



The ethics of television

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ABSTRACT ● This paper explores the ethical turn in new and old television formats. From docusoaps to tabloid talk to lifestyle shows, examinations of *ways to live* are now a major source of content and conflict. Television is now deeply implicated in shaping our ethical sensibilities. This development makes trouble for the logic of tabloid moralism and its obsession with policing the boundaries between right and wrong, for when moralism gives way to ethics the role of television in governing populations becomes much more complex and multifarious. Using the ethical theories of Foucault and Deleuze, the political implications of television's version of ethics are examined. ●

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There is no doubt that television has taken an ethical turn. By this I do not mean that the pursuit of goodness has replaced the pursuit of profits in network boardrooms. Rather, that *ethics* have become *entertainment*. Beyond the phenomenal rise of 'infotainment' there is the emergence of a whole range of new formats, from docusoaps to reality TV to tabloid talk, where everyday ethical dilemmas are very often the source of conflict and content. Growing amounts of television programming now involve examinations of *ways to live*: information about the care and management of the self, explorations of the tensions between collective versus self-interest, audience participation in quests for the truth of the self.

Surfing channels on almost any night of the week can now take you from

a tense confrontation between team members about ‘the rules’ involved in searching for treasure on an isolated island; to images of a group of landscapers frantically doing good in the backyard of a recent stroke victim. Television is now a relentless reminder of Foucault’s observation that life is one long ethical seminar; ethics are where the textual and economic action is in television.

This significant shift in programming (that parallels the decline in drama and current affairs) means that television is now deeply implicated in shaping our ethical sensibilities, in marking out fields and activities that warrant ethical attention, in advising us on how to cultivate particular practices and conducts in the interests of realizing ethical goals: use a condom, recycle, eat less fat, get active, share the road, the drain is just for rain. In infotainment, in particular, we can see how ethics operate as a form of self-shaping, as a shifting terrain of practical rules, judgements and techniques for managing the self and its relations with others.

But infotainment’s version of ethics as a form of personal governance and cultivation is simply one of many. Televisual ethics are remarkable for their sheer diversity, for a rampant plurality. In the realm of docusoap and reality TV we are not being invited to manage the self, to reflect on ways of being; rather to spectate on simulated ethical crises. Whether we can enter imaginatively into a world of ugly competition, sexual jealousy, deceit and malice is not really the point; maximizing ethical conflict and thoughtlessness for their entertainment value is.

What are we to make of this excess of ethics? Of this sense that many new television formats are unconcerned with policing the boundary between good and bad, right and wrong, but privilege, instead, the liminal zone of uncertainty and struggle between these binaries. Of the perception from some social commentators that the endless advice and information about ‘lifestyle choices’ – whether for sofas or sexual partners – is evidence of the trivialization, even collapse, of serious moral principles. What do these new formats mean for the role of television as an institution of moral management, as a technology of governance? How do we encounter televisual ethics? How does television limit or extend our conceptions of ethics, particularly around difference? These are the questions driving this paper. My intention is not to read the development of new television formats as a sign of wider cultural malaise or transformation, to use *Big Brother* or *Survivor* to diagnose the social. Rather, my fascination is somewhat more modest and theoretical. I am interested in how television’s version of ethics might open up other lines of thought beyond governmental accounts of the media/subjectivity relation; how the different ethos of engagement or relationality we sometimes experience watching ethics on TV could signal what William Connolly (1999) calls ‘a politics of becoming’.

In many ways these questions emerge from the different uses that Foucault and Deleuze have been put to within political theory, from an emergent

dialogue between the Foucault of governmentality and the Deleuze of multiplicity and becoming. At stake here is a way of thinking about the role of television, not simply in making subjects (and this is very much the governmentality project) but in *unmaking* subjects, in cultivating new sensibilities and engagements, in enabling different micropolitics of the self. Ethics are crucial here because they foreground the perpetual instability and ambiguity of normativity, morality and identity. Those very formulations are most often understood as part of the governing logic of television, as fundamental to the sociopolitical 'effects' of television. Yet in those moments when you flick the 'off' button on the remote with rage: 'I cannot watch this for another second!', or when your eyes unexpectedly fill with tears watching *Australian Story* (a high-rating documentary series on the ABC about stories of everyday life), in those moments of deep interactivity and emotional exchange with the small screen we experience the multiplicity of being, the layered registers of self that are enfolded with normativity and moral reason. And it is precisely these affective and visceral movements of the self that not only complicate existing accounts of governmentality, but also foreground the corporeality of ethics, the ways in which ethics are implicated with what Deleuze refers to as 'the molecular in-between of subjects' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988).

The ethical turn in television parallels an ethical turn in cultural studies. And it is this important theoretical shift that opens up the possibility of thinking about how television might be implicated in unsettling norms of identity and moral codes and commands. For the ethical theory developed by Foucault in his later work and in Deleuze's reflections on Spinoza is not only grounded in bodies, actions and sensibilities but also in a concern with an 'aesthetics of existence'. This aesthetics of existence does not mean the privileging of self-realization at the expense of the bonds of mutuality, as many critiques of Foucault have argued; rather, it foregrounds the practical and everyday terrain of making oneself a subject. Ethics are fundamental to the multiple processes of subjectification, they allow us to judge, cultivate and order ourselves not simply in relation to wider moral interdictions but also in relation to 'askesis' or sensibilities that establish the range of possibilities in perception, enactment and responsiveness to others. Ethics are never solely a matter of codes or fixed and abstract rules of behaviour – they are also about our sensuously-engaged responses to the world and others. As Jane Bennett argues, 'this ethico-aesthetic sensibility is more crafted than uncovered and its cultivation is at least as crucial to ethics as are principles, reasons and their assemblage into a moral code' (1996: 655).

Part of the fascination with the rise of new television formats, then, is seeing morality give way to ethics. And nowhere is this more obvious than in the decline of current affairs. Enormous growth in new formats has had profound effects on this type of programming. Not only has the amount of airtime declined but the tone and content has substantially altered. While it

is impossible to claim that the shift towards the tabloidization of current affairs, particularly on commercial channels, is directly related to the rise of new formats, it is possible to claim that what tabloidization reveals is that disciplining normativity is still alive and well on television though its status and impacts could well be diminishing. And perhaps one of the reasons for this is the privilege given to morality and moralism over ethics?

It is worth investigating briefly the nature of tabloid's moralizing logic in order to see how different it is from ethical exploration and instruction, and in order to see how the ethics of television generate quite different audience relations and modes of viewing.

Consider this notorious example from the Australian prime time current affairs show *A Current Affair*. Over the period of a week in 1996 *A Current Affair* pursued the Paxtons, a family where three of the children were unemployed. All the usual tabloid tricks were mobilized: interviews with angry neighbours about the 'lazy good for nothings' next door; meetings between the unemployed Paxtons and potential employers on an island resort where a slight resistance to getting very short haircuts was amplified to highlight how workshy these three were; doorstep interviews with the Paxtons' mother, angry and irate about unfair media treatment; sanctimonious voiceovers from the show's host, Ray Martin; and follow-up articles in the tabloid press praising *A Current Affair* for taking on idle youth. Overall, a classic exercise in blaming the victim, winding up audience hostility to a defenceless and easily set-up target.

In this television sequence confrontation was the name of the game. Ray Martin did not have a conversation with the unemployed – he put them on trial. This was Ray's version of gardening: digging up dirt, muckraking. But exactly what was happening when Ray classified the Paxtons as rubbish? What was happening was that Ray made himself into the moral centre; he used the Paxtons to engage in a bit of transcendental egoism. This was Ray as cosmologist putting the world in order, taking on the dirty work so that we all knew where we stood. So we all knew what was right and wrong, who was good and bad.

This kind of treatment of difference and disadvantage, widely criticized for its gross abuse and exploitation, shows us how moral discourse often works. It seeks not to engage with difference, but to discipline it and classify it in ways that maintain the identity and moral superiority of the classifier. Ray Martin's identity wasn't unsettled by this encounter with the unemployed; it was shored-up and affirmed and that is because he did not recognize any relation with them. He policed a boundary between workers and idlers, good and bad, clean and dirty, morally upright and morally lax, us and them; all in the name of 'moral responsibility'. However, what this version of responsibility fundamentally denied was the ethical implications of this term. When *A Current Affair* uses the term 'responsibility' it means defending categorical moral imperatives, it means insisting that its moral

standards are universal, natural, transcendent, shared by every decent Australian. It means judging and setting down norms. This is how moral standards become moralism; an injurious shameful exercise in denigrating and excluding difference, cleaning up the world so that everything is in order. And it is moralism that is at the heart of the tabloid media's discursive logics.

There is, of course, a very different meaning for responsibility: one informed by the ethical theories of Levinas and Derrida and many theological writings. This is the idea of responsibility as *responding to* and seeking to understand the experience of the other: imagining yourself in the place of the other. Being able to think of yourself not only as the subject of actions, but also as the object of them. In its simplest form we can see this kind of ethical awareness being nurtured in the statement we so often make to children: 'how would you feel if someone did that to you?' And we can also see it in those televisual encounters when we find ourselves unexpectedly moved or unsettled, confronted by difference and aware of how our responses to it can productively disturb our senses of moral and self-certainty. This is the distinction between ethics and morality, and this is the space that some new and not so new television formats open up.

In the rest of this paper I would like to explore the political significance of the ethics of television. And in order to do this I am going to examine two different TV formats, one relatively new and the other old, familiar and a fundamental part of television's history. Each of these formats reflect different strands of ethical theory. In the recent rise of infotainment the insistence on personal management and cultivation resonates with Foucault's insistence that ethics are fundamental to self-shaping. In documentary, by contrast, we see how television can be implicated in an ethics of responsibility, how it can cultivate responses to difference and disagreement that radically contest the exclusions and shaming of tabloid moralizing. In both these formats, televisual ethics signal new kinds of political relations that render the prescriptive authoritarianism of tabloid morality anachronistic in the extreme.

A conversation

It was a matter of analyzing, not the behaviours or ideas, nor societies and their 'ideologies' but the problematisations through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought – and the practices on the basis of which these problematisations are formed. (Foucault, 1990: 11)

This is how Foucault announces the intellectual project of *The Use of Pleasure* (1990). It could also function as a perfectly apt description of the logic of infotainment. Problematization is the necessary first step in the calculation of an ethical telos. It refers to the conditions in which we query

what we are, what we should do, how we should be in the world. This process of reflexivity, of turning the self into an object of ethical inquiry reveals, not simply how problems become moral concerns, but also the operations of 'conscience' as a self-shaping and regulating practice.

Now problems are the stuff of infotainment: 'my kids won't eat vegetables', 'my barking dog is driving the neighbours crazy', 'I have a dark and gloomy corner in the living room', 'my compost smells'. But where is the ethical content in all this, you might ask? Hidden by its very ubiquity. Lurking around all that advice about how to live, all those practical instructions on management of the home, pets, self, are assumptions that continually recode the viewer within a variety of wider moral knowledges. And it is this movement between macropolitical technologies of subjectivity (moral codes and discourses, popular reason, knowledge, and expertise) and these minor, everyday ways of thinking and acting on the self that is governmentality, that is the relation between subjectivity and subjection.

In the final two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (1978) Foucault subjected interiority to radical critique. He pursued the questions of how the relation to oneself and others constituted subjectivity and how principles of internal regulation change. A central concern was what happened when formerly esoteric, ethical and spiritual practices were taken up by large-scale institutions such as the church and then bureaucratic states and, we would now add, the media. This is the terrain of the government/subjectivity relation, where relations to oneself become implicated in agencies of power-knowledge. When, according to Deleuze, 'the individual is coded or recoded within a "moral" knowledge, and above all he becomes the stake in a power struggle' (Deleuze, 1995: 103). This is the point when subjectivation becomes subjection, when power in the form of control and dependence becomes implicated in daily life and interiority, when subjects become tied to an identity by conscience and other techniques of moral self-knowledge (Deleuze, 1995).

The presence of a conscience in viewers is fundamental to the textual logic and pleasure of infotainment. For example, it is assumed on *Gardening Australia* that every garden has a compost heap and that non-chemical solutions to weeds are better than chemical ones, thereby endorsing, without ever proclaiming it, green or environmentally-aware practices over others. The privilege given to these conducts presumes and speaks to an already-established ecological conscience in the audience, no matter how suppressed and minimal this may be. Or take, for example, cooking shows: there is a constant discourse on these about fresh is best, about the importance of home cooking over prepackaged, commodified meals, about the disappearance of certain endangered ingredients. Cooking is being linked with certain modes of living and self-cultivations: learning how to fillet a fish, or scramble an egg is not just a lifestyle matter, it is about the production of a particular habitus: an arrangement of personal habits, attitudes and rituals that are

informed by ethical values and principles: cooking for yourself and your family is being valued here, is being classified as *good* and, by implication, buying takeaway is bad.

Infotainment transforms wider questions about how should we live, about ways of being, into technical advice. How should we *be* in our garden, how should we relate to food, to our lovers, to our pets? This technical advice is never purely technical – it is also at the same time *ethical* because it involves giving privilege to certain conducts over others, the classification of certain conducts as good. And in choosing to endorse specific techniques, infotainment is advising us on how to relate to ourselves, how to cultivate the self, shape it in certain ways, improve it in relation to implicit moral problematizations: chemical overload is bad, the over-reliance of prepackaged food is contributing to loss of skills in the kitchen. Techniques, advice, ‘how to’, are always implicitly framed by ethical principles and in taking up this advice we are making the self into an object of ethical attention.

What is really important about these shows is that they offer ethical instruction usually without any appeal to large-scale authorities. The state, religion, or moral reason are not being mobilized here to justify certain techniques and conducts. Instead it is those *everyday* experts of subjectivity: Don Burke, Peter Cundall, Nigella Lawson, Jamie Oliver, encouraging us to make the right choices that are not random or purely aesthetic. Rather, they are framed within carefully defined objectives that seek to realize ethical goals. This means that a quite different pedagogic relation with viewers is established with the infotainment format as opposed to current affairs. The hybridized nature of this genre gives the hosts a quite different effect, their performance of expertise is informal and authoritative rather than authoritarian, and that is because they are not dealing in transcendent moral categories. They offer advice rather than categorical imperatives, and advice presumes what Nikolas Rose (1999) calls a ‘freely choosing subject’: a subject seeking to enterprise itself, to maximize quality of life through acts of choice rather than through relations of obligation and dependency. Advice-as-entertainment presumes a subject able to self-regulate, an actively-responsible self committed to making appropriate calculations about its conduct in the interests of identity, personal fulfilment and lifestyle.

In other words, I would rather have Peter Cundall or Jamie Oliver telling me what to do than Judge Judy or Ray Martin. And that is because Judge Judy uses moral sanctions to force me into communities and positions I do not want to take, while Peter and Jamie are far more modest in their ethical claims. They show us that ethics are the stuff of everyday life, that ethics are practical, various, creative, experimental and relational; that while ethics can be implicated with wider moral codes (they often are), they can also be relatively autonomous, a product of our own particular sensibilities, principles and micro-moral communities. In other words, you can be ethical without being told to be.

Consider, then, a sequence from *Gardening Australia*, one of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's few remaining infotainment shows. This sequence features not direct-to-camera advice but a conversation. It helps push the idea of ethics not simply as self-shaping but also, more importantly, as creative and relational. I have chosen a conversation rather than a moment of direct-address advice because in this conversation we see intersubjectivity, an encounter with difference (as all conversations are) and the value of this is that we get to the 'guts' of ethics, the ways in which ethics can never be easily separated from politics. For the real political complexity of ethics is found in relations with difference: not just how we relate to the differences within ourselves but how we relate to the difference of others, how we deal with those who are not like us, those who represent vastly different ways of being.

In this sequence we see Peter Cundall, the host of *Gardening Australia*, wander through an olive grove in conversation with its owner Attilio Minnucci. They discuss the history of the grove, techniques of pruning and planting, the place of olives in Australian migrant lives. Beyond all the clichés of Italianicity and the classic migrant story this segment privileges a conversational mode that, I would argue, is deeply ethical. There is a constant movement and exchange between Peter's expert advice and Attilio's experiential advice. This works to recognize and affirm different forms of knowledge. The amateur and the expert are open to each other's ways of knowing olives. And in this sense the audience is invited to be open to difference, to learn from otherness, to positively value what is foreign or unfamiliar. Perhaps we take our lead from Peter Cundall's example because his interactions, his mode of relating, are infused with an ethos of generosity. His enthusiasm, his willingness to hear from the amateur and to respect his knowledge is fundamentally inclusive. Not in an assimilationist way, not in a way that privileges a morality of 'feel good tolerance' but in a way that implicitly acknowledges the *self-in-relation*. Peter Cundall does not use Attilio's difference to secure his identity as the norm, as the moral or tolerant centre. In fact at the end of this sequence he urges the audience to plant olives, to change, to become Italian! He has a conversation with Attilio that is generous, open, mutual, in which the play of differences between them is enjoyed, not resented, not judged.

This conversational landscape also reveals the complex relations between time and ethics. By television's standards this is an exceptionally long sequence, it runs for about seven minutes, more than twice the standard time of an infotainment segment on a commercial channel. And it is this willingness to let the encounter unfold, to let the conversation take time that signals an ethos of *generosity* and *responsiveness to difference*. Unlike the usual soundbites or two-minute sequences on *Burke's Backyard* or *Our House* (the two most popular infotainment shows on commercial TV in Australia), which resolutely commodify information and those who deliver it, this

sequence shows how an intersubjective encounter informing viewers of the techniques of olive growing is also a rich insight into ethics as relationality.

The extent of these new formats focusing on ethics as self-shaping shows how valuable a governmental approach is to analysing television. Infotainment is now a crucial site for understanding the relation between the forms of truth in which being is problematized, and the habits and practices through which we shape our own and others' conduct. This approach allows us to see how governing in all its multiple permutations and variations is doubled or implicated in modes of ethical reflection and practice. It shows how conscience is a mode of obligation to rules and norms, how the 'fold of the relation between forces according to a particular rule' (Deleuze, 1995: 104) constitutes us as governable subjects.

Governmentality as a method, as a way of thinking about the relation between media and subjectivity, also creates trouble for a whole history (which still thrives) of media studies in which power is seen as a fundamentally repressive possession of 'the media', inhibiting the essential freedom of viewers. As comforting as this grand logic may be it is pretty hard to see it at work in the minor, petty trivia of lifestyle TV. Infotainment is one of a multitude of contemporary sites where personal conduct is ordered, not through the operations of a disciplining normativity, rather through a complex network of power-knowledge relations that render various forms of being thinkable, and therefore governable, and where the ethical claim of audiences to choice is recognized. Infotainment allows us to see the variety of ways in which we become implicated with television, the various ways in which the media 'does' power.

A classroom

What then of documentary, hardly a new format on television or a site of everyday ethical instruction in the infotainment sense? How does documentary's claim to truth and 'the real' open up another, equally important, terrain of televisual ethics? Ethical dilemmas and complexities are, of course, not foreign to documentary; this type of content is fundamental to this form. In fact, the rise of hybrid documentary formats such as reality game shows and docusoaps with their simulated ethical crises exploit this relation ruthlessly. My concern in this section, however, is not with hybridized documentary but with the more traditional format. I want to consider documentary ethics not only in terms of how they are represented but also in terms of how they are experienced.

Documentary has been one of the key sites on television where difference is represented, where we are invited to understand the truth of the other. Beyond the classic ethnographic format are those myriad shows that examine the extraordinary in the everyday, that reveal the complexities of

different experiences of the social. How can our responses to difference on documentary open up new sorts of political possibilities? What would a progressive ethos of engagement with difference be and how could television be implicated in this? For what documentary can remind us of with a jolt are the ways in which our visceral identifications and emotional responses to difference are not only fundamental to ethics, but also antithetical to notions of moral certainty. For when we are open to difference, when we seek to engage with it rather than control or ridicule it, we are accepting that our identity is far from fixed, that our way of being is not universal. And in this ethical move, that documentary can sometimes invite us to make, the self is responding to difference rather than judging and classifying it. And it is precisely these responses that allow us to see how television can be implicated in the relation between ethics and a politics of becoming.

To pursue these questions further we need to look at Deleuze's thoughts on the politics/subjectivity relation. He argues that the plane of molar political organization exists in a relationship of tension and negotiation with other planes and dimensions of being. Deleuze's insistence on the plurivocity of being, on the multiplicity of dimensions, lines and directions, signals how movements of becoming and immanence fragment the normative work of the plane of organization. It also signals an ethics that has little to do with rule-bound moralities.

In his readings of Foucault and Spinoza, Deleuze is concerned with forms of being that exist *beyond* or in the interstices of guilt and conscience. In seeking to restore ethics to explorations of ways of living and the molecular inbetween of subjects, he gives privilege to ethical practices that depend less on external authority such as state disciplines and prescriptive moral codes, and more on cultivations and sensibilities. Deleuze's metaphor of the fold is central to this ethics. The fold presumes not simply a self-in-relation but also a self without any essential interiority. The inside is an enfolding of the outside, folds incorporate without totalizing, internalize without unifying, they make spaces, surfaces, flows, layers. 'Subjectivation is created by folding', by bending the outside through practical exercises (Deleuze, 1995: 104). And, Deleuze argues, even though Christian technologies of the self may have transformed the person into a site of subjection, subjectivation persists in those spaces and folds where the relation to oneself resists being codified by agencies of power-knowledge, 'the relation to oneself is continually reborn, elsewhere and otherwise' (1995: 104). Deleuze's use of resistance does not imply some essence of the self called 'agency' or otherwise, rather, it signals sensibilities and intensities moving below and within those folds of the self implicated in modes of obligation and duty to various forms of authority.

Deleuze's account of enfolding has been taken up by theorists of governmentality, particularly Nikolas Rose (1999) and Mitchell Dean (1996). In seeking to understand the relation between the forms of truth in which being

is problematized, and the habits and practices through which we shape our own and others' conduct, this work effectively decentres notions of power, rule and authority. It allows us to see how governing in all its permutations and variations is doubled, or implicated in modes of ethical reflection and practice. Yet, as useful as this work is for thinking about rule as a form of enfolding, it involves a somewhat partial and particular reading of Deleuze, one that focuses more on forms of being rather than becoming. What the governmentalsists seem less interested in are those forces of ethical life and being, those encounters, visceral movements, differences that initiate *other* possibilities for subjectivity and intersubjectivity, what William Connolly (1999) calls the movements of becoming.

Connolly's question, unlike that of the governmentality theorists, is not: how are codes of morality and normativity enfolded with particular habits of being? rather, how can *new* identities and ethical attachments emerge out of the unexpected energies and disturbances that unsettle being? How does being operate in a paradoxical relation of tension and interdependence with the movements of becoming (1999: 195)? In Connolly's argument, conscience and other code-driven moral techniques are crude and blunt tools for coping with the world. Their tendency to ground moral actions in law, God, 'community standards' or any other categorical imperative makes them blind to the ambiguous, disturbing, contradictory aspects of most ethical encounters. This is moral obligation working in the interests of mastery and self-certainty, obligation that undermines senses of ethical connection, implication and becoming, in order to maintain separation and the stability of being. This is obligation as a moral technique that suppresses the visceral and the affective.

In our encounters with television we occasionally encounter moments that move us, that speak to our most visceral registers, that profoundly unsettle. Despite all accounts of television generating postmodern distance, dislocation and distraction, there are times when television grabs us with emotional intensity, when we are not distant but deeply connected and affected. And it is in these moments of responsiveness, these currents of movement and difference within the self, in the self's relation to otherness, that Connolly locates the politics of becoming.

Responsiveness resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the body as a plane of affects:

Affects are becomings . . . We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 256–7)

For Connolly, responsiveness is a condition of possibility, it opens up lines of mobility and difference within the self, it is something to be cultivated. An 'ethos of critical responsiveness' (Connolly, 1999: 62) connects

becoming to various practices of self-modification, it involves work on the self in the interests of recognizing the plurivocity of being and denaturalizing identity as stasis or essence:

The constitutive uncertainty at the center of becoming does not defeat the central point. It, rather, reminds us how ethical uncertainty haunts the politics of becoming and how important it is to those who care for the plurivocity of being . . . to cultivate an ethos of critical responsiveness irreducible to a fixed moral code or abstract conception of the person. (Connolly, 1999: 69)

I would like to use an example from a TV documentary to show what this ethos of critical responsiveness might look like, this time from a documentary on Australia's free-to-air multicultural broadcaster, SBS, called *Whiteys Like Us*. This *cinema verité* documentary tracked a group of whites meeting each week to discuss Aboriginal reconciliation and other issues in black-white relations. The documentary begins with the first meeting when everyone shows up only to find there is no teacher to guide them, just a set of detailed study materials and the odd guest lecturer. They have to do it themselves. After the initial shock of the DIY reality has passed, a heated discussion begins about what 'reconciliation' means. The discussion is dominated by Lesley, a feisty 70-something woman who thinks reconciliation, multiculturalism, etc. are destroying the fabric of Australia. She launches into a hardline assimilationist rant replete with accounts of her days as a missionary working with remote Aboriginal communities: 'they were helpless, they didn't even know how to blow their noses'. The camera pans around the classroom: those who are not trying to interrupt Lesley with outraged counter-viewpoints are either seething with suppressed rage or slumped in a state of shock. It is riveting TV: one feels the pull of visceral identification with those on-screen squirming with discomfort and disgust, struggling to figure out how to deal with such raw racism.

The next scene involves reflections on this first meeting by individual members of the group a few days later. They are asked what they thought of Lesley's contribution. One woman gives a graphic description of her bodily response as Lesley spoke: 'I felt sick, my stomach was churning, I couldn't focus, I really wanted to get out of that room.' This is a fascinating moment in the documentary not simply because the audience can identify, because it so aptly describes the experience of watching, but also because we see in it the ways in which ethical or moral judgement can never be about abstract reason or rational thinking. These sorts of assumptions completely deny the visceral and affective intensities that inform, underpin and circulate around thinking and reason. Politics and morals can never exclude the visceral, the emotional, as much as they may struggle to, as much as it is claimed that such things distort proper judgement and argument. The woman who declares 'I felt sick' is having, quite literally, a gut

reaction to difference. But, unlike Ray Martin, she does not use it to assert her superiority, to engage in a bit of self-righteous moralism, to become the tolerant non-racist to the other's colonial nostalgia. Instead she acknowledges that she is unsettled by it, that her identity is disturbed by it, that the naturalness of her self and her reason is called into question by this sort of difference. She is engaging with difference, recognizing how it impacts on her (physically, emotionally and intellectually), struggling to make sense of it and this means that she is accepting the contestability of her own beliefs.

This documentary shows us ethics in action, it shows us a group of strangers figuring out how to find points of agreement, consensus, contingent settlements in amongst vast differences. And central to this were certain practices of the self that had to be cultivated by all the members: listening, generosity, empathy, *restraint*. This is not to deny that there was not also argument, animosity and disgust but these responses often had to be contained in order to favour other, more ethical ones. It could be seen that people were controlling themselves. And in that very process of watching people discipline themselves and practise *other* responses to difference was a *politics of becoming*, was evidence of movement within each of those participants where the visceral and the emotional were not denied, but used to make participants open up to each other and to the possibility of change within themselves. A politics of becoming is not about tolerance of difference, it is about cultivating new responses to it in which your own identity is moved or productively unsettled, it is about recognizing how the identity of others disturbs your own claims to self-certainty.

It might seem paradoxical, perverse even, to use a segment from this documentary involving the opinions of an openly-racist woman as evidence of a politics of becoming. Especially when the visceral registers triggered in viewers, as well as the participants, may well have involved nausea and hate. But watching how this group took on and coped with Lesley was deeply moving precisely because they did it with ethical care and generosity. Lesley came to the end of term group dinner, no one left the group because of her, and at this dinner we see a strange community of difference, a deep acceptance of plurality. Some of the group spoke about how much their identities depended on a mythical racist 'Other' against whom to define themselves. As one of them said later, 'if Lesley had not been there I think we would have had to invent her'. For the typical liberal SBS viewer racists are, of course, stigmatized identities and wider political responses to such extreme politics have quite rightly appealed to existing notions of justice and morality. But encountering these viewpoints face-to-face on television complicates that kind of moral certainty and pushes us into a realm where we experience, feel, the constitutive fragility of ethics. For Connolly, it is precisely this experience of disturbance and fragility, this documentary affect, that opens up possibilities for different politics:

Those inspired by an ethos of generosity can participate in a politics of becoming without having to ground their ethics in something solid, fixed or frozen. Because we can act ethically without being commanded by god or transcendental imperative, we can also deploy . . . political disturbance to cultivate responsiveness to movements of difference. For we do not need external or certain foundations to act ethically. (Connolly, 1999: 54–5)

Documentaries can move and disturb us, they can touch our affective and visceral registers in ways that infotainment rarely does. They allow us to see real ethical complexity and struggle and to feel our own moral certainties unravel. For me they are suggestive of a politics of becoming, precisely because they recognize multilayered forms of being, because they show us how thinking and moral reason can never be separated from emotion and the visceral.

And all of this thanks to television: from *Gardening Australia* to an SBS documentary an extraordinary range of ethical practices is revealed. My aim in this paper has been to insist on seeing the media as a site of ethical plurality, not just moralizing normativity. And to argue that within this plurality we can encounter some significant examples of the role of television in showing us how ethics are implicated in new and important political possibilities.

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