

Dramatic US Television in the 21st Century: Articulating the Human through Expressions of Violence

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Abstract : United States dramatic television in the 21st century is inarguably violent. This violence can be as physical as the gruesome viscera spilled in AMC's *The Walking Dead*; it can be as psychological as the suppressive dominance of Tony Soprano over his wife Carmella in HBO's *The Sopranos*; and it can sit like shares on the stock market, where investment in violence sits as an economic choice, as with AMC's *Breaking Bad*. Violence permeates these narratives, simultaneously threatening and defining the lives of their characters through its use in their relationships. What propels this exploration of humanity through violence is the use of language: the dictation of interaction in an economy in which characters negotiate successful acts of violence, or how they meet with the successful violence of others. Language is the defining force which separates and elucidates characters through conflict, as Slavoj Žižek writes, "it is because of language that we and our neighbours (can) "live in different worlds" even when we live on the same street." This paper examines three different manifestations that violence takes in US television, specifically through the examples of *The Walking Dead*, *The Sopranos*, and *Breaking Bad*. Through the prism of Žižek's conception of language as the uniquely human vehicle of violence, I aim to display how these shows sit as expressions of a neo-humanism, in which the complexities of language manipulate violence and define character in the process.

Keywords : violence, humanism, neoliberalism, American television

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