

**The nexus: a story of the evidentiary, the heart  
and dramatic representation  
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Here you and I are.

Tuesday Night, in front of two t.v.'s.

One left. One right.

\* You died nine years ago, and missed this forensic television phenomenon that is *C.S.I.: (Crime Scene Investigation)*

Many more dramas exploring death followed...

*Six Feet Under* took the road less travelled, and wove a family drama among the explicit depiction of the post-death scene.

Two more franchises of *C.S.I.* evolved from their successful parent – all after your mysterious death at Ben Buckler Point, Bondi, Australia.

My memories of Bondi now are not of big surf, or lifesavers, or even trendy café's along Campbell Parade.

I remember you and your death...which is why we are sitting together now, watching the current episode of the show that pits a talented team of forensic investigators against the sometimes bizarre backdrop of modern Las Vegas.

This episode also deals with the death of a young woman.

I explain to you that – as is the style of the show – we will be with the dead girl quite intimately for a great deal of the program - watching her flanked by police and the team from *C.S.I.*

Later we'll even travel inside her body, while the medical examiner leaves no avenue unexplored, attempting to uncover the clues to her death.

You sit back, confused.

No – the investigation into your death wasn't anywhere *near* that thorough.

Yes. We did follow up on your behalf.

Yes. The police left witnesses *un*-interviewed.

Yes. The medical examiner *did* seem confused, unorganized – not at all like the ones  
on

*C.S.I.*

Yes. That was the one. I remember that he didn't check your fingernails.

Yes. Evidence was lost. Police claim this was due to a delay in identification.

Yes. That did affect the investigation into your death.

Let's look at the t.v on the right.

In this episode, ballsy, red-headed C.S.I. Investigator Catherine Willows, has to face the fact that the man with whom she was briefly intimate the night before, has become a suspect in the very investigation at hand.

I watch for a long moment, and as I have many times in the past, feel the gut-wish there had been a Catherine Willows *for you*.

*She* would never have put up with the frustration that arose from what we perceived to be

at times, something of an *un*-investigation.

Missed opportunities.

Requests for deaf ears.

You're shaking your head.

You understand that, if watching *your 'episode'* - we wonder how the hell the show was ever made.

It begins with you being unidentified in the morgue for five days...a combination of your secrets and the fact that you were found without identification stumped everyone.

No bag.

No tattoos.

Now you're leaning forward to watch *C.S.I.'s* Dr. Albert Robbins, working on the dead girl's body.

The camera pulls back to show a t.v monitor, mounted in the lab and screening proceedings. My interest in dramatic representation vs reality is spiked.

It's a similar feeling to my (Unplanned? Subconscious?) placing of your photograph, not far from a reproduction of the same photograph – accompanying a newspaper article reporting the open finding from the inquest into your death.

Back to *your episode*. *The t.v on the left*.

When would we feature the witnesses that the police didn't bother to interview?

Yep. The one we found still living in the flats above the cliffs.

Yes. The guy who heard screaming on the night you died.

And an argument.

That guy.

That wouldn't fit the pattern of the show though – of *any* crime drama.

It wouldn't do to have relatives and friends uncovering witnesses *themselves*.

We settle back into the show.

Sure, Catherine seems a little disturbed this episode – but *she* would have combed Campbell Parade and found the man above the cliffs.

I remember looking again at the details from your inquest and police witness statements. Particularly, I remember having the same feeling I did when I first read the witness statement of the man who discovered your body wedged in the rocks.

You see, part of the first-hand experience of death, is observing through the filter of television.

So the question might be:

Am I suspicious of the scene on the day you were found, for *my own reasons*? Or have I developed *my own Catherine Willows* – a tiny, doubting t.v. detective that reacted, and *still reacts* to particular elements of your case, many years later?

Back to the scene.

For the purposes of clarity, we'll call it a CRIME SCENE.

*My tiny, doubting "t.v Catherine"* tells me that C.S.I. Catherine would have found things everyone else would have missed.

Yes. She would have found those teeth.

*His* teeth.

I want to ask you if you knocked them out of his mouth – but I know you won't tell me.

I'd have to rely on Catherine to find them – then to track your boyfriend through the prison system – and match them to his untrustworthy face.

Yes. For the moment I'm morphing into Australian author, Helen Garner, I know – and opening everything up again in my own head and heart.

Your beautiful, wry smile tells me I'm 'doing a Joe Cinque,' with your story.

Yes, I agree – Helen may have crossed the emotional line with her investigation into a young man's awful death, at the hands of his girlfriend.

C.S.I. Catherine arrives at the scene of yet another young girl's death.

I discuss with you how, for a long while after your death, I was aghast at the whole 'murder industry.'

By that I mean I found it *really difficult* to grasp how anyone could watch crime dramas.

I even pondered the term *whodunit*.

You smile again when I explain that you can type that phrase into a computer and it's accepted when other words are crudely underlined in red, to alert you to an error.

And it was *just that* that I was grappling with.

That *acceptance*.

What I'm getting at is the *difference* between the *actual* and the *dramatic*.

But even that is too simple, perhaps too banal an explanation.

The other day I saw a t.v. promo for a program that would re-enact / follow the investigation of someone's *actual death* - described as 'a first rate thriller.'

Was it the reaction from my emotional scars that caused offence?

Or was it something that we *all should feel*, when someone's death becomes an opportunity to be 'entertained.'

Back to *your episode*.

In a flashback, we see you arrive at Bondi police station, to report that you are afraid – your boyfriend is behaving strangely.

We watch as they drive you to an address of an acquaintance in Surry Hills.

When the incident fails to feature later in *your episode*, I imagine a t.v audience, sitting up in their armchairs, expounding:

'That would have been a major point in the investigation! Those police should have been at the inquest!'

But this is *your episode*. 'Those police' did not appear at the inquest and no connection was made between the appearance at the police station, the subsequent lift, and the discovery of your body the next day.

*My tiny, doubting 't.v Catherine'* (also a redhead) scowls.

You and I are both glued to *C.S.I. again*.

C.S.I Catherine has reached her dreaded moment of truth – she walks into the interrogation room – the suspect / one- hour-stand is smug.

"Ask the red-head!" He barks at the investigators.

"Can you see my conundrum here?" I turn to you.

On the one hand, I feel compelled to compare the *reality* of violent death – with its shattering and echoing effects on families and friends – with the *dramatic* depiction of similar circumstances.

While on the other hand (still somewhat clenched) I have longed, and continue to do so, for a slick t.v detective...silhouetted against Ben Buckler Point and determined to unravel the mystery of your death.

Instead, we have the dour, Paul Keating look alike detective – lacking either Hollywood charm or flashy camera angles.

The guy who explained he was watching out for his health – ordering his lunch without butter while he took my sister’s statement.

This would be the place to lament a lack of heroes, I suppose.

Guys who aren’t afraid of animal fat.

I remember the last time I saw him, in an awkward meeting in the bookshop where I worked.

Was he embarrassed that he had been unable to solve what he had described as “a very strange case?”

It may have been the fact that action had been taken to have the case re-opened – action that involved complaints about the handling of the investigation.

I tell you that my head has started to ache and it’s not from watching too much t.v.

It’s true.

Thinking about violence gives me a headache that only ice cream can help.

Someone told me once that’s because ice cream is an ‘affirmation of life.’

I return to the current episode of *C.S.I.* with a bowl of *Blue Ribbon*.

I look at you and wonder what you’re thinking, while we both watch the dramatic depiction of the victim’s autopsy.

You seem fascinated by the point-of-view of the bullet entering the victim’s body.

That’s contentious, I explain.

People are fascinated with that whole approach – both from the point of view of the ‘colonised body’ and perhaps from a ‘simple’ feeling of horror at the graphic nature of its depiction.

You’re still glued to the t.v.

I put down my bowl and pick up my notes.

I’m thinking about *professional distance*, as portrayed dramatically, vs the reality of it, as it manifests in legal proceedings.

Then the thought leads me to something related.

I flick the pages back to the statement, once more, of the man who discovered your body.

I remember how this layman employed distance – as is the practice of professionals, in part of his statement.

“I’ve seen it.” He tells police, once they have arrived at the scene.

“I don’t want to see it again.”

And it brings me to thoughts of how *the system* affects the circumstances after unexplained death.

The legal system has a great deal of influence on the emotions and memories of those who grieve.

In my head I’m seeing Helen Garner. Again.

I look at you and wonder if you remember that she passed us on the last day I saw you.

I remember she was wearing white, and walked close by at the Kings Cross Fair.

To return then, to my point/s about reality vs drama – it would be a very difficult thing, indeed, to replicate / dramatise the feelings associated with facing the *re-representation of a loved one* as they are *re-constructed in a legal context, packaged as a product of proceedings, and delivered back to you.*

*What you do with that package* that is left to you is well, *left to you.*

True. If the system has packaged your loved one as a suicide, there *are* counselling services to help you deal with that.

If the system has packaged your loved one as a murder victim, there *are* counselling services to help you deal with that.

But in 1996, there were *no services* that dealt with OPEN FINDINGS.

In terms of *your episode*, the one with the missing evidence, the melancholy detective, the un-recorded police interface – the script – with its open ending, left the surviving characters dangling between points of assistance.

It occurs to me, as we observe C.S.I. Catherine, deep in thought ‘amidships’ of the current episode - that this *dramatic state of confusion* – could be said to *characterise the entire experience of unexplained death.*

I’m talking about a static ‘quality of moment’ here – and not just the lack of a tidy t.v. ending.

There’s been another crowd gathering recently, silently – waiting to be recognised, but not making any moves for my attention.

While I’m juxtaposing life experience with television drama, I don’t believe they can be excluded – and yet it’s only recently that I’ve come to consider them and their roles so closely.

These, if we are to use industry parlance – are the *extras or old-fashioned ‘bit players.’*

Supporting police.

Police rescue and ambulance officers.

What I have realised is that the 'extras' involved in real life experience of death carry something vital.

And uncomfortable.

What gives them stark relief is *knowledge*.

The aura surrounding their existence - that permeates their accounts - *is their emotionally repressed awareness of someone you love after they've died*.

Again, this is the wound, the injury to the living that could never be explained by any t.v. medical examiner.

Let's look at our television screens side by side again.

We both pay rapt attention.

In a typical television crime drama we witness countless police / ambulance officers and morgue staff attending stretchers.

*Waiting with the body.*

On the left, you and I watch *your episode*.

Six male and one female officer, among others, take considerable time to retrieve your body from the cliffs.

Ben Buckler is not a place you would cast a television crime drama.

To begin with, it's difficult to get to – at the Northern, rather inaccessible end of Bondi Beach - its cliff formation resembling the silhouette of an outstretched hand, turned on its side - but without the friendliness of fingertips.

I return to watching you, watching C.S.I. - the wildly popular television experience that recently notched up one hundred episodes, with a big Hollywood bash and a 'C.S.I.' cake that included novelty POLICE CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS tape, in familiar yellow and black.

Once you cut through that tape, it occurs to me – you get cake.

Not just any cake.

Sweet, thick *Hollywood cake* – with enough sugar to kill you – or leave you with a taste for more.

And it leaves me wondering this:

What do we do with the show that we have?

What about *your episode*?

The single episode with the nine year run.

The one about your unsolved death, the unhappy detective trying to kick his butter habit and the heroin addict boyfriend claiming he's the devil.

I look across at you and you look like you've fallen asleep.

My hands reach out to snap at the switches on both televisions - my fingers slipping, as they always do - at the blank control panel on the left.

\* *Natalia Bond was found dead at the cliffs below Ben Buckler Point, Bondi, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, 1996 – investigations indicate her death possibly occurred some*

*time in the early hours of that morning.*

*Following two separate sessions of Inquest in the Glebe Coroner's Court, Sydney, during*

*1997, Deputy State Coroner John Abernathy recorded an Open Finding into her death.*

*The hours before her death remain a mystery, and the answer may still lie with what Mr. Abernathy has described as the "selective memory" of her boyfriend of three years, whose history of drug addiction and criminal activity was only made clear to Natalia's family and friends, during the course of the police investigation and inquest.*

*During the inquest, claims by him of conversations with her regarding suicide appeared unsubstantiated by other witnesses, in proceedings coloured by discussion of devil worship and professional discussion of the definition of psychosis...*

*Mr. Abernathy describes the situation, prior to Natalia's death, as "surreal."*

*Mr. Abernathy further states:*

*"There is...still no evidentiary nexus placing that man with the deceased in the vicinity of the cliffs at Bondi that Tuesday."*

*The case remains open.*

**Bibliography:**

New South Wales State Coroner's Court, Inquest into the Death of Natalia Teresa Bond  
Thursday 14 August 1997

New South Wales Police Brief of Evidence 1997

Official C.S.I. website: [www.cbs.com/primetime/csi](http://www.cbs.com/primetime/csi)