Introduction

(1) In 2003, in an email to the American listings magazine *TV Guide*, a member of the public expressed concern about the 'real trend to showing explicit gore on TV' (Anon 2003: webpage). This concern was not a reiteration of the common complaint about media violence, but rather a sense of disappoint that, as someone who suffers from 'a weak stomach', they were 'pretty much excluded from watching shows like *CSI*, *Nip/Tuck* and even *The X-Files* [and] even though I adore Eliza Duskhu, it sounds like *Tru Calling* will be unwatchable for me, too.'

(2) Alternatively, in Australia, the *Age* complained of a phenomenon, which it called 'gore TV', and it described a scene from a recent television programme in which a car crash victim finds himself 'impaled on a fence post', an incident that results in the following 'montage':

> medics taking to the man with a power saw; slapping him awake whenever he looks like fainting from the pain; grainy black-and-white footage, close up, of the bloodied timber protruding from his guts and then of his sliced-open belly. (Houston 2006: webpage).

However, what really outraged the newspaper was that this wasn't 'the latest from Wes Craven', which it was claimed would have produced an 'outcry', if it had been shown in primetime, but rather a show called *Amazing Medical Stories* that was not only deemed 'suitable for family television' but was 'officially, "heart-warming"'.'

(3) Nor is this episode, or even the show from which it is taken, supposed to be exceptional but on the contrary, as the email to *TV Guide* suggests, gory television programmes have become ubiquitous on television screens, like 'a plague that has descended on us.' (Houston 2006: webpage).

(4) If the article in the *Age* sees such images as inappropriate to television, critics in previous periods had assumed television to be virtually incapable of producing such images. For example, in a discussion of horror television, Gregory Waller has argued that 'made-for-television horror would seem to be by definition impossible' (Waller 1987: 159), and while cinematic horror has 'explicitly visualised graphic violence and taboo subject matter to a degree unprecedented in commercial American cinema' since introduction of '"the industry Code of Self-Regulation" in 1968', television is hampered by 'network censorship codes' that mean that television horror 'rarely offers what would qualify for PG-13, much less an R-rating.' (148)

(5) Stephen King has made a similar point. For King, horror and television are at best strange bedfellows, and his reasoning is that television is 'dedicated to the pervasion of the status quo and the concept of the LOP – Least Objectionable Programming' (King 1982: 252), a situation that places it in tension with the fundamental character of horror: 'in whatever medium you choose … the *bedrock* of

horror … is simply this: you gotta scare the audience' (King 1982: 253 italics in original).

(6) Television horror is therefore presented as a 'revealing contrast to theatrical horror films', which are presumed to constitute a more authentic version of horror against which television horror can only be judged to be inferior. (Waller 1987: 145) If cinematic horror is claimed to be transgressive, dangerous and challenging, television horror is supposed to be frustrated by the limitations imposed by broadcasters, who are nervous of offending their audiences and prefer to simply confirm and reassure them instead. Nor are broadcasters simply frightened of offending audiences, and it is claimed that the demands of advertisers 'dissipate the horror' in other ways. On the one hand, programmes are made so that they integrated with, rather than clash against, the advertisements that continually interrupt them; and, on the other, it is claimed that any moments of horror are quickly neutralised: 'immediately after a suggestive yet incomplete glimpse of the horrific', commercial interruptions neutralise the fear 'by transporting us to a clean, safe, brightly lit, quotidian normal world in which solving problems is simply a matter of buying the right product.' (148)

(7) However, for Waller, it is not just that television programmes are not *allowed* to work as horror but rather that the whole character of the medium is supposed to work against the genre. For example, he repeats a series of arguments that present television as a barely a visual medium (147-9). Among these arguments, Waller harks back to Ellis' contrasting of television with cinema, where Ellis claimed that, while the latter was a predominantly visual medium that was organised around the spectator's 'gaze', television 'engages the look and the glance rather than the gaze' so that it is sound that 'holds the attention more consistently than the image, and provides a continuity that holds across momentary lapses of attention.' (Ellis 1982: 128)

(8) Like Ellis, Waller therefore sees the character of television as being rooted in the 'relatively poor definition of the standard television image', which 'hampers, if not prohibits, telefilms from disclosing to the viewer a complex mosaic of vivid, mysteriously charged details' (Waller 1987: 147), a problem that is further compounded by 'the functional, invisible style of "video realism" that characterises the telefilm' and is fundamentally 'at odds with' horror as a genre (149). In this way, television is claimed to be an insufficiently visual as medium so that its 'invisible style' is read as an absence of style and the quality of its image is claimed to conceal rather than reveal. Furthermore, the television image is supposed to be so poor that, even when it does conceal, its 'shadows and darkness become murky, textureless areas that lack the ominous blackness so favored by horror directors.' (148)

(9) Of course, as Waller himself is aware, there are a number of problems with this account, one of which is that, prior to 1968, American cinematic horror had been as subject to censorship as the American television that Waller discusses. In other words, the issue is less about inherent differences between film and television as media than about specific historical and institutional conditions. After all,

Waller's discussion of advertising is only relevant to commercial channels and, even then, the commercial break is only one way in which commercial television has been organised. For example, prior to the late 1950s, American television channels had been funded through a system of commercial sponsorship, which involved a very different relationship between programmes and commercial messages.

(10) There have also been a series of challenges to Ellis's distinction between the cinematic gaze and the televisual glance, and the underlying assumption that television is somehow lacking in terms of the visual (see for example, Caldwell 1995; Corner 1999; Jacobs 2000; and Lury 2005). In one such challenge, John Caldwell has argued for a re-consideration of the visual qualities of television, and his analysis offers a possible explanation for the supposed shift from the televisual dissipation of horror to the current plague of gory excess. As cable and satellite television developed in the 1980s, and was forced to compete with existing channels and networks, one of the key ways in which they could mark themselves out as distinctive was precisely through their ability to provide materials that were taboo on the established television channels. For example, in the United States, HBO defined itself as 'not television', and it did so through its handling of 'adult' material, which was emphasized through its graphic depictions of violence, sexuality and through dialogue that would have been unacceptable on American network television, particularly the use of sexual swearwords. Such strategies have often proved highly successful and forced the networks to fight back with material that sought to test the limits of acceptability.

(11) Even more significantly while horror may be a popular genre for fiction television, it is not just in the realm of horror that we now find graphic depictions of sex and violence. Nor is it even simply in traditionally masculine genres. While the crime drama was once a standard form of family entertainment, it has produced some of the most famous examples of these new explicit shows, with examples such as the various *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000-) programmes on the one hand and *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) on the other. Similarly, while *Gunsmoke* (1955-1975) once stood as the epitome of the family show, the western has produced one of the most "dirtied" of the new explicit shows, *Deadwood* (2004-2006). Where the classic television Westerns like *The Lone Ranger* (1949-1957) or *Rawhide* (1959-1966) were relatively "clean" visions of the past, *Deadwood* is a show which deals not just with explicit gore, but also showcases the unsanitary nature of the past with, for instance, a whole episode devoted to bodily fluids, as central character Al Swerenegen (Ian McShane) attempts to pass a kidney stone ('Requiem for a Gleet,' Season 2, Episode 4). In much the same way, HBO (with the BBC) have been altering perceptions of the historical drama with *Rome* (2004-), which features graphic battle and sex scenes, as well as incidental scenes of full frontal nudity, and a profoundly "grunge" oriented view of the ancient Roman world. These new historical dramas are still positioned as quality television (Jancovich and Lyons 2003), with prestigious casts and high production values, but their appearances indicate the way HBO in particular are skewing those production values to focus on the body with explicit depictions of sex and violence.

(12) Even a traditionally female genre such as the medical drama is now frequently associated with excessive gore (Jacobs 2003). *House M.D.* (2004-), for example, uses the body as the equivalent of the parlour scene in the detective genre, with its central Sherlockian character Gregory House (Hugh Laurie) unmasking the villain lurking within. It does so using the same techniques of CGI and medical imaging found in *CSI* (see Weissman this volume), allowing the camera to pass in and out of the body with apparent ease, breaking down the integrity of the body's borders. This new explicitness even appears in shows like *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), which draws on the romantic comedy, pushing the televisual envelop in terms explicit sexual content. One currently popular mingling of the two genres, the medical and the romantic comedy/drama, can be found in *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-), where, in a classic hospital drama trope (Jacobs 2003), problems in the young doctor's lives are mirrored in the medical and lifestyle issues afflicting their patients. Somewhat different in *Grey's Anatomy*, however, is the way in which those patient's bodies become sites of horror, with the interns competing to get the most grotesque, distorted and malformed bodies possible. In this way, *Grey's Anatomy* foregrounds the increasingly damaged nature of its protagonists while also according to developing dramatic conventions around the explicitly "gory" human body.

(13) While recent explicit depictions of the body on television may have become increasingly precipitous, they are not necessarily new. The articles in this collection all, in various ways, seek to explore depictions of the body in television, although they do so in different ways. The collections therefore suggests that we need to be careful about claims that television has changed, particularly when changes are posed in terms of neat, binary oppositions. Rather than accept the claim that earlier periods of television did not feature explicit or graphic images of the body on the one hand, or that television is now awash with television gore on the other, it is important to question if there has been a change and, even if there has been one, to be clear about the precise terms of that change. For example, while Jacobs claims that, in classic medical shows such as *Dr Kildare* (1961-1966), death and decay were kept off screen and that there has been a move to far more explicit depictions in contemporary television, he also suggests that this is simply a matter of *how* the body is presented. For example, as he points out, the move towards more graphic depictions of the body was actually bound up with a move *away* from the dilemmas of the patient and a move *toward* the plight of the medics. In other words, while *Dr Kildare* and *Marcus Welby, M.D.* (1969-1976) might have been less gory than their successors, this does not mean that they were not focused on the body. On the contrary, their stories were usually emotionally focused on the bodily crisis of a patient, and on the emotional therapy that these doctors supplied, which enabled their patients to come to terms with these bodily crises (Jacobs, 2003).

(14) Similarly, while 'body-horror' is often claimed to be a symptom of a post-modern collapse of distinctions between self and other, subject and object (see for example Modleski, 1986; Tudor, 1995), television has featured mutating bodies since the 1950s at the very least. For

example, Mark Jancovich's essay examines *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953), one of the key programs of the 1950s, and one that was developed by the BBC at the very moment at which its monopoly was challenged by the introduction of a commercial rival, the new Independent Television.

(15) *The Quatermass Experiment* is a serial about an astronaut who, on his return to earth, begins to mutate into an alien being that threatens to engulf the world, and the essay not only examines the ways in which this narrative of bodily transformation is dealt with in the serial, but also places the show within broader traditions of televisual horror at the time. In other words, while Waller claims that 'made-for-television horror would seem to be by definition impossible' (Waller 1987: 159), Jancovich's essay argues that horror was actually vital to the development of television and was seen as a key genre by the BBC.

(16) If *The Quatermass Experiment* is often seen as one of the classics of science fiction and horror television, another classic is *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), which is discussed along with *The Outer Limits* (1963-1965) and *Star Trek* (1966-1969) in Lincoln Geraghty's essay. For Geraghty, these shows often focus on an encounter between the human and the alien, although they present this encounter in different ways. For example, while *The Twilight Zone* largely avoided representing the human and the alien body as being visually distinct from one another, both *The Outer Limits* and *Star Trek* frequently used make up and special effects to depict visual differences as spectacle. However, despite their visualization of the alien, Geraghty also demonstrates that these two later shows were actually quite different from one another and that, in its handling of otherness, *The Outer Limits* shares more in common with *The Twilight Zone* than it does with *Star Trek*. In other words, while *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits* frequently use the encounters between humans and aliens to relativise American cultural values, *Star Trek* is often accused of placing the human at the centre of its universe and judging aliens in relation the human. In other words, while all three shows focus on the distinction between the alien and human body, they each present this distinction very differently.

(17) If Geraghty's essay focuses on the alien body in science fiction, Milly Williamson's essay examines the monstrous body in the cult horror soap opera, *Dark Shadows* (1966-71), and particularly that of its vampire protagonist, Barnabas Collins. Although this show was not particularly graphic in its physical violence, Williamson demonstrates that it was crucially concerned with the Barnabus's fraught relationship to his own body, and she examines the ways in which this feature became central to the fan cultures that emerged around the show, fan cultures that also helped to shape the development of both Barnabus's character and the narrative focus of the show.

(18) Furthermore, the scheduling of this show clearly targeted housewives and children, and even programming straightforwardly designed as children's television was hardly immune to graphic depictions of altered bodies. Indeed, many British adults remember *Doctor Who* (1963-1989, 1996, 2005-) as a show that scared them as

children, and Matt Hills' essay concentrates on what is, for many, one of the classic eras of the show, when Phillip Hinchcliffe and Robert Holmes helmed the Doctor's Tardis. One of the reasons this period of *Doctor Who* has been remembered so vividly by fans is that it was a period renowned for its obsession with body-horror. Moreover, like Williamson, Hills focuses on Gothic horror depictions of the body, but while *Dark Shadows* was not particularly graphic, *Doctor Who* presented the body as 'subject to monstrous fabulation and fabrication'. Like *The Quatermass Experiment* before it, this era of *Doctor Who* was one that was obsessed with graphic images of bodily mutation and transformation.

(19) Of course, *Doctor Who*, like *Star Trek* and *The Outer Limits*, was therefore heavily dependent on make up and special effects techniques for the realization of its obsessions. Techniques for constructing the body and performance are also a key concern in Rayna Denison's investigation of *The Muppet Show* (1976-1981). For Denison, *The Muppet Show* not only makes the constructed nature of television bodies abundantly clear, but the show even celebrates the skills of its puppet-makers and puppeteers through its fantastic creations, creations that refused classification and frequently exhibited an anarchic rejection of classical notions of bodily integrity. Bodies not only expand and contract but their various parts are also rearranged or detached as Jim Henson and his associates experiment with the possibilities of these fabricated creatures. Through this experimentation with the puppet body, Denison argues, corresponding to Hills' assessment of horror and science fiction, that the body's instability in family television created as much horror as mirth. Likewise, Denison's article shares a concern with the presentation of the body on television similar to Rebecca Feasey's deconstruction of the eponymous Angel. In both essays, the core of characterisation is expressed in the visual performance of the body, through its accoutrements, in the way it has been pieced together with clothing, grooming and even detachable facial features.

(20) If the previous essays focus on the body within television history, later essays like Feasey's concentrate on the body in contemporary television culture. Like Williamson's essay, Feasey's study of *Angel* (1999-2004) examines the show's central vampire protagonist and his difficult relationship to his own body. However, while Barnabas Collins was tortured by his vampiric urges, Angel suffers from a series of anxieties about his masculinity, which he tries to resolve through costuming and adornment. Although the show operates within the horror genre, and involves a series of monsters of which Angel is one of the most extraordinary (no less than a vampire with a soul!), the show deals with Angel's anxieties both through melodrama *and* comedy, knowingly ridiculing his heroic image and even the process of adornment, through which it is, in part, constructed. As such, the processes of costuming and accessorising Angel's body do not simply tell the vampire's story, but are also the object of reflective observation and commentary within the show.

(21) If Angel adorns his body to present an image of control and authority to the world, *The League of Gentleman* (1999-2002) uses

costuming and make-up to create a world of Gothic grotesques that hovers somewhere between the genres often seen as epitome of safe television, the sitcom, and its other, horror. However, despite its often explicit and confrontational 'bad taste', Peter Hutchings argues that the show's graphic depictions of the body cannot simply be reduced to a more general contextual reference to 'what might be termed "autopsy TV", with American and British series such as *CSI*, *Silent Witness* (1996-) and *Waking the Dead* (2000-) offering, and to a certain extent normalising for the television audience, graphic representations of bodies in various stages of decade and dissection.' In contrast, he argues that *The League of Gentleman* 'is too distinctive – or peculiar – simply to be contextualised and thereby explained away.' He therefore attempts to give a far more complex picture of the wide range of heterogeneous traditions that converge in the show, and result in its 'distinctive' and 'peculiar' depictions of the body.

(22) Finally, in the last piece in the collection, Elke Weissman examines one of the key shows in current debates over graphic television, *CSI*, and examines its graphic investigations into the body. For Weissman, the series uses the body in ways that bring it closer to the horror genre than to traditional detective fiction, and this is most clearly felt through its repeated and insistent focus on bodies that are rendered as 'abject'. Not only does the series format often figure the terrifying discovery of bodies that are horrifically transformed through mutilation, decay or both, but it also emphasizes how difficult it is even for the traditional discourses of law and science to neutralise the horror of this body. As a result, she argues that the series is closer to 'body-genres', such as horror and pornography, which not only depict bodies but also seek to excite the bodies of their audiences. Therefore, rather than simply featuring a cerebral process of investigation, as is supposed to be common within the traditional detective series, *CSI* is claimed to address its audience physically and emotionally, too. In short, Weissman focuses on key sequences within the *CSI* format and examines the ways in which the depiction of the body raises crucial issues about its operation as a series.

(23) The *CSI* team's investigation of 'mysterious' bodies, its attempts to solve the riddles left behind by abject bodies, to give them faces, names and identities provides the common thread to this collection. Namely, that the body on television yet remains an un(der)identified entity, whose importance has been elided and whose nature and functions now require serious scrutiny. If the body on television is often a source of 'gross-out' horror, unacceptable to audience members with weak stomachs, it is also a source of much pleasure for other audience members, and has been from almost the inception of television broadcasting.

(24) This collection represents attempts by the authors to piece together the traces of the television body, to recover its historical roots and to resolve some of its current mysteries. Thereby the authors are redefining the television body and, like the investigative teams of procedural dramas, are reconstructing the identities of television's mysterious bodies.

Bibliography

Anon (2003), 'Ask Matt', *TV Guide*, August 11,
     http://www.tvguide.com/News-Views/Columnists/Ask-Matt

Caldwell, John T. (1995), *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television*, New Brunswick: Rutgers.

Corner, John (1999), *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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

Houston, Melanie (2006), 'Too Bloody Much', *The Age*, October 29,
     http://www.theage.com.au

Jacobs, Jason (2000), *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jacobs, Jason (2003), *Body Trauma TV: The New Hospital Drama*, London: British Film Institute.

Jancovich, Mark and James Lyons (eds.) (2003), *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans,* London: BFI Publishing.

King, Stephen (1982), *Danse Macabre*, London: Futura.

Lury, Karen (2005), *Interpreting Television*, London: Hodder Arnold.

Modleski, Tania (1985) 'The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory', in Tania Modleski, (ed.), *Studies in Entertainment*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 155-66.

Tudor, Andrew (1995), 'Unruly Bodies and Unquiet Minds', *Body and Society*, 1, 1: 25-41.

Waller, Gregory A. (1987), Made-for-Television Horror Films, in Gregory A. Waller, (ed.), *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.