Butler (2005). *Giving an Account of Oneself.* New York: Fordham UP, p. 24

Makeover television intervenes in this excess with reassuring order, discipline and expert advice. Despite makeover television's pretence towards universality and ahistoricity, it therefore cannot help but call upon and make known the cultural-aesthetic categories that grant value to participant-subjects. It cannot but help interpellating its subjects into pre-existing systems of knowing themselves, and signalling that knowledge to others. Rationalised and organised under the rubric of pedagogy[43] to the viewer, the participant-subject is a worked-upon body; a vicarious process and voyeuristic spectacle, and an exemplar. Looking back at oneself is a complex optical and teleological set of processes, and makeover television renders it a moral command under a visual regime that prioritises the surface of the body.

Spectator-subjects and expert gazes

Participant-subjects who present themselves inadequately occupy not a neutral position but a deficient one. Those who do not represent their social competence on the surface of their bodies, such as by dressing "too sexily" (or not sexily enough) for their age, not only deprive themselves of the value of being appropriate but also practise a kind of pitiable self-deception, because they do not adequately know themselves, or how to insert themselves within extant networks of commodity meaning and value.

To simply be looked at is never a guarantor of legibility or recognition. Some parties, however, are invested with the authority to determine the rules by which legibility and legitimacy are granted. In makeover television the gaze – of experts, subjects, viewers – renders bodies texts themselves, implicated in games of truth, regimes of expertise and government. These body/subjects are divided temporally and spatially, carved up and valued, displayed to themselves and others as object, and ordered according to specific, historically situated discourses and fields of knowledge.

This subject-creation occurs through the kind of disciplinary power that "renders subjects hyper-visible" via techniques such as the examination.[44] Aesthetic and taste knowledges,

[43] In today's oversupply of commodities, amid the explosion of items in the marketplace with its complex interplay of taste, signs and capital requires intervention by experts, hence their pedagogical reification in lifestyle television. Lewis, *Smart Living,* p. 35. Pedagogy and expert arbitration therefore become essential modes of engagement with products and their symbolic capital.

[44] Heyes, *Self-Transformations,* p. 30

instead of psychiatric or criminological or bureaucratic knowledges, are the domains of disciplinary power in makeover television and operate *directly upon* the bodies of participant-subjects. Experts, who McCarthy calls the "interpellative mechanisms" of the text,[45] intervene to convert their apparently innate knowledge and cultural capital into mass-accessible products and advice, becoming the intermediary through which viewers benefit from specialised and superior knowledge, taste and skills.[46]

The gaze of the expert on makeover television is fixed on participant-subjects – it is their surveillance of *her* body and behaviour that triggers the narrative. As was argued in chapter three, we cannot assume some kind of uncomplicated transformative internalisation or even appropriation by audiences of the information or values about lifestyles presented on screen, as much as networks and L'Oreal might wish it were otherwise, and as much as programs might promote tips and tricks for audiences, or reproduce the material in magazines like *Better Homes and Gardens*. However, the moral and normative force of makeover experts, even where accompanied by playfulness and irony, order the visual phenomena of participant-subjects' bodies such that seeing occurs *through* the expert's eye, with an expert's aesthetic value-systems and epistemologies. Being able to recognise, for instance, a pear-shaped body, is dependent on this alignment of gazes and remaking of the visual field, as the below screencapture from *Trinny and Susannah's Australian Makeover Mission,* demonstrates.[47]

"What's wrong with my jeans?"

"They do nothing *for your shape."*

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[45] McCarthy, "Reality Television," p. 31

[46] Powell and Prasad, "As Seen on TV," p.112

[47] *Trinny and Susannah's Australian Makeover Mission*, Season 1 Episode 2 ("Canberra")

The processes of makeover television are not simply commands from a repressive apparatus of power, but a requirement that the visual field be ordered according to particular aesthetic codes. Makeovers must be internal and taken up as a project by the self on the self. Yael D. Sherman notes that neoliberalism requires that makeover subjects' "will and desire must be engaged," that subjects must be the progenitors and willing, albeit guided, authors of their own transformation.[48] Experts in makeover shows must therefore focus their attention on transforming the teleologies of their subjects, their understanding of how to care for themselves, through their tools and methods of expertise, from a typology of bodies and the clothes that best flatter them (Trinny and Susannah in *What Not to Wear* (UK, BBC Two/One, 2001-2010), to extreme cosmetic surgery (*The Swan* (US, Fox, 2004)).[49] Transformation all along this continuum is visual and performative.

The worked-upon subjects are in stark comparison to the various experts and hosts that populate makeover shows, who have an apparently innate talent for looking good. "There is no suggestion," writes McRobbie in her discussion of habitus and makeover television, "that the victims will ever belong to the same social group as their improvers."[50] "Television's personality system" emphasises ordinariness, accessibility and familiarity,[51] and we are encouraged to feel like we are on a first-name basis with our celebrity hosts and experts.[52] Nevertheless there remains a stark visual distance between participant-subjects and the stars and experts, that continues to link the participant-subject to her prior state of lack. As shall be seen below, this ineradicability of participant-subject's 'original state' is both a condition of and partial negation of makeover narratives.

Again here, the gaze serves to prioritise a subject's appearance, and locate her within a narrative of lack and presence, worthlessness and value, according to a demand for an improved and disciplined self. The participant-subject's body signals to the expert her inability to appropriately create herself as a neoliberal subject; in assessing, taking action, and then assessing again, the expert is essential to the unidirectional narrative of improvement, to the modern project of the self that current scholarship so closely identifies

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48 Yael D. Sherman (2008). "Fashioning Femininity: Clothing the Body and the Self in *What Not to Wear*." *Exposing Lifestyle TV.* Ed. Gareth Palmer. Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 52

49 Doyle and Karl, "Shame on You."

50 McRobbie, "Notes on *What not to Wear,*" p. 104

51 John Langer (1981). "Television's 'Personality System'." *Media Culture and Society* 4, pp. 351-365

52 Lewis, *Smart Living,* p. 13

with neoliberalism and makeovers.[53]

The expert is a crucial part of the operations and play of visibility and invisibility that make up the truth-games of lifestyle television, and more specifically and with even stronger prominence, makeover television. To render makeover images meaningful, viewing subjects and participant subjects must align the ordering of their visual experience with the expert's. This requires at the same time a looking-back at oneself that implicates subjects in teleological projects of the self.

Authentic inner selves

Makeover television legitimates its interventions by performing two interrelated services – both dependent upon making subjects a particular kind of visible. Firstly, as noted above, it is pedagogical, teaching participant-subjects and viewing subjects about commodities and how one ought to look. Part of this pedagogy is, of course, the narrative process of disciplining and transforming the surface of the body in order to be appropriately feminine. Sherman notes three common reasons women in *What Not To Wear* state for undergoing their makeover: to increase their self-esteem, which leads to greater agency; to find romance or keep a partner; and to present as a better worker, hopefully resulting in upward mobility.[54]

Ultimately, these reasons circle around again to the "essential subject," the "deeper" motivations of increased self-esteem, and the alignment of the surface with who the participant "really is inside."[55] Makeover television therefore ultimately performs the emancipatory service of liberating women from the shackles of their inappropriate or deceptive exteriors. Here again the show is required to make present what is absent, but instead of making the exterior anew, the show must bring forth something *true and fundamental* lying forgotten or unimagined at the centre of a subject.

Cressida Heyes argues that contemporary subjectivity is characterised by an understanding of a fractured, somatic self that must be made whole and coherent. Drawing on Wittgenstein, she identifies a "picture of the self" that "holds us captive": a picture of an inner, authentic

53 See for example Toby Miller (2008). "The New World Makeover." *Continuum* 22 (4), pp. 585-590; Oulette and Hay, "Makeover Television."
54 Sherman, "Fashioning Femininity," p. 58
55 Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, p. 100

self that must be made visible on the outer self.[56] Contemporary technologies of the self are therefore marked by their common function of representing an authentic interior on the deceptive exterior.[57] Of course, these processes of making visible a true inner self are necessarily productive of both inner and outer. As the participant-subject opens her body to the expert's and the viewer's gaze, it is read under the various signifying-systems and discursive formations that precede us and her. Spectatorship of televised images is, as this thesis has repeatedly argued, not neutral; it is an act of *creation*, of both subject and the object of sight.

Visibility and invisibility are again crucial. The producers of the show, the viewers, the experts and, not least, the participant-subject herself, all have stakes in making something *appear* on the surface of the body. Techniques for working on the subject locate around interlocking areas of expertise such as popular psychology, health sciences, management philosophies, and aesthetic authorities. Makeover television displaces government onto individuals through disciplinary techniques that cast freedom and choice as success in the "technical adjustment [of the self] in relation to the norm of the autonomous self aspiring to self-possession and happiness."[58] This also emerges in the increasing recourse to the psychologistic language of "self-esteem."[59] Invasive cosmetic surgery, for instance, becomes simply another technology of asserting the 'true' self,[60] of making the true self intelligible to the world, where previously it had been obscured by deficient bodies.

Experts are required, then, not simply to make subjects *beautiful* according to restrictive patriarchal beauty norms, but to bring the outside and inside of a participant-subject into greater harmony. This is a crucial distinction, argues Heyes, lacking in many treatments of makeover television.[61] A contestant on *The Swan* with severe burn scars, for instance, is transformed so that she can be liberated from her unrepresentative and marred exterior.[62] A

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56 Heyes, *Self-Transformations,* p. 15. Heyes also identifies a second picture to which we are beholden, in which power is sovereign, external, and imposed (challenged by a Foucauldian understanding of subjects as producing themselves in complex networks of power that operate laterally as well as vertically).
57 See, for instance, Heyes, *Self-Transformations;* Miller, "The New World Makeover"; Zylinska, "Of Swans."
58 Nikolas Rose (1996). *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood.* London: Routledge, p. 158
59 Tinknell, "Scourging," p. 84
60 Meredith Jones (2008). "Media-Bodies and Screen-Births: Cosmetic Surgery Reality Television." *Continuum* 22 (4), p. 519
61 Heyes, *Self-Transformations,* p, 37
62 Meredith Jones, "Media Bodies."

commitment to finding authentic selves also leaves constrained room for difference, with a small but comfortable space that nods towards ethnicity or aesthetic preference, such as a woman who would be uncomfortable in sexually revealing clothing: after all, what is required is the revelation and performance of a "true self."

This "dys-identity," this "inside to which no outside corresponds," is activated by the gaze of others, that critiques, objectifies and alienates.[63] It is also activated by the imperfect gaze of the subject, whose self-knowledge and self-reading is mediated by the screen of signs and can never be complete, can never fully encompass or transcend the visual systems and power relations that precede and constitute her.

In makeover television, producing a true stable self involves the contradictory requirement of a plastic, "endlessly flexible" subject.[64] Are participant-subjects lying, then, when they assert post-makeover that "it's very me"? Does it even matter? These assertions by the subject are required by the generic conventions of makeover television, deployed as part of a self-narration of coherency and authenticity, and proof of the success of a makeover intervention. We must be able to *see* inner selves. Where the standard account of makeover governmentality and discipline is one in which subjects' behaviours are managed in order to transform inner selves, a subject-oriented approach to makeover texts presents a co-existing picture of processes of subjectivity, in which disciplining visual techniques liberate an apparently already-stable inner self, who must be made available to sight. This chapter therefore complements current research on neoliberal subjectivities by exploring in greater depth the primacy of visuality as a neoliberal phenomenon.

Aestheticisation and the primacy of the exterior

Despite this need to legitimate the makeover process though telling it as a transformation of an inner self, a pull of the subject into the bright light of agency; and despite the recourse to talking heads as the participant-subjects acknowledge or resist constructions of their faults, it remains that reality television can only represent the exterior workings of the subject. It is no coincidence that makeover shows are about the appearance of people, gardens, and

[63] Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, pp. 26-27; Joanne Finkelstein (2007). *The Art of Self Invention: Image and Identity in Popular Visual Culture.* London: IB Taurus, p. 158

[64] Palmer, "Introduction," p. 9

rooms. These are objects from which experts can draw upon already-established patterns of aesthetic evaluation, and where transformation is easily shifted to surface processes that result in ostensibly dramatic change.

The success of this change draws on established norms of ‘failure’ and ‘success’ that are often circular, arbitrary or self-referential, and tied to pre-existing visual logics of class, gender, and aesthetic value. Success is defined by what the participant-subject *doesn't* have, but as the preceding discussion has indicated, lack usually interlocks with classed, gendered and raced systems of value. Strategies and modes of change are aestheticised through the ‘universal’ economic and aesthetic knowledges of experts and the ‘common-sense’ opinions of viewers (and people-in-the-street, as in *10 Years Younger in 10 Days*).

Being *seen* is a complex process that requires self-reflection and self-work. Exterior surfaces are thus privileged as the site of aesthetic evaluation and transformation, because that is where cultural identity and belonging are made visible.[65] To look respectable is to *be* respectable; ostensibly, here, hyper-visible signs of lower-class status are transformed to signifiers of neutral or better class status.[66] This strategy purports to erase markers of class distinction but results in their reinforcement and reduction to visual, aesthetic markers.[67] In makeover television, this phenomenon is expressed aesthetically, with processes of normalisation drawing on the visual regimes discussed above, that create a subject whose exterior, not interior, is privileged as the site of disciplinary work.

This reformative self-(re)making is a process that must be carried out in public and must be visible.[68] The body of the subject is here is not just one that is ‘trained’ through health and scientific discourse; it is one that is aestheticised.[69] The word aestheticisation is used here to indicate the reduction of inner and outer to the skin-and-cloth-surface of the body and its assessment via particular visual codes and aesthetic standards. Aestheticised subjects exist in a cultural and media context in which the visible is all that is accessible to the reformative and restorative gaze of the expert, where assessments of successful transformation are

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65 McRobbie, “Notes on *What Not to Wear,”* p. 102
66 Palmer, “Introduction,” p.4
67 Doyle and Karl, “Shame on You,” p. 97. Rather than, for instance, the area in which you live, or the school you attended.
68 Gilman traces this public visibility back to the Enlightenment. Gilman in Zylinska, “Of Swans,” p. 130
69 After all, notes Tinknell, to recover one's youth in these programs is an aesthetic project; not one in which the subject “joins a band, takes a gap year or abandons her children.” Tinknell, “Scourging,” p. 87

visible, and where particular aesthetics are linked to appropriate or inappropriate values of class or femininity. Participant-subjects are required to understand the relationship between surface and self as direct and uncomplicated, and to perform themselves and their transformations accordingly. An embodied experience of deficiency is embedded in the language used in the shows, which link external aesthetic states with internal subjective feeling: a woman *feels* ugly or misrecognised, which is why she has to get a makeover, regardless of how she looks.

Aestheticisation, then, goes hand-in-hand with the other modes and processes of visuality discussed above. Makeover subjects, both specific participants and more generally abstract subjects, are known to be deficient through expert and self-gazes, are transformed through visual processes of remaking, and are assessed again for their conformity to visual signifiers of neoliberal appropriateness. Makeover television creates a narrative of the improved self that comes to us in pictures of a subject bettered through examination of her surface, and requires forms of meaning-making dependant on particular scopic regimes.

In doing so makeover television requires a collapse of any distance between inner selves and outer appearances. The exterior – what is accessible to the eye, in the visual medium of television – may either betray or transparently reveal the inner; it is nevertheless the gateway to a 'true' transformation. This results in two opposing but complementary modes of making-visible:

1. Disciplining the outside to transform the inside; that is, making a subject happier, healthier and more competent.
2. Making an inner authentic self visible through transforming a deceptive outer self, that is, a self that fails to 'represent' identity authentically.

Visuality, self-gaze, and expert gaze are therefore key to both understanding and enacting makeover television's teleology of the subject. These are also key questions of subject-oriented textual analysis, as discussed in part one of this thesis, and lead into the remainder of the chapter on textual analysis.

Contemporary makeover scholarship casts makeover television as a highly politicised event in contemporary socio-economic and political organisation; these shows, it is argued, are essentially makeovers for contemporary subjectivities themselves, recasting them into neoliberal regimes of commodification and self-discipline. A subject-oriented textual

analysis links this activeness of texts to processes of visuality and spectatorship, that emphasise processes of making-visible and alignment of gazes. These themes are investigated more closely below.

Makeover Television

In contrast to the drama shows studied later in this thesis, reality television is ‘ordinary television’: ephemeral, everyday, domestic, high-rating, and low-status.[70] This does not, of course, indicate that it is politically insignificant. Exploding as it did onto daytime television (in the '80s) and primetime television (in the '90s), reality television gleefully utilised all forms of identity categories to both cross and reinforce boundaries of taste, quality, public/private, and, most fundamentally, reality/fiction.[71] The generic opposition between reality and fiction is of course a constructed one, bound up in other taste-value oppositions.

Realism in fiction, it will be argued in chapter six, is more prestigious, and is often seen to better represent ‘reality,’ factually and emotionally, than reality television. In turn, contemporary reality television, particularly makeover television, often abandons the documentary authority of news programs and fits its content into the familiar ebb-and-flow of three-act or five-act drama. As a subject-oriented textual analysis demands that we pay attention to form, the remainder of this chapter discusses further how the dramatic structure of makeover television's narrative and images reinforce the picture of the aestheticised subject as a project to be improved, drawing out processes of subject-production, visual history, and spectatorship, that are uniquely televisual.

The idea of making over an actual person as a mediated event[72] can be traced back to US women's magazines in the 1920s and '30s; in 1936 *Mademoiselle* magazine offered to make over an “average” woman, a well-received feature that became an ongoing part of the magazine.[73] This feature remains a regular item in contemporary ‘women's’ magazines such

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70 Frances Bonner (2003). *Ordinary Television*. London: Sage, pp. 1-4

71 Other prominent theoretical paradigms for discussing reality television are to look at unruly-ness (see eg Julie E. Manga (2003). *Talking Trash.* New York: New York UP); in terms of its redescriptions of social life (see for instance Palmer, *Discipline and Liberty;* McCarthy, “Reality Television”); or in terms of its fictiveness/factualness (see also: Arild Fetveit (2004). “Reality TV In The Digital Era: A Paradox in Visual Culture?” *The Television Studies Reader.* Eds. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill. London: Routledge, pp. 543-556

72 Of course, the trope of an overnight miraculous transformation is as old as stories themselves.

73 Miller, “New World Makeover.” p. 586

as *New Idea* and *Woman's Day,* relatively staid in structure and presentation: a celebrity or 'ordinary' person details the events of their transformation, the reason for it, and how they feel.

In noting this history of the makeover (as many texts do[74]) the transition to television seems straightforward, and indeed many tropes such as transformation, comparison, regularisation, personal attestation, and the appeal to experts, are retained across mediums and will be familiar to the makeover television viewer, as gazes open up and fold in the text and its subjects. However, the transition to television *is* transformative, and textual analysis must, this thesis argues, be sensitive to such transformations. Most significantly, magazine makeovers inevitably contain a before-and-after shot, but the layout of a magazine page permits examination of the before-and-after image before any initial engagement with the article. In television, it is argued below, the before-and-after shot is chronologically and narratively the crescendo or culminating moment of the text. Closer examination of various moments within the televisual makeover structure therefore allows a more nuanced understanding of televisual gazes and subjects.

Makeover televisual form

As has been noted we operate here under the rubric of governmentality, which Foucault reminds us requires a "relationship of self to self" in which "the partial...or total transfer of the gaze, of attention, of the focal point of the mind" turns around to focus on the self, thus constituting the subject as an "object and domain of knowledge."[75] This turning of the gaze is very literal in makeover television, and is constitutive of subjectivity in a way that makes the surface of the body the primary site of praxis.

This section therefore highlights the paradoxes and contradictions of makeover television, and foreshadows how those contradictions are expressed in the before-and-after image. As Gareth Palmer notes, makeover television reifies both the coherence and finality of *appearance,* as well as the labour and action of *process*.[76] Indeed, makeover television is full of contradictions that complicate its meanings. For instance, makeover television is

74 See for instance, Lewis, *Smart Living,* pp. 39-46
75 Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 252-253
76 Palmer, "Introduction," pp. 4, 5

demanding, critical, alienatory, “toxic,” “banal”[77] – but it is also pleasurable and empowering; it is about simulacrum, sign and commodity while “remaining utterly corporeal.”[78] It is about both depth and surface. As the below demonstrates, it is this inherently paradoxical core of makeover television that undermines the narrative of the subject that it, and the scholarship that critiques it, relies upon, while reinforcing a picture of subjectivity as beholden to spectatorship and visuality.

Makeover television does not use camera techniques that imply a point of view of a subject's interiority, as do many dramatic shows such as *Six Feet Under* (US, HBO, 2001-2005). This lack of access to the participant-subject's interiority requires visual epistemologies of transformation, whereby televisual images are interrogated for crucial signs of progress. In contrast to other makeover media such as magazines, makeover television aestheticises subjects in distinctively televisual ways. By folding her lived experience into a series of failed or successful performances of a failed or successful self through surveillance, talking-head attestations, discussions with experts, and the provision of her body for visual consumption, the initial stages of a makeover episode expose the participant-subject's lack. These moments must be examined for evidence of authenticity and make visible change, both by viewing-subjects and managing authorities within the show. In the final scenes, internal transformation is assumed to have occurred as the exterior is transformed: identity is “collapsed onto visual signs”[79] and the participant-subject can finally feel happy because they finally look good.

Makeover gazes

This making-visible of the subject is a fundamental operation of makeover television; a pantomime, performative logic that requires multiple gazes to prompt and fix its operations to the body: the gaze of the expert, the gaze of the participant-subject, the gaze of the camera and viewer. In this sense, Sherman argues, makeover television aligns with the doubled structure of femininity, where women are called to be the subject of their own surveillance.[80] In the below screencapture of the ‘makeover episode’ of *The Biggest Loser* (Australia, Ten

[77] Tincknell, “Scourging,” p. 83, Jones, “Media Bodies,” p. 515
[78] Jones, “Media Bodies,” p. 517
[79] Finkelstein, *The Art of Self-Invention,* p. 7, 163
[80] Sherman, “Fashioning Femininity,” p. 51

Network, 2006-present),[81] the framing and focus of the shot emphasises how the participant's happiness and successful self-transformation is only available through her gaze at herself and her expert's approving gaze. Viewers are similarly able to examine the surface of her body for signs of successful transformation. In doing so, they draw, as was discussed above, from a visual regime that aligns with the expert's.

Self-gazes

Bringing the phenomenal world under the normalising gaze of scientific knowledge (for Foucault and Rose this is of course the science of the school, the hospital, the prison, the psychiatrist; in this chapter we see the calculating and rationalising gaze of the aesthetic expert) involves a visual re-ordering, and an ongoing spot-the-difference exercise cataloguing the subject's "coincidences and differences from values deemed normal."[82] In makeover shows, participating subjects often figure this self-gaze via camera or mirror as both humiliating and empowering;[83] here, the distance of a second screen and the presence of an expert gaze that orders the visual data of the reflection, adds a gloss of objectivity to their self-looking. As was discussed in part one, this reading of an ostensibly objective or stable image is a writing of it, an organising of visual information into something legible according to pre-established codes. Through objectifying the visual logics and values of experts, mirrors and camera surveillance are crucial tactics deployed by makeover television to naturalise its narrative of the subject as a project to be improved through transforming

81 Season 4, Episode 52 (1 April 2009)

82 Nikolas Rose (1989). *Governing the Soul.* London: Routledge, p. 136

83 Sherman, "Fashioning Femininity," p. 53, 58

appearances.

Narratives of improvement

Narrative organises the flow and play of "multiple intensities of image and sound," hauling into line recalcitrant and disruptively fecund images. This organisation "defines terms...specifies relations and reflects a subject as the direction of those relations," limiting the scope of meaning of images, and channelling that meaning with purpose.[84] This is not to say, as the end of this chapter also argues, that narrative sediments meaning finally or ultimately. Narrative can only *be* to a viewer who can comprehend it; narrative cannot mean *anything at all*, it is true, but the most casual acquaintance with fellow television viewers tells us that televisual narratives usually mean multiple *somethings.*

Still, makeover narratives are remarkably stable and recyclable, with common features appearing across shows and sub-genres. The fundamental narrative, of course, is that during the episode a participant-subject is improved. In order to evidence this improvement the program must show its workings: the extremities that must be *resorted to*, and the chronological ordering of the improved subject. Episodes are therefore structured around the gaze and procedures of the expert knowledge and taste of the makeover technicians, and go through several stages.

Firstly, there is the initial encounter and evaluation of the contestant subject. This includes lengthy elaboration of the subject's lack and incompleteness portrayed through the expert's playful outrage or pity at the subject's misfortune, as she is "somewhat pathetic in [her] un-madeover state."[85] The participant-subject's history, family, and everyday life comes under examination as the subject's failings become apparent. She is made aware of the inadequacy of her attitudes, self-care, taste, skills, and body, all of which are problematised as objects to be studied and subjected to the operations of expert knowledge. This requires, it has been shown, an alignment of spectatorship, a self-gaze and a co-location of the eye with the expert's.

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[84] Stephen Heath (1977). "Film Performance." *Cine-Tracts 2* 1:2 (Summer), p. 9
[85] Jones, "Media bodies", p. 516

Fallen states

Makeover subjects initially submit themselves (or are nominated by family and friends) knowing that *something* is wrong with them, but it takes experts to articulate exactly what that is, and subsequently methods for restoration. The self is therefore a confluence of "fixable problems" that map to the domains of whichever experts are present on the day of evaluation.[86] In the above screen capture of *10 Years Younger In 10 Days*,[87] mirrors are used to align participant-subject and expert visual experience, establishing proof of the below-normal status of a subject's hair. The contrast between experts, who always look impeccable, and participant-subjects, who even in their transformed states cannot access the aesthetic status of their teachers, turns the hard-earned aesthetic, medical and trade knowledge of experts into discourses of natural taste, talent and style.[88] Such televisual images again serve to reinforce a narrative of the subject as an object to be improved through processes of visuality.

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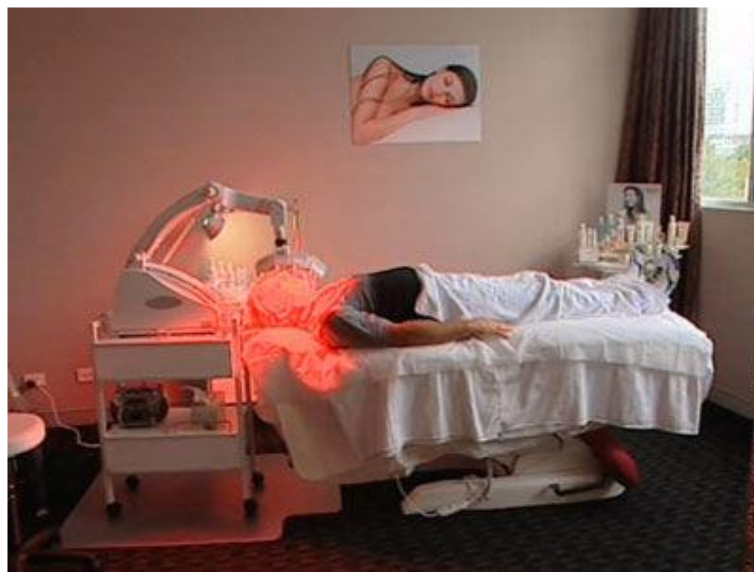
86 Lewis, *Smart Living,* p. 68. For instance, shows without a plastic surgeon on the expert panel never regard cosmetic surgery as an option; these shows, which tend to position themselves as an everyday resource for the everyday woman, such as *What Not To Wear*, resolve issues that could be projects for cosmetic surgery with haircuts, makeup, and flattering clothes.

87 Season 1, Episode 2, 28 April 2009

88 Deborah Philips (2005), "Transformation Scenes: The television interior makeover." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8 (2), pp. 214, 215, 217

Secondly, experts strategise, discussing tactics for improving the hair, the clothes, the beard, the skin, the hygiene rituals. Occasionally at this stage the programs employ photographic or computer generated technology to envision the processes in question. Here again the participant-subject becomes object, the blank text upon which experts trace their knowledge; sometimes literally, as in tracing the dots of plastic surgery across faces and stomachs, or metaphorically, as stylists hold up clothes to subjects' bodies, overlaying that which connected the subject to their past and specific circumstance with a fashion commodity. This planning stage again reveals the reliance makeover television has on visual representations of improvement.



Tooth-whitening procedure

Thirdly, we see the procedures of improvement as different experts divide up the participant-subject and fix what is wrong with their particular domain: this one takes her clothes shopping; this one performs a skin peel; this one cuts her hair. Subjects are shown getting suntans, surgery, or teeth-whitening procedures. This, once again, is an issue of spectatorship. Despite the corporeal material and consequences of these procedures, *seeing* is what is truly at stake in televisual makeovers. In order for redemption of the subject to be believable, viewers must have extensive access to the labour, capital and technology that has made it possible.[89] Paradoxically, the visibility of this labour, it is argued below, can bring dissonant and counterproductive meanings to the makeover narrative.

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[89] Tinknell, "Scourging," p. 90

Finally, we see the proof of the participant-subject's improvement through a series of reveals, and crucially, the before-and-after image. This is the climax of the episode, emotionally and narratively. Emotionally, it is demonstrated through the reactions of the subjects and their family in varying degrees of ambivalence, joy and catharsis. Narratively, it is the resolution to the underlying question driving the storyline: “what does she look like now?” Makeovers cannot function without this stage, in which viewers receive ostensibly objective proof of improvement. The experts, their expertise and their technologies must be evaluated and affirmed. Evidence of improvement therefore is not the experience or attestation of the madeover individual but is demonstrated by before-and-after comparison made available to the viewer's gaze; typically two images sitting side by side, or occasionally a literal overlaying of the after image on top of what went before. While dramatic tension hangs on the reveal of the new subject to those who know the old subject (including the viewing subject and the participant subject herself), it is this moment of summary and affirmation that allows the program to exist.

It may seem odd that makeover television needs internal justification at all, considering the ease with which much reality television locates its purpose in the realm of spectacle, voyeurism and humour, such as with *The Bachelor* (US, ABC, 2002-present) and *Duck Dynasty*. While spectacle is certainly a part of the attraction of makeover television, especially for extreme shows such as *The Swan* or *Extreme Makeover* (US, ABC, 2002-2007), the underlying narrative principle of makeover television is not a semi-scripted fly-on-the-wall documentary or a pure competition; at the heart of makeover television is a story about the reformation and restoration of the subject. The before-and-after shot is therefore a distinguishing and enabling feature of makeover television, and it is worthy of closer examination.

Before and After

Here,[90] in the before-and-after shot, the subject is presented for visual consumption and evaluation, divided chronologically into before and after, problem and solution, sad and happy, lonely and loved, bad and good, inadequate and normal. The narrative of improvement attempts to contain the subject within these easily-separated temporal and

[90] Stills taken from *10 Years Younger In 10 Days* Episodes 1 and 2, 21 April 2009, 28 April 2009

aesthetic moments. Ostensibly, what is achieved is restoration from a fallen state, so the "after" shot is the baseline of normal; the cut and dyed hair and plumped and botoxed face and styled and trained body, the disciplined subject/object, is what is natural and right, and revealing of the true inner self.

Before and after

More so than most televisual images the before-and-after shot calls to viewing subjects not just as its *raison d'etre* (all images need a viewer, after all) but as an organising principle; as Michael Ann Holly notes of Renaissance paintings that require a spectator to create the illusion of perspective, bringing a "scientific" understanding of space that renders line, shape and colour legible, the before-and-after shot is an "expression of a desire to see the world a certain way."[91] The before-and-after shot is the distillation of a sign-system, the purpose of which is to "produce the illusion of a unified, stable, safe subjectivity."[92] Viewing it is to recognise and enjoy the comfort of resolved contradictions, narratives of success and happiness.

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91 Michael Ann Holly (1996). *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image. Ithaca:* Cornell UP, pp. 49, 77

92 Teresa Ebert (1988). "The Romance of Patriarchy: Ideology, Subjectivity, and Postmodern Feminist Cultural Theory." *Cultural Critique* 10, p. 40

At the same time, however, this stability and closure is undermined and exposed as a construct. The before-and-after comparison is also intended to elicit an understanding of the corporeal workings of expert knowledge. During the episode, the processes and technologies of improvement are lingered upon, as the surface of the subject/object is actively worked upon by those with knowledge/power. At the end in being called upon to agree that one picture is good and one picture is bad, in employing our understanding of genre, narrative and aesthetic to make meaningful the highly charged binaries of this double image, we are forced to acknowledge the artifice of the narrative, the effort, trial and cost of expert intervention, the replacement of specificity with universality, and the contingency of the supposedly ordered and natural subject.

Before and after

Looking at the participant-subject after this moment of reveal is therefore an experience of palimpsest, where the memory of before, of underneath, destabilises the new and improved subject, and the program's projects of objectification/subjectification. While the program attempts to situate itself as a crucial moment of intervention, a present interruption of past and future, of an erasure and re-inscription, a discarding of a bad way and adoption of a new; where the program attempts to re-write the contestants' bodies and faces as signifiers of a universal, appropriate way to be, the before-and-after shot reveals the transformation as ephemeral and specific.[93]

Corporeal trauma such as surgery undertaken throughout the episode becomes here not

[93] Hearn, "Insecure," p. 503

invisible but *not-visible*, remaining known-of but unseen through much effort, masked by the re-written surface. Other corporeal events such as tooth-whitening or rhinoplasty remain hypervisible, and, indeed, *must* be seen, must be a marker of differentiation from "before." Repeated exclamations of difference therefore turn on themselves and force a search for what is unchanged, and what remains. As the viewer's eye moves left-to-right and right-to-left, this dual perception, as the re-written surface of the present and intended future cannot completely erase the knowledge of its artificiality and contingency and the memory of the past, therefore undermines the assumed naturalness, inevitability and rightness of the program's narratives of the improvement of the subject.

Both participant-subjects and the before-and-after image assert that the after-body is one in which inner and outer are finally in harmony: where an authentic inner self has finally been exposed to the eye. Cindy, the subject of a makeover, views her own before-and-after shots after extensive cosmetic surgery, and says: "well, I definitely like the new better. But seeing the old I'm glad that old is there too because it was, it was me."[94] Of course, as Butler notes, even in this self-narration, the terms "by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and others" are "social in character," emerging not from an originary subject but against a discursive field that makes only certain statements and ways of accounting for oneself meaningful.[95] The before-and-after image both argues for the naturalness and authenticity of the after subject, while at the same time revealing (as it must, or else the experts' labour was for naught) the artificiality of such remaking.

Similarly, far from making the cultural categories of class and femininity that hierarchically organise neoliberal subjects invisible and natural, the before-and-after shot calls upon them stridently in order to work. Heyes correctly notes that makeover television justifies itself with extensive attention to the hard, corporeal labour of transformation; however, it is less certain, as many scholars of makeover television assert, that this transformation is tacitly accepted by the viewer. Heyes suggests that in the same way as fairy-stories such as Cinderella, makeover television texts show "frightening transitions culminat[ing] in a stable perfection that bears no trace of earlier trauma."[96] This may be true of after shots alone; however, as the above discussion noted, makeover television relies on the dual nature of the

94 Jones, "Media bodies," p. 516
95 Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, p. 21
96 Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, p. 102

before-and-after shot, which is far from being "simple."[97] Televisual before-and-after images are a complex confluence of gaze, memory, labour, and sign that resist the standard account of makeover television as producing ideal neoliberal subjects.

What is ultimately made visible on the surface of the participant-subject's body, in her doubled before-and-after state, is as much a troubling state of plurality and vacillation as it is a neoliberal or authentic teleology of the subject. Where mechanisms of normalisation and governmentality might imply that epistemologies, ways of organising knowledge and understanding of the self are as important as ontology in constructing subjectivity,[98] a salient "way of knowing" in these programs must be this process and procedure, this chronological ordering of the subject into before and after, as a project in a concrete, visible, measurable progress towards betterment. Despite makeover television's specific strategies and ways of making the subject sensible, of constructing it as knowable and orderable, this palimpsest, where the "earlier connotations are not erased completely but continue to permeate"[99] reinforces a notion of subjectivity as always unfinished, partial, and non-linear,[100] as well as deeply indebted to systems of visuality and spectatorship.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the dominant way current scholarship 'writes' makeover television is as a process of gendered neoliberal discipline and governmentality in which the transformation of the participant-subject stands in for the transformation of the neoliberal subject in general. Here, the makeover program creates a vision of an appropriate subject through gendered and classed discourses, being both an expression of wider neoliberal demands for self-transforming subjects and an active agent in producing those subjects.

As was argued in part one of this thesis, subject-oriented textual analysis requires that we specify which subjects are at stake in analysis (the participant-subject, the viewing-subject, or the 'subject of neoliberal discourse'), and further, examine what processes of subjectivity

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97 Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, p. 102

98 Sonia Livingstone (1999). "Mediated Knowledge: recognition of the familiar, discovery of the new." *Television and Common Knowledge.* Ed. Jostien Gripsrud. London: Routledge, p. 101

99 Dorothy Bloom (2008). "Gender in/and/of Health Inequalities." *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 43 (1), p. 22

100 Lisa Blackman, John Cromby, Derek Hook, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Valerie Walkerdine (2008). "Creating Subjectivities." *Subjectivity* 22, p. 6

are relevant to the discourses of their production. A subject-oriented approach to texts directs attention to the ways in which visuality and subjectivity intersect. Makeover television, it was argued above, requires aesthetic or visual changes to be registered on the surface of the body, and focusing on these processes of making-visible distinguished two subjects: a deficient subject whose exterior must be disciplined in order for an inner transformation to occur, and a subject whose authentic inner self is betrayed by a defective exterior. These two contradictory but complementary pictures of the self overlap at the surface of the body, the site where transformations occur for our viewing pleasure.

The intense effort that goes towards making a subject visible in makeover television shows further demonstrates the central claim of this thesis: that that visibility is not natural, but productive of both subjects and texts, and implicated in wider social meaning-structures. For instance, the above discussion showed that to be meaningful, makeover television depends on forms of spectatorship and visuality that align with expert gazes.

The chapter also discussed the role of the before-and-after image, which is both the culmination of makeover narratives and their negation, troubling and pluralising the apparent stability of the perfected neoliberal subject. This argument is not intended to refute that many, most or all viewers might agree that ‘after is better,’ but to refute that the before-and-after image is ‘simple’ in any way. This reading of the image, in which the surface is held in tension with the narrative, goes some way to accounting for the inherent contradictions of makeover television, and its supposed neoliberal project of the self.

Cultural studies-inflected television studies – in particular, feminist studies – usefully highlights that subjectivity in a neoliberal socio-economic context is at stake in makeover television. Feminist analysis has long asserted the importance of spectatorship and performance in producing subjectivities, and this chapter contributes to such research by examining how specifically televisual ways of seeing and projects of becoming are implicated in meaning-making and subject-creation. Through its analysis of makeover texts this chapter was able to identify and re-examine the multiple subjectivities at stake, clarifying the interdependencies between visuality and corporeality. A subject-oriented textual analysis thus reveals that this genre of television, which appears so univocal and insistent in its production of subjects, contains a more complex picture of subject-production than we might otherwise realise.

5

TABLOID CURRENT AFFAIRS AND SUBJECTIVE IDENTITIES

Introduction

This thesis has argued that subject-oriented textual analysis can contribute meaningfully to television studies because it requires textual analysis that is able to sustain political aims and critiques. This is not to posit the subject as a shadow of politicised texts, but to acknowledge that subjects are indebted to systems of visuality, spectatorship, and subjectivity that precede them, and have social and political consequence and character. The current chapter therefore examines the capacity of images to be "active," legislating meanings about politicised subjectivities and viewer-text relations, through an examination of the genre of tabloid current affairs. The ways in which these subjectivities, or identity categories, are represented is a source of great interest and concern for media and politics scholars; however, their construction in tabloid current affairs has been undertheorised, as has the genre itself.

The previous chapter highlighted the way makeover television privileges visibility and spectatorship as the means and method of subject-creation. Visual transformations were integral to a narrative of improvement, and a visual re-presentation of the subject was part, it was argued, of televisual processes of subject-formation. This chapter, on two popular Australian current affairs shows, *A Current Affair* (9 Network, 1988-present) and *Today Tonight* (7 Network, 1995-present), also investigates the role of narrative and identity in subject-formation.

This chapter begins by introducing *A Current Affair* (herein *ACA*) and *Today Tonight* (herein *TT*) as part of a contemporary debate over the tabloidisation of journalism. These two long-running Australian television shows have been severely undertheorised in both television studies and literature on the politics of subjectivity. Politically, the meanings of *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight* appear to be obvious and stable, and when they are studied, are typically characterised as a distinctive form of "bad discourse" that may actively produce

"bad" citizen-subjects.[1]

Despite (or perhaps because of) the unusual activeness of these texts, as well as their ostensible status as public information programming, current scholarship remains concerned with the text's relationship to an assumed or imagined audience or political public. For some authors, the rise of "soft news" is linked to the devaluing of the public sphere, "failing to provide citizens the public affairs information they need to perform their role as citizens."[2] This chapter, it must be stated outright, is not intended to refute or deny the representational and political concerns of many of these critics. Such a significant feature of the Australian media landscape, however, deserves closer examination than it has received, with specific attention to how its images might operate.

The chapter therefore goes on to elaborate on textual form and contexts. Through their aesthetic, genre hybridity, and alignment with public service, it is argued, the shows' narratives of *us* and *them* raise questions of communal subjectivities: plural, public subjects generated in a wider context of nation and belonging. These belongings and identities are not, however, necessarily stable. Politicised cultural categories such as welfare recipient, it will be seen, can be invested with startlingly contradictory moral meanings. At times, even virtually identical images are used to signify opposite meanings. As in the previous chapter, the dominant "way of seeing" these texts and the categories of subjectivity they draw upon can gain more nuance when approached via subject-oriented textual analysis.

This approach, as was discussed in part one, requires us to look for processes of subjectivity, power relations, visuality, and intersubjectivity. The chapter finally therefore turns to an examination of how tabloid current affairs television texts construct subject-categories such as pensioner and battler; this is an examination less of individual subjects seen on screen, as with the previous chapter, and more on the ways in which viewers are called upon to make

[1] See, for instance: Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Fiona Nicoll (2006). "We shall fight them on the beaches: Protesting cultures of white possession." *Journal of Australian Studies* 30 (89), pp. 149-160. Graeme Turner (2005). *Ending the Affair*. Sydney: UNSW Press; David Price (2011). "Dole Bludgers and Battlers: Depictions of Unemployment on Mainstream TV." *Screen Education* 63, pp. 78-83; Damien McIver (2009). "Representing Australianness: Our national identity brought to you by *Today Tonight*." *Media International Australia* 131, 46-56; Gail Philips (2011). "Reporting Diversity: The Representation of Ethnic Minorities in Australia's Television Current Affairs Programs." *Media International Australia* 139 (May), pp. 23-31

[2] John Zaller (2003). "A New Standard of News Quality: Burglar Alarms for the Monitorial Citizen." *Political Communication* 20 (2), p. 110

these categories meaningful within an almost schizophrenically shifting framework of public service information.

A subject-oriented approach to textual analysis has been shown to necessarily involve a political dimension; that is, an understanding of subjects as embedded in networks of power and meaning that exist prior to them. The political significance and relevance of *ACA* and *TT* also lies in the way they require viewing-subjects to be empty containers, singular but embedded in wider and dominant patterns of Australian social being. Close attention to processes of visuality, form and subjectivity therefore allows new understandings of how tabloid current affairs television might operate, and its functions in the Australian political and media landscape.

A Current Affair and *Today Tonight*: Contents and Contexts

A Current Affair and *Today Tonight* are two of the most consistently-watched television shows on Australian television. In 2014, *TT* ceased broadcast in the eastern states to make way for a longer news bulletin, but it continues to exist and rate well in other states, marking 600 weeks at #1 in South Australia in April 2016.[3] While direct ratings numbers are dropping along with the ratings of most television shows, *ACA* and *TT* retain their relative status, dependably rating in the top ten – often top five – shows viewed each night, with *ACA* beating popular prime-time soaps and attracting between eight hundred thousand and one million viewers nationally Monday - Friday.[4]

The contemporary version of *TT* has been running in some form uninterrupted since 1995; *ACA* has been on the air since 1988, but its tabloid identity consolidated around the personality of Ray Martin in the mid-to-late 1990s. At various stages each show has broadcast local editions in major metropolitan centres; as of August 2016 *ACA* is a national broadcast presented from Melbourne by Tracy Grimshaw, and *TT* is broadcast in an Adelaide edition and a Perth edition, hosted by Rosanna Mangiarelli and Monika Kos, respectively.

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[3] David Knox (2016). "Today Tonight: 600 weeks at #1 in Adelaide." *TV Tonight.* Retrieved from <http://www.tvtonight.com.au/2016/04/today-tonight-600-weeks-at-1-in-adelaide.html> Last accessed 30 September 2016

[4] David Knox (2016). "All the drama of ratings week." *TV Tonight.* Retrieved from <http://www.tvtonight.com.au/2016/07/all-the-drama-of-the-ratings-week.html> Last accessed 30 September 2016

It is therefore unsurprising that *ACA* and *TT* have a large presence in the body of Australian television. A segment will often provoke a back-and-forth metacommentary in print media, breakfast or other current affairs television, and in later segments on the shows themselves.[5] These are particularly prevalent after the airing of a controversial segment such as Martin's feud with the Paxton family or Grimshaw's with Gordon Ramsay, fuelling an explosion of television, print and radio coverage, pushing the programs further into the national consciousness. Often *ACA* or *TT* will do an expose on the bad practice of its rival, or other shows or personalities on their rival's network, and strong criticism of their reporting practice is a regular feature of public broadcaster ABC's media ethics watchdog *Media Watch* (Australia, 1989-present).

Their formats are virtually identical, distinctive and familiar enough to provoke parody. The comedy show *Frontline* (Australia, ABC, 1994-1997), was a direct satire of the personalities and modes of reporting involved in *ACA* and *TT*; the show-within-the-show competed directly against *ACA* and *TT*. Similarly, news/sketch/commentary show *The Chaser's War on Everything* (Australia, ABC, 2006-2009) aired regular segments highlighting the absurdity and underhand practices of, particularly, *Today Tonight*, including one called "What have we learned from current affairs this week?" that mocked the methods and aesthetics of *ACA* and *TT* segments, reporters and presenters.

As the formats of *ACA* and *TT* coalesced into their current distinctive form, they have been accompanied by a narrative of decline. Amanda Meade, media columnist for *The Australian,* regrets that the shows, "[o]nce the stage for prime ministers to make big announcements, politicians to be grilled and legendary hosts Mike Willisee, Jana Wendt, Ray Martin and Peter Luck to look behind the news... now provide programming that gives viewers lifestyle, health, and financial advice in abundance," with regular stories on "back pain, shonky tradesmen, diets, plastic surgery, home renovations, budgeting and the ubiquitous neighbourhood dispute."[6] Similarly, Craig Mathieson notes that *A Current Affair* has

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5 See, for instance, Jen Vuk (2015). "Media attack on Paleo Pete leaves a bad taste that's more akin to sour grapes." *The Sydney Morning Herald.* 18 May: "Evans' latest pillorying comes to us from that bastion of social standing, *A Current Affair.*"

6 Amanda Meade (1999). "Tricks of the Trade: The cut-throat competition in current affairs / TV's tawdry affairs." *The Australian*. 22 April 2009; See also, Meg Roberts (2004)." The Mundane and the Frightening." *Australian Screen Education* 34, pp. 18-23. Christopher Scanlon (2004). "A Touch of Class." *The Age*. 17 April 2004

> long been defined by its bitter rivalry with *Today Tonight*, an endless cycle of competing promos, spoiler stories, and gotcha accusations that appeared to be fuelling a race to the bottom of the barrel at 6.30pm on weeknights…siblings, speaking a shared language of car park confrontations and miracle diets.[7]

In their move away from traditional investigative current affairs journalism (as typified in Australia by *60 Minutes* (Australia, 9 Network, 1979-present) and *Four Corners* (Australia, ABC, 1961-present), *ACA* and *TT* have developed a unique televisual form, marked by drama, repetition, partiality, and playfulness, elaborated upon in this thesis under the hybrid name of tabloid current affairs television.[8] In their prominence and joint singularity therefore, *ACA* and *TT* are integral and unique part of the Australian media landscape and thus worthy of scholarly attention in the field of politics and cultural studies.

Undertheorisation in current scholarship

Considering the consistent and ongoing narrative of decline that surrounds *ACA* and *TT*, it is perhaps not surprising that most scholarship on the programs – where it exists – understands them as a concerning evolution in the tabloidisation and commercialisation of news and journalism as a whole. Nevertheless, when discussing either current affairs television or tabloid journalism, scholarship on Australian politics, Australian identity, or Australian media rarely analyses these shows with any textual specificity; where they have, the focus has typically been on linking textual representations to Australian socio-cultural phenomena, such as Islamaphobia.[9] This is, as was discussed in chapter three, a central goal of cultural studies textual analysis and such work is essential to tracking serious social issues like Islamaphobia. Nevertheless, this focus, it will be shown below, misses other critical aspects of the shows' televisual form and the subjectivities it constructs.

Despite their prominence in the Australian media landscape there has been little scholarly attention given to *ACA* and *TT*. Unlike a more global brand such as *60 Minutes, ACA and TT* are located in distinctively Australian media contexts and narratives of personhood and

[7] Craig Mathieson (2014). "Last tabloid news show standing." *The Sydney Morning Herald.* 23 June 2014.

[8] Turner, Philips and Tanya Muscat use "commercial current affairs," but this thesis prefers "tabloid" as a way of emphasising its generic hybridity. Turner, *Ending the Affair;* Philips, "Reporting Diversity"; Tanya Muscat (2015). "Constructing the Nation Every Night: Hegemonic Formations in *Today Tonight* and *A Current Affair*." *Media International Australia* 155 (May), pp. 16-27

[9] Philips, "Reporting Diversity."

identity, regularly deploying "Australian" as a signifier of appropriateness and moral worth. Yet they don't appear in, for instance, the index of Elder's recent *Being Australian*; in a survey of how the

> simple phrase 'being Australian' has, as a result of decades of storytelling, myth-making, news reporting, academic pontificating, cinema production and watching, and more, become a recognisable shorthand way of expressing a certain conglomerate of desirable characteristics that are seen as unique to Australians,[10]

to have no mention of shows that invoke the phrase "Aussie battler" to the point of self-parody seems an oversight.

Popular and print discussions of the shows critique factual errors or opine on the controversies.[11] Where they are specifically mentioned in academic texts, they often appear briefly as limiters at one end of a continuum of current affairs television ("from tabloid-style programs such as *A Current Affair* through to such programs as ABC's *Lateline"*) or to discuss how another kind of current affairs show performs better journalism.[12] This folds the unique and fraught elements of *ACA* and *TT* into the wider label of current affairs television. However, as chapter three argued, attention to the specific televisual features of a show is crucial to understanding the processes of subjectivity implicated.

Unsurprisingly, the paradigm within which most academic work discusses *ACA* and *TT* is that of the tabloidisation of news media. Increased commercialisation has lead to shows that "thrive on exploiting the more trivial and frightening perils of the 'human condition'."[13] For instance, Meg Roberts worries that *ACA* and *TT* emphasise individual issues over structural ones: by showing an interview with a pensioner rather than investigating "the vulnerability of aged people in the media spotlight" the shows operate less as current affairs journalism and more as a kind of "cathartic outlet for those that feel helpless."[14]

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[10] Catriona Elder (2007). *Being Australian: Narratives of National Identity.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, p. 3

[11] See for instance Amanda Meade (2002). "Trivial Pursuits: Why Seven and Nine steered their flagship current affairs shows downmarket." *The Australian* 12 September. Meade, "Tricks of the trade"; Roberts, "The Mundane and the Frightening."

[12] Geoffrey Craig (2004). *The Media, Politics and Public Life.* Sydney: Allen and Unwin, p. 94; Frances Bonner and Susan McKay (2007). "Personalising Current Affairs without becoming tabloid: the case of Australian Story." *Journalism* 8 (6), pp. 640-656

[13] Roberts, "Mundane and the Frightening," p. 18

[14] Roberts, "Mundane and the Frightening," p. 21

This is of political consequence, it is argued, because it leads to a debasement of the important genre of current affairs television. In his book *Ending the Affair* Graeme Turner is concerned that *ACA* and *TT* fail to live up to the public service responsibility of, along with the news, "providing the information component of free-to-air broadcasting" which is a service "fundamentally important to a civilised democracy."[15] The question of current affairs television then becomes one of its death or potential future; of whether there are any bastions remaining to provide the essential democratic function.[16] The death of current affairs in general and the rise of these shows in particular therefore has a deleterious effect on society as a whole and "devalues the currency" of journalism.[17]

Where the *problem* is understood to be the slow death of current affairs and thus informed citizenship, the particular televisual qualities of the tabloid versions (such as partiality in a dramatic voiceover) become reasons to lament the existence of the genre as a whole, without analysis of how these markers might operate. Instead of understanding tabloid current affairs television as a hybrid or other genre, the programs remain under the label of current affairs television, albeit commercialised or degraded. Roberts' criticism extends to the corruption of current affairs journalism, investigative journalism, and journalistic ethic and practice. Jessica Raschke similarly notes how they are "notorious for making use of more underhanded production techniques to generate stories, such as hidden cameras, set-ups and chequebook journalism;"[18] these critiques are all also reflected in non-academic venues such as *The Chaser*.

Deconstructing and denaturalising representations – of cultural groups and of socio-economic organisation – appears as much in analysis of tabloid current affairs television as it does in other genres of television, and scholarly as well as print commentary of the ideological and investigative workings of *ACA* and *TT* is important. For instance, Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Fiona Nicoll deconstruct a 2006 *TT* segment on contested land to demonstrate the way the host Naomi Robson and the segment itself utilise racist discourse

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15 Turner, *Ending the Affair,* p. ix; see Patricia Holland (2006). *Angry Buzz: This Week and Current Affairs Television.* IB Taurus, for the same perspective on UK current affairs television.

16 Turner, *Ending the Affair,* p. 21; Vanessa Evans and Jason Sternberg (1999). "Young People, Politics and television current affairs in Australia." *Journal of Australian Studies* 23 (63), 103-109. Zaller, "A New Standard of News Quality."

17 Turner, *Ending the Affair*, p. 25-26

18 Jessica Raschke (2006). "Tabloid Current Affairs Programs and the Production of Meaning." *Australian Screen Education* 42, p. 95

to frame Indigenous parties as land-grabbers and a white couple as distraught property owners.[19] Similarly, Tanya Muscat's analysis of five segments featuring non-white individuals revealed that only two demonstrated positive constructions of non-whites.[20] Undoubtedly, such representations portray disadvantaged members of Australian society in an even more damaging way and deserve discursive deconstruction and strong critique.

Indeed, segments of *ACA* and *TT* regularly display controversial representations of many different social categories that deserve and invite rebuttal. As will be discussed below, the central narrative technique of the shows is the deployment of partisan and unbalanced narratives, which can easily provoke feelings of anger or injustice, be it at the content of the segment or the way in which that content is presented. This can render them unpleasant to watch, as Gay Hawkins notes in her strong criticism of tabloid current affairs television, which can make her "flick the 'off' button on the remote with rage."[21] In fact, the content of *TT* and *ACA* appears to be so grossly overdetermined in the receptive register that there may seem to be little interpretive or analytic work to be done except to mark the ways in which they construct "bad" subject categories.

As was mentioned in chapter three, this concern over the effects of negative representations of vulnerable groups is an important central strand of television studies and cultural studies research. Here, these concerns link to media studies and political communications critiques over the tabloidisation of news and current affairs media. The textual features of tabloidisation, therefore, are seen as intrinsic to their lamentable representational strategies and their construction of politicised subjectivities. For instance, Muscut performs close discursive analysis of several segments on individuals from ethnic minorities by identifying production and communicative elements drawn from Ian Connell's 1979 list of elements of news production.[22] Undeniably her results are concerning regarding the negative portrayal of non-white individuals and groups. Nevertheless, such an approach can fail to consider the context of these segments within the episode as a whole and its generic placement within the Australian media landscape.

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19 Moreton-Robinson, "We shall fight them on the beaches," pp. 158-160

20 Muscat, "Constructing the Nation."

21 Gay Hawkins (2001). "The Ethics of Television," *International Journal of Cultural Studies,* 4 (4), p. 414

22 Muscat, "Constructing the Nation," pp. 19-20

The cultural studies focus, therefore, on politicised representations of class, race, gender, and other points of difference runs the risk of diminishing other vectors of analysis. To only understand *ACA* and *TT* as *bad* current affairs targeting the vulnerable is to sideline much of the texts and their operations. As in the case of makeover television in the previous chapter, the meanings of these shows appear simple and obvious; however, recalling that spectatorship is as critical a factor in meaning-making as interpretation, even overdetermined meanings can be of interest to textual analysis. The ways in which the various metatextual and aesthetic strategies of the shows (such as how they position themselves as a public service or their emphatic graphics) corral the meaning-making process is crucial to understanding how they operate at the levels of subjectivity, visuality, and spectatorship.

Certainly, textual analysis is made more difficult by the fact that the content of *ACA* and *TT* is extremely fleeting; airing five nights a week, almost every week of the year, with only a fraction being archived on program websites,[23] content is both extremely ephemeral and extremely repetitive, as though it were overwriting itself nightly. However, while the similarly ephemeral genres of news and talk shows have long been objects of study in the field,[24] tabloid current affairs television as a genre is still undertheorised both as a form of Australian media and as a window into Australian personhood or subjectivity.

Apart from news, soaps, and talk shows, ordinary, everyday television is often ignored by television scholarship because of its ephemerality and repetition. Intertwined with the rhythms of everyday life such as preparing and eating meals, and lacking glamour, focusing on the domestic and mundane, featuring people *just like you*, this kind of television nevertheless occupies an important epistemological register, emphasising the similarity between the world of the viewer and the worlds of the programs.[25] Unlike "quality television" such as *The Wire* (discussed in the next chapter), which can be viewed and re-viewed rewardingly and is archived on DVD or other media for easy access,[26] *TT* and *ACA* virtually disappear after broadcast, creating further challenges for textual analysis.

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23 Some recent content is archived on the programs' websites, in increasingly incomplete and abridged form as it ages, to make way for the latest stories. See, for *Today Tonight:* http://www.todaytonightadelaide.com.au or www.7perth.com.au/view/today-tonight and for *A Current Affair:* http://aca.ninemsn.com.au/

24 David Gauntlett and Annette Hill (1999). *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge, p. 52

25 Frances Bonner (2003). *Ordinary Television*. London: Sage, p. 44

26 Mark Jancovitch and James Lyons (Eds.) (2003). *Quality Popular Television.* London: BFI

However, as this thesis argues, an approach to textual analysis that understands texts as existing at the confluence of subjectivity, spectatorship and meaning-making permits a reading of these difficult texts that is sensitive to their form and content while situating their meanings politically. For instance, this very partisanship and overdetermination, it is argued below, is a generic feature that contributes to their construction of multiple and plural points of spectatorship and subjectivity. As tabloid current affairs is relevant to Australian media studies, politics and identities, textual analysis of these shows fills a significant gap. The subject-oriented textual analysis of the remainder of the chapter therefore asks questions about the nature of spectatorship and visual history of the genre's images, processes of subjectivity and meaning-making. At the heart of the tabloid current affairs television mode of address, it is argued, are delocated and shifting constructions of communal subjectivities.

Tabloids and the public sphere

The visual history of tabloid current affairs television intersects with its generic history across media. As a descriptive or generic term, "tabloid" indicates the intersection of populism or anti-elitism, commercialism, journalism, and the everyday.[27] The tabloid qualities of *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight* are an unignorable generic feature. As was indicated above, other tabloid media forms, particularly print media, have been granted rather more scholarly and critical attention. Following the basic ideological-democratic themes seen above, it is rooted in criticism of British print media such as *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail,* which sensationalised or wholly fabricated news, and focused on celebrity and scandal. In television, early popular versions of the format such as US show *Hard Copy* (US, Paramount Domestic Television, 1989-1999) incorporated tabloidisation with headlines such as "LITTLE WENDY SEX SLAVE" and a focus on salacious sex and crime stories incorporating nudity and violence.[28] In contrast, making their alignment with print tabloids and international versions less relevant, and highlighting the need for specific televisual analysis, *ACA* and *TT* rarely display overt sex and nudity, extreme sensationalism, or explicit violence; this is, it is argued below, due to their place within the programming schedule, their claim to public service, and their need to encourage viewer identifications.

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[27] Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (2008). "Introduction." *The Tabloid Culture Reader.* Eds. Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 1-4

[28] Turner, *Ending the Affair*, pp. 52-53

Tabloid approaches to news have occasionally been celebrated for – but are more typically accused of – loosening journalistic codes of truth and ethics. As a highly visible sign of the commercialisation of news, tabloids are central to the debate over information "by the people" vs. "for the people", which is to say, the debate over media, commercialisation and democracy.[29] As Simon Jenkins notes, in the eyes of critics journalism has always tended to suffer in comparison to a lost "golden age" of times past, unsullied by conflict or commercialism.[30] Nevertheless, current affairs programs are held to have a particular significance for citizenship, and their apparent tabloidisation is a concern for many. For instance, in Sarah Baker's overview of New Zealand current affairs television, increased commercialisation corresponds to a withering of the public broadcasting remit, leading to the "death of a genre."[31] Similarly, Annette Hill argues that it is critical for current affairs television to not be tied to commercial interests: the quality of a nation's current affairs television, she says, is a measuring stick for the healthiness of its public service broadcasting.[32]

Scholarship, argues Graeme Turner with respect to tabloid and popular radio, must find a way to grapple productively with the ethical questions raised by the commercialisation of media.[33] Indeed, the very content of *TT* and *ACA* pose problems for standard ways of analysing news media. Many segments are about products and services, to the extent that their product can be called "as much the product of public relations and publicity as of journalism."[34] While these segments of the shows do not receive as much scholarly attention as their more overtly political ones, this focus on commodity purchases and home life introduces the further generic hybrid element of lifestyle shows, which was discussed in the previous chapter. However, again the segments do not map perfectly to lifestyle narratives and features; those that are not more straightforward product-placement retain their justification as public service, revolving more around effectiveness "road tests," whereas

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29 Laurie Ouellette (1999). "TV Viewing as Good Citizenship? Political Rationality, Enlightened Democracy, and PBS." *Cultural Studies* 13 (1), pp. 64, 67

30 Jenkins in Bob Franklin (2008). "Newszak: Entertainment versus News and Information." *The Tabloid Culture Reader*. Eds. Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 14-15

31 Sarah Baker (2007). "The Death of a Genre?: Television Current Affairs Programmes on New Zealand Public Television." *Communications, Civics, Industry – ANZCA2007 Conference Proceedings*.

32 Annette Hill (2007). *Restyling Factual TV.* Oxford: Routledge, p. 229

33 Graeme Turner (2008). "Ethics, Entertainment, and the Tabloid: The case of talkback radio in Australia." *The Tabloid Culture Reader*. Eds. Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 67-68

34 Turner, *Ending the Affair*, p. 10

lifestyle television proper has as its driving force "philosophies of living,"[35] shifting the meaning of products from their utility to their role in narratives of "lifestyle."

Other scholars, framing tabloids more as a mode of popular entertainment, note tabloid journalism's privileging of the anti-elite and everyday. In this sense their public service is as much about maintaining moral borders in everyday life as about providing the public impartial information. In the Netherlands, argues Mark Deuze, Dutch tabloids seem to "serve as the guardian of civic morality."[36] This blurring of the boundaries and functions of public service means that tabloids are a "prime example of a popular medium where one cannot draw a meaningful distinction between 'information' and 'entertainment.'"[37] Tabloids are thus a threat to the supposed impartiality and public-service-oriented character of 20th century journalism. Similarly, *ACA* and *TT* make strong internal claims to legitimacy by constructing themselves as for and by the people, providing a valuable public service.[38]

This debate, as Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn point out, exists in a Reithian media ecology in which entertainment-value signifies a lesser form of programming.[39] Some scholars attempt to rehabilitate the reputation of tabloid journalism on its own terms. Henrik Ornebring and Anna Maria Jonsson note its status as the *other* of elite, investigative journalism. Tracing the development of journalism in the public sphere, they discuss the ways originally discredited practices like the interview have become standard elite procedure, historicising the normative values of modern journalism and leaving space for the alternative methods of tabloid reporting.[40] From the point of view of producers, it is a matter of public service to allow consumers to have an influence in what they want to see:

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35 Tania Lewis (2008). *Smart Living: lifestyle media and popular expertise.* New York: Peter Lang. p. 43

36 Mark Deuze (2005). "Popular journalism and professional ideology: tabloid reporters and editors speak out." *Media, Culture and Society* 27 (6), p. 876

37 Deuze, "Popular journalism," p. 861

38 It is worth noting that the very term "public service" is contested, particularly in the context of media and television. As Eric O. Clarke argues, processes of publicity (that is, "the socialisation of private persons into participatory citizens,") are held in tension between ideals of public communication and cultural identity, and the role of the media and the state in shaping it (Clarke (2000). *Virtuous Vice: Homoeroticism in the Public Sphere*. Durham: Duke UP). See also, Richard Collins (2004). "'Ises' and 'Oughts': Public Service Broadcasting in Europe." *The Television Studies Reader.* Eds. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill. London: Routledge, pp. 33-51. As will be seen below, public service from the point of tabloid media producers aligns less with a Reithian mandate of social and personal improvement and more with a) the commercial democratisation of "giving people what they want," b) being guardians of public mores and etiquettes, and c) investigatory exposés of local corruption or malfeasance.

39 Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (2004). "The Especially Remarkable: Celebrity and Social Mobility in Reality TV." *Mediactive* 2, p. 46

40 Henrik Ornebring and Anna Maria Jonsson (2004). "Tabloid Journalism and the public sphere: a historical perspective on tabloid journalism." *Journalism Studies* 5 (3), 283-295

"a public service should aim to give the majority of the public what the majority wants to see," argues a *This Week* producer.[41]

When comparing "good" and "bad" contributors to the public sphere, Alan McKee notes, form and function are as much at stake as content. Linear narrative, which as discussed below is a strong feature of *ACA* and *TT* segments, is typically eschewed in traditional news reporting.[42] Similarly, sensationalist news, that relies on spectacle and is broadcast widely, is opposed in cultural hierarchies to a more ostensibly neutral and insightful news content delivered to a smaller audience with values in common.[43] Because the media is an arena in which "social, cultural and political identities are continually posited, negotiated and dissolved," media sources are significant contributors to a contemporary Australian political landscape, in which identity categories are highly politicised and cast into value hierarchies while permitting the nation to maintain the shape of a tolerant liberal pluralism.[44]

Democratising and commercialising the public sphere, Catherine Lumby argues, has pluralised and diversified public voices and forms of speech; to pretend that the public sphere is the sole purview of the state or public institutions is to misread the form and function of the sphere itself, to be "haunted by a mythical public zone; a zone of transparent and rational communication between equals."[45] Indeed, the traditional conception of the public sphere has always excluded certain categories of people and forms of communication and representation. In addition, an opposition between high public culture and low private culture also maps onto other problematic binaries: affective, bodily pleasures vs. mental stimulation; active vs. passive; normal vs. deviant, and more.[46]

Whether cast as a positive diversification or a negative debasement, the fact of a text existing "out there" in the ether of the public sphere can, it has been seen, be counted as contributing to the good or bad health of the public sphere itself, and the health of its citizen-subjects. This chapter does not attempt to resolve such debates, but to complement them through a textual analysis of the genre of tabloid current affairs television. Such analysis, it is hoped,

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41 Peter Black in Holland, *Angry Buzz,* pp xvi-xvii
42 Justin Lewis in John Tulloch (2000). *Watching Television Audiences*. London: Arnold, p. 189
43 Alan McKee (2005). *The Public Sphere: an Introduction.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p. 105
44 Catherine Lumby (1999). "Media Culpa: Tabloid Media, Democracy and the Public Sphere." *The Sydney Papers* Winter 1999, pp. 119-120
45 Lumby, "Media Culpa", p. 119
46 McKee, *The Public Sphere,* p. 105; see also Clarke, *Virtuous Vice*

can inform further discussion.

As *ACA* and *TT* sit at the centre of these debates over the meaning and purpose of the public sphere, it is worth investigating them more thoroughly. While Australian political science has rarely, as Murray Goot recently argued, prioritised media as an object of research,[47] subject-oriented textual analysis casts all media as inherently political, and provides a methodology for investigating political subjectivities. It also forces attention to form, requiring that analyses deal with televisual texts with nuance and specificity. The genre hybridity noted above is exacerbated, for instance, by the ways in which *ACA* and *TT* retain and modify traditional current affairs television generic features such as the seated interview, the investigative mode of journalism, and graphical overlays. This chapter turns now to a closer examination of how these generic features, and the form, aesthetic and content of *ACA* and *TT* operate, highlighting the way they construct politicised subjectivities and manage processes of spectatorship.

Form and Content

Part one forwarded the argument that meanings are not simply embedded or withdrawn from televisual images, but emerge in the interplay between spectatorship, subject-formation, and wider sign-systems. To read an image, it was argued, is to write it, but within systems of visuality and power that precede meaning-making subjects. For those who advocate a "return to form," television studies is in need of methodologies that "[refigure] our potential relationship to the programmes we know and love;" that is, finding ways to "consider television programmes as art, not just artefacts."[48] While granting some room for the "lower" forms of television such as soaps, however, this approach does not leave us with much of a foundation for analysing the "bad" texts that are anathema to aesthetic judgement.

Nevertheless close textual analysis of "bad texts" such as *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight*, with an orientation towards scopic subjects, can reveal startling textual properties and socio-political dynamics. These emerge from broader socio-cultural contexts, and it is essential to relate form to such variables. As has been seen, despite the development of *A*

[47] Murray Goot (2009). "Political Communication in the Media." *The Australian Study of Politics.* Ed R.A.W. Rhodes. London: Palgrave McMillan, pp. 173-185

[48] Sarah Cardwell (2006). "Television Aesthetics." *Critical Studies in Television* 1 (1), p. 78

Current Affair and *Today Tonight* out of traditional current affairs television and their generic label of current affairs, they operate discursively and generically as something very different from traditional current affairs. This section therefore discusses the ways in which schedule, aesthetic, content and narrative combine to create texts with exceedingly strong *internal* claims to public service, but changeable foci of justice and value.

Schedule

David Gauntlett and Annette Hill's 1990s study of how television was received in the home emphasised the importance of the schedule, routine, and everyday life to television viewing.[49] *ACA* and *TT* occupy a critical place in the weekday television schedule. For many years they competed directly opposite each other in the 6:30pm slot, immediately after their respective channels' nightly news and before primetime entertainment. Recently, *ACA* shifted to 7pm to make room for an extended news broadcast, nevertheless remaining a bridge between news and lighter entertainment. Indeed, on both channels, the news and the show following it are intertwined to the extent that the host of the current affairs show teases the upcoming program during the news broadcast. Conversely, near the end of *ACA* the newscaster will break in to recap the day's news highlights. The presenters of *ACA* and *TT* also appear in their respective channels' promotions of their 'news teams'; Tracy Grimshaw, says Channel 9, is part of the respected team that brings you the hard-hitting issues of the day, asserting her program's public service function.

ACA and *TT* therefore occupy a borderline place in the schedule that reflects their genre hybridity and critical function within a network's programming strategies, providing an important bridge between the traditional news of 6pm and the night's following primetime drama and light entertainment. Scheduled after *TT* every weeknight is the long-running popular soap *Home and Away* (Australia, 7 Network, 1989-present); after *ACA* comes, typically, reality programming, from makeovers to talent shows, as well as police reality such as *RBT* (Australia, 9 Network, 2010-present).[50] Positioned as they are, *TT* and *ACA* domesticate the evening ahead, smoothing the transition from serious to fun and from work to home. This blended space of serious/light entertainment often coincides with the preparation of the evening meal and allows viewers the chance to reposition themselves, to

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[49] Gauntlett and Hill, *TV Living*, pp.52-79. It also raised concerns over increasing tabloidisation of news.

[50] Sitcoms such as *The Big Bang Theory* are also regular stablemates.

know themselves again as domestic subjects.[51] Within an episode, this flow is typically replicated as the shows begin with issues-based or investigative (news) stories, shifting to lighter, lower-stakes stories of celebrity and product advice at the end.[52]

As a consequence of the programs' position in the daily schedule, segments must find different material than the traditional news. Craig McPherson, executive producer of *Today Tonight*, said in 2002 that following the news broadcast means that they cannot do too many repeats of news stories or "behind the news"- style segments because "the audience generally don't like repeat news stories or elongated news stories at 6:30pm; their time is valuable."[53] Here lies another point of difference with traditional current affairs, further indicating the need to discuss these shows as something other than *bad* current affairs.

Ray Martin laments that a search for higher ratings has driven the programs into "soft" news,[54] and *ACA* and *TT* have indeed gradually become detached from the news agendas of the day, with little intent to impact the understanding of current news issues. While segments are introduced as having relevance to topical concerns such as power prices or the budget, these are repetitive to the extreme and often contain only tenuous links to the day's issues. Where the news is marked by the appearance of the foreign and unfamiliar, *ACA* and *TT* float more freely, redefining "current affairs" around what could easily be labelled entertainment themes, and creating stories around familiar everyday subjects such as minor illnesses or community events.[55]

Aesthetic

Scheduling continuity with the evening news is just one of the generic tactics deployed by both shows that attempt to position the programs in the tradition of public service. Sitting behind a desk, with their styled hair and well-fitted suits, Grimshaw and the *TT* hosts[56] appear of the same breed as their newscaster counterparts; the set is similarly bathed in the blues and reds of a news setting, and video screens preview the upcoming story, providing a title and grainy picture that sets the segment's emotional and factual context.

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51 John Corner (1999). *Critical Ideas in Television Studies.* New York: Oxford UP, pp. 88-89
52 Meade, "Trivial Pursuits"
53 Meade, "Trivial Pursuits"
54 Martin in Roberts, "The Mundane and the Frightening," p. 20
55 Turner, *Ending the Affair,* p. 33
56 As of September 2016, Rosanna Mangiarelli in South Australia, and Monika Kos in Western Australia.

"Bad Bev" ACA 24 April 2015 (pixellation added)

In keeping with established modes of current affairs journalism, however, the experience is more personalised: there is never the anonymous bustle of a newsroom behind Grimshaw or the *TT* presenters, for instance. The reporters of *ACA* and *TT* are cast as investigatory journalists of the lone crusader mould, often deploying the generic features of news and tabloid journalism on content it is not designed for, such as a new line of kitchen appliances by supermarket giant ALDI.[57] Despite this, the tone of segments, particularly those eschewing an "expose" angle, is often light-hearted, ironic, or playful.[58] When embracing this mode of address – for instance, standing in a graveyard while talking about the impending transfer of wealth from baby boomers to younger generations[59] – we could understand *ACA* or *TT* as embodying a more populist or postmodern aesthetic compared to modernist-rationalist bourgeois "High Journalism."[60] However, *ACA* and *TT* never cross the line into the kind of relaxed, comedic light-entertainment current affairs seen on shows such as *The Project* (Australia, Network 10, 2009-present) or *The Weekly with Charlie Pickering* (Australia, ABC, 2015-present).

The shift towards the "entertainment" end of the "news entertainment" spectrum also makes more investigative techniques available to reporters: for instance, their increased use of the (once) ethically-suspect hidden camera, which exploits "television's capacity for dramatic

57 "Budget Appliances" *ACA* 22 March 2016; reporter Erin Mitchell's voiceover, accompanied by a soundtrack of serious strings: "Recently it was announced that home improvement store Masters would soon be winding up, leaving a hole in the hardware and appliance market."
58 "Own a Drone" (*ACA* 1 July 2016), for instance, features a camera-equipped drone crashing into a bride and groom: the voiceover says, *"oops!"*
59 "Youth Debt" *TT* 8 January 2015
60 Matthew C. Ehrlich (1996). "The Journalism of Outrageousness." *Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication* Monograph 155, p. 15

visual exposure and revelation."[61] For Turner, the use of methods rejected by traditional journalism requires increased reliance on credibility of hosts such as Tracy Grimshaw.[62] In contrast, it is argued below that in the particular case of *ACA* and *TT* the credibility of hosts and reporters is supported less by the appearance of journalistic integrity, and more by the narrative moral force of the segment being viewed at the time.

Content and narrative form

The world is rendered knowable on *ACA* and *TT* under several moral-epistemological domains; these are conveniently summarised on the *Today Tonight* website as "Public Affairs, Lifestyle, Justice, Finance, Entertainment."[63] An episode will typically consist of four or so segments, with a "special investigation" into a matter of "Public Affairs" or "Justice," and a shifting selection from other categories of story. "Special investigations" deal with community issues that bear the most similarity to traditional current affairs, and due to this resemblance it is these segments that often attract the most attention for being controversial or bad journalism. This narrow focus can lead to reduced attention to equally important operations of the texts.

Content is often driven by its promotional potential and producers will start devising promos before the story is completed and submitted for broadcast.[64] Commercialism drives many segments, which often function as extended advertisements. Furthermore, content is often related to other properties of the parent company, or serves as advertising for content on the channel: coverage of an AFL scandal, for instance, leads to Mangiarelli urging Adelaide viewers to see the game later on the same channel.[65] Socio-economically, in contrast to the makeover television discussed in the previous chapter, it is less easy to identify a political-economic perspective such as neoliberalism that informs *ACA* and *TT*. In different segments, for instance, the shows will advocate first increased and then decreased public spending.[66] However, themes of aspiration and battlers abound.

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61 Turner, *Ending the Affair*, p. 14
62 Turner, *Ending the Affair*, p. 14
63 Categories of segment listed on Today Tonight website <http://www.todaytonightadelaide.com.au > accessed 2 October 2016. These categories demonstrate an even stronger claim to public service than categories featured in previous years; in 2015 the website listed "special investigations, retail deals, celebrity interviews, cooking, beauty and health [and] money."
64 Meade, "Trivial Pursuits"
65 "Adelaide's Footy Bombshell" *TT* July 9 2010
66 See for instance "Welfare Check" *ACA* 13 May 2015 vs. "Hold the Phone" *ACA* 21 May 2015

Crucially, a central tactic of *ACA* and *TT* is the construction of a hero/villain narrative, where the hero is always the underdog. Damian McIver notes the prominence of the "battler" identity category in *TT* and the way it is deployed to give meaning to a narrative about, for instance, the artist Pro Hart, who is pitted against the "art-world mafia."[67] The moral and normative force of these segments is impossible to miss, from the overt (stamping "loser" over a still image of a villain), to the just as overt (voiceovers such as "pensioner Rob Roberts is screaming for help"[68]), to still very overt (music cues signalling danger, drama or humour).[69]

This underdog versus villain structure extends even in to the less narrative or investigative segments such as consumer advice segments, grouping viewers into the underdog category. A segment on an iPhone application developed to help drivers find out if a parking inspector is near their parked car, adopts a slightly playful tone that nevertheless asserts the right of *you*, who has been "forking out millions of dollars every year" to "turn the tables" on the parking inspector – shown lurking in the distance, or refusing to be interviewed. The reporter invokes a larrikin community spirit to justify using this application and situates it in the cultural history of meter maids. The application (despite being developed by an American) signifies as a moment of traditionally Australian underdog-ness, all the better to embrace the product. There is no nod to civic responsibility except for a brief talking head where a person in local government allows that the practice is not illegal.[70] Visually, aurally, and narratively, every element of the segment is heavily loaded with meaning-value designed to encourage enthusiastic agreement, even with regards to such an inconsequential topic and product.

While all news and current affairs journalism draws on cultural resources and narratives to make sense of the chaos of human action,[71] it is this overloading, this overdetermining of the final meaning, that gives *ACA* and *TT* a unique televisual form and separates them from their more-or-less tabloid-y current affairs counterparts.

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67 McIver, "Representing Australianness," p. 49

68 "Retirement Residents Under Siege" *TT* 9 July 2010

69 Muscat, "Constructing the Nation," p. 20

70 "Parking Meter App" *TT* July 8 2010

71 James Ettema (2010). "News as Culture." *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism.* Ed. Stuart Allen. London: Routledge, p. 295

No More Excuses ACA 2 January 2015

Through narrative tropes, archetypes, and resonances that "provide story forms within which events can be organised, recounted and understood,"[72] *ACA* and *TT* link temporaneous events to eternal myths and modes of meaning-making. This enables them to return to the same story subjects over and over. The same story elements – of an ongoing story, such as in the case of the Paxton family's shift from victims to villains, or in the case of twin sisters used first in a more positive story of their reunification and then in a more negative story on their involvement in a polyamorous relationship,[73] or of similar topics, such as with the cycling segments discussed below – can be reconfigured with different meanings, purposes, and tone, shifting easily between warning, comedy, tragedy, and investigation. What is consistent is a claim to newsworthiness or public service, and that directs the moral and narrative force of the segments with little regard for ideological consistency, making unanchored use of subject-categories.

Alignment with public service

Crucially, *ACA* and *TT* never transition wholly into magazine-format light entertainment shows about products, celebrities and everyday home and community life such as *Better Homes and Gardens.* Despite their constant construction of and appeal to values of common-sense, domesticity, and ordinariness; and their use of humour and familiar personalities, segments such as those on family health, celebrities at home, makeovers, and cooking, and lifestyle aesthetics such as warmly-shot cooking or interview segments, *ACA* and *TT* retain

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[72] Ettema, "News as Culture," pp. 289, 295

[73] Turner, *Ending the Affair,* p. 63; Catherine Lumby (1999). *Gotcha!* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, pp. 135-136; Muscat, "Constructing the Nation," p. 21

a notional alignment with public service broadcasting.

Without this generic alignment, *ACA* and *TT* might face a legitimacy crisis, or shift wholly into lifestyle television. Instead, news journalism and current affairs journalism continue to power the narratives of many segments, and the way in which they are introduced and summed up by the hosts. For Turner, this "devalues the currency" of journalism, as journalism becomes a "means of spuriously legitimating the excessive representational power available to a hybridised genre of entertainment...[defending] the tactics of the program as fundamentally democratic."[74] Certainly, shows cast themselves as performing a democratic function in their focus on the local and immediate, as opposed to the international and far-reaching stories of *60 Minutes* and *Four Corners.* This is justified discursively (through narrative and aesthetic) as public service, as being relevant (nay, essential) to local community and family lives. Investigative pieces expose dangers to individuals, families and neighbourhoods, while consumer advice segments help you manage your family's finances more responsibly. The internal strength of this "journalistic currency" is critical to the *us versus them* positioning discussed below.

"Now He Wants Welfare" ACA 9 March 2015 (pixellation added)

Indeed, the sheen of public service is retained even in segments that are essentially advertisements for a consumer product: the new iPhone app; the bra without underwire; the best brand of orange juice.[75] Similar rhetorical and semiotic tactics of lack and fulfilment are used as appear in the advertising that lives within the demarcated ad breaks (segments can even contain excerpts of those advertisements). Nevertheless, existing under the rubric of public/news service, these segments turn on lines of social justice or personal need. Women

74 Turner, *Ending the Affair,* pp. 25-26

75 *ACA* 8 June 2010; *TT* 8 July 2010; *ACA* 29 May 2015

are rightfully concerned about the appearance of age lines on their face, but the global financial crisis means that botox and other invasive procedures are out of the question, and alternative products are required.[76] Labelling could be hiding the true content of the orange juice you and your family are drinking, exposing you to poisons, sugars, or old and unpleasant concentrates: brands must be analysed and compared.[77]

This rhetoric of public service allows a repositioning of the segment not as crass commercialism but as something that has a legitimate place in a current affairs broadcast, and it is similarly deployed in other kinds of segments. Those extending over several nights on the breakup of a famous couple are introduced with the reporter nodding to reflexivity and the cultural significance of celebrity.[78] Others concern themselves with health, *caveat emptor,* and consumer advice stories, intervening in the exploitation of the public by exposing the truth of falsely-labelled sourdough bread[79] or the fine print of gift cards.[80]

In this way, *ACA* and *TT* invoke journalistic ideals as legitimating, at the same time as abandoning central practice such as impartiality. Like many critics of the genre, Raschke is concerned that viewers of *ACA* and *TT* cannot tell the difference between these programs reflecting and constructing public interest,[81] a distinction that relies upon a traditional understanding of journalism's civic and democratic importance (and an assumption that traditional news did not also construct public interest).

Beyond the condemnation of such water-muddying, this chapter is concerned with how such hybridity operates in the meaning-making encounter. The extraordinary imperative with which the segments in *TT* and *ACA* are pushed as public interest and important viewing means that viewing-subjects *must* have a stake in them.[82] A close analysis of tabloid current affairs television visuality, therefore, reveals an extremely active text. Below, this chapter explores further how this constant imperative and structuring of spectatorship implicates subject-categories and processes of communal subjectivity in shifting moral narratives of *us* and *them*.

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[76] *ACA* 26 August 2009
[77] *ACA* 29 May 2015
[78] *ACA* 13 July 2010
[79] *ACA* 12 July 2010
[80] *TT* 9 June 2010
[81] Raschke, “Tabloid Current Affairs,” p. 96
[82] “Tune in tomorrow for the information that every parent needs to know,” for example.

Changeable meanings, changeable subjects

The section above outlined several production forces that influence the unique narrative and aesthetics critical to the meaning of *ACA* and *TT* segments; below, attention to processes of subjectivity and political identity categories reveals constantly shifting alignments and identifications.

As was noted above, great lengths are taken to situate the meanings of *ACA* and *TT* in the context of news and journalism. In order to turn information or footage on supermarkets or pensioners or hooliganism into a story answerable to the ideal of public service, producers draw on the organisational factor of community. Structurally, this results in an *us versus them* narrative. Voiceovers especially contain many features that loop viewing subjects into an *us*, such as:

1. Groupings that rhetorically include viewers ("the Australian people firmly believe"[83]; "you the taxpayer"[84])
2. Appeals to sympathy and imaginative place-taking via imagination ("imagine waiting for almost two decades for public housing"[85]; "imagine what it would feel like to be hit by a 100kg cyclist"[86])
3. Emotive and dramatic phrasing ("she was high on life; he was high on ice. He beat her and she begged him to stop."[87])
4. Overt construction of an underdog narrative ("The little guy" versus "the powerful developer"[88])

Kaja Silverman describes the use of the pronoun *you* in Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* as an interpellation, summoning the viewer to community before she gives permission.[89] This familiar discursive/rhetorical strategy implicates the viewer or reader in meanings and groupings outside of her control.

Such identifications are constructed forcefully by the modes of address iconically employed

[83] "No more excuses" *ACA* 2 January 2015
[84] "Now he wants welfare" *ACA* 9 March 2015
[85] "Houso Scandal" *ACA* 26 May 2015
[86] "Two Wheeled Hoons" *ACA* 11 May 2015
[87] "Killers on Ice" *ACA* 20 May 2015
[88] "Fight for your Rights" TT 8 July 2010
[89] Kaja Silverman (1983). *The Subject of Semiotics.* Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 51

by *ACA* and *TT*. Switching constantly between second person and first-person plural, Tracy Grimshaw, the *TT* presenters, and reporters in nearly every segment, dictate the concerns and preoccupations of the viewing subject. “I'm very disappointed,” says a parent concerned over supermarket chains' labelling of fruit juice; “and so are we all,” agrees Mangiarelli when the segment ends.[90] Following a discussion of poverty, the host of *ACA* faces the audience and asks, “are we going to leave that door closed, or are we going to offer some real help?”[91]

MvIver argues that this *us* is quintessentially Australian, invoking narratives and myths of the battler, the country, and the “Aussie,” and regularly using Australian vernacular such as “fair go” and “mate.”[92] This familiarity and casualness of language is also due to the shows' scheduling, easing the formality and distance of news broadcasts into a light entertainment primetime. Furthermore, as a program that airs nationally, *ACA* is often careful to avoid too much local information in its segments; taste-test families are “Australian” families, not “Melbourne” families. As shall be seen below, however, the ubiquity of labels such as “Aussie” and their deployment in a great variety of situations tends to destabilise such apparently rigid cultural categories, strengthening the container while emptying it out.

By way of comparison, a different light factual entertainment show, *Bondi Rescue* (Australia, Network 10, 2006-present), also utilises a familiar conception of Australianness. It is complex, shifting and historicised, but the formal and ideological properties of *Bondi Rescue* nevertheless render the mythical category of Australian relatively stable and coherent.[93] *Bondi Rescue* deploys hegemonic visions of Australian masculinity, mateship, bodies, play and family; its setting is the familiar borderland of the beach that needs to be patrolled. Because it is situated on Bondi beach, opposing or contrasting masculinities that appear on the beach are generally (overseas) tourists. Emma Price notes that reality television such as *Bondi Rescue* perpetuates identity categories such as “Australian” through visuals and narrative (such as the beach, action, white heterosexual masculinity). Here, “the representation of Australian identity at work” is “the perpetuation of a cultural simulation

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90 *TT* 7 July 2010

91 “Struggle Street” *ACA* 14 May 2015; in terms of genre hybridity, this is a collusion and community-making that is more typically found in glances to the camera of recent fly-on-the-wall sitcoms such as *The Office*, *Parks and Recreation,* and *Modern Family.*

92 McIver, “Representing Australianness,” p. 48, *passim*

93 Emma Price (2010). “Reinforcing the myth: Constructing Australian identity in Reality TV'.” *Continuum* 24 (3), pp. 451-459

[and] a constructed performance within negotiated television conventions."[94]

In contrast, the content of the performance of "Australian" or "battler" on *ACA* or *TT* is far less fixed, and the formal properties of the shows discussed above render the content of the cultural categories they deploy far more incoherent. These shows often lean heavily on a number of familiar categories of person: "battler" and "Aussie" are some of the most prominent. However, "Aussie battler" is not a stable social figure in the same way that "Aussie man" is on *Bondi Rescue*, but a function of narrative; whosoever is positioned as the underdog for the purposes of the segment becomes the "Aussie battler" for viewing-subjects to identify with, including even Muslim families.[95]

In this way, the plurality of *us* is significantly large, limited only by the self-selection inherent in television viewing.[96] As Christopher Scanlon notes:

> Terms such as battler and aspirational are solid enough to tap into basic human emotions and experiences, yet sufficiently inchoate that people can flesh them out with their own expectations. The people tagged with such labels may be worlds apart socially, economically and culturally, but they conjure into being the idea that we all share a common world-view and set of expectations, while leaving blank the details of what make up that world-view and those expectations.[97]

As constructed in *ACA* or *TT,* a battler could be a person who has been a taxpayer all their lives ("they're the aging battlers who've worked hard but who live on the breadline")[98] or someone who has never been employed ("Is it right to target the battlers?").[99] Similarly, pensioners are just as liable to "rort the system" as they are to be victims of it,[100] or to be morally evil or morally innocent.[101]

These empty categories can intersect in complex ways if the segment's narrative demands it: within the space of a week on the same show a "drug user," even a person who uses drugs

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94 Price, "Reinforcing the myth," p. 451
95 Muscat, "Constructing the Nation," p. 25
96 Sometimes even self-selection is not possible; not everyone has equal power over the remote.
97 Scanlon, "A Touch of Class."
98 "Pensioner concessions" *TT* 15 May 2015
99 "Welfare Check" *ACA* 13 May 2015
100 "Bad Bev" *ACA* 24 April 2015, "Welfare check" ACA 13 May 2015
101 "Greedy Granny" *ACA* 2 June 2015, "Wendy's battle" *ACA* 20 February 2015

while pregnant, can be a battler and deserving of sympathy against a larger socio-economic field of disadvantage; or a drug user can be person of pure evil, whose drug use is never mentioned in a wider social context.[102] A battler can be stoic or teary-eyed, young or old, poor or well-off. Even the modifier "Aussie," which is regular outside of the context of *ACA* and *TT,* is not a necessary condition for a good or evil narrative; "battler" can apply, for instance, to migrants, refugees, and tourists.[103] What *matters* is that Grimshaw or the reporters intone the words over a picture. The category "battler" simply serves to position the subject in relation to the moral and epistemological message of the story.

Grimshaw and the *TT* hosts are tasked with the difficult duty of linking these disparate themes and moods between segments, connecting the unconnectable with a now familiar series of facial contortions and soundbites. These gymnastics were highlighted when *The Chaser* created a segment called "Anna Coren's segue of the week," making infamous such attempts as "Brian Seymour [reporting here on a fraudulent investment company], as authorities try to unravel the truth about FinCorp. To do that, they wouldn't want to rely on Hollywood, whose stars lead real lives that often have little resemblance to their public image."[104]

These segues serve to draw a direct line of meaning between the themes and moods of each segment, positioning viewing-subjects as complicit in a communal moral throughline despite moments of contradiction within each episode. The overdetermination of meaning of *ACA* and *TT* therefore means that the viewer-subject here is not singular; she is always being called upon to recognise her place in a constantly shifting, multilayered system of same and other.

To make these overdetermined texts meaningful is to construct oneself as bounded and boundary-less, particular and universal, static and malleable. As was discussed in chapter three, the representational investigations undertaken by cultural studies and media studies analyses, such as those by Muscat, McIver, Philips, and Hawkins, come to textual analysis with the goal of co-locating textual representations and social phenomena such as

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102 "Struggle Street" *ACA* 15 May 2015; "Killers on Ice" *ACA* 20 May 2015

103 "Refugees" *TT* 7 July 2010, "Welfare check" ACA 13 May 2015; Muscat, "Constructing the Nation," p. 21; Philips, "Reporting Diversity," p. 26

104 *TT* 30 March 2007

multicultural negotiations of identity. This is valuable work; however, such an approach to textual analysis struggles to fully describe the complexities of *ACA* and *TT* as texts, and, consequently, with processes of subjectivity and meaning-making. Similarly, the political-cultural focus on topics such as minority identities and public spending debates leads to diminishment of segments and textual qualities that are equally important to the nature of the shows.

As chapter two argued, spectatorship is not neutral but productive of both subjects and texts. It is significant, therefore, that the spectator-positions of *ACA* and *TT* are chaotic and plural. Each segment, each night, each week, calls upon the same *us*, and proceeds to load *us* with different content. For instance, the 22 May 2015 episode of *ACA* covered dashcam crashes, hip operations, children abducted by their parents, and an Australian celebrity's investment losses.[105]

Subject-oriented textual analysis directs us to ask questions of subject-production, visuality and intersubjectivity. The rhetorics of community in tabloid current affairs television are therefore notable and reveal incoherent meanings and identity categories that are nevertheless highly politicised and appear to have significant import. What, that is, is the character of "us", the Australian viewing public? Within the space of a half-hour program, *I, we* and *you* is the subject *qua* consumer, *qua* constituent, *qua* victim, minority, majority, taxpayer, homemaker, mother, grandfather, boss, employee, road-user, holiday-maker, movie and television fan, health nut, sports nut, technology nut, silly videos nut, and so on, and on, and on.

The whiplash mood shifts and content dissonance experienced every few minutes provides another opportunity to discursively construct a new spectator-position. Every element of the show describes members of an *us*, a community, but *us* is another empty category that fills with whatever rhetorical construction fits the purpose of the segment. *Today Tonight* and *A Current Affair* therefore constantly construct an epistemology of community that invests sides of whatever convenient boundary with moral force: inside/outside, male/female, able/disabled, worker/boss, taxpayer/non, native/immigrant, white/of colour.

105 *ACA* 22 May 2015

This is not something that accumulates over time, but switches rapidly and repeatedly. Within the space of three days in May 2015, for example, *A Current Affair* constructed two opposing narratives around the topic of cyclists and road safety. “Two-Wheeled Hoons” (11 May 2015) featured cyclists as “aggressive” road users who broke the law and threatened the safety of pedestrians and drivers. Two days later, a family, and the show's journalists, made emotional pleas for drivers and pedestrians to be more careful and bicycle-aware after their father was killed by a driver (“Hit and Run” 13 May 2015). Both of these stories turned on issues of public safety, and through sensational dashcam footage, expert testimony, emphatic voiceovers, emotion, and other audio-visual-narrative strategies forcefully legislated meanings available, through their moral iconic framework of ‘good’ versus ‘bad.’[106]

However, it is crucial to emphasise that these moral lines are not set in stone. “The underdog” or “the battler” is a character précis that indicates a moral-narrative function but remains otherwise incoherent and inconsistent over time. Meaning, it must be remembered, does not lie “in” the image. For instance, an interview featuring the cyclist Gabby Versalo, who was severely injured in a cycling accident, was used to make a point about cyclists in danger (“Vicious Cycle” 23 April 2014) and about dangerous cyclists (“Two-Wheeled Hoons” 11 May 2015). For these segments, *A Current Affair* reused the same talking head, photographs, and video to create two mutually exclusive narratives and categories of person.

This narrative and political incoherence can be difficult to incorporate into a conventional political science or cultural studies analysis, in which textual representations support or resist hegemonic constructions of identity. Despite regular scholarly and popular condemnation of their divisiveness or political regression, there are occasions when the expected narrative of a segment shifts. A story about community violence that invokes categories like “ethnic” and “migrant” ends up granting significant time to spokespeople for those minorities.[107] Villains and heroes are explicitly identified by the segments, and constructed regardless of how political scientists might generally characterise their relationship to larger social structures of power; the constant requirements of these shows for a moral point of view is constrained by the vagaries of whatever material they can source under compressed production schedules, and forecloses the possibility of any consistency.

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[106] Dueze, “Popular journalism,” pp. 875-876
[107] McIver, “Representing Australianness,” p. 53

For instance, *ACA* and *TT* are notorious for categorising people living on welfare as dole bludgers and taxpayer burdens.[108] However, in a 13 May 2015 segment on *A Current Affair* titled "Welfare Check," a great deal of time is given to journalists and community leaders to explain in detail why funding cuts adversely affect people on welfare; the work-for-the-dole scheme is called "questionable"; and people who are struggling are given substantial time in talking heads, elaborating on cycles of poverty and disadvantage. This is all tremendously unsubtle, accompanied by the usual heavy-handed production values, voiceovers and graphics, and in a lengthy interview, a church leader says, "[i]n lots of ways battlers and people I work with all the time are demonised by everybody...often I feel I'm all alone...I know I'm not! I know a lot of people watching aren't [judgemental] like that."

Less than ten days after "Welfare Check," these very same power relations and identity categories rearrange into a narrative casting welfare-recipients as villains.[109] Similarly, *ACA* aired a segment critical of the ways in which the SBS show *Struggle Street* (Australia, 2015) is shot and marketed as 'poverty porn,' ruining people's lives;[110] what was critiqued were the exact same kinds of shot *ACA* uses to generate curiosity and revulsion in its own segments.[111] "We don't want to be portrayed as TV characters who are going to be judged for light entertainment," says one interviewee, in a segment on how *Struggle Street* demonised her community; three weeks earlier, *ACA* had used almost identical shots of a community to condemn welfare-recipients.[112]

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[108] Price, "Dole Budgers," p. 79; Hawkins, "The Ethics of Television," p. 415
[109] "Hold the phone" *ACA* 21 May 15
[110] "Struggle Street: What's next?" *ACA* 14 May 2015
[111] For example, "Caravan Hell" *ACA* 16 April 15
[112] "Centerlink: Medical Scam" *ACA* 24 April 2016; "Struggle Street: New Suburb" *ACA* 18 May 2016

"Centrelink" ACA 24 April 2016

"Struggle Street: New Suburb" ACA 18 May 2016

Divorced from narrative and surrounding images, these stills might appear to carry the same meanings and objectifying scopic relations. However, as was discussed in part one, meaning is not embedded in and extracted from televisual images, but emerges in the viewing encounter; in the case of tabloid current affairs television, these meanings are forcefully legislated by textual properties disallowing polysemy or ambiguity.

Laurie Ouellette notes that in the 1970s in the US, public broadcaster PBS actively positioned itself against commercial networks through discursive strategies designed to construct citizen-subjectivities along rational-democratic lines.[113] In contrast, the discursive strategies of *ACA* and *TT* are designed to engage with the schizophrenic selves demanded by late capitalism, where from moment-to-moment the best and most logical consumer choice could either be a generic supermarket brand ("Super Saving Mum") or the most expensive brand ("OJ Tested"), depending on how the segments intersect with other categories: in the

[113] Ouellette, "TV Viewing as Good Citizenship?" *passim*

former, with thrifty mothers; in the latter, with socially-conscious mothers.[114]

The viewing subject is thus one who is deeply invested, as a matter of public service, self-interest, and basic morality, in the importance of artisan bakeries and the treachery of supermarkets that do not sell authentic sourdough (*ACA* 12 July 2010) *as well as* in and the vital and family-saving necessity of bulk shopping at Costco (*ACA* 15 July 2010). In *ACA* and *TT,* the lack of pretence to journalistic impartiality, but the retention of the moral force of public service information, constructs subject-positions out of politicised identity categories, and rhetorically and discursively enforces scopic relations aligning viewer subjectivities with whoever happens to be the victim. Any destabilising discomfort is immediately neutralised with a quick segue, a commercial, and a celebrity break-up palate cleanser. Memory is neither expected nor required in the tumble to the next five-minute segment. In that sense, this is the Derridean endless play of signification – there is no essential referent or signified but an endless deferral of meaning. It is the system, the structure that generates meaning.[115]

Hawkins argues that the moral force of tabloid current affairs television is less an "ethical exploration and instruction" and more "categorical moral imperatives...insisting that [their] moral standards are universal, natural, transcendent, shared by every decent Australian."[116] However, she does not recognise that these moral norms are, to a large extent, emptied out, retaining only the *structure* of a moral code. There is no internal ideological consistency or moral framework in a show passionately advocating both expensive, artisan products and cheap, bulk, home-brand products, or in labelling the same people welfare cheats one night and battlers the next night. The ideology of the show is not rendered stable, as might be expected, under the rubric of journalistic balance or even the commercial imperative. The legitimising background and structure of public service creates a uniform *tone* and *moral narrative* of us vs. them/good vs. evil, but does not demand coherency of content, or coherency of subjectivity.

Lumby argues that an increased diversity of voices, and the dissolution of public/private boundaries, leads to increased attention to, for instance, issues of domestic violence that

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[114] *ACA* 19 May 2015 and 29 May 2015
[115] Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics*, p. 32-34
[116] Hawkins, "The Ethics of Television," pp. 415-416

might otherwise be excluded from the traditional liberal Western public sphere.[117] Certainly, tabloid current affairs is a part of this diversifying of the public sphere, and scholars who focus solely on traditional political communications or cultural studies representational categories may be missing much of how these programs operate and the ways in which they construct subjectivities. At the same time, however, it is difficult to deny that these programs deploy representations and narratives that, for instance, vilify welfare recipients. Such normative and “universalised” identity categories become clear features of the contemporary political landscape through a “taken-for-granted”-ness, an obviousness and ahistoricity that appears natural, that is partly constructed through the media, and deserves to be critiqued through politically informed textual research.[118]

This chapter's subject-oriented textual analysis has shown that the difficulty of assigning tabloid current affairs television's place on a spectrum of good/bad high/low culture can be partly explained by the ways in which these seemingly stable political categories are organised more by narrative than by content. Monday's vulnerable pensioner needing community help, that is, may well be Tuesday's pension-grubbing welfare cheat, rorting that same community. [119]

Conclusion

A Current Affair and *Today Tonight* are generally held in scholarship and in the popular imagination to be constantly reinforcing hegemonic moral-cultural understandings of personhood through their “toxic” degradation of journalistic ethics.[120] This chapter demonstrated that we can better understand the ways in which these texts operate by examining key processes of subjectivity such as meaning-making and visuality.

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[117] Lumby, “Media Culpa.”

[118] Carol Johnson (2005). “Narratives of Identity: Denying empathy in conservative discourses on race, gender and sexuality.” *Theory and Society* 34, p. 55

[119] As this thesis is in its final stages of being written, the shock results of the UK Brexit referendum and the 2016 US election have renewed international debate over the role of tabloid, news, and ‘fake’ media. Australian tabloids and news media differ significantly from their UK print and US television counterparts, demonstrating once again that context is critical to textual analysis. Nevertheless, media and political studies requires more strongly than ever robust methods for analysing texts, images, and narratives, and how they construct realities and subjects. The dislocation of truth-value from image demonstrated in this chapter’s discussion of tabloid narrative and aesthetic will, it is hoped, complement future analysis.

[120] Mathieson, “Last tabloid news show standing.”

The chapter first located *ACA* and *TT* in contemporary Australian and international debates over the commercialisation and tabloidisation of current affairs media and news media in general. Instead of understanding viewing subjects as victims of these programs' failures to produce democratically-informed citizen-subjects, attention to the televisual properties of *ACA* and *TT* gives a picture of viewing subjects as making televisual images meaningful by implicating themselves in an *us* and *them* narrative. Paying attention to processes of subjectivity beyond categorising good and bad representations provides an understanding of tabloid current affairs television as producing a communal televisual subject, an *us* whose boundaries are constructed on-the-fly according to the demands of the segment.

The second part of this chapter therefore undertook a close textual analysis, focusing on processes and constructions of subjectivity and meaning. As was argued in part one of this thesis, theories of textual subjectivity must be modified before use with television, and must be deployed with sensitivity to the texts themselves. This chapter reinforced the arguments of part one, emphasising that attention to form is important for nuanced understandings of how even apparently obvious and bad texts such as *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight* operate.

These meanings emerge from and are constrained by production contexts such as scheduling and commercialisation, and a public service rhetoric that forcefully manages its messages. Despite being required to do little interpretive work when watching the overdetermined segments on the immorality of supermarket bread, viewing subjects are still required to make the flow of signifiers meaningful. Nevertheless, subject-oriented textual analysis reveals that this is less a problem of reading and interpretation than that other pressing question: that of spectatorship, and the ways in which texts organise viewing relations.[121]

This chapter also contributed to scholarship on Australian politics and the media by supplementing the small body of work on *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight.* It also contributed to the politics of subjectivity by examining not only how cultural categories such as welfare recipient are constructed in the media but also by highlighting how such categories can be incoherent and contingent upon the narratives constructed around them. Political identity categories, Carol Johnson argues, are often bound up in *us* and *them* narratives that

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[121] W. J. T. Mitchell (1994). *Picture Theory.* Chicago: Chicago UP, p. 16

work to reinforce the status quo of subordination and exclusion.[122] This chapter does not disagree that *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight* often run segments that display socially conservative values over categories of vulnerable people such as migrants and welfare recipients. Indeed, it has expanded upon the ways in which *us* and *them* narratives are deployed in both political and apparently apolitical contexts. However, it is worth examining how such narratives work, and how viewer-subjectivities might be implicated. Approaches that are limited to linking representation of such categories to the health of the public sphere, or accounting for their positivity or negativity, risk, this chapter has shown, a gap in their understanding of the texts in their full context.

As this chapter indicates, the politics of subjectivity must also deal with questions of intersubjectivity and relational being. Highly politicised identity categories involving class, race, gender, and other points of cultural difference are, as was argued in chapter three, longstanding vectors of analysis in television and cultural studies, because of the ways these identities are enmeshed in power structures. The particular televisual qualities of *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight* revealed occasional instabilities and shifting subjective alliances in representations of these categories; in contrast, the next two chapters on race and African-American representation in the United States discuss a visual legacy in which *us* and *them* is more firmly established. Nevertheless, the particular narrative qualities of *The Wire* (chapter six) and *Treme* (chapter seven) also permit more complex conceptions of intersubjectivity and the subject-other relationship.

[122] Johnson, "Narratives of Identity."

6

THE WIRE, RACIALISED OTHERS, AND EMPATHY

Introduction

As part one discussed, subject-oriented textual analysis, in which texts are analysed through consideration of the key questions of subjectivity, has the advantage of an inherently political approach. This chapter demonstrates that in its focus on processes of subjectivity and subject-production, this form of analysis requires attention to another kind of subject: the other, the shadow-subject, the relational being produced by and producing our own selves. The other is a critical concept in the politics of subjectivity as it is closely tied up with questions of power and the subaltern. The way in which the other is represented is significant ethically and politically because constructions of the self are dependent upon simultaneous constructions of the other. In its application of subject-oriented textual analysis to the HBO show *The Wire* (US, 2002-2008), this chapter draws out the way in which empathic responses to the text enable intersubjective subject-production, and highlight aspects of the text that are not typically the focus of scholarship.

A particularly fraught category of otherness is racial difference. By racial difference, this thesis refers not to an actual state of intrinsic race but to the intersection between history, knowledge systems, social structure, and ways of seeing that produces cultural groups from collections of diverse individuals. Poststructuralist and postcolonial writing on subject-other relations often describe a subject whose stable existence depends upon a constant bringing-into-presence and disavowal of the raced other. This disavowal is enabled by and often emerges through images and texts that represent raced bodies in binary opposition to white bodies, and generates white subjectivity as the invisible norm. Because these ways of seeing are indebted to visual history and are implicated in subject-production this chapter's first section briefly outlines ways of seeing and visualising black African and black American bodies. The continuing legacy of these ways of seeing, it is argued, leaves contemporary

television with a system of visuality that constrains the possibility of empathy with non-whites.

Empathy is significant to discussions of intersubjective relations in textual analysis because it is an other-focused emotion that can only be activated in the viewing encounter. With the increasing recognition of the political significance of emotions,[1] it is worth developing analytic approaches to how affect is experienced in response to texts, especially when the relevant representations are also tied up with questions of power, suffering, and race. Television drama, which is usually long-form, serialised, and character-heavy, provides many opportunities for affective bonds between viewers and characters, and there is a growing body of scholarship that argues for the significance of televisual form, and affect and empathy.[2] For instance, Fiona Cox discusses how long-form serialisation allows female characters on *Mad Men* (US, AMC, 2007-2015) who initially seemed to be objects for the male gaze to be subjects in their own right.[3] Similarly, Colin Tait analyses how manipulation of genre in several HBO shows allows viewers to "attach themselves" to negative or supposedly inaccessible archetypes such as drug dealers or prostitutes.[4]

The link between form and affect is one that has often been described in the domains of literature and film studies.[5] Empathy is a significant tool of analysis for the politics of

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1 See for instance Jack Barbalet (2002). *Emotions and Sociology.* London: Wiley

2 See for instance Jason Mittell (2009). "All In The Game: *The Wire*, Serial Storytelling, and Procedural Logic." *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives.* Eds. Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 429-438 on complex serial narratives.

3 Fiona A. Cox (2012). "So Much Woman: female objectification, narrative complexity, and feminist temporality in Mad Men," *Invisible Culture* 17 Retrieved from <http://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/the-other-woman-joan-and-peggy-move-up-in-the-world/> last accessed 30 September 2016

4 Colin Tait (2008). "The HBO-ification of Genre." *Cinephile* 4, section 2. Retrieved from <http://cinephile.ca/archives/volume-4-post-genre/the-hbo-ification-of-genre/> last accessed 2 October 2016

5 See for literature: Suzanne Keen (2007). *Empathy and the Novel.* Oxford: Oxford UP; Keith Oatley (1994). "A taxonomy of the emotions of literary response and a theory of identification in fictional narrative." *Poetics* 23, pp. 53-74; Marcus Wood (2002). *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography.* Oxford: Oxford UP; Dolf Zillmann (1994). "Mechanisms of emotional involvement with drama." *Poetics* 23, pp. 33-51; Carol Johnson (2005). "Narratives of Identity: Denying empathy in conservative discourses on race, class and sexuality." *Theory and Society* 34, pp. 37-61. For treatments of film, see for example Katherine Thomson-Jones (2008). *Aesthetics and Film.* London: Continuum; Carolyn Adams-Price, Jim Codling, Mark Goodman (2006). "Empathic Resonance and Meryl Streep." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 34 (3), pp. 98-97; Amy Coplan (2004). "Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62 (2), pp. 141-152; Carl Plantinga (1999) "The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face on Film." *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and* Emotion. Eds. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, pp. 239-255; Berys Gaut (2010). "Empathy and Identification in Cinema." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy,* pp. 136-157; Luke Hockley (2007). *Frames of Mind: A Post-Jungian Look at Film, Television and Technology.* Intellect Ltd; Alex Neill (1996). "Empathy and Film Fiction" *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies.* Eds. David Bordwell

subjectivity because it requires recognition of the other's alterity, while forging dependent intersubjective bonds. Drawing from work in these fields, the second part of this chapter therefore uses empathy as a means to investigate the interrelationship between televisual form, meanings, affect and subjects. Not only is this the work of this thesis as a whole, it contributes to an ongoing wider discussion about the relationship between televisual form and affect. Affect responses such as empathy are, it is argued, epistemologically relevant in televisual encounters with the other: in a visual system that often denies non-white bodies an essential humanity, the way in which television texts encourage or discourage empathic perspective-taking is relevant not just as an intervention in our wider visual culture but also to subject-creation in the viewing encounter.

The final part of this chapter is once again therefore subject-oriented textual analysis, prioritising processes of subjectivity, power relations, gazes, meaning-making, and knowledge. The text examined in this chapter is HBO television series *The Wire,* a show notable for its universal critical acclaim, its representational strategies, and its inclusion of a great number of black characters. This chapter therefore also contributes to a growing body of work on *The Wire* and its increasing recognition as a critical text in television studies and African-American studies. *The Wire*'s self-conscious realism – which is constructed through its narrative content, its character work and its televisual form – encourages emotional intimacy and feelings of knowing complex socio-economic disadvantages and social histories that are atypical of television texts and representations of race.

Close consideration of these aspects of *The Wire* gives an understanding of how viewer empathy emerges not in service of a pedagogical lesson or as a mode of alienating raced others but as part of intersubjective, circular, and generative processes of meaning-making. Rather than reinforcing racist subjectivities, empathy in response to *The Wire* permits new epistemologies of knowing the other and new ways of constructing the self. Empathy, it is argued, keeps the other present and active in the subject without subsuming them into sameness.

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and Noël Caroll. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 175-194

The Other: Alterity, Ethics and Presence

Subject-oriented textual analysis, as described in this thesis, requires textual researchers to locate the processes of subjectivity that structure and enable meaning-making in the viewing encounter. As meaning-making can only happen through reference to cultural forms, values, and knowledge-systems that pre-exist us, this process is always social and relational. In this chapter and the next, the specific figure of the *other,* it is argued, is critical to these systems of meaning-making.

Far from existing as a singular being, the subject is always called upon to recognise her place in a system of same and other: the other is always already there, is always already a constitutional factor in the subject.[6] For those theorists who understand subjects as emerging through language, this is an intentional break with the Cartesian *I*, which can establish itself through reference only to itself. Subjectivity, here, is fundamentally relational, with the subject and the other featuring as a pre-eminent and productive oppositional pair. The linguist Emile Benveniste, for instance, argues that subjectivity is only possible when the two syntagms *I* and *you* become paradigmactically linked in the mind.[7] Without a *you*, the concept and experience of *I* is fundamentally meaningless.

As was discussed in chapter two, this is the first step that allows poststructuralist and psychoanalytic work to build a subject constantly formed and reformed through the play of sign systems and human communication. The subject who is split by entry into the symbolic order is also connected to others, to a social way of being, through language.[8] In *Giving an Account of Oneself* Judith Butler, following Adriana Cavarero, argues that storytelling, dialogue and even monologue is impossible without a 'you' who must first be recognised by the 'I'; similarly, for Paul Ricoeur, any utterance is always interlocution: an 'I' speech act is immediately an act of double-constitution, as the 'I' speaker always presupposes the 'you' listener.[9]

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6 Emmanuel Levinas (1998). *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence.* Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, p. 117

7 Kaja Silverman (1983). *The Subject of Semiotics.* Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 172

8 Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1992). "Psychoanalysis, Film and Television." *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled.* Ed. Robert C. Allen. New York: Routledge, pp. 237, 209-210

9 Judith Butler, (2005). *Giving an Account of Oneself.* New York: Fordham UP, p. 32; Paul Ricoeur (1992). *Oneself as Another.* Trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 44

Beneath this structural picture of a mutually-productive subject and other is a commitment to understanding this relationship as ethical. Far from emptying out the possibility for moral action, as is often the concern of critics of poststructuralist accounts of contingent knowledge and subjectivities, understanding subjects as emerging in relation to others and in circumstances not of their own making is a necessary condition to ethical action and requires an acute accounting of power relations and operations.[10] This chapter (and the thesis as a whole) therefore has an ethical-political stake in its account of human communication, language, and sign-systems as constitutive of subjects. It is not enough, in the end, to simply note that entry into language generates subjects. How that entry occurs and repeats itself in intersubjective encounters must also be examined: most conversation, reminds Edward Said, is not between equals, but "resembles more the unequal relation between coloniser and colonised."[11]

Similarly, Lola Young describes violence towards and oppression of others (particularly raced and gendered others) as occurring when a diminished sense of selfhood is shored up through violent abnegation of the other-in-self.[12] Indeed, disavowal and negation are central preoccupations of the subject, particularly subjects who occupy privileged social/cultural positions.[13] The other often therefore emerges in its absence, not presence. Postcolonial scholarship demonstrates the ways in which the other is always traced upon the modern Western subject in the "erasures and ambivalences, psychic and epistemic violence, the suppressions and phantasies" of the discourse, practice, and systems of knowledge/power that have constituted modern subjects.[14] The other is therefore often situated in non-presence and radical alterity.

Subjectivity becomes as much a matter of what one is *not* as what one *is.* Psychoanalysis describes identity as a process of interiorising what is exterior, beginning (in the Lacanian account) with the mirror image before becoming increasingly dependent on linguistic and cultural representations in the symbolic order, especially those of the 'alien' or 'other.'[15]

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10 Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself,* pp. 7-8

11 Edward W. Said (1983). *The World, The Text, and the Critic.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, p. 48

12 Lola Young (1996). *Fear of the Dark: 'race', gender and sexuality in the cinema.* London: Routledge, p. 182

13 Johnson, "Narratives of Identity."

14 Young, *Fear of the Dark*, p. 31

15 Kaja Silverman (1989). "Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Look, Gaze and Image." *Camera Obscura* 7 (1 19), p. 56

Crucially, psychoanalysis characterises this dependence as interiorising a *lack* as a *presence*. Here, subjectivity is dependent on the disavowal and rejection of what is disliked and insupportable.[16]

As in the dyadic, interlocutory social encounter, texts – written, visual, and other – always presuppose a movement between the *I* and *you,* a "struggle which may be cooperative or may be combative, a struggle for knowledge, for power, for pleasure, for possession."[17] With this acknowledgement at the heart of subject-oriented textual analysis, and noting, as was established in part one, that that visual history is critical to subjectivity, this chapter turns now to closer examinations of the visual history of one particular category of otherness: race, specifically, blackness.

The Other and representational categories

Meaningful vision, it has been argued, is inseparable from questions of power that become particularly pertinent to political study when subordinated groups are involved. Racial categories precede subjects, rendering them always-already raced through broadcasting visual markers of non-whiteness such as the colour of your skin and your hair type.[18] Corporeal markers such as skin are therefore "hypervisible,"[19] and race, which is apparently "given by Nature," is naturalised.[20] The black man's body, writes Frantz Fanon, is "a third-person consciousness," rendered an object by the white eyes that fix him via a "racial epidermic schema" leaving him "overdetermined…from without."[21] Media visuality – that is, the ways in which people are made visible and intelligible – is therefore especially relevant to considerations of race, and forms of textual analysis that take visual history as foundational are useful to examining such fraught images.

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16 Couze Venn (1999). "Occidentalism and its Discontents." *New Ethics, Old Racisms?* Ed. Phil Cohen. New York: Zed Books, p. 53

17 Marie Maclean (1988). *Narrative as Performance: The Baudelairean Experiment.* London: Routledge, p. xii

18 Michele Wallace (1990). "Modernism, Postmodernism and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-American Culture." *Out There: Marginalisation and Contemporary Cultures.* Eds. Trinh T. Minh-ha, Russel Ferguson, Martha Gerver, Cornel West. New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, p. 40; also Young, *Fear of the Dark* p. 50

19 Mary Anne Doane (1999). "Dark Continents." *Visual Culture: The Reader*. Eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. London: Sage, p. 453

20 Stuart Hall (1981). "The Whites of their Eyes." *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties.* Eds. George Bridges and Rosalind Brunt. Lawrence and Wishart, p. 33

21 Frantz Fanon (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks.* Trans. Charles Lam Markman. New York: Grove Press, pp. 112, 116; Doane, "Dark Continents," p. 455

The race of the racialised other carries meaning implicated in social power structures outside of the control of the suborned. Examining representation for stereotypical content is, as chapter three indicated a central project of much textual analysis. In the United States, which is where *The Wire* hails from, commentators have long noted the ways in which representations of black persons, from the days of slavery to the present, have been contested sites, places of disempowerment and othering. Partly because representational ability coalesces in the hands of the powerful:

> [t]he modern Black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness can be understood as the condition of *relative lack of Black power to represent themselves for themselves and others as complex human beings, and thereby to contest the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by White supremacist ideologies.*[22]

Race is a concept that organises people's bodies and histories, and cultural texts are inevitably a significant venue for the construction of "what *race* is, what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the 'problem of race' is understood to be."[23] Social structures and representations feed back into each other and frame the way race is understood as identity formation.[24]

As was argued in chapter two, visual phenomena are organised by already extant visual regimes and ways of seeing. Subjects are always already raced, already implicated in knowledge/power systems beyond their control.[25] In a postcolonial world, there is no way to tell of the nation or community without positioning the viewer-subject and the other in raced relations haunted by the spectre of that which the modern subject has cast out.[26] In America, according to Toni Morrison, blackness functions as

> the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution

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22 Cornel West (1990). "The New Cultural Politics of Difference." *October* 53 (Summer), p. 102 (original emphasis)

23 Hall, "Whites of their Eyes," p. 35

24 Andre Brock (2009). "Life on the Wire." *Information, Communication and Society* 12 (3), p. 346

25 Venn, "Occidentalism and its Discontents," p. 43, 44

26 Venn, "Occidentalism and its Discontents," p. 42, 51; Diawara in bell hooks (1992). *Black Looks: Race and Representation.* Boston: South End Press, p. 117

but a progressive fulfilment of destiny.[27]

This is not simply a matter of "knowing," but of creating a "visual articulation"[28] of such knowledges; of marrying scientific, colonialist and disciplinary knowledges to representations, generating ways of seeing that construct subjectivities along racial lines. Historical and contemporary representations of American blackness are therefore ineluctably part of the construction of race in America.[29]

For instance, post-slavery America saw a great demand by white wealthy art collectors for paintings depicting black people as "grotesque buffoons, servile menials, comic entertainers, or threatening subhumans;" a demand that was supplied readily by local artists.[30] Blackness is associated with physicality and whiteness with the mind; whiteness relegates blackness to a certain corporeal schema, or to corporeality itself.[31] The Mammy, the Native and the Clown are all stereotypes relying on aspects of primitivism, a language that articulates racial and ethnic groups not in terms of history but in terms of Nature.[32] Understanding subjects and others as oppositional dyads renders "the black man" always "black in relation to the white man"; crucially, this othered blackness is unable to be assimilated.[33]

Representational optics and economics that were developed during slavery and the modern European colonial project involved the dissemination of "exotic" paintings and photographs of people of colour, at the same time as European scientific discourse developed medical and anthropological justification for white supremacy. Images of this time worked to create a racialised other (and simultaneously a white European self) and their echoes remain: it is "impossible to start afresh, as if it were outside of the history of such images."[34]

As this thesis repeatedly argues, meaning in the present day cannot exist outside of the systems of visuality that precede both images and subjects. In this sense, images in the present legislate meaning, containing the legacy of past ways of seeing and knowing black

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[27] Morrison in Alan Nadel (2005). *Television in black-and-white America: race and national identity.* Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, p. 2

[28] Kaja Silverman (1993). "What is a Camera? Or, History in the Field of Vision." *Discourse* 15 (3 (Spring)), p. 28

[29] And, of course, globally, but it is outside the scope of this thesis to explore international concerns.

[30] Richard Leppert (1996). *Art and the Committed Eye.* Boulder: Westview Press, p. 210

[31] Doane, "Dark Continents," p. 453

[32] Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes," pp. 38-41

[33] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 110; Fanon in Young, *Fear of the Dark,* p. 18

[34] E. Ann Kaplan (1997). *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze.* New York: Routledge, p. 19; Ron Burnett (1995). *Cultures of Vision.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, p. 55;

bodies. Modern-day stereotypes, argues Homi Bhabha, are an arrested, fixated form of representation, denying the play of difference and returning the colonial subject to its identification of an ego that is white and whole, ensuring the dominance of white subjectivity.[35]

The next chapter, which also discusses an HBO television drama (*Treme* (US, 2010-2013)) with a majority black cast, delves further into this system of representation, and how it others black bodies and subjectivities. For the purposes of this chapter, however, it is critical to note that this is a kind of visuality bound up with both knowing *and* disavowal, objectification *and* erasure, two processes that work together and apart to ensure that whiteness remains the invisible norm.[36] Objectification renders others knowable in a limited and targeted regime, while erasure produces a "void and dread of racial questions."[37] Invisibility in Ralph Ellison's work, for instance, is a literary metaphor for the unacknowledged debt white subjects have to black subjects.[38]

Crucially, here, white subjectivity relies upon a denial of the foundational dependence it has upon racialised others; and in this, there is also the foreclosure of empathic possibilities. Such foreclosure, it must be remembered, takes place in a civil-social context in which "citizens and state institutions betray a pervasive lack of concern for black suffering."[39] As Juliet Hooker notes of the series of fatal racist police shootings that prompted the Black Lives Matter movement, what is at stake is recognition of the other's – the *raced* other's – essential "humanity."[40]

Crucially, then, representation is not simply a matter of images we can taxonomise as good or bad; representation is fundamentally an epistemological and productive exercise. The emergence of television in the US during the Cold War period's demands for homogenisation and national unity worked to cement the "imaginary space" of America as a nation of white

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35 Bhabha in Mark Williams (1998). "Entertaining "Difference": Strains of Orientalism in Early Los Angeles Television." *Living Colour: Race and Television in the United States.* Ed. Sasha Torres. Durham: Duke UP, p. 25

36 See for instance Richard Dyer (1988). "White." *Screen 29 (4)*; Young, *Fear of the Dark,* p. 181

37 Wallace, "Modernism," p. 40

38 Wallace, "Modernism," p. 43

39 Juliet Hooker (2016). "Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice to Democratic Repair." *Political Theory* 44 (4), p. 449

40 Hooker, "Black Lives Matter," p. 466

citizens.[41] African-American viewers of mass media often experience it as a "system of knowledge and power reproducing and maintaining white supremacy" where participation as an audience member is to participate in your own othering and erasure.[42] Consequently, televisual representations of black Americans are always overloaded with meaning;[43] black bodies on screen are the site of difference and otherness, and race relations is raised as an issue to be diffused through the reiteration of values such as harmony, cooperation, individual learning and an essential sameness.[44] This is the sameness of assimilation, which is its own form of representational erasure, a denial of the other in his or her own contextual experience.

For decades, and on into the present day,[45] American media contained repetitions of colonial fantasy: stereotypes of black men as criminals, athletes, and entertainers, a rigid and limited grid of representations that generate an ideological and psychic *idée fixe* about blackness.[46] These categories and ways of knowing and seeing function to objectify and render knowable, while at the same time reinforcing white supremacy and a white-as-norm, black-as-other subjectivities. Textual analysis that identifies moments and mechanisms of disruption is therefore useful. To that end, this chapter recruits the concept of empathy, which is a form of intersubjectivity that retains the other as *other,* but keeps their presence active in the self. For television programs to become the venue and strategy for the rearticulation of race and the construction of anti-racist systems of representations, not only new kinds of representation are required, but new ways of seeing that engender non-racist subjectivities.

Empathy, Intersubjectivity and Representation

Power relations between subjects and others are therefore caught up in *ways of knowing* the self and the other. The feeling-state of empathy, in particular, is highlighted by ethicists and

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41 Nadel, *Television in black-and-white America,* p. 6

42 hooks, *Black Looks,* p. 117

43 Young, *Fear of the Dark,* p. 7

44 Herman Gray (1986). "Television and the new black man: black male images in prime-time situation comedy." *Media Culture and Society* 8, p. 232

45 Thankfully, recent years have seen some recuperation of these stereotypes and an increasing diversity of representation in US fictional television, in particular: the dramedy *Survivor's Remorse,* the melodrama *Empire,* the sitcom *Black-ish;* fantasy show *Sleepy Hollow*; the very diverse *Orange is the New Black;* and "Shondaland," the several (otherwise unconnected) shows developed by mega-producer Shonda Rhimes such as *Scandal* and *How to Get Away With Murder*.

46 Kobena Mercer (1999). "Reading Racial Fetishism: the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe." *Visual Culture: the Reader.* Eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. London: Sage, p. 437

postcolonial theorists as an intersubjective move that has epistemological consequences for subject-other relations. In terms of cultural texts, this "problem of epistemology" is also a problem of meaning and spectatorship; that is, how meanings and spectator-positions are produced.[47] As subject-oriented textual analysis requires that we also look at processes of intersubjectivity, it is a useful mode of analysis through which to question such subject-other constructions.

One of the most fundamental operations of any narrative work is the emotional connection it fosters between viewers and the various characters in the text. This relationship is enmeshed in a web of feelings that could be directed at the media artefact itself (for example nostalgia), the plot (suspense), the form (aesthetic pleasure) or the character (happiness at their success).[48] Discussions of feeling in television studies tend to adhere around pleasurable responses to texts, as opposed to other anhedonic emotions; as might be expected, questions of affective response to texts are more the domain of ethnographic research and audience reception studies.[49] In this vein, television studies is particularly notable for contributing to media studies uses and gratifications theory, that researches audience emotion, community-building, and active viewers.[50] However, as was argued in chapter three, it is worth developing methods of specifically textual analysis that can incorporate affectivity without having texts stand in for real or imagined audiences.

Empathy, like sympathy, is an other-focused emotion, where my emotional state is in direct response to yours; in the case of the former, I feel *with* you, and in the latter, I feel *for* you. For the purposes of this chapter the distinction is crucial, because empathy is an experience of sharing with an other, where a sympathetic response may occur irrespective of what the other is feeling.[51] As distinct from sympathy, empathy is a relatively new concept, drawn from German aesthetics into the realm of psychology and brought into English in 1909 by Edward B. Titchener.[52] It retained the meaning of a way or kind of feeling: *Einfühlung*, or

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47 See, for instance, Lynne Joyrich (2001). "Epistemology of the Console." *Critical Inquiry* 27 (3), pp. 439-467

48 See Gaut, "Empathy and Identification in Cinema," p. 136 for a further breakdown

49 See, for instance, John Corner (1999). *Critical Ideas in Television Studies.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 93-107

50 Roger Silverstone (1994). *Television and Everyday Life.* New York: Routledge, pp. 143-144

51 Neill, "Empathy and film fiction," pp. 175-176; Oatley, "A taxonomy," p. 62; Plantinga, "Scenes of Empathy," p. 245 For instance, dramatic irony can prompt feelings of sympathy but not empathy for a merry character who is ignorant of an approaching event or realisation.

52 Zillmann, "Mechanisms," p. 39; Gaut, "Empathy and Identification," p. 138 (Zillmann notes the date as 1915)

"feeling into" something or someone else.[53] Empathy is of great interest therefore to theorists who wish to engage ethically with problems such as subject-other formation, the alterity of the other, and how such structural issues of being relate to social and political disenfranchisement.

Empathy in particular can be understood as politically significant and a possible challenge to unequal power relations because it requires perspective-taking, an understanding and imagining of another's subject-position.[54] In contrast to sympathy, which is an affective response to someone's suffering that does not need to extend beyond the ontological-epistemological boundaries of the subject, empathy raises the possibility of changing the way a subject *understands the world to be*.[55] Sympathy may provoke compassion, but empathy has epistemological significance, an important point of differentiation in this thesis, which understands subjects as emerging at the intersection of epistemology and visuality.

Furthermore, empathy is also distinct from "if *I* were in his shoes" imagining, and requires characterisation, an understanding of how and why another would react to a situation *as that other*, in order to "feel into" emotions that are qualitatively the same.[56] It is similarly distinct from another other-related affective response, emotional contagion, which does not require understanding of another person's situation or feeling-state.[57] In contrast, argues Tony Wilson, if we empathise with a character in film there occurs not only a congruency of emotions but also a fusion of horizons whereby the viewer understands the world at that moment in a similar (yet also different) way.[58] Crucially, with empathy, we must have a *conception* of the person we empathise with *and* understand their alterity.[59]

This can be significant when what is represented is a culturally subordinated other, such as sexual or racial minorities. An inability to imagine the other or empathise with their struggles and suffering, argues Carol Johnson, can further disempower marginalised groups. Moreover, if the way in which the other is narrated or made knowable is sufficiently limited

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[53] Or a situation. Zillmann, "Mechanisms," p. 39; Gaut, "Empathy and Identification," p. 138
[54] Plantinga, "Scenes of Empathy," p. 245
[55] Neill, "Empathy and Film Fiction," pp. 188-192
[56] Katherine Thomson-Jones (2008). *Aesthetics and Film.* London: Continuum, p. 121
[57] Coplan, "Empathic Engagement," p. 146; in contrast, see Plantinga, who uses emotional contagion as a mechanism for empathic response. Plantinga, "Scenes of Empathy."
[58] Tony Wilson (1993). *Watching Television: Hermeneutics, Reception and Popular Culture.* Cambridge: Polity Press. p. 131
[59] For Gaut, this happens in terms of identification. Gaut, "Empathy and Identification," p. 138

as to refuse empathy altogether, such representations can even deny the fact of marginalisation in the first place.[60]

Media psychology literature does not generally prioritise the political nature of emotions. In this literature, emotion is an evolutionary trait involving an appraisal of and response to a situation with cognitive and physiological changes, generating a feeling state.[61] Here, the neurological processes that underpin empathy are a "fundamental adaptation in a social species, like humans, and regarded as the basis for bonding and cooperation and even for the fundamental awareness of others as self-identities like us."[62] Empathic response to a text is similarly seen, in work on emotion and literature, as apolitical because of its pedagogical potential. Empathic engagement with characters in written fiction appears to be standard part of the psychological process of reading, and some theorists argue that empathy works on readers of novels such that they vicariously plan responses to situations or reconstruct the reasons for why someone is feeling bad.[63] Readers (of written texts) may instinctively adopt the spatiotemporal perspective of characters.[64] Readers also attribute emotions to characters more easily when they accord with narrative and character, implying perspective-taking.[65]

Entertainment is thus seen as particularly relevant to emotion theory because of its simulative or training nature, comprising "a particularly efficient system for developing adaptive functions in a variety of complementary ways," such that the spectator will have the advantage of having already pre-experienced, as it were, scenarios when they encounter them in real life.[66] Pedagogy, here, is generally "benign," "allow[ing] for play with emotions," because anything learned is about "a hypothetical, not a real, situation."[67] George Eliot, for instance, found empathy valuable as a tool to teach the "nobler emotions," such that readers could experience pity in their everyday lives.[68]

There is general agreement about the involvement of imagination and some argue that

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60 Johnson, "Narratives of Identity," p. 45

61 Eduard Sioe-Hao Tan (2008). "Entertainment is Emotion: The Functional Architecture of the Entertainment Experience." *Media Psychology* 11 (1), p. 33

62 Tan, "Entertainment," p. 43

63 Coplan, "Empathic Engagement," p. 143; Tan, "Entertainment is Emotion," p. 39

64 Rinck and Bower, Rall and Harris in Coplan, 'Empathic Engagement," pp. 141-142

65 Gernsbacher *et al*, Harris and Martin in Coplan, pp. 142-143

66 Tan, "Entertainment," p. 34

67 Izod in Hockley, *Frames of Mind,* p. 42

68 Neill, "Empathy and Film Fiction," p. 179

empathy is relived emotion memories; in contrast, Keith Oatley argues that it is a form of simulation, analogous to computer simulation as we imaginatively create a matrix of a character's world, goals and experiences, generating emotions through a process of identification.[69] Similarly, de Wied *et al* focus on the psychological mechanisms that leave the viewer with a feeling of euphoria after being affected by a tragic film. In terms of textual analysis, these approaches reduce texts to a series of triggers (such as "death of a character") that work almost mechanically upon audiences according to preformed variables such as having a high degree of trait empathy.[70]

On this view, affective response such as empathy requires distance and contains no real threat to or destabilisation of the integrity of the self. This is particularly evident where research focuses on neurology, consciousness and pedagogy. Dolf Zillmann, for instance, outlines three conceptualisations of empathy: innate, physiological reactions or "motor mimicry"; conditioning processes that are not consciously directed; and deliberate direction of imagination or feeling.[71] There is room, therefore, for politically-motivated examinations of empathy and texts. In the context of this chapter the potential for rehearsals of emotion that might occur though empathy is less politically and ethically relevant than the way this state of *feeling into* the experience of others is significant to meaning-making in the viewing encounter.

Empathy and texts

In a subject-focused textual analysis, it is clear that empathy takes on political character beyond rehearsing emotions, because empathy is an important affective response in terms of subjectivity. Firstly, empathy forces recognition of the personhood of someone apart from the self, someone who is capable of suffering or joy; secondly, while it requires understanding that person as *not* the self, it also keeps that person present *in* the self. This chapter therefore bypasses the search for a neurological and psychological mechanism of empathy. Instead, it draws on a broader definition of empathy as an imaginative recreation of an other's feeling-state, in order to highlight the epistemological and intersubjective

69 Oatley, "A taxonomy," p. 72

70 That is, empathy conceived of as a personality trait and the degree to which one is sensitive to empathic engagement. Minet de Wied, Dolf Zillman, and Virginia Ordman (1994). "The role of empathic distress in the enjoyment of cinematic tragedy." *Poetics* 23, pp. 91-106

71 Zillmann, "Mechanisms," p. 40

processes at stake in televisual meaning-making.[72]

In the same way that knowledges are politicised through understanding them as structural and social, politicising emotions requires understanding them as socially constructed, and as having social consequence. Feeling-experience is social, argue Jessica Fields *et al*, and "irreducible to the bodily organism and to the particular individual who feels them."[73] Emotions help us locate ourselves relationally in stratified society, leading some emotion theorists to "fix their analytical attention on social conventions and norms that shape the feelings that people typically experience and define as 'natural'."[74] In this way, feelings experienced in response to texts similarly occur within social structures.[75] The social and political aspects of emotion are therefore relevant to forms of textual analysis that conceive of both texts and subjects as indebted to each other and to wider systems that structure meaning-making.

Martin Hoffman, in his seminal text on empathy, is dubious as to the positive effects of television upon our empathic muscle, asking whether the intimate broadcast of trauma contributes more towards increased awareness and empathy towards victims, or towards habituation and empathic fatigue; or furthermore, whether exposure to, for instance, particular conflicts might foster ethnic hatred.[76] Much of the literature on empathy and film is viewer-orientated, grappling with the "paradox" of audiences seeking out the "hedonically negative" empathic distress of tragic films[77] or raising concerns over how effectively

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[72] Another way of describing intersubjective relationships between viewers and characters is identification; the use of this term ranges from rigorous deployment in psychoanalytic film theory to a catch-all phrase signifying vague liking of and alignment with a character. This blurring of the term that has led some to call for its abandonment. See for instance Plantinga, "Scenes of Empathy," p. 244; Zillmann, "Mechanisms," pp. 34-35; Coplan, "Empathic Engagement," p. 147; Thomson-Jones, *Aesthetics and Film,* pp. 115-117; Elly A Konijn and Johan F Hoorn (2005). "Some Like it Bad: Testing a Model for Perceiving and Experiencing Fictional Characters." *Media Psychology* 7 (2), p. 108. Identification "falls short of explaining the complexity and intrinsic affectivity that is natural to media exposure" as well as the variability of affective responses, including negative ones, towards compelling characters (Konijn and Hoorn, "Some Like it Bad," p.108). At any rate, this chapter is specifically interested in empathy as an intersubjective phenomenon, rather than a more general theory of identification.

[73] Jessica Fields, Martha Copp, and Cherryl Kleinman (2006). "Symbolic Interactionism, Inequality, and Emotions." *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions.* Eds. Jan Stets & Jonathan H. Turner. Boston: Springer, p. 156

[74] Fields *et al*, "Symbolic Interactionism," pp. 156, 158

[75] John Ellis (2009). "What are we expected to feel? Witness, textual and the audiovisual." *Screen* 50 (1), p. 71

[76] Martin Hoffman (2000). *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*,* p. 214. This is Hoffman's only consideration of television in *Empathy and Moral Development* and he calls for more research.

[77] de Wied *et al*, "Empathic distress," p. 92

empathy "works on" its audiences.[78]

By Amy Coplan's definition of empathy, the similar psychological states that arise between the empathiser and the empathisee are *dependent* on perspective taking, which she shows to be inherently textual, a function of the experience of narrative.[79] These conclusions are generally expanded to visual media, with more or less consideration of how a different medium affects the process. Textual analysis must, however, be able to investigate specific texts with medium-specific methodologies. As this thesis has repeatedly stated, meaning does not simply "happen" in televisual images, but must be *made*, and form is critical to structuring possibilities of meaning.

Affect is an invasion, and "any experience of the psyche," even emotion in response to fiction, "must be treated as psychologically real."[80] Nevertheless empathic feelings do not necessarily overwhelm the subject so that they are incapable of anything else. Imaginative simulation and feeling *of* another's situation can run concurrently with other psychological processes and emotions, such as moral judgement or sympathy. Crucially, nor does empathy require a loss of self. This chapter therefore follows Coplan in arguing that self-other differentiation is a definitional requirement for empathy, preventing the empathiser from acting as though she were actually in the other's situation, and, importantly, forcing a recognition of "the singularity of the other's experience as well as his or her own."[81]

Empathy, therefore, is of significant interest to the politics of subjectivity, because it creates intersubjective relationships without subsuming the other into the self, or allowing one to stand in for the other. Clearly, visual and meaning experiences that enable empathic response are of interest.

The Wire

This chapter therefore turns now to discuss *The Wire.* Textual analysis reveals that realism and privileged knowledges create complex subject-other relations, and resists the racist

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78 E Ann Kaplan (2005). *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP

79 Coplan, "Empathic Engagement," p. 144

80 Hockley, *Frames of Mind,* p. 44; Gaut, "Empathy and Identification," p. 138

81 Coplan,"Empathic Engagement," p. 144

processes of subject-formation discussed at the beginning of the chapter by prompting socially aware forms of knowing and empathic response. *The Wire,* shown in the United States on HBO from 2002 to 2008, is a particularly interesting object of analysis. A crime show like no other crime show on television, it is serial like television, auterist like film, broadcast like television, and elite like film; a drama with extensive comedic elements, its narrative is a literary, novelistic, and intricately-detailed class polemic. This mixing of formal properties certainly demonstrates the insufficiency of the typical binary opposition between television and cinema and emphasises the need, as this thesis argues, to examine televisual form in its particulars.

The Wire also cultivates exceptionalism in its critical and popular response. Regarded as an evolution of, or interruption of and improvement upon, the police procedural genre,[82] it contains many of the markers of "quality television": treatment of social justice issues, a large cast of characters, a complex and interweaving narrative, high production values, and educated consumers with high cultural capital who can afford premium cable television or DVD box sets. Almost since its inception critics have regularly cited it as one of the best, if not the actual best, television shows ever made.[83] John Wilde cites nine reasons for this assessment: the scope of its ambition; its consistency; its good casting; its easy-to-care-for characters; its density and novelistic quality; its naturalistic and complex writing; its setting, that brings Baltimore alive; Bubbles, the character who "encapsulates the humanity at the heart of the show"; and finally, the connections viewers make with others through sharing, discussion and communal viewing.[84] In its content, form, and position in the televisual

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[82] Tait, "HBO-ification of Genre"; Helena Sheehan and Sheamus Sweeney (2009). "*The Wire* and the world: narrative and metanarrative." *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 51 (Spring). Retrieved from <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/Wire/index.html> last accessed 30 September 2016

[83] See for example: Tim Goodman (2006). "Yes, HBO's *Wire* is challenging. It's also a masterpiece," *SFGate (The San Francisco Chronicle*) 6 September. Retrieved from <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2006/09/06/DDG7BKV7HK26.DTL> last accessed 30 September 2016: "It's an astonishing display of writing, acting and storytelling that must be considered alongside the best literature and filmmaking in the modern era."; Jacob Weisman (2008). "*The Wire* on Fire: Analysing the Best Show on Television." *Slate*. 4 January 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/recycled/2008/01/the_wire_on_fire.html> last accessed 30 September 2016: "*The Wire*... is surely the best TV show ever broadcast in America... no other program has ever done anything remotely like what this one does, namely to portray the social, political, and economic life of an American city with the scope, observational precision, and moral vision of great literature."; See also: Marsha Kinder (2008). "Re-Wiring Baltimore: The Emotive Power of Systemics, Seriality, and the City." *Film Quarterly* 62 (2), 50-57; Alisdair McMillan (2008). "Dramatising Individuation: Institutions, Assemblages, and *The Wire*." *Cinephile* 4: Post-Genre. Retrieved from <http://cinephile.ca/archives/volume-4-post-genre/dramatizing-individuation-institutions-assemblages-and-the-wire/> last accessed 30 September 2016; Sheehan and Sweeney, "*The Wire* and the World."

[84] Jon Wilde in Steve Busfield and Paul Owen (Eds.) (2009). *The Wire Re-Up.* London: Guardian Books. p.

landscape, *The Wire* is a peculiar televisual object, with a cultural status and notoriety that precedes it to the viewing encounter.[85]

While, as with many shows, its topics are criminality, policing and the law, its thematic concerns run deeper, to how modern institutions such as the educational system, the police force, and drug organisations systematically disenfranchise individuals that come into contact with them. Unlike the majority of economically mobile and aspirational characters on television, characters in *The Wire* who are not in the upper echelons of their respective institutions are dealing with the trauma and isolation of a ravaged urban life marked by poverty, a rampant drug trade, and despair. The title *The Wire* refers not simply to the wiretaps that the Major Crimes Unit places on the Barksdale Gang in season one; it also is a metaphor for the division between the "Two Americas," one which has access to the American Dream, and one which does not.[86] "It's a thin line between heaven and here," remarks drug addict Bubbles, returning to his downtown crackhouse habitus after a brief excursion to suburbia.[87] Immediately, it is apparent that *The Wire*'s representational concerns extend far beyond a typical good guy-bad guy police narrative. This is a narrative of American institutional and ideological failure, and how this failure affects the most marginalised, stereotyped, and invisible members of society—and, in particular, black American men, women and children, who traditionally occupy, as was highlighted in the first part of this chapter, an oppositional otherness to white viewing subjects.

Realism and privileged knowing

With such concerns the representational and epistemological stakes are high, and the creators and fans of the show do not shy away from asserting that *The Wire* evinces significant truths about and produces new and more humane ways of knowing life in a city such as Baltimore. Creator David Simon, an ex-*Baltimore Sun* journalist from the crime beat who researched drug addiction in the city for his book *The Corner,* required authenticity right down to

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[85] The common joke being that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who have seen *The Wire*, and those who are being harangued to see *The Wire*.

[86] David Simon in Slavoj Zizek (2012). "The Wire: Or the Clash of Civilisations in One Country." Audio Recording of paper given at Birkbeck institute of the Humanties, London. 24 February 2012. Retrieved from <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2012/02/slavoj-zizek-the-wire-or-the-clash-of-civilisations-in-one-country> last accessed 30 September 2016. David Simon interview in Busfield and Owen, *The Wire Re-Up,* pp. 260-266

[87] Season 1, episode 4, "Old Cases"

shooting in the correct Baltimore neighbourhoods and casting locals as actors and extras.[88] Set-ups were so indistinguishable from the real that actual junkies tried to buy from the actors playing drug dealers.[89] Co-creator Ed Burns, former member of the Baltimore Police Department, advised on accuracy and was also a former teacher whose experiences were drawn upon for season four's school plotline; Simon spent much time embedded with Baltimore Police Department, and much of cast did ride-alongs.[90]

The taken-for-granted authenticity of *The Wire* is overwhelmingly part of the discursive response to it,[91] but less attention is given to how this realism is constructed. Representation, it was argued in chapter three, is not a window to the real but a transformation of it, and Simon's invocation of realism in *The Wire* is not a neutral movement. Realism is a mode of representation, of "specific narrative forms" that generates subjects and trains them to have specific expectations; in this sense it is productive, "producing new kinds of action, but by way of production of new categories of the event and of experience, temporality and causality, which also preside over what will now be come to thought of as reality."[92]

Simon deflects any questions of authenticity goofs or mistake to the quibbling of "fact-grounded literalists"; those who object on the grounds of authenticity could only be objecting to something minor like a Hubig's pie, not understanding that such license is taken in order to reflect a larger, more powerful and resonant truth.[93] Where naturalism is concerned with surfaces and the visual experience of light on our eyes, realism as a generic marker in art is

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88 Bethlehem Shoals (2006). "For the City: David Simon Q & A." *Heaven and Here.* October 2006. Retrieved from <http://heavenandhere.wordpress.com/2006/10/15/for-the-city-david-simon-qa/> last accessed 30 September 2016; Clark Johnson in Marc Spitz (2012). "Maxim Interrogates the Makers and Stars of *The Wire*." *Maxim.* 4 June 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.maxim.com/tv/maxim-interrogates-the-makers-and-stars-of-the-wire> last accessed 30 September 2016

89 Spitz, "Maxim Interrogates."

90 Spitz, "Maxim Interrogates."

91 See for instance Bowden, Wesburg, Stanley in Amanda Ann Klein (2009). "'The Dickensian Aspect': Melodrama, Viewer Engagement and the Socially Conscious Text." *Wire: Urban Decay and American Television.* Eds. Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshal. New York: Continuum International Publishing, p. 177

92 Jameson in Tait, "The HBO-ification of Genre." For instance, Ruth Franklin, in her essay "David Simon's World:" "Even—or especially—for me as a Baltimorean, the line between the fictional Baltimore and the real Baltimore was hard to draw; and as the series progressed, the Baltimore of *The Wire* became even more real to me than the city where I grew up." Ruth Franklin (2010). "David Simon's World." *The New Republic.* 5 May 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.tnr.com/article/the-read-david-simons-world> last accessed 30 September 2016

93 David Simon (2010). "HBO's Treme creator David Simon explains it all for you." *NoLA.com.* 11 April 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.nola.com/treme-hbo/index.ssf/2010/04/hbos_treme_creator_david_simon.html> last accessed 30 September 2016

concerned with typological depths.[94] Realist representations therefore have epistemological consequences, conveying not simply a "real-looking image," but a deeper and more contextualised way of knowing.

"More real than real," realist genres work to expose what subjects typically wouldn't be able to see in their everyday lives, "a conscious extension of dramatic material to areas of life which had been evidently excluded."[95] The impetus of realist televisual representations is not to replicate one's field of vision in the outside world, but to structure it such that frames convey a *depth of meaning and knowledge,* to understand the world *as it really is*, without illusion.[96] This is part of every aesthetic and narrative choice of *The Wire.* Eschewing a "teleological cause-and-effect" style of narrative, *The Wire* represents the geography of Baltimore, its institutions and its inhabitants in such a way that viewers are inevitably called to understand complex social networks of inclusion and exclusion.[97] In the next chapter, this "opening up" of a community – in that case, New Orleans and black lives – to the viewing-subject's eye is characterised as occurring through objectifying scopic relations. In this chapter, however, the textual strategies discussed below mitigate such "touristic" gazes, resisting objectifying scopic relations and encouraging empathic ones.

Particular dramatic techniques, such as the avoidance of happy endings, position *The Wire* against a "false" American dramatic tradition. Realism is activated most when things go bad, such as in the "[Henry] James-like authenticity" of suffering children in season four.[98] This, as Andre Brock notes, gives the show a mimetic sheen, a verisimilitude that generates an intense critical and fan following.[99] In fulfilling its realist aims, *The Wire* has developed a distinctive appearance (elaborated upon further below) that Claire La Berge calls a "radical break with standard televisual aesthetics."[100]

The discussion of visual history and otherness at the start of this chapter established that such representations often bear white-supremacist legacies of scientific "knowledge" of

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[94] Martin Jay (1988). *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique.* Routledge, p. 26
[95] Raymond Williams (1977). "A Lecture on Realism." *Screen* 18 (1), p. 67
[96] Burnett, Cultures *of Vision,* p. 13
[97] Hua Hsu (2010). "The Wire and the Limits of Empathy." *Criticism* 52 (3/4), p. 513
[98] Leigh Claire La Berge (2010). "Capitalist Realism and Serial Form: The Fifth Season of The Wire." *Criticism* 52 (3/4), p. 557, 558
[99] Brock, "Life on the Wire," p. 348
[100] La Berge, "Capitalist Realism," p. 547

black subjects as lesser-than white subjects, and that viewers are particularly receptive to these images when they validate extant ways of knowing such subjects. Seeing, argues Young, is not only linked to 'believing' but also 'knowing,' a process that can transform "the film camera – when it is used as an extension of the imperial/anthropological eye" into "an instrument of power and control of the Other."[101]

Representations of black bodies, it is discussed in the next chapter, often carry a truth-burden, a weight of revelation about the *truth* of black subjects.[102] *The Wire* certainly does not abandon this truth burden; indeed, it shoulders it willingly, in order to complicate dominant ways of knowing black bodies though strategies of typological depth and social complexity. This depth of knowing into the experience of disadvantaged others is further enabled by the visual-aesthetic strategies of the show.[103]

Televisual form and realism

The Wire is seen to have "blown apart the traditional limits in depicting African-Americans on television."[104] However, many television shows also depict black men as criminals or cops, and deny empathy to such characters and categories of person. How then is *The Wire* different? Realism was identified above as a strategy that plays a part in differentiating these characters from the standard tropes; the remainder of this chapter turns to close analysis of other aspects of form, to draw out how aesthetics convey deep knowledges of socio-political and character contexts, and encourages emotional intimacy and empathic engagement. As Raymond Williams notes, television is a particularly useful medium for artists with realist intentions.[105] Despite its being lauded as "better than television" or as a "visual novel," it is important therefore to come to *The Wire* as a televisual text, not as "a novel that happens to

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[101] Young, *Fear of the Dark,* p. 50

[102] Jennifer Fuller (2010). "Dangerous Fictions: Race, History and "King"." *Cinema Journal* 49 (2), 40-62.

[103] It must be noted at this point that alternative viewing-subjects exist, as do, of course, alternative subject-positions that would complicate empathic reactions. Most obviously, textual research that analyses in terms of black subjectivities (which can be broken down further by class, location, gender and other points of difference) would undoubtedly demonstrate different processes of spectatorship and intersubjectivity. That is outside of the scope of this thesis, which reflexively assumes the "white eye" of mainstream inherited visual culture, and which is the inherited visual culture of the author of this thesis, who is also white.

[104] James S. Williams (2008). "The Lost Boys of Baltimore: Beauty and Desire in the Hood." *Film Quarterly* 62 (29 Winter)), p. 58

[105] Williams, "A Lecture on Realism," p. 67. Interestingly, Williams identifies the "social extension" of television into working-class social life as fundamental to its realist potential; by contrast, as this chapter shows, *The Wire* is notoriously 'prestige' and is marked by exclusivity of distribution and narrative form.

be televised."[106]

As was noted above, the aesthetics of *The Wire* were very carefully considered to deliver a specific experience of televisual realism, attempting to avoid "reveal[ing] the movie itself, rather than the reality the movie is trying to convey."[107] Even such apparently invisible or given textual features such as aspect ratio are relevant to textual analysis.[108] All seasons of the show were produced in 4:3 aspect ratio, a squarer ratio than the more cinematic 16:9 and one that's associated with television,[109] because the producers and Simon believed that 4:3 "feels more like real life and real television and not like a movie."[110]

Kevin McNeilly describes viewers of *The Wire* as "embedded observers" because of its unique visual style, which uses a "fluid, ground level camera" that moves around a complex social system.[111] As the seasons progressed the show consolidated into an even more uniform look centred around long lenses on a dolly, which allowed unobtrusive but flexible filming from a distance. This was a specific attempt to evoke a feeling of distance, observation and voyeurism, where viewing subjects "don't know who the observer is, [creating] that sense of life being under surveillance."[112] *The Wire,* like any show, uses close-ups to evidence characters thinking and feeling, and to create emotional connections between character and viewer. However even these are shot in a way that emphasises the realist, 'unvarnished' nature of *The Wire*, refusing beautifying makeup or glamour lighting. Visually, these techniques reflect and contribute to the show's themes and moods of powerlessness, social embeddedness, and labyrinthine bureaucracy, reinforcing an understanding of the characters' world as unfriendly and inescapable.

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106 Mittell, "All in the Game,", p. 429

107 Simon in Mittell, "All in the Game," p. 435

108 Sarah Cardwell (2015). "A Sense of Proportion: Aspect Ratio and the Framing of Television Space." *Critical Studies in Television* 10 (3 (Autumn)), pp. 83-100

109 4:3 was used in early cinema but by the end of the 20th century widescreen signified cinema, and 4:3 television – for instance, the pan-and-scan edits of movies for home video.

110 Nick Griffin (2007). "Inside HBO's *The Wire.*" *Creative COW Magazine.* Retrieved from <https://library.creativecow.net/articles/griffin_nick/hbo_the_wire.php> last accessed 30 September 2016. A recent high-definition release had the frame reformatted to widescreen, something David Simon (thoughtfully) criticised see: David Simon (2014). "The Wire in HD." *The Audacity of Despair*. 3 December 2014. Retrieved from <http://davidsimon.com/the-wire-hd-with-videos/> last accessed 30 September 2016

111 Kevin McNeilly (2010). "Dislocating America: Agnieszka Holland Directs 'Moral Midgetry'." *The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television.* Eds. Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshal. New York: Continuum International Publishing, p. 207

112 Director of Photography Joe Chapelle in Griffin, "Inside HBO's *The Wire.*" Unsurprisingly *The Wire* is often analysed in Foucauldian frameworks of surveillance and discipline.

In this apparent realist objectivity, *The Wire* is also visually different from other instances of "quality television," which often are made with pleasing aesthetics such as widescreen aspect ratio, saturated colours, an emotional soundtrack, high definition video, elaborate camera moves, Steadicam, and subjective camera tricks such as shaky handheld, over- or under-cranking, and flashy editing.[113] In contrast *The Wire* only ever uses plain cuts, without a fade-to-black except at the start and end of the show. The only music heard in the show (apart from the title and end title music) comes from sources within the scene such as car radios.[114] It also uses a naturalistic lighting system that eschews "beauty lights" and favours 'practicals,' real-life light sources such as fluorescents and windows in sets such as the police station. The lighting therefore is "harsh and appropriate to the environment" and characters will often move in and out of shadow.[115] Sets are practical, cramped and claustrophobic. By reinforcing the realism of the show, such techniques prioritise feelings of inescapability. These aesthetics reinforce the authenticity of its images, narratives and arguments about institutions.

Comstat (Season 3, Episode 1)

Moving through this difficult and oppressive world are the multitude of characters featured in *The Wire*'s five seasons. Such a scope "challenges and problematises the distinction

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[113] See, for instance, Jane Feuer (2007). "HBO and the Concept of Quality TV." *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond.* Eds. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass. London: IB Taurus, pp. 145-159

[114] Mittell, "All in the Game," p. 435

[115] Griffin, "Inside HBO's *The Wire"*

between protagonists and 'secondary characters,'"[116] making nearly every character relevant or potentially relevant. By sitting on the radical edge of what televised narrative complexity can handle – through purposeful lack of clarity, dense and esoteric dialogue, complex plotting with little signposting, and events that make sense only in retrospect – the show requires highly attentive viewing and increases opportunities for character understanding.[117] This distance requires an unusual amount of interpretive labour from viewers to engage with the image and story, as they are forced to pick up clues about the significance and meaning of scenes and character interactions from the *mise en scene* and dialogue.[118]

Indeed, the way in which it requires viewers to notice, understand and remember concepts, characters, places, actions and dialogue over five seasons without any "hand-holding" by the makers of the show is one of its most notable features. It has a complex serial narrative that does not deploy any of the devices (dream sequences, flashbacks, surrealism, reflexivity, voice overs) that feature in other complex and 'quality' programs such as *Six Feet Under* (US, HBO, 2001-2005)*, The Sopranos ((*US, HBO, 1999-2007)*, Mad Men* and *Lost* (US, ABC, 2004-2010)[119] that might otherwise give viewers a clearer understanding of a character's motivations and desires. Paradoxically, the initial ambiguity and impenetrability of *The Wire*'s characters, and the effort required from viewers to make these images meaningful, opens space for *reading into*, and intellectually and affectively engaging with character. That is to say, the less access to character interiority viewers have, the more strongly a text calls upon the empathic resources of its audience.[120]

The figure of the black drug user is prevalent in US televised discourse on drug abuse and criminality, and is rarely offered as a place of empathy or understanding. Black men are regularly associated with thuggishness and criminality.[121] Subordinate identities are often framed not so much oppositionally as complementarily, reaffirming and supporting privileged identities.[122] The characters of Bubbles, the con-artist crack addict, and Dennis

[116] Fredric Jameson (2010). "Realism and Utopia in *The Wire*." *Criticism* 52 (3/4), p. 359
[117] Ted Nannicelli (2009). "It's All Connected: Televisual Narrative Complexity." *The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television.* Eds. Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshall. New York: Continuum International Press, pp. 190-202
[118] Griffin, "Inside HBO's *The Wire."*
[119] Mittell, "All in the Game," pp. 435-437
[120] Keen, *Empathy and the Novel,* p. ix; Neill, "Empathy and Film Fiction," p. 188
[121] See for instance Jimmie L. Reeves (1999). "Re-Covering Racism: Crack Mothers, Reaganism, and the Network News." *Living Colour: Race and Television in the United States.* Ed. Sasha Torres. Durham: Duke UP, pp. 97-117
[122] Johnson, "Narratives of Identity," p. 43

“Cutty” Wise, the ex-felon ex-drug enforcer and murderer, are therefore figures that would typically work to confirm privileged identities. However, here we are asked to understand and feel into Cutty's struggles to find peace and purpose “out of the game,” and with Bubbles: twitchy, isolated, constantly picking at sores, his addiction and homelessness writ on flesh, but with a caring heart, a sense of humour, and a strengthening will to sobriety.

Bubbles (Season 4, Episode 7)

In his review Kent Jones writes that it takes only a few episodes for viewers to understand that “nothing but the moral luck of the draw separates us from the homeless addict Bubs, or Namond, the teenager with no heart for the game. On *The Wire* there really is no such thing as ‘them.’ There is only us.”[123] This heartfelt response is typical of reactions to *The Wire's* textual strategies for reducing stereotyping or objectification. Indeed, Fredric Jameson argues that there is such a vast diversity of black characters on *The Wire* that “black” as a relevant category dissolves,[124] leaving viewers confronting characters in their specificity, action and history: Michael, a young man hardening to street life; D'Angelo, a mid-level manager of a drug-selling organisation; Bunk: smart and funny, often drunk, and regularly adulterous but “good police”; Snoop, an unintelligible, androgynous enforcer; Bodie, a murderer and mid-level drug dealer seeing the game change around him; Omar, a gay man, a murderer and thief with a strong moral code; Freamon, a patient and clever cop; Burrell, an ambitious and careful (Deputy) Police Commissioner, willing to sacrifice his

[123] Kent Jones (2008). “Down in the hole.” *Sight and Sound* 18 (5), p. 22
[124] Jameson, “Realism and Utopia,” p. 370

subordinates; Kima, a lesbian, sardonic, also adulterous and also good police; Shardene, a stripper and a kind, helpful witness. This list barely scratches the surface, but the show is able to fill in their circumstance with rich characterisation as well as complex understanding of their socio-economic-cultural subjectivities.

Crucially, unlike the novels or the aforementioned quality television shows, *The Wire* does not attempt to "probe the interior lives" of these characters.[125] Instead, *The Wire*'s realism, long-form complex seriality, aesthetic and characterisation generates an emotional resonance "around individual characters tragically enmeshed with institutions;" *The Wire* thus, argues Marsha Kinder, takes both an expanded view (systemic critique of post-industrial institutions) and an intimate view (emotional connection with characters).[126]

Feelings of empathy for these characters are particularly facilitated by their suffering in the face of impersonal institutions. The show makes clear the structural inequalities that dictate their habitus, denying the neoliberal narrative of personal failure that otherwise often attaches to people in poverty (particularly non-white drug users).[127] Characters on both sides of the law are unable to escape institutional structures of power, and the ways in which these disenfranchised bodies on screen are shot, argues McNeilly, creates an "ethical imperative: the demand that we treat each other humanely."[128] These unique spatial and temporal qualities set up viewing positions that acknowledge the state of existing as a labour source with little concrete power.[129] Empathic feeling is encouraged further by the way the creators work to generate a deep sense of estrangement and an ethical imperative towards humanism and compassion.[130]

Those on both sides of the law are embedded and essentially powerless in parallel institutions bigger than any individual. In the very first episode, for instance, Detective McNulty being reprimanded by his boss Major Rawls is immediately followed by drug dealer D'Angelo being reprimanded by drug kingpin Avon. To this end, shot construction works to compress and make claustrophobic the environments of oppressed and restricted characters on either

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125 Mittell, "All in the Game," p. 430
126 Kinder, "Re-Wiring Baltimore," p. 50
127 Johnson, "Narratives of Identity," p. 54; Reeves, "Recovering Racism," pp. 97-117
128 McNeilly, "Dislocating America," p. 203
129 Hsu, "*The Wire* and the Limits of Empathy," p. 525
130 McNeilly, "Dislocating America," p. 203

sides of the law, such as street-level dealers, bottom-line cops, junkies, or students, and expand the environment of those in power.[131]

Viewer relationships to characters are therefore critical to the meanings and narratives of *The Wire*. Tony Wilson links meaning-making irreducibly to processes of identification with characters. It is identification with “intra-textual characters,” he argues, that makes viewers project sense or meaning onto texts, a hermeneutic “involvement in the processes of manufacturing a coherent 'unit of meaning' (sense) out of the events of a life, a program, or both.”[132] As has been seen in this thesis, however, subject-oriented textual analysis does not require a theory of identification. Instead, it was argued that meaning-making is a scopic process in which viewing subjects draw upon pre-existing systems of meaning and value to create the televisual images in their field of vision, and thus themselves; that meaning-making precedes identification and is in fact a necessary condition for recognition of character, narrative and televisual image itself.

Narratively, *The Wire* focuses on the procedures of crime and policing, as many police procedurals do, but it refuses episodic and ideological closure. A resolution doesn't come for a long time for Bubbles, and the triumph of his sobriety and acceptance back into his family is tempered by the tragedy of sweet-natured young teen Dukie's homelessness and descent into heroin addiction. Emotional response is encouraged by deployment of the techniques of socially-conscious melodrama to encourage viewers’ emotional engagement with the characters and issues on screen. These techniques include “a focus on powerless victims, an emphasis on corruption and injustice as the primary source of conflict, and the characters' frustrating inability to effect change around them,” as well as “vivid scene[s] of suffering.”[133]

131 Sheehan and Sweeney, “*The Wire*.”
132 Wilson, *Watching Television*, pp. 85, 87
133 Klein, “The Dickensian Aspect,” p. 178, 179

Dukie shoots up (Season 5 Episode 10)

However, unlike melodramas, in *The Wire* catharsis and resolution are denied so that the viewer cannot remain passive – cannot cry as a means to resolving the tension of melodramatic injustice.[134] The viewer is left "hooked in" – left, for instance, with Dukie, as he finds relief from the torment of his day by shooting up in the final episode. The denial and delay of catharsis in *The Wire* means that the affect generated – the "deeply felt, visceral emotional response on the part of the viewer"– cannot be cried or laughed away; that the moral and emotional tensions of the text cannot be displaced into emotional release.[135]

Affect "intrudes against the will," transforming the subject psychically and physiologically.[136] *The Wire* leaves engaged viewers in a state of suffering; crucially, that suffering is organised around intimate knowledge of how structural inequality and social disenfranchisement has left characters in states of anguish and hopelessness. Where typical representations of black homeless drug users might work to constrain or deny complex understanding and empathy, *The Wire* depicts inner-city socio-political disenfranchised identities and creates opportunities for empathic intersubjective connection. Vision is often implicated in processes of essentialising, objectifying, and alienating; this section, on the other hand, has demonstrated that *The Wire*'s form works in the opposite way, generating not only feeling in viewing-subjects but complex, contextualised feeling.

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[134] Klein, "The Dickensian Aspect," *passim*
[135] Klein, "The Dickensian Aspect," p. 179
[136] Hockley, *Frames of Mind,* p. 39 (for Hockley this is the explicitly Jungian definition of affect)

The Wire *and empathic intersubjectivity*

Hua Hsu asks, after noting *The Wire*'s strategies for creating empathic intimacy between viewers and characters: "what are we to do with all that we have seen?" That is, can we assume the transformations of an individual viewer's consciousness? How can we "deploy this realism?"[137]

These are the questions and ongoing challenges of effects research. When facing viewers, the role of empathy becomes aesthetically pedagogical, allowing viewers to experience something foreign, to turn compassion into action.[138] The challenge of proof here is significant. Kathleen LeBesco, for instance, examines online responses to *The Wire* to evaluate the extent to which the show has changed people's political consciousness, and struggles to arrive at a non-ambiguous conclusion: for some, maybe, for some, maybe not.[139]

This thesis, however, is not effects research but textual research. Subject-oriented textual analysis of *The Wire* provides an opportunity to examine systems of visuality that produce empathic responses, empathic subjects, and reverse typical ways of knowing and seeing black bodies and black others. There is no requirement for empathy to entail altruistic action, argues Coplan; that the perspective-taking of another and the emotional concurrence felt therefore does not "in and of itself" compel us to alleviate the other's distress. If "the act of looking is always one of deciphering,"[140] then textual analysis can usefully identify and analyse processes of spectatorship, visual history, power relations, and intersubjectivity, in which "the self is maintained even as the other is experienced."[141]

Empathic response to characters on *The Wire,* it was argued above, is to make a knowledgeful and complex intersubjective connection. Martha Nussbaum in *Upheavals of Thought* argues that empathy is politically and ethically significant: it is closely connected with compassion, and more importantly, it forces recognition of an entity apart from the self that has a personhood of its own.[142] Radical alterity does not, it seems, mean radical opposition. The

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137 Hsu, "*The Wire* and the limits of empathy," p. 524
138 Neill, "Empathy and (Film) Fiction," p. 179
139 Karen LeBesco (2009). "'Gots to Get Got': Social Justice and Audience Response to Omar Little." *The Wire: Urban Decay and Contemporary Television.* Eds. Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshal. New York: Continuum International Publishing. 217-232
140 Leppert, *Art and the Committed Eye,* p. 172
141 Ellis, "What are we expected to feel?" p. 72
142 Martha Nussbaum (2001). *Upheavals of thought: the intelligence of emotions.* Cambridge: Cambridge

idea of the other as *radically* other does not mean that we are unable to understand or incorporate in some way the other, but that the other will never be accountable to the subject: it is the subject who will always be accountable to the other. Empathic response to *The Wire* acknowledges the imperative force of the other, turning the absence and denials of raced epistemologies of knowing into the presence and understanding of empathy.

The first part of this chapter, it will be remembered, outlined a cultural context in which the denial of empathic connection – that is, the denial of personhood[143] – to black subjects has a long and violent history in the fictional and non-fictional texts of Europe and the United States. The history of race and representation is one that makes black bodies and existence knowable for white audiences:[144] but knowable from the outside, from the supremacist position. Western visual traditions "have long traded in the coin of social class and racial difference as a principal means of marking human value."[145] These are the limits of the epistemological horizon that representations are forced to engage with: the question, according to Butler, is not simply "can I know you or be known," but can I be "compelled to realise that 'you' qualifies in scheme of human within which I operate."[146]

It is not enough to assume that witnessing suffering is a transformative scopic event. E. Ann Kaplan notes that images of the Second Gulf War prompted only "empty empathy," because the images "hardly seemed real."[147] John Ellis, on the other hand, uses the term witness to describe an almost mechanical process whereby witnessing the suffering of others to whom you would grant personhood automatically engenders empathy.[148] Rather than positing witnessing as a mechanism of resistance, this chapter demonstrated that visuality is complex and reliant upon contextualised meaning-making. Strategies of textual analysis locate subject-production in ethical terms, and help locate sites that resist spectator relationships where encounters in which "the normative subject need not have an ethical relation based on the obligation to treat the other like oneself."[149]

University Press. p. 333

[143] See for example Nussbaum on Nazism, the portrayal of Jews, and German moral life. *Upheavals,* p. 335

[144] And, of course, for black audiences too.

[145] Leppert, *Art and the Committed Eye,* p. 173

[146] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself,* p. 134

[147] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture,* p. 94

[148] Ellis, "What are we expected to feel?" p. 73

[149] Venn, "Occidentalism and its Discontents," p. 51

In *The Wire*, that is, empathic-affective response is central to and constitutive of processes of meaning-making, because televisual form here is disruptive of traditional legacy of African-American represented bodies. Empathy is a social emotion-state and requires a recognition of personhood – not a *granting* of personhood but an understanding of an other as *always-already* being a person. If Western Cartesian subjectivity "is founded on the systematic disavowal of the primacy of the relation to the other and the denial of the difference of the other"[150] then empathic processes may help recoup an idea of the subject founded relationally not in disavowal or subjugation but in recognition and ethical concern.

This is not, of course, to suggest that *The Wire* has fixed American television, or racism itself. *The Wire* remains positioned by its otherness in both the televisual landscape and the landscape of black American representation. This chapter examined the history of raced representation not to rescue the naïve viewer, whose praxis we have no access to, but to prioritise the epistemological and productive nature of texts and images, and to highlight empathy as relevant to disruption of ways of knowing blackness and black subjectivities. The visual-perceptual experience of race is one in which "perception represents sedimented contextual knowledges"; that is to say, meaning-making in a show featuring black bodies relies upon the racist structures that always precede visual categorisation.[151] Empathy, which is intersubjective, however, provides some opportunity for rehabilitating what has gone before.

Conclusion

As did the previous chapters, the case study of this chapter prioritised processes of subjectivity in its approach to textual analysis. Moreover, it built on the work of those chapters in understanding subjectivity in its social and political contexts. Where chapter four discussed subjectivity in its more singular and personal constructions, and chapter five discussed constructions of communal subjectivities, this chapter expanded the scope of research to the critical arena of intersubjectivity and subject-other relations. If subject-oriented textual analysis calls us to examine processes of subjectivity – and if we understand

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[150] Venn, "Occidentalism and its Discontents," p. 52

[151] Alcoff in Janet Borgerson and Jonathan Schroeder (2008). "Building an Ethics of Visual Representation: Contesting Epistemic Closure in Marketing Communication." *Cutting-Edge Issues in Business Ethics: Continental Challenges to Tradition and Practice*. Eds Mollie Painter-Moreland and Patricia Werhane. Chicago: Springer, p. 95

subjects to be fundamentally constituted in relation to the other – then this approach to texts offers significant opportunities for investigating politically relevant constructions of subject and other.

As this chapter showed, racial difference is an important factor in the theorisation of subject-other relations; it is, furthermore, a significantly *visual* phenomenon. This chapter began with a discussion of systems of visuality and knowledge that cannot escape the structuring forces of the other and of race. As part one argued, subjectivity in response to texts emerges through processes of meaning-making, as subjects implicate themselves in wider scopic regimes of meaning and visuality. There is a long history of cultural texts that produces subjects in relations of white supremacy; as a possible destabilisation of this dynamic, therefore, the chapter discussed empathy, which is an other-related emotion that requires feeling *with* another. This feeling does not attempt to subsume or overwrite the other, but to experience and recognise their alterity, specificity, and humanity.

The Wire was subsequently identified as a relevant text for study due to its reputation, its large number of black characters, and its unique visual strategies that engender both distance and intimacy, as well as apparently authentic, deep knowledges of social disenfranchisement. *The Wire's* form, it was argued, generates unique opportunities for empathic intersubjectivities. If, as Butler says, "there is no "I" that stands outside of the conditions of its own emergence,"[152] then one of those conditions is the legacy of raced images that forecloses empathy. Texts that open up channels of intersubjective subject-creation along lines of empathy are therefore significant, as this subject-focused analysis reveals.

This chapter therefore also contributed to subjectivity politics by identifying and expanding upon empathy as a significant contribution to work theorising relational subjectivities; at the same time, it supplemented the growing recognition of *The Wire* as a vital cultural text of the new century. In terms of this thesis, it demonstrated that subject-oriented textual analysis can do the important political-ethical work of investigating intersubjectivity. The next chapter expands on this discussion of visual history and race, but moves from questions of knowing and intersubjectivity to questions of gazing and spectatorship, which, as part one of this thesis showed, are critical to understanding processes of subjectivity.

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[152] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, p. 7

7

TREME, THE OTHER AND GAZES

Introduction

The previous chapter explored intersubjectivity and the subject's reliance upon the other to structure the scope and nature of its being. This foundational relationship, it was argued, could be examined for both oppressive and emancipatory configurations through subject-oriented textual analysis. Empathy, in this instance, was discussed as a useful tool for the politics of intersubjectivity. Below, this thesis's final case study expands on these themes by turning to questions of gazes, spectatorship and power relations. In its discussion of the television show *Treme* (US, HBO, 2010-2013) this chapter therefore explores the subject's and the other's constitution through various ways of looking and objects of sight: the colonial, touristic gaze; the returned gaze; and the face of the other. It contributes to the politics of postcolonial subjectivities and television studies, and demonstrates the usefulness of subject-oriented textual analysis's attention to visuality and meaning-making.

This chapter therefore builds from the previous chapter, in which race and postcolonial theory provided the context and analytical tools to discuss the ways in which television shows generate or foreclose empathy for the other. Race and postcolonial theory are also crucial here, as the focus is narrowed even further to the face-to-face encounter with the other. As in chapter four's discussion of the before-and-after shot, this chapter's final section is dedicated to an encounter with a singular image; unlike that chapter, it is concerned less with the return to the self and more with an orientation outward, towards the other.

This chapter expands chapter six's discussion of the visual legacies surrounding raced bodies and representations into visual legacies of colonialism. Crucial here are questions of spectatorship and witnessing; of visual regimes that structure subjectivities in response to scenes of suffering, and grant only some spectators the right to gaze. This builds on the work of the previous chapter as it is not only knowledges about race but the very act of spectatorship that is a key process of subject-formation. The imperial gaze is unidirectional,

more concerned with the subject's anxieties; it requires a closing off of connection, and forces a coherence and rationalisation of the object. Below, this chapter draws on the work of bell hooks, E Ann Kaplan, and others to characterise imperial visual culture as a gaze. The imperial gaze looks without seeing, stultified by an anxious denial of the fragility of its own privilege. It is objectifying and refuses the invitation to a looking relationship. The imperial gaze is thus a practice and an exercise of power.

Like *The Wire*, *Treme* is a David Simon project, and has a large, majority-black cast. The below textual analysis of *Treme* orients itself to processes of subjectivity by referencing colonial and postcolonial modes of viewing: that is, by analysing the scopic relationships between characters within the show and between viewers and characters, as revolving around territory, culture, desire, and racialised subject-object formation. How, that is, is the other "generated for consumption"?[1] Following Kent Ono, this chapter therefore also reinserts colonialism into discussions of race in US television.[2] Similarly, returned gazes are a critical analytical figure in much postcolonial work on film and photography. However, argues Paula Amad, the actual returned gaze has often tended to lose specificity in its formal analysis and has slipped into a general metaphor of the 'returned gaze' which, wherever spotted in whatever context, is deployed as a fillip and moment of resistance to the traditional binary power structures of viewing. Amad calls for revisiting the returned gaze with close textual analysis.[3]

Such analysis is undergone in the middle part of this chapter. *Treme* engages explicitly and repeatedly with questions of appropriation and desire, of tourism and the gaze, deploying narrative and (tele)visual strategies to generate a subject consciously enmeshed in the

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1 Hamid Naficy and Teshome H Gabriel (1993). "Introduction - Consuming the Other." *Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged.* Eds. Hamid Nacify and Teshome H Gabriel. Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, p. xi. This chapter does not call upon feminism as a dominant critical lens, although of course feminist theory and politics has contributed significantly to work on the gaze in postmodern and postcolonial theory. The chapter thus sidesteps, for instance, the work of Mulvey or Copjec that connects the gaze with the Panopticon and female objectification, figuring the female subject as bound up with the structure of the look and the "localisation of the eye as authority." Copjec quoted in E. Ann Kaplan (1997). *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze.* New York: Routledge, p. xviii. As with the previous chapter, complicating subjectivity with further categories is outside of the scope of this thesis; undoubtedly there is further work to be done here.

2 Kent A. Ono (2009). *Contemporary Media Culture and the Remnants of a Colonial Past.* New York: Peter Lang; Stuart Hall (1981). "The Whites of their Eyes." *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties.* Eds. George Bridges and Rosalind Brunt. Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 28-52

3 Paula Amad (2013). "Visual Riposte: Looking Back at the Return of the Gaze as Postcolonial Theory's Gift To Film Studies." *Cinema Journal* 52 (3 (Spring)), p. 63

relations of desire and fear that constitute postcolonial subjectivity. This thesis has repeatedly politicised questions of gazes and spectatorship. While 'looking' may not initially seem to be a question of ethics, both postcolonial and Levinasian theory prioritise looking relations as ethically charged and involved in dynamics of power and suffering. In the context of images and visual culture – and more specifically, television – looking relations between characters on screen, and between the viewer-subject and the characters, are characterised by recognition and invisibility; by lack or constraint, by what is excluded from representation and what structures and gives shape to meaning-making by its absence. Furthermore, this chapter argues, what is often absent to the viewer is the viewer herself. Through its narrative, theme, and form, *Treme* calls the viewing-subject into visibility and self-consciousness.

In phenomenological terms, sensory experience – what was called in chapter two 'base retinal data' – of the other is organised, interrupted and inflected by pre-existing sign-systems. These looking relations are often implicated in unjust social organisation; we are thus called to seek for moments of destabilisation and ethical interruption. The chapter closes, therefore, on a brief discussion of the Levinasian ethics of the subject-other relationship in the textual face-to-face encounter.

Seeing, Suffering and Place

Treme is set in New Orleans three months after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, and follows several residents as they confront the change the failure of the levees has wrought on their homes, lives and families. Like *The Wire*, much of *Treme's* cast is non-white, and like *The Wire*, *Treme* makes strong claims to quality and value on the back of its subject matter, high production values, accomplished acting, and aura of authenticity. However, the milieu of *Treme* is significantly different. The characters of *Treme* are primarily culture-makers: musicians, chefs, Mardi Gras Indians, radio DJs, writers, and YouTube vloggers. The show specifically selects as its narrative the post-Katrina experiences of people involved in New Orleans culture in order to examine the production of identity and place.[4]

[4] David Simon (2013). "David Simon on what HBO's *Treme* meant to him and what he hopes it meant to New Orleanians." *The Times-Picayune*. 27 December 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.nola.com/treme-hbo/index.ssf/2013/12/david_simon_on_what_hbos_treme.html> last accessed 30 September 2016

As with *The Wire, Treme* generates a feeling of authenticity and credibility in large part through being impenetrable and obscure about its "realities," and refusing to explain them outright to audiences. Despite claims from Simon that the show is not intended to be journalism or documentary,[5] actor Wendell Pierce calls the filmmaking team "anthropologists," saying "one thing I'm certain of is that we're going to be authentic," to the point of only booking musicians who were in town at the time.[6] *Treme* used people in the production with intimate knowledge of the events and themes depicted: Pierce is a local and was affected by the floods,[7] and those working behind the scenes as consultants and writers include the New Orleanians the characters were based on, for instance chef Susan Spicer and DJ Davis Rogan, as well as other locals such as Times-Picayune writers.

Nevertheless, historical fiction, even of recent history, is never a case of straightforward representation. The visual mediation of *Treme*, argues New Orleans writer Jonathan Alexander, "exemplifies how the circulation of traumatic images in media over time allows us to trace how those images become re-mediated;" what ends up on screen is less a reflection on "the trauma itself and more on the production of culture about trauma."[8] Far from being a simple matter of "accurately representing factual events," such representations cannot be a simple chronological revisiting, because the figural imagination has always been there before us, and always already structures meaning-making: "[i]f we see the past," argues Michael Ann Holly, "it is because it has yielded the images with which to look."[9] Furthermore, in New Orleans,

> the past isn't even past...all of it, seemingly, is still up for grabs, shaped and reshaped by a populace who is, to a soul, convinced that it knows it is Tracey's over R&O's, or that Mac copped that one from Booker, or that pocky way means two gangs in the street, coming at each other and any Indian who tells you otherwise is some jive-ass, glue-gun firing Jazz Fest Injun.[10]

The meanings of *Treme*'s images and narratives, while making claims to truth and accuracy,

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5 Simon, "David Simon on what HBO's *Treme* means to him."

6 Pierce quoted in Jan Ramsey (2010). "HBO's *Treme*: To Tell The Truth." *Offbeat Magazine*. 1 April 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.offbeat.com/articles/hbos-treme-to-tell-the-truth/> last accessed 30 September 2016

7 Ramsey, "To Tell the Truth."

8 Jonathan Alexander (2013). "The Arts of HBO's *Treme* in the Aftermath of Trauma." *Los Angeles Review of Books* 23 September. Retrieved from <https://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/katrina-media-the-arts-of-hbos-treme-in-the-aftermath-of-trauma> last accessed 30 September 2016

9 Michael Ann Holly (1996). *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image.* Cornell University Press, p. 151

10 Simon, "David Simon on what HBO's *Treme* means to him."

are of course contingent and constructed. Viewing subjects are produced in relation to Simon's (and his team's) vision of a recent past, and are purposefully enmeshed in a narrative about control over New Orleans identity, territory and culture.

Colonialism: seeing, knowing and subjects

These themes inevitably implicate the deeper past. As was discussed in part one, subject-oriented textual analysis draws attention to the intersections of visuality, sociality, and spectatorship in televisual images, and how subjects emerge in this context. The previous chapter introduced the visual legacy of racism and racist media: in a socio-cultural system in which black bodies are regularly linked to criminality and bestiality, *The Wire,* which is about criminals and law enforcement, disrupted a legacy of such images through aesthetic and narrative strategies that encouraged empathic subjectivities. Similarly, *Treme* confronts issues of fascination, desire, lack, territory, and belonging, all of which are part of the push-pull dynamics of colonialism. Subject-oriented textual analysis, which requires us to investigate intersections of gaze, power, visual culture and the other, is therefore a useful way to engage with such a text.

While drawing on many of the same tropes of racism discussed in the previous chapter, colonialism and imperialism contain their own visual culture, their own modes of visualisation and spectatorship that, unsurprisingly, further projects of European expansion, Eurocentrism, and white supremacy. For instance, the European fascination with world exhibitions in the latter half of the 19th century was a managed encounter with others *qua* objects, collating and organising the artefacts of foreign people, places and times such that objects took on *representational* value.[11] These European societies of spectacle were represented in Egyptian and Middle Eastern accounts as peculiarly ocular.[12] Objects thus negated themselves: “everything was arranged before an observing subject into a system of signification, declaring itself to be a mere object, a mere 'signifier' of something further.”[13] Systems of spectatorship therefore structured and produced colonial subjectivities.

Black bodies also took on object- and representational-status. The “Hottentot Venus” was

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[11] Timothy Mitchell (2001). “Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order.” *The Visual Culture Reader.* Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. London: Routledge, p. 499

[12] Mitchell, “Orientalism,” p 496-500

[13] Mitchell, “Orientalism,” p. 500

two Khoikhoi women "imported from South Africa and exhibited in the major cities of Europe because of their large and fatty buttocks," a visual practice that converged with notions of black hypersexuality to generate the image of the wanton black female.[14] When photography developed it was immediately (in 1839, the same year as the invention of daguerreotypes was announced) implicated in bringing images of Africa to Europe, creating such a hunger for images of exotic and sensual black bodies that by the twentieth century "American photographer F. Holland Day was manufacturing studio images of 'Nubians' and 'Ethiopian Chiefs' shot in America and modelled by African Americans."[15]

Technologies of the image and the coagulation of a plurality of potential signifiers into "ways of seeing" – which were also "ways of knowing" – were therefore vital to bringing depictions of the colonies to Europe. Colonial visual systems, therefore, do not simply represent, map or illustrate encounters with new peoples and places but organise these landscapes, peoples and cultures into a project of Western becoming, and refigure the indigenous into pre-established categories of the Native or Negro, thus "Other[ing] the Other."[16] Kobena Mercer, for instance, writes that Mapplethorpe's photography presents black men as mysterious and isolated, as a "virginal space to be penetrated and possessed by colonial desire to probe and explore an alien body."[17] Representations that ensure its objects are received as "exotic" are part of a visual system that "inscribes its object with an acultural illegibility, isolated from any coherence of origin."[18] Non-white territory and peoples become an object for white consumption and reorganisation.

Black bodies were, from the earliest days of the colonial project, objects of white European gaze and scientific-philosophical knowledge.[19] Empire building requires a "mental apparatus" of scientific-anthropological techniques of knowing race; this mental apparatus

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[14] Sander L Gilman discussed in Michele Wallace (1990). "Modernism, Postmodernism and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-American Culture." *Out There: Marginalisation and Contemporary Cultures*. Eds. Trinh T, Minh-ha, Russel Ferguson, Martha Gerver, Cornel West. New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, p. 45

[15] Olu Oguibe (1998). "Photography and the Substance of the Image." *The Visual Culture Reader.* Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. New York: Routledge, p. 566

[16] Terry Smith (2001). "Visual Regimes of Colonisation: Aboriginal Seeing and European Vision in Australia." *The Visual Culture Reader.* Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. New York: Routledge, p. 484

[17] Kobena Mercer (1999). "Reading Racial Fetishism: the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe." *Visual Culture: the Reader.* Eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. London: Sage, p. 438

[18] Harriet Guest in Ron Leppert (1996). *Art and the Committed Eye.* Boulder: Westview Press, p. 204

[19] Lola Young (1996). *Fear of the Dark: 'race', gender and sexuality in the cinema.* London: Routledge, p. 49

has also structured visual practices.[20] Far from being neutral, colonial viewing practices require a spectator/viewer with a "white eye," the position from which imperialist and colonialist understandings of race and representation can only make sense.[21] This requires an understanding of cameras and photography not as technologies that capture and represent the "personal intentions of the individual behind the lens" but as technologies and artefacts that "say something about certain ways in which white people 'look' at black people,"[22] and present black bodies and territories as accessible objects of white curiosity and desire.

Under a truth-regime of scientism and representation that linked seeing to believing, the colonial eye constituted both the object of its gaze and itself; similarly, the film camera, "when it is used as an extension of the imperial/anthropological eye – may be characterised as an instrument of power and control of the Other."[23] Neocolonialism – the resurgence of colonial viewing practices and social relations – retrieves and repackages the stories and cultural tropes that supported the colonial project: "travel, tourist and escape narratives about exploring strange lands and civilisations…locking up and keeping aliens away from the rest of society."[24] A secret fantasy and longing for the other is embedded in white supremacy, a yearning for "meaning, for those qualities which the dominant order has exiled or lost."[25]

Colonial art, even that most sympathetic to the pain of non-whites, generates epistemologies of the other that prioritise white sentiment and white gazes. The visual experience of the suffering of the other is connective and interpersonal but not necessarily disruptive of a social and visual order that subordinates non-whites. Compassionate responses to suffering, therefore, are still recuperated within the visual and emotional regimes of colonialism.

For instance, John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam,* in its narrative and its illustrations by Blake and Bartolozzi, depicts a world where black suffering is first and foremost inflicted upon a white observer, an "enlightened man of sentiment."[26]

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[20] Kaplan, *Looking for the Other*, p. 60

[21] Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes," p. 38-39

[22] Mercer, "Reading Racial Fetishism," p. 435

[23] Young, *Fear of the Dark,* p. 50

[24] Ono, *Contemporary Media,* p. 13

[25] Nacify and Gabriel, p. xi; hooks in Sherene Razack (1998). *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 5

[26] Marcus Wood (2002). *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography.* Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 98

Spectacles of Suffering

The verse below the image reads, "Unhappy Youth while bleeding on the ground;/'Twas *Yours* to fall – but *Mine* to feel the wound."[27] Here, Stedman's perceptual and emotive abilities and sophistication mark him as a "true" man of feeling, of "civilised consciousness." On a more basic level, the "sympathetic capacity" makes him human instead of "brute" or "savage."[28] This is a far cry from the discussion of empathy via cultural representations in the previous chapter, which enabled intersubjective connection over dehumanising supremacist subject-other relations. Again, here, the subject could not exist without also creating a racialised other; and again, representation is used to create a way of knowing and feeling the other that denies the other personhood, and renders their capacities a moment of fascination for the enlightened white spectator. Black suffering is simply an occasion for white fascination. *Treme,* it is shown below, identifies and resists this dynamic.

This is not simply a way of analysing or confronting racism in historical images or cultural

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27 Image from Wood, *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography,* p. 101
28 Wood, *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography,* p. 101

products or practices. The systems of power/knowledge at the basis of this representational regime continue to structure visual experience. Ono describes contemporary US culture as one in which colonialism continues to function by, counterintuitively, the discursive strategies of equality and colour-blindness, sending racism underground and creating a kind of "colonial amnesia."[29] "The progress of the Western conscience no longer means purifying thought of cultural alluviums and language particularisms," argues Levinas. Because "significations arising on the horizon of cultures, and even the excellence of Western culture, are culturally and historically conditioned" the danger is that "emancipation of minds can be a pretext for exploitation and violence."[30]

Subject-oriented textual analysis requires attention to the visual histories informing meaning-making possibilities. Vision – *seeing* – is, as has been argued repeatedly, socially conditioned and a social act. Gazing at bodies therefore organises, taxonomises, and creates both the object of sight and the viewing subject. "Between retina and world," says Norman Bryson,

> is inserted a *screen* of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena... [To] articulate my retinal experience with the codes of recognition that come to me from my social milieu(s), I am inserted into systems of visual discourse that saw the world before I did and will go on seeing after I see no longer.[31]

Images are not free from their history and signification is not ahistorical: "*access is part of signification itself*. The scaffoldings are never dismantled. The ladder is never drawn up."[32] What is at stake is meaning-making, rendering retinal experience intelligible. To gaze is to make – and to make is to be made via the screen of signs. In a colonial viewing system, it is to be made with a white eye.

As was argued in the previous chapter, race is a visual phenomenon that precedes subjects into the world. Visual regimes prioritise skin colour, "ineluctably establish[ing] race in a Manichean binary of white/black."[33] Often this inherited binary is restated and reworked in

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29 Ono, *Contemporary Media Culture,* p. 13 (emphasis removed)

30 Emmanuel Levinas (2003 [1972]). *Humanism of the Other.* Trans. Nidra Poller. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, p. 37

31 Norman Bryson (1988). "The Gaze in the Expanded Field." *Vision and Visuality.* Ed. Hal Foster. Seattle: Bay Press, p. 92

32 Levinas, *Humanism of the Other,* p.20

33 Mary Ann Doane (1999). "Dark continents: epistemologies of racial and sexual difference in

the media, as television and film become significant spaces in which images of the other are constructed and distributed. Examinations of race in US media rarely tie racism as a structure and signifying practice to colonialism, which is seen to be a historical event instead of psychically, economically and bodily productive. So colonialism remains a "ghost-like presence" in contemporary media, as citizens go about the historical and contemporary labour of forgetting.[34] Nevertheless, the desire to colonise via the gaze remains. As *Treme* teaches us, closed communities of black culture-producers, for instance, retain their fascination for white gazes both inside and outside the text.

Subject-oriented textual analysis therefore calls us to examine issues of spectatorship, gazing and power relations. To consume difference requires nothing from those in a dominant position, bell hooks reminds us:

> When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominant races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other.[35]

As a prestigious show about black American cultures after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, it is certainly possible that *Treme* could produce subjects enmeshed in looking relations of cultural or trauma tourism and spectatorship, reaffirming the unassailable and invisible subject-position of viewing-subjects. However, subject-oriented textual analysis reveals that gazing and looking relations in *Treme* are more complicated.

Treme and the Right to Look

Much of *Treme* is given over to spending intimate time with culture-producers such as jazz musicians and Mardis Gras Indians, discursively constructing and emphasising a particular narrative of New Orleans culture as indebted to the artistic output of musicians, chefs, Indians and carnival culture as a whole. Furthermore, *Treme* explicitly links cultural production to community and subject-production. Rebuilding New Orleans, in *Treme*, is as

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psychoanalysis and cinema." *Visual Culture: the Reader.* Eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. London: Sage, p. 252

[34] Ono, *Contemporary Media Culture,* pp. 4, 13

[35] bell hooks (1992). *Black Looks: Race and Representation.* Boston: South End Press, p. 23

much about rebuilding culture and cultural practice as it is about bricks and mortar.

Labouring over costumes

Performance

This is a unique and dominant narrative strategy of the series, noticeably mentioned in every review and piece of criticism. Long and multiple sequences within each episode are given over to musical and carnival creation, rehearsal, and, most especially, performance, to the point at which it pushes against the boundaries of traditional television.[36] *Treme* is therefore a show about the productive capacities of performance and spectatorship. Consumption is never passive but instead is strategic, as characters fight to be able to reproduce their own community and culture in the devastating wake of Katrina.

The colonist, argues Frantz Fanon, needs no specificity when regarding those he subjugates: "the Negro is neither an Angolan nor a Nigerian, [and is simply spoken] of as 'the Negro.'"[37]

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[36] Alyssa Rosenberg (2012). "What *Treme* and *Breaking Bad* can tell us about the limits of television," *ThinkProgress.* 24 September 2012. Retrieved from <http://thinkprogress.org/alyssa/2012/09/24/879571/treme-breaking-bad/> last accessed 30 September 2016

[37] Frantz Fanon (1969 [1963]). Trans. Constance Farrington. *The Wretched of the Earth.* London: Penguin, p. 210

In contrast, *Treme* demands that viewers engage with the specificity and minutia of its various communities: to understand the important differences between a flag boy and a spy boy, between playing the packed bars of Bourbon Street, the jazz bars outside the French Quarter, and the airport, between being born in New Orleans and moving to New Orleans; furthermore it requires this understanding without ever outright explaining such critical information. Viewers who work hard to understand these differentiations are therefore permitted, even encouraged, to understand themselves as insiders: to know this particular culture from an inside-eye, not an objectifying, outside-eye. According to Simon, *Treme* "is from an interior point of view. It allows for a certain kind of tourism on the part of viewers, but only if viewers are willing to extend themselves. What we perceive of people from the outside can only take you so far."[38]

NoLA.com, the website for the Times-Picayune, even provided guides for New Orleans novices about the kinds of people, locations, food and even words that appear in each episode.[39] After every episode, those with knowledge about New Orleans culture posted on the internet detailed explanations of myriad references to music, place, people, history and minutia of the New Orleans landscape.[40] As dense and opaque as *The Wire,* for those viewers who "get it," *Treme* cultivates a knowingness and an insider-feeling to the communities represented, and tourism figures as a prominent metaphor in discussions of *Treme.* "There are no tourists in Simon's audience," says one television critic; "[t]o watch him is to go native."[41] Another downplays the spectre of exoticism: "it didn't strike me as exotic, since that's a word I would use to describe something I felt distanced from. But here I felt a strong connection."[42]

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38 J. C. Frenan (2010). "Interview: David Simon." *Slant Magazine.* May 7 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.slantmagazine.com/tv/feature/interview-david-simon/225> last accessed 30 September 2013; also Simon to the BBC News: "A lot of network TV is on the tour bus." BBC (2010). "Writer's Delight at *The Wire* Reaction." *BBC News.* 31 May 2009. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/8075840.stm> last accessed 30 September 2016

39 See, for instance, <http://www.nola.com/treme-hbo/index.ssf/2010/04/hbos_treme_explained_do_you_kn.html>

40 *The Times-Picayune*, for instance, ran a "Treme Explained" column after each episode.

41 Tim Appelo (2010). "*Treme*: Another HBO Must-See from The Wire's David Simon." *IndieWire.* 11 April 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.indiewire.com/2010/04/treme-another-hbo-must-see-from-the-wires-david-simon-238839/> last accessed 30 September 2016: "*Treme* [is] the name of America's oldest, freest black community, and ... [the] newest, freest, blackest epic series...If you tune into *Treme* hoping for the kind of quick plot payoffs most TV shows go for, you'll go crazy waiting. And you'll be like a dumb tourist who needs directions to Bourbon Street while standing on it, not getting it, oblivious to all but the obvious."

42 Nancy Franklin (2010). "After the Flood," *The New Yorker.* 12 April 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/television/2010/04/12/100412crte_television_franklin> last accessed 30 September 2016

Treme seeks to neutralise the possibility of cultural tourism in its viewers through a reluctance to explain itself that manifests in nigh impenetrability: it "virtually prohibits you from loving it, while asking you to value it."[43] Some critics and viewers have found this off-putting, and criticised *Treme*'s first season for implicating viewers as a kind of virtual tourist, aligning them with non-New Orleans characters that consume the city's cultural products but produce nothing themselves.[44] This discomfort stems from making viewers conscious that gazing is an *act,* a privilege generally assumed. *Treme* does not take the right to view for granted, and indeed differentiates between types of gaze, setting up two kinds of touristic gaze – that from the outside, and that from the inside.

Two early first-season scenes in particular have fed this discussion of tourism. In the second episode, the character DJ Davis,[45] who is passionate about "authentic" New Orleans culture, is fired from his hotel concierge job for directing a group of out-of-town volunteers to (potentially more dangerous) locals' bars so they can experience "real" culture. They have a wonderful time, return the next morning drunk and covered in beads, and express their gratitude to Davis, marking themselves as good tourists, willing to engage and listen, participate and appreciate: to look without gazing.

"Bad" tourists are those who wish to gaze from an exploitative, colonial position. One notable scene from episode three opens on a funeral ceremony for a Mardis Gras Indian, which is then interrupted by a Katrina Tour, a busload of out-of-towners touring the damaged areas of New Orleans. They are – or at least the driver[46] is, as the other tourists remain securely behind black windows – chastised by the funeral-goers and depart sheepishly.

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43 Franklin, "After the Flood."

44 See, for example, Scott Tobias (2010). "*Treme*: "Right Place, Wrong Time: S1/E3." *The AV Club.* 25 April. Retrieved from <http://www.avclub.com/articles/right-place-wrong-time,40461/> last accessed 30 September 2016. "As viewers, *we're* very much on the outside here. There are times when I worry I'm simply not cool enough to hang out with *Treme*. It gets mad when I neglect it, but it isn't happy with my interest, either. Because no matter how hard you try, you're never gonna be New Orleans enough for it."

45 Who is, in a sense, a tourist himself: a white man from a privileged background, who is is turn positioned by the show as a benign interloper into black culture.

46 Played by David Simon himself, lending a layer of self-awareness and acknowledging the potential for the tourism criticism for those viewers in the know.

Drive away from here, sir.

You're right, you're right, I'm sorry.

You can look, these scenes argue, explicitly and didactically, but you don't belong; and if you don't belong, you shouldn't even look.

The show therefore doesn't shy away from potentially aligning viewing subjects with the problematic gazes internal to the show. *Treme* spends much of its first season problematising looking and the gaze, and viewers are left with the knowledge that their own gaze could be aligned with these tourists. Many of the visual and narrative properties of *Treme* require us to acknowledge that spectatorship is somatic, singular and contingent, while denying the gazer a right to a view, a right to a community that is not already theirs. How spectators gaze, and their reasons for doing so, are critically important.

"Who gets to look" is a question that television programs rarely ask, let alone answer. It is also a significant question when considering black bodies, which carry a legacy of

objectification, of being what the invisibly white subject gazes *at*. Theorists such as Laura Mulvey, hooks, and Fanon remind us that looking relations are always historicised, flowing along lines of power, structured by and structuring cultural texts.[47] Film spectatorship, argues Michele Aaron, is "intrinsically ethical" because of the contractual identifications with others and their suffering that takes place.[48] While this thesis agrees that looking relations are always an ethical phenomenon, the multiple viewing positions and formal qualities of television do not make such a claim as apparent in televisual spectatorship.

Typically, in television, the viewer's gaze is privileged. Transforming the realms of private and public, television shows are often given over to representing things we rarely have access to: the dissection and display of strangers' bodies for critique; the trajectory of a bullet through internal organs; other people's sex lives; a celebrity's kitchen; the everyday lives of police, lawyers, and doctors. The traditional televisual gaze constructs intimacies such that it is easy to forget that what is being seen is not the limit of what is knowable in the world. For instance, Yasmin Ibrahim notes in her discussion of televised suffering and trauma that viewers become "insensitive to the transgression of public gaze into private arenas and private lives of the injured, the victimised and marginalised."[49]

"An art that builds into its program a judgement about looking is a political art," argues Christian Metz, and as such it is implicated in "long-standing debates about the connection of pleasure and desire to knowledge and power."[50] *Treme*, in contrast to much television, constructs the relationships between spectating subjects and what they are viewing as intrinsically ethical and political. Attention to processes of subjectivity and visuality in textual analysis draws out the show's textual strategies that discomfit the viewer, that call her to know herself as an *eye,* a viewer whose right to look is being interrogated. In foregrounding its criticism of cultural and suffering tourism, the show pushes back against the possibility of viewers engaging in the kind of spectatorship that efficiently and effectively others those viewed, reaffirming the subject-position of the spectator. Rather than positing cinematic identification, which is Aaron's strategy, this chapter argues that in making

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47 Laura Mulvey (1975). "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16 (3), 6-18; hooks, *Black Looks;* Fanon*, The Wretched of the Earth.*

48 Michele Aaron (2007). *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking On.* London: Wallflower, p. 112

49 Yasmin Ibrahim (2010). "Distant Suffering and Postmodern Subjectivity: The Communal Politics of Pity." *Nebula* 7.1/7.2 June 2010, p. 127

50 Christian Metz (1982). *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema.* London: McMillan Press. p. 44

televisual images meaningful, television viewing-subjects are always producing themselves in networks of sign-systems that pre-exist them, in the gaze of the world, and, as *Treme* notes, in the gaze of specific subordinated others. Looking-back, that is, has consequences for subjectivity.

Returned Gazes

The confrontation between the tour bus driver and the locals discussed above is also an example of a returned gaze. The imperial gaze is unidirectional, and "stresses the observer's objectivity,"[51] his detachment. When that gaze is returned, the tour bus operator is shocked into recognition of his viewing transgression, his territorial transgression, and the supporting structures of his own subjectivity. Pleasure and fascination turns into recognition and awareness of the self and other. In the way it asserts the agency of those who are gazed at, therefore, the returned gaze can potentially "[subvert] both the subject-object dynamic and the narrative syntax of voyeuristic pleasure."[52]

As Homi Bhabha reminds us, there is always the threat of the Other returning the gaze.[53] hooks also affirms the power of looking-back:

> all attempts to repress our/black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: "not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.[54]

While some groups have the license to look openly, an illicit, subordinated, oppositional gaze will always peer out; it criticises, and it documents.[55]

In terms of textual analysis, there is an understandable desire on the part of researchers to use returned gazes to "magically [restore] sight to the previously only seen objects of the Western imperial eye," thus granting them subjectivity and agency.[56] Postcolonial

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[51] Kaplan, *Looking For the Other*, pp. 204-205

[52] Thomas Waugh (1998). "The Third Body: patterns in the construction of the subject in gay male narrative film." *The Visual Culture Reader.* Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. New York: Routledge, p. 644. In this case talking about gay male cinema.

[53] Homi K. Bhabha (1983). "The Other Question…" *Screen* 24 (6), p. 33

[54] hooks, *Black Looks,* p. 115, 116

[55] hooks, *Black Looks,* p 116; Jane Gaines (1988). "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory." *Screen* 29 (4), p. 24

[56] Amad, "Visual Riposte," p. 52

scholarship on culture and cultural artefacts often clings to returned gazes in paintings, photographs, early pseudo-scientific or anthropological film, documentaries, or fictional cinema as a destabilisation or disruption of colonial viewing relationships, where the spectator-subject is forced to recognise the personhood and subjectivity of the other. Returned gazes are held to be a "refusal of the assumed monolithic, unidirectionality of the West's technologically mediated structures of looking at cultural Others" and may, apparently, have the power to "transform our existences, to substantially change our view of our lives and the world we inhabit."[57]

However, Paula Amad criticises the blanket deployment of returned gazes as inherently destabilising. In her discussion of early nonfiction films of colonised others she notes several instances in which returned gazes appear briefly and do not actually disrupt the ongoing colonial representational project.[58] Analysis of gazes, therefore, must be sensitive to the actual form and context of the returned gaze. The returned gazes of makeover participants or the talking heads of current affairs television discussed in earlier chapters operated very differently, due to particularities such as genre, form, purpose, and (not least) the overwhelming whiteness of their subjects: far from being radical, these are, as Therese Davis notes, "the most banal unit in television's limited syntax."[59]

Similarly, *Chappelle's Show* (US, Comedy Central 2003-2004) is, like *Treme*, a US television show that uses fourth-wall breaking to call attention to the workings of institutionalised racism in the US; and yet the returned gaze in sketches such as "The Niggar Family"[60] does not operate to disrupt colonial viewing structures. In this sketch, after being refused a good seat at a restaurant, Dave Chappelle laughs and turns to the camera and says, "This racism is killing me inside." As a parody of a 1950s sitcom this returned gaze is a moment of criticism of the (white) viewer's complicity and opportunities for (black) commiseration, but it is not a moment of disruption of traditional viewing relationships and structures. Similarly, when the character Solomon looks at the camera for an extended painful moment in the 2013 drama film *12 Years a Slave* (dir. Steve McQueen) as he begins to sing slave songs, this formal choice provokes empathy and identification, but not

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57 Amad, "Visual Riposte," p. 53; Dixon quoted in Amad, p. 55

58 Amad, "Visual Riposte."

59 Therese Davis (2004). *The Face on the Screen: Questions of Death, Recognition and Public Memory.* Bristol: Intellect, p. 1

60 *Chappelle's Show,* Season 2, episode 2. January 28 2004

recognition of the structure of racist representational systems.

Subject-oriented textual analysis requires looking not only for processes of subjectivity but also the ways in which television images are specifically televisual and situated within texts. We cannot simply assume that images operate consistently across format, genre, and theme. A "more deeply contextualised application" is called for.[61] The final part of this chapter is therefore devoted to close examination of a unique returned gaze in *Treme*, that of the character Daymo.

Daymo's gaze

Treme features another critical moment of returned gaze in its final episode (episode 10) of season one. A major plot thread of *Treme's* first season is the search for Daymo, who is the brother of central character LaDonna Battiste-Williams, and who went missing during the floods. Daymo, we eventually discover, was arrested during the hurricane, and was subsequently lost in the system due to mistaken identity and the general chaos and malpractice of the time. Daymo cannot be subsumed into the representational category of African-American criminality as the preceding nine hours of television have worked to tell his story – in retrospect – as one where racist policing mistakenly and tragically left him to die in custody.

Daymo's body is discovered in a semi-trailer along with other unidentified decomposing bodies in episode 9. However, this is not the only time we see Daymo. The final episode features a series of flashbacks that prioritise visuality and spectatorship, as our characters, who have dispersed to safer locations, watch Hurricane Katrina make landfall on their motel televisions, "equally avid in their scopophilic drives."[62] One extended flashback tracks, crucially and unexpectedly, Daymo himself; as the scene unfolds it becomes apparent that the narrative LaDonna and her lawyer uncovered is correct: Daymo died in the floods because he was pulled over needlessly and taken to jail.

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[61] Amad, "Visual Riposte," p. 52

[62] Kevin Dowler (2013). "Dismemberment, Repetition, and Working-Through: Keeping Up in *Treme.*" *Canadian Review of American Studies* 43 (1), p. 159

There, in jail, Daymo breaks the fourth wall and gazes at the viewer. This returned gaze occurs during the flashback, as LaDonna tries in vain to call her brother. The scene shows his house, curtains flapping and wind howling, with a gradual push-in to his unanswered ringing phone. There is then a smash cut to a close-up of Daymo in his cell, slowly raising his lowered head until he is gazing directly into the camera and out of the screen.

Daymo

Typically, dramatic narrative television illustrates interpersonal encounters through filming two actors gazing at 30-degree angles from the screen. The camera is a lacuna, and the viewing-subject is invisible. In breaking the fourth wall at such a critical moment of the narrative, Simon creates an interpersonal encounter between the character and the viewing-subject. This moment betrays expectations, unsettling an entrenched visual system and challenging the traditional assumptions and privileges of the televisual gaze.[63]

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[63] It is worth noting some similarities and differences with another recent episode of television, Season 4 Episode 13 of prison drama *Orange is the New Black* (US, Netflix, 2013-present). This episode, also a season finale, features a fourth-wall break by the black character Poussey, who died at the end of the previous episode in a manner explicitly designed to mirror the death of Eric Garner. This episode contrasts prison officials' debates over how to deal with her dead body with flashbacks of Poussey enjoying a night on the town in New York before her incarceration. The final shot has Poussey surveying the lights of New York before turning to smile into the camera.

As with *Treme*, *Orange is the New Black* does not at other times break the fourth wall, making this a remarkable moment in the series. Also in common is the way in which the themes surrounding the character's death, and narrative structures such as flashbacks, are used to comment on racism in US politics, policing and corrections. It is a significant difference, however, that Poussey was a fan-favourite character established over four seasons, and that her facial expression when looking into the camera is one of an almost knowing or mysterious joy. As well, flashbacks are common in *Orange is the New Black* as a way of recontextualising characters and learning more about them. Because of this, Poussey's fourth-wall break appears to operate less as a moment of radical destabilisation of subject-other spectatorial relations and responsibilities and more as a moment of release and comfort: one fan describes it as Poussey looking back from Heaven. (Jordana Lipsitz (2016). "Was Poussey's Final Flashback In 'Orange Is The New Black' A Dream Or Heaven? It's All Possible." *The Bustle* 27 June. Retrieved from <https://www.bustle.com/articles/169110-was-pousseys-final-flashback-in-orange-is-the-new-black-a-dream-or-heaven-its-all>, last accessed 2 October 2016).

White subjectivities can be destabilised by the gaze of the other because they are not used to it.[64] hooks, for instance, notes the fundamental shock felt by white students in her class realising that the subordinated other (black students) was watching them, and was thinking critically about whiteness, and that they had the power to make the powerful visible;[65] that is, make the subject visible to herself. Daymo's returned gaze is a significant disruption of the visual grammar of *Treme* in particular and dramatic television in general, a disruption that discomforts *ipso facto*. But more than that, in a televisual system that has always relegated blackness to otherness, that draws from a visual culture that renders black bodies objects and negates the black gaze, Daymo looking through the screen and returning the gaze of the viewer is fundamentally reconstitutive, and a reconstruction of the potential of looking in contemporary Western television.

For white subjects, the self's invisibility is taken for granted: "in white supremacist society," argues hooks, "white people can "safely" imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people accorded them the right to control the black gaze."[66] With a returned gaze such as we see in *Treme,* as the spectated "place the spectator in the field of their gaze," viewing subjects lose the privilege of invisibility.[67] The subject is made visible to themselves; as Foucault writes of the painting *Las Meninas*, "[w]e are observing ourselves being observed by the painter, and made visible to his eyes by the same light that enables us to see him."[68] But there is no light flooding the cell in Daymo's gaze, as there is in Las Meninas; no painted mirror: in the murkiness, defiance, and suffering of Daymo's gaze subjects are made visible to themselves not bathed in light but entrapped in an uncomfortable subject-other relationship.

Amad argues that many of the returned gazes lauded by postcolonial film criticism seem to be investing a power in the breaking of the fourth wall that is not justified by the ephemerality and context of the returned gaze.[69] In contrast, it would be hard to dismiss Daymo's gaze as fleeting or accidental. *Treme* is not avant-garde, as are several of the

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64 Kaplan, *Looking for the Other*, p. xix
65 bell hooks (1992). "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination." *Cultural Studies.* Eds. Lawrence Grossberg and P. A. Treichler. New York: Routledge, p. 339
66 Hooks, "Representing Whiteness," p. 340
67 Michel Foucault (1994 [1966]). *The Order of Things.* Trans. Robert Hurley. Vintage Books, p. 5
68 Foucault, *Order of Things*, p. 6
69 Amad, "Visual Riposte," p. 55

examples Amad uses to discuss the power of the returned gaze. Narrative form, which has generated sympathy and empathy with LaDonna, evokes feelings of outrage and injustice; but Daymo's gaze is not a seduction, or playful, or forgiving, or pathetic: it is other, outside the time and space of the show.

The look of the other both fixes and remakes the subject.[70] Zygmunt Bauman argues that "confrontation with the other is first and foremost a recognition of oneself," that is, "objectification of what would be pre-theoretical."[71] A returned gaze such as this is a political and ethical moment, because it is bound up with subject-formation; that is,

> the overarching problem of subjectivity: I can only speak or look if I am a *subject*, not an object; I can only know the Other from a position of a subject able to stand outside myself, and, while still being the subject I have constructed, construct myself differently because in relation to this Other.[72]

The returned gaze of the other is decentring, insisting upon its status as *being beyond* the subject. Daymo's returned gaze, and his face, is therefore an interruption of typical ways of gazing at raced others, inserting a radical understanding of the status of the other and of the subject's ethical indebtedness to the other.

Subject-oriented textual analysis requires processes of subjectivity and intersubjectivity to be at the heart of the approach to texts. Such an approach has drawn out the ways in which Daymo's returned gaze is a formative intersubjective experience. This is not explained, as it was in the previous chapter, through empathy for his suffering. As in the examples of communities challenging relations of gazing discussed earlier in the chapter, such non-traditional scenes and events of spectatorship make subjects visible to themselves as though from without, and provide alternatives for theorising intersubjectivity.

Daymo's face

As a final observation on how gazes can operate when textual analysis is oriented towards processes of subjectivity in the televisual encounter, and to emphasise the intrinsically ethical

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70 Stuart Hall (1989). "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation." *Frameworks* 36, p. 78; Frantz Fanon (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks.* Trans. Charles Lam Markman. New York: Grove Press.

71 Zygmunt Bauman (1987). *Legislators and Interpreters: on modernity, post-modernity and intellectuals.* Ithaca: Cornell UP. p. 9

72 Kaplan, *Looking for the Other*, p. 156

and political nature of this chapter and the thesis as a whole, this chapter will finish with a brief discussion of a Levinasian ethics of the face. Levinas has been usefully drawn upon by postcolonial and poststructuralist theorists such as Judith Butler and Couze Venn to rethink the possibilities and foundations of subject-other relations.[73] If the very condition for recognising a face relies upon historically contested frames of reference and mediation then processes of subjectivity and visuality are also at stake.[74] Daymo's returned gaze can therefore also be seen as an irreducible exposure to the fact and demands of the other.

Privileged subject-positions create binaries that categorise and subjugate the other when viewing texts, and struggle to assimilate difference; this difference, argues Kaplan, generates "psychodynamic guilt" as well as guilt over the political and economic oppression of the other.[75] But why should viewing-subjects feel guilt if the other is mere object? Guilt requires recognition of suffering, and objects, as the Stedman example used above reminds us, cannot suffer. What Bhabha called the "threat" of the returned gaze is not simply the concern that the other might condemn privileged subjects and subject-positions. The threat also encompasses a demand: in the nakedness, the exposedness of the face-to-face relationship, the other appeals to subjects preontologically, inaugurating them in its ethical demand: "Thou shalt not kill."[76]

This is a divergence from the discussion of the previous chapter, in which visibility and more complex and contextual ways of knowing had the potential to create empathic intersubjective connections. Visibility here is about *irreducibility* and a *lack* of knowledge. What is at stake is *exposure*, as Butler says, following Cavarero: "the 'I' encounters not only this or that attribute of the other, but the fact of this other as fundamentally exposed, visible, seen, existing in a bodily way and of necessity in a domain of appearance."[77]

Therese Davis reminds us that images of a person's face on screen can be banal or radical. Those radical images, she argues, are radical because they bring us to a recognition of death, of the non-existence which is typically concealed. Underneath the face is the death's head,

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73 See, for instance, Couze Venn (2000). *Occidentalism: Modernity and Subjectivity.* London: Sage

74 Judith Butler, (2005). *Giving an Account of Oneself.* New York: Fordham UP, p. 29

75 Kaplan, *Looking for the Other,* p. 62

76 Emmanuel Levinas (1985). *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Phillippe Nemo*. Trans. Richard Cohen. Pittsburgh: Dusquene UP, p. 89

77 Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself,* p. 33

and images are less sites of ideology or interpretation than they are “confrontations with a social or historical consciousness.”[78] This is a reading of the face in contexts where a fundamental “shock of experience” involves a return to the self, a reprocessing of personal and cultural experience. *Treme*, in contrast, contains a radical shock that remains irreducibly other. Death is present, but is unable to be recuperated into the self; death comes with the unassailability of Daymo’s face.

Emmanuel Levinas characterises the face as an epiphany that calls upon us to recognise the unassailable exteriority of the other.[79] The face of the other signifies a being beyond what can be reducible to ourselves; the face of the other is thus the ultimate ethical responsibility. Faces, in Levinasian terms, are not static symbols but ungraspable traces of themselves, “given over to my responsibility, but to which I am wanting and faulty;” their appearance can “only be formed in ethical language.”[80]

The above section and previous chapters have repeatedly argued that subject-oriented textual analysis is inevitably ethical, and the ineluctability of Daymo's gaze and face in *Treme* is further evidence of this. Daymo's face and returned gaze refuses spectating subjects the possibility of a comfortable return to themselves (“the same,” in Levinasian terms). Again, this a divergence from chapter six. While Daymo's suffering may prompt an empathic or sympathetic response in the abstract, the actual encounter with his face is not an occasion of fellow-feeling. Daymo – the Other, in his status as a raced other as well as his simple alterity – is not appreciative or pleading in his assay of viewing-subjects. No, he is dead, and witnessing has been fruitless: the Other, in its unassailable exteriority and boundless demand, is ungrateful.[81]

At the core of this thesis's approach to subject-formation in pre-existing sign systems is an assertion that the capacity to read and recognise a face as human, the capacity to respond to it ethically, is developed through historically contested frames of reference and mediation that can be more or less inclusive.[82] The question of how subjects are spoken, seen, and read is as much about absence as it is about presence. Michel Foucault teaches that discourse

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[78] Davis, *The Face on the Screen,* pp. 1-3, 12
[79] Paul Ricoeur (1992). *Oneself as Another.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 188
[80] Emmanuel Levinas (1998). *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence.* Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, p. 91
[81] Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, pp. 26-27
[82] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, p. 29

produces the subject at a cost; discourse limits, and cannot acknowledge what is outside its speakability.[83] Comprehension, that is, can be conceived of as a form of appropriation of the meaning of the other, or of containment, as a wide field of possible meanings are reduced to the few that maintain intelligibility.[84]

At the same time, however, recognition of and ethical response to the other is "based on apprehension of epistemic limits," as subjects cannot know *inside* the other.[85] Viewing-subjects must of course make Daymo's face meaningful, must organise their retinal data into readable images, but in his suffering, anger, and ingratitude, in the disruptive shock and affect of his face and returned gaze, he remains unreachably other. The sense of the face becomes a sign via the cultural actions of representations, argues Levinas, but the other nevertheless exists *beyond* that cultural action.[86] The alterity and opacity of the other-subject creates an "ethical demand that we let 'you' live."

In this chapter and the previous one, televisuality – that is, televisual systems of visuality that structure meaning-making – was framed as an organisational apparatus, that drew on a visual regime that sustains white dominance by cultivating the visual experience of black bodies as less-than. In the case of Daymo's face, however, before the opportunity to refuse or assent is even available, the subject is assigned responsibility for the other, is "accused in its skin, too tight for its skin."[87] The face, according to Levinas, "imposes on me and I cannot stay deaf to its appeal, or forget it...I cannot stop being responsible for its desolation."[88]

It is worth noting in this discussion that Levinas himself wrote against the ethical capacity of images, and severely. They commit, he said, the error of "mimicking rather than participating in the real world of ethical encounter."[89] Art, according to Levinas, does not have "the quality of the living instant which is open to the salvation of becoming."[90] It is in this sense that he can argue that the face precedes vision; the ethical demand of the face

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83 Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself,* p. 121
84 Shoshanna Felman (1988). "Lacan's Psychoanalysis, or the Figure in the Screen." *October* 45, p. 99
85 Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself,* p. 43
86 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity,* pp. 86-87
87 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being,* p. 106
88 Levinas, *Humanism of the Other,* p. 32
89 Aaron Rosen (2011). "Emmanuel Levinas and the Hospitality of Images." *Literature and Theology* 25 (4), p. 367
90 Levinas in Rosen, "Emmanuel Levinas," p. 367

cannot be contained by its signification.[91] Nevertheless, faces speak, and mean, and meaning-making in response to images is a living instant and productive for viewing subjects. Aaron Rosen attempts to recover art and the image for a Levinasian project, but it is not *only* (as it is for Rosen) the “capacity of art to initiate discourse”[92] that gives it an ethical bent. Images, it has been asserted repeatedly, are active, and finding ways to analyse such activity is important.

We can partially characterise that activity through Levinas's phenomenological formulation in *Humanism of the Other,* in which he repeats that it “is extremely important to stress the anteriority of sense with regard to cultural signs...no direct or privileged contact with the world of Ideas is possible.” The subject is indebted, forever and always, to systems outside of him or herself in order to make the world and the self intelligible. At the same time, as this chapter and the last has shown, “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other.”[93] These two chapters therefore investigated the ways in which this “thinking-of,” occurs, and the ways in which it is responsive to images and processes of meaning-making. We can understand this thinking-of-the-other, this relationality, as constitutional and pretheoretical, but it does not emerge in subjects or produce them as social beings ahistorically, without input from wider social and cultural systems.

For Levinas the 'saying' [*dire*] interrupts or erupts in the 'said' [*dit*]; that is, meaning-making – *process* – emerges in content. The subject is always present, and the “totality of being must produce itself to illuminate the given.”[94] Signification of the given does not occur without production of the subject, and that signification must draw extensively upon extant visual systems and networks of meaning. Because meanings available to subjects as they interact with culture and the phenomenal world “are culturally and historically conditioned,”[95] Daymo's gaze can only be an affective shock in its particular televisual context; the subject and other it generates is created through televisual signs systems and meaning-making. Attention to the subject during textual analysis, therefore, is a research model that specifies the modes of televisuality that speak each of us, at a cost, and how it might be destabilised.

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91 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity,* pp. 86-87
92 Rosen, “Emmanuel Levinas,” p. 369
93 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 3
94 Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, p. 14
95 Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, pp. 36-37

Conclusion

This chapter began with a discussion of intersections of colonial visual history and viewing practices, and the way in which they create subjectivities. The "problem" of the gaze and the act of spectatorship can be characterised as one of power differentials. Images such as those in *Treme*, in which white characters view and consume black culture and assume a right to black territory and community, are inflected by colonial epistemologies, ways of knowing and seeing black bodies and subjects. Signification, as was argued in chapter two, produces subjects; that is, subjects cannot make televisual images meaningful without the weight of the history of such images coming to bear on subjects themselves.

Such an understanding of subjectivity has directed the formulation of subject-oriented textual analysis in part one of this thesis. This kind of textual analysis requires sensitivity to the history of images and an understanding of the accumulations, flexibility and historicity of visual culture. Applied to *Treme* in this chapter, it shows that this accumulated cultural baggage around even such an apparently simple thing as the direction of a gaze makes *Treme* a particularly interesting object of analysis. Through its criticism of colonialism and tourism, and though strategic deployment of oppositional gazes, *Treme* makes viewers visible to themselves, in a racialised colonial context which typically demands viewers' own 'white eye' construction remain invisible and naturalised. It thus denaturalises typical viewing relations that support white supremacy.

The second half of this chapter therefore turned to an examination of returned gazes, which can in scholarship become "the fetishized trace of our contemporary desire for – based on the historical lack of – the irrecoverable reverse shot of the Other's view of the world."[96] Close textual analysis of *Treme's* engagement with the visual systems, themes, and dynamics of colonialism, however, revealed that returned gazes in *Treme are* significant in the corpus of television texts. They challenge and disrupt supremacist systems of visuality, spectatorship, and intersubjectivity.

The images of *Treme* – the characters, narratives, musical performances, the community

[96] Amad, "Visual Riposte," p. 56

building, the returned gazes and faces of the suffering – have no meaning without a subject to render phenomena into meaning, image and narrative; but the viewing-subject cannot make meaning without producing herself via the weight of linguistic and textual sign systems. Textual analysis that takes this mutual genesis as its focus, therefore, understands the 'screen' as interpersonal: we cannot gaze without producing ourselves *and* others, and such production has ethical and political consequence. Subject-oriented textual analysis thus directs research towards questions of ethics, power relations, and visuality. The case studies of part two have demonstrated that such an approach reveals textual operations and processes of subjectivity that challenge or complement with fresh perspectives more typical textual analysis approaches. This chapter, for instance, has proved significant for the politics of subjectivity because it assists in the search for alternative subject-other relations, and provides tools for the specificity of textual analysis.

Moreover, the moments of television discussed in this chapter required a context-sensitive, *televisual* analysis of subjectivity. This chapter was therefore significant for this thesis because it highlighted ethics and interpersonal obligations and responsibilities as foundational to subjectivity and therefore subject-oriented textual analysis. It also highlighted the critical process of spectatorship. Furthermore, it demonstrated how a subject-oriented textual analysis can accomplish a diversity of analytic foci; although this chapter had a similar text to chapter six, it produced a different analysis by responding to critical questions of subjectivity that the *text itself* raised.

As was discussed in chapter three, television studies as a field has been marked by a tension over whether and how to treat televisual texts as the final object of analysis. The “return to the text” that has been called for by many in television and cultural studies, it was argued, requires methodologies that prioritise political analysis without rendering texts the shadow of audiences. Part one of this thesis proposed the category of the subject and the method of subject-oriented textual analysis as a way forward; in part two, those key questions of subjectivity as outlined in chapter two have generated readings of both texts and subjectivities that contribute fresh perspectives to both fields.

8

CONCLUSION

Subjectivity, Visuality and Politics

The chapters of textual analysis above – on makeover television, tabloid current affairs television, and serialised dramas *The Wire* and *Treme* – demonstrate that a subject-focused approach to textual analysis provided useful and novel ways of understanding televisual textual meanings and operations. Before it could be undertaken, however, the kind of subject at stake had to be made visible. In chapter two, therefore, the category of the subject was introduced as a useful way of understanding texts as involved in processes of subject production, without reducing subjects to shadows of the text. Subjects, here, are indebted to systems of visuality and spectatorship that pre-exist them. This understanding of the subject emerges from Lacanian accounts of visual experience and Foucauldian analyses of the relationship between power, knowledge and subjectivity. Texts are, it was argued, simultaneously larger than the subject, forming part of the symbolic order that precedes subjects, and indebted entirely to the subject, formed in the viewing encounter. The meaning of texts, that is, is processual and productive of both texts and subjects.

Chapter two established the phenomenological debt of this thesis, one in which visibility, and indeed the capacity for moving through the world, is dependent on pre-existing ways of reading phenomena, of making it meaningful. In Levinasian terms, "signification precedes givens – that is, phenomena detected by the senses such as the weight and opacity of a book – and illuminates them...the given is presented forthwith *as* this or that; that is, as signification."[1] Subjects have no direct access to referents. Making the world – including texts – meaningful is to draw upon a symbolic order that is always someone *else's* language. Chapter four, for instance, demonstrated that makeover images make *sense* when participant-subject and viewing-subject ways of seeing are aligned with expert gazes that are in turn

[1] Emmanuel Levinas (2003 [1972]). *Humanism of the Other.* Trans. Nidra Poller. Champaign: University of Illinois Press. p. 13

allied to complex socio-political, economic, and visual histories. Meanings, therefore, exist both beyond and within subjects.

Three psychoanalytic concepts, in particular were identified as relevant to the work of this thesis: the idea of the subject as created upon its entry into the symbolic order; the screen of signs; and the gaze. These three concepts, it was argued, prioritise visuality and the productivity of signs, but diversify the location of the eye and the status of the object being gazed at. This *way of seeing* that "saw the world before I did"[2] can be thought of as a gaze back at the subject, and the symbolic exchanges of wider cultural fields as an intervention point or scotoma between the eye of the subject and the eye of the world. As such, images and their meanings are not neutral, but socially constructed and constructing, and constitutive of subjectivities. The question of how meanings are made – the sign and knowledge systems that grant particular meanings and capacities to retinal data – is then crucial.

Chapter two also briefly examined psychoanalytic film theory as one way of approaching the moving image with the subject in mind. While the gaze, the screen of signs, and the entry into the symbolic order are also embraced by psychoanalytic film theory, such work typically draws from a text-subject relationship characterised by Freudian conceptions of sexual difference and unconscious identification. Freudian anxieties are seen in this scholarship to be expressed "over there on screen" and remade in the unconscious via viewing structures and cinematic images that dictate or influence psychic processes. Even Lacanian-inflected psychoanalytic film theory was a difficult framework to import across to television as many of its fundamental assumptions (such as the cinema as cave or the text as providing closure) do not apply. While acknowledging the precedent psychoanalytic film studies provides, chapter two argued away from metaphoric or deterministic functions of the unconscious and identification and towards meaning-making as a driving force in subject-creation. This thesis therefore demonstrated the need for specific responses to televisual texts within the politics of subjectivity and media.

When the social – the relationship to the other and others, and the extra-personal organisation of those relationships through pre-existing systems such as visuality – enters, so does

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[2] Norman K. Bryson (1988). "The Gaze in the Expanded Field." *Vision and Visuality.* Ed. Hal Foster. Seattle: Bay Press. p. 91

politics. The second part of chapter two investigated Foucauldian accounts of the link between subjects and texts. It was argued that texts have epistemological weight, drawing on pre-existing rules that make certain languages, meanings and ways of being available at the expense of others. What is at stake here is power, and the subjects who exist within networks and structures of power relations felt at every level of daily lives.

Truths, Foucault tells us, are not ahistorical and ideal, but constructed and productive; so, of course, are the meanings of texts and images, which exist in relation to other texts, other discourses, and other institutions. Images – or alternatively, representations – do not grant access to a *truth* beyond the world, but fundamentally *construct* that truth. Representations of politically volatile identity and social categories such as welfare recipient, for instance, are implicated in these games of truth, and chapter five contributed to debates over the political significance of their appearance in tabloid current affairs by identifying their textual instabilities and incoherence.

As with Lacanian accounts of subject-formation, spectatorship emerged here as a critical concept. Gazes are located both in subjects and in the institutions, individuals, and knowledge/power regimes that look back at the subject. Bodies are therefore the field, the "visible ground" upon which power plays out: training, marking, dissecting, surveilling. External eyes are internalised. Recognition and intelligibility are key processes, and in the medium of television, which relies upon character-based narrative in most fictional and non-fictional contexts, bodies are carriers of meaning and narrative. Chapters six and seven, for instance, examined the legacy of racist and colonial representations, in which black bodies are discursively constructed as less-than and bestial. This meaning-structure also enables white viewing subjects to construct and understand themselves as white.

The visual, in this thesis, is always at the heart of subjectivity, and is implicated in the processes of subjectivity that chapter two identified as key: the intersections of visual history, intersubjectivity, materiality, and gazes and spectatorship. To establish these themes is thus to identify the key areas of inquiry for a subject-oriented textual analysis. There is "no subject outside of a social formation, outside of social processes which include and define positions of meaning."[3] This thesis holds that theories of the subject are most relevant

[3] Stephen Heath (1977). "Film Performance." *Cine-Tracts 2* 1 (2 (Summer)), p. 14

if the subject is a category that we can insert usefully into domains of political and ethical, personal and interpersonal theory and praxis. This understanding of subjectivity as inherently political and related to systems of visuality and spectatorship is a significant contribution to both the politics of subjectivity and textual analysis research.

Television Studies

Chapter three turned towards television studies and approaches to the relationship between textual meanings and subjects within the field. First it examined mass communications research, in which televisual meanings are discrete, stable, and predictable, and work upon viewers with a measurable effect on their behaviour. For those concerned with the influence of media artefacts upon the viewer's behaviour or opinions, popular culture consists of texts whose expressive and affective functions can be easily assayed, through, for instance, correlating the amounts of a thing or attitude in a show to population statistics and surveys. While this understanding of texts still exists, particularly in popular discourse (as seen in chapter five in anxieties over the tabloidisation of current affairs) textual content, here, exists in a simplified subject-object relation with viewer, becoming an 'effect on' them.

Far more influential in the field is cultural studies, and the chapter next discussed cultural studies-inflected television studies. Significantly, this approach provides an important precedent for connecting textual representations and social being. Cultural studies understands representations as mediated, as reproductions are not independent of human labour and social organisation but fundamentally *of* it. This is a wide body of work with diverse aims and methods, and is drawn on extensively in this thesis. In general, positioned as the field is between the humanities and the social sciences, textual analysis in cultural studies aims to identify content in the text and relate it to a social phenomenon, typically with the goal of critiquing unequal social power relations. This thesis's similarly strategic attempt to insert politics into textual analysis provides further opportunities of analysis for this ongoing project.

Nevertheless, chapter three also noted that within this project, particularly as it has influenced the methodologies and paradigms of television studies, there exists some tension over the true object of analysis. Some theorists argue that a turn away from texts is necessary to maintain academic rigour and politicisation; conversely, for those concerned with

formulating approaches to the text, this risks analysis in which texts 'stand in' for the real object of research: social phenomena, or audiences.

This thesis locates itself as part of the latter approach, focusing on ways of dealing with texts as ends in themselves, while still acknowledging the pressing need for analysis of socio-political context. Recent calls to return to the form and stuff of television are useful to characterise the medium and develop analyses specifically for television, but some of this work lacks mechanisms that bring political questions into the heart of textual analysis. What is required, chapter three argued, was a methodology of textual analysis that understood both subjects and texts as contingent and productive, and a way of describing their activity and interaction that allows for transformation without reducing content to an effect on the viewer.

Chapter three therefore built on cultural studies approaches, incorporating scholarship from visual culture and art history to describe a relationship between subjects and texts as mutually productive. Viewing is active, a performance just as much as it is an interpretation. Reading, it was argued, is writing. And yet at the same time, televisual images are not infinitely polysemous, and cannot mean all things to all people; television draws on, constructs, and contains identifiable scopic, verbal and aural regimes and discourses, which legislate how we approach texts. In this sense, visibility is synonymous with intelligibility, as meaning-making is necessary and inevitable, and will always draw on subjects' symbolic and personal capacities. Neither screen nor sign can exist without a consciousness to recognise them or make them meaningful. Viewing-subjects are not a mirror of "taxonomied cinematic effects"[4] or an effect of discourse. Ultimately, it is the attribution of meaning to visual phenomena that creates meaning, and viewing-subjects.

The particular grammars of visual culture, and more specifically television, have consequences for how the subject is structured in response to the subject-image encounter. Similarly, texts' socio-historical circumstances dictate their reception context through prevailing image-systems and critical systems.[5] Sensitivity to meaning-making, it was argued, bypasses and refutes "any form of technological determinism"[6] as might be found in some psychoanalytic film theory or mass communications theory. Images have legacies; they

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[4] Ron Burnett (1995). *Cultures of Vision.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, p. 109

[5] Edward W. Said (1983). *The World, The Text, and The Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, p. 39

[6] Jan Baetens (2006). "Screen Narratives." *Literature-Film Quarterly* 31 (1), 2-8. p. 4

are part of multiple intersecting sign-systems that pre-exist subjects, that are situation-specific, and that connect to wider symbolic orders, ways of seeing, and visual regimes of knowledge/power.

The key themes of chapter two emerged as questions for subject-oriented textual analysis. A subject-oriented approach to texts will ask questions aimed at locating and analysing processes of subjectivity. These include relations of gazes and spectatorship, visual histories, questions of materiality and corporeality, and, remembering that this is a *political* conception of subjectivity, how all these things intersect with power relations. This is, not a *viewer*-focused or reception-focused analysis, but rather a subject-focused one, which draws on psychoanalytic and poststructuralist conceptions of subjects as a continual and contingent set of processes, responding to and emerging in social and psychic structures of power and knowledge.

Furthermore, acknowledging that these key questions and processes of subjectivity are also bound up in ways of seeing and visual histories, it was argued that textual analysis in television studies must be sensitive to the ways in which the images in question are specifically *televisual*. Attention to the relationship between meanings and subjects prioritises textual form. However this is not to argue that 'television' is one particular thing; television is a very slippery object of analysis, and television studies requires methodologies that can grapple with its diversity of forms and contexts. Chapter three therefore finished with a discussion of the elements of television as a medium that would be taken up with greater depth in the case studies of part two.

A subject-oriented textual analysis therefore politicises textual analysis with the category and analytic imperatives of subjectivity, while maintaining focus on texts themselves. Subject-oriented textual analysis therefore allows fresh ways of understanding mediated subjectivities and political subjectivities, and provides nuanced and novel textual analyses, as the case studies in part two demonstrated.

Summary of Case Studies

As a methodology, this is a general approach that requires specificity in analysis, that could adapt to various scholars' interests, and that could be applied to different genres and

academic frameworks – as chapters four, six, and seven showed, this approach intersects significantly with the concerns of feminist and postcolonial theory. It requires researchers to ask specific questions about meaning, gazes, visuality, subject-formation, power, and intersubjectivity, but does not specify textual locations or features such as genre. The case studies of this thesis are moderately diverse, and result in varied contributions to scholarship, but the texts themselves are, in the end, relatively traditional objects of analysis (reality television, news and current affairs, narrative drama) and by no means indicate the limits of the approach.

The case studies that made up the bulk of this thesis revealed that subject-oriented textual analysis can produce significant and novel results that contribute to academic debates in different spheres, most notably the politics of subjectivity and television studies. As such, below is a brief summary of their conclusions and significance.

Chapter four: makeover television

Chapter four's subject-focused approach to makeover television drew on, but was not limited to, the typical critiques of gendered neoliberal subject-production that characterise academic approaches to the genre. A description of the uniquely televisual nature of the varied subjects of makeover television supported the arguments of part one, showing the interdependence of visuality and aestheticisation with subjectivity. By directing attention to spectatorship, meaning-making, and ways of seeing, the chapter highlighted the constructedness and contingency of vision. This complicated and complemented typical characterisations of makeover television's subject-producing processes, providing more room and flexibility for analysing subject-production under neoliberal regimes of self-discipline.

Chapter five: tabloid current affairs

Tabloid current affairs television suffers from a lack of scholarly engagement. As well as being ordinary, ephemeral television – that is, repetitious, non-serialised, low-value television that is rarely archived – its images and meanings appear so overdetermined that there seems to be little interpretive work to do on them. Instead, the shows *Today Tonight* and *A Current Affair* are typically characterised as symptoms and causes of a corrupted and commercialised public sphere. However a subject-oriented textual analysis, that prioritised

spectatorship over interpretation, was able to describe their unique deployment of highly politicised cultural categories by identifying and analysing how these texts generate subject-positions within a constantly-shifting us-and-them framework. These observations complicated typical socio-political critiques of the genre, and demonstrated the importance of approaching televisual images *as* televisual images – here, in the context of repetition and incoherence, and in the remainder of the thesis, in the context of race, prestige, and authenticity. This, it has been repeatedly argued, ought to be of foundational importance to textual analysis in television studies.

Chapter six: The Wire

Chapter six's discussion of *The Wire* adjusted the picture of the subject to one that existed with the other in constitutive dyad "to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other."[7] The subject-other relationship in textual research, it was argued, can be understood through processes of visuality and spectatorship that are indebted to a long visual history of white supremacy. A subject-focused approach here again delivered a useful understanding of the show, outside of but encompassing the typical analysis of it as a pedagogical exercise and revolutionary example of 'Quality Television,' with its critique of failing neoliberal institutions. Subject-oriented textual analysis of *The Wire* identified its strategies of realism, aesthetics, and knowledge production that permit empathic connections with subject-positions such as 'black drug user' that are typically denied. Such connections recuperate the structural non-presence of otherness in subject-production, but do not attempt to subsume it. Instead the other remains active in the subject. This chapter therefore also contributed to debates on affect and empathy in the media, as well as scholarship that politicises intersubjectivity.

Chapter seven: Treme

The final chapter, on *Treme*, pushed the link between texts, spectatorship, and subjectivity even further. A close consideration of *Treme's* televisual form demonstrated that the show re-enacted and recreated colonial looking-relations in order to explicitly critique and trouble them. Subject-oriented textual analysis identified spectator-positions developed by the text that positioned viewing-subjects in a self-aware raced relationship with the other. This

[7] Paul Ricoeur (1992). *Oneself as Another.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 3

engagement with the visual systems, themes, and dynamics of colonialism, and the way in which it challenges and disrupts them, is significant in the corpus of television texts and significant for our understanding of subject-other relationships. Chapter seven's discussion of power relations and gazes also contributed to the ongoing discussion in postcolonial and media studies scholarship over the activity and political value of returned gazes. Building upon the theory outlined in chapter two on the productive capacity of gazes, this investigation into gazes, visuality and meaning-making culminated in a discussion of the Levinasian face-to-face encounter. This encounter, it was argued, produced subjects and others in an ethical relationship, constituting responsibility for the other while maintaining his alterity.

While the labour of this thesis, therefore, has been televisual textual analysis, these chapters demonstrated that a subject-focused approach to textual analysis significantly contributes to political research on subjectivity, power relations as expressed through visual culture, and the power and politics of the media.

Conclusion

The category of the subject is the best way we have of understanding the productive relationship between social power and personal being, but it is not necessarily a monolithic or consistent category. Foucault, writing for an encyclopaedia under a pseudonym, characterised his lifelong project as the study of the ways the subject is "constituted as an object for himself: the formation of the procedures by which the subject is led to observe himself [and] recognise himself as a domain of possible knowledge."[8] Foucault, of course, also cast the academy as a site of knowledge/power. The way in which disciplines within the academy characterise or figure subjectivity is significant, because the way in which subjectivity is held to be formed or beholden to the world dictates research on domination, freedom and praxis.[9]

Just by invoking terms such as psychoanalysis, visual culture, poststructuralism, and feminism, we can see that the subject, both as a concept of study and in its very constitution,

8 Michel Foucault (1984). "Foucault." *Dictionnaire des philosophes.* Retrieved from <http://foucault.info/doc/foucault/biography-html> last accessed 2 October 2016

9 Peter Dews (1984). "Power and Subjectivity in Foucault." *Left Review* 144 (March-April), p. 79

sits intersectionally, gracing the boundaries, bodies and crossroads of all disciplines that deal with identity, personhood, people, and society. Indeed, Blackman *et al* introduce the first issue of the journal *Subjectivity* with a list of relevant disciplines ("cultural studies, sociology, social theory, science and technology studies, geography, anthropology, gender and feminism, and psychology"),[10] the length and breadth of which indicates the importance of relating social and cultural forces to theories of personhood, the self, and identity. Implied in this list is the broader umbrella of political studies and science, and the investigation of social and institutional power. Academic and critical approaches to subjectivity therefore reveal and emerge from political and artistic commitments, and conclusions are set up by the framing of questions. Drawing on the insights of visual culture studies and the politics of subjectivity in order to supplement televisual textual analysis, this thesis established a picture of subjectivity as indebted to language, signs and cultural texts.

The argument herein was not simply an attempt to widen the scope of interpretation or to reveal the "true" meanings of misunderstood texts, but to marry the political to textual analysis through the category of the subject. If the subject "cannot be distinguished from signification," then new significations hold the potential for new subjectivities.[11] Moreover, new approaches to subject-text relationships can continue to work for emancipatory possibilities. The objective of the research undergone here is to indicate a flexible and robust mode of inquiry, not for just how meaning comes to us, but how it makes us; and in that analysis, and in the face of suffering and injustice, how we are called upon to further an ethical-political project.

This thesis therefore draws on, critically engages with, and adds to work in cultural studies, television studies and other disciplines to generate a picture of the subject, and a picture of television, that contributes to useful and productive modes of analysing both subjectivity and texts. This approach delivered, in its case studies, work that contributes to current research in such varied areas as contemporary neoliberalism, feminism, identities, empathy, postcolonialism, and race and the media. In drawing on American and Australian examples it also filled a significant gap on Australian tabloid current affairs media as well as contributed to the increasing body of work highlighting the significance of *Treme* and *The*

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[10] Lisa Blackman, John Cromby, Derek Hook, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Valerie Walkerdine (2008). "Creating Subjectivities." *Subjectivity* 22, p. 1. We might add politics, literature studies and education

[11] Kaja Silverman (1983). *The Subject of Semiotics.* Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 199

Wire. More fundamentally, by bringing the intersections of visuality, spectatorship and subjectivity into television studies, this approach contributed an alternative method for those seeking "returns to the text" within television studies. As a whole, this thesis reinforces the need for political science research to understand politics and power as emerging constantly in arenas that are not typically the subject of analysis. Textual analysis as an end in itself, therefore, is both inherently political and theoretically valuable when we use subjectivity as a methodological imperative.

9

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