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DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

Thrill in Showtime's *Dexter*: An anthropological and
psychological approach to fear

verfasst von

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 2015

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 190 344 299

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Lehramtsstudium UF Englisch

UF Psychologie und Philosophie

Betreut von:

Ao. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Eva Zettelmann

Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written this paper in English all by myself. Quotations from sources are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes.

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Acknowledgments

“Wo die Angst ist, ist der Weg”¹, as my younger brother used to say, are words that encouraged me to expose myself to horrific entertainment. Proud not only of finishing my diploma thesis but of challenging my innermost fears, I want to use that moment to thank those who believed that someday I would finish my paper; who endured endless discussions on death, crime and murder and who soothed me during my daily ride on this emotional rollercoaster. Special thanks go to my family for supporting me financially and offering me the opportunity to delve into my interest and to Phil ódem Gott des Words. Finally, I extend my gratitude to my diploma supervisor who gave me as much freedom in writing as I could have hoped for.

¹ Dederichs, Lars C. *Dope your life: 52 legale Mittel für ein erfolgreiches und erfülltes Leben*. Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2004.

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1. Introduction

Showtime's *Dexter* hit the screen in 2006 (Howard xviii), won 23 awards (Schlück et al. 168) and led to the emergence of fan sites on an international level (Howard xviii). Consisting of eight seasons, 'Shrink Wrap', the eighth episode of the first season, attracted more viewers than ever before in Showtime's history of drama series (Green *Critical Studies in Television* 25). As Glennon (pars. 1) states, '[i]t is a breakout hit for Showtime.'

In accordance with Jeff Lindsay's novels, on which the television *Dexter* is based (Santaularia 58), the show encourages the audience to side with its eponymous main character Dexter, a serial killer hunting the worst criminals of Miami. The series' invitation to enter into a close relationship with a murderer has caused wide debates (Gerow pars.1), while making the show, according to Green (*Critical Studies in Television* 26), 'simultaneously disturbing and compelling.'

Falling in line with Miron's conception of human beings as 'pleasure seekers' (Miron 349), I presume that the series' popularity is based on its successful generation of that very sentiment. As *Dexter's* affiliation to the horror genre (Santaularia 58) suggests fear to be the main driver of pleasure, I further assume that thrill, the amalgam of pleasure and fear (Hanich 100), is a key element of the show. To shed light on the series' success, the present paper therefore endeavours to reveal thrill-provoking techniques in the first season of Showtime's *Dexter*.

The first chapter will juxtapose different literary theories on the phenomenon of thrill to arrive at an understanding of the term's meaning. This will lead into an analysis of fear from a biological and psychological point of view and an identification of instinctive, socially-constructed and unconscious fear-evoking stimuli in Showtime's *Dexter's* first season. In the next step, it will be investigated how the show challenges the audience's perception of themselves by manipulating viewers to root for a serial killer. The remainder of this paper will be divided into two sections. Section 1 will explain how thrill is generated by means of character endangerment, while section 2 will focus specifically on thrill as a 'loss-of-control game' (Mikos 43). It needs to be noted that the present paper refrains from generalisation of all kinds, concurring with Mikos's (47) opinion on the diversity of spectatorship,

[t]he way in which specific spectators experience a certain film depends on the makeup of their identity, structure of experience, and social engagement in the web of their life world.

2. Thrill

Thrill is classified as a form of 'Spannung' (Wenzel *Erzähltextanalyse* 184) and defined by its effect on the audience (Droese 27). There is a general consensus that thrill evokes strong emotions (Wulff&Koebner 9; Späth 155; Wenzel *Erzähltextanalyse* 184) comparable to intense excitement, '[...] das Wort bedeutet Nervenkitzel, heftige Erregung, eine emotionale und körperliche Stress-Situation' (Wulff&Koebner 9). Originating from the 'Middle English root meaning 'to pierce' (Rubin 7), the term's etymology lends evidence to the claim that thrill affects the body. As Rubin (*ibid.*) states, 'a thrill is a sharp sensation, as if one had been pierced or pricked by a sharp instrument.'

According to Seeßlen (20) thrill involves regression, allowing the satisfaction of primitive drives that civilisation rendered taboo, '[...]as ist die Lust im Thrill, daß mit der Sicherheit auch die moralische, soziale, erotische Fesselung verlorengeht' (*ibid.*). He further notes that thrill is a mixture of two opposing emotions from a societal viewpoint; namely pleasure and fear (Seeßlen 26). More precisely, constraints of modern civilisation on sexual, aggressive and voyeuristic impulses led, according to the author, to a separation of pleasure and fear in everyday life, creating a void that entertainment struggles to fill (Seeßlen 19). Thrill can therefore be regarded as a reunion of what civilisation keeps apart, '[...]diese Kombination kann man als das Wesen des Thrill ansehen: den Weg zur Lust über die Angst' (Seeßlen 17). Similarly, Hanich (100) describes thrill as 'pleasurable fear', emphasising that in an experience of thrill, pleasure and fear no longer oppose each other but merge into one emotion.

Hence pleasurable fear (*Angst-Lust*) does not consist of two components that stand next to each other [...]. Instead, pleasure is a quality of the emotion *itself*—a positive valence, as psychologists say. (*Ibid.*)

Droese (23), in an analysis of Hitchcock's thrillers, observes thrill to elicit a loss of security for characters and audience alike, creating what Albert La Valley (qtd in Droese 23) calls 'emotional chaos'. Rubin (6), on the other hand, speaks of an 'off-balance effect' and 'a string sensation of *vulnerability*' that thrilling experiences involve, comparing their emotional quality to what is experienced in fun houses and on roller coasters.

Likewise, Balint (23) establishes a connection between funfair attractions and thrilling sensations, identifying a common underlying structure of all thrills, namely, the sensed presence of an 'external danger' (*ibid.*), the voluntary subjection to fear

triggered by danger, and the hope that one can continue life unharmed (ibid.). Following Balint (ibid.), thrill thus entails the feelings of fear, hope and pleasure and involves a process of *leaving* and *rejoining* [ë] security (Balint 26). He further notes that the experience of thrill can be compared to a drama in three acts, in which the relative ease of the beginning leads into growing tensions, accompanied by the hope of a good ending (Balint 44). Seeßlen (20) expands Balint's structure of thrill from a three act to a four act drama, adding a climax and a return to the starting point to the phase of ease and gradual tension.

Applying Balint's theory of thrill to the film medium, Mikos (43) identifies 'a twofold framework' of security that allows viewers to perceive fear as pleasurable. More precisely, the film's 'dispositive structure' (Mikos 39) guarantees that no harm will befall the spectator, while fear for a character in the story is counterbalanced by the hope that films adhere to genre conventions and have an emotionally satisfying ending (Mikos 45). Fahy (12) speaks of 'fear through control' and the 'safety net of predictability' concurring with Mikos that knowledge of a good ending allows the audience to enjoy the fear experienced, further adding that 'it is this safety net that makes horror so much fun' (ibid.).

Besides providing security, Mikos (41) argues that the 'safety net' (Fahy 12) is a fertile ground for thrill generation. More precisely, films can threaten to break the promise of upholding 'the fourth wall' (Brown 8), or pretend to ignore genre constraints, starting a 'loss-of-control game' (Mikos 43) that Mikos believes to be at the heart of a thrill experience.

It is the ongoing task of the formal and dramaturgical tools to call this security into question by stimulating the spectators' emotional and cognitive activities. This leads to a pleasurable sense of fear and a temporary loss of control. (Mikos 41)

Mikos (42) further notes that the more the 'safety net' (Fahy 12) loosens, the more intense the feeling of thrill is perceived, an assumption to which Wilson et al. (429) lend credence by speaking of the 'pleasures of uncertainty'. More precisely, they argue that predictability reduces thrill, while uncertainty heightens it, in contrast. Reasons lie, according to the authors, in individuals' craving to understand and thus predict their environment, '[w]hen we feel that we do not understand something important, we feel threatened and aroused [ë]' (Wilson et al. 422).

Similarly, Balint (29) claims that thrill increases the further one moves against his or her instincts for safety, which he defines as the urge to cling to various objects in an attempt to lessen exposure and find support.

We understand know why the thrill is the greater the farther we dare get away from safety - in distance, in speed, or in exposure; that is to say, the more we can prove our independence. (Balint 29)

With regard to the film medium the aforementioned twofold framework of security (Mikos 43) that in Mikos's understanding provides control, can therefore be said to be the mind's instinctive point of refuge when exposed to fictional danger. Consequently, Balint's theory also lends support to the claim that thrill is perceived more intensely the more the safety net (Fahy 12), consisting of the knowledge of genre convention and film's fictional quality, loosens.

Taking a slightly different view, Seeßlen (28) builds on the notion of independence, arguing that a move from heteronomy to autonomy is what intensifies the experience of thrill. By way of an example, themes of identity loss, an element particularly popular in spy films, evoke thrill by combining the fear of complete disappearance and the pleasure of slipping into different roles. Murderers are, according to the author, particularly frightening as the result of what he terms a *ófehlgelaufene Wandlung* (Seeßlen 28).

Conversely, Droese (31) considers thrill to be the highest in states of shock, which are, according to her, characterised by a sudden display of violence. To illustrate her point, she cites the attack on the camera as a means to directly threaten the viewers and induce shock by pretending to cross the border between fiction and reality (ibid.). These thrill peaks, she notes, can affect the audience irrespective of an emotional involvement with a character (ibid.).

With the exception of moments of shock, Droese (31) believes thrill in most parts to simply transfer itself from an endangered character to the audience, provided that *óffective dispositions* (Zillmann *Suspense* 205) toward the character have been formed. Drawing on a differentiation between psychological and physiological endangerment of a character made by Alewyn, Conrad and Trautwein, Droese (21) elaborates that the audience is unnerved when exposed to a world dominated by chaos in which the liked character is subjected to dangers directed at body and/or mind (Droese 21-25).

In a similar fashion, Rubin (7) points at character identification as the process responsible for the viewers's thrilling experience, elaborating: *ó[w]e derive pleasure*

form watching characters suffer [ë], but we ourselves suffer by virtue of identifying with those characters (ibid.). Späth (171) develops the argument further by distinguishing between three different kinds of thrill that can be aroused by the identification with a character. More precisely, depending on whether the audience identifies with the superior or inferior character in a power setting, óMacht-Thrill (Späth 156), óAngst- Thrill (ibid.) or óRührungsthruill (ibid.) is elicited. Generally speaking, he considers any imbalance of power between two or more dramatis personae, in which the liked character is physically and/or sexually threatened, to be thrill encouraging.

In an analysis of the ósuspense thriller (genre, Derry (19) argues that thrill can be either óvicarious[ly] experience[d] or aroused by ósimple depiction of danger and violence. Morreall (365) concurs by stating that ódetailed, vivid representations of grave dangers, as found in horror films and thrillers, suffice to arouse pleasurable fear. Späth (155) goes as far as to claim that any presentation, verbal or visualised, of either crime or sexuality can already create óAngstlust (ibid.), provided that sufficient time is offered for the audience to feel the emotions triggered, ó[t]hrill bedarf eines geschickt kalkulierten Maßes an Zeit in dem sich das lesende Subjekt seinen Emotionen hingeben kann (Späth 165). More precisely, while in action scenes the sequence of events captures the audience's full attention, prohibiting self-reference as well as identification processes, scenes of a more static quality appear to stretch time, allowing thrill to be experienced more intensely (Späth 171).

Furthermore, Späth (171) assigns a key role to anticipation, noting that thrill is more intense before an event hinted at is realised.

Deren Verarbeitung ließ erkennen, daß bei der Entstehung von Thrill dem Moment der Antizipation eine wesentliche Rolle zukommt. Die Darstellung der Phase vor der Aktualisierung einer befürchteten Gefahr ist für die Erzeugung von Thrill fruchtbarer als das Eintreten des Befürchteten. (Ibid.)

Consequently, audience's superior knowledge and a character's low chances of surviving the dangers to which he or she is exposed heightens thrill further.

Koch (15) identifies a third category besides crime and sexuality as thrill provoking, namely nutrition. A mixture of what he terms ócrimen, ósexus and ófructus (ibid.) in films, as for example the portrayal of an incestuous relationship, intensifies, according to the author, the experience of thrill (qtd. in Wenzel *Spannung* 25). Reasons for their strong effect lie in evolutionary theory, according to Koch (qtd. In Wenzel *Spannung* 25); in other words, their ongoing contributions to the species

survival render them significant and thus arousing. Miron (343) lends evidence to the claim that sexual and aggressive impulses are innate human drives, noting that they are situated in what she calls the *óreptilian or instinctual brain* (ibid.).

Mikos (47) distances himself from Koch's theory of thrill, which restricts itself to the involvement of biological drives, arguing that any scene can induce thrill, provided that it connects to frightening experiences of the past.

The spectators cry, are sad, jealous, envious, disgusted, afraid, repulsed, and so on. They feel this way not because the characters do, but because the scenic arrangements remind them of events from their own biographies. (Mikos 46)

Along similar lines, Hogan (156ff.) argues that works of art activate audience's memories of long gone events, with the respective emotions reaching consciousness, the content, however, remaining latent. These feelings then become attached to the work of art, influencing its reception.

Events and characters in the literary work are defined by some properties. These properties prime particular memories in a reader. The memories are the source of the reader's emotive reaction to work. (Hogan 160)

With respect to thrill generation, it can thus be argued that frightening experiences of the past may be re-activated by narrative elements, either triggering or heightening fear.

Leaving aside the discussion on thrill evocation, the next three sections will focus on fear as primary component of thrill, endeavouring to identify instances of fear that are biologically and/or psychologically anchored. It needs to be noted that the categories at hand by no means echo the variety of fears existing, but were chosen on the sole basis of their potential to induce thrill in a broad viewership.

2.1. Instinctive fear

Miron (351) argues that human beings are *óprewired* with fears that have functioned to preserve their species, such as *ófear of dark and high places, sudden sounds and movements, snakes and spiders, and approaching strangers, especially those with angry faces* (ibid.). These fears are, according to the author, deeply engrained in the human brain and persist despite changing life situations.

Because the ability to detect life-threatening situations is maximally important for survival, it evolved as a genetically ingrained function, protected from vagaries of individual learning. (Miron 351)

Similarly, Öhman (128) speaks of an *óarchaic remnant* situated in the human *ópredatory defense system*, holding it responsible for today's fear of animals which are no longer life-threatening.

Olsson and Phelps (1996f.) develop a slightly different view, arguing that 'fear-relevant stimuli', that is to say, stimuli which in former years aroused fear instinctively, are no longer engrained as dangerous in the human fear system. However, they are more quickly learned to be life-threatening through observation, experience or conditioning than 'non-fear relevant stimuli.' In accordance with Olsson and Phelps, Bandelow (1997) is of the opinion that what historically presented life-threatening danger is inscribed in the human genes and thus responsible for the development of certain phobias, such as arachnophobia, aquaphobia, or claustrophobia.

Morreal (1990), on the other hand, differentiates between two kinds of instinctive fears, of which only one is 'unlearned.' More precisely, he states that primal fear is 'objectless' and triggers an immediate response; even if the source of danger is unknown, fear that developed from negative experience of the past is evoked by a distinct cognitively identified object. He adduces 'loss of support, loud noises, and sudden movements' as examples of primal fear.

While opinions differ on the influence of the evolutionary built fear system, there is a general consensus that stimuli, once inscribed as dangerous in the human brain, trigger automatic bodily responses such as 'vigilance, increased heart rate, sweating, increased muscle tension, fidgeting' (Miron 1991). As a result, the body is prepared for either defence or escape, a response commonly known as 'fight-or-flight' (Miron 1991; Zillmann *Psychology of Entertainment* 1997). These 'collective whole body responses' (Sluckin 1986) aim at preventing injuries of varying severity and function as a warning signal of potential endangerment (Sluckin 1986). The fear system's focus on life sustenance and harm avoidance leads, in the event of danger, to a backgrounding of cognitive functions to secure immediate reaction (Miron 1991; Dozier 1997) and maximise chances of survival (Öhman 1986). As Burke (qtd in Altheide 1997) argues, '[n]o passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.'

As reason is temporally suppressed during a fight-or-flight response, the portrayal of instinctive fear is a popular element among filmmakers of horrific entertainment (Miron 1991; Morgan 1997). Norden (1997), who comments on the exploitation of instinctive fear in films, argues that the high level of stress during a fight-or-flight response immerses viewers into the fictional world and universalises their response; '[d]uring these moments when our behavior has become primitivized, we find ourselves surrendering almost completely to the filmmaker' (ibid.).

Drawing on Mikosö(43) definition of thrill as a process of losing and regaining control, an instinctive fear response to a mediated stimuli can be compared to a temporal loss of control, while re-activation of reason, in the sense of reminding oneself of not being in danger, can be perceived as a means of regaining control. As Morgan (2f.) notes on the interplay of rationality and instinctive fear,

[ë] the horror literature tradition is an aspect of our mental life in which our physiological constitution is most notably implicit, that horror is essentially bio-horror and involves the tenuous negotiations between rationality and a looming biological plenum that defies rational mapping.

Dozier (247) asserts that the evolutionary developed fear system does not distinguish between real and artificially aroused fear, a claim to which the theory of óstimulus generalizationô (Cantor *Media Effects* 291) lends evidence. More precisely, applied to the film medium, the theory holds that the fictional portrayal of animals, darkness and heights, among other elements, evoke fear due to their similarity with real-life fear inducing stimuli (ibid.). Zillmann (*Psychology of Entertainment* 227) goes as far as to claim that frightening films can trigger the release of ófight-or-flightô hormonesô (Koch 14) and Lelord and André (279) argue that the audience's inability to interfere in the action potentially heightens fear.

Leaving aside theoretical considerations, the following section endeavours to identify concrete examples of inborn fear that lend themselves to frightening entertainment. Öhman (128) asserts that danger from predatory animals has been a key influence in the building of the human fear system, thus all stimuli associated with a potential attack, or suggesting the presence of a predator, are, as per the author, particularly frightening. He lists ópaired forward-looking eyes, particularly in the context of a rapidly approaching animalô (ibid.), as well as specific noises and outcries of human beings as examples of stimuli that arouse inborn fears. Moreover, he notes that any place that increases chances of falling prey, due to, for example, little opportunity for cover, can already trigger fear responses (ibid.). Sluckin (105) agrees with Öhman that some places entail a higher risk of mortality, concluding that fear decreases with familiarity, as knowledge about water supplies, types of predators, and/or shelter heightens chances of survival (Sluckin 105).

Besides animal hunting behaviour, Sluckin (105) observes characteristics of the human species to provide clues for the identification of inborn fears. By way of an explanation, as a ódiurnalô and ósocial speciesô (ibid.), fear of darkness and isolation is inherent in human beings. Moreover, since finding cover is an innate protective

response among people, lack of shelter can be particularly daunting and manifests itself in agoraphobia.

Gow (65) classifies agoraphobia as well as claustrophobia as 'instinctive dread[s]', listing the portrayals of cellars, sewers or vast isolated spaces as cinematic attempts of exploiting inborn fears. By contrasting open and confined spaces the frightening experience is, according to the author, intensified, as making a room appear smaller or bigger.

Cantor (*Responding to the screen* 177) believes that deformities commonly arouse fear in real-life as well as in media presentations, '[...] a related set of stimuli that typically evoke fear might be referred to as deformities and distortions, or familiar organisms in unfamiliar and unnatural forms' (Cantor *Responding to the screen* 179). Consequently, people who deviate from the norm in 'size, shape, skin colour or facial configuration' (ibid.) are potentially fear-provoking. Experiments with chimpanzees, conducted by Hebb, suggest such fear to be inborn (ibid.).

Mikos (47) notes that '[...] films deal with structures of experience that relate to spectators' unconscious fears and wishes' thus pointing at the existence of a second kind of fear. The following subchapter on thrill will focus on how media exploits what is situated in the human unconscious.

2.2. Unconscious fear

As mentioned in chapter two, Seeßlen (22) considers entertainment to be an outlet for primitive impulses and a means to break free of societal norms. As morality collides with internal human drives, aggressive or sexual stirrings are, however, not always solely pleasurable (Seeßlen 20). In a psychoanalytic understanding, an inner conflict, characterised by impulses from the id seeking to discharge and attempts of the ego to keep them from surfacing (Schuster 45), potentially evokes fear as a common defence mechanism (Schuster 43). According to Seeßlen (20), the portrayal of unconscious wishes in film triggers fear as a means to hide the fact that viewers crave what they see.

Drawing on Jung's concept of the 'shadow archetype' (Goldstein 187), which refers to 'animal instincts' (ibid.) inherent in human beings, Goldstein takes a slightly different view. He notes that awareness of what is understood as one's 'dark side' (Goldstein 188) arouses fear, since threatening the ego's attempt to abide by moral beliefs. Similarly, Payne (48), who draws on Kristeva's theory of abjection, which in its simplification posits the existence of an 'intense fear of that which threatens boundaries or destabilizes order' (Sisco King 21), notes that rising power of the id unleashes fear as

representing the danger of assuming control over the ego. Likewise, Coon and Mitterer (398) claim that, 'if we were solely under the control of the id, the world would be chaotic beyond belief,' since it constitutes the part of the psyche that is 'self-serving, irrational, and impulsive' (ibid.). Cherry (99) argues along similar lines, observing that the monsters portrayed in horror films are symbolic of how the empowerment of the id affects human beings and thus they can be regarded as personifications of people's dark sides.

To reduce fear of one's own evil, Fuchs (28) posits that criminals are commonly marked as the Other, by referring to them as perverted, deviant and/or pathological, 'diese völlige Ausgrenzung des Verbrecherischen als das *Andere* [ë]' (Fuchs 28). As a result, monstrosity is located outside oneself and not perceived as inherent in human beings, further upholding the belief that one is not capable of committing abhorrent crimes.

According to Nickel (28), not only conflicting desires, but also knowledge on world's dangers, are commonly repressed. In other words, Nickel reveals people's trust in others and in the world to be unfounded. He further claims that considering that safety never truly existed, belief in it can be easily shaken.

We can hardly resist relying on the world not to annihilate us, and we can hardly resist trusting others not to do so. This is not because such reliance is rationally compulsory, but because we choose it as the most easy and natural strategy. (Nickel 17)

Morgan (3) and Norden (75) concur that people refuse to see their lives as constantly endangered, noting that the truth of one's own death and decay is also commonly pushed aside.

And our neglected, marginalised organic life, it will be argued here, also finds symbolic expression in the atavistic, demonic images conjured by macabre literature - body horror, pain, death, and dismemberment are facts of everyday physical life on the one hand and phantoms of our dreams and imagining at the same time. (Morgan 3)

Grodal (*Cinema Journal* 27) notes that fear can be transformed, and/or constructed through influences from culture, personality and experience. The following subchapter will investigate social anxieties, that is to say, fears which are socially shaped and/or constructed and nationally or internationally heard (Cherry 11).

2.3. Socially constructed fear

Altheide (196f.) argues that socially constructed fear changes over time and needs to be viewed in relation to one's life experience. Accordingly, such a fear stands in stark contrast to the aforementioned rigidity of instinctive fear. A further difference between socially constructed and biologically anchored fear is the response they elicit. More precisely, Olsson and Phelps (1995) note that the portrayal of social fear results in an increased autonomic arousal of the viewer, a mild reaction compared to the large amount of energy set free during an instinctive fear response (André & LeDour 1982). However, while fear quickly subsides when triggered by stimuli that are instinctively known to be dangerous, fear aroused by the portrayal of or allusion to socially constructed anxieties is longer in duration. The reason lies in the fact that this fear is orientated toward the future, triggering an anticipation of danger rather than an immediate reaction (ibid.).

Lindner (2008) lists currency crises, terrorism and atomic explosions as examples of culturally formed fears, while André and LeDour (1983) identify social upheaval, infectious diseases and genetic manipulated food as belonging to the same category. Most of these fears derive, according to the authors, from knowledge of former eras.

Conversely, Altheide (1995) believes that social interaction and communication, of which media is a constitutive part, determine the discourse of fear (Altheide 1990). Similarly, Miron (1991f.) argues that news reports that focus on natural and social (Miron 1992) catastrophes distort reality, and influence people's perception of danger and security. In reference to films, Plantinga (*Moving Viewers* 81) likewise observes that media show[s] us how and what to fear by constructing and foregrounding objects of fear, formulating the nature of the threat, and demonstrating proper responses.

Bryant and Davies (2000) draw on classical conditioning, to point at the considerable influence of media on fear evocation. The theory holds that if a stimulus frequently co-occurs with a stimulus that provokes a strong emotional response, it will eventually generate similar responses, even if appearing on its own. In the case of media consumption and in relation to fear as a cultural construct, it can thus be said that the audience is conditioned to stimuli that regularly appear together with scenes of danger, violence and/or crime. To put it differently, their portrayal, in time, evokes fear without the presence of already established signals of danger.

Dozier (2009) proposes a different answer for the question of why media is a powerful tool in fear evocation. Drawing on the evolutionarily developed alarm system,

he claims that in the light of the news reports primary focus on danger, fear cannot but extend to a wider range of objects.

Wir leben in einem Meer von Angst, in den sich tagtäglich, gespeist aus den Massenmedien, neue Ströme von erschreckenden Nachrichten ergießen. Berichte über Verbrechen, Krankheiten, Terrorismus und Millionen andere Gefahren stürzen auf uns ein. Wir schenken ihnen Beachtung, weil unser primitives Angstsystem darauf fixiert ist, jedes Alarmsignal wahrzunehmen. (Dozier 229)

Likewise, Olsson and Phelps (1995) argue that the rapidly changing environment demands storage of new information on dangers; the sources being direct experience, observation of real or fictional events and verbal descriptions thereof. Cantor (*Media Effects* 293) goes as far as to claim that people consciously seek out media in an attempt to gain knowledge on potential endangerments. As a result, he believes that danger which is imminent and/or grounded in reality heightens fear.

Because part of the emotional response to such stimuli might arise from viewers' anticipations of future consequences to themselves, depictions of real threats should evoke more fear than dramatic portrayals of events that could never happen. (Cantor *Media Effects* 293)

Moving on to the analysis of Showtime's *Dexter*'s first season, Green (*Continuum* 582) claims that the impact of the series is its ability to stir very real fears and social anxieties. The first three chapters will therefore endeavour to identify isolated scenes from *Dexter* in which biological, unconscious and socially constructed fears are exploited.

3. Darkness, isolation and confinement - manifestations of instinctive fear in *Dexter*

As the character Dexter prefers attacking at night and killing in remote places, isolation and darkness, both inborn fears (Sluckin 105), are frequently portrayed stimuli in the series. Donovan, for example, is murdered far off the city, in an old, abandoned cabin after a concert, Jaworski is assaulted and killed on a construction site at night and Chambers is knifed inside an abandoned liquor store after dawn. The following chapter will commence by outlining instinctive fear stimuli portrayed in the series and by discussing elements that intensify their frightening effect. In a next step, it will be illustrated how a world of the animalistic is created that Späth (162) considers beneficial to thrill evocation.

3.1. Triggering inborn fear - exploitation of fear-relevant stimuli in *Dexter*



Fig. 1: Fear of darkness, isolation and enclosed spaces (Love American Style, S.1: 45:20)

Examining the time and place of Castillo's and his wife's murder, Figure 1 shows that fear of isolation and darkness is paired with claustrophobic dread. More precisely, not only are they killed in a secluded area after nightfall, but also in a narrow trailer that potentially evokes a feeling of confinement.

As Hanich (172) notes, putting characters inside a building 'confine[s] the filmic space and thus create[s] a corresponding lived-body experience.' A similar observation is made by Max (qtd. in Hanich 172), who, in reference to the film *Seven*, remarks that a low ceiling can trigger the sensations of being 'squeez[ed,] [...] physically and emotionally.'

Re-examining Figure 1, it is notable that the plastic wrap, covering the trailer's inside, makes the space look smaller than it already is, thus potentially heightening the feeling of confinement. Moreover, the 'low angle shot' (Lewis 88) allows viewers to perceive their surroundings from a similar angle as Dexter's victims. Consequently, the sight of the trailer's exit is constricted, while the lowness of the ceiling is brought into focus, both means that are likely to intensify claustrophobia. Additionally, the illusion may be created of being among the doomed, immersing viewers into the filmic world, and thus causing the 'phenomenological distance' (Hanich 160) to be reduced. As a result, a feeling of confinement, imprisonment and exposedness to danger may be triggered and/or intensified.

Leaving aside the discussion on Dexter's murder of Castillo and his wife, the following section investigates the portrayal of instinctive fear during the abduction of Debra by the Ice Truck Killer. As mentioned in chapter 2.1., Gow (65) claims that feelings of claustrophobia and agoraphobia can be intensified by contrasting images of confinement and vastness. Such a method of aggravating fears can be seen in Figure 2 a, b and c.



Fig. 2a: Claustrophobia (Born Free, S.1: 04:09)



Fig. 2b: Agoraphobia (Born Free, S.1: 04:12)



Fig. 2c: Claustrophobia (Born Free, S.1: 04:18)

The camera first zooms in on the boat on which Debra is bound hand and foot, cutting to a long shot of the ocean, only to return to a portrayal of the happenings on board. Drawing on Gow (65), it can be argued that the ocean appears wider as put in contrast to the small boat, while the boat appears more confining as set against the vast sea.

Moreover, Figure 2b illustrates how the darkness of the sky merges into the darkness of the sea, rendering the night almost pitch black. Such a degree of darkness presumably heightens claustrophobia. As Böhme (qtd. in Hanich 178) argues, '[d]arkness cloaks us like heavy cloth, imposing itself upon us. It affects not only our sense of vision, but the lived body as a whole, oppressing and constricting us.'

Besides darkness, the fact of being surrounded by water may also enhance the feeling of confinement. By way of an explanation, the dangers lurking in the sea, which are those of total darkness, isolation, drowning, freezing or falling victim to predators, are of similar severity to the dangers on the boat. Escape is thus hardly an option; Debra is bound to remain at the Ice Truck Killer's side, which may make the space on board appear even more confining.

In addition to claustrophobia, being at sea may also evoke fear of isolation, given the 'immensity' (Hanich 177) of the ocean as well as Debra's remoteness from civilization.

The sea is a [] place of the unknown. Its immensity reaches much further than we can see, beyond an endless horizon. Most of it remains secretive and far away from civilization. Being alone out there can be a particularly isolating experience. (Ibid.)

The long shot of the boat, as can be seen in Figure 2b, may intensify the experience of loneliness. According to Toles (4), long shots are in some contexts employed to create a distance between the audience and the characters. As a result, the viewer's powerlessness in the light of the events is underlined and the feelings of desolation, triggered by a liked character being far from help, is heightened.

At the most basic level, distance can convey utter abandonment, placing characters even beyond the spectator's reach. Our desire to join with a figure on-screen as an invisible, hovering partner in grief can be defeated by the swift, cold insertion of a spatial gap, a remoteness we are powerless to lessen. (Toles 4)



Fig. 3: Fear of darkness, isolation and confinement (‘Let’s Give the Boy a Hand,’ S1: 47:50)

A further example in which inborn fears are exploited can be seen in Figure 3a. On his quest of finding Toni Tucci, a security guard who has been abducted by the Ice Truck Killer, Dexter enters an abandoned hospital at night. He walks along a narrow, dark corridor, and, given that the camera is positioned opposite of Dexter, appears to head directly

toward the audience. Drawing on Morgan (2f.), who states that during the exposure to danger signalling stimuli cognitive activities are reduced, it can be argued that despite the audience’s knowledge of the figure’s identity and intentions, the scene still contributes to fear elicitation. In other words, on a non-cognitive level, approaching Dexter may trigger fear, as darkness makes him look like a stranger and thus renders him part of an inborn signal of danger (Miron 351). Moreover, due to the narrowness of the corridor and the only visible exit being blocked by the shadowy figure, the audience may feel exposed to danger and thus experience claustrophobia.

Although threat can be easily controlled by reminding oneself that the approaching man is Dexter, a feeling of unease may still remain, adding to the fear aroused by being in the presumed location of the Ice Truck Killer. More precisely, by positioning the camera opposite of Dexter, the audience is not only subjected to the instinctive fear of an approaching stranger, but visually constricted, in the sense of not being able to see what is potentially lurking behind their backs. Fearing what is in front, while dreading what might appear from behind, potentially increases the feeling of confinement. Moreover, as the Ice Truck Killer’s identity, intentions and capabilities are not yet revealed, he represents an unpredictable threat; in other words, he might appear anywhere, at any time, a claim more thoroughly discussed in chapter 7.1..

Lastly, darkness makes the threat of a murderer’s presence an uncontrollable experience since, according to Grodal (*Moving Image Theory* 160), it ‘diminish[es] visual control’ causes a ‘depression of activity’ and thus impedes viewers’ attempts to identify danger. As viewers sense danger but are unable to pinpoint its source, dread is likely to be evoked. As Hanich (161) observes, dread is characterised by ‘strongly expect[ing] something but never know[ing] what will happen precisely and if it will happen.’ The following subchapter will illustrate how, by means of instinctive fear stimuli, a world of the animalistic is created.

3.2. Creating a world of the animalistic - Dexter, the predator

Dexter's frequent imitations of predatory behaviour are likely to trigger fear responses. By way of an example, during the attack on Donovan (‘Dexter,’ S.1), Dexter dashes out of the dark, putting a line around Donovan's neck with such swiftness that only his outline is recognisable. Similarly, when attacking Jeremy (‘Popping Cherry,’ S.1) he materializes out of the dark, running toward his victim in high speed, barely being visible. Sluckin (88) describes ‘sudden, fast, direct movement toward the prey,’ a typical hunting style of predators, and Morreal (361) notes that human beings respond instinctively to ‘sudden unexpected movement in the visual environment,’ since interpreting them as signals of danger.

A further parallel to animal hunting behaviour can be drawn as Dexter circles Donovan like a shark circles his prey, an image popularised through films like *Jaws* by Stephen Spielberg (Ritter pars 1; Choi). Moreover, as Dexter puts a noose around Donovan's neck to drag him into a nearby cabin, images of a lion pulling his prey may also be conjured, as could be seen, for example, in the film *The Ghost and the Darkness* by Stephen Hopkins. Inside the Cabin Dexter stares intently at Donovan and occupies a ‘forward-directed body posture’ (Sluckin 119), both characteristics of animal hunting behaviour (ibid.).



Fig. 4: fear evocation through mimicry of animal attack (‘Circle of Friends,’ S.1: 3:21)

The ‘direct fixed stare’ (ibid.) as signal of impending danger is further exploited in season one episode seven. A sequence alternating between a black screen, Dexter attacking the camera, and Dexter staring at the camera, unfolds. Figure 4 shows the serial killer's intense stare and open mouth, which, following Sluckin (119), is a facial

expression that forebodes an attack in the animal world. Moreover, since, drawing back on chapter 2.1., sudden movements can be classified as instances of ‘primal fear’ (Morreal 361), the sudden, quick and forceful gestures toward the camera, that interrupt either the darkness of the screen or Dexter's blunt staring, are likely to arouse fear instinctively. Lastly, since viewers are either completely deprived of their vision or restricted in their sight and, since the camera closely frames Dexter face, fear might be evoked out of the inability to foresee the point of attack. As discussed earlier, in scenes of impending danger darkness counters viewers' urge to visually control the environment (Grodal *Moving Image Theory* 160).

It is interesting to note that instead of inducing fright indirectly, that is to say, through an endangered character, the scene directly assaults the audience, thus moving the danger from the fictional onto the real world. Drawing back on Mikosö (39ff.) theory of thrill, fear control, consisting for one of the knowledge that no harm will befall the spectators, is thus thwarted and the audience is drawn into the world of predators and prey. Moreover, by making them victims to sudden and violent attacks, shock, which according to Droeseö (31) is the most intense experience of thrill, is likely to be evoked.

Another technique employed to build an animal world is the drawing of parallels between humans and animals. In addition to contributing to the creation of wildlife atmosphere, this strategy additionally potentially evokes existential anxieties; accordingly, it will be discussed in the course of the subsequent chapter, which focuses on unconscious fears.

4. Torture, death and mutilation - manifestations of unconscious fear in *Dexter*

In *Dexter* death and crime is omnipresent. Not only does Dexter torture and murder various serial killers, but he himself is on the radar of a murderer who puts the dead bodies of his victims on display. The present chapter's topic will be approached from two different angles. Firstly, the kinds of unconscious fears aroused by the recurrent portrayals of and references to death will be investigated. Secondly, ritualistic murder will be regarded as an outlet for primitive impulses, and the generation of thrill through the satisfaction of unconscious wishes will be explored.

4.1. The reality of death - emphasising humans animal nature



Fig. 5b: Fear of distortion, the uncanny, the abject (óDexter,ô S.1: 11:49)



Fig. 5a: Fear of distortion, the uncanny, the abject (óPopping Cherry,ô S.1: 10:37)

Figures 5a and b show victims of the Ice Truck Killer as left for the police to find. In reference to chapter 3.1, these images potentially trigger an inborn fright reaction, as

portraying a deformed human body (Cantor *Responding to the screen* 179). From a psychological point of view, however, they also evoke unconscious fear. More precisely, Morgan (91) draws on the psychoanalytic theory of 'the uncanny', commonly described as a feeling of unease, triggered by seeing something that is both familiar and unfamiliar (Cherry 103f.), to explain people's frightening responses when confronted with the inward parts of a body. He illustrates his point by referring to a baseball player who fainted at the sight of his bone protruding the skin.

We are unnerved when our 'flesh' appears to us as meat, as we may be when 'meat' appears to us as dead animal [ë]. In accidents such as this the familiar body thus becomes the uncanny. (Morgan 91)

Although the corpses of the Ice Truck Killer's victims still resemble the human form, they are mutilated so that they do no longer represent the familiar image of the human body. As a result, it can be argued that they are manifestations of the uncanny and thus evoke fear. Referring to the depictions of corpses in general, Kristeva (3f.) notes that they arouse fear as representing the body as abject in the sense of portraying what is beyond the border of the living, '[t]he corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life' (Kristeva 4).

Abjection is not only embodied by the series' corpses, but by some of the show's serial killers. Although Hantke (36), in reference to the depiction of modern monsters in films, notes that as their bodies are no longer 'a site of abjection' (ibid.), 'illicit thrills' (ibid.) are diminished; it can be argued that thrill in *Dexter* is intense despite encountering average looking monsters. More precisely, Schmid (qtd. In Green *Critical Studies in Television* 28) asserts that if fictional murderers are more alike than different to what is considered normal, the clear line between the ordinary and the devious threatens to blur. Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 394) concurs with Schmid by arguing that in *Dexter* Mary, the nurse who kills her patients by overdose, and Meridian, the psychiatrist, who talks women into killing themselves, evoke fear by representing '[t]he indistinct line between good and evil.' As a result, it can be argued that they pose a threat to order, embodying the abject.

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (Kristeva 4)

Moreover, Kristeva (4) adduces 'the criminal with a good conscience' and 'the killer who claims he is a savior' (ibid.), as examples of abjectness, thus *Dexter*, the serial

killer who follows a moral code and serves justice by killing the bad, evokes fear by likewise blurring the line between good and evil.

Returning to the question of what kinds of fear are triggered by horror films' depictions of death, Freeland (21) argues that beyond a psychoanalytic reading, acts of murder reveal human beings as 'mortal, fragile creatures whose bodies can be pierced and can bleed and can come apart'. Similarly, Janis (qtd. in Norden 75) notes that mutilated corpses 'shatter the entire set of psychological defences that maintain expectations of personal invulnerability'.

In *Dexter* fear of death is triggered not only by the portrayal of corpses, but also by verbal statements on life's ephemerality. By way of an example, as Dexter watches the family of the recently killed policeman, Ricky, scatter his ashes over the sea, he notes in voice over, '[a] whole life reduced to ashes. For Ricky Simmons, it's over' ('Popping Cherry', S.1: 4:53-57). Furthermore, while trying to flush the dead fish of Cody, his girlfriend's son, Dexter thinks, '[l]ife is so fleeting, so fragile, every breath the potential to be our last' ('Return to Sender', S.1: 3:31-35).

Goldenberg and Roberts (72f.) argue that if people are confronted with their 'physicality', by for example being made aware of the similarities existing between human beings and animals, fear of death is likely to be triggered, '[e] people are threatened by their physical, animal nature and [e] existential concerns underlie these threats' (Goldenberg & Roberts 73). In *Dexter* human beings are frequently compared to meat, reminding viewers of their mortality. By way of an example, the Ice Truck Killer hangs up his victims and severs their jugular to let them bleed to death, a method popular in slaughterhouses. Consequently, Debra calls him a 'fucking butcher' ('Crocodile', S.1: 19:45) and Dexter and Masuka compare his way of handling a dead body to people's way of handling meat. In season one episode eleven, for example, Dexter, on finding out how the Ice Truck Killer causes the death of his victims, remarks, '[t]hat's how he bleeds them out. He strings them up like meat' ('Truth Be Told', S.1: 18:24-26) and Masuka, in the subsequent episode, utters, while investigating the killing tools of the Ice Truck Killer, '[c]heck this out this is where he played with his meat' ('Born Free', S.1: 19:00-03). The similarity between bodies of humans and animals is further highlighted by the fact that Rudy wraps the body parts of his dead victims in butcher's paper, as can be seen in Figures 5a and b.

Dexter is no better, since he compares the murderers he intends to kill to animals awaiting slaughter, '[i]n slaughterhouses, they stun the animals before butchering them.

It's the humane thing to do. These animals – they're the lucky ones' (‘Crocodile,’ S.1: 44:06-16). Moreover, he describes his hunting style by using words like ‘stalk-and-ambush’ (‘Popping Cherry,’ S.1: 14:15), ‘instincts’ (‘Popping Cherry,’ S.1: 14:18) and ‘prey’ (‘Popping Cherry,’ S.1: 14:21), thus evoking fear by portraying himself as a wildlife predator. As Byrne (14) notes, ‘[t]here is nothing that threatens human existence, overall, from a predatory standpoint, save humans who prey on other humans.’ The next subchapter will show that, while ‘reminders of the mortality’ (Goldenberg&Roberts 73) evoke fear of the end of one's own existence, there is also joy in watching a character suffer a painful death.

4.2. Satisfying hidden impulses - the joys of torture

Drawing back on chapter 2.2., the depiction of repressed impulses is said to evoke fear (Seeßlen 20), a reaction that functions to hide people's craving of what civilisation rendered taboo. Green (*Continuum* 581-183) shares the assumption that *Dexter* is a series rich in portraying conflicting desires, stating,

Dexter's body can be seen as a site of projected desire in which audience hopes and fears may be concentrated [...] he is at once the embodiment of a transgressive desire for untrammelled action and the avenging angel of social restitution.

Watching Dexter not only taking the lives of other people, but also truly savouring the moment of torture, is likely to evoke sadistic pleasure in viewers. More precisely, Schorsch (112) notes that the portrayal of sadistic crimes connects to phantasies of violence, inviting the audience to share the experience of the torturer. Similarly, Morris (qtd. in Fahy 6) argues that the pleasure of a perpetrator during tormenting his victims transfers itself onto the spectators, forcing them to face their own darkness.

Here is the genius of sadistic torture-horror: it transforms the source of fear from a distant other to something familiar in ourselves. The terror of the victim is supplanted by the delight of the torturer/killer, which is being consciously shared by the audience: that is the source of horror. (Qtd. in Fahy 6)

As mentioned in chapter 2.2., fear of one's own dark side can be controlled by demonising the criminal (Fuchs 28). In the series *Dexter*, however, fear is maintained as the serial killer remains a liked character. The effects of siding with a serial killer on viewers' emotions will be discussed in chapter 6.

Apart from offering a vicarious experience of sadistic torture, voyeuristic desires are also satisfied. Toles (6) points to the fact that many films provide ‘the inadmissible pleasure [...] of watching nasty or ignorant strength prey upon a too naked weakness.’

During the killing ritual, Dexter, being armed, stares at a defenceless, naked victim who is strapped down to a table; he cuts into the cheek of the doomed and ends his or her life. By preventing his victims' movements, Dexter rids them of their bodily autonomy, thwarting any chance of self-defence. Statements like, 'you are mine now so do exactly as I say' (Dexter, S.1: 2:09-12) further emphasize the extent of his takeover and the pleasure he gains from their helplessness. In short, the killing ritual represents an extreme example of power inequality.

As mentioned in chapter 2, Späth (156) believes that an imbalance of power triggers either 'Macht-Thrill', 'Angst-Thrill' or 'Rührungsthрилл' depending on whether identification rests with the inferior and/or superior character. Chapter 6.2. will identify elements that encourage the audience to approve of torture, providing evidence that at least to some extent, the audience sides with the serial killer during his conduction of the killing ritual. Consequently, power, a craving that is according to Krug and Kuhl (57) 'often negatively connoted', can be given free rein during Dexter's act of torture. Before moving on to discuss the fears unleashed by entering into a close relationship with a serial killer, the exploitation of socially constructed fears in *Dexter* will be examined.

5. Evil in our midst - manifestations of social fear in *Dexter*

Because of that fact that *Dexter* shows numerous murderers haunting the city of Miami, preying on the weak and killing the innocent, the series depicts what Green (*Critical Studies in Television* 32) calls 'the modern cultural anxiety of "killer at large"'. It should be noted that the murderers portrayed in the series are mostly inconspicuous, well-adapted and average members of society, thus conforming to the modern day perception and representation of the serial killer. More precisely, Jarvis (329) observes murderers' ordinary appearance to be a widespread topic in literary discourse and Hantke (34ff.) points at developments in the depictions of monsters from Frankenstein and Dracula, who had 'evil [ě] written on their bodies' (Hantke 36), to modern day killers, as John Doe in *Seven* or Buffalo Bill in *Silence of the Lamb*, who lack 'physical markers of otherness' (Hantke 34). As mentioned in chapter 2.3., media constructs the 'objects of fear' (Plantinga *Moving Viewers* 81); consequently, it can be argued that the portrayal of well-adapted serial killers in *Dexter* builds upon an already established angst, tapping into cultural anxieties. All things considered, the show represents a prime example of what Nickel (20) calls the dramatization of a 'paranoid scenario'. More

precisely, it constructs a reality in which even the closest friends or lovers could be harbouring a dark side, undetectable to human senses. As Lindsay (pars. 14f.), the author of the *Dexter* literary series, writes,

[ë] when they catch him, he will probably look just like us. He will be known as a charming and thoughtful co-worker, a nice man who helps his ailing neighbor carry her groceries, and no one will have suspected what he really is. This is the theatre of paranoia, and it grips us, too, because we need a way to see the clues that must be there. Who among your friends and colleagues might be staring at your back and sharpening a knife?

The focal point of the present chapter's topic will be an exploration of how the paranoid scenario of an undetectable evil in one's midst is constructed and intensified. The first subchapter will concentrate primarily on the role of Dexter in heightening fear of an inconspicuous evil, while the second subsection will examine the extent to which the show's other serial killers contribute to the creation of the paranoid scenario.

5.1. Hidden evil - a real-life threat

From the very beginning of the first season, the series *Dexter* urges the audience to question the trust they put in other people. The main character embodies the fear of a lingering evil among human kind that is not visually distinguished from the good. Dexter is a well-respected blood spatter analyst, a dearly loved brother, boyfriend, welcomed colleague and father substitute. However, these roles are all part of a charade to hide his true self, which is that of a serial killer who enjoys purging the city of bad men. The following paragraphs demonstrate how the show makes Dexter's lives as serial killer and family man intersect to intensify threat of a hidden evil.

Rita calls Dexter on the phone while he is packing up the dead body parts of Jaworski, his recent kill. As she asks what he is doing, he swiftly replies, "I'm just finishing up a little project" (Dexter, S.1: 40:51-53). The excuse Dexter uses is relatively common and thus close to real-life experiences, potentially prompting viewers' memories of similar conversations, and planting a seed of doubt in their minds about their loved ones' goodness.

A similar function fulfils the scene in which Dexter breaks into his psychiatrist's workplace to reveal the secret of how the mental doctor caused three women to commit suicide. Browsing through doctor Meridian's laptop, he receives a text message from Rita ("Shrink Wrap," S.1). Although the scene does not, as before, show Dexter in midst of disposing body parts and thus contrasts the very extreme sides of his life, it fulfils the same purpose, since it establishes a connection to the world of the audience's

experience. By way of an explanation, the viewers may come to think of times they did not know what their loved ones were doing, most likely assuming it to be something innocent; this innocence is what the series draws into question.

A comparable scenario presents itself in the case of Debra and her boyfriend Rudy. Unable to reach him by phone, she leaves a message on his voicemail, saying that she assumes he went to bed or fell asleep on the sofa watching television, which are all innocuous activities. However, what Rudy really does, as witnessed by the audience, is carrying a prostitute who he has just strangled unconscious, into his home built freezer to kill (‘Truth Be Told,’ S.1). Consequently, the series once again builds a bridge to the viewers’ real-life, revealing their trust in people a dangerous gullibility.

Additionally, more subtle techniques are employed to intensify the paranoid scenario of hidden evil in one’s midst. In season one episode three, for example, Dexter is shown watching a news report of a crime committed by young offender Jeremy, who has just been released from prison. Staring out into the night, Dexter discloses that he has been planning Jeremy’s murder for a long time, ‘[b]ut I knew what he was and what he’d do again, all I had to do was circle my calendar and wait’ (‘Popping Cherry,’ S.1: 6:16-21). The scene is accompanied by the same music heard during Dexter’s very first night-time hunt in season one episode one, which ended with a man’s death. In a nutshell, darkness, the musical theme and Dexter’s statement all create an anticipation of murder.

To bring into focus the paranoid scenario of hidden evil, the subsequent scene shows a close up of a red shovel that is thrust into the earth next to a tree in broad daylight. Seconds afterwards, the camera reveals the worker to be Dexter who helps Rita and her children planting a lemon tree. The radical change from Dexter the serial killer thinking about his next victim, to Dexter the helpful boyfriend bringing joy into Rita and the children’s world, brings the fear of a serial killer finding cover in family bliss closer. Moreover, the close up of the red shovel pushing into the earth, is likely to evoke associations with murder, given the colour of the working tool as well as the action of forcefully piercing the earth. As a result, the audience is reminded that behind the friendly mask of Dexter remains hidden a ruthless killer.

In a similar fashion, a scene in season one episode four commences by a close up of someone thrusting a knife into what turns out to be a pumpkin. The camera reveals the stabber to be Dexter who under close observation of Cody and Astor, Rita’s children, prepares a pumpkin for carving. The strong stab into soft texture may once

again trigger associations of murder during a scene of family happiness. As a result, the threat of undetected evil is kept fresh in the audience's mind.

It should be noted that the opening sequence of each episode employs the same mechanism in generating fear. By way of an explanation, Dexter is shown during his morning ritual of brushing his teeth, putting on his shirt and making breakfast. The activities are filmed in such a way as to arouse associations with crime. As Karpovich (34) explains, "[t]he sequence takes a familiar action, one probably done by most of the viewers, and suggests a sinister undercurrent through the use of extreme-close-ups, unusual framing, and rapid editing." As a result, the audience is reminded that evil might hardly be recognisable, as not starkly different from the ordinary people.

Apart from strategic scene combinations and camera techniques to fuel fear of evil among human kind, language is used to visualise the extent of the characters' blindness, while pointing at psychological mechanisms that make deceptions work. Consequently, the audience is encouraged to draw parallels to the workings of their own minds, which brings to the fore questions of how carefully their own trust is placed.

By way of an example, Rita tells Dexter that he is "[t]he one good, truly decent man left on the planet" (Crocodile, S.1: 38:58-39:01) and laughs when Dexter admits that he, like Paul, Rita's abusive ex-husband, has a dark side (Return to Sender, S1). Reasons for her blindness are given as she, for example, interprets Dexter's lack of emotions after receiving the news of his biological father's death, as a protective reaction of his psyche, saying, "Dexter, you're not feeling any of this, are you? You're obviously so overwhelmed that you've shut down" (Father Knows Best, S.1: 10:28-34). Reisch (xi) observes that hiding being a sociopath is far from difficult, as people tend to unquestionably transfer common assumptions about human beings onto everyone else; "[w]e are so confident that we know what other people are about, we do the work for them" (ibid.).

In a similar fashion, the conversation between Debra and her boyfriend, Rudy, after Rudy's revelation of being the Ice Truck Killer, draws attention to the fact that people tend to transfer their own beliefs onto others.

DEBRA. This isn't you.

RUDY. Pretty sure it is.

DEBRA. No. I know there's more. I've seen it.

RUDY. I never wanted to hurt you.

DEBRA. I know, I know.

RUDY. Does that make it easier for you? 'Cause I can keep going.

(Born Free, S.1: 4:29-50)

Debra cannot accept the fact that Rudy's affections were no more than pretence, instantly clinging to his admittance of unintended harm. The scene demonstrates how easily expectations, beliefs and assumptions distort the picture of reality, making oneself vulnerable to manipulation. As Gillmann (220) notes, '[w]e see what we want to see, what we are prepared to see, what we have been educated to see, what we already believe we are going to see.' At this point it is important to note that fear does not solely arise out of recognising common human mechanism, which casts doubt on one's own judgment of people, but is nurtured by Rudy's coldness in the face of Debra's craving for love and affection. As Seeßlen (20) argues, '[i]n einer Beziehung, die nach Wärme der Gefühle verlangt, bleibt einer der Partner merkwürdig kalt. Das ist der Ausgangspunkt des Entsetzens.'

In season one episode two, Dexter explicitly points to the fact that common people are incapable of seeing behind 'a mask of sanity' (Hantke 42). Watching Matt Chambers, a hit and run driver successfully lying to the jurors by feigning compassion, sadness and despair for crimes he stands accused of, Dexter thinks, '[m]en like Matt Chambers know how to pull on the invisible mask of sympathy, even empathy, and otherwise right thinking people don't stand a chance' ('Crocodile', S1: 25:23-32). By drawing attention to people's susceptibility to manipulation, Dexter thus promotes the fear that signs of evil cannot be seen. The next section will move away from a sole focus on Dexter and Rudy to consider the series's portrayal of murderers in general, while investigating how the show proves viewers's feeling of safety to be false.

5.2. The omnipresence of evil

Donovan, a music teacher, is introduced in midst of conducting a student's choir. He smiles to the applauding, hugs and kisses what seem to be his wife and children and shakes hands with visitors. However, what appears to be a proud teacher, a loving husband and father, Dexter reveals to be a child murderer. As crimes against children in state institutions are frequently addressed in real-life media reports, the series mirrors reality in its depiction of crime, building on already established fear. Consequently, danger appears more imminent, and as mentioned in chapter 2.3., is thus perceived as more frightening (Cantor *Media Effects* 293).

Fear of evil in disguise is further intensified by the introduction of Nurse Mary and psychiatrist Meridian that have already been mentioned in relation to Kristeva's notion of abjection in chapter 4.1.. As the two killers are shown exploiting their

patients' vulnerability by causing their deaths, they represent a prime example of what Greig (11) terms 'Todesengel'.

Todesengel sind noch verstörender als die meisten Serienkiller. Sie wirken nach außen wie die Stützen unserer Gesellschaft - Hausfrauen, Großmütter, Krankenschwestern und Ärzte. Von allen respektierte Männer und Frauen, die ihr Leben dem Dienst an dem Mitmenschen verschrieben haben [ë]. (Ibid.)

Concurring with Greig (ibid.) that the crimes committed by people who misuse their protective function in society are deeply unsettling, Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 394) refers to an 'unspoken fear of the very people meant to help us'. Reasons lie in the fact that by portraying murderers that are likely to be encountered in real-life, as pursuing professions that fulfil an important function in society, the possibility of falling victim to killers is depicted as beyond viewers' control. Put differently, if killers are found among nurses, therapists and policemen, danger can hardly be avoided, and thus feelings of powerlessness emerge (ibid.).

By bringing evil into places associated with safety, the feeling of security diminishes further. By way of an explanation, not only does a hospital employ a nurse administering fatal doses of morphine ('Popping Cherry', S.1), or is a psychiatrist's office run by a man talking women into killing themselves ('Shrink Wrap', S.1), but a police station is home to Dexter, a serial killer. Furthermore, a body washes on shore of a well-frequented beach ('Love American Style', S.1), the Ice Truck Killer dumps his victims in public places ('Dexter', S.1), and an underhand of a major drug dealer is killed in prison by a presumably bribed or disguised guard ('Crocodile', S.1). Home is deprived of safety as well, as Kara, a police officer's wife, is shot in her own apartment ('Crocodile', S.1) and Dexter frequently demonstrates how quickly and easily locks are opened. Lastly, not even daytime is shown to be a shield from evil. Dexter and the Ice Truck Killer observe and/or contact their victims in broad daylight, pretending to be a drinking companion ('Crocodile', S.1), a man interested in a car restoration ('Love American Style', S.1), or a cable man ('Father Knows Best', S.1). A world is created in which every day, every hour and every place holds the threat of getting on the radar of a killer.

Im Dschungel ist es allemal gefährlich, aber inmitten eines großen Festes, auf einem überfüllten Platz in einer öffentlichen Vorstellung, inmitten der größten Versprechungen von Sicherheit, ist diese Gefahr umfassend und dringt in die Seele ein, weil sich kein Fluchtpunkt mehr denken läßt. (Seeßlen 39)

The following chapter will endeavour to show that *Dexter* creates a world of evil that expands onto the audience, in the sense that darkness is not only located outside, but within themselves, thus heightening fear of an omnipresent evil.

6. Rooting for a serial killer - uprooting audience's moral foundation

Schmid (142) points out that the Parents Television Council opposed the rebroadcasting of *Dexter* episodes on CBS in 2008 on the basis that the series manipulates viewers into siding with a serial killer, an assumption Santaularia (60) shares: 'In spite of his criminal activities and villainous nature, the character of Dexter intends to canvass the audience's approval.' Similarly, Schlütz et al.'s (371ff.) analysis of posts from blogs and discussion forums about *Dexter*, revealed viewers' deep affection for the serial killer; to mention one among several love declaring entries, '[t]here are moments when I find Dexter, the mass serial killer, absolutely adorable' (qtd. in Schlütz 37).

The following chapter will endeavour to explore the implications of rooting for a serial killer for the viewers' emotions. It will commence by applying two literary theories on the generation of empathy onto the series *Dexter*, aiming to show how an empathic response for the main character is triggered. In a next step, the paper will move from considering Dexter's personality and actions as the aspects responsible for people's allegiance to him, to examine how the series presentation of crime and criminals pulls viewers on Dexter's side. In a last step it will be investigated how, in scenes of torture, the series elicits empathy for Dexter's victims, creating fear by revealing viewers' moral frailty (Tallon 36) and inner darkness.

As we gain more and more mastery of the world, it can be easy to forget that, deep down, we still lack mastery of ourselves []. The origins of modern horror provide a vivid presentation of the inherent moral weakness and often present darkness in the human condition. (Tallon 38)

It should be noted that, as in the preceding chapters, no claims to absoluteness are being made, acknowledging the director's limits of control and audience's diversity.

6.1. Empathy with Dexter

Carroll (76), as well as Smith (*Engaging characters* 188), believe morality to be at the heart of empathy generation. More precisely, the goodness of *dramatis personae* are,

according to the authors, to a large part determined by their possession of virtues, such as strength, fortitude, ingenuity, bravery, competence, beauty, generosity (Carroll 79). And it is because the characters exhibit these virtuous - that we cast our moral allegiance with them (ibid.). Additionally, Carroll (79) and Smith (*Engaging characters* 190) observe that behaviour toward minor characters heavily influences moral evaluation. They arrive at the conclusion that, on a general level, sensitive treatment of physically and socially weaker characters (Smith *Engaging characters* 190) sheds positive light on *dramatis personae*, thus encouraging the building of affective dispositions (Zillmann *Suspense* 205) toward them.

Quite frequently in mass fictions, characters are designated as morally good in virtue of their treatment of supporting characters, especially ones who are poor, old, weak, lame, oppressed, unprotected women, children, helpless animals and so on. (Carroll 79)

Pointing to the fact that some actions are condemned in real life while accepted in fiction, Carroll as well as Smith assign very little influence to the actual belief system when viewers morally evaluate a character. Categorisations of good and evil rather depend, according to the authors, on the distinct ethical system (Carroll 79) each film creates by a different set of characters.

To become allied with a character, the spectator must evaluate the character as representing a morally desirable (or at least preferable) set of traits, in relation to other characters within the fiction. (Smith *Engaging characters* 188)

Conversely, Zillmann (*Suspense* 205ff.) believes that viewers' moral principles considerably influence judgments of fictional characters. However, as they are too diverse to build a theory of empathy on their sole influence, exempting films with clear-cut good and evil characters, he introduces the notion of subjective affective dispositions (Zillmann *Suspense* 205). More precisely, empathy is, according to the author, determined by the liking or disliking of a character, with morality having only a slight influence on the judgment.

In the following subchapters, Carroll's, Smith's and Zillmann's theories of empathy will be applied onto the series, in an attempt to identify distinct examples that render Dexter a moral and/or likeable character. Beyond the theories discussed, subchapter 6.1.5. will investigate how Dexter's traumatic past contributes to the formation of affective dispositions (Zillmann *Suspense* 205) toward him.

6.1.1. Dexter - a crutch for the weak

Examining Dexter's potential to evoke empathy from Carroll's and Smith's point of view, his possession of the majority of Carroll's listed virtues, in addition to his well-treatment of minor and weaker characters, arguably encourages the building of 'affective dispositions' (Zillmann *Suspense* 205) toward the serial killer. First of all, Dexter is strong, which is not only discernible from his body shape, but made explicit in scenes of attack or defence. Moreover, his body, that Green (*Continuum* 580) describes as '[n]eatly muscled, [and] carefully exercised,' concords to the western beauty ideal (Diedrichs 553), and thus makes him appealing. Dexter also shows great skills at his work as a blood spatter analyst and has a gift for sensing murderers, thus proving to be competent and ingenious. In addition, he regularly brings doughnuts to his working colleagues, coffee to his girlfriend Rita and ice cream to her children, which makes him appear generous toward main and minor characters. That Dexter has a lot of good qualities is also observed by Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 392), '[...] Dexter is strong, meticulous, skilful, and knowledgeable; he easily subdues his victims; he is a clever hunter of minds when it comes to tracking criminals and monsters [...]'.⁶

A prime example of the series efforts in portraying Dexter as friendly and forthcoming to minor characters is his quick chat with Sue and Dan, two officers who only appear once in the first season. The exchange of courtesies between them, does not further plot development, but puts Dexter, who offers them doughnuts, asks about their families and tells a joke that makes them burst into laughter, in a positive light. Some may argue that since his acts of kindness are self-serving, functioning to hide his identity as a serial killer, they do not contribute to empathy generation. Drawing on Smith's (*Engaging characters* 188) and Carroll's (79) assertion that characters are evaluated in relation to the other *dramatis personae* present, Dexter's behaviour, especially when opposed to Sergeant Doakes's irascibility, Rita's husband's abusiveness and other murderers's killings of the innocent, is likely to be considered noble. Moreover, it has to be noted, that Dexter's thoughts, which are audible to the audience, are never directed against the innocent.

Dexter's treatment of his sister, Debra, his girlfriend, Rita, and her children, Astor and Cody, further highlights his good nature, particularly since they can be categorised as weak in Carroll's (79) and Smith's (*Engaging characters* 190) understanding. More precisely, Rita suffers from the consequences of abuse by her now imprisoned husband Paul. She frequently relies on Dexter's help to solve difficulties

faced with as a single parent and wife of a drug addict. By way of an example, as an acquaintance of Paul takes away her car to clear alleged debts of her husband, Dexter not only supports her emotionally, but also offers help where needed.

DEXTER. Is everything OK?

RITA. Yes, I'm. Look, the thing is

DEXTER: You need me to pick up Cody after school?

RITA. No. Colleen's gonna take him to karate with Hudson.

DEXTER. What about Astor's piano?

RITA. Jen's got that covered. It's social services. There's a caseworker coming by the house this afternoon. I should be home by four but with the buses

DEXTER. I'll be there. Don't worry about a thing.

RITA. Thank you, Dexter. (óPopping Cherry,ô S.1: 23:24-50)

As the dialogue above illustrates, Dexter is eager to help Rita, shows concern for her well-being, guesses the kinds of tasks she wants him to fulfil and knows the children's schedule and whereabouts. When Rita asks him to receive social services at her house, he interrupts her in mid-sentence, brushing all her worries away by immediately agreeing to the favour asked.

A scene that underscores Dexter's good care of Rita in similar manner is his preparation of breakfast and packing of lunches for the children, as Rita, who the day before had been assaulted by Paul, gets up later than usual. Moreover, he hands Rita a pepper spray, soothes her worries about further attacks by Paul and expresses concern about her refusal to take time off from work (óSeeing Red,ô S.1).

It needs pointing out that no matter how bad his own situation, Dexter always answers Rita's calls, listens to her problems, consults and reassures her. In season one episode six for example, Dexter's identity as a murderer is threatened to be revealed, since the Ice Truck Killer recovered one of Dexter's recent victims from the sea - his dumping spot for corpses - leaving the body for the police to find. Despite being preoccupied with thoughts about his imprisonment, apprehensively watching Doakes and Batista investigating the murder case, Dexter picks up the phone when Rita calls.

Similarly, in season one episode ten Dexter puts her worries above his own. More precisely, after having a breakdown caused by the sight of a blood-soaked hotel room that reactivated memories of his traumatic past, he answers Rita's call, despite having problems holding himself together. There are numerous other situations in which Dexter goes through considerable length to support Rita, who notes that Dexter has the qualities of a 'perfect boyfriend' (óShrink Wrap,ô S1: 30:19).

Apart from taking care of Rita, Dexter frequently spends time with Astor and Cody, Rita's children, whose age and experience of domestic violence render them

weak. His fatherly skills are constantly brought into focus; he is shown goofing around with the children, singing them a song (‘Crocodile,’ S.1) and skilfully removing a splinter (‘Popping Cherry,’ S.1). Dexter also proves to be highly perceptive and protective of them. He sends the children away to tell Rita in private that her fear of Paul scares them (‘Seeing Red,’ S.1), he guesses Cody's hiding place when he disappears (‘Truth Be Told,’ S.1) and he gives Rita valuable parenting advice (‘Truth Be Told,’ S.1). As Bruhm (52) points out, ‘[i]f our hero has one unassailable virtue, it’s in his quality of the lion protecting his cubs.’

Dexter is a bastion of calm not only for Rita and her children, but also for Debra, his step-sister, whose weakness expresses itself in her self-doubt, sensitivity, and father-issues. He helps Debra to get transferred from vice to homicide by building up her confidence, ‘[j]ust state your case clear and easy. You’ll be the hero’ (‘Dexter,’ S.1: 34:47-49), sharing his ‘hunches’ (‘Dexter,’ S.1: 10:35) about the Ice Truck Killer with her and leaving her an anonymous tip so that she finds Toni Tucci, the Ice Truck Killer’s hostage (‘Let’s Give the Boy a Hand,’ S.1). In addition to being a perfect boyfriend, Debra confers on him the title of ‘perfect brother’ (‘Crocodile,’ S.1: 13:00).

Drawing back on Carroll’s and Smith’s assertion that films produce their own set of values through characters’ ‘relative desirability’ (Smith *Engaging characters* 194), the next subchapter will explore how the actions of other characters make Dexter appear the lesser of two evils.

6.1.2. Bad - worse - worst: Dexter, the ‘good’ killer

Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 393) claims that Rudy, Debra’s boyfriend who turns out to be the notorious Ice Truck Killer and Dexter’s biological brother, represents the personification of Dexter’s compulsion to murder. Consequently, it can be argued that he draws attention to the qualities in Dexter that exist beside his killing impulse. More precisely, while Brian rejoices in his identity as a killer, some part of Dexter rejects his own murderous urges, a point discussed in more detail in chapter 6.1.5.. Furthermore, while Dexter spares the lives of the good people, Brian’s victims are primarily innocent and from the socially weaker strata, that is to say, prostitutes, a former drug addict (‘Father Knows Best,’ S.1), and an elderly woman (‘Father knows Best,’ S.1).

It is not merely his brother that reflects well on Dexter, but also his victims who, like the Ice Truck Killer, do not refrain from killing the good. Already in the first episode of the first season, Dexter differentiates himself from serial killer Donovan.

DONOVAN. I couldn't help myself. I couldn't. I just... Please, you have to understand.

DEXTER. Trust me, I definitely understand. See, I can't help myself, either. But children - I could never do that, not like you. Never, ever kids.

DONOVAN. Why?

DEXTER. I have standards. (óDexter,ô S.1: 4:25-52)

The dialogue above shows that, despite acknowledging a shared impulse to murder, Dexter sets himself apart by referring to a set of standards that forbid him to kill children. In reference to Dexter's moral code, Riches and French (117) write, 'ó[s]o, although Dexter's *desire* to kill is very much animalistic, in *satisfying the desire*, Dexter is perfectly ratiocinative.' In other words, the code is what makes Dexter follow reason instead of pure instinct (ibid.) and draws a line between him and other murderers like the Ice Truck Killer, whom Riches and Frenches (124) observe to be 'out of control'.

Returning to a comparison between Rudy and Dexter, Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 393), drawing on Boichel, argues that Rudy, like the Joker in *Batman*, represents 'chaos and criminality', while Dexter, like Batman, stands for 'control and justice'. Similarly, Bruhm (51) notes that since Dexter's crimes seem not, like those of others, motivated purely by greed or excitement, he appears to 'answer to a Dark Knight, outside justice the better to see justice done'.

Paul, like Rudy, represents a 'distorted mirror image' (qtd. in Smith *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 393) of Dexter, casting a good light on the serial killer. More precisely, both are or were in a romantic relationship with Rita, and occupy a father role for Astor and Cody. However, while Paul quickly loses his temper ('Circle of Friends,' S.1: 22:45), threatens to harm his children, '[t]hey don't wanna see me? Those kids are gonna remember who the head of this fucking family is' ('Father Knows Best,' S.1: 50:16-20), and tries to force himself on Rita ('Father Knows Best,' S.1), Dexter, as described in the previous chapter, is pictured, a loving, caring and supportive boyfriend.

In addition to criminals, ordinary people also draw attention to Dexter's good side. More precisely, inappropriate comments of working colleagues make him appear more thoughtful, competent and caring. Forensic expert Masuka for example tells Dexter how attractive his sister looks, while standing in front of a dismembered corpse and officer Batista, in similar manner, comments on the beautifully formed arse of the dead woman ('Dexter,' S.1), remarks that Dexter ignores completely. Moreover, in season one episode four, officer Batista, while investigating the recent find of a victim's body part, asks Dexter's opinion on an anniversary gift for his wife Nina. It is the serial killer who calls attention to the inappropriateness of his question given their presence at

a crime scene, thus once again appearing more sensitive (‘Let’s Give the Boy a Hand,’ S.1). Furthermore, as Rita and her friend Yelina, enter the morgue to identify Yelina’s husband’s corpse, the receptionist comments on the stupidity of the dead man, ‘I don’t know what kind of idiot thinks an inner tube is gonna get him over 90 miles of open ocean. If you ask me, man it’s Darwin’s theory at work’ (‘Love American Style,’ S.1: 18:19-30). Dexter, on the other hand, who watches Yelina break down in tears at the sight of her dead husband, is for once thankful for his lack of emotions as not having to share her pain. In contrast to the receptionist, he is thus shown to notice and respect other people’s feelings.

A last example that pictures Dexter a better person than non-criminals is the case of young offender Jeremy, who is, besides Rudi and Dexter, the only murderer in season one presented with a past, and thus more complexly drawn. The audience learns that like Dexter’s, Jeremy’s urge to kill developed out of a traumatic experience. During his interrogation by the police, Jeremy is shown to be scared, distraught and close to tears. His similarity to young troubled Dexter, to whom viewers are introduced in the show’s flashbacks, and his open rejection of and visible suffering under the impulse to kill, portray Jeremy as a victim and thus as weak in the sense of being hurt, alone and helpless. Once again drawing on Carroll’s (79) and Smith’s (*Engaging characters* 190) claim that especially the treatment of weak characters influences moral evaluation, it can be argued that behaviour toward Jeremy significantly influences audience’s judgement of the characters in the series. While Dexter, recognising the boy’s torments as his own past struggles, offers him advice on how to deal with his inner emptiness, the police officer that leads the interrogation refers to Jeremy as ‘piece of shit’ (‘Circle of Friends,’ S.1: 43:13), kicks the chair in front of him and screams at the frightened Jeremy to stand up. Consequently, the scene contrasts Dexter, who realises that Jeremy’s murder is a cry for help, with a police officer who uses the interrogation of Jeremy for letting off steam, insulting and frightening the imprisoned.

As discernible from above, Dexter wishes to help Jeremy after recognising similarities between them. Resemblance is but one aspect that, according to Jens and Hogan, creates a feeling of closeness and potentially renders a person more likable. Drawing back on Zillmann’s (*Suspense* 205) claim that the liking of a character is a precondition of empathy, the following section will endeavour to shed light on how likeability can be influenced.

6.1.3. Beauty, weakness and sensible goals - the golden ticket to likeability

Junkerjürgen (39) points at three factors, identified by Tan, that determine whether a character is liked or not, that is to say, physical attractiveness, the display of minor weaknesses to not appear superhuman and the pursuit of reasonable goals. Weiten (518), Cantor and Hoffner (65) provide evidence supporting the claim that beauty influences character evaluation by drawing on different studies that show attractiveness and likeability to be correlated. As already mentioned in chapter 6.1.1., Dexter has a slim and muscular body that conforms to the western beauty ideal (Diedrichs 553). Moreover, season one frequently draws attention to Dexter's build, by showing him topless or wearing an exceptionally tight shirt during his work as a serial killer. Greco (pars. 3) compares his 'stalking shirt' to a 'superhero costume' arguing that it deliberately draws attention to his physique, making him appear 'powerful and strong and quick and agile' (ibid.). Furthermore, Green (*Continuum* 580) notes that Dexter's effect on women, like Rita, already proves his appeal.

The second of Tan's criteria, which is that of having some weakness besides overall strength, is fulfilled as well. More precisely, although Dexter easily overpowers, tortures, kills, and disposes of a number of ruthless killers, an ability that in Green's understanding 'renders him almost superhuman' (Green *Continuum* 580), he suffers from an identity crisis, is caught up by his traumatic past and devoured by a craving for integration, acceptance and authenticity, 'I like to pretend I'm alone. Completely alone, maybe post-apocalypse or plague, whatever. No one left to act normal for, no need to hide who I really am. It would be freeing' ('Love American Style,' S.1: 3:08-28). These life challenges cloud his senses (he does not suspect Rudy of murder) interrupt his focus during his work as a serial killer (thoughts of losing Rita obtrude during stalking and killing Castillo ('Love American Style,' S.1)), influence his work as blood spatter analyst (feeling like a fraud, a glass tube slips out of his hands and falls on the ground ('Let's Give the Boy a Hand,' S.1)) and make his attempts to hide behind a mask of benevolence more difficult (he screams at Doakes after collapsing in the Marina hotel room ('Seeing Red,' S.1)). These points will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7.4..

Tan's third criterion, the pursuit of reasonable goals, is also met. Pointing at the existence of mirror neurons responsible for the mimicry of other people's emotion and/or actions, a theory more thoroughly discussed in chapter 6.3.1., Lebreton et al. (7146) argues that people's motivation might also be mirrored, '[w]e suggest that,

beyond automatic elicitation of action representations, MNS [mirror neuron system] activation may affect the observer's own motivational system, increasing the desirability of objects pursued by others (ibid.). Whether Lebreton's theory of 'goal contagion' (7146) can be transferred onto more abstract goals, like Dexter's planning to commit murder, is open to discussion. However, considering that his goals are frequently emphasised through close ups of his excited face ('Dexter,' S.1: 27:57), his setting up of a kill room, ('Crocodile,' S.1: 32:43) or his stalking of a murderer ('Dexter,' S.1: 18:38), it should be kept in mind that they potentially transfer onto the audience or strengthen the already existing desire of a character's death. More precisely, apart from potentially underlying biological processes, the fictional world in Dexter, that is to say, the frequent occurrence of crime, the inability of the state to contain danger, as well as the sheer evil of the killers, render Dexter's murders acts of necessity to protect the innocent, a point on which chapter 6.2. will elaborate. Therefore, issues of justice and safety alone result in a shared craving for the perpetrators' deaths.

Apart from common thoughts of murder, finding the Ice Truck Killer, Dexter's main venture, is likely to be a mutual goal as well. Naturally, with the Ice Truck Killer posing a threat to the innocent and later more explicitly so to Dexter and Debra, the desire to reveal the serial killer's identity is reasonable for reasons of safety and the protection of liked characters. Besides issues of safety, camera techniques that immerse the audience in the quest for the popular serial killer presumably strengthen viewers' participation in the search for the murderer.



Fig. 6b: Immersion in the quest ('Crocodile,' S.1: 19:21)



Fig. 6a: Immersion in the quest ('Seeing Red,' S.1: 05:07)

To illustrate this point, Figure 6a pictures the moment Debra, Dexter and Batista find the cut-off fingertips of one of the Ice Truck Killer's victims. By positioning the camera opposite and at eye level with the police, the illusion is created that the audience is part of the investigation. Likewise, in Figure 6b, which shows the police gathering to examine a jar of blood that was sent anonymously to their station, the camera is positioned opposite the crowd, this time, however, filming upwards. As the audience

appears small in comparison to the other people present, while the object of interest seems further away, an impression intensified by Dexter holding the jar aloft, a longing to see what the others so thoroughly eye might emerge. Sharing the same interests, goals and desires, does not only explain Dexter's goals and actions, but make audience and serial killer more alike, a factor that the subsequent subchapter will show to influence the formation of a positive attitude toward Dexter.

6.1.4. Dexter and the audience - in intimate togetherness

Jens (138) observes that films can influence disposition formation by manipulating viewers' perception of distance and closeness to fictional characters. By way of an example, the audience is likely to feel close to dramatis personae who are similar to them in appearance, nature, attitude or interest, who face common problems, experience familiar situations, or fulfil the same social roles such as family or working man/woman (Jens 149f.). Moreover, thoughts and actions of characters who resemble friends, colleagues and/or family members, are better understood (Jens 149); having a clear idea of someone's personality is often a precondition for feelings of closeness to develop (Jens 146).

One of the reasons for being able to influence the perceived closeness to a character lies, according to the author, in the films' potential to activate audience's memories (Jens 150). More precisely, past feelings are projected onto characters, influencing viewers' evaluation of them (ibid.). Hogan (161), whose theory of primed memories was discussed in chapter 2., concurs with Jens by arguing that elements in films may lead to a re-experience of past emotions, rendering a character more likeable or detestable in the process.

There is a general consensus that if a character mirrors features of one's own self, chances of liking him or her are high (Jens 150). Reisch (xii), for example, argues that viewers' positive response to Dexter is based on their resemblance to him. He observes that Dexter's 'stressed out workdays and fast-approaching deadlines' (ibid.) are part of ordinary life and parallels Harry's guidance of Dexter to the help offered by real-life parental figures. Similarly, Green (*Critical Studies in Television* 27) observes that 'Dexter is portrayed as one of us' and Fairweather (15) notes that the only thing that differentiates viewers from the serial killer, is his free time activity of murder.

But Dexter, aside from killing lots of killers [] is a pretty normal guy. He drinks beer, has a job, gets laid; the stuff of life, the kind of life typical of members of our species in the twenty-first century. (Ibid.)

Conversely, Reisch (xii), does not perceive Dexter's darkness as a distinguishing factor since, according to him, everyone possesses what Dexter calls his 'dark passenger' ('Truth Be Told,' S.1: 3:58-59). In other words, while Dexter kills murderers, the audience breaks and bends other societal rules.

The following section will continue to identify parallels between Dexter and the audience's life, to provide an explanation for how viewers come to like the serial killer. As films generally aim at reaching a broad audience, I proceed from the assumption that the series *Dexter* attempts to depict situations that evoke memories in a large number of people. The following chapter thus will look at the portrayal of themes that are commonly experienced.

Doakes's constant degrading of Dexter by calling him names like 'psycho' ('Dexter,' S.1: 16:35), 'weirdo' ('Dexter,' S.1: 16:59), 'creep job' ('Father Knows Best,' S.1: 6:39), 'Sparky' ('Return to Sender,' S.1: 9:47), by refusing to acknowledge his work, 'what fucking good are you?' ('Popping Cherry,' S.1: 16:23-24) and by attacking him physically ('Born Free,' S.1), is bound to revive memories of similar humiliation, provocation and/or assaults that undoubtedly everybody experiences sometime in life. In reference to chapter 6.1.2., Doakes's bullying not only primes audience's memories, but also provides a point of comparison for the evaluation of characters, in other words, highlighting Dexter's respectful treatment of his colleagues.

Another theme of the first season that touches on real-life experiences is Dexter's search for identity, and his de-idealisation of Harry. Drawing on developmental psychology, the formation of an identity (Keller 192) as well as the detachment from caregivers, are considered steps in adolescence development (Keller 387). Furthermore, psychoanalytic theories state that parental attitudes form the basis of the human super-ego, influencing the ego's decision making (Schuster&Springer-Kremser 44). Dexter, who lives in accordance with his father's principles, 'the code of Harry, my foster father, is satisfied. And so am I' ('Dexter,' S.1: 8:17-19) represents a prime example of how parental beliefs can affect behaviour. Moreover, in the course of the series, Dexter is shown to gradually detach himself from his foster father's beliefs, getting closer to finding his true self, a development on which the following section will elaborate.

Trying to figure out whether his choices are truly his own, 'am I going because it's what he [the Ice Truck Killer] wants or because that's what Harry would want? And what do I want?' ('Let's Give the Boy a Hand,' S.1: 46:16-24), or whether he is

nothing but the living, breathing idea of Harry, ó[b]ut sometimes, I'm not sure where Harry's vision of me ends and the real me startsô (óLet's Give the Boy a Hand,ô S.1: 36:13-28), Dexter ventures on a journey of self-discovery. His idealisation of Harry is most obvious when receiving the news about his biological father's passing. More precisely, since Harry told young Dexter that his father died in an accident, he is convinced that the information about his father's recent death is incorrect, although it was obtained from a legal document.

DEXTER. I know the truth, because Harry always told me the truth. He had to. He was teaching me principles, a code. He knew what I would become without it. So Joseph Driscoll of Dade City must have been mistaken. (óFather Knows Best,ô S.1: 9:03-14)

Dexter's train of thoughts illustrates that his abiding by the code is closely linked to his trust in Harry. As a result, the sequence hints at the danger that if their bond were to loosen, he might discard what in reality are the principles of his father. The utterance ó[h]e knew what I would become without itô, stirs imagination in the direction of a no longer controllable Dexter. Chapter 7.4.2. will offer a more in depth analysis of how Dexter's reflections on breaching his code generates thrill.

Returning to the discussion on Dexter's de-idealisation of his father, season one episode nine shows how the results of a DNA test, which prove Dexter's blood relationship to Joe Driscoll, force Dexter to acknowledge Harry's dishonesty and consequently shake the foundations of his life.

DEXTER. I had a fatherë someone other than Harry who called me son. The thought never even occurred to me. Harry was all I needed. It was Harry who always had the answers. He knew who was good, bad, safeë and dangerous. I built my life on Harry's code. I lived by it. But Harry lied. Why would he do that? What else don't I know? My concrete foundation is turning to shifting sand. Maybe Rudy was right. You never can truly know anyone. (óFather Knows Best,ô S.1: 51:48-52:29)

Dexter's thoughts provide additional evidence that he idealised Harry, as he acknowledges the fact that Harry was óall he neededô and that his perception of life is based on his worldview. The process of de-idealisation is reflected in his questioning the truth of all of Harry's assertions, ó[w]hat else don't I know.ô To cut a long story short, as Dexter's struggles mirror familiar processes of idealisation and de-idealisation inherent in human development, the audience is likely to feel close to him.

A further theme that pervades the whole of the first season and reflects real-life experiences is Dexter's craving to belong.

DEXTER. But there was something Harry didn't teach me, something he didn't know, couldn't possibly know. The wilful taking of life represents the ultimate disconnect from humanity. It leaves you an outsider, forever looking in, searching for company to keep. (óPopping Cherry,ô S.1: 46:49-47:04)

Zag (35) argues that integration and acceptance are evolutionary-based needs. As ózoon politikonô (Garmaier 98) human beings depend on membership, approval, protection, procreation and family life (Zagö 35). Similarly, Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 395) notes that craving óconnectionô is a universally shared phenomenon. Given the importance of integration for human beings, Zag (35) concludes that the more often a film pictures people's desire for acceptance, the more intense viewers respond, ó[u]nd je mehr die Geschichte eines Films diese Sehnsucht der Menschen nach Kontakt thematisiert, desto intensiver wird die Reaktion beim Publikum ausfallenô (ibid.).

Looking at Showtime's *Dexter*'s first season, some of the show's flashbacks into Dexter's past show that as an adolescent, the serial killer had already suffered from being different. In season one episode five for example, young Dexter, arriving home late after a school dance, asks Harry whether he will ever be able to truly feel. Moreover, an intertextual reference to Pinocchio, that is to say, Dexter's referral to himself as óthe little wooden boyô (óPopping Cherry,ô S.1: 57:57), underscores his desire to belong, drawing a parallel to a puppet who craved to be like everyone else, namely a real human being. Recognising Dexter's longing for acceptance as their own; viewers arguably understand and like the serial killer.

As the previous descriptions showed, Dexter and the audience have much in common, however, the serial killer fears he lacks the most essential human characteristic, that is to say, emotions, óI don't have feelings about anything [ë]ô (óDexter,ô S.1: 8:58-59). Snow (71) argues that a certain degree of similarity between character and audience is a precondition for empathy to occur. As emotions are a basic human characteristic, she concludes, ó[i]f we do not believe that the other experiences emotion, then, by definition, we cannot empathizeô (ibid.). Dexter's inadequate emotional life thus potentially impedes the formation of óaffective dispositionsô (Zillmann *Suspense* 205) toward the character, a possible effect that is, to my mind, countered by the serial killer's relationship to Debra. More precisely, much like pairing James Bond with likeable but inferior women to make him more human and thus more suitable for thrill evocation (Späth 172), Debra represents the antithesis to Dexter; ó[m]y sister puts up a front so the world won't see how vulnerable she is. Me, I put up a front so the world won't see how vulnerable I am notô (óCrocodile,ô S.1: 40:11-20). She

thus presumably compensates for his lack of emotion, making empathy more likely to occur.

It should be noted that Dexter's claim of being unable to truly feel is drawn into question in the course of season one as incongruous with some of his thoughts and actions. In season one episode two for example Dexter realises how much he likes spending time with Rita, which fuels his fear of losing her.

DEXTER. Lately, the thing that surprises me most about Rita is how much I like being with her. But whenever that happens with a woman, when I feel comfortable with her, it all goes wrong. (óCrocodile,ô S.1: 17:16-26)

His worries grow so big that he is constantly on edge in Rita's presence, fearing that she might discover his emotional shortcomings, ó[s]he wants something from me. Ever since the blow job, she assumes we've taken it to the next level. She doesn't know yet - I don't have a next levelô (óLove American Style,ô S.1: 8:06-14). Furthermore, thoughts about Rita persist despite being busy stalking and murdering Castillo. More precisely, while exploring the boat of the perpetrator, he ponders whether Rita might enjoy a fishing trip, and shortly before murdering Castillo and his wife, he demands to know how they have maintained a happy relationship.

At the end of season one episode six, the genuineness of his feelings is most obvious. After almost getting caught he realises that life is fleeting, deciding to ómake the mostô (óReturn to Sender,ô S.1: 49:17) of the days to come. He then picks up Cody, spins him around and laughs wholeheartedly, thus identifying his life with Rita and the children as valuable. The final proof of his love for Rita is given by Meridian, the psychiatrist whom Dexter visits to solve the mystery surrounding the deaths of three of the doctor's patients. Meridian, who is presented as an expert on his field, ó[t]his guy is goodô (óShrink Wrap,ô S.1: 11:32-33), confirms that Dexter's feelings are genuine, stating, ó[y]our girlfriend really means something to you. I know thatô (óShrink Wrap,ô S.1: 35:19-22).

Dexter's feelings for Debra can be seen most plainly in season one episode twelve, which focuses on her abduction by the Ice Truck Killer. Meeting Rudy at a house that turns out to be his childhood home, Dexter recovers a lost memory, recognising Rudy, alias Brian, as his biological brother. However, instead of savouring the moment of family reunion, he desperately runs from room to room in search of his step-sister. Realising himself to be óveryë fond of herô (óBorn Free,ô S.1: 36:05-08), he refuses to fulfil Rudy's wish of killing Debra, a final proof of his affection for her.

Apart from the series' attempts to make Dexter similar to everyman, techniques are employed that elicit a spatial as well as temporal feeling of closeness to the character (Jens 143). Jens (146f.) observes that the more frequently spectators bear witness to a character's inner and outer life, the better they will understand his or her actions and the closer they will feel physically to him or her. Moreover, access to private moments of the character's life are said to deepen feelings of intimacy and complicity (Jens 144). Following the *mere exposure hypothesis* (Jens 143), familiarity with a character alone contributes to the building of sympathetic attachments (*ibid.*). Bordwell and Thompson (*qtd. in* Droese 95) go so far as to claim that "[p]lunging into the depths of mental subjectivity" encourages identification with the character while allowing prediction of his or her actions.

Temporal proximity, on the other hand, is achieved by inviting the audience to share the character's experience, potentially leading to an activation of mirror neurons, that are, as mentioned in chapter 6.1.3., responsible for the imitation of a character's actions and/or emotions (Jens 144). Slow-motion, quick-cutting, volume-alternation and point-of-view shooting (POV) are commonly employed audio-visual techniques that enable the audience to experience characters' actions and/or emotions alongside them. Consequently, the *dramatis personae* are better understood and rendered more likeable (Jens 145-154).

Investigating Showtime's *Dexter*'s first season in the light of the above mentioned theoretical framework, Dexter, who is internally focalized (Sänger 42), since viewers hear his thoughts in voice over and experience his memory flashbacks and dreams with him, is likely to elicit a feeling of closeness. As Howard (xv) notes, "[h]e literally speaks to us, a fact that creates a degree of familiarity between Dexter and the viewer." As stated above, familiarity, which is, following the mere exposure effect, already created by Dexter being the main character and thus frequently shown, encourages a positive response toward him. Schlük et al. (368) conclude that the deep insight gained into Dexter's mind facilitates empathy as well as identification with him.

In some scenes Dexter's and the audience's perspectives are completely equal, for example when Dexter leaves the Marina hotel room after collapsing in blood (*"Seeing Red,"* S.1), when he is called to his own crime scene (*"Return to Sender,"* S.1), or when he frantically searches for his sister, Debra (*"Born Free,"* S.1). As relevant for the creation of *"Angst-thrill"* (Späth 156), these scenes will be more closely analysed in chapter 7. For the time being it suffices to note that, as Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film*

and Video 396) observes, '[t]he camera puts us into [Dexter's] world, solidifying our identification.'

A last technique discussed in the present subchapter, which aims at establishing a close relationship between Dexter and the viewers, is the employment of what Jens calls 'parasoziale Interaktion' (Jens 141). More precisely, audience and characters engage in a seemingly real interaction, an illusion created for example by a character's look at the camera (ibid.). In *Dexter*, the opening sequence ends with the serial killer winking at the audience before walking along an exterior corridor. Consequently, he acknowledges the audience's presence, immerses them into the film world and creates an intimate atmosphere. As Brown (13) argues,

[i]t is clear that having a character address the audience directly is a very particular gesture towards intimacy with that audience. [...] This intimacy can be threatening [...] or it can, more commonly, be performed for the sake of encouraging our sympathy or some other kind of special connection with a character.

It should be noted that the act of winking can be interpreted as symbolising the audience's and Dexter's shared secret of his life as a serial killer. While the other characters remain in the dark, Dexter makes the audience his 'silent collaborators', as Green (*Critical Studies in Television* 26) puts it. Such degree of complicity is likely to elicit a feeling of closeness to the character.

The next subchapter will move away from considering distinct elements that create proximity between Dexter and the audience, investigating the effect of the serial killer's traumatic past on the generation of empathy. I proceed from the assumption that Dexter can hardly be blamed for killing for multiple reasons, including Dexter's own perception of himself as split-off from his darkness, the show's portrayal of his urge to kill as direct result of his childhood traumatisation, and his identification of his stepfather as the driving force behind his development into a murderer. As Michaud (37) writes,

[w]e don't damn him for being a serial killer. We feel that is something he cannot help; it makes no sense to blame him for being a serial killer than it makes sense to blame a cheetah for having a need to eat meat.

6.1.5. Dexter - the wooden boy

In reference to Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*, Freeland (368) asserts that if a character has some good qualities and if his evil half is explained as a result of having had to face difficult circumstances, empathy is likely to occur. Similarly, Fahy (60), in an analysis of Capote's *In Cold Blood*, claims that abuse and neglect, among other childhood

sufferings, can evoke sympathy for a killer. Results from Schlütz (375ff.) et al.'s study of entries on blogs and discussion forums about *Dexter* confirm the assumption that a traumatic childhood can absolve perpetrators of blame. More precisely, it was found that viewers tend to justify Dexter's morally ambiguous actions by referring to the fact that he witnessed his mother being murdered. The following section will delineate how the portrayal of Dexter's darkness tempts viewers to overlook his murderous impulse.

In the first episode of the first season Dexter introduces his darkness as a split-off part of his self that takes influence irrespective of his own desires. While driving to his first victim, he thinks,

DEXTER. Tonight's the night. And it's going to happen again and again - has to happen [ë]. Miami is a great town. I love the Cuban food. Pork sandwiches - my favourite. But I'm hungry for something different now.
(óDexter,ô S.1: 00:38-1:11)

By using the modal verb *has to* in reference to what later turns out to be murder, Dexter emphasises the compulsion behind his urge to kill and thus underlines his passive role in the decision to murder other killers. Moreover, the usage of the word *hunger* puts his urge on the same level as an instinct, which further highlights his powerlessness against the craving.

After the introductory murder of Donovan, Dexter distances himself from his actions by referring to an external force responsible for his development into a killer, *only* name is Dexter, Dexter Morgan. I don't know what made me the way I am, but whatever it was left a hollow place inside (óDexter,ô S.1: 6:05-12). In season one episode two, Dexter expresses disliking of the control the urge exerts over him, which creates the impression that he suffers from an addiction, *soon enough, I'll have to go back to doing what I do* so I make a point of enjoying days like this when I have them (óCrocodile,ô S.1: 5:12-19). Similarly, Steele (178) understands Dexter's killing as compulsory, stating, *he kills because of his addiction to the thrill of killing*.

In season one episode eleven Dexter personifies his urge to kill by calling it *the dark passenger*, noting that it took possession of him the day he witnessed his mother's death, *I was there. I saw my mother's death. A buried memory, forgotten all these years. It climbed inside me that day. And it's been with me ever since - my dark passenger* (óTruth Be Told,ô S.1: 3:43-59). Kort-Butler (256f.) argues that by labelling perpetrators as evil or insane, they are classified as different. Dexter, who gives a name to his urge to kill, thus draws a clear line between himself and his dark other living inside of him. With relation to empathy, it can be argued that by distancing himself

from his darkness, Dexter invites the audience to side with a man haunted by evil, instead of with a man being evil. As Lasswell (pars. 15) argues,

THE WORLD of Dexter is not so much a moral vacuum as a moral swamp, one in which the main character's taste for slaughter is presented as, at worst, a character flaw in an otherwise good man.

In season one episode eleven Dexter once again emphasises his own disliking of the darkness that inhabits him, continuing to personify his urge by using words like 'birth' and 'diving' which normally refer to animate beings, to talk about his killing impulse: 'I don't like this place. Something nameless was born here' 'Something that lives in the deepest, darkest hole of the thing called Dexter' (óBorn Free,ô S.1: 14:29-38). It is interesting to note that while breathing life into the urge, he objectifies himself, thus underlining his passivity in the decision to kill.

The show's inclusions of flashbacks of Dexter's childhood also contribute to the depiction of Dexter as a victim of his killing impulse.

HARRY. You still don't remember anything from before, you know, before we took you in?

DEXTER. No. Is that why I have these urges?

HARRY. What happened changed something inside you. It got into you too early. I'm afraid your urge to kill is only gonna get stronger.

DEXTER. You're saying I'll be like this forever.

[ë]

HARRY. [ë] We can't stop this. But maybe we can do something to channel it. Use it for good.

DEXTER. How could it ever be good?

HARRY. Son, there are people out there who do really bad things. Terrible people. And the police can't catch them all. Do you understand what I'm saying?

DEXTER. You're saying they deserve it.

HARRY. That's right. (óDexter,ô S.1: 28:42-29:58)

As discernible from the dialogue above, Dexter is portrayed as suffering under his urges, hoping for a life without their influence, 'ó[y]ou're saying I'll be like this forever?'ô While Harry believes that Dexter's killing impulse can be turned into something good, Dexter questions his assumption, 'óhow could it ever be good?'ô, which underlines his rejection of the darkness that inhabits him. Moreover, the dialogue identifies Harry as the driving force of Dexter's development into a vigilante killer. In the course of the first season it is gradually revealed that Dexter, the code abiding serial killer, is the result of Harry not being able to cope with the injustice he was confronted with during his work as police officer. Green goes as far as to claim that, [l]ike Victor

Frankenstein's monster (Shelley 1980), Dexter is his father's creature [ë]ô (Green *Continuum* 580).

Aside from Harry's influence, his mother's death is portrayed as the origin of his darkness. As Meridian, Dexter's psychiatrist notes, an experience of utter powerlessness caused Dexter's craving for control and his inability to feel (óShrink Wrap,ô S.1). Dexter's state of mind is thus presented as a natural reaction to unfortunate circumstances. Meridian's analysis of Dexter explains not only his development into a killer, but indirectly gives reasons for his killing ritual. More precisely, strapping his victims down on a table to restrict their movements represents the ultimate execution of power and control. Sentences like ó[y]our're mine now, so do exactly as I sayô (óDexter,ô S.1: 2:09-12), or ó[y]ou have to listen. And do what I sayô (óDexter,ô S.1: 3:15-19), which he utters during his abduction of Donovan, provide further proof that the killing ritual is a compensation for his past experience of control loss. As Dexter's dark side is fully explained, it can be incorporated in the audience's world view. Consequently, Dexter as a whole cannot be othered, but needs to be acknowledged as an ordinary human being, who suffered a stroke of fate. The next subchapter will investigate which aspects, besides Dexter's personality, actions and traumatic past, encourage viewers to approve of his killings.

6.2. Invitation to kill - encouraging the audience to crave murder

óKilling must serve a purpose. Otherwise it's just plain murderô (óPopping Cherry,ô S.1: 16:22-30), says Harry in one of Dexter's memory flashbacks. Like Harry, Fuchs (20) differentiates between murder that finds some degree of understanding, and murder that seems inexplicable, as devoid of reason, ó[e]inige Bluttaten kann die Gesellschaft niemals verdauen, andere schockieren sie zwar bis in ihr Innerstes, aber sie fügen sich doch noch irgendwie ins gesellschaftliche Bild [ë]ô (ibid.). By targeting only murderers, Dexter kills under the pretext of justice and safety, which makes his crimes appear less reprehensible.

Lerner, Miller and Holmes (qtd. in Lerner 30) argue that people's craving for justice is based on their need to feel safe in an actual unsafe world. Similarly, Duncum (32) observes that the approval of óretaliatory violenceô (ibid.) is based on the fear of becoming a victim, ó[p]aradoxically, the desire to live in a safe world, especially when feeling threatened, influences the acceptance of violence to secure safetyô (ibid.). At the heart of people's attraction to violence, so Goldstein (185f.), lies the wish to control the

world's dangers. Altheide (136f.) concurs by pointing to the fact that particularly when crime seems random, in the sense of not being bound to a time or place and thus being unpredictable and unavoidable, people accept various methods of crime prevention. The rise in brutality of the investigation methods of terrorists in America after the September 11th attacks (Miller&Goldman&Tate pars. 1) provides evidence for the claim that with rising fear of becoming a victim, violent means of protection find wider acceptance. Similarly, Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 390) identifies abuses at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo as a reaction to terrorist attacks, believing the emergence of Dexter the heroic serial killer who rids the world of evil, a response to 9/11. Schmid (133) concurs by noting that post 9/11 serial killer depictions no longer feature the evil 'Other', but 'familiarize' the bad. As Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 391) argues, in reference to Dexter's punishment of the bad, '[o]ur darkest, most brutal, and vengeful desires are fulfilled; this is a world where an eye for eye is literalized and right, even righteous and pleasurable.'

The following subchapters will demonstrate how a fictional world is constructed in *Dexter* where a high number of the most evil murderers preying on the most innocent victims are set against a poor criminal defence system; this renders Dexter the last potential straw the audience can grasp on to to restore justice and control the chaos that is outlaid before them. As Greene (*Continuum* 582) argues,

Dexter rests partly on a disturbing presumption: that the social order is in disarray, beyond the scope of police enforcement, and that this tear in the fabric of the democratic rule of law therefore permits restitution to be achieved by other means.

6.2.1. Failing to provide safety - power, law and ignorance in *Dexter*

With only 20% of the murder cases being solved ('Dexter,' S.1) the government of Miami is shown incapable of containing criminal threats. Chambers, for example, who is charged with a hit-and-run felony, reported his car stolen before running over Alexander Pryce, which, in addition to his successful pretence of emotional devastation, allows him to walk out of court a free man. Moreover, while Dexter discovers that Chambers stood trial for the same felony in other cities, always finding a loophole in the legal system ('Crocodile,' S.1), the court of Miami does not look as deeply into the matter, acquitting the accused, unaware of the pile of evidence against him. As Dexter listens to the verdict he draws attention to the fact that while Chambers may be able to 'beat the system', he cannot deceive someone who works outside the law, 'Matt

Chambers may have found a way to beat the system – but so have I (óDexter,ô S.1: 25:42-47).

As much as law permits injustice, it also restricts police's opportunity for action. Castillo, for example is under suspicion of smuggling Cubans to Miami for money and killing them if their families cannot pay a surprise release fee (óLove American Style,ô S.1: 10:22-23). As the police do not have enough evidence to get a search warrant, Castillo cannot be touched. The conversation between Dexter and a police officer from the immigration department, after the disappearance of Rita's friend's husband, emphasises that although in full knowledge of the happenings, their hands are tied by law.

DEXTER. So, have you heard of any other Cuban immigrants disappearing?

POLICE. A few. The poor bastards. They spend their life savings, get stuffed into a fishhold, puke the whole 90 miles to Miami. Then they get here, thinking, 'I'm an American. I'm free.' Except the damn coyote – he won't let him go till his family comes up with a surprise release fee. If they can't pay –

DEXTER. They disappear.

[ë]

DEXTER. You have any suspects?

POLICE. Sure, four or five. Mostly Cubans themselves, but not enough evidence for a conviction or even a warrant. [ë]. Look, buddy – I know you want to help out your maid, but there ain't a hell of a lot you can do.

DEXTER. You'd be surprised. (óLove American Style,ô S.1: 10:01-11:06)

Looking at the last two sentences it becomes obvious that, like in the previously discussed example, viewers are reminded that Dexter is not restricted by law. Consequently he is the last hope that justice will be restored, a fact to which Dexter himself, shortly after breaking into Castillo's work place, draws attention, 'ó[t]they never got enough evidence for a search warrant, but I don't need permission to keep an eye on this guy' (óLove American Style,ô S.1: 11:38-43). In the case of Jaworski, a murdering valet, Dexter likewise emphasises his superiority over the police in containing evil, as he is not restricted by law, 'ó[t]he cops arrested my favourite valet, but his lawyer got him off on a faulty search warrant. It's a good thing I don't bother with them' (óDexter,ô S.1: 19:02-13).

Another reason given by the show for the high number of unsolved murder cases is people's lack of instinct in recognising murderers and/or suspicious activities. By way of an example, officer Batista believes the firearm related deaths of three women to be self-inflicted, while Dexter finds their mutual psychiatrist to be the cause of their demise (óShrink Wrap,ô S.1). Moreover, the coroner regards the murder committed by Jeremy as an act of impulse, while Dexter knows it to mark the beginning of a new

serial killer (‘Popping Cherry,’ S.1). The prime example of people’s blindness, however, is the fact that serial killer Dexter is able to live undetected among the police.

DEXTER. The only real question I have is why, in a building full of cops, all supposedly with a keen insight into the human soul, is Doakes the only one who gets the creeps from me? (‘Dexter,’ S.1: 17:08-19)

The show goes one step further in portraying a crime-ridden world in the hands of incapable police officers. More precisely, it reveals promises of safety and/or actions taken against criminals, to be based on the leading police officers’ wish to uphold the public image of control and gain a good reputation. In other words, lieutenant LaGuerta and Captain Matthews, who are the heads of the Miami Metro Homicide department, are shown to be blinded by their lust for power, approval and popularity, which is best illustrated by their handling of the Toni Tucci and Neil Perry case. Eager to reap the fame of catching the Ice Truck Killer, lieutenant LaGuerta makes rash decisions, releasing a manhunt on Toni Tucci that requires all of the police resources (‘Popping Cherry,’ S.1), despite evidence casting serious doubts on him being the notorious murderer. Although Captain Matthews knows about the mishandling of the case, he gives lieutenant LaGuerta free rein to proceed, wanting to appear in control of the situation.

LAGUERTA. [ë]Are you telling me to call off my manhunt? [ë]

MATTHEWS. No, no. You go ahead and hold your press conference, Maria. People of this city need to know we’re doing something about this mess. (‘Popping Cherry,’ S.1: 34:51-15:03)

The subsequent press conference seen on television starkly resembles a real-life news report. The audience watch lieutenant LaGuerta presenting her decision of a manhunt as reasonable and necessary to catch the Ice Truck Killer, all the while knowing that it is based on loose evidence. Consequently, the series raises the question of whether promises of safety made in real-life media are to be trusted, or whether the world is deeper in chaos than police may admit.

The Neil Perry case stirs an even greater fear of police’s incapability of containing the threat of murderers. By way of an explanation, Captain Matthews, who, as lieutenant LaGuerta, believes Perry to be the Ice Truck Killer, steals her fame by presenting the imprisonment as his achievement. Driven by revenge rather than concern for the safety of the citizens of Miami, LaGuerta goes through great lengths to expose Perry as fraud, persuading him to recant his statement. Despite evidence pointing at Perry being a wannabe killer, Captain Matthews refuses to admit his mistake, upholding

the public view that the Ice Truck Killer is captured, closing the case and, accordingly, further investigations.

The failure of the police to imprison criminals and thus avert danger led Harry to the decision to make Dexter a weapon against other murderers. That Harry, a police officer, saw it necessary to work outside the law to provide safety contributes to the series' presentation of a crime-ridden world.

YOUNG DEXTER. Bad guy kills a cop and nothing happens? That's not fair

HARRY. Life's not fair, Dexter.

YOUNG DEXTER. Can't anyone do anything? Can't you do something?

HARRY. No, not now.

YOUNG DEXTER. So, what then? The world just keeps spinning out of control?

HARRY. No. The world can always be set right again.

(*Crocodile*, S.1: 46.16-46)

Here, Dexter's choice of words is of great significance: '[t]he world just keeps spinning out of control?' which draws the picture of an unpredictable danger. As mentioned in chapter 6.2., being faced with a threat that seems beyond control heightens acceptance of violent means to restore order (Altheide 136f.).

According to Duncum (33) the portrayal of justice in *Dexter* is fairly stark, black and white terms also contribute to the approval of retributive violence. The following subchapter will demonstrate that, besides the high criminality and the state's failure to contain evil, a simplified representation of the good and the bad strengthens the audience's wish for the criminals to fall into the hands of Dexter.

6.2.2. Serving justice - a world of clear-cut good and evil

While Dexter is a killer who evokes ambiguous feelings, a point that will be discussed in chapter 6.3., the criminals he brings to justice are presented as downright evil and eager to kill the innocent, good and happy. As Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 494) observes, *Dexter* 'promotes a sense of righteous justice insofar as Dexter kills the most evil, those who kill the most blameless and good.' The introduction of Jaworski, a serial killer, represents a prime example of the show's clear-cut depiction of good and evil.

DEXTER. This guy, Jamie Jaworski. Six months ago, I think he fell in love with a pretty brunette, Mrs. Jane Saunders - a sweet mother of two married to a successful banker - all living a pleasant life until she, unfortunately, disappeared, leaving the kids emotionally devastated forever.

(*Dexter*, S.1: 18:39-57)

It is interesting to note that Dexter uses the adjective 'sweet' in his description of Jane Saunders and portrays her life as lacking neither joy nor wealth. Photos included in the missing person's report visually support his description. More precisely, an image of Jane's broadly smiling face and a photo of her husband and young children standing in a beautiful garden, all beaming into the camera, highlight the family's happiness. The last picture, taken after Jane's disappearance, however, shows her two sons who are no longer smiling, their faces averted from the camera. Along with Dexter's certainty that her children face a life of enduring devastation now that their mother is gone, it emphasises the dramatic effect of Jane's disappearance on her family. In short, the recollections of events portray two opposing emotional extremes: the sheer bliss of family life and the never-ending misery, caused by the presumed murder of Jane.

Likewise, Alexander Pryce's family, the victims of Chamber's hit-and-run, is described as falling from pure happiness to extreme hardship. Shortly before the court proceedings, they are pictured in close embrace, until the father, gesturing his wife and daughter to stay, enters the courtroom alone, sparing them the torment of a trial. Not contributing to plot development, the scene functions to emphasize the family's pain, to demonstrate their closeness and heighten the emotional impact of the prosecutor's recollection of events.

PROSECUTOR. He finished his homework, kissed his mom, went out for a jog. He told her he'd be back in time to take out the trash cans. Just another night, until the defendant not only struck him with his car, but fled the scene, leaving Alexander Pryce alone and dying for hours before his body was found the next morning. From heinous to unspeakable. The people will prove that not only did Mr Chambers strike and kill Alexander Pryce, but did so while once again under the influence of alcohol. (Crocodile, S.1: 8:56-9:27)

As is discernible from above, the prosecutor commences by describing an exemplary son who appreciates his mother, attends to his school duties, and helps around the house. Like in the case of Jane Saunders, the description is accompanied by photos of the victim that function to reaffirm this portrayal. Alexander's broadly smiling face, which is projected onto a screen, conveys the image of a happy young man, for example. As the prosecutor recounts his last moments of life, the photo changes to that of his dead body, covered in blood. Besides the portrayal of a corpse, that, as mentioned in chapter 4.1., can unleash the fear of mortality (Freeland 21) and represents the abject (Kristeva 4), the description of Alexander's death as long and lonely, 'leaving Alexander Pryce alone and dying for hours,' presumably unsettles the audience further because it alludes to the fear of isolation, which is, as mentioned in chapter 2.1., inborn

(Sluckin 105). Moreover, by emphasising that death interrupted daily routines and thus came unforeseen, 'just another night', danger is located in the most familiar environments. As Tallon (39) notes, 'horror is often rooted in what feels most safe and secure: the home [è], the family [è], or innocent and mundane activities such as checking into a motel or babysitting [è].' Consequently, the audience is confronted with the unpredictability of death, which, as mentioned in chapter 6.2., causes cries for justice to grow louder as viewers fear becoming a victim themselves.

After the prosecutor's introductory statement, a video of Alexander Pryce's birthday is shown, which adds to the picture of a well-functioning family-unit. It is an exuberant celebration of not only Alexander's birthday, but the start of his studies at Harvard the following year; 'it's everything I've ever wanted for you' ('Crocodile', S.1: 9:47-50), his father says proudly, a sentence that draws attention to the fact that Chambers destroyed a father's hopes and dreams and a life full of opportunities.

Moving away from the discussion of how the victims are portrayed, the following section investigates the depiction of the perpetrators. With the exception of Dexter, Rudy and Jeremy, whose pasts can be blamed for their crimes, no comparable explanation is given for the other murderers' abhorrent actions, making them appear evil for no reason. Moreover, since many of them are portrayed as free of remorse, shame, or guilt, they are presumably easily condemnable. Chambers for example refers to his killings as mistakes, merely lamenting on the involvement of the law, 'we all make mistakes. Unfortunately, mine usually involve lawyers' ('Crocodile', S.1: 30:50-53). Likewise, Jaworski does not grasp the viciousness of his crime, refusing to beg for forgiveness.

DEXTER. Talk to me about Jane Saunders.

JAWORSKI. Ok. I did her.

DEXTER. How?

JAWORSKI. In a movie, snuff film. But I'm not sorry.

('Dexter', S.1: 39:46-56)

Leich (qtd. in Schmid 136) argues that 'violence can be rendered acceptable to a sensitive audience by being ascribed to an evil Other, or by being justified in rational terms [...].' The criminals in *Dexter* represent, according to Green (*Continuum* 581), 'the other' as they do not abide by a code. As already pointed out in chapter 6.1.2., the absence of moral principles is what renders some of the show's serial killers uncontrollable, which in turn, as mentioned in chapter 6.2., increases people's acceptance of violent means to secure safety.

A further technique that potentially encourages the audience to side with Dexter on his venture of killing evil, is the serial killer's absolute assurance in his victims' guilt. The chance of error, which is a strong argument against death penalty (Pioreschi 320) is starkly diminished by presenting Dexter's instincts as impeccable, 'that dog recognises me as easily as I can recognise Jaworski or any other killer' (Dexter, S.1: 20:12-19) and by making certainty of guilt a rule of Harry's code, which Dexter follows, 'my father taught me one thing above all others - to be sure. And I am' (Crocodile, S.1: 32:47-53). Moreover, Dexter always delivers either visual (e.g. videos showing the perpetrator in midst of committing a crime (Dexter; Shrink Wrap, S.1)), verbal (urging the victims to confess ('Dexter; Crocodile; Love American Style, S.1)), or physical (DNA matches (Dexter; Crocodile, S.1)) proof of his victims' involvement in a crime of murder.

Confronting the perpetrators with their murderous deeds, an act the killing ritual demands, functions not only to provide last evidence of their guilt, but helps to re-activate the gruesomeness of their crimes. As a result, attention is drawn to their evil nature, counterbalancing empathy that may be evoked by the victim's plight, the main point of discussion in chapter 6.3.. As Duncum (27) notes 'a strong negative disposition toward an antagonist sets many people free to enjoy retribution.'

Drawing back on chapter 6.1., Smith (*Engaging characters* 190) claims that 'especially behaviour toward physically and socially weaker characters (children, the old, the sick, the oppressed)' influences the formation of attitudes toward a character. A similar view is expressed by Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 394), who observes that crimes against children are judged most harshly. Reasons may lie in the fact that young people are, according to Altheide (150), 'powerful symbols for protection', an assumption shared by Snedker (18), who notes that women in particular extend their 'protector role' onto youth. In accordance with Smith (*Engaging characters* 190), Gregoriou (279) notes that victims who are disabled or subject to abuse are considered 'undeserving' of additional harm. As a result, crimes committed against them evoke, according to the author, a yearning for vigilantism (ibid.). Examining selected scenes in which Dexter confronts the perpetrators with their crimes, it becomes evident that the series aims to reinforce viewers' negative attitude toward the criminals.

In the case of Castillo, for example, photos hanging on the wall of Dexter's kill room reveal that an old woman and a boy suffering from Down syndrome were among

the *ócoyote[ös]ô* (*óLove American Style,ô* S.1: 10:16) victims. As mentioned above, one feels strongly about crimes committed against people who suffer from disabilities or are of old age. Moreover, before killing Castillo and his wife, Dexter reminds the audience of their unspeakable crimes, by emphasising that they did not refrain from killing men, women and children for the sole reason of greed, *ó[y]ou twoë have quite a lucrative operation going. [ë]. No one questions another drowned Cuban man or womanë or childô* (*óCrocodile,ô* S.1: 45:29-55).

Castillo is but one of many of Dexter's victims who took advantage of the weak. In the case of Meridian, for example, Dexter, prior to the killing ritual, draws attention to the fact that the mental doctor exploited his patients's trust and dependence, *ó[y]ou took women who trusted you at their weakest possible moment, but rather than help them, you suggested they end it allô* (*óShrink Wrap,ô* S.1: 28:20-27). Right before killing the psychiatrist he further notes that not only did Meridian destroy the lives of his patients but of those they left behind, *ó[y]ou took powerful women and made them powerless. They left behind families, childrenô* (*óShrink Wrap,ô* S.1: 47:28-35). It should be noted that Dexter, as in the case of Castillo, emphasises that children suffered at the hands of the murderer. As pointed out earlier, the very young trigger feelings of protection. Consequently, knowledge of someone doing them harm is likely to arouse hatred.

Donovan is a prime example of a murderer who is condemned for his crimes against children. Before Dexter takes his life, he forces him to look at the decaying corpses of the three young boys he killed. As in the case of Alexander Pryce, the sight of their carcasses is likely to evoke fear of mortality, while their clothing which are partly preserved, may vividly remind viewers of the life the children once had. By bringing Donovan's crime against children into focus, he thus appears most malicious and deserving of death.

Another factor that strengthens support for Dexter's murder ritual is safety. More precisely, since all of Dexter's victims are on the brink of committing another crime, while being untouched by and/or untouchable to the police, as illustrated in chapter 6.2.1., Dexter is the last hope of protecting the citizens of Miami. By way of an example, Jaworski is seen opening the door for an attractive blonde woman, greedily looking down her body as she passes by, a behaviour that hints at his ill-intentions. In a later scene, Dexter confirms the assumption that Jaworski is going to kill again, thinking, *ó[h]is needs are evolving, turning violent. He's on the fast trackô* (*óDexter,ô*

S.1: 20:47-51). Since the police already failed to imprison Jaworski and since the time to prevent another murder appears to be limited, the audience is bound to root for Dexter.

Similarly, Chambers, who is known for re-settling under a different identity after committing a crime, is depicted as a continuing threat by revealing his plans for skipping town, 'remember, there's nothing a new city can't cure' ('Crocodile,' S.1: 31:13-15). Danger takes clear shape as drunken Chambers is shown getting into his car and driving away in high speed, his car's tyres squealing, while at the same time a man, woman and a little girl are entering a family wagon that is parked next to his automobile ('Crocodile,' S.1). More precisely, it can be argued that the family reminds the audience of the fate of Alexander Pryce and entails an indirect warning that if no one intervenes, another family's happiness will be destroyed. As Chambers has repeatedly been acquitted of his charges, rooting for Dexter, once again, appears to be the sole option for preventing further misery.

A last technique to encourage the audience to approve of murder is the show's focus on the good that ensues from a perpetrator's death; as Gregoriou (282) notes, 'it is the killing of non-innocents that makes his actions acceptable to us all, indeed good accomplishments for us to thank him for.' She hereby alludes to the fact that Dexter is presented as a distributor of good who rids the world of evil. Similarly, Riches and French (129) argue that Showtime's *Dexter* is a representation of an 'ethical consequentialist' ideology in which the ultimate justification for Dexter's murders is their positive effect on other people. As Dexter says when killing Donovan, '[s]oon you'll be packed into a few neatly wrapped Hefties and my own small corner of the world will be a neater, happier place. A better place' ('Dexter,' S.1: 5:17-42). By using the adjectives 'happy' and 'better' to describe a world without Donovan, Dexter points to the fact that ridding the earth of a killer distributes happiness while diminishing further suffering.

In the course of the first season, the positive effects of killing criminals are repeatedly brought into focus. By way of an example, after killing Castillo and his wife, Dexter is shown freeing their prisoners, many of whom would otherwise have faced death ('Love American Style,' S.1). Moreover, as the corpse of Castillo's wife is found by the police in season one episode six, a little Cuban boy, who had witnessed Dexter attacking Castillo's accomplice and freeing the immigrants, is asked to help composite a sketch of the person he had secretly observed. The final draft shows the face of Jesus

instead of Dexter, highlighting the fact that the serial killer's crime brought good into the world. Another scene that puts a positive angle on crime is Harry's recovery after the death of Nurse Mary, who, as noted earlier, administered fatal doses of morphine to her patients. Not only did Dexter prevent the death of other patients by fulfilling Harry's wish to 'stop her. [ë]. Before she hurts anyone else' (Popping Cherry, S.1: 33:01-12), but he also saved his father and gave their family one more year together. After receiving the news of Harry's recovery, Debra is portrayed happily pushing her father's wheelchair while both are smiling broadly at Dexter. The scene is filmed in slow motion, calling attention to the immense joy brought into the world by the death of a murderer. As Duncum (32) notes, violence may be 'considered to be used for the common good.'

The final episode of season one ends with an imaginary sequence in which Dexter is rejoiced for purging Miami of evil. Standing in midst of cheering bystanders he thinks, 'yeah, they see me. I'm one of them' in their darkest dreams' (Born Free, S.1: 53:13-21). He then raises his eyes and, for a split second, looks at the camera, conveying the message that the audience has its place among the applauding. The next subchapter will investigate how, by witnessing the carrying out of the killing ritual, conflicting feelings are aroused while the viewers are confronted with their own darkness and 'moral frailty' (Tallon 36).

6.3. The killing ritual - aggravating the conflict

While, as demonstrated in the previous subchapter, the series *Dexter* resorts to black and white presentations of the good and the bad as a means to provoke a shared desire in the audience for a perpetrator's demise, serial killer Dexter is more complexly drawn. More precisely, his personality traits, his actions and his childhood trauma, as discussed in chapter 6.1., render him likeable and partly absolve him of his crimes, while the crime-ridden world, the inability of the police to contain evil and his decision to kill only the bad, as analysed in chapter 6.2., render him a fighter of evil. However, considering that Dexter remains a murderer, who not only takes the lives of others, but truly enjoys torturing his victims, which is repeatedly shown during his conduction of the killing ritual, the show, according to Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 395) 'create[s] a bridge between our (in)humanity and his and [ë] force[s] ourselves to question our own complicity with, and tolerance of, his behaviour.'

In the following subchapters I hope to reveal how the series's portrayal of the killing ritual encourages the audience to empathize with Dexter's victims, thus heightening the conflict arising out of rooting for a serial killer. The first section will commence by outlining theories that present that possibility for empathy to occur irrespective of how good, moral or likable a character is, which are the preconditions for empathy brought forward by Carroll (79), Smith (*Engaging Characters* 190) and Zillmann (*Suspense* 205), as discussed in chapter 6.1.. In the next step, techniques will be identified that bring the audience closer to Dexter's victims during the killing ritual, while the last two sections will look at what kinds of fear arise out of watching and excitedly awaiting scenes of torture.

6.3.1. Feeling with the bad - somatic empathy, emotional contagion and suppressed rationality

Curtis (49) brings attention to experiments with macaque monkeys that led researcher to discover a 'physiological capacity' responsible for the phenomenon of mimicry. Mirror neurons, he argues, allow 'a viewer of an activity being performed by another being to be experienced simultaneously and viscerally within the viewer's own organism as if she herself were active' (ibid.). Hanich (103) points to the fact that, besides motoric actions, mimicry can affect sensations and emotions, and belongs to the category of 'somatic empathy' (ibid.), that is to say, 'a form of *Einfühlung*' (ibid.), which denotes a 'partial parallelism between a character's and my own body's sensations, affects or motions' (ibid.). Moreover, Hanich (104f.) describes somatic empathy as a 'reflex-like response' (Hanich 104) of 'compulsory quality' (Hanich 105), since it tends to occur suddenly and largely deprives itself of control.

With respect to horror films and thrillers, Hanich (104) further notes that somatic empathy is characteristically generated by the display of pain that leads to an 'intense foregrounding of the lived-body.' Moreover, he posits that it is the proximity to the sufferer, as well as the loudness of 'horrifying sounds' (Hanich 106) that encourages a shared sensation of pain as diminishing 'the phenomenological distance' (ibid.). Similarly, Gaut (265) argues that particularly in scenes portraying a character's suffering, empathy occurs, '[ë] if we are confronted with visual evidence of an individual's suffering, we have a strong tendency to empathise and sympathise with her' (ibid.). Hanich (106) adds that somatic empathy can be intensified by portraying pain that is familiar.

We experience and comprehend movies not just *cognitively* but with our entire bodily being - a body that is always informed by the history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium. (Ibid.)

Consequently, witnessing a character being cut by a knife more strongly affects the audience than watching a character getting shot or blown up (ibid.).

Leaving aside the discussion on Hanich's theory of somatic empathy, Plantinga (*Montage* 7-13) observes that a close shot of a character's facial expression can elicit an empathetic response through processes such as *óaffektive Nachahmungô* (Plantinga *Montage* 11), meaning the automatic mimicking of facial expressions, *ófacial feedbackô* (Plantinga *Montage* 9), that is to say, the influence of facial expressions on emotions, and *óemotional contagionô* (ibid.), the adoption and/or emergence of the sensation shown. However, for emotional contagion to occur he believes it necessary for the camera to either linger on the face of a character or repeatedly bring it into focus (Plantinga *Montage* 19). Consequently, shooting in point-of-view structure, meaning alternating between showing the subject who sees and the object being seen, or long and closely framing a person's face, is a means favourable to empathy evocation because it provides sufficient time for feelings to develop (ibid.).

Besides visual techniques, Plantinga (21) links the strength of emotional contagion and empathy to the liking of a character. Norden (77), on the other hand, argues that *ócharacter engagementô* (Hanich 104) does not necessarily influence empathic involvement. More precisely, he posits that situations evoking high levels of stress in the audience reduce rational thinking and thus reduce moral evaluations to the background. As a result, disliked characters can also trigger strong affective responses.

We may surmise from the foregoing observations and evidence that during a stressful moment within a film, viewers undergo an altered state of consciousness, whereby their response becomes narrowly-focused, their rationality is severely but momentarily retarded, and their vulnerability to manipulative efforts of the filmmaker is increased. (Hanich 76f.)

While, as discussed in subchapter 6.2.2., murderers are dehumanised by promoting a clear-cut distinction of good and evil, the subsequent section will demonstrate how Dexter's act of torturing the perpetrators re-unites viewers and criminals through the display of pain and fear as common denominator.

6.3.2. Contagious pain - humanising the dehumanised

During each killing ritual Dexter injects a syringe with animal tranquillizer into a perpetrator's neck, waits for the criminal, who is naked and strapped down to a table, to

awake, takes a blood sample by cutting his or her cheek, and eventually ends the criminal's life. As discernible from the description, the killing ritual represents a highly stressful situation. More precisely, Dexter renders his victims powerless and prevents their movements, conditions that evoke aggression in real-life (Schrader 7; Schmitz 55). Moreover, as Dexter's victims are completely naked and, as clothing can be argued to represent the 'last line of defense' (Toles 6), they are subjected to what Toles (ibid.) terms the 'worst fear of lying helpless in an attack.' Lastly, degradation, which Öhmann (124) believes to be a fear greater than death, is likely to be a source of their suffering. More precisely, Toles (14) observes the impossibility of escaping an offender's peering eyes to be humiliating as 'strip[ing] its object of privacy, forcing it into a space where no solidarity or shelter is available' (Toles 14). During the killing ritual the perpetrators are exposed to a serial killer who, against their will, causes and witnesses their fear, desperation and death, thus humiliating them before taking their lives.

Examining the camera work during the conceptions of the killing rituals, it becomes apparent that the series encourages the audience to share the experience of fear, pain and humiliation with Dexter's victims. More precisely, the camera frequently focuses on their pain striking faces, either in a point of view structure ('Dexter,' 'Shrink Wrap,' S.1) or through the recurrent use of close ups ('Crocodile,' 'Shrink Wrap,' S.1), a possible means to, following Plantinga (*Montage* 19), trigger emotional contagion.

Investigating the torture and murder of Chambers more closely, which lasts around two minutes, it is notable that his frightened frontal face is filmed 12 times in close up. Moreover, the camera slowly films from his belly toward his face, where it comes to a rest. Chambers is so close to the viewers that they can see sweat running down his body, which creates the illusion of being able to touch him. Consequently the spectators are likely to feel physically close to him which, as noted earlier, encourages somatic empathy (Hanich 106).

Similarly, during the torture of Meridian, which lasts roughly the same time as Chamber's ordeal, the psychiatrist's face is shown nine times in close up, one time in extreme close-up and three times in medium close up. In addition to evoking empathy by close framing, four long shots that show the psychiatrist's strapped down body, his heavy breathing and his attempts of moving his limbs presumably trigger a shared feeling of high nervousness and excitement. More precisely, Rister and Huang (55)

argue that the fight-or-flight impulse realised in the face of danger releases adrenaline in the brain that remains flowing until action is taken. It can thus be concluded that, if unable to move, energy builds but cannot be released. Watching Meridian's body trying to move might trigger a similar feeling of constriction and excitement in the audience via motor mimicry.

Leaving aside camera technique's to encourage empathy, the killing ritual's involvement of taking a blood sample by cutting the cheeks of the perpetrators likewise fosters a shared experience of agony. More precisely, the pain of the victims is emphasized by their whimpering sounds and more importantly so, by the fact that cutting the skin is part of the audience's carnal knowledge (Hanich 106). In other words, the sensation is familiar and thus relatable. Moreover, being reminded of the pain emanating from a cut, terror in the light of the subsequent murder, likewise by sharp instruments such as knives or saws, is bound to heighten.

All things considered, the portrayal of the victim's pain arguably causes high levels of stress in the viewers, thus leading to the downplaying of cognitive activities, strengthening empathy with the victims, and as a result overshadowing previously established negative attitudes toward them. Forced to co-experience fear, dread and panic, the spectators are confronted with the gruesomeness of a crime they wanted to see happen. Given that torture is commonly understood to be immoral, watching the killing ritual is likely to evoke conflicting feelings that will be the focal point of the next section.

6.3.3. Between lust and disgust - conflicting feelings during the display of torture

In reference to Cohen, Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 395) argues that by inventing a monster that is not readily defined or easily visible, the series *Dexter* undermines people's desire of 'project[ing] fear outward onto identifiable creatures.' As mentioned in chapter 2.2., Fuchs takes a similar view, pointing at people's tendency to position themselves in opposition to evil in order to uphold the belief that they are not capable of abhorrent crimes. If monsters in films are, as noted in chapter 2.2., a representation of what happens when the id takes over control (Cherry 2009:99), or, as Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 390) observes, 'reflective of our own innermost, unchecked passions', then thwarting attempts to shove aside evil to a distinct other is likely to trigger fear of one's own darkness.

As illustrated in chapter 6.1., Dexter is a character too likeable, moral and psychologically wounded to distance oneself from and, as demonstrated in chapter 6.2.,

the world he lives in is too dangerous to not approve of him killing the bad. However, there is a shared consensus (Smith *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 395: Schlütz et al 374; Green *Critical Studies in Television* 29) that rooting for a serial killer also causes feelings of guilt in addition to pleasure.

There is pleasure and danger in this identification, as it implicates us in Dexter's actions and makes us ponder just what is moral, and what is the content of Dexter's and our own shared humanity. (Smith *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 398)

Since the audience takes the side of a serial killer and shares his wish for a perpetrator's death, the series brings to surface their hidden impulses. Feelings of culpability are bound to rise in moments of the killing ritual, during which, as the previous subchapter demonstrated, viewers are manipulated into feeling the pain of Dexter's victims. Consequently the audience is confronted with the fragility of common moral beliefs while facing their own darkness. As Tallon (36) argues, horror reminds us of our inner moral frailty and [it] force[s] us to take seriously the moral reality of evil.

Unease arising out of recognising evil as part of oneself is, among other aspects, based on the fear of the collapse of social order (Goldstein 187f.). More precisely, as mentioned in chapter 2.2., acknowledging one's shadow archetype (Goldstein 187) triggers the fear that the id, in its irrationality, impulsiveness and selfishness (Coon&Mitterer 398) might overrule people's ego (Payne 48), plunging the world into chaos (Coon&Mitterer 398). Drawing on Hobbes, a life without state as the upholder of order could result in the realisation of the metaphor *homo homini lupus* (Höffe 128), that is to say, a state of latent war in which everyone's life is constantly endangered (Höffe 128f.). Fearing the dominance of the id, or in other words the destruction of order and the emergence of chaos in its stead, Kristeva's (4) theory of abjection finds application as well. Moreover, as darkness is located in oneself, the audience provides proof that evil is inconspicuous, a fear triggered by the portrayal of well-adapted serial killers in *Dexter* as discussed in chapter 5. The next subchapter will look at how an anticipation of the killing ritual is created so that the audience's darkness is a constant companion.

6.3.4. Heightening thrill - anticipating murder

It is interesting to note that in contrast to suspense, which increases if a liked character's chances of survival are low (Wenzel *Erzähltextanalyse* 183), thrill during the killing ritual emerges out of the inevitability of the death of a disliked character. Like in a roller

coaster ride up, in anticipation of the subsequent ride down, various clues of impending murder gradually heighten excitement. Drawing back on chapter 2., Späth (171) notes that thrill is most intense in the anticipation of a violent act. In *Dexter* various modes of foreshadowing are used to create an anticipation of Dexter's conduct of the killing ritual.

First of all, the show employs repetition, a form of narrative forewarning (Hanich 162), most commonly encountered in the serial killer genre (*ibid.*), to extend the duration of anticipation while enabling viewers to foresee the approximate moment of the attack and/or kill. By way of an explanation, investigating the introduction of Dexter's victims, it becomes apparent that they are almost always encountered relatively early in the episode, are introduced by Dexter himself and are mentioned by their full name, for example, 'there he is. Mike Donovan' (Dexter, S.1: 1:41-44), 'this guy, Jamie Jaworski' (Dexter, S.1: 18:38-41), or 'Jorge Castillo. Number three on the department's list of suspects' (Love American Style, S.1: 11:26-28). Moreover, with the exception of Donovan, who is the introductory kill of the first season, all of Dexter's victims are attacked and/or murdered toward the end of an episode and engage in an activity on their own seconds before the attack takes place. Donovan, for example, is shown walking toward his car (Dexter, S.1), Jaworski is portrayed stealing copper pipes (Dexter, S.1), Jeremy is seen playing on a machine (Popping Cherry, S.1) and Castillo is witnessed imprisoning Cuban immigrants (Love American Style, S.1).

Apart from repetitive patterns, verbal foreshadowing (Hanich 162) is used to heighten anticipation. By way of an example, while searching through Jaworski's apartment, Dexter thinks, 'it's just a matter of time before he becomes a drop of blood in my glass slide collection' (Dexter, S.1: 27:46-49). Moreover, in midst of preparing his kill room for Chambers, Dexter notes in voice over, 'Matt Chambers, Miami is your last stop' (Crocodile, S.1: 32:53-55), while stroking the handle of a knife.

Green (*Continuum* 584) points at 'a visual cue of anticipation' employed in *Dexter*. More precisely, she notes that his tight khaki shirt predominantly worn when stalking and killing hints at an impending death. Drawing back on chapter 2.2., the theory of classical conditioning states that emotions tend to transfer themselves onto stimuli that regularly co-occur with stimuli that have a strong emotional affect, so that in time their presence alone triggers an emotional response of similar quality (Bryant&Davies 22). Consequently, it can be argued that, as Dexter mostly stalks,

attacks and kills while wearing his khaki shirt, its sole presence, in time, will generate thrill, since it hints at an impending murder.

As anticipation of the killing ritual is created and upheld throughout the series, one's own maliciousness, which expresses itself in the craving for a character's painful death, may come to be felt with increasing clarity. Such constant shaking of the audience's inner world is likely to create an 'off-balance effect,' which Rubin believes to be prototypical of thrill, heightening overall excitement.

The next chapter will move away from examining the kinds of fear arising out of the confrontation with one's own darkness, looking at how thrill is generated through the endangerment of a liked character.

7. When the strongest show fear - character endangerment in

Dexter

As pointed out in chapter 2., Späth (156) distinguishes between two kinds of thrill, triggered by the arousal of either power or fear. More precisely, depending on whether identification rests with the inferior or superior character in a power setting 'Angst-thrill' (ibid.) or 'Macht-thrill' (ibid.) is evoked. Similar to Späth's notion of 'Angst-thrill' (ibid.), Droese (18) believes the endangerment of a liked character to evoke thrill, '[i]n den Bedrohungssituationen empfinden die Rezipienten große Angst um ihren Helden, der stellvertretend für sie Gefahren durchlebt' (ibid.). Moreover, her analysis of thrill, as pointed out in chapter 2., is based on a distinction made by Alewyn, Conrad and Trautwein between physiological and psychological dangers to which a character can be exposed (Droese 21).

The present chapter's topic will be approached from three different angles. Firstly, fear triggered by the Ice Truck Killer, Dexter's main adversary, before the revelation of his identity to the audience in season one episode eight, is discussed. Secondly, physical threats toward Dexter and Debra are investigated for their potential to evoke thrill and lastly, psychological endangerment of the serial killer is examined carefully, identifying the first season's climax and pointing at techniques used to maximise thrill.

7.1. The Ice Truck Killer - fearing the unknown

Trautwein (qtd. in Droese 21) argues that opponents who are superior to the hero, through for example the possession of a weapon, pose a physical threat to him or her. In

Dexter the Ice Truck Killer derives power by knowing important details about Dexter's life, like his address, his past and his secrets, while his own identity and intentions remain hidden for most of the first season's episodes. Moreover, Dexter's astonishment at the sight of the bloodless corpses, left behind by the Ice Truck Killer, 'but that bloodless body' This guy may have exceeded my own abilities' (Dexter, S.1: 13:25-13:30) or 'damn. This guy is good' (Dexter, S.1: 26:17-19) adds to the image of a dangerous killer.



Fig. 7: Creating fear by hiding identity (Dexter, S.1: 42:44)

At the end of season one episode one Dexter follows the person he thinks to be the Ice Truck Killer to a closed bridge, where the unidentifiable driver turns his truck around, heading toward Dexter. Figure 7 shows that the scene evokes fear on several levels. Firstly, drawing back on chapter 2., instinctive fear is triggered by darkness, isolation and constriction (Sluckin 105; Gow 65). More precisely, it is nighttime, no other people are close by and Dexter cannot pass the truck nor can he turn his car quickly enough to avoid confrontation. Secondly, inborn fright is evoked by the approach of a stranger, given that the driver of the truck is a mere shadow (Miron 351). Moreover, seeing only the silhouettes of who is assumed to be the Ice Truck Killer, arguably propels imagination about the murderer's appearance and capabilities, heightening fear further.

If we don't know the nature or appearance of a monster (its full abilities and hideousness), we imagine the worst. []. Having imagined the worst, we now fear the worst. (Sipos 82)

Not before the end of season one episode eight does the audience learn that the Ice Truck Killer is Rudy, who himself is introduced no sooner than at the end of season one episode five. Consequently, all of the Ice Truck Killer's doings before his revelation cannot be attributed to an identifiable object, creating what Hills (27) calls an 'objectless anxiety.' In other words, although the audience senses danger, they cannot pinpoint its source, which triggers dread in the sense of 'the absence of a tangible source of danger' (Sieber et al. 13), a building block of 'Angst- thrill' (Späth 156).

According to Späth (163), the evocation of dread often goes hand in hand with the portrayal of an unpredictable world. In *Dexter's* first season the ice truck's killer's actions of breaking into Dexter's apartment (Dexter, S.1), leaving dismembered corpses (Dexter; Crocodile, S.1) and body parts (Let's Give the Boy a Hand, S.1)

in various places, and bringing up Castillo's wife, whom Dexter killed, from the depth of the ocean ('Return to Sender,' S.1), without being seen, appear to be beyond the natural and thus make the Ice Truck Killer seem unpredictable. In his analysis of *Blair Witch Project*, Hills (26) writes that not knowing the extent of a character's power can give him or her an 'omnipresent' quality. In summation, by creating a powerful antagonist who, until the revelation of his identity, seems in possession of supernatural skills, fear for Dexter's well-being is likely to be triggered.

Anticipation of a re-encounter between the two serial killers is raised at the end of season one episode one. Dexter finds doll parts in his refrigerator, believing them to be an invitation to play by the Ice Truck Killer, '[i]n fact I think this is a friendly message kind of like, "Hey, wanna play?" And, yes, I wanna play. I really, really do' ('Dexter,' S.1: 49:08-20). After his last sentence Dexter turns to look at the audience, thus acknowledging their presence while drawing them deeper into the filmic world. Drawing on Timoty et al.'s (429) notion of the 'pleasures of uncertainty,' it is the uncertainty of the outcome of the two serial killers' encounter that, besides spectators' fear for Dexter's life, contributes to thrill evocation.

As the audience learns that the Ice Truck Killer is Debra's boyfriend Rudy, fear changes from being relatively objectless to clearly identifiable. The following chapter will discuss how thrill is evoked by the Ice Truck Killer's endangerment of Dexter's life, after his identity is revealed to the viewers.

7.2. Physical endangerment of Dexter

Späth (170), as mentioned in chapter 2, argues that thrill may arise out of the audience's superior knowledge. What thereby triggers fear is, following Norden (57), the audience's helplessness and consequent frustration of watching a liked character consorting with the villain. It should be noted that granting the audience superior knowledge is a common method of generating suspense (Klingholz 9), which on a general level differs from thrill in that it focuses on how to uphold tension rather than on how to evoke it (Klingholz 11). For the present paper, suspense is only of relevance to the extent to which it may heighten audience's fear.

The following subchapters will analyse selected scenes in which Debra and Dexter are physically endangered by the Ice Truck Killer without their knowledge. While viewers' superior knowledge of the killer's identity will be adduced as the scenes' main element of evoking thrill, the subchapters will refer to additional aspects

contributing to the creation of 'pleasurable fear' (Hanich 100). The reason for including Debra in the discussion on physical endangerments of Dexter is his relatively close bond to her, 'if I could have feelings at all, I'd have them for Deb' ('Dexter', S.1: 9:00-02) and her role as a raft for Dexter to hold onto, so that his 'dark passenger' ('Truth Be Told', S.1: 3:58-59) will not take complete control, 'if you feel like you're slipping, lean on your sister. She'll keep you connected' ('Popping Cherry', S.1: 26:37-27:20). In other words, as long as Dexter has steady contact with his sister, his human side prevails. Consequently, the endangerment of Debra heightens thrill in so far as her death could be Dexter's fall to evil, and as such cause the death of his human self.

7.2.1. Endangering Debra's life

Examining the first scene ('Father Knows Best', S.1:11:02-23) in which Debra's life is directly threatened, a structure of a drama in four acts, the format commonly underlying thrilling experiences, as mentioned in chapter 2., (Seeßlen 20), can be identified. More precisely, the scene features Debra lying naked in bed seemingly asleep. While semi-darkness and dark non-diegetic music create an eerie atmosphere, no clear threat is identifiable yet. Fear rises as soon as the lower body of Rudy becomes visible and climaxes as he walks toward a cupboard, touching a scissor. The moment Debra opens her eyes the situation returns to the starting point with danger hanging over the scene, however not yet realised.

Apart from the scene's structure, its static quality contributes to the generation of 'pleasurable fear' (Hanich 100). By way of an explanation, the scene is filmed in one take, lasting approximately 30 seconds, which is long, considering that the average shot length is around six seconds (Abrams&Bell&Udris 99). Drawing back on Späth (165), scenes of a static quality in comparison to action rich sequences, encourage thrill, due to providing time for feelings to be developed and felt by the viewer.

Remaining at Späth's (171) theory of thrill, since the attack and/or murder of Debra is merely hinted at, the audience is allowed to savour the moment of anticipation, which is, according to the author, richer in thrill than the realisation of danger. It is interesting to note that anticipation of Debra's attack is created in season one episode nine, intensified in season one episode eleven and realised no sooner than at the end of season one episode eleven. Because of Späth's aforementioned assumption of thrill being particularly high during the anticipation of a criminal or sexual act, it can be argued that by delaying the attack on Debra, thrill is increased.

Besides the role of anticipation, an unequal power relationship, which Späth (170) observes to be beneficial for thrill evocation, arises out of Debra's endangerment.

[E]ine Darstellung [erzeugt] Thrill insbesondere dann [e], wenn sie die folgenden Merkmale aufweist: ein Machtgefälle zwischen zwei (selten mehr) Personen sowie eine unmittelbare körperliche, oft eine sexuelle Bedrohung des Sympathieträgers, die mit der Gefahr besonderer Erniedrigung verbunden sein kann. (Späth 170)

Applying Späth's observation to the present scene, Debra is physically threatened through Rudy's presence and his touching of a sharp instrument. More precisely, knowledge of his identity as a serial killer and his signature characteristics of dismembering his victims make his touching of the scissor appear a direct threat to her life. Moreover, Debra is sexually vulnerable as lying naked in bed and threatened to be humiliated, since, in case of death, she would have been killed by the very person she was hunting, without ever having harboured the slightest suspicions. Lastly, as identification is presumably resting with Debra, who is not only portrayed as a liked character², but, as pointed out earlier, important to Dexter in her ability to keep him from being swallowed by his darkness, 'Angst- thrill' (Späth 156) is presumably generated by her endangerment (Späth 170).

Besides the unequal power relationship, the scene evokes thrill by portraying crime and sex, two of the three thrill provoking categories identified by Koch (15). By way of an example, Debra's naked body, covered only by a thin cloth, and Rudy's bare torso create an erotic atmosphere. Moreover, the audience's knowledge of their relationship, memories of their lovemaking, voyeuristically shown in season one episode eight, mingle with the threat of violence, posed by Rudy's presence and more directly by him touching a sharp instrument. After an analysis of different horror films, Grodal (*Moving Pictures* 252) concludes that when people are murdered or attacked in situations that are normally perceived as pleasurable, like on the bed or in the shower, the emotions triggered are ambiguous.

Without being masochists or sadists it is difficult for viewers not to have an ambiguous interpretation of the seen in situations which, by bracketed contextual clues like 'bed' and 'shower' are indicated as possibly erotic scenes, an arousal that is primarily labelled as pain, but which is visually expressed by many of the signs normally interpreted as pleasure. (Ibid.)

² Many of the reasons given for viewers' empathy with Dexter in chapter 6.1. are also valid for Debra, as for example her treatment of other characters in relation to Doakes, or the series' serial killers, or her similarity to the audience.

Consequently, in the present scene, sexual and violent impulses are deeply interwoven as Debra's life is threatened while lying in bed naked.



Fig. 8a: Anticipation of violence - Monique (óTruth Be Told,ô S.1: 6:32)



Fig. 8b: Anticipation of violence ñ Debra (óTruth Be Told,ô S.1: 13:20)

Apprehension for Debra's well-being climaxes in season one episode eleven, as her fate is paralleled to the attack and murder of Monique. Figures 8a and 8b show Debra and Monique from a bird's eye view, lying naked on their stomachs in Rudy's bed, the scenes about seven minutes apart. In both sequences Rudy is present. However, while Monique is strangled unconscious and carried into Rudy's home-built freezer, awaiting death, Debra is left asleep. As viewers witness the attack of Monique at the beginning of the episode, the subsequent scene that shows Debra from the same angle, lying in the same bed, in a similar posture and likewise naked, is likely to activate memories of the prostitute's fate, thus heightening fear through ónarrative forewarningô (Hanich 162). As Hanich (83) notes,

[w]e are frightened by the sheer presence of the monster [ë] because it reminds us forcefully of an act of violence we have already witnessed or have inferred from the plot; or because it points towards an impending cruelty indicated by the monster's aggressive behaviour and/or dangerous appearance.

Apart from paralleling Debra's and Monique's fate, thrill is triggered by the victims' obliviousness and the audience's knowledge of danger. As pointed out earlier, watching characters unknowingly putting their heads in the lion's mouth evokes fear. By way of an example, Figure 8a shows that Monique is completely unaware of her fate; lying calmly in bed, while Rudy is drawing cutting lines onto her body. Similarly, Debra has no idea of the danger she is in, welcoming Rudy's offer of wine and valium, joking at their effect of making her helpless.

RUDY. Andë I got a little thing to help you sleep.
 DEBRA. That ain't no little thing.
 RUDY. I meant Valium [ë].
 DEBRA. Wine and Valium? I'dl be totally helpless.
 RUDY. You read my mind. (óTruth Be Told,ô S.1: 12:55-13:11)

While Monique is awake during her assault, giving the audience dim hope of her escape, Debra is completely at Rudy's mercy, as in a drug-induced sleep. Moreover, the

bird's eyes view, shown in Figure 8b, makes Rudy look comparatively bigger, and thus more powerful, while distance makes Debra appear fragile and weak. Drawing back on Tolesö (6) argument, as discussed in chapter 3., that 'distance can convey utter abandonment, placing characters even beyond the spectator's reach,' it can be argued that viewers' powerlessness is highlighted by the show's employment of a long shot, causing frustration to grow as viewers are unable to warn Debra. Putting aside the discussion on the physical endangerment of Debra, the following subchapter will turn to look at scenes in which Dexter's life is at stake.

7.3.2. Endangering Dexter's life

In season one episode ten Rudy visits Dexter at his place under the pretext of seeking advice about his relationship with Debra. Like in the depiction of Debra's endangerment in season one episode nine, the scene adheres to the structure of thrill as described by Seeßlen (20). More precisely, Dexter opening the door for Rudy represents the relative ease of the beginning, as the audience, who knows Rudy to be a killer, may be unsettled by his appearance; however not overly frightened, as unaware of his intentions. At the very moment Rudy asks for a knife to cut the steaks he has brought with him, tensions presumably rise, with the audience remaining on edge as Rudy prepares the meal, gesturing with his knife while conversing with Dexter. Fear reaches a high point as Rudy, walks right toward Dexter to pick up his cell phone, with the knife pointed in his direction. As Rudy unexpectedly lays down the knife, going outside to speak to Debra on the phone, the relative ease of the beginning is re-established.

Thrill is not only fed by the structure, but by the anticipation of violence and the audience's superior knowledge. More precisely, as Rudy asks for a steak knife, the camera cuts to a close up of the cutting tool lying in a cupboard, thus guiding the audience's focus and underlining the importance of it. Moreover, as the camera closes in on Rudy cutting the steaks, viewers are presumably reminded of the Ice Truck Killer's dismembered victims, whose body parts were packed in butcher's paper and thus reduced to meat. Consequently, the act of cutting alludes to an impending attack. Needless to say, the audience's superior knowledge heightens overall thrill and may be particularly effective in triggering fear the moment Dexter thoughtlessly hands Rudy the knife. As mentioned in chapter 8.2., it is the powerlessness in the light of a character's fate that generates fear (Norden 57).

An example of thrill evocation by means of a more indirect physical threat to Dexter is found in season one episode six. The Ice Truck Killer brings up the dead body

of Castillo's wife from the bottom of the ocean - Dexter's dumping spot for corpses - to put him on the police's radar. In contrast to the previously discussed sequence, thrill is not generated by superior knowledge of the audience, but by consolidating their relationship with Dexter. More precisely, I proceed from the assumption that, by deepening feelings for Dexter during season one episode six, the thought of him being caught, imprisoned and ultimately put on death row is more frightening.

On the basis of an analysis by Stein and Wicklund, Vorderer (249) notes that the 'quantity' and 'quality' of a relationship between character and audience, that is to say, the perceived closeness³ to a character and the degree of congruence of beliefs and attitudes, influences 'perspective taking', in other words, it determines whether a character's perspective is adopted and thus influences whether his or her endangerment is feared. As the relationship with a character can change in the course of a story (ibid.), the following section will analyse in how far, during season one episode six, the audience and the main character are brought closer and how a more or less conflict-free relationship between them is upheld.

Walking toward what Dexter recognises as his crime scene, the audience is invited to share his perspective. In addition to filming large parts of the sequence from Dexter's point of view, slow motion is employed to give the scene a dream like quality and to mirror Dexter's disbelief of the corpse no longer resting at the bottom of the sea. As Dexter approaches the trailer in which the corpse of Castillo's wife lies, slow and quick motion come into use to reflect his attempts of staying calm and inconspicuous while searching for potentially incriminating evidence to hide. Drawing on Jensö (144-154) theory of character closeness, as discussed in chapter 6.1.4., Dexter's and the audience's experience are matched by means of the camera techniques listed above, so that through the activation of mirror neurons viewers come to share the emotions of the character, and thus feel close to him.

Aside the theory of perspective taking, the likelihood of an empathic response toward Dexter, and thus 'the actual experience' (Vorderer 248) of his apprehension, grows as well. As mentioned in chapter 6.1., feeling close to a character can make him or her appear more likeable (Jens 144-154) and thus encourages the building of

³ Proximity is said to be influenced by "intraindividual" as well as "interindividual characteristics" (Vorderer 249). As empirical data would be required to investigate influence from the second characteristic, the present paper restricts itself on analysing how the series creates closeness and/or distance to the audience instead of shedding light on viewers' "disposition to respond emotionally to other persons" (ibid.).

‘affective dispositions’ (Zillmann *Suspense* 205) toward *dramatis personae* (Zillmann *Suspense* 205ff.). Moreover, drawing on Hogan’s (1966) theory of primed memories, as discussed in chapter 6.1.4., the feeling of being found out for having done something that is considered morally wrong is undoubtedly familiar. Consequently, past feelings are likely to be activated, making Dexter appear more likeable, while increasing overall fear of the exposure of his crimes.

Returning to the theory of perspective taking, the following section investigates the quality of the relationship between Dexter and the audience during season one episode six. It should be noted that since Dexter is a serial killer who enjoys torturing and murdering his victims, conflicted responses are likely to occur, especially when witnessing the killing ritual, as discussed in chapter 6.3.. To reduce ambivalent feelings toward Dexter in season one episode six, the murder of Castillo’s wife is presented as righteous by other characters. By way of an example, as Castillo’s wife’s part in the murder of the Cuban immigrants is revealed, officer Batista expresses approval of her death, ‘[s]ounds like she got exactly what she had coming to her. Personally, I’d shake this guy’s hand’ (Return to Sender, S.1: 16:53-58). Moreover, as he interviews one of Castillo’s prisoners, whom Dexter freed after killing Castillo and his wife, the woman starts crying and angrily utters in Spanish what Batista translates as follows, ‘[w]hen we find them, to make them suffer for what they did, especially that concha that treated her like a dog’ (Return to Sender, S.1: 14:23-30). In short, both characters justify Dexter’s murder, presenting it as an act of justice. Consequently, the fact that Dexter’s main motivation was pure bloodlust might more easily be disregarded.

A further element that strengthens the audience’s relationship with Dexter is the episode’s focus on his role as protector of the innocent. Drawing back on chapter 6.2.2., Gregoriou (279) claims that people who are suffering from disabilities or abuse are believed to be undeserving of further harm. Consequently, if not for the sake of Dexter than for the sake of characters like Rita and her children, who experienced domestic violence, the audience is likely to fear the serial killer’s imprisonment. Moreover, by emphasising how devastating a revelation of Dexter’s true nature would be for the little family, the series draws attention to the fact that his imprisonment would harm the good, while his freedom harms only the bad.

Looking at distinct examples in season one episode six that present Dexter as indispensable for Rita and her children, it becomes apparent that Paul’s release from prison is strategically included in the same episode where Dexter faces arrest. More

precisely, Rita, who is frightened because of Paul's return, retells scenes of his abuse, while being reassured by Dexter that he will support her. Consequently, Dexter's role as protector of the family is underscored, 'ó[y]ou're not that woman any more. You're stronger than that now. If their dad shows up, we'll deal with it together' (Return to Sender, S.1: 22:28-34). As Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 393) observes, by portraying Dexter as a man who shields Rita from evil, negative dispositions toward him are hardly possible.

Moreover, Dexter directly draws attention to the pain that unveiling his murderous secret would inflict on a woman who is just about to recover from the repercussions of her previous relationship.

DEXTER. I shouldn't even be here. Rita will be devastated if I'm arrested. Her husband was a crackhead, and her boyfriend's a serial killer. It's kind of hard not to take that personally. (Return to Sender, S.1: 22:46-22:56)

In a similar fashion, the series explicitly and implicitly draws attention to the effects Dexter's imprisonment would have on Rita's children. More precisely, Astor wets her bed the night after hearing the news of her father's release from prison, which shows that she still suffers from Paul's wrongdoing. The revelation of Dexter's identity would thus aggravate an already tense situation. Furthermore, looking at Astor and Cody watching television, Dexter notes that Rita's loss would be theirs too, 'I wonder, in time, if they'll even remember me, other than the man who broke their mother's heart. I'll be breaking their hearts, too' (Return to Sender, S.1: 21:24-32). Cody then turns back and smiles at Dexter, reinforcing his affection for him and drawing attention to the pain Dexter's imprisonment would inflict on him.

As Dexter has a nightmare, which is atypical for him, the threat of exposure is shown to affect his psyche.

DEXTER. I don't have bad dreams. When I sleep, all of me sleeps. Nothing ever goes bump in Dexter's night. I've never felt a moment of remorse, doubt, regret. What's happening to me? (Return to Sender, S.1: 24:32-34:56)

After the audience hears his thoughts in voice over, Dexter stands up and walks toward the window. Seeing his face reflected, he wrinkles his brow before disappearing in the shadow, images that tell the story of a Dexter, who no longer recognises himself. The following subchapter will continue to explore scenes in which Dexter is psychologically endangered.

7.4. Psychological endangerment of Dexter

Droese (25) argues that dangers affecting a character's inner life are more frightening than threats to his or her life.

Die wirkliche, lebensgefährliche Bedrohung erfolgt häufig nicht durch die offene Konfrontation mit einem sichtbaren Feind. Sie resultiert vielmehr aus verdrängten Ängsten, Schuldgefühlen, Neurosen und Traumata, die aus dem Unterbewusstsein, der Psyche des Helden, allmählich an die Oberfläche steigen. (Ibid.)

The present subchapter will illustrate how the Ice Truck Killer not only poses a physical threat to Dexter, but shakes the foundations of his life by exposing Harry as a liar and Dexter as a fraud, and at the same time re-activating his childhood trauma. The first part will demonstrate how the returning memories of Dexter's traumatic experience endanger the serial killer's moral self and heighten the probability of him being exposed as a serial killer. The remaining subchapters will illustrate how the fear of Dexter's development into an uncontrollable killer gradually heightens in the course of the first season, climaxing as Rudy demands that Dexter kills his step-sister.

7.4.1. The return of the childhood trauma

In season one episode ten the Ice Truck Killer uses blood, drained from his victims, to visually recreate Dexter's repressed childhood trauma of witnessing his mother being brutally murdered. Entering the Marina hotel room 103, the location of the staged crime scene, Dexter collapses in a pool of blood while experiencing a memory flashback. Given that the sequence portrays Dexter in one of his weakest moments, and embodies what Droese (25) found among the greatest threats, namely, the return of repressed content, the following paragraph commences by outlining aspects that gradually increase fear, while identifying the sources of thrill.

Before Dexter enters the Marina hotel, anticipation of the terrors lurking inside is raised. By way of an explanation, since the key for the hotel room 103 is sent to the police department in a jar full of blood, and since Dexter assumes the Ice Truck Killer to be the sender of the parcel, '[a] jar of blood, dramatic, cryptic, playful. Could it be him?' (Seeing Red, S.1: 5:42-47) viewers can infer from the jar's content and knowledge of the Ice Truck Killer's brutal killings that they are likely to be exposed to images of violence.

Moreover, the frightening reaction of Debra and Doakes, upon opening the door to the Marina hotel room, triggers the fear that what is inside might be too abhorrent to

process. By way of an explanation, the moment the door is opened the audience's view is restricted, as the camera closely frames the fear-ridden faces of Doakes and Debra. Doakes's frantic call for backup, 'I need uniformed backup, forensics. Fuck it. Just send everybody out' (Seeing Red, S.1: 6:31-34), Debra's panicked exclamation, 'O my God! Jesus' (Seeing Red, S.1: 6:23-24) and the fact she frequently averts her gaze suggest a sight of overwhelming gruesomeness, while heightening viewer's anticipation of what is inside.

Delving into film analysis, it is notable that during the present scene 'the reaction shot' (Hanich 87) is shown before clearly identifying the object and /or action that triggered it. As a result, 'the principle of maximum visibility' (Hanich 164) is neglected, which creates a longing to see what the characters see. Moreover, as the audience knows from previous film experiences that vision is restricted to hide 'something negative' (Hanich 164), they are likely to feel threatened (ibid.). Hanich (159) argues that viewers often fear that what they encounter might 'exceed [their] psychic means of self-protection - precisely because [they] cannot perceive it and thus mentally categorize it yet.' In other words, fear is intense as well as uncontrollable, since danger is not materialised and thus neither identifiable nor assessable.

We are strongly interested in the outcome of the scene, because this outcome might possibly be overwhelming. At the same time, we are afraid of the overwhelming outcome since we have formulated a hypothesis about what follows. (Hanich 169)

In addition to Doakes's and Debra's frightened responses, 'verbal foreshadowing' (Hanich 163) heightens the fear of what is inside the room. More precisely, Dexter, while preparing to enter the hotel, remarks, '[i]t's been a while since we went prophylactic' (Seeing Red, S.1: 6:29-31), thus suggesting that the crime scene must be exceptionally gruesome. Moreover, Masuka notes, '[n]o one's been inside. Too much blood' (Seeing Red, S.1: 6:39-40) and Doakes and Debra warn Dexter that it is seriously bad inside. As Dexter is asked to go in on his own, fear for his well-being is likely to add to the fear of whether one can process what is about to be seen.



Fig. 9: Heightening anticipation by stretching time (Seeing Red, S.1: 7:23)

Figure 9 shows Dexter standing in the elevator on the same level as room 103. The camera is positioned at the other end of the corridor, making Dexter appear small in comparison to whatever lurks inside room 103, which arguably heightens viewer's fear for him.

Moreover, the corridor connecting the elevator and the room appears to be particularly long, while the use of slow motion as Dexter walks toward the danger literarily stretches time. As Hanich argues, if 'the outcome is withheld' (Hanich 168), anticipation rises.

Apart from prolonging time, proximity to Dexter is created by closely framing his face (Jens 144). Furthermore, as the audience hears him think, '[n]ow I am really curious' ('Seeing Red,' S.1: 7:28-30), he most likely voices their own thoughts, drawing attention to the similarities between them, thus intensifying the perceived closeness (Jens 149). Like in season one episode six, as discussed in chapter 7.3.2., the closeness established between character and audience, before the realisation of danger, functions to ensure that the audience takes the characters perspective and thus fears for his well-being.

As Dexter finally enters room 103, the 'movement into [...] space' (Hanich 160) presumably heightens fear since immersing the audience more deeply into the filmic world. As Hanich (160) notes, 'the filmic space thus develops a kind of undertow, "sucking" the viewer in.' Inside the room the experience of Dexter and the viewers are matched, so that proximity to the character is maintained and/or strengthened. More precisely, Dexter's scanning of the room is shown in point of view shooting and his sudden flashback is visualised for the audience, who, at the same time as Dexter, sees a little boy sitting and crying in a pool of blood. Moreover, the sounds of crying and electric whirring are muffled to create the same distant, dream-like situation to which Dexter is subjected. Such a close degree of temporal proximity, maintained during his breakdown into the pool of blood as the camera techniques mirror his 'vertigo' (Smith *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 379), 'nausea' (ibid.), and 'disorientation' (ibid.), through the means of 'fast motion' (ibid.), 'a jump cut' (ibid.) and 'slow motion' (ibid.), is likely to intensify fear for Dexter's well-being.

As the serial killer stumbles out of the hotel, the camera once again imitates his dizziness by turning in circles, alternating between slow motion and quick cutting. Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 397) argues that the 'camerawork' is what 'draws us into Dexter's world' making viewers understand and presumably share his 'sense of nausea and claustrophobia.' Moreover, by filming LaGuerta and Doakes from Dexter's point of view and in 'intense close-ups' (Smith *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 397), his angry response 'I don't fucking know' ('Seeing Red,' S.1: 9:11-12) as being asked why no bodies were to be found in the hotel room, is understandable and thus unlikely to reflect negatively on his character. The dropping of his mask of

friendliness is an indicator of how deeply he is affected by the past memories. His acknowledgment of fear later in the episode, 'fortunately, I've never met a problem I can't manage. Until that boy in the blood. He scares me. I want him to go away' (Seeing Red, S.1: 18:29-39), further suggests that the return of his trauma will have a long-lasting effect on his life.

Uncontrollable flashbacks influencing his work as serial killer and blood spatter analyst confirm the fear that Dexter can no longer maintain his sanity. By way of an example, breaking and entering into Paul's home, a sudden flashback of the little boy in blood forces Dexter to leave the apartment, slumping down at its front wall, breathing heavily. Moreover, arriving at a crime scene where his friend and colleague, Batista, got stabbed, a huge blood stain on the ground triggers a flashback, 'so much blood, what's happening to me?' (Truth Be Told, S.1: 5:12-20) hampering Dexter's investigation. It is interesting to note that this is the second time Dexter fails to understand his mental state; more precisely, he asked the same question 'what's happening to me?' in season one episode six after his first nightmare, discussed in chapter 7.3.2.. Consequently, thrill once again arises out of what Droese (23) calls a 'Sicherheitsverlust des Helden'.

It soon becomes obvious that Dexter's dwindling confidence and mental instability pose a threat to his life; as a result psychological danger comes to interact with physical danger. By way of an explanation, preoccupied with processing his traumatic memory, Dexter has difficulties upholding any form of pretence, which heightens the danger of him being exposed as a serial killer. For example, as LaGuerta announces that the surgery of Batista was successful, Dexter cannot bring himself to join the group hug, leaving the hospital, 'I know I should stay, be a part of the group hug. But I can't focus. I'm trapped in the clutches of a memory. I need to know what it means' (Truth Be Told, S.1: 9:18-9:28). Doakes, who from the very first episode is portrayed as suspicious of Dexter, presses him to the wall and demands to know whether the news of his friend's survival makes him feel anything at all. Unable to restrain himself anymore, Dexter responds forcefully 'take your fucking hands off me' (Truth Be Told, S.1: 9:57-59), confirming Doakes's assumption that he is someone other than who he impersonates.

Besides fearing the exposure of his crimes, the return of his past memories add to an already known danger, that is to say, the possibility of him breaking Harry's code. By way of an example, due to his inability to solve his own problems, he finds satisfaction in solving Rita's instead; her biggest problem is Paul, who may be abusive

but who is not a murderer: *ôI can always see other people's problems more clearly than my own. Fortunately, Rita's has a name* (See *Seeing Red*, S.1: 18:59-19:04). The subsequent subchapter will investigate how thrill is generated by Dexter's potential turn to evil.

7.4.2. Dexter and the moral code - walking the fine line between good and evil

In season one episode three, body parts of Toni Tucci, an innocent security guard abducted by the Ice Truck Killer, and Polaroid pictures thereof appear in places Dexter connects to childhood memories; this allows viewers to get clarity about the Ice Truck Killer's intentions. More precisely, apart from holding the power of revealing Dexter's identity, *ô[w]hen he broke into my apartment, he took some time to get to know me, my life. My secrets* (See *Popping Cherry*, S.1: 7:27-35), the Ice Truck Killer wants Dexter to acknowledge that most of his behavioural patterns are learned. By way of explanation, the memories evoked by the places adorned with Toni Tucci's body parts involve lessons by Harry on how to *ôblend in* (See *Let's Give the Boy a Hand*, S.1: 19:04). Dexter thus starts to question the authenticity of his actions, losing confidence in himself and drowning in chaos. Consequently, thrill is triggered by a loss of security of the main character, similarly to the return of his repressed memories, discussed in the previous chapter (Droese 23).

DEXTER. Harry was the only one who saw me, really saw me, so he taught me to hide. And that's what's kept me safe. But sometimes, I'm not sure where Harry's vision of me ends and the real me starts.
(See *Let's Give the Boy a Hand*, S.1: 36:13-27)

Once again drawing a parallel to the previous chapter, accidents at work and troubles to maintain his friendly mask are, like after the return of his traumatic past, indicators of how deeply Dexter is affected by the Ice Truck Killer's doings. By way of an example, he drops a glass tube containing evidence (See *Let's Give the Boy a Hand*, S.1: 22:04) on the floor while thinking about the Ice Truck Killers authentic demeanour.

DEXTER. Unlike Harry my new friend doesn't place much value in blending in. He wants me to see who he is and what he does. Everything about him is brazen, authentic. What does that make me?
(See *Let's Give the Boy a Hand*, S.1: 22:49-23:02)

Moreover, when Batista, his colleague, asks whether he is all-right, Dexter declines in an unfamiliarly rough tone, as he is unable to uphold his pretence.

As the Ice Truck Killer leaves clues for Dexter to find Toni Tucci maimed and bound, challenging him to kill the security guard, his full intentions are revealed. More

precisely, he hopes that, during Dexter's journey of self-discovery, he might come to discard the code, which consists of his father's principles, allowing his 'dark passenger' ('Truth Be Told,' S.1: 3:58-59) to assume control. As mentioned in chapter 6.1.2., Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 393) argues that the Ice Truck Killer can be considered as Dexter's 'doppelgänger', since personifying his inner darkness that is characterised by chaos. Consequently, the danger of Dexter developing into an uncontrollable killer is already visualised and the audience may come to realise that Dexter's turn to evil would amount to losing the one person who brought order in a world dominated by criminals and thus plunge the world into an even deeper chaos. Put differently, if discarding his code, Dexter would no longer threaten only the lives of criminals, but of all characters. As Green (*Critical Studies in Television* 26) notes, 'although the spectacle of Dexter's executions is horrific, viewers are supposed relieved of concern by the promise that Dexter's danger to others is contained by the Morgan code'

As Dexter decides against murdering the innocent man, the Ice Truck Killer takes a Polaroid picture of him standing before Toni Tucci, thus demonstrating his power of revealing Dexter's identity. Moreover, by Dexter being the final and only whole-body picture in a series of photographed body parts, the Ice Truck Killer implicitly lets Dexter know that he is nothing more than a composition of different parts of Harry's mind-set, confirming one of Dexter's worst fears 'if I'm just a collection of learned behaviours, bits and pieces of Harry, maybe my new friend is right, maybe I am a fraud' ('Let's Give the Boy a Hand,' S.1: 36:30-36).

Although his decision not to kill Toni Tucci reduces fear of his development into an uncontrollable killer, 'I can't kill this man. Harry wouldn't want it. And neither would I' ('Let's Give the Boy a Hand,' S.1: 50:23-39), doubts of whether he will remain on the righteous path are renewed at the end of season one episode four. More precisely, to symbolise the rejection of his self as formed by Harry, Dexter burns the Polaroid picture the Ice Truck Killer left behind, heralding a new Dexter era.

DEXTER. Maybe I'll never be the human. Harry wanted me to be – but I couldn't kill Tony Tucci. That's not me, either. My new friend thought I wouldn't be able to resist the kill he left for me, but I did. I'm not the monster he wants me to be. So I'm neither man nor beast. I'm something new entirely, with my own set of rules. I'm Dexter.
(*'Let's Give the Boy a Hand,' S1: 53:45-54:23*)

The second to last phrase 'with my own set of rules' alludes to the fear of Dexter turning into a different, more ruthless killer. That such a development would endanger

characters and audience alike is emphasised as Dexter, after his monologue, looks directly at the camera saying 'BOO' ('Let's Give the Boy a Hand,' S1: 54:34). By way of an explanation, according to Brown, direct address can fulfil different functions, ranging from drawing the audience deeper into the fictional world (Brown x) to symbolising a character's power (Brown 13f.), and transferring the realm of fiction onto the real world (Brown 14f.). In the present sequence, Dexter's look into the camera is meant to reduce the distance between fiction and reality, thus extending the threat of an uncontrollable Dexter onto the audience. Moreover, by presenting Dexter powerful enough to cross the border between fiction and reality, the series hints at the immense danger his freedom of code might hold. Besides fearing the serial killer's power, the audience may feel a pang of guilt for siding with someone who is now more clearly perceived as dangerous.

As mentioned in chapter 7.2., as soon as the Ice Truck Killer's identity is revealed to the spectators, thrill arises out of their superior knowledge. Unable to share the information of Rudy's true intentions, viewers, in season one episode nine, helplessly watch how the killer attempts to undermine Dexter's trust in Harry. Since the code is a manifestation of his father's beliefs, danger heightens that Dexter is going to choose a life without it. More precisely, as already mentioned in chapter 6.1.4., Rudy kills Joe Driscoll, Dexter's biological father, so that notice of his death reveals that Harry lied about his parents dying in a car crash. The dialogue below illustrates how Rudy, whom Dexter mistakes as a friend, tries to make him recognise his step-father's faults, to bring him closer to discarding the code.

RUDY. Still, the possibility has got to be weighing in you.

DEXTER. What possibility?

RUDY. That Joe could actually be your dad.

DEXTER. The only way that's a possibility is if Harry was wrong. And that's just not possible

RUDY. Or he lied. ('Truth Be Told,' S.1: 29:21-30)

Re-examining the second part of Dexter's thoughts expressed upon finding out the truth about his real father, as already quoted in chapter 6.1.4., it is notable that the fear of Dexter rejecting his principles is now stirred more directly.

I built my life on Harry's code. I lived by it. But Harry lied. Why would he do that? What else don't I know? My concrete foundation is turning to shifting sand. Maybe Rudy was right. You never can truly know anyone. ('Truth Be Told,' S.1: 51:48- 52:29)

More precisely, by aligning with Rudy 'maybe Rudy was right. You never can truly know anyone,' whom viewers know to be the Ice Truck Killer, and by using the past

tense when referring to the code, *ôl lived by itô, it appears that Dexter has already made the decision of rejecting his father's principles.*

The last subchapter on character endangerment will deal with what I understand to be the climax of the season, as Rudy comes closest to pull Dexter to the dark side, almost causing Debra's death. Moreover, the influence of Dexter's memories is the strongest and his confidence the weakest. Lastly, it is the sole moment of the first season in which all three of the thrill generating drives (Koch 15), discussed in chapter 2., are deeply interwoven.

7.4.3. The first season's climax - to kill or not to kill - torn between freedom and moral duty

To arrive at a better understanding of how thrill is generated during the first season's climax, the present subchapter will commence by examining some of the scenes preceding it. Toward the end of season one episode twelve Dexter, who searches for his abducted sister, follows the Ice Truck Killer to a house that turns out to be their childhood home. Being in a place of his past, memories are forced to the surface, exposing Rudy as his brother, Brian, of whose existence Dexter was unaware. Consequently, the serial killer finds what he had always been craving: connection, acceptance and integration.

RUDY. I know what you've been going through all these years. The isolation, the otherness, a hunger that's never satisfied. Well, you're not alone any more, Dexter. You can be yourself with me. Your real, genuine self. Takes the breath away, doesn't it? (ôBorn Free,ô S.1: 32:39-33:03)

It should be noted that Dexter's memory flashbacks of Brian, which are co-experienced by the audience, picture the Ice Truck Killer as a kind-hearted boy. More precisely, he is seen hugging young Dexter, although he had just revealed his hiding place during a game of hide and seek, and is shown putting a plaster on his little brother's knee while praising his bravery and giving him advice on how to practice skateboarding safely. By exposing viewers to the memories of a nice, caring and thoughtful young Brian, Dexter's subsequent conflict about whether or not to kill Debra, a deed demanded by his brother, is made more comprehensible. As a result, it is ensured that Dexter is perceived as a victim, rather than a perpetrator, sustaining the audience's fear for him.

Looking at the first season's climax, in which Debra is bound, naked on a table, while Rudy urges Dexter to kill her, the unequal division of power is, drawing on Späth (170) , likely to provoke thrill. Rudy's superiority to Debra is visually emphasised by her nakedness and inability to move. Power over Dexter expresses itself in his apathetic

state, the result of unravelling the extent of Harry's lies, learning the truth about his past and being trapped in a crisis of identity. Dexter's self-consciousness is emphasised as he takes the knife Rudy hands him to kill his step-sister, saying, 'I don't know who I am' (Born Free, S.1: 35:36).

While Debra is physically endangered, Dexter's morality is on the line. As elaborated in chapter 7.2., Debra is Dexter's connection to a life beyond darkness and in accordance with the code. As a result, the decision of whether or not to kill Debra boils down to a decision between good and evil. That his rejection of the code would be the first step to becoming a ruthless killer is emphasised as Rudy draws a parallel between the influence of Harry on Dexter and the influence of Jiminy Cricket on Pinocchio.

RUDY. Dex, you don't have a code. Harry did. And he's been dead ten years. You can't keep him sitting on your shoulder like Jiminy fucking Cricket. You need to embrace who you are now. (Born Free, S.1 35:09-27)

By way of an explanation, as Jiminy Cricket is Pinocchio's personified conscience (Tick 18), providing him with ethical sensibilities (ibid.), the series underscores the fact that Harry's code is what separates Dexter from the Ice Truck Killer. Consequently, if Dexter were to ignore Jiminy Cricket, he might set foot on the path of the conscience-free, uncontrollable and unpredictable killers, a metamorphosis that is thrilling in itself, since it would be freeing him from all heteronomous control. As Brian asks Dexter 'who am I?' (Born Free, S.1: 34:48-49), he replies 'A killer' without reason or regret. 'You're free' (Born Free, S.1: 34:51-35:01), thus pointing to the fact that he lives a life that is unrestricted by moral principles, rules and conventions. However, while the Ice Truck Killer represents freedom, he also personifies what Seeßlen calls a 'fehlgelaufene Wandlung' (Seeßlen 28), that is to say, a transformation from a little, innocent, kind-hearted child into a killer without a conscience, 'der unheimlich Mörder zerstört die Alltäglichkeit des Lebens und ist zugleich das schreckliche Beispiel einer fehlgelaufenen Wandlung' (Seeßlen 28).

The last point of this subchapter discusses Koch's theory of thrill in relation to the first season's climax to demonstrate how 'crimen', 'sexus' and 'fructus' (Koch 15) are combined to intensify the experience of thrill. Violence merges with family matters, as Dexter's biological brother urges him to kill his step-sister. Additionally, 'sexus' finds expression in the former intimate relationship of Rudy and Debra as well as in her present state of nakedness. Furthermore, the impending murder of Debra can be compared to an impending act of incest, thus linking sexuality and violence. By way of an explanation, Johnson (81) observes that during the conduction of ritualistic murder

Dexter becomes intimate with his victims, since he undresses them, restricts them of their movement and forces them to face their crimes. In line with Johnson, Smith (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 393) argues that for Dexter, sex and death are infinitely intertwined. To provide evidence for her assumption, she refers to Dexter's first diffuse memory of his mother's murder during one of his therapy session that enabled him to engage in sexual intercourse with Rita for the very first time.

Brauerhoch (135) argues that repressed sexuality often lies at the bottom of sadistic pleasure, '[i]n der Erregung sadistischer Lust im Horrorfilm wird die erotische unerkannt und verdeckt miterregt' (ibid.). Examining Dexter's sexual behaviour, it is notable that at the beginning of season one he shuns intimacy. More precisely, in the first episode of the first season Dexter acknowledges that he does not understand the pleasure of sex.

DEXTER. Friday night - date night in Miami. Every night is date night in Miami and everyone's having sex. But for me sex never enters into it. I don't understand sex. [ë] when it comes to the actual act of sex, it's always just seemed so undignified. (Dexter, S.1: 21:36-22:01)

Moreover, he expresses relief about Rita's avoidance of sexual intimacy, given her history of abuse. As Rita eventually regains her sexual desires, it is Dexter who backs off, requiring psychiatric counselling to finally engage in sexual intercourse. Drawing back on Brauerhoch (135), one can argue that Dexter uses torture to compensate for his inability to feel and act on sexual impulses, an assumption that would explain his unconscious touching of Rita's upper thigh, '[w]hy did I touch her that way?' (Dexter, S.1: 27:11-12), while excitedly telling her about the Ice Truck Killer's victims.

Returning to the discussion of the first season's climax, Brian's urging of his brother to kill Debra in the same manner Dexter killed numerous other people for pleasure, thus equals a demand for incest, particularly as Rudy hands Dexter a knife, which can be psychoanalytically read as a phallic symbol. As Johnson (81) argues '[Dexter] penetrates his various victims with knives or other sharp objects - a penetration that could arguably be read as phallic.' In short, 'crime', 'sex' and 'fructus' (Koch 15) are deeply interwoven, as Brian, Dexter's biological brother; tries persuading Dexter, a killer murdering for pleasure and excitement, to kill his naked and strapped down step-sister, which is also Rudy's former lover, with the help of a knife, a psychoanalytic symbol of sexuality.

Leaving aside the discussion on the first season's climax, the next chapter will focus on how the series undermines attempts of fear control, generating thrill through an interplay of security and insecurity, control and loss of control (Mikos 43).

8. Control and loss of control in *Dexter*

There is a general consensus that an audience needs to feel safe in order to enjoy a thrilling experience (Balint 23; Mikos 42; Fahy 12). As discussed in chapter 2., Mikos (43ff.) identifies two different levels that enable viewers to control their fear triggered by a film's content, that is to say, their knowledge of the film being mere fiction and their knowledge of the film's genre. Moreover, he observes filmmakers to commonly induce fright by pretending to take away viewers's safety net (Fahy 12).

The present chapter will identify levels of fear control beyond those brought forward by Mikos by offering a comparative analysis of the attack on Donovan and Jaworski, and Debra and Monique. Moreover, isolated scenes will be discussed to demonstrate how a loss-of-control game (Mikos 43) is generated in *Dexter*.

8.1. Means to control fear

A first juxtaposition of the attack on Jaworski and Donovan shows that whereas Jaworski is assaulted inside a half-built multi storey house, located in a remote area, far away from civilisation, Donovan is ambushed only a few metres away from his previously directed concert. Drawing on a distinction made by Hanich (181) between the 'feeling' and 'understanding' of danger, my contention is that while Jaworski's situation causes strong fear on a non-cognitive level, given that the portrayal of isolation and darkness are stimuli that, as mentioned in chapter 2.1., instinctively arouse fear (Sluckin 105), the audience is unsettled for a longer time period by the attack on Donovan. The reason lies in the fact that getting into a car parked at some distance to a social event one attended is more likely to be experienced than driving out of the city to steal copper pipes from a construction site after dark. Consequently, while witnessing the attack on Donovan, audience's fear may be directed at future real-life situations.

Moreover, fear aroused by Jaworski's attack can much more easily be controlled, by, for example, blaming the victim for seeking out a place predestined for violence. Referring to theories of 'victim blaming', Andrew (132) observes that people tend to find fault in the victim's behaviour or personality to maintain the belief in a 'just world'.

The belief that victims must have done something neglectful, foolish, or provocative that led to their misfortunes dispels feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness and gives the blamer peace of mind about the existence of an orderly and just world. (Andrew 132)

Dietrick and Hall (98) argue along similar lines, noting that, if victims are perceived as 'thoughtless risktakers' or 'selfish hedonists', the level of empathy is lowered and morality is dismissed, so that the people involved are reduced to monster and prey. Consequently, the information that all of Dexter's victims are murderers reduces fear, as their fate appears self-imposed, a point that will be more thoroughly discussed in the subsequent subchapter.

Pointing at the results of different studies, Andrade and Cohen (293) argue that 'high levels of cognitive empathy (i.e., perspective taking) can significantly reduce people's ability to experience positive affect when facing negative stimuli and that emotional empathy (i.e., empathic concern) tends to heighten negative affect [6]. As Debra is, as noted earlier, an empathetic character, the question arises if the attack on her by the Ice Truck Killer can nevertheless be experienced as pleasurable. Some may argue that her decision to enter Rudy's boat, the location of the attack, reveals her as an aforementioned 'thoughtless risktaker' (Dietrick&Hall 98) and thus reduces audience's empathic feelings toward her. However, the Ice Truck Killer is portrayed as a master of disguise; even Dexter is deceived by him. Further, Debra's deep love for Rudy seems to blind her senses, which is presumably a common experience given the popularity of the proverb 'the eyes of love make blind'. Accordingly, one can hardly blame her for accepting the invitation of her boyfriend to drink one glass of champagne on his yacht after his proposal of marriage. Especially when compared to Monique's far more thoughtless behaviour of accepting Rudy's booking, despite having been questioned by the police about him, Debra's action appears reasonable.

Returning to Mikos's (34ff.) assumption that viewers' fear can be reduced by reminding themselves that the filmic world is not real, and/or hoping for films to adhere to genre conventions, it can be argued that Debra's plight is pleasurable, as viewers can infer from genre knowledge that main characters rarely die in the first season. Additionally, I feel that another level of fear control is offered by the series in the form of 'internal narrative cues' (Hanich 156). More precisely, the audience can, for example, draw on knowledge of Rudy's attack on Monique, shown at the beginning of episode eleven, and conclude that Debra, like the prostitute, will get strangled unconscious before being killed, which in turn raises their hopes that Dexter has enough

time to rescue her. Moreover, Dexter, already in full knowledge of Rudy's true nature, is shown frantically searching for his sister. As a result, control is provided by once more giving hope that Dexter will find her in time. Leaving aside the exploration on fear control, the following subchapter will discuss isolated scenes in *Dexter* that generate thrill by reducing audience's feeling of safety (Mikos 43).

8.2. *Dexter* - a loss-of-control game

The present analysis will look at three examples in *Dexter* that play with the audience's fear by offering and taking away their security. The first section will illustrate how, by omitting relevant information, the audience is subjected to an intense, but short-lived danger. The second section will demonstrate that the level of audience's fear goes up and down during the story of the Ice Truck Killer, while the last section will show how thrill is generated by making promises only to break them.

8.2.1. The murder of Mike Donovan - omitting significant information

Considering that Donovan is assaulted before the series reveals that Dexter merely kills murderers, his attack represents a prime example of the 'interplay of [] control and loss of control' (Mikos 43). By way of an explanation, the first episode of the first season starts with a man, who later introduces himself as Dexter, driving in a car at night. His thoughts, which are heard in voice over, 'on nights the night and it's going to happen, over and over again' (Dexter, S.1: 00:38-46) are an example of what Hanich (163) calls 'verbal foreshadowing' and contribute to the creation of a scene of dread, 'in an anticipatory type of fear like dread we expect something threatening to happen anytime soon' (Hanich 156f.). A few minutes into the episode Dexter, while observing Donovan conducting a choir, gives more specific information on his plans, 'here he is. Mike Donovan. He's the one' (Dexter, S.1: 1:41-47). Drawing on Hanich (163) '[] explicit information magnifies the threat, raises our expectations and enhances dread' consequently, when Donovan walks toward his car, viewers are presumably sitting on the edge of their seats. Upon entering his automobile, fear is likely to heighten, since, as already pointed out in chapter 7.4.1., 'movement into or through space' (Hanich 160) immerses viewers into the filmic world.

Besides triggering intense fear, the attack on Donovan causes loss of control. By way of an explanation, since Donovan is presented as a model citizen, a loving father, a skilful teacher and a friendly companion who seems to have no relations to his attacker, Dexter's assault lacks a motive. In an analysis of the thriller genre, Seeßlen (20f.) argues

that what provides security is knowledge of the opponents motive for murder, *ó[e]rst indem Moment, wo wir der Motivation des Täters auf die Spur gekommen sind, löst sich die Lähmung des Schreckens* (ibid.). Similarly, Fuchs (20), as mentioned in chapter 6.2., argues that killing for the sole purpose of killing is particularly disturbing. Besides the randomness of the crime, its close relation to real-life experiences also generates control loss. More precisely, as already mentioned in subchapter 8.1., getting into a car parked close to a concert is hardly avoidable and thus perceived as a danger one is exposed to in everyday-life (Cantor 193).

Drawing back on Andrew (132), blaming a victim for a crime allows viewers to uphold the belief that they are in control of danger, in other words, fear of a world in which *óbrutal acts might afflict anyone at any time* (ibid.) is reduced. Information on Donovan being a murderer, which is given shortly before Dexter conducts his killing ritual, thus offers fear control. More precisely, Donovan's plight can now be perceived as provoked, deserved and, considering the common proverb 'what goes around comes around', asked for. The next section will look at how information on the Ice Truck Killer alternately offers and withdraws control.

8.2.2. The Ice Truck Killer - playing with the audience's fear

As mentioned in chapter 7.1., up until the end of season one episode eight the Ice Truck Killer's identity remains hidden from the viewers as well as the characters. His existence is only discernible from the corpses and/or body parts he scatters at various places and the symbolic messages and/or clues he leaves for Dexter to find. Wulff (11) observes that

[w]hen one does not directly present protagonists' opponents or the source of the danger threatening them, but only shows its effects on the protagonists' world, then the antagonists become uncontrollable, pure calculation, and the product of the workings of the viewers' imagination [...]

Consequently, it can be argued that until the revelation of his identity, the Ice Truck Killer's actions trigger loss of control.

With the introduction of Neil Perry as the suspected Ice Truck Killer, fear can be controlled on two different levels. Firstly, evil can be attributed to a distinct object, losing its power as being extinguishable.

The more we see evil, and the more numbers that put it on display, the more shallow its depiction usually becomes. It is treated more simplistically and is easier to make fun of and wipe out. (Freeland 270).

Secondly, Neil Perry is marked as different from the ordinary people when one considers that he is described as a *loner* (‘Circle of Friends,’ S.1: 23:39), is found living in a trailer, pursues the art of *crypto-taxidermy* (‘Circle of Friends,’ S.1: 10:25), sings an operetta song during his arrest, and talks confusingly while being investigated. To use Zimmerman’s (xv) words in her description of how mental illnesses are portrayed in films, Neil Perry ‘exhibits an otherness’ since he deviates from the norm. Consequently, he becomes an avoidable and thus controllable danger. More precisely, the fear of falling victim to a murderer’s deception, generated by the show’s portrayal of well-adapted serial killers, presumably loses its grip in the light of Neil Perry being the Ice Truck Killer.

However, the control offered is taken away as soon as Rudy, the highly adapted amputee expert, is revealed to be the actual Ice Truck Killer. In contrast to Neil Perry, who lives withdrawn from the world and looks like a stereotypical computer nerd, Rudy is described as sexy (‘Seeing Red,’ S.1: 30:14) and portrayed as possessing a passion for helping. By way of an example, as obtaining the order to make prosthetic limbs for Toni Tucci, the recently discovered victim of the Ice Truck Killer, Rudy tells Debra, ‘Tony lost a piece of himself and I helped him find it I mean how often in life do you get to make someone whole?’ (‘Circle of Friends,’ S.1: 37:23-30). The fact that Rudy, unlike Neil Perry, does not stand out and attracts others, rather than repelling them, rekindles the audience’s fear of falling victim to a serial killer. In analysis of Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, Fahy (61) notes that fear is intensified by ‘lack of visual otherness’ (Fahy 61), since everyone is potentially dangerous in a world in which the bad do not differ from the good in appearance.

Moreover, as Rudy manages to fool Dexter, who is portrayed as possessing sharp senses, fear of not being able to recognise evil further increases. As Dexter eventually starts to question Rudy’s identity, the series subtly draws attention to the fact that Rudy manipulated him in the same way Dexter manipulates the audience. More precisely, Rudy’s display of virtues, such as friendliness, helpfulness, and generosity, which are part of Dexter’s own means to encourage affection from the audience, is what makes Dexter doubt that he is the Ice Truck Killer, ‘[t]hinking Rudy attacked Batista doesn’t make any sense. He’s a loving boyfriend. He spends his life helping people in need. He brought me steaks’ (‘Truth Be Told,’ S.1: 42:28-35).

The show goes one step further by trying to make the spectators victim to the same deception as the fictional characters. More precisely, after being kept in the dark

about Rudy's identity for over three episodes, they might find themselves as surprised as Dexter when learning about Rudy's true nature. If they are to fall for his deception, fear control is thwarted, as they can no longer reduce character's ignorance to mere fiction; the hope that their trust is placed more carefully thus fades. As Nickel argues, 'horror's bite [ë] is a *malicious* ripping-away of this intellectual trust, exposing our vulnerabilities in relying on the world and on other people' (Nickel 28).

Examining another method employed in *Dexter* to generate a 'loss-of-control game' (Mikos 43), season one episode eleven pictures Rudy standing in front of body parts, which are neatly arranged on a table and adorned with Christmas ribbons, while singing a changed version of the Christmas song *Deck The Halls*, '[d]eck the halls with parts of bodies [ë]' ('Truth Be Told,' S.1: 10:14-16). The scene offers fear control by revealing that the previously seen inconspicuous behaviour of the Ice Truck Killer is nothing more than an act to hide his real-self, which is distinguishable from the masses. By way of an explanation, as mentioned in subchapter 5.2., Schmid (qtd. in Green *Critical Studies in Television* 28) argues that fear is triggered when the line between the ordinary and the inhuman can no longer be drawn. Consequently, people endeavour to reveal the normality of a killer as a 'mask of sanity' (ibid.). Referring back to Lindsay's (pars 14.f) comment, quoted in chapter 5., '[t]his is the theatre of paranoia, and it grips us, too, because we need a way to see the clues that must be there.'

While, as demonstrated above, control is offered by showing that the Ice Truck Killer's real-self is differentiable from ordinary people, other sequences reduce the feeling of safety by deliberately emphasizing Rudy's human side, thus locating Otherness within human nature. By way of an example, as the police find a lozenge wrapper of the Ice Truck Killer at a crime scene, Dexter thinks, '[m]y favourite serial killer is a lozenge eater. How human of him' ('Love American Style,' S.1: 41:30-34).

Diese Mörder verstören uns zutiefst - die ganz normalen Typen, die Nachbarn oder Arbeitskollegen sein könnten, die vielleicht eine schwierige Kindheit durchleben mussten, aber alles in allem nicht mehr Grund zu töten haben als wir selbst. Diese Mörder verblüffen und erschrecken uns, eben weil sie so durchschnittlich wirken und uns - an der Oberfläche - so sehr gleichen. (Greig 6)

The following subchapter will show how repetitive elements in the series allow viewers to form expectations about the development of the story, and how viewers's knowledge of the killing ritual is exploited to generate loss of control.

8.2.3. Paul Bennett - the making and breaking of promises

As the killing ritual, shown six times in the first season, always ends with the death of Dexter's chosen perpetrator, and is preceded by Dexter introducing and stalking his victim, the audience is likely to draw on knowledge of previous episodes to form expectations on the outcome of the killing ritual and the events preceding it. I proceed from the assumption that such clear expectations of the story's development fulfil a similar function as the knowledge of the film's genre in Mikos's understanding, that is to say, offering fear control as viewers are familiar with some of the film's dos and don'ts, at the same time as representing a breeding ground for thrill, as the show can threaten to deviate from established patterns (Mikos 41).

For the purpose of illustrating how the series *Dexter* exploits viewers's knowledge of the killing ritual, I need to expand my analysis onto the first episode of the second season. More precisely, against expectations, one of Dexter's victims, who is already naked and strapped down to a table, breaks free (ÓIt's Alive, S.2). Consequently, viewers's emotions change from the anticipation of a victim's death to the unexpected fear for Dexter's well-being. Thrill is thus generated by ripping away viewers's safety net (Fahy 12).

The seventh and tenth episode of the first season follow a similar pattern in generating thrill, however, this time exploiting the audience's knowledge of Dexter's choice of victims. More precisely, the second rule of Dexter's code, which he is shown following sternly, forbids him to kill the innocent. Consequently, the audience rests assured that Dexter does not kill the good, which provides security. However, by making them believe that Dexter is going to kill Paul, a non-murderer, their safety net (Fahy 12) is taken away. It should be noted that his reflections on breaching the code trigger the fear that Dexter might turn into an unpredictable killer, a point discussed in detail in chapter 7.4.2..

Examining more closely the series's attempts to generate thrill through Dexter's potential murder of an innocent person, it is notable that danger heightens gradually. In season one episode seven, initial thoughts on murdering Paul enter Dexter's mind. More precisely, as Rita expresses the wish to see Paul gone, Dexter smiles, thinking 'he can do that' very easily (ÓCircle of Friends, S.1: 32:53-56). Furthermore, the moment Rita's lawyer announces that she could lose her children to Paul, the camera lingers on Dexter's face, suggesting his ill-intent. In season one episode ten his thoughts turn into plans, as he breaks into Paul's apartment, wearing his khaki shirt, thus instigating an

action that usually precedes murder. Moreover, while Dexter's reflections on breaching the codex were not expressed directly thus far, he is now heard thinking, "Harry didn't believe in pre-emptive killing, but maybe I can bend the rules, just this once" (Seeing Red, S.1: 22.43-33).

Fear reaches its first high point as Dexter hits Paul with a pan after a provoking conversation in Rita's kitchen and climaxes as Paul is portrayed lying in bed unconscious, while Dexter puts on gloves, takes out a syringe and says, "[l]et's face it, Paul. You've been a problem. It's time for you to go away" (Seeing Red, S.1: 45:06-23). The camera focuses on Dexter's face as he seems to pull something tightly. The scene then cuts to a portrayal of a freeway, leaving the outcome to imagination. Knowledge of Dexter's killing ritual encourages the audience to draw the conclusion that Paul has just been murdered. More precisely, the presence of a syringe and white gloves, which are tools used in all of Dexter's killing rituals, in addition to his remark that Paul is a problem that is now going to be solved, suggest his death. Fear is alleviated and safety re-established when it is revealed that Dexter did not kill Paul, but injected him with heroine so that he appears to have violated a condition of his probation and will be re-imprisoned. Drawing back on Mikos's (41) description of thrill, it can thus be observed that "formal and dramaturgical tools" were used to lead the audience astray, temporarily taking away control.

9. Conclusion

The preceding paper set out to investigate the generation of thrill in Showtime's *Dexter's* first season, to find reasons for the show's acclaim. A review of literary theories on the notion of thrill and an exploration of fear as its major element set the basis for the analysis of the show's first season.

Investigation into the exploitation of inborn fright revealed isolation, darkness and confinement to be among the show's frequently exploited stimuli. Their unsettling effect was found to be intensified by means of camera settings, *Mise en Scène*, or the combination of different fear evoking elements. Moreover, it was demonstrated how the exploitation of instinctive fear contributes to the creation of a scene of dread, triggers a moment of shock and creates a world of the animalistic.

Exploration into the portrayal of unconscious fear showed that abjection reveals itself in the form of the show's corpses and serial killers. Moreover, themes of death and the parallelisation between humans and animals were revealed to confront the audience

with repressed knowledge of their mortality, vulnerability and decay. Lastly, Dexter's killing ritual was identified as an outlet for fantasies of sadism, voyeurism and power.

Examination into the depiction of socially-constructed fear disclosed that *Dexter* taps into modern age anxieties by constructing a paranoid scenario of an evil that is not visually distinguishable from the good. Camera settings and editing techniques as well as characters' dialogues were found to intensify fear by drawing parallels to the real-world. Moreover, the show's portrayal of well-adapted serial killers was shown to give evil an omnipresent quality.

The subsequent chapter outlined intrinsic - the serial killer's personality and actions, as well as extrinsic - characteristics of the fictional world, criteria that manipulate the audience into siding with Dexter, ultimately hoping for a perpetrator's death. The guilt of rooting for a serial killer was shown to be upheld by the continual creation of anticipation of murder and revealed to climax when Dexter carries out the killing ritual, as audience and victims are united in pain. Moreover, fear was explained to result from facing one's own darkness and recognizing the fragility of common moral beliefs.

Considering thrill evocation through character endangerment, it was found that fear triggered by the Ice Truck Killer changes from a state of dread into a fear of an identifiable object, with thrill being primarily generated by the superior knowledge of the audience and the anticipation of violence against a well-liked character. Additional sources of thrill during the endangerment of Debra's and Dexter's life were identified, while a focus on psychological endangerment of the serial killer revealed fear to centre around Dexter's turn to evil and showed physical and psychological dangers to be interrelated.

Investigation into thrill as an experience of loss of control showed that the series offers fear control through internal narrative cues (Hanich 156), which provide hope for a character's survival, and through portraying victims with flawed personalities to reduce empathetic involvement and/or viewers' fear of uncontrollable crime. Moreover, examination of isolated scenes revealed that, in order to generate thrill, spectators are frequently deprived of control as significant information is omitted, their attempts to locate evil outside themselves is thwarted, or they are deliberately led astray.

All things considered, the preceding paper revealed that Showtime's *Dexter's* first season applies a wide range of fear-evoking techniques in an attempt to elicit thrill in a broad viewership. One rung on the ladder to success thus surely represents the

show's capability of giving high and frequent doses of thrills to a pleasure seeking audience.

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11. Appendix

Abstract (English)

The present paper examines thrill generating techniques in Showtime's *Dexter*'s first season to shed light on the series's success. Based on an analysis of the concept thrill and

an exploration of biological and psychological fear, the topic is approached from four different angles.

Firstly, thrill is considered to arise out of a portrayal of instinctive, unconscious and socially-constructed fear. It is demonstrated how depictions of stimuli triggering inborn fright result in the evocation of dread and shock, while contributing to the creation of an animalistic world. In the subsequent step, themes of death and crime are linked to the psychoanalytic concept of the uncanny and the abject, and shown to trigger existential anxieties. Moreover, it is illustrated that Dexter's killing ritual represents an outlet for primitive impulses, and it is revealed how social anxieties are exploited to construct and intensify a paranoid scenario of a hidden evil.

Secondly, thrill is regarded as emerging out of viewer's close relationship with a serial killer. It is illustrated how the audience is manipulated into siding with Dexter and shown how witnessing and anticipating his killing ritual unleashes fear by confronting viewers with their own darkness and with the fragility of common moral beliefs.

Thirdly, thrill is discussed as the physiological and psychological endangerment of a liked character. Through selected examples, elements that maximize thrill during Debra's and Dexter's exposure to danger are outlined and the series' climax is identified and analyzed.

Lastly, thrill is understood as an interplay of security and insecurity (Mikos 43). Different levels that offer viewers a sense of safety are identified, and selected examples are discussed to illustrate how the series alternately provides and withdraws control.

With the identification of thrill-provoking techniques in Showtime's *Dexter's* first season, the present paper could be used as a basis for qualitative research on viewer's responses to provide sustainable evidence for an existing correlation between the show's implementation of thrilling elements and its notable success.

Abstract (German)

Als Erklärungsansatz für den Erfolg der Fernsehserie *Dexter* untersucht die vorliegende Arbeit Techniken der Spannungserzeugung („Thrill“) in der ersten Staffel. Basierend auf einer Analyse des Konzeptes „Thrill“ und einer Betrachtung biologischer und psychologischer Ängste erfolgt eine Annäherung an das Thema aus vier Blickwinkeln.

Als Erstes wird *ÄThrilló* als eine, durch die Darstellung von biologischen, unbewussten und sozial-konstruierten Ängsten, ausgelöste Emotion verstanden. Das Hervorrufen von Furcht (*äreadö*) und Schock, sowie der Aufbau einer animalischen Welt werden auf die Ausnutzung instinktiver Ängste zurückgeführt. Des Weiteren werden Thematiken des Todes mit dem psychoanalytischen Konzept des Unheimlichen und *ähe abjectö* sowie mit der Auslösung existentieller Ängste in Verbindung gebracht. Schließlich werden die von dem Hauptcharakter Dexter durchgeführten rituellen Morde als ein mögliches Ventil für unterdrückte Wünsche analysiert und es wird demonstriert, wie durch das Heranziehen sozialer Ängste ein paranoides Szenario eines unscheinbaren Bösen konstruiert und intensiviert werden kann.

Als Zweites wird *ÄThrilló* als eine durch die enge Beziehung zwischen Zuschauer/innen und Serienmörder ausgelöste Emotion verstanden. Es wird untersucht inwieweit die Zuschauer/innen dazu manipuliert werden können, die Seite des Hauptcharakters einzunehmen. Thematisiert wird zudem, dass das Zusehen und das freudige Erwarten ritueller Morde Angst auslösen können, da der Fokus auf die menschliche Schattenseite und die die Zerbrechlichkeit herrschender moralischen Prinzipien gelenkt wird.

Als drittes wird *ÄThrilló* als physische und psychologische Bedrohung einer sympathischen Figur betrachtet. Mittels ausgewählter Beispiele werden Elemente herangezogen, welche die Spannung in jenen Momenten maximieren, in denen Dexter und Debra einer Gefahr ausgeliefert sind. Im selben Schritt wird der Klimax der Serie näher beleuchtet.

Im letzten Kapitel wird *ÄThrilló* als ein Wechselspiel von Sicherheit und Unsicherheit verstanden. Zum einen werden verschiedene Ebenen aufgezeigt, welche den Zuschauer/innen Sicherheit bieten. Zum anderen wird anhand ausgewählter Beispiele diskutiert mit welchen Strategien die Serie abwechselnd Kontrolle offeriert und entzieht.

Die Identifikation von spannungserzeugenden Methoden in der ersten Staffel von Dexter kann als Ausgangsbasis für eine qualitative Forschung über die Reaktion der Zuschauer/innen herangezogen werden, mit dem Ziel eine nachweisliche Korrelation zwischen *ÄThrilló* und dem Erfolg der Serie aufzuzeigen.

Lebenslauf

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