

ON LIVING WITH
TELEVISION
AMY HOLDSWORTH



ON LIVING WITH TELEVISION

BUY

CONSOLE-ING PASSIONS

TELEVISION AND CULTURAL POWER

Edited by Lynn Spigel

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ON LIVING WITH
TELEVISION
AMY HOLDSWORTH

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For my family

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INTRODUCTION

Television has always been there for me. I have never lived without it and honestly find that prospect anxiety inducing. I admit to being immediately suspicious of those who don't have one in their home. When I moved to Glasgow in 2009, I drove up from Yorkshire the night before the moving van was due to arrive. Knowing the tenement flat I had rented would be bare, I packed my car with life's essentials: a kettle, tea bags, beer, crisps, and a small TV set. I ventured around the corner to a grocery store to buy a pint of milk but then quickly scurried back to the relative safety of my new home. I camped out in the front room that first night, alone and frankly terrified of the life decision I had made to leave my home and family for a new job, city, and country. So I got drunk, ate Monster Munch, and wrestled with a cable box in order to get a weak digital signal, and eventually settled in to watch *EastEnders* (figure Intro.1). Though I was in a new place, the experience was familiar. In 1998 the same TV set came with me to the University of Warwick when I started my undergraduate degree and moved into the residence halls. Rootes E50 was my designated cell, a small rectangular room with a single bed, a desk and chair, a couple of shelves, and a sink. It was the cheapest option on campus, which meant it did not have a bathroom. My dad and older sister, Jess, drove me down the motorway, and with each sign for the university we passed, the knot in my stomach would tighten. Taking advantage of our family Motability bus, I had packed it full, aiming to simply transfer my teenage bedroom to this new accommodation and to bring all that was familiar with me as an antidote to the blind fear and trepidation I felt. When we arrived, Jess, by that point an experienced student, helped me construct my home away from home. We put up posters and made the bed; we set up the stereo, TV, and VCR and located

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FIGURE INTRO.1
First night in Turnberry
Road, Glasgow,
August 2009.



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the communal kitchen; and when it was all unpacked, it was time for them to leave. Alone and immediately stricken with homesickness, I switched on the TV and opened a beer.

In 2004 I returned to Warwick to start my PhD. The experience was uncannily similar, and though the room was bigger there was still no private bathroom. The university housing office had given me a room in a former nursing home that now housed around twenty postgraduate students. I'd left the terraced house in the West Yorkshire village we grew up in, where I'd settled in with Jess and our cat for the last three years, to begin the next stage of an academic career that I had dreamed of since I was a child watching Inspector Morse stride around the hallowed halls of Oxford (the halls at Warwick were certainly less hallowed but fortunately less murderous). My dad and stepmother were in charge of crisis management, on this occasion rushing out to Argos to get me a TV cable when I realized I'd left it behind, resulting in a cross between a tantrum and a panic attack. I followed the same routine—we unpacked and said our goodbyes, and I turned on the TV and opened a beer before plucking up the courage to leave the room and meet my fellow residents.

There I was, and years later, here I am again. It is the summer of 2017 and I've arrived in Liverpool for a disability studies conference. I am older, I'm financially secure, I don't drink as much beer, and I don't do communal bathrooms. I find myself checking into a hall of residence on the Liverpool Hope University campus. The rectangular room is bare and austere, with a single bed, a desk and chair, a couple of shelves, and a private shower (I'm not sure if I'm going up in the world or coming down). I am rushed by a series of feelings as the anxiety and homesickness of those previous experiences loop themselves around who I am now. I set about making the room more palatable. I drape a scarf over the fluorescent light, plug in my laptop, and connect to the university Wi-Fi. I click on the livestream of BBC One through the iPlayer. *EastEnders* is playing. I haven't watched it in years, but the familiar sights and sounds of Albert Square spill into the drab room and immediately make me feel more at home.

THIS IS NOT AN unfamiliar story. Television in this account emerges as both a companion to the everyday and a way of managing crisis and transition. It speaks to the kinds of "ontological security" that forms of broadcasting have been imagined to provide and of a viewer who is well rehearsed in this particular cultural practice.¹ It may not tell us much about the text of television,

but it alludes to a set of text-based experiences that are durational (the long-running soap opera, for instance) and iterative (a pattern of retreat and return that is captured in my own academic comings and goings). It also speaks to a series of continuities and discontinuities in both my life in general and my life with television. I recently turned forty, and my life (so far) might easily be split in two: my formative years as analog and adult years as digital. It's not that simple, though, as my own sense of self, like television's technologies, continues to loop, layer, and multiply, and I still insist on using VHS tapes in my lectures. This is a story that reminds us of the materiality of television and its ability to transform space and of the way it is used in these recurring scenes to turn an unfamiliar space into a home. As an object and a medium, it has been seen to connect the near and far, home and away, over space but also over time. In this instance it also acts as a meaningful object or locus around which my own multiple selves are summoned—as undergrad, postgrad, early career, and midcareer academic—reminding me of the opportunities and sacrifices that have accompanied each stage. It is also a story that, like the soap opera itself, is ongoing and incomplete.

In a 2006 essay John Caughie asks the following question: “When we as academics and intellectuals write about television, who do we think we are?”² While the question alludes to the anxious place of television studies within the academy, it is prompted by an observation of the ways in which the reflections of different scholars on their own histories, experiences, and engagements with television underpin their critical responses.³ This is perhaps not unique to the film and television studies scholar: for instance, as educational theorist Wolff-Michael Roth argues, “Because we are the products of the world that we attempt to describe, our auto/biographies and our scholarly works are deeply integrated.”⁴ But what might an autobiography of television look like? This work might take the form of an individual's viewing history or an account of specific televisual moments that have punctuated a life story. Literary scholars and critics have certainly produced plentiful accounts of individual reading histories and particular acts of rereading. Alison Waller categorizes these into “‘bibliomemoirs’ and ‘autobibliographies’: the former taking books read over a lifespan as a starting point for exploring a life history narrative and the latter employing autobiographical anecdote to illuminate certain texts or aspects of literature.”⁵ My own use of autobiography in this book utilizes both modes, tracing a lifelong relationship with television forms and cultures and using the personal as a *way in* to specific television texts and experiences. I have written elsewhere about the idea of a television autobiography to refer to the memories, references, and associations that are built up

across a life lived alongside television. This should be seen not simply as the accumulation of an archive of televisual sounds and images but as a knotting together of our on- and offscreen lives. The autobiographical emerges, I argue, as a way in which to unravel some of these knots and to explore those experiences of intimacy, familiarity, repetition, and duration that have come to characterize television. An autobiographical focus, then, can tell us not only something specific *about* television but also something more general about *living with* television—about (not) growing up and growing old at a particular time and in a particular society.

Caughie's question and discussion that follows attends to the generational differences in having or having not "grown up" with television: scholars who remember the arrival of television into their homes as an exciting novelty and those, like me, for whom it has always been there. I wonder about how we navigate, in both our scholarship and our teaching, a similar generational divide between those of us who "grew up" analog and the digital natives who supposedly now fill our classrooms. I refer to Caughie's question here because, intentionally or not, it is also one that appeals to a feminist approach I follow in this book, placing the stress on "situated knowledge," the value of experience and a recognition of the scholar as embodied and embedded in a particular culture.⁶ Clearly, asking *who* we are also requires us to reflect on the *when*, *where*, and *with whom* of television viewing as well. This means not just looking to the present but also attending to where we have been and, indeed, *who* we have been and how this informs our writing about television. As feminist literary theorist Liz Stanley writes in her advocacy of the term "auto/biography," we are all constituted by and connected to "a multiplicity of other people throughout [our] lives. No person is an island complete of itself."⁷ But we should also understand the autobiographical past as "peopled by a succession of selves as the writer grows, develops and changes."⁸

What I want to do is not just to consider the significance of the generation of television from which we emerge but also to recognize how our experiences as viewers continue and change over the life course: as children, teenagers, students, scholars, parents, carers, siblings, friends, (time) poor or rich, at home or away, in crisis and in the routines of the everyday, in sickness and in health, till death do us part. At Glasgow I often teach a core course called Television Analysis, and we begin the semester with examples of preschool television. As they are often bored and frustrated by the endless repetitions within *In the Night Garden* (CBeebies, 2007–9), I remind the students that "not all television is *for them*" and ask them to talk to older or younger family members or friends about the different ways they use and watch TV. I encour-

age them to reflect on how they watched when they were children themselves or how they might imagine using TV in the future as they move through the life course. There is plenty of scholarship that addresses the notion of “television in transition,” and while television has never been a technologically stable object, the pace of change brought about by digitization has amplified this line of inquiry. This research tends to focus on the effects of change on television technologies and industries, accounting for evolutions in patterns of consumption and the impact these have on production, form, and aesthetics. It is a line of argument that can often be teleological in impulse—TV is (apparently) getting better.⁹ While others have clearly teased out the implications for this line of inquiry in relation to questions of value and the legitimation of an object of study that has *always been there* for a small band of scholars, what I call attention to is an acknowledgment of the viewer or audience as also in constant transition. In her ethnography of television use by parents of young children, Ksenia Frolova, for example, argues that audiences are “often presented as a homogenous group,” with their “viewing practices studied in broad generic terms.”¹⁰ This relates directly to the value of particular demographics, audiences, and experiences to the industry and the academy. Those sections of society not seen to be “productive” or “autonomous” in socioeconomic terms, such as the very old and the very young, are often marginalized and neglected. In the UK, for example, our central public service broadcaster, the BBC, caught between austerity-era politics and neoliberal market forces and subjected to extensive budget cuts, recently made the controversial decision to abolish free TV licenses for people over the age of seventy-five. While concerns regarding neglect and social justice are implicit within this project, I am aware that I am writing from the vantage point of the “ideal” viewer—independent, healthy (relatively, anxiously), white, financially secure, gainfully employed, middle aged, and middle class—but what this book endeavors to trace are former and future selves encountered through the medium and the points of connection between subjectivities that might emerge in tracing the life lived with television. In an era of niche content and algorithmically targeted modes of address, is there a different way to use our own lives to think beyond our own immediate experiences?

While I privilege the term “autobiography” (converting to “auto/biography” in chapter 1 as it explores the relational aspects of televisual spectatorship through the story of my younger sister, Alice, and her use of Disney Home Video) the book adopts, at different stages, an autobiographical *and* an auto-ethnographic approach. The latter is not an uncommon strategy for studies of popular culture, though writing tends to focus on issues of representation

and the possibilities for identity construction, identification, and (mis)recognition: for example, how we use popular narratives and characters to make sense of or inform our own lives and relationships and the personal and political ramifications of how and where we do or don't see ourselves onscreen.¹¹ These are questions that emerge in my final chapter. However, for the purposes of this project I suggest that the combination of autoethnography as, in Roth's words, an "exploration of culture" and autobiography as a "pattern of life history"¹² makes it possible to follow cultural practices that are often everyday, invisible, and ephemeral while also establishing, through memory and reflection, a sense of these experiences over time.¹³

Obviously, time is complicated—and philosophers and theorists have been wrestling with it for centuries. Writing this book to a deadline, I am also acutely aware of how time can dictate, determine, and regulate our lives and bodies. Elizabeth Freeman's notion of "chrononormativity" describes the emergence of "properly temporalized bodies" that cohere with linear, teleological, state-sponsored timelines of the heteronormative life course. The institution of marriage, the accumulation of health and wealth, and the practice of childrearing enact a "sequence of socioeconomically 'productive' moments" that determine "what it means to have a life at all."¹⁴ Theorists from a number of academic traditions have sought to unsettle and disrupt this sequential logic and its ramifications for thinking about the personhood of those who exist outside a dominant temporal order and its cultural script, including, though not limited to, children, the elderly, queer people, the "childless," and the chronically ill and/or disabled. Freeman also reminds us that "having a life entails the ability to narrate it not only in these state-sanctioned terms but also in a novelistic framework: as event-centered, goal-oriented, intentional, and culminating in epiphanies or major transformations."¹⁵ My experience of a life lived is more "televisual" in its narrative framework: looping, repetitive, banal, catastrophic, messy, and incomplete. This is not a project that focuses on the use of television at different "ages and stages" (these are developmental terms that I challenge both in this book and elsewhere); rather, in something like the critical equivalent of a reverse tracking shot or a dolly zoom, it focuses in while pulling back to reveal a series of patterns that emerge both in time—in the loops and routines of the everyday—and over time—in the durational aspects of television. The patterns I recognize are textual—characteristics of television's formal and narrative features—and experiential—the result of a life lived alongside television as both a visual medium and a material object.

Ultimately, what I want to suggest is how television itself, and our atten-

tion to its micro and macro temporalities and textualities, has the potential to offer a vehicle through which to challenge, in Jackie Stacey and Janet Wolff's words, "the modern imperatives towards linearity and sequence [that] promise an orderly sense of directional flow."¹⁶ As domestic object, text, and experience, television has a much greater capacity for temporal complexity than the unidirectional "flow" metaphor suggests. "Complexity" has itself become a central and somewhat contentious term within television studies over the last decade. Employed by Jason Mittell to describe a high-end narrative mode characterized by puzzle shows such as *Lost* (ABC, 2004–10), the term has been subject to critique due to the hierarchies of cultural value it constructs by placing one subset of television (and, by extension, one subset of viewers) over another.¹⁷ The poet Claire Schwartz, however, writes that "to hold complexity is to have many possible sites of connection."¹⁸ Within this sense of the term I imagine television as a fragmented surface on which different times and spaces, bodies and worlds come together and depart, and a meeting point at which I find myself again and again.

Television in and over Time

Theories of time have been, like me, preoccupied with models, forms, and patterns as ways of characterizing our experience of the world. It was in Rita Felski's *Doing Time*, though, that the patterns I recognized in television emerged most clearly. Felski's approach is to challenge an existing and gendered binary between models of time as either linear or cyclical. Broadly speaking, a linear model of time (or the "arrow of time") is the time of history, evolution, and progress and symbolically associated with masculine, industrial, and Western cultures. Cyclical time, on the other hand, is characterized by repetition, the everyday, the feminine, and the natural world. For theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, cyclical time is also anathematic to the idea of progress and a "sign of women's enslavement in the ordinary."¹⁹ Felski is writing against a masculine intellectual tradition that devalues both the everyday and those subjects and objects associated with it: "Everyday life," she writes, is a term "deployed by intellectuals to describe a nonintellectual relationship to the world. For Lukács and Heidegger, for example, the everyday is synonymous with an inauthentic, gray, aesthetically impoverished existence."²⁰ As the rich traditions of feminist television scholarship have taught us, the terrain of the everyday, and time as routine and repetition, is also that of television, and it has struggled with and against the same associations.

Felski's work offers us a way out of this binary thinking that continues to

reproduce gendered hierarchies of social and cultural value by dismantling the division between cyclical and linear time and instead recognizing both as central to social life.²¹ This means challenging the perception that “cyclical time is a uniquely female province”²²—a notion that underpinned early feminist scholarship: for instance, the work of Tania Modleski and others on the housewife and the soap opera. Gendered experiences of the televisual everyday are not the central frame of this book, and while I acknowledge how they underline my own experiences and my critical approach, it is Felski’s conceptualization of everyday time that I wish to foreground. For Felski, “The temporality of everyday life is internally complex; it combines repetition and linearity, recurrence with forward movement. The everyday cannot be opposed to the realm of history, but is rather the very means by which history is actualized and made real.”²³ What emerges here is a series of loops: in the repetitions of our everyday (sleeping, eating, washing, caring) and over time (generational cycles, modes of inheritance, losses and recuperations). The textual aspects of television itself are also completely loopy: the running gag, the recurring joke, the before and after and before and after, the previously on and coming up, the remakes and reboots and resets, the templates and formats, the recaps and highlights, the maverick detective and the female victim, the monsters of the week and the big bads.²⁴ One of the central aims of my project is to see how these loops overlap and intersect, where they might unfold in unison, and where the threads can get tangled.

Felski’s model of everyday time as “recurrence with forward movement” is also suggestive of an iterative pattern that has come to characterize the textuality and the experience of television. Iteration is, to employ the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, “the repetition of an action or process (implying frequency or long continuance); repeated performance.”²⁵ In this sense, iteration defines television in its operation as a storytelling medium, but the mathematical application of iteration is equally important. From a mathematical perspective, iteration as a repetitive process is done with the aim of approaching a desired goal, target, or result, but the process remains open-ended, where the results of one iteration are used as the starting point for the next iteration.²⁶ From this perspective, television is understood as a kind of folded media with a nonlinearity that is, once again, akin to a process of spiraling, looping, or doubling—continually moving backward and forward. The process here is, like the most recent celebrations of television’s serial characteristics, cumulative, distinguished by an iterative process of repetition that is “lived” over time. Television iteration is therefore not simply a textual but also a temporal and spatial experience.

Television's "evolutionary logic"—the desired goal—may or may not be achieved: whether this is a sleeping child, a successful meal, or a satisfying ending.²⁷ Freeman's critique of "chrononormativity" is insightful as she argues that the "double time" of industrialization harnessed the sequence and its "dialectical companion," the cycle. Here the repetitions and routines of domestic life were seen to offer a space for the restoration and renewal of workers. The "idea of time as cyclical," she writes, "stabilizes its forward movement, promising renewal rather than rupture."²⁸ Renewal, though, is not always on the cards: the child won't sleep, the pot boils over, your favorite show is canceled or "jumps the shark," and what happens after the joke wears out? The disruptions and distractions of both television and the domestic are many, and in challenging the logic of linearity, there is a need to emphasize the contributions of queer theory and theorists such as Elizabeth Freeman. Freeman's work focuses on examples from literature and video art, but the investigation of television has been taken up by others with writers such as Gary Needham, Lynne Joyrich, Amy Villarejo, and Zoë Shacklock offering insights into the contradictions of television and its messy temporalities, informed by queer theory and experience. Villarejo's project *Ethereal Queer* examines the role of television in the construction of queer identities and subjectivities and how television time(s) experienced as "segmentation, repetition, seriality, frozen, paused, captured, looped, restored, lost, and found" might be used to "organize, disrupt, or otherwise confront queer temporalities."²⁹ The capacities of these temporal modes have arguably been intensified through on-demand services, time-shifting devices, streaming video, and the multiplication and layering of screens. This multiplicity has led some television studies scholars to endeavor to "bring some order to [a] volatile and messy media landscape,"³⁰ and while this analysis may be invaluable to those of us who are still catching our breath, I'm keen to stress an alternative direction or opportunity that is less a desire for order than an embrace or temporary untangling of what is volatile and messy.

Joyrich, for example, in her short essay on the possibilities of a "queer television studies," draws on queer and feminist challenges to the logic of linearity and reproductive futurism to critique television, with its "narrative and economic reliance on futurity," and tackles a series of temporalities and textualities that are much more complex and contradictory.³¹ She argues: "Televisual temporality and narrativity hardly adhere to a linear model of simply positive progression. Rather, television operates via restarts and reversals, iterations and involutions, branchings and braidings. Its imaginary is thus one of futurity without direct forward thinking, involving propagation without necessarily measurable progress and generation without necessarily clear continuity.

Thus, with both problems and potential, TV offers a model of proliferation—of multiplications, hybridizations, disseminations—beyond and besides teleological, Oedipal conceptions of a linear track from past to future.”³²

The pattern that begins to emerge in Joyrich’s description—of “futurity without direct forward thinking”—can also be found in Felski’s model and in her description of iterative movement. Joyrich offers an example of these iterative loops at play in her description of sitcom form: one that “depends on a regular return to the defining situation, thus constituting an iterative practice that, with whatever hijinks, hilarities, and even relative changes to the character group ensue in weekly episodes, impedes the possibility of straightforward, linear futurity.”³³ The recent NBC sitcom *The Good Place* (2016–20), for example, knowingly plays with the notion of the “reset button” that has been seen as key to sitcom form by folding this feature into its ethical and moral experiments. The situation revolves and plays around with a supernatural being (Michael) and his all-knowing AI assistant (Janet) as they test a group of flawed human characters (Eleanor, Chidi, Tahani, and Jason) to see if they can learn and change enough to eventually make it to the “Good Place.” An actual reboot button is incorporated into the scenario and, if pressed, will wipe the characters’ memories and reset the experiment. As our “soul squad” learn to become “better people,” the comedy, narrative, and character development is based around ideas of repetition and progress, and as Felski reminds us, “repetition is one of the ways we organize the world. . . . Quite simply, we become who we are through acts of repetition.”³⁴

While queer (television) theory is not the central framework of my project, I use it here both for what it tells us about (television) time and as a recognition of the alliance that can be drawn between queer lives with writing on disability, “crip time,” and a feminist ethics of care that emerge as central to various chapters in this project. These are critical frameworks that also challenge notions of linearity and the accompanying orthodoxies of growth and development that privilege a vision of the child as the “future adult.” This is a cultural script that emphasizes notions of competence, individualism, and autonomy alongside compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness.³⁵ In writing this book I have drawn on my own experiences of caregiving and -receiving—as the sister to a young girl with Rett syndrome (chapter 1), the aunt of a young boy and girl quickly growing up (chapter 2), a single woman dining alone (chapter 3), and a middle-aged homemaker (chapter 4)—as a way to think through where television conforms to and departs from this normative script and to deepen our frames of reference in order to recognize the breadth of television’s audiences and their lived experiences.

In the context of these rich traditions of thought and how they open up the possibility for the inclusion of a wider range of subjectivities and experiences in our investigations of television, I've found myself increasingly frustrated with the narrowness of a dominant critical lexicon used to discuss contemporary, predominantly US television: the cinematic, the complex, and the separation of television into "linear" and "nonlinear" forms. These are terms that circulate in popular, academic, and industry discourse, and within each are a set of implicit, and sometimes clearly explicit, value judgments that position different types and experiences of television against one another. "Cinematic," for instance, a term succinctly taken apart by Brett Mills,³⁶ elevates one form of television (predominantly high-end drama) over the rest of television by linking it with a more prestigious cultural form (see also the descriptor "novelistic"). "Complex" television, as previously encountered, is a term employed by Mittell to describe a particular mode of contemporary series-serial storytelling, characterized by puzzle narratives, transmedia world-building, and heightened fan engagement and control. The term is problematically positioned against that which he describes as "conventional" or the more "traditional" forms of episodic and serial storytelling that do not inspire, according to Mittell, the same level of passion and commitment among audiences.³⁷ The flow of broadcast television, now categorized as "linear," is that of an impoverished ordinary or everyday medium still controlled by schedulers and at the mercy of domestic distractions. Nonlinear forms, those that exist outside of broadcast television's traditional flow, are instead celebrated as offering viewer control, choice, and concentrated or immersive viewing. Nonlinear forms, for instance, are more likely to be associated with "prized content," which Amanda Lotz places in opposition to "linear viewing" to describe content "so compelling that it suffers from interruption" and that might be characterized by viewers' or content producers' attempts to eliminate or reduce disruption.³⁸ Alongside dictating the cultural status of specific television forms, the risk here is also in reproducing hierarchies of engagement—for example, positioning the "distracted housewife" in opposition to the "absorbed fan"—that impacts on the kinds of subjectivities imagined by television and television studies. In the context of the puzzles and prizes of contemporary television, it is perhaps paradoxical that the teleological applications of the "complex" and the "nonlinear" returns us instead to the linear time of history, progress, and evolution.

As these terms imply, it is the notion of interruption that returns as a defining characteristic of the medium and one that is seen to reflect the way the television text is embedded in the everyday lives of its viewers. In the privi-

leging of prized forms and immersive and mobile modes of engagement, certain scholars within the field have raised concerns regarding the “loss of the ordinary”³⁹ that has emerged with the growing interest in the ways in which “television has been liberated from time and space.”⁴⁰ This is television that, with the emergence of DVRs, DVDs, on-demand and streaming services, and mobile platforms and technologies, affords the “viewer” with a new sense of agency. In this framework, television consumption is no longer subject to a program schedule or to the quotidian rhythms of the home. There may be a false equivalence in this argument, however, given that the removal of television content from a scheduled broadcast flow does not necessarily mean it is removed from the experience or its occupation of daily life. While this everyday is certainly of a more “privatized and individualized”⁴¹ kind, which clearly has implications for how we think about the nation-binding project of television (particularly in a public service context like the UK), the relationship between television text and domestic context is still ripe for continued investigation and analysis.⁴² Within the domestic context, therefore, interruption and distraction still have a part to play in our understanding of the viewing experience: misbehaving children still need putting to bed, sofa spills still need mopping up, ghosts continue to intrude, and life doesn’t always go as planned. In chapter 3, for instance, I consider what it might mean to eat with television and how attitudes of distraction and mindlessness accompany both sides of this dynamic. But I also recognize that distraction and interruption are not the only experiences that characterize the ways in which television is embedded and embodied in the everyday. This project is less concerned with defining what television *is* than with finding ways to describe what television *does* to us and what *we do* with television. In relation to my own autobiography, home and the family are my central points of reference as I return to the embrace of television and, in Patricia Mellencamp’s words, its “messy vitality.”⁴³

Television’s Ordinary Affects

I appreciate that the domestic scenarios I explore in this book are not the only sites in which television is consumed, but the home remains a principal site of consumption, and one that is still alive with possibilities and resonances for the ways we might remain attentive to television. Television’s placement within and influence on domestic space, family arrangements, and everyday lives has long been subject to the investigations and analysis of scholars and researchers.⁴⁴ The home and family are ambiguous and ambivalent sites, and

everyday life, as Felski writes, “should not be conceptualized as a homogeneous and predictable terrain. It embraces a diverse range of activities, attitudes, and forms of behavior; it contains ‘broken patterns, non-rational and duplicitous actions, irresolvable conflicts and unpredictable events.’ Nevertheless, we typically conduct our daily lives on the basis of numerous unstated and unexamined assumptions about the way things are, about the continuity, identity, and reliability of objects and individuals.”⁴⁵ Expressed in these terms, everyday life is filled with both anxieties and securities, plans and revisions, and practices—such as television viewing—that work to ensure a sense of continuity, regularity, and familiarity but that are also alive to the possibilities of interruptions, accidents, and emergencies. This book seeks to explore the role of television within this diverse and often contradictory terrain and to highlight those “unstated and unexamined assumptions” that also underpin the taken-for-granted status of television. In her writing on what she refers to as “ordinary affects,” Kathleen Stewart explores the ways in which we can become “tuned in” to the everyday and attentive to the practices, affects, and intensities of the ordinary.⁴⁶ One of the purposes of this project is to situate television among these ordinary affects in order to open up the resonances and potentialities that emerge in both specific moments of viewing but also in and across a life lived with or alongside television. Stewart writes of everyday life as “a continual motion of relations,”⁴⁷ and it is in this notion of both continuity and relationality that the taken-for-granted, “always there” status of television might be seen to have a particular affective power. This is not, however, to lock television into the time of the now (and television therefore as forgetful and forgettable) but to understand how continuity is always open to contingency and to look out for those loops between past, present, and future. I draw on Stewart’s writing to situate television as part of a system of ordinary affects that rest on a particular understanding of the imaginative possibilities of everyday practices within the home.

“The home cocoon,” Stewart writes, “lives in a vital state—open, emergent, vulnerable, and jumpy.”⁴⁸ Certainly, early theorizations of television’s liveness and copresence focused on the vulnerable and jumpy aspects of live broadcasting, from technical breakdowns to catastrophic irruptions and the threat to that home cocoon that television could pose. Anxiety, as theorized by Mellencamp, was “television’s affect,”⁴⁹ but comfort, security, and familiarity could also be found in its emphasis on continuity and the promise of return to the same time and place tomorrow. In chapter 2, I explore this fluctuating dynamic of anxiety and security in more detail and in relation to the role of television in mediating the anxiety associated with children’s bedtimes. The

contingencies associated with television's liveness and its public address may have lost some of their affective power in a digital era in which audiences are more fragmented. The contingencies of everyday life, however, still create particular conditions in which the experience of viewing remains open and emergent. Stewart writes that the home "lives as a practiced possibility, emergent in projects like home remodeling, shopping, straightening up the house, rearranging furniture, making lists, keeping a diary, daydreaming, or buying lottery tickets."⁵⁰ These are practices that harbor the promise of the future. But the home is also filled with "traces of a past still resonant in things; on a dresser top are loose change, pens, receipts, books, scattered jewelry, knick-knacks, a kid's drawing, and a long-discarded urgent list of things to do."⁵¹ Television in the home can also be seen to bear the weight of possibilities and promises of the future along with the traces and resonances of the past. Television's contingency, like that of the home, remains alive to the possibility that the viewer might travel in either direction: memory and remembrance as likely to be activated as fantasy, aspiration, and desire. The domestic practices that Stewart references (and I want to emphasize the implication of iteration within the word "practice") are ones that "stage the jump from ideal to matter and back again" and "that can fuse a dream world to the world of ordinary things."⁵²

These imaginative and relational movements can be seen to enact a continual pattern of retreat and return, another set of loops that Karen Lury has also seen as central to the experience of television and that is also crucial to this book: "There is no escape from the everyday; or rather, in sleeping, dreaming, working, in sex and in watching television, each everyday is occupied by a series of escapes and returns. If it can be agreed that television criticism is addressing the encounter between viewer and text—recognizing this as offering opportunities to both escape from and return to the individual everyday—then this experience will be interesting, revealing and worth understanding, whether it is a two-year-old girl watching the *Teletubbies*, or a forty-year-old man watching *Deadwood*."⁵³ In this short essay Lury draws on Roland Barthes's notion of the punctum—a snag or trigger that pulls the viewer backward or forward to a different time and space—to argue that the work of television criticism should be alive or attentive to the contingencies of these unplanned affective responses. In both the repetitive aspects of the everyday and the accumulations of our autobiographies, this book seeks to capture the push and pull of television, how it exists alongside the patterns and rhythms of other everyday practices, such as caregiving, sleeping, eating, and traveling, but also how it can become braided within them, through the

design, choice, and implementation of particular forms of texts. Alongside and related to the notion of iteration, this pattern of retreat and return recurs across the case studies I explore in this book. This movement backward and forward across times, spaces, borders, and boundaries emerges in a series of everyday materialities and affects that form the focus of this project; from the transitions between waking and sleeping, eating and digesting, to the losses and recuperations of remembrance, homesickness, and homemaking. These border crossings, segues, and transitions also remain a central feature of television's characteristic flow, whether we are gently pulled, coaxed, lured, or pushed between programs and content. Likewise, the television screen continues to be productively conceptualized as a threshold in and of itself, and one this book traverses alongside those of the bed, garden, body, home, and nation.⁵⁴

Vanessa Feltz's Grandmother

Television not only facilitates but articulates in its textual forms and content those looping relationships between everyday time and life time and the different affective registers of contingency and continuity. *Cucumber*—an eight-part series written by Russell T. Davies and broadcast on Channel 4 in the UK in 2015—centers on the lives of a middle-aged gay couple, Henry and Lance, who live comfortably in the northern city of Manchester. It is a series that echoes Davies's hugely successful, controversial, and influential 1990s drama *Queer as Folk* (Channel 4, 2000–2005) by returning to the same town and community, though focusing on new characters at a different stage of their lives. In this sense both series mirror their queer author's experiences of growing up and growing old. The main catalyst for the later series is Henry's midlife crisis, prompted by his own sexual insecurities and the lure of a younger man, as he walks out of his relationship and the home he shares with Lance. So far, so familiar to regular viewers of soap opera, however, the series takes an unexpected turn in episode 6 to produce a remarkable and hugely affecting piece of television. The episode opens with Lance casually shopping in a brightly lit supermarket and accompanied by the show's familiar upbeat soundtrack. This rather banal scene is one that recurs across the series, with the supermarket invested with middle-aged desire and characters "cruising" down the aisles. In the closing shot of this particular scene, Lance turns a corner and walks away from camera, framed in the center of two supermarket aisles. It is here, in this most everyday of moments, that *Cucumber* unexpectedly announces Lance's imminent death with the following text appearing

in the bottom half of the frame: “Lance Edward Sullivan 1966–2015.” What follows in the next twenty minutes is the story of Lance’s life up until the present day. We witness his birth, the death of his mother, and the grief of his father; we see the joyful child laughing in front of the TV and his revulsion at his father’s “birds and bees” talk. The same boy runs through the woods wracked with shame as he tosses an illicit copy of *Playgirl* into the river. We follow as he leaves for university, where he meets his first girlfriend before acknowledging a different sexual identity and discovering a queer community. In a repeated scene that conveys the passing of years, we see Lance repeatedly return home at Christmas to deliver presents to his father and sister: first with his girlfriend, who is warmly welcomed in, and later with different same-sex partners in tow. In these later scenes Lance stands with each partner on the threshold as his disapproving father coldly answers the door (see figures Intro.2–7). These returns are intercut with a history of hope and broken hearts, casual encounters, and a loved one lost to the AIDS epidemic—a detail that emerges when Lance turns up for Christmas one year on his own. We are privy to this succession of relationships intertwined with a blossoming career and upward mobility. Across the years, fashions, haircuts, tastes, music, homes change, repeat, and accumulate. His father’s acceptance is signaled as Lance finally crosses the threshold with his choice of partner. Then Henry eventually enters his life, the love of his life, supporting him through his father’s death, and soon thereafter they make a new beginning by buying a house together. But then we witness the ways in which their relationship becomes cluttered by building irritations and unspoken resentments until that fateful argument in the first episode in which Lance and Henry eventually fall apart. The remaining thirty minutes of episode 6 chart Lance’s final day. He is still hurt and angry but also nervously and excitedly preparing for a “date” with his new colleague, Daniel (a handsome but erratic “straight” man with whom he has developed a flirty relationship). At the end of the date, Lance goes back to Daniel’s flat. Daniel’s clearly unstable undertones are heightened by both the viewer’s foreknowledge and the character’s confusing sexual signals. We are simultaneously unsurprised and shocked when a moment of intimacy between the two men is quickly flipped: with hatred and self-loathing, Daniel turns on Lance and smashes him across the skull with a golfing iron. Just once. Quick and brutal and senseless, but not yet the end. The camera closes in to a close-up of Lance, sitting up straight as blood trickles down the side of his head and tears pool in his eyes. Silent. Still. His life flashing before his eyes as his death looms. The image of Lance is intercut with a montage that depicts his final thoughts and sensations. Blurred images and sounds of



FIGURES INTRO.2-7 Lance on the threshold. *Cucumber* (Channel 4, 2015), episode 6.

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his immediate surroundings are mixed with a fragmentary collage of his most vital and banal memories drawn from across the life we've just witnessed. Among the fragments are images and sounds that fill in some of the gaps—a panicked boy horrified as pages of a pornographic magazine float up to the surface of the river; his lover dying in a hospital bed. There is sex, love, grief, loss, joy, judgment, music, laughter, dancing, light, and Henry. And then blackness and silence.

This example articulates several of the ideas that I have sought to establish in this chapter. The first is the intertwining of what Felski has referred to as everyday time with life time and the looping effect created by a pattern of repetition with forward movement. The chronological charting of Lance's life and death moves forward in time while capturing a series of cycles that characterize the life course: love, sex, death, betrayal, departures and returns, the fodder of any good soap opera or the "best bits" of the reality television show participant. Lance's perpetual, seasonal return to the threshold of his family home dramatizes both a history of queer exclusion and acceptance but also illustrates the border crossings—between bodies, homes, and relationships—that become a central theme of the drama and its exploration of modern queer identities and communities. The series also folds these dramatic moments into an attentiveness to the affective qualities of the everyday and both the banality and significance of popular culture's role within it. Lance's dying moments are infected by an earworm he has been unable to shake all day as televised images of Massiel singing "La, La, La" at the Eurovision Song Contest in 1968 infiltrate that last series of associations. The song is there to visualize a conversation Lance had earlier in the day when a remorseful and contrite Henry comes round to the house to try and make amends. Trying to appear upbeat and unfazed but seething with anger, Lance, while putting his shopping away in the kitchen, chatters about the song he's had stuck in his head:

That stupid song, keeps going round and round and round. Some stupid piece of shit from thirty years ago. It's like—I read this article once, by Vanessa Feltz. About twenty years ago when she used to write for the *Mirror*. She said her grandmother always used to do the washing up in the same way: water too hot to the touch. I remember reading it because that's exactly how I wash up. The thing is, every time I wash up, I think of Vanessa Feltz's grandmother. Isn't that ridiculous? Every single day of my life. Just for a second. I think of Vanessa Feltz's grandmother. 'Cause she's in there, she's stuck; she's this tiny little thing that won't go

away. 'Cause that's all we are, Henry. Heads full of shit. All the stuff that just gathers over the years whether we want it or not. Stupid old song. Water too hot to the touch. I love you. So what?!

Despite Lance's disenchantment in this scene, the affect of this speech and the way in which that "head full of shit" is captured in the final moment of the episode is invested with urgency and poignancy, both momentary and momentous. The episode loads up the weight of this man's life, both ordinary and extraordinary, then discharges that weight in one senseless act of hate. The sense of loss is devastating. But Lance's anecdote also captures that push and pull of the everyday "that can fuse a dream world to the world of ordinary things." Associations become memories become habits, and now, every time I wash up, I think of both Lance and Vanessa Feltz's grandmother.⁵⁵

Despite the violent nature of Lance's death, the pattern of return that I want to highlight is not constituted by the hauntings and hallucinations that might characterize forms of trauma. There is clear potential for trauma in Lance's story and its depiction of a violent crime enacted on a queer Black body,⁵⁶ but as I have argued elsewhere, trauma has come to dominate discussions of television and its relationship to memory.⁵⁷ In such models television is *taken to* task for reproducing and repeating traumatic images and narratives or is *put to* task as a therapeutic machine that can "work through" the recurrence of such extreme emotions. Instead, here I draw on Lance's story for the way it dramatizes the interweaving of temporal patterns: in the episode we are invited into Lance's everyday time—the repetitive act of washing up, the song or reference that goes round and round and round—and Lance's lifetime. What the episode conveys is a relationship between different temporal scales, micro and macro, that informs my own understanding and experience of television. This configuration is different to the relationship between "part" and "whole" that is often the preoccupation of writing on television's serial forms. I wish not to return us to this completist sensibility but, instead, to foreground the "ongoing-ness" of the everyday. As Ben Highmore argues: "The sense that the artwork completes sensual experience (resolves it into more satisfying and morally superior forms) is a central tenet within aesthetic discourse, and it immediately suggests that there is something generally incomplete and unsatisfactory about day-to-day experience . . . aesthetic satisfaction (in its dominant mode) is satisfaction in the end form of a process, rather than in the messy *informe* of the ongoing-ness of process. Most of what constitutes the day-to-day is irresolvable and desperately incomplete, yet, for all that, also most vital."⁵⁸ It is this last line that seems to me to perfectly cap-

ture the power of Lance's story, but it also opens up a way in which to value and understand television on its own terms and precisely for its incompleteness. The possible textual manifestations of this idea are diverse, and this project remains attentive to those fragments that become buried, stuck, or lost and that can prompt a range of affective responses—from frustration, grief, and desperation to resilience, hope, and care. Attentiveness has itself been central to understandings of care and how we recognize and respond to the needs of others (in both caring and being cared for). This has taken the form of an attentiveness to embodied forms of knowledge and the “small moments” that have been seen to evidence the existence of care (moments that become central to the scenes of care I revisit in chapters 1 and 2). But the attentiveness that this book advocates is also fundamental to the work of textual analysis. In its cultivation of a close reader, one who lingers and dallies,⁵⁹ the labor of textual analysis can uncover, unfold, or untangle those “small” pleasures, moments, and movements that constitute the ordinary affective realm of television in order to begin to build an incremental and iterative portrait of a life.

On Living with Television

This book is populated by my own encounters with television: sometimes momentary, sometimes durational, often repetitive either through form, feeling, or routine. They are encounters that I've chosen in an endeavor to capture those patterns of television that emerge within both everyday time and across our lifetimes, and my choice of examples is motivated by a desire to interrogate how television can become folded into our lives and how our lives, in turn, activate our uses of television. Alongside autobiographical anecdote, memory, and reflection, my approach draws on the analysis of a range of television texts that, during the writing of this book, became central to these various encounters. My use of textual analysis can be characterized as operating in two distinct but interrelated modes that are indebted to feminist critical traditions within television studies and beyond. The first explores the relationship between the text of television and the domestic context of viewing to account for both textual and experiential characteristics of the medium. The second turns to the relationship between the text and the self as a key site for the production of meaning.

Early theories of television broadcasting understood the ways in which the medium, as technology and cultural form, was entangled with the rituals, rhythms, and routines of our private and public lives: bound to the repetitive

experiences of domestic labor and the cyclical patterns of the nation. Returning to where Carol Lopate and Tania Modleski began, I remain captivated by the ways in which the textual object is activated by the material and affective dimensions of everyday life. Tackling issues of cultural value, women's genres, feminine aesthetics, and "reading" positions, this scholarship established a common understanding of television's medium specificity as tied to its spatiotemporal arrangements: the housewife emerged as the model viewer, and domestic space and culture as the principal zone of consumption. Here the textual and the experiential qualities of television were seen to be both activated and constituted by the times and spaces of the home and its quotidian rhythms. Charlotte Brunsdon writes that it was Lopate "who first formulate[d] the correlation between the rhythm of daytime programming and housework."⁶⁰ For instance, Lopate observed how the busy aesthetics of the morning game show and the anesthetic qualities of the afternoon serial rhymed with daily patterns of women's work and rest in the home.⁶¹ However, it was Modleski's development of this observation in *Loving with a Vengeance* that had a lasting impact.⁶² Modleski considered the soap opera as both an archetypal televisual and feminine form and worked to illuminate the ways in which the context of viewing (the home) and the experience of the viewer (the housewife) were inscribed within the text. This particular alignment produced two couplings that became central to early understandings of television's medium specificity: the repetition and endlessness of the soap opera's "eternal return" to the "same time tomorrow"⁶³ and the characteristics of interruption and distraction that emerged through the endless deferral of narrative resolution, the fragmentation of television flow and the distractions of the domestic environment. In her emphasis on the feminine aspects of soap opera form and its ambivalences, Modleski argued for an understanding of its narrative pleasures and unpleasures as "thoroughly adapted to the rhythms of women's lives in the home."⁶⁴

For Modleski, the entanglement of text and context is read through the subjectivity of the "housewife." However, one of the central critiques of her argument is the reference to a female subject that is seen to be a "historically unchanging and universal category."⁶⁵ While I wish to pay a debt to Modleski's legacy, I will decenter the position of the wife and mother in this particular study of television. My own approach has been to acknowledge a viewer that is, like television itself, both changing and unchanging and a subject position that depends on a notion of relationality. For example, in the stories I draw on I am neither a wife nor a mother, but a sister, daughter, aunt, child, adolescent, and adult. Sometimes these different selves are alone with televi-

sion and sometimes they watch together. And while the experiences I write about—eating, sleeping, homemaking, driving, caring—will be recognized by many readers, I understand that the stories and encounters I draw on won't necessarily be. This, however, is a fundamental aspect of an autoethnographic approach it opens: a space for the reader to consider how they do or don't recognize themselves or their experiences in the description of familiar everyday practices. As Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams, and Arthur Bochner write, "In autoethnography, the focus of generalizability moves from respondents to readers, and is always being tested by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know."⁶⁶ There is certainly a parallel to be drawn here with aspects of reader-response theory that inform my other use of textual analysis within the book. Within this particular tradition, "the virtual space between text and reader" is understood to be a site for "meaningful interpretation or communication."⁶⁷ Here the attentiveness that textual analysis requires is central to my project—not just as an illustration or representation of a particular everyday practice but as a demonstration of how television articulates memory, emotion, and affect. More specifically, I draw on feminist writings and understandings of the text-reader relationship that have given us, as Lynne Pearce has argued, "a new model of how the text-reader relation can be used to make sense of the world(s) we inhabit: and, in particular, the way in which we can creatively combine the texts of others with the textual productions of the self to gain a new perspective on our complex 'locatedness' within contemporary culture."⁶⁸ Out of this tradition, Pearce herself devises an intertextual autobiographical approach that I have employed at certain points in this book and that accounts for "the emotional fabric of the reading process" as one dependent on "an interweaving of textual and extra-textual associations, as some cue in the text prompts us to the scripting of a parallel text based on some aspect of our personal or intertextual experience."⁶⁹ The modes of analysis I employ offer me a way into the intertwining of television's texts with everyday domestic practices and life histories and allow me to get at the intimate, durational, and ordinary affects of the television experience.

The soap opera or the serial itself might have seemed like the obvious texts to analyze in this way. Scholars such as Robert Allen and Christine Geraghty recognized early on the ways in which long-term engagement with soap opera narratives carried the accumulative weight of both characters' and viewers' memories and histories.⁷⁰ Instead I have chosen an approach that has been led by different examples of routine and everyday practices, performances, and affects that are experienced in relation to the home and the

family in order to investigate how they are inscribed within and activated by television. I adopt a multigeneric approach as a way to think more holistically about the diversity of texts and experiences that television offers and to suggest that these diverse texts (when and because they are television) can act in this way: from the seemingly most simple (preschool television) to the apparently most complex (high-end drama). A secondary purpose of this has been to widen the frames of reference and analysis beyond television's legitimated forms and to pay attention to different kinds of viewers and experiences that are often marginalized by film and television studies. My opening two chapters, for example, revolve around the use of television (Disney Home Video and preschool TV) by the dis/abled child and those who care for them. But I also maintain that it is necessary to see how, rather than arresting and rescuing them from the polluted flow of the rest of television, those legitimated forms still sit within our everyday lives. For instance, my discussion of *Hannibal* (NBC, 2013–15) in chapter 3 frames the series in relation to practices of eating and digesting to insist on an understanding of television as existing within an embodied everyday rather than as a prized or rarefied commodity. To put it simply, this book describes the life lived with television while asking questions about what it means to “grow up” with and to live alongside television in the process. In doing so it reembraces the loopiness of television: its contradictions, oscillations, and ambivalences, its multiplications and layers, its againness and its endlessness. This is television again in Patricia Mellen-camp's terms, as “both/and” rather than “either/or.”⁷¹

Coming Up . . .

Chapters 1 and 2 explore the role of television as a scene or site of care. The material and affective qualities of care are central within our everyday lives, especially within the context of the home and family. However, caring practices have received little attention in relation to domestic media cultures. Across these chapters, then, I argue for an understanding of television as a technology of care by exploring the ways in which it finds itself embedded within complex routines of care within the home, specifically in relation to the child, child care, and children's television. Through a feminist ethics of care I uncover the forms of love and labor associated with both caring and being cared for and the role that specific forms of television can play in the constitution of these bonds and relationships. Chapter 1 employs an auto/biographical approach as it opens with the tale of my younger sister, Alice, and the significance of her repetitive viewing of Disney Home Videos throughout

our childhoods and adolescences. Here I consider how Alice's experience, as a child with profound and multiple disabilities and an obsession with Disney films and songs, widens our understanding of media use and complicates notions of "growing up" and prevalent (normative) conceptions of childhood. In this context, the patterns of time and feeling that this book explores disrupt linear notions of growth and development and, alongside an ethics of care and practices of life-writing, challenge the sovereignty of the autonomous subject that is often imagined in writing about film and television spectatorship. My use of an auto/biographical approach interweaves Alice's story into my own and operates, in this chapter, to emphasize the relational and interdependent aspects of both care and life-writing that, I argue, have particular political resonance for the stories we tell about disability.

Chapter 2 continues the exploration of discourses and experiences of care in relation to television through its focus on preschool scheduling and programming, exemplified by the CBeebies Bedtime Hour and the series *In the Night Garden*. Though the use of autobiography is less sustained in this chapter, it employs a series of vignettes charting my own experiences of caring for my young niece and nephew as it reflects on the design of television intended to be used by the carer and child as part of a bedtime routine. This is a routine that has been characterized as one that moves between conflict and comfort, anxiety and security as the child and carer negotiate the transitions between times and spaces within the home. Children's bedtime television emerges as a potent example through which to renew our attention to both the "dailiness" of television and the patterns of anxiety and security that have been central to theorizations of the medium through the work of scholars such as Patricia Mellencamp and Roger Silverstone. Preschool television's attempts to manage this experience in the home is an example of the way in which it can be seen to "care for" its audience. This is framed within a public service context and as part of the "duty of care" undertaken by broadcasters and tied to a history of paternalism that seeks to protect, control, and manage the child and instill "proper" notions of parenting within the home. This history also relies on a normative conception of childhood by positioning the child as the future adult and citizen to construct a fantasy of the family unit that assumes in its address both a dutiful child and a caring parent. However, as Charlotte Brunsdon has written in relation to the fantasy image of the housewife, "Fantasies of the real and the everyday can be as powerful as fantasies of the unrealistic/fantastic." Brunsdon remarks on the continuities between soap opera viewing and the little girls' imagination of the "tidy house" as a "fantasy of an everyday life of gendered order."⁷² Here the CBeebies Bedtime Hour

emerges as a fantasy of an everyday life of *generational* order as I explore the ways in which the Bedtime Hour is constructed as a “useful tool” for carers and parents and a space for intergenerational engagement. *In the Night Garden* is a product of this specific intergenerational use and address, catching the viewer somewhere between an adult’s memory and a child’s dream. In this chapter, I continue to interweave television’s texts and contexts to uncover how the motions and patterns of the bedtime routine are mirrored by their textual manifestations. In this context, television, with its repeated patterns and journeys of retreat and return, is used to help negotiate the transitions between times and spaces faced by the child (between day and night; waking and sleeping; today and tomorrow; diegetic and domestic; being with others and being alone). Through these negotiations, the Bedtime Hour works to alleviate anxiety and ensure a sense of continuity for the child. Here we cross thresholds represented by the bed, home, and garden, and these are aligned with the threshold of the television screen, representing permeable borders between inside and outside, the self and the world, the private and the public.

Chapter 3, “TV Dinners,” continues to investigate the relationships between inside and outside, individual and social, though this time focusing on the threshold of the body. Unlike in the previous two chapters, the viewing context is that of living alone with television. The image of the lone viewer is one that populates advertisements for newer forms of “platform mobility” that celebrate ideas of individualism and the freedom to move, unhindered, both around and outside the home. These images and promises of the fluid transitions between times and spaces are also suggestive of the imagined porosity of the television screen. Here an alignment can be drawn between the threshold of the screen and that of the body, one that is illuminated through the act of eating with television. As Annemarie Mol has written: “Neither tightly closed off, nor completely open, an eater has semi-permeable boundaries.”⁷³ This chapter seeks to explore the alignments and synergies between eating and television through both theoretical understandings of the two practices and in relation to each as part of our routinized and everyday behaviors within the home. The metaphorical associations between television viewing and eating have long invoked a set of cultural anxieties that rehearse the discourses of distraction and attention that have dominated discussions of television. But these associations also call into being the material conditions of both viewing and eating and how they work together as an often-overlooked mode of engagement, and in which one can be seen to act as an accompaniment to the other. This chapter asks what the consequences of this layered engagement might be for our experiences of texts, tastes, and textures

alongside what it can tell us about the forms of intersubjectivity that television enables. Drawing attention to a series of “eating scenes” both on and in front of the screen, I consider how these moments have informed, and been informed by, the ambivalences of eating within my own life. Here I consider how, for example, the protean affects of a series such as *Man v. Food* (Travel Channel, 2008–10) are created through those parallel texts of program and viewer. Through a discussion of the series *Hannibal*, I argue that scenes and performances of eating also offer another lens through which to make visible the iterative patterns of television forms (from the serial to the GIF) and experiences. And despite the contemporary sovereignty of the individualized and autonomous viewer, this relationship offers a prime site through which to explore the continuing connections that television can forge between the self and others.

Returning to where this book began, the final chapter continues to reflect on the comings and goings that have characterized my adult life so far. Whether by choice or necessity, a range of life events and experiences—work, study, romance, estrangement, exile—can take us away from the places and landscapes in which we grew up. My own experience of traveling between my family home in Yorkshire and my working home in Scotland forms the basis for this chapter as I consider how these repetitive journeys and the associated feelings of disorientation and indeterminacy have informed the views of “home” I see on TV. Here I draw on the BBC family drama *Last Tango in Halifax* (2012–), set in my home county of West Yorkshire in northern England, for the particular view of the north it offers. The series sits within a tradition of representation that is underpinned by northern writers’ experiences of departure and return, and an experience that also heavily features in the shuttling to and fro of the choreography and characters in the drama itself. This pattern of movement through the landscape evokes my own experiences of travel but also points toward a more unsettled point of view, one that sits on both the inside and the outside, always yet never quite at home. These unsettled feelings are produced, in part, through the copresence of times and places that characterize television as, in Mimi White’s terms, always “a relation between at least two places or identities, and often more.”⁷⁴ But it is also symptomatic of the temporal, experiential, and textual loops of television that similarly shuttle us between past, present, and future. Through an analysis of the midlife terrain of the sitcom *Catastrophe* (Channel 4, 2015–19) I consider how past experiences and imagined futures have shaped the decisions I’ve made in the present. Caught in

between past and future, here and there, I conclude by reflecting on the necessary incompleteness of both television and the life-writing project.

With this incompleteness in mind, and because the events of 2020 perfectly illustrate the contingency that characterizes our domestic and televisual lives, I felt the need to add an epilogue. The COVID-19 pandemic and the national and local lockdowns that followed have presented, for many though not all, a radical break in our everyday lives. But it has also made the experience of living with television highly visible: viewers have turned to the medium—in both its broadcast and online variants—in record numbers. In line with the themes of this book, the epilogue reflects on the affordances and avoidances of television viewing and how they shaped my own experiences of an unsettled and unsettling period in recent history.

Television, in each of these chapters, is understood as a relational object, but importantly, the television viewer is recognized as a relational being in their connection to other people—regardless of whether those other people are in the room or not—and to their previous selves. Despite these experiences of disorientation I am lucky to have a family that has given me such steady foundations. For that, for them, for our sadnesses and our joys, the conflicts and the comforts, I am beyond grateful. This book is for all of them, present and absent, whether they want it or not. The losses and gains, the securities and anxieties I explore in this book won't be everyone's, but they might resonate beyond my own life to capture a broader sense of the ambivalences, oscillations, and iterations that emerge through the everyday nexus of television, the home, and the family. The analysis, criticism, and appreciation of television, I argue, should remain alive to the contingencies and continuities of everyday life and to the passing of time, thus enabling us to access the full range of television's uses, meanings, and patterns of feeling.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, 3.
- 2 Caughie, "Telephilia and Distraction," 5.
- 3 The autobiographical voice has been invoked in a number of recent books that consider lifelong relationships with and durational experiences of television. Elana Levine, for instance, opens her study of US daytime soaps with an account of the layering of time experienced by a longtime soap viewer alongside her own memories of excitedly following a major *General Hospital* (ABC, 1963–) storyline on a radio in the schoolyard. Amy Villarejo's phenomenological claim in *Ethereal Queer* that "we live as and on television" is partly informed by an account of her childhood in West Los Angeles growing up in proximity to sites of television production. In an approach more firmly embedded in literary criticism, Ann duCille's *Technicolored* employs a sustained use of family history and memoir to examine changing representations of African Americans on US television screens. See Levine, *Her Stories*, 1–3; Villarejo, *Ethereal Queer*, 11; and DuCille, *Technicolored*.
- 4 Roth, "Auto/Biography and Auto/Ethnography," 13.
- 5 Waller, *Rereading Childhood Books*, 14.
- 6 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 183–201.
- 7 Stanley, *Auto/Biographical I*, 14.
- 8 Stanley, *Auto/Biographical I*, 61.
- 9 See Tryon, "TV Got Better."
- 10 Frolova, "'We Pretty Much Just Watched It All Back to Back!'" 245.
- 11 For a useful overview of writing in this area and a discussion of autoethnography as method for cultural studies scholars, see Manning and Adams, "Popular Culture Studies and Autoethnography."
- 12 Roth, "Auto/Biography and Auto/Ethnography," 3–4.
- 13 Uotinen, "Digital Television and the Machine That Goes 'PING!'" 166–67.
- 14 Freeman, *Time Binds*, 4–5.
- 15 Freeman, *Time Binds*, 5.

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- 16 Stacey and Wolff, *Writing Otherwise*, 7.
- 17 Newman and Levine, *Legitimizing Television*, 163–64.
- 18 Schwartz, “Poetry Rx.”
- 19 Felski, *Doing Time*, 82.
- 20 Felski, *Doing Time*, 79.
- 21 Part of Felski’s project is to unpick an approach to ideas of time that is “preoccupied with establishing the differences between epochs” rather than the differences *within* them (*Doing Time*, 14). Felski begins to achieve this internal complexity by demarcating three specific “scales” of time that she sees as existing concurrently—everyday time, life time, and large-scale time—and this approach allows her to combine characteristics of the linear and the cyclical. Felski, *Doing Time*, 14–19.
- 22 Felski, *Doing Time*, 20.
- 23 Felski, *Doing Time*, 85.
- 24 Amanda Ann Klein and R. Barton Palmer refer to these textual loops as “multiplicities” in a collection that covers a range of case studies from across film and television. See Klein and Palmer, *Cycles, Sequels, Spin-Offs, Remakes, and Reboots*.
- 25 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “iteration (n.),” accessed February 15, 2021, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/100312>.
- 26 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “iteration (n.),” accessed February 15, 2021, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/100312>.
- 27 Helen Piper offers a useful discussion of this as a logic of the serial in her essay “How Long Since You Were Last Alive?,” 248.
- 28 Freeman, *Time Binds*, 5.
- 29 Villarejo, *Ethereal Queer*, 10.
- 30 Johnson, *Online TV*, 18.
- 31 Joyrich, “Queer Television Studies,” 135. Gary Needham similarly argues for an understanding of the temporal experience of television as a “significant location for queerness” in his essay “Scheduling Normativity,” 157.
- 32 Joyrich, “Queer Television Studies,” 135.
- 33 Joyrich, “Queer Television Studies,” 135–36.
- 34 Felski, *Doing Time*, 84.
- 35 Intersectional scholars such as Alison Kafer and Robert McRuer have already created an alliance between disability and queer theories and activisms as ways to understand and challenge cultures of compulsory ablebodiedness and heterosexuality. The intersection between notions of “queer time” and “crip time” has also been a particularly productive line of inquiry. See Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*; and McRuer, *Crip Theory*.
- 36 Mills, “What Does It Mean to Call Television ‘Cinematic?’”
- 37 Mittell, *Complex TV*, 35.
- 38 Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 13.
- 39 Schwaab, “‘Unreading’ Contemporary Television,” 21.
- 40 Moseley, Wheatley, and Wood, “Introduction: Television in the Afternoon,” 1.
- 41 Jacobs, “Television, Interrupted,” 258.
- 42 The work of Shaun Moores, for instance, offers some compelling insights into these digital arrangements within everyday life. See Moores, *Digital Orientations*.

- 43 Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 5.
- 44 Ethnographic accounts and cultural histories of television are often situated within or upon this terrain, and the resulting scholarship has formed important foundations for both the discipline and for this particular project. These areas of scholarship are extensive and cover different national contexts and historical periods. Key early texts include Lull, "The Social Uses of Television"; Morley, *Family Television*; Fachel Leal, "Popular Taste and Erudite Repertoire"; O'Sullivan, "Television Memories and Cultures of Viewing, 1950–1965"; Spigel, *Make Room for TV*; Mankekar, "National Texts and Gendered Lives."
- 45 Felski, *Doing Time*, 93; Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, 7.
- 46 Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*.
- 47 Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 2.
- 48 Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 55.
- 49 Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 80.
- 50 Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 56.
- 51 Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 56.
- 52 Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 56.
- 53 Lury, "A Response to John Corner," 372.
- 54 For a recent exploration of the threshold of television, see Josie Torres Barth's essay "Sitting Closer to the Screen."
- 55 Vanessa Feltz is a journalist, broadcaster, and television personality who has been working in British television and radio for a number of decades. She is perhaps most famous for her daytime talk show in the 1990s and for her public meltdown in the first UK series of *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2001.
- 56 Lance's death is situated by the drama in the context of a history of homophobia and hate crime experienced by the queer community in Manchester. In a nostalgic gesture to Davies's earlier series set in the same community, Lance encounters the character of Hazel as he leaves the bar on Canal Street. Hazel's presence is itself marked as ghostly, while she warns Lance of the danger he is in, ambiguity remains as to whether his encounter with her is real or imagined.
- 57 Holdsworth, "Televisual Memory," 131.
- 58 Highmore, "Bitter after Taste," 123.
- 59 Freeman, *Time Binds*, xvii.
- 60 Brunson, *The Feminist, the Housewife, and the Soap Opera*, 55.
- 61 Lopate, "Daytime Television."
- 62 Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*.
- 63 Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, 89.
- 64 Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, 87.
- 65 Spigel, "Detours in the Search for Tomorrow," 225.
- 66 Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, "Autoethnography," 283.
- 67 Waller, *Rereading Childhood Books*, 25.
- 68 Pearce, "Introduction: Devolution and the Politics of Re/location," 28.
- 69 Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, 9.
- 70 See, for example, Allen, "Audience-Orientated Criticism and Television"; and Geraghty,

“Continuous Serial.” See also the work of C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, which employs a life course approach and perspectives from cultural gerontology to examine the lives of soap opera fans. Harrington and Bielby, “A Life Course Perspective on Fandom.”

- 71 Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 5.
- 72 Brunson, *The Feminist, the Housewife, and the Soap Opera*, 68.
- 73 Mol, “I Eat an Apple,” 30.
- 74 White, “Flows and Other Close Encounters with Television,” 106.

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- 1 Kuhn, *Family Secrets*.
- 2 Spigel’s images, she argues, are of “people staging their own visual responses to television” that run parallel to the official manuals and guides for how to incorporate TV into the home in the mid-twentieth century. For Spigel, with television providing a setting rather than a focal point, the technology “becomes a backdrop for the presentation of family, self and gender.” Spigel, “TV Snapshots.”
- 3 Kittay, *Love’s Labor*.
- 4 Barnes et al., “Introduction,” 17.
- 5 Titchkosky and Michalko, “Body as the Problem of Individuality,” 140.
- 6 Brown and Reavey, “Turning Around on Experience,” 146.
- 7 Kittay, “The Personal Is Philosophical Is Political,” 406.
- 8 Pallant, *Demystifying Disney*, 89.
- 9 Newman, *Video Revolutions*, 43.
- 10 Meltzer and Kramer, “Siblinghood through Disability Studies Perspectives,” 19.
- 11 See Ryan, *Crippled*.
- 12 Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 57.
- 13 Couser, *Vulnerable Subjects*.
- 14 See, for example, Torrell, “Plural Singularities.”
- 15 Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 169.
- 16 Ward, “Reciprocity and Mutuality,” 166.
- 17 Schormans, “People with Intellectual Disabilities (Visually) Reimagine Care,” 180.
- 18 Schormans, “People with Intellectual Disabilities (Visually) Reimagine Care,” 181.
- 19 Ward, “Reciprocity and Mutuality,” 167.
- 20 Rueschmann, *Sisters on Screen*, 12.
- 21 Stockton, *Queer Child*, 10.
- 22 Mitchell, *Siblings*, 1.
- 23 Newman, *Video Revolutions*, 44.
- 24 Mitchell, *Siblings*, 10.
- 25 I am indebted to Hannah Andrews for this observation on the sibling-like relationships among TV, film, and new media.
- 26 Mitchell, *Siblings*, 4.
- 27 Sigafos et al., “Communication Intervention in Rett Syndrome,” 305.
- 28 A wealth of literature from a range of disciplines has troubled the assumed temporalities