

MY MEDIA AND MY INNER WORLD: A Natural History

by Robert M. Young

I begin with a question and some definitions. What is the difference between **media** and **culture**? My on-line dictionary defines media as ‘the main means of mass communication (esp. television, radio, newspapers, and the internet) regarded collectively’ and culture as ‘the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively’. It adds that in the twentieth century this was extended to include **popular culture**. So - the media are the means of mass communication, including the communication of all levels of culture.

The **inner world** is the mental space in which we conduct our object relations, largely unconsciously. Our objects are not things, as the word suggests, but objects of our attachments, of meaning, love, hate and ambivalence. Freud called these ‘cathexes’ (rather scientifically). In conducting our object relations we metabolize and conjure with what matters to us. We do this at the most primitive level. For example, Bion once said that all experience is mediated, unconsciously, through the mother’s body. Culture is a hugely important representation of our object relations, offering us, among other things, stories, images (including moving images) and sounds (often with

words), that affect our feelings, meanings, loyalties, antipathies and values. We ponder and ruminate and interpret them in our conscious thoughts and feelings, in our preconscious and, above all, in our unconscious, which contains the majority of our mental processes. Freud employed major cultural documents, e.g., the Oedipus myth, *Hamlet*, Narcissus and Dostoyevsky, in formulating his account of human nature. I employ Mahler's 8th Symphony and the songs of Willie Nelson to sustain my sometimes-faltering belief that life is worth living and the TV series of David Simon, especially *The Wire*, to nourish my stoicism.

When I was invited to contribute to this project Caroline Bainbridge referred to its scope as including 'the role of emotion in popular culture' and to my knowing about popular culture as well as psychotherapy. Those are the hats I am wearing today.

Moving on from definitions and generalities, I shall spend most of my time giving an account of my relations with some of the media. You may find this account self-indulgent. I hope you won't. My ostensive purpose is to contribute to the project being launched here today. I offer it as a case study, the one I know most intimately. I shall give inventories of my experiences of certain media and also my activities as a contributor to some of them.

My earliest recollection of a medium is when I was six. On December 7th 1941 we were all huddled around the big radio in

the living room, listening to the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. From that day to this I have never failed to listen to several news broadcasts every day. The first radio I owned was a crystal set, followed before I was ten by a small mains radio and a few years later by a larger one with a short wave band on which I listened to the BBC World Service. In my mid-teens I became the proud owner of a large Hallicrafters multi-waveband communications receiver with which I roamed the world's airwaves, for example, listening to Radio Moscow, a risqué thing to do on those McCarthyite times. I think of my keenness on short wave radio was an intuitive effort to transcend the barren and stifling provincialism of suburban, reactionary Dallas, Texas, the suburb on which the television series was based decades later. Its wave bands gave me mental space. More than half a century later I have just acquired a portable radio, smaller than a shoebox, that pulls in over 12,000 Internet radio stations.

I also listened to a regular diet of radio drama, including 'The Shadow' with Orson Wells in the title role, which always began with his portentous voice saying, 'Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows'. The list goes on: 'Gangbusters', 'The FBI in Peace and War', 'Dragnet' 'The Lone Ranger', 'The Lux Radio Theater' and 'I Love a Mystery: The Adventures of Jack, Doc and Reggie' (which came on at 10, after my bedtime, so I hid my little radio under my pillow,

which it scorched). It featured Mercedes McCambridge, who, like Orson Wells, had a hugely resonant voice. I have long believed that radio is the most visual medium. By that I mean that what radio voices conjure up in our imaginations is richer than what most set directors create. I can still recall images from this radio series, especially the story 'Stairway to Heaven'. When researching for this talk I read that 'I Love a Mystery' is widely believed to be 'the greatest radio serial of all time'. It was written and directed by Carlton E. Morse and ran off and on from 1939 until 1953. You can still hear some episodes on-line on the Internet's Old Time Radio Network.

My afternoons after school were filled with soap operas, a genre that has always held a mirror up to the vicissitudes of family, neighborhood and society, offering an opportunity vicariously to experience the trials of life through familiar characters. It goes a long way back. Think of Dickens, 'Coronation Street' and 'East Enders'. Returning to my American experience, there were also compelling music programmes. e.g., the 'Louisiana Hayride' (where I first heard Elvis) and 'The Grand Old Opry' (where I met Hank Williams). 'The Hit Parade' was a weekly must. I acquired a recording machine at 14 and began a lifelong habit of recording music. I was particularly attached to XERF, a hugely powerful 50,000 watt radio station broadcasting from across the Border in Mexico which offered country and black blues. The American

authorities could not censor its adverts. For example, XERF sold by mail order personally autographed pictures of Jesus Christ and busts of the Virgin Mary that glowed in the dark.

I should add an important contextual matter about the availability of media in my childhood. I am relatively venerable. I did not have regular access to television until my mid-twenties.

For reading matter I had the two local newspapers, both of which I delivered and one of which I got up every day at 4am for eight years to deliver, I was also an avid reader of *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Life Magazine*, *Time*, *The New Yorker*, *Business Week*, *Popular Science*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Mechanics Illustrated*, I used my earnings from my paper routes to buy all sorts of comics, especially *Superman*, *Bat Man*, *Captain Marvel* and *Classic Comics*, which I read instead of assigned novels in high school. When I was younger a lovely and generous woman at the local library, Miss Childers, guided my book reading, but I soon lost the habit of book reading until I left home. Throughout my youth I also I went to church three times every Sunday and read my Bible all the way through. Oh, and some friends and I got by mail order *A Modern Sex Manual*. While it was my turn to have it, it disappeared. Many years later I found it hidden behind *The Britannica*, heavily scored. My parents had purloined it and set out to diminish their sexual naïveté. Contrast this generational change in the availability of sexually explicit materials with recent times. No one any longer

needs to have an embarrassing encounter with a newsagent in order to buy sex education or pornographic materials. The Internet is awash with them and so is television. Looking more broadly, Freeview, cable and Sky offer many rich and prurient menus – more media than we can cope with.

Returning to my childhood, every Saturday afternoon there was a double feature and a serial at the local Village Theater that cost nine cents and which I never missed. From thirteen I went out on my motor bike most evenings, roamed the city and saw practically every movie in town until I went away to college at 18. There was, for example, the Coronet Theatre that imported Ealing comedies and the classic horror movies - ‘Frankenstein’, ‘The Wolf Man’, ‘Dracula’ and ‘The Mummy’. The Frankenstein monster and the Mummy seriously haunted me until I was in my late teens. I spent all the time I could away from home, evading its dark atmosphere, my mother’s depression and my father’s authoritarianism. My values were profoundly shaped by westerns, classic gangster moves and film noir, leaving me with an anti-authoritarianism and sense of justice that afforded little room in my mind for moral compromise and left me unable to refrain from confronting bullies or corruption. This has had its gratifying side, but it sure can be burdensome.

You may be beginning to feel that you are hearing about the origins of a lifelong manic defense against a bleak home life.

I cannot deny this, but I also feel that, like many other voracious consumers of media and culture, I have been sustained, comforted and enlightened by all these activities, and my understanding of life, my relationships, teaching and writing have benefitted considerably. My appetite for periodicals, movies, radio and television remains as strong as ever. I still subscribe to a number of them, though I cannot pretend to get through all of them and confess to allowing them to pile up, much to the annoyance of my housemates.

Beginning at college I turned to editing and writing for the media. I have served on the editorial boards of a number of periodicals and have taken part in the founding of eight, for example, *Radical Science Journal*, *Science as Culture* and *Free Associations*. The origination of some of these periodicals took place in the context in the anti-authoritarian ferment of the sixties when people felt that in order to find and to speak in their own voices it was necessary to control the means of production - hence, for example, *Radical Philosophy*, *Telos*, *Critique of Anthropology*, *Radical History Review*, *Science for People*, among many others. Styles of writing changed dramatically. Eschewing the pseudo-objectivity of the house styles of academic periodicals, people began to include themselves and their direct experience in their narratives, in the same way that the writers of *Rolling Stone*, *The New Yorker* and Tom Wolfe did, for example, in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* and *From*

Bauhaus to Our House. This has been tremendously liberating and involves a great deal of searching of the inner world while writing about the outer one.

There is a whole other story to be told about the development of the means of production, including electric typewriters, electronic typesetting and the rich variety of programs that have developed for the Internet, making publishing a truly home-based industry. Nowadays one need only have a computer with Microsoft Office and a few hundred pounds to bring out a small print run of an average-sized bound book. Similar things can be said about music and film publishing. Just now publishing short films for distribution by mobile phones is a burgeoning technology. To indicate the possible scope of this medium, among others, I read this week that over half of the world's population now pays for the use of a mobile phone.

In case you are again wondering what I am up to in this recitation, I remind you that I am using my own example to sketch the breadth and depth of the media viewed from where I sat and sit, including its increasing plumbing of more personal and intrapsychic matters. I am, I'm told, the second person to carry this way of thinking onto the Internet and to make almost all of his writings freely available, writings which, increasingly, did not pass through the grist mill of an academic or publishing house editor. I have written 160 essays, reviews and lectures and

written or co-edited ten books. I co-founded the largest and most oft-visited web site on human nature, as well as the largest one concerned with psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. I gather that trainees find these sites very helpful, indeed. These sites host a very large body of books and essays and guides to the Internet and to various literatures. They also play host to many of the writings of others and to on-line journals. I also belong to a large number of Internet discussion forums and have founded and moderated more than a dozen others. People who follow and contribute to the threads of these ongoing and sometimes heated discussions can do so largely free of the constraints that operate in their professional and work settings, and they can make criticisms in the hope of finding kindred spirits.

Membership is open to any serious applicant. I once wrote a polemical essay entitled ‘We Don’t Need Them to Make Culture – or to Share It’. This is becoming truer and truer at a very fast clip. God Bless Tim Berners-Lee!

From the editing and publishing of periodicals there grew a publishing venture, Free Association Books, also free from institutional constraints or editors, from which there eventually emerged about three hundred volumes on psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, radical science and cultural studies. The press was extravagantly admired but was not profitable. When colleagues who I had brought in to give financial and editorial support to the press took it away from me, I managed, with Em

Farrell, to publish a few more books under the Process Press imprint and to move on to putting even more books and periodicals on-line on our web sites.

Beginning in the early sixties I began taping music - mostly popular, folk and country - on a reel-to reel Ampex recorder. With the aid my college's record library and a friendly local record shop I built up a collection of several hundred tapes - containing several thousand LPs - and gave seminars on the music at my home, wrote the programme of the first Shepton Malet rock festival and broadcast on the Third Programme on the history of rock's relation with country, e.g., the Beatles were first called The Silver Beatles and wore country and western garb. In my recording activities I later moved on to compact cassettes and Walkmans and eventually to iTunes and iPods, containing several tens of thousands more tracks. I broadcast on various topics on radio and also made a dozen television documentaries broadcast in the first year of Channel Four under the title 'Crucible - Science in Society' with an accompanying book series published by Pan. In this period I began making VHS tapes from the television and moved on to collecting films on VHS and DVD and music on iTunes and CDs. The result is a very large collection that I use to entertain, share and use as a research archive for my thinking, conversation and writing. They also provide the same kind of solace as my listening to the radio did when I was a boy. The latest news about access to

music on the Internet is that it is increasingly becoming the case that one can access very large amounts of music free and legally, the leading web site being Spotify, and there are several others. Ninety-five per cent of current downloads are illegal. Much the same is true of film downloads.

I turn now to content. I believe that the best recent and current television is as good as any films I have seen or books that I have read. In particular, I am an avid watcher of television and increasingly buy and watch whole runs of ongoing drama series. My tastes are not everybody's, but they are wide. For example, I could never get on with '24' or 'Curb Your Enthusiasm', but I have been loyal to 'ER' and 'Grey's Anatomy'. As I plunge into my own list of favourites I am well aware that it is as idiosyncratic that of anyone else here. Compared to what was on offer when I was young, there are many, varied and growing menus from which to select. I preface my expositions with an over-reaching observation: current television drama is not something to relate to ideas about the inner world. Psychoanalytic and related concepts and ways of thinking are *constitutive of the world views of those who create those dramas*. They are in at their conception.

'Hill Street Blues' was created by Steven Bochco in 1981, and David Milch worked on it for five years. Bochco and Milch

then created 'NYPD Blue' which ran from 1993 until 2005, and Milch went on to create 'Deadwood' (2004-6). All of these are characterized by ensemble casts, fast and overlapping dialogue (a way of preventing the bosses from making cuts) and extreme realism: telling it like it is. All had extremely flawed major characters. Captain Furillo in 'Hill Street Blues' was a recovering alcoholic, while Andy Sipowicz, the central character in 'NYPD Blue' was created by Milch to be a thoroughly obnoxious man - racist, drunken bully, viciously sarcastic to all and sundry and bad father - hard to like, and in the course of twelve series we see a faltering moral development. In the very first two episodes he touches bottom and slowly seeks to make reparation, abetted by those around him. When his son, with whom he had made considerable progress, dies, he heads straight for the bottom again. It is a morality play that could have been inspired by *Pilgrim's Progress*, but it is of its time - a psychoanalytic developmental odyssey.

In 'Deadwood', starring Ian MacShane as Al Swearengen, owner of a frontier saloon, Milch created a town bereft of all morality or other trappings of civilization. In the three seasons it ran before the network canned it because Milch did not deliver the scripts on time, the main characters found that, however reluctantly, they had to develop some of the rudiments of civilization and sympathetic imagination about others, if only to

survive. They are extremely hard-bitten, hard swearing, hard on women and yet somehow found themselves relenting from some of their most nefarious schemes. The scripts are based on historical events. I am particularly attached to this series, because my mother was born in Deadwood not very long after the action of the story.

Many of the creators of these series and others I shall mention were themselves very troubled by depression, drugs, alcoholism, gambling, writers' blocks. This is especially true of David Milch. David Chase, the creator of *The Sopranos*, suffered severe depression in school and college and is still fighting it. We see some of the roots of this in the character of Tony Soprano's vicious and manipulative mother whom Chase modeled on his own mother. What all these series have in common is profound moral ambiguity. It lies not only in the personalities of the characters and in their interactions. It is also at the heart of the groups, institutions and society they inhabit. This is most famously true of '*The Sopranos*', whose family lives and their Mafia Family lives are intricately interwoven to the point that relatives sometimes have to be killed for the sake of preserving the Mafia Family, a theme we also see in the '*Godfather*' films. The inner world of the central character, Tony Soprano, is open for all to see, since he is shown to be in long-term psychotherapy. We are also privy to his therapist's

private life and supervision, conducted, by the way, by Peter Bogdanovitch, who plays her psychiatrist.

Some say that ‘The Sopranos’ is the best series ever. Others say that ‘The West Wing’ is. We see there, too, the President lying to the country, killing off an enemy of the state and also in therapy. I like ‘The West Wing’ a lot, but, in the end, it was relentlessly goody-goody. This cannot be said of my own two candidates for preeminence among television series, by which I mean preeminence in helping to mirror and ponder inner worlds, albeit rather Kleinian inner worlds. I do not by this mean that we are mobsters or bump off members of our families or our close colleagues, however tempting this idea may be. I do mean, however, that the dynamics of all our lives are explored and illuminated in these dramatizations. I should add that there are many reality TV shows that, in my opinion, traduce people’s inner worlds for the sake of tawdry sensationalism. I embrace the ironic observation that fictional series about Mafiosi and crooked cops are much more moral than so-called ‘reality TV’ series featuring media wannabees.

My first candidate for most profound characterization of the inner world is the work of David Simon who is an American author, journalist, and writer/producer of television series. He worked for *The Baltimore Sun* City Desk for twelve years. He wrote a book after spending a period researching -- *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* -- and co-wrote with Ed Burns *The*

Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood. The former book was the basis for the NBC TV series *Homicide: Life on the Street*, on which Simon served as a writer and producer. He adapted the latter book into the Emmy Award winning HBO mini-series *The Corner*. He is also the creator of the critically acclaimed original HBO television series *The Wire*, for which he served as executive producer, head writer, and show runner for six years. Simon next produced and wrote *Generation Kill* for HBO with Ed Burns. This miniseries is an adaptation of the non-fiction book of the same name. It relates the first 40 days of the 2003 invasion of Iraq as experienced by 1st Reconnaissance Battalion of the US Marines and their embedded reporter, Evan Wright. Simon and Burns worked with Wright in adapting his book into the series.

In a talk that Simon gave to a live audience in April, 2007, at the Creative Alliance's storytelling series, he disclosed that he had started writing for revenge against John Carroll and Bill Marimow, the two most senior editors at *The Baltimore Sun* when Simon was a reporter there. Simon said he had watched Carroll and Marimow 'single-handedly destroy' the newspaper and that he spent over ten years trying to get back at them. He continued, 'Anything I've ever accomplished as a writer, as somebody doing TV, anything I've ever done in life, down to, like, cleaning up my room, has been accomplished because I was going to show people that they were [bleeped] up, wrong,

and that I was the [bleeping] center of the universe and the sooner they got hip to that, the happier they would all be’.

Sounds OTT, I’ll grant, but it might have come out of the mouth of one of his characters. I find it refreshingly candid. His characterizations put us in touch with detectives and criminals who are that able to express their primitive motivations and routinely act on them. *Homicide: Life on the Street* is like *Hill Street Blues* and *NYPD Blue* in being the ongoing story of a team of cops, but it is unlike them in probing much deeper. ‘The Corner’, which came next, is a mini-series about a single street corner in Baltimore where dope is sold and the vicissitudes of junky families in which, e.g., a mother steals her son’s stash while believing at the same time that she wants the best for him. Next came five series of ‘The Wire’, which follows an evolving police team in Baltimore and looks at them from a series of perspectives: the drug trade, the port, the city bureaucracy, the school system, the print media (the paper where Simon worked). The ensemble cast remains, centering on Detective Jimmy McNulty, an insubordinate cop with serious personal problems, played rather implausibly but brilliantly by Dominick West, an actor who turns out to be an Old Etonian. Many of the actors were drawn from the streets, while others play themselves. All are caught up in the dynamics of the system, all are compromised, all do reprehensible things, some very much so. None triumphs, unlike the heroes and heroines of lots of crime

series. The line between the law and the drug dealers is often unclear, and the motives of the bosses are as often dreadful as they are in the public interest. We find ourselves identified with people in the drug culture as often as we are with the law. In short, it feels all too real, and as the story evolves we learn that no one can be free of the taint of a corrupted society. Simon said of the last season that it deals with 'what stories get told and what don't and why it is that things stay the same'. In the last series of 'The Wire' even McNulty invents a bogus serial killer in order to stir up publicity to keep a case going.

The latest project of Simon to be screened is 'Generation Kill', a seven-episode mini-series about the first few weeks of the invasion of Iraq as experienced by motorized US Marines. They are depicted utterly naturalistically, as if we were on the streets of New York in *NYPD Blue* or in Simon's Baltimore series. What we see is the casual brutality of war – petty motives, vain higher-ups, believable people killing without good reason - a slice of sliced life, full of sick ironies of the kind we witnessed in *Catch-22*. I read a review of it after one episode calling it a masterpiece, and I agree. What continually impresses and moves me about Simon's work is his ability to make me see why people do things that are at the outset utterly incomprehensible. He uncovers people's deep -- deeply irrational – motives. He is naturalistic about the unnatural.

But there is another series where it can be argued that this is done at least as well and some say better: 'The Shield'. It centers on an elite team of detectives headed by Michael Chiklis who plays Vic Mackey, leader of the Strike Team in the Los Angeles PD. In this team the balance is tipped even further toward the dark side of human nature. They are cynical and corrupt and get even more so as the seven years of the series proceed. In the very first episode Vic figures out that a new member has been brought in to his team to spy on its four members, Solution: he shoots him dead during a drug bust. Somewhat later the team manages to rob a very large shipment of drug money from Albanian drug lords. Keeping these two acts covered up underlies the weaving of the web of the ongoing plot. There is, until late in the series, complete loyalty among the team, while all about them rise and fall: politics, sex, corruption, planting of evidence – all sorts of things come and go. Vic has two autistic children, and he will do anything for them, so we are invited to have a soft spot for him. But a misunderstanding as a result of an internal police investigation finally brings another member of the team mistakenly to kill one of his own, leading eventually to his own and his family's downfall. Yet the mixed and often base motives of others in the squad room lead us to see something of what makes Vic and his team act as they do. (Series seven has just begun airing in the UK.)

There are a number of other television series, which come to mind as I think about the media and the inner world, but I fear that you will think I am droning on. Some, like '24', 'Prison Break' and 'Bones', contain themes that seem to me to echo our times in which great institutions are corrupt on a grand scale, reaching to the highest echelons of government in each of these series. 'The Company' becomes the Kafka-esque villain in 'Prison Break'. 'Bones', featuring a women forensic anthropologist, is all about literally digging up the truth by examining dead bodies. The person on whose work it is based, Kathy Reichs, does just such work in Canada, the US and in war zones. The character also has parents who fought government corruption and who had to go on the run because their lives were at risk. She is left unable to form deep loving relationships and is somewhat schizoid, i.e., displaying a split between her emotions and her ability to express them. We have here and in 'Prison Break' family loyalties right up against world-scale government malfeasance. Sound familiar?

Like 'Bones', 'Six Feet Under' gives close scrutiny to death. In it we are introduced to the Fisher family, owners of a funeral home. Throughout its five-season, 63-episode run, major characters experience crises that are in direct relation to their environment and to the grief they've experienced. Its creator, Alan Ball, relates these experiences as well as the choice of the series' title, to the persistent subtext of the programme:

“Six Feet Under” refers not only to being buried as a dead body is buried, but to primal emotions and feelings running under the surface. And when one is surrounded by death it seems like to counterbalance that, there needs to be a certain intensity of experience, of needing to escape. It’s Nate with his sort of womanizing; it’s Claire and her experimenting with dangerous boys and dangerous drugs; and it’s Brenda’s whole sexual compulsiveness; it’s David having sex with a hooker in public; it’s Ruth having affair after affair; it’s the life force trying to push up through all of that suffering and grief and depression.’

Death and the inner world are juxtaposed and intertwined. Every episode begins with someone dying before our eyes. The body goes to the funeral home, and it and its near and dear interact with the Fisher family and those close to them. I watch it with my 12-year-old daughter, and, believe me, it provides food for thought and exploration. David, one of the sons who take over the running of the mortuary is gay and not at all at peace with himself. The other, Nate, who had not hitherto found himself, has casual sex in the airport in episode one and goes on to have a promising but fraught relationship with Brenda (played by Rachael Griffiths), a former child prodigy who has a manic-depressive brother and hippie psychiatrist parents. He also develops a brain tumor (as my own son did), which is successfully removed. Rachael, meanwhile, returns to

promiscuity, and Nate manages to impregnate an old girl friend. He leaves Brenda, marries his child's mother and, at the point where I am now, it is dawning on him that this relationship may not endure. The widow of the funeral director embarks on various attempts to get her life going, the other child, a teenage daughter, has various unsuitable relationships, including one with Brenda's mad brother, and father (as you might have guessed?) rematerializes from time to time, and we learn that there was more to him than met the eye when he was alive.

Now is a time when many media are reflecting at length on death, dying and disability as they affect families: think of the Cameron family, Jade's cancer, assisted suicide, injured service personnel.

I want briefly to mention four more drama series that have personal meaning for me. 'Joan of Arcadia' is another favourite for my daughter and me to watch together. It goes far beyond bringing dead fathers to life. It brings us God speaking to her through the mouths of various people in the show. Her family contains a father who is a sheriff, a mother who teaches art, an older brother who is wheelchair-bound from a car accident, which was arguably his fault, and a younger brother who is a brilliant student. The centre of the series' concept is the moral development of Joan. Having God speak from time to time in natural language is a nice way to convey moral issues without

being too Biblical or off-putting. I am told that this series is the darling of the American Right.

‘I’ll Fly Away’ was a series aired in 1991-93 that was set in the US South and concerned a family in which the mother was mentally ill and for most of the series confined to a mental hospital. Childcare was divided between the father, played by Sam Waterston, and a black servant touchingly played by Regina Taylor. This family dynamic of the plot occurred in the time when the civil rights movement was still stirring, and involve Lily, her and her employer’s family and the larger issues of the time. Aside from its considerable intrinsic merits, I suppose I am so enamored of this series, because much of my bedridden and suicidally depressed mother’s caring role was fulfilled by a devoted black servant, Lucy Wilkerson, at the expense of spending enough time with her own family, much to their detriment. It is a poignant, moving and evocative story. My chest tightens as I type these words.

I turn finally to ‘Mad Men’, a currently running drama series about the advertising industry in Madison Avenue, New York in the 1960s. At its centre is a handsome rising executive, Don Draper, performed by John Hamm, his family and his colleagues and their families and the secretaries with whom the sexist men dallied. Its realization is uncannily accurate – rather like that of the film ‘Revolutionary Road’ and nearly as bleak. It was the period in which my contemporaries and I were forging

careers post-college, though I was not pursuing advertising but medicine. The style, the corporate values and the facades – especially that of the main character who is busy hiding his dark and humble beginnings -- are very painfully reminiscent for me. Fortunately I managed to get away to England, but, alas and of course, I brought my self along. The image behind the opening credits is powerful. Men are falling through space in their grey flannel suits, against the background of skyscrapers – evocative of the 9/11 jumpers nearly half a century in the future. They are fallen souls, engaged in adultery, deceit, ruthless competitiveness and duping the public. You might say they are white collar Sopranos: people who are mired in sin. Like many of the main characters I have mentioned, they dwell more often in the paranoid schizoid position than in the depressive one.

This concludes my exposition of dramas. I have three other thoughts.

There are times when one seeks to escape into a medium in an effort to avoid being sundered by psychic pain. When my first wife became involved with another man I turned to long books – *Les Miserables*, *The Naked and the Dead*, *The Alexandria Quartet*, among others. For some weeks I read until I fell asleep, slept until I woke and read until I fell asleep again. I felt helpless and only wanted to curl up into a ball. I believed that I had been wronged. She would not talk about it or go into

marital therapy, but I felt that I had to stick around. I think my escapist behaviour once the affair began was a desperate search for a haven, an attempt at psychic survival in the face of helplessness and unbearable pain. It later became apparent that she was mentally ill, something I had only dimly suspected. I did survive. She left and left our son behind in my care. Her next relationship was as troubled as ours had been, and after many cycles of manic-depressive illness, she killed herself. At her funeral her second husband came up to me and said that if he had not left her he felt sure that one of them would eventually have killed the other. I am not saying that what was in those books was irrelevant and merely escapist. *Les Miserables* remains my favourite story of moral courage, and what was moving in those and others I have read while in despair kept alive a belief that life is probably endurable. By this I mean that the struggles of the human spirit and the vicissitudes of relationships are heartening, a source of solace, whether or not the details of what one reads come anywhere near ones own travails. Sometimes they do, as in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*. More often they don't.

I suppose that my summaries may strike you like playing an LP at 78rpm. My point, in shoveling in the details that I have, is to indicate that in these drama series we have all of life, deviance, crime, murder, the struggle to be decent -- in short, reflections of our deepest unconscious motivations and

anxieties. The better written and better performed they are, the more use they are to us in getting through life with more meaning and dignity and forgiveness than we might otherwise have done. Let's note that many of the best drama series are about crimes and those who seek to solve them. This genre is ideal for providing a very wide range of case studies of human's interacting *in extremis* and coupling them with people thinking hard about base motivations – puzzling them out and getting to the bottom of them. Added to this we have the interactions and motivations at work among the crime solvers – the cops. It usually becomes apparent that the minds of criminals and those who pursue them are not as different as is conventionally supposed. This is also true of patients and therapists. In fact, cops and robbers, readers, viewers and writers have inner worlds that have a surprising amount in common. This is the place to mention the huge popularity of books of crime fiction, which is partly explained by the universality of base motives and the search for retribution and reparation. Of all the interactions in all media concerned with crime fiction those among the cops are almost always central to the story.

I won't list them, but I assure you that these drama series have been garnered with many, many awards in the annual ceremonies, and I, for one, think that they are as good as it gets and that we are living in a golden age of television drama series just as I lived in 1940s and '50s in the golden age of radio

drama series. You may be forgiven for finding the autobiographical passages of this talk tiresome and immodest. We have a saying in Texas that if you can do it, it's not bragging. I set out to show the links, and it seemed to me that it might be helpful to draw on the media and to show some of the specific links between the media and the inner world that I know best. As indicated in my title, natural history rather than high theory, about which, in any case, I am not well-informed.

I am sorry if my final section is a non sequitur. I have been asked to say something about the media as an object in the inner world and whether or not my relation to my inner world impacts on my practice as a psychotherapist. I am not sure what the first question means. Since the media mediate so much of our experience, surely they reflect and feed our inner worlds, as do other experiences. The news media do so hugely, though I have to say that on the days after a major event, e.g., 9/11 or the London bombings, I have been surprised by how few patients mention such major external world events. If the question refers to the media as such, I don't think so, except, for example, for the transmission of norms, e.g., of thin bodies, which we all know to be intensely persecuting. As for the role of the media in my clinical work, I submit that it's like anybody else's, except that the therapeutic norm that we should not set agendas for our patients and should not introduce topics self-indulgently means

that I should refrain from commenting, for example, on a bit of news I have just seen on the television.

There is one thing I do, however, which might be disapproved of by the clinicians among you. I will ask a patient if they know of a book, film or song. If they do, I might use it to make a point to them as part of an interpretation. If they don't, I say, 'No matter' and drop it. Just occasionally, if the material is very apt indeed, I will tell it as a story. I do this sparingly, however, since the telling of it may take us a gratuitously long way around. I can think of one case, however, when I plunged in. A patient who was a painter was having grave difficulty finding his own style. My view was that a life-threatening illness when he was very young had effects on him and his family such that neither they nor he felt that they had 'the right stuff' to be creatively or personally fulfilled. His mother has since independently and spontaneously confirmed to him that the illness had this effect on the parents.

I had, while we were exploring this theme, seen a film and read a book, both entitled *The Legend of Bagger Vance*. Intriguingly, the author, Steven Pressfield, set out to tell the story of the Indian holy book, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, In an effort to make it accessible to a current audience the author recast it as a story about a golfer. In the Indian book the god Lord Krisna is helping Arjuna to find his true destiny and duty. In the novel a golfer named Rannulph Junah ('rjunah'), played by Matt

Damon, who had shown great promise as a youth but returned from the First World War a broken man, was called upon to recover his form in order to win a match that was of crucial importance to his locale, Augusta Georgia. He refused but was finally persuaded by a black man, Bagger Vance (the name is a variation on the Indian word for God), played by Will Smith, with a compelling personality, who said if Rannulph would play he would caddy for him. To cut a long story short, the task became that of finding Rannulph's 'authentic swing', and all of Bagger's skills as a coach and spiritual guide were applied to this task of inspiration and midwifery. It is a compelling story, though with some mystical elements which I found grandiose. In the end, after much travail, Rannulph found his authentic swing, won the match and got his life back and the golfing economy of the locale prospered. My patient watched the film and read the book, and this story gave us a symbolic framework and rhetoric for exploring his own self-limitation. It helped him a lot to focus on his lack of self-entitlement and to work through toward a more authentic way to paint. You could say that the story gave him hope and inspiration in our work. It provided a containing and paradigmatic central myth.

I began by quoting Orson Wells as *The Shadow*: 'Who Knows what evil lurks in the hearts of Men?' I believe that the

drama series I have sketched are as good at answering this question as any other media representations I have seen or read. Turning to the wider sense of media, when we are struck by a news item, when we are moved by a story – perhaps to tears – there is a congruence, a resonance, an identification between what the media offer and our inner worlds, a connectivity, sympathetic imagination, meaning, catharsis. At its best, it is far from sentimentality. It is art. Otherwise, why would people from childhood to senescence spend so much time and emotion engaging with the media?

I have a patient, a schizophrenic with whom I have worked for many years and with some success. For a very long time he could not sit through a play. He had to get up and leave. It was too real.

Delivered at the founding conference of the Media and the Inner World Research Network, Roehampton University, London, 7 March 2009

