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TV Love:
Television and Technologies of Intimacy

Susan Crozier

Abstract

*TV Love* is a study of the emotional and imaginative possibilities summoned and sustained by television programmes, possibilities that are here gathered under the rubric of love. By taking seriously a vernacular claim to love particular television programmes, this thesis intervenes in conventional practices of academic television criticism. It does so in order to develop an approach that would allow a focus on what television programmes make possible for the viewers who love them. I argue that the transactions between viewers and television texts constitute forms of emotional training that not only reproduce social subjectification, but also enable diverse forms of intimate experience. This is especially important for those subjects who struggle to find forms of psychic sustenance in an off-screen context.

The critical approach taken in this thesis is termed reparative, following the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in so far as it describes a process of restoring value to much maligned cultural objects. As a rationale for critical practice, reparation recognises the inadequacy of the social context in which diverse subjects must make a possible world for themselves. In particular, reparation describes the processes by which queer subjects have been able to mark out the terms of their own possibility in the face of difficult social or psychic conditions. The value of reparative criticism is not limited to queer readers or viewers, although queerness frequently demonstrates what is at issue between the conventions of academic television criticism and the alternate mode developed in this thesis. While academic criticism most often focuses on the ideological lessons presumed to be delivered by television programmes, this frequently overlooks the smaller scale emotional work that subjects carry out every day. Television programmes can both enable this emotional work and be the subject of its labours. In order to develop a fuller and more useful practice of television criticism than currently exists, *TV Love* contends that it is necessary to attend to the affectively enlivening potential of television for its viewers.

The first chapter considers television as a technology of intimacy in terms of its domestic location and critically analyses television scholarship that has sought to address the specificity of that context. The second chapter further develops this theoretical overview by examining approaches that more explicitly deal with the affective engagements television allows. It then moves on to outline the particular reparative approach taken in this thesis. Chapter Three considers the series of documentaries that began with *Seven Up* in 1964 and, in a departure from the conventional discussion of class associated with the documentaries, this chapter focuses on the affective training the series carries out over its four decade history. The situation comedy *Bewitched* is the focus of the fourth chapter, which explores the way in which sitcoms can be profoundly imbricated in the very experience of childhood and family life. The repetition of a favourite programme from childhood, even years later, can generate emotional returns that demonstrate this intimate connection. Chapter Five continues the discussion of situation comedy with an analysis of the seventies hit *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. In particular this chapter attends to the reiterations of the Mary Richards character across other textual contexts in order to identify the emotional competencies the Mary character makes possible beyond her seventies context. Chapter Six takes on the heritage criticism that has framed
academic thinking about the serial drama *Brideshead Revisited* and presents an alternate reading in which high-cultural forms serve to connote homosexuality. The final chapter examines a series of programmes about the late Diana, Princess of Wales in order to identify the affective politics those programmes might be seen to enable.
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