



## *The Personal Is Professional on TV*

# **Crafting the Politics of “Special Space”: 90210’s Scripting of Media Enjoyment in the Private Sphere**

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The television series *Beverly Hills, 90210*, won itself some instant enemies in addition to its excess of fans. Whether fan or foe, however, viewers often mention the show’s relentless focus upon the private social lives of its characters. Even though *90210* ostensibly depicts the lives of a group of college students, (once high school students, but they have matured through the show’s long run) one is hard pressed to find a scene in which these characters attend class, let alone use a book as something other than a coaster for their milkshakes. At first glance, this hermetic focus on the never-ending leisure activities of its characters suggests that the series focuses exclusively on concerns and happenings of the private sphere, as opposed to those of the public. This claim works from an understanding of the public sphere as a site of “social, political, and economic forces,” and the private as a “domain of individuality” existing beyond “political and economic forces.”<sup>1</sup> Understood as such, *90210*’s subordination of the school world (a training ground for entrance into the social, political, and economic forces of the public sphere) to that of a backdrop for teenaged personal life (a “domain of individuality”) suggests that the show’s narrative interest in the private sphere renders the public sphere of the *90210* world an empty prop, at best.

The claim that *90210* portrays private sphere, personal life to the exclusion of the public sphere, however, is complex if one considers more closely the nature of a *90210* teen’s personal life. Even when the *90210* character relaxes at home,

she or he listens to compact discs, watches television, rents videos, and reads magazines like *Rolling Stone* and *Seventeen*. As Bo Reimer suggests in his example of a teen using a personal computer, the use of media within the home infuses the private with the public sphere, thereby creating what he terms a “special public youth sphere.”<sup>2</sup> Joshua Meyrowitz also points to modern media technology’s evolution of a “special” sphere, in terms of describing an area that eludes categorization as either distinctly public or private. Meyrowitz suggests that those who watch television in their homes occupy a “non-place,” in that the viewer’s location cannot be defined by “walls, or streets, or neighborhoods,” but only by an “evanescent ‘experience’” of viewership.<sup>3</sup> For Meyrowitz, the existence of a “non-place” prompts the question, “. . . how does one behave in such places?”<sup>4</sup> Whether we call it a “non-place” or a “special sphere,” Meyrowitz’s question points to the possibility that the space a *90210* character creates when she or he flips on the television in the Walsh household is neither purely private nor public.<sup>5</sup> It follows, then, that the social role of a person occupying this “special sphere”—this new hybrid sphere of both public and private—is defined neither by the public nor private sphere.

How, then, does the social role of an individual placed in the unlocatable space of a special sphere get defined? In pursuit of this question, this essay draws upon an extended reading of a *90210* scene, and begins by mapping out how the *90210* characters in this scene do occupy a “special,” public and private hybrid space, as opposed to merely a private space. The *90210* text renders this hybrid space as “naturally” as possible, drawing, as will be discussed, upon the structure of the music video in order to make the *90210* viewer comfortable with the potentially jarring interruptions that can accompany a convergence of public and private space. This move to erase, or “naturalize” the presence of public media in the private sphere thereby creates a space for the television text of this episode to script the role of a special sphere participant. Scripted approaches I will examine here include foregrounding the happy viewer, offering rationalizations to convert the potentially unhappy viewer, using visual clues to harmonize the public sphere’s invasion of the private to again allay potential viewer discomfort, and finally psychologizing and expelling any private person who overtly resists public media’s saturation of private space. Such scripting writes the special sphere viewer’s approval of media saturation, and thereby obscures that viewer’s personal politics in favor of what I will call “media politics.” Finally, this paper closes with a discussion of how historical changes in our understanding of the term “character” structurally reinforce the *90210* text’s claim that media politics have a necessary, or “natural” presence in private space and the private self residing there.

To begin this case study of how social roles get crafted by media in the “special space” where the private sphere and public media converge, we can turn to some scenes from one of *90210*’s Spring, 1996 episodes. In this episode, David and Donna have made a music video for *Powerman 5,000*’s “Strike the Match,”

in which Donna stars as a leather clad bimbo. The two have an appointment to pitch their video to an agency, but decide to first screen the video for their friends in order to get some personal feedback. Here, then, we have the makings of a "special sphere": David and Donna air a professional-quality media production ("professional-quality" because the video ends up being purchased by the agency), in the private, personal space of their friend Brandon's living room. This public-private intersection is further underscored by David and Donna's plan to use their friends' personal, affective reactions to edit their professional, media production. In so doing, the private consumption of media becomes a public production; a friend's like or dislike transmutes into critical feedback which the professional media producer then incorporates into future media creations.

In addition to the structural resemblance David and Donna's private video screening has to a "special sphere," specific attention to camera shots in this scene also points to the public-private hybridity involved in a *90210* character's private consumption of a media product. For example, when David dims the lights we hear the first bar of heavy bass music that accompanies his video, but the camera neglects to show us the images that presumably accompany this music. Instead, we see a close up of Donna, who has her eyes riveted to the airing video that we, the audience, do not see. It is only after the camera has lingered on Donna's face that we cut to the video, thus our view of the video is delayed. Hence, our focus is scripted primarily on the narrative of audience reception, rather than on the narrative of the video itself. As the video progresses, furthermore, these interruptions of the video narrative occur with more frequency and more complexity. In addition to the close-up shot of a *90210* character followed by a cut to the video, we have a series of cuts that show the video makers anxiously scrutinizing their audience. In one series the camera cuts from the airing video to a close-up of Donna's face, follows her gaze to cut to her boyfriend, Joe, and then follows his eyes back to the video screen. The series can also get extended, where a gaze that begins with Donna and cuts to Joe will then return back to Donna before focusing on the video screen. The frequent repetition of these types of cuts thus extends the focus on audience reception begun by the camera's opening focus on Donna. Further, such focus on audience reception hinders any exclusive focus upon the media production itself, since the camera shots of viewing characters frequently interrupts the video narrative. Audience reception focus also forecloses any exclusive attention to personal interactions between characters; Brandon and Susan, for example, cease their horseplay on the living room sofa as soon as the video begins. Concern about the performance of audience reception does not fit squarely into the public world of a video production or the private world of sofa horseplay. Instead, it occupies a "special space" in between, created by the private character's structured *consumption* of the public production.

The camera time *90210* gives to its characters' reception of media could potentially frustrate and disrupt the *90210* fan in that one's ability to watch the video gets jaggedly interrupted by the series of camera cuts discussed. Instead, the

television text renders such interruptions “natural,” and thus works to ensure the viewer’s comfort in this space of foregrounded media consumption. The structure of the music video suits itself particularly well to making interrupted media feel natural. While it may have an underlining, all-encompassing narrative, the music video thrives on stringing together series of potentially discrete picture images, a technique well suited to interruption.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, David and Donna’s video particularly lends itself to the option of discrete shots as opposed to linear narrative, since nothing seems to “happen” in the fragments of video that we do see. We either watch a singer and his band performing before an audience of screaming fans, or watch Donna’s solitary video persona in her scanty leather, contorting her body in different “sexy” positions as she sits (or stands, or lies, or crouches) on a parked car. Here, then, we find some of the ultimate clichés for music video images: a performing band, adoring fans, and a half-naked, gyrating, not-doing-anything-in-particular woman. As a cliché in excess, however, the video seems tailor-made for interruption; clichéd images do not need to be seen in a full continuum to be understood, and thus the television audience can feel as if it has watched the entire video even though it has “missed” at least half of it because of the multiple camera cuts to the *90210* characters/viewers. Additionally, the music accompanying the video works to naturalize the *90210* cuts from video to viewer. These cuts usually occur during moments in the song where the singer’s lyrics and loud guitar give way to a drum beat accompanied only by a lone bass line pulsing out three-note progressions in a series of four bars. This sudden, extended drop in volume and musical complexity produces the equivalent of a musical “pause” or interlude. By pairing the cuts with these interludes, the breaks from the video shots to the audience reception shots appear as organic outgrowths of the corresponding breaks, or interludes, in *Powerman 5,000*’s song.

With a *90210* audience willing to watch teenagers watch a video, the television text has space to model detailed performances of good and bad viewing behavior. Not surprisingly, *90210* tells us that the “good” viewer-consumer enthusiastically enjoys public entertainment and welcomes it into his or her home. For example, when the previously discussed series of camera cuts focus on Brandon, he appears to concentrate totally on the airing video. In these shots, Brandon’s eyes never leave the screen, his brow furrows in concentration, and he occasionally nods in approval. Considering that the video contains only an extended string of clichés, one might wonder why Brandon needs to watch so intently; after all, the television audience can watch only a part of the video and still get the gist of it. Brandon’s intense concentration, then, cannot be a necessity. Rather, his intensity functions as a performance of viewing approval and engagement. As the most stable and supposedly objective member of the *90210* gang, Brandon acts as a moral fulcrum for the show’s values. Thus, when Brandon appears to relish his consumption of mass media in the private space of his living room, he sanctions that media’s presence. Similarly, Brandon’s brainy girlfriend, Susan, appears fully taken with what she sees. Camera cuts to her face invariably

find her smiling broadly, and her eye contact with the video screen is as uniform as Brandon's. The pleasurable absorption both these characters exhibit in their media consumption thus scripts a primary type of "good media consumer" behavior, in which the occupant's role in the "special sphere" centers around enjoying, and thus perpetuating, the occupancy of public-private space.

Besides its construction of these halcyon images of the "good" media consumer who both enjoys and approves of the practice of media consumption, this episode also scripts how a viewer might become the good consumer we see impersonated by Brandon and Susan. That is, *90210* constructs a type of subconscious conversion narrative, instructing how a would-be "bad," or resistant viewer might re-read any potentially offensive media so that it instead becomes pleasurable.<sup>7</sup> Reconsider the image of the grinning Susan. As a character, Susan is portrayed (and often ridiculed) as a feminist in excess; she debuts on the series, for example, by writing a so-called "male-bashing" editorial for her college newspaper. It is this same, crudely conceived feminist character who watches the music video in which Donna, clad in various combinations of tight leather and breast-spilling bustiers, exposes her body to every angle the camera can invent. Incredibly, however, Susan grins throughout the airing of this production—a grin explicable, I suggest, by her ability to re-read the video in a manner consistent with her formalist, feminist politics. In her explanation of why she enjoys the video, Susan crows: "I may be biased, but I love the fact that the woman has all the fire and the men have to come to her. . . . we should all be that lucky." Susan's approval here of the video exhibits "re-reading" in that substantively, her reading is questionable. In terms of a woman "having all the fire," Donna's video character possesses literal fire only in the form of a match that she lights on the inside of her leather-booted leg, and then extinguishes with a breath that allows a lingering close-up of her fire-engine red lips. Indeed, in a literal sense, Donna extinguishes the fire Susan claims for her. Susan may, however, be referring to a metaphorical "fire," in which case "fire" could connote the MTV sexiness of Donna's exposed, gyrating body in the video. If so, then such power would arguably be of a very limited kind. For Susan, already a college newspaper editor and an aspiring politician, the use of an exposed female body to symbolize power suggests a discordant (and potentially displeasing) contrast with the ways in which Susan pursues power.

Susan's claim that "men have to come" to the woman Donna plays in the video also rings false. In the fragments we see, Donna's character remains continuously isolated from the all-male band singing to a crowd of adoring fans. While the concert takes place in a crowded theater of some kind, Donna's car is parked in what appears to be a remote country setting, where she seems isolated from the notice, let alone the approach, of any man in the video narrative. The substance of Susan's reading, then, is not particularly sophisticated or even accurate, yet this does not necessarily point to narrative sloppiness in the *90210* script. Rather, Susan's inexact attention to media content presents re-reading as

a wholly formal process, and thereby transforms re-reading into an accessible and facile skill that can be accomplished instantaneously enough for the viewer to enjoy a program before she or he even consciously experiences it as offensive. Hence, we never see a Susan who dislikes David and Donna's video because of its potentially anti-feminist portrayal of women. Rather, Susan so quickly uses her formal re-reading skills to align the video with her personal "bias," that she "likes" the video before any dislike has the chance to manifest itself physically. Thus, Susan's self-conversion into a "good," (happy) consumer, sanctions and demonstrates re-reading as a means of using the politics of media enjoyment to override one's private, "biased," or particularized points of view.

In addition to working at the level of narrative, as in the Susan example, *90210* makes its audience more comfortable with public media's saturation of private space by manipulating visual cues. In Donna's case, we encounter a possible viewership disruption different than Susan's potential political objections. Donna embodies the potentially irreconcilable split of understanding oneself as simultaneously a private viewer and public persona: a split theoretically present for any private television viewer whose absorption in a show depends upon that viewer's dual and simultaneous identifications as a private self, and as the public character she or he watches. Donna's position as both viewer and actor dramatizes the *90210* viewer's potentially schizophrenic identification. In this dramatization, furthermore, the gap between Donna's public and private selves seems particularly cavernous because there is such a disjunction between the character Donna plays in the video and the private character she plays as part of the *90210* gang. In the video, Donna embodies visual clichés of a sexually "ready" character, as suggested by her tight leather outfits as well as the close-up shots of her parted lips and opening legs. This sexually "ready" character strongly clashes with the "personal" character Donna plays on the show, where she is the only female "virgin" in her gang of friends, and in one episode considers joining a convent. How, then, is the *90210* viewer to understand Donna's public-whore image in relation to her private-virgin persona? Through the suturing work of the camera, the viewer gets encouraged to smooth over the jarring difference between the personal and the public Donna.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, cuts by the television camera create the illusion that movements made by the demure Donna in Brandon's living room are continued by the gyrating character she plays in the video. For example, as *90210*'s demure Donna lifts her hand to her face, the camera then cuts to the video's gyrating Donna, whose hands play around her face, and then again cuts back to *90210*'s demure Donna, whose hand we see drop. Through this series of cuts focused on Donna's hand, then, the camera stitches together the movements of the virgin-Donna with the whore-Donna, thus easing the viewer through the paradox of viewing both.

One problem in the above example of how the camera integrates the virgin Donna with her whore representation erupts with Joe, Donna's boyfriend. In the series of cuts with Donna's hand, the camera (and we) follow the gaze of Joe: we see demure Donna's hand, the camera cuts to focus on Joe, whose gaze we follow

to the sultry video image of Donna's hand, the camera cuts back to Joe's gaze, and we finally follow his eyes to look at demure Donna and watch her hand drop. Joe's placement in this sequence of shots foregrounds him as one who potentially interrupts *90210*'s otherwise fluid visual movement between Donna's private self and its public representations. In other words, he structurally occupies the space of a resistant media consumer, and one does not have to wait long to find out why; Joe fails to re-read public media in a manner that gives him pleasure. Unlike Susan, he allows his personal bias to disrupt his viewing; thus he dislikes the video he watches.

Joe's position as a resistant viewer is narratively pre-figured before the video airs; he chooses to watch the video from a standing position, and places himself much farther away from the television set than either Brandon or Susan, who sit together on a sofa relatively close to the screen. The standing viewer is more likely to leave the media-infused room before the seated viewer, and the same is true for the viewer who has an excess of physical distance between her or himself and the screen. Furthermore, once the video begins, Joe's "bad media consumer" symptoms are confirmed; he exhibits facial expressions of displeasure, at times looks away from the screen altogether, and following the screening, Joe leaves the room abruptly and isolates himself in Brandon's kitchen. Joe's initial symptoms of resistant viewership, then, snowball into his removal to the kitchen, and concomitant physical rejection of the "special" living room space of media presence within the private sphere. The connection of his symptoms of inattentive viewership (looks away, distance from screen) and non-enjoyment (frowns) to his spatial removal lend further weight to the argument that the *90210* text's portrayal of happy and enthralled viewership are media politics critical to the perpetuation of the "special sphere." With opposite symptoms, as we see in Joe's case, a character may exit the special sphere in search of a more private space.<sup>9</sup>

Having figured Joe as resistant to the special sphere, the *90210* story line heavy-handedly shuts down this resistant character in order to un-block the flow of media into private space. First, the episode censors Joe's behavior by psychologizing his dislike of media.<sup>10</sup> When, for example, Donna follows Joe into the kitchen to ask him about the video, she does not ask "Did you like the video?" or "Do you have a problem with the video?" but instead demands hostilely, "What's wrong with you?" This accusatory question forcibly figures Joe's displeasure with the video as a personal failing on his part; something must be wrong with him, not the video. And, by articulating what his video watching already implied, Joe's response tells us what's wrong—he resists the dissemination of public media in private spheres, as suggested by his reply to Donna's question. "What if this thing [meaning the video] actually ends up on TV? . . . You want my family to see you dancing around half-naked?" Here, Joe blatantly objects to media dissemination. He hopes that the video will not be shown on television, and specifically notes that he would not want the video to invade family space—a space that, in American culture, has long signified the private sphere. In short, Joe

wishes the public media sphere away from the private sphere, and thus up-ends the very media dissemination of which *90210* is a part.<sup>11</sup>

Joe's specifically stated desire to cordon off his family space from certain media productions expands the range of personal politics we have thus far seen in this episode. Whereas Susan possesses a formalist feminist outlook, Joe seems to practice clichéd rudiments of the conservative's view on television. He objects to images of a woman in a state of undress, ("... dancing around half-naked?") and his impulse is to prevent, or censor the projection of such images into the home—an agenda that could easily integrate itself into a treatise by Bob Dole on "family values," Demi Moore, and *Striptease*. Joe's character profile extends this impression of him as a young, representative conservative: he is a white male, hails from a small, rural town, plays varsity football, and imagines his future wife as a homemaker. Just as Susan's feminism gets subordinated to media politics of enjoyment, however, so too must Joe's conservatism find a space for itself within media enjoyment. Joe, however, shows no signs of learning to re-read media so as to reconcile it to his personal politics. As both his physical rejection of Brandon's living room, and his verbal rejection of Donna's performance suggest, Joe instead chooses to reject any medium that he finds discordant with his personal system of values.

The *90210* plot line finds a crude, though decisive means of containing Joe's subversive refusal to engage with media: by killing his character. Immediately following the video viewing, Donna and Joe's relationship heads into a downward spiral, and after just two more shows and a rejected proposal of marriage, Joe heads back to small town life and permanently departs from the *90210* scene.<sup>12</sup> I call this move "crude" in that it blatantly suggests that to reject public media's presence in one's private space is to cease existing: a self-fulfilling prophecy for television representation, in that if Joe's character stops being disseminated, that character in a sense stops "living." This notion of a self that exists only so long as that self can be refracted through media also backhandedly appears in the rhetoric of Donna's response to Joe's challenge. In her answer to Joe's quip about half-nakedness, Donna retorts: "It's not me, I'm playing a *character*." Here, her use of the term "character" transforms Donna from a personal, private "me" into a professional actress required to take and discard various personas as part of her work. Donna's public/private distinction, however, fails on a pragmatic level in that the "me" she lays claim to is just as much the production of a professional actress as is the character Donna plays on the video; the *90210* viewer knows that both the "personal" Donna and the "public" Donna are acted characters. Ironically, Donna's claim to a division between self and character instead points out the difficulty of constituting any "me" distinctly separate from a public performance of self. Furthermore, if self appears inextricable from media expressions of it, then a personal refusal to include media dissemination in the innermost recesses of one's private life and space appears not only "abnormal," but also impossible.



The use of the term "character" to point out how *90210* constructs self as inextricable from its representations suggests a modern manipulation of vocabulary about character. Historically understood, Donna's use of this term to justify dissemination of her undulating, leather-clad body reads ironically. In the nineteenth-century, for example, the term "character" denoted (according to Joan Rubin's reading of Emerson) "integrity and balance within," qualities that hinged on attention to "'moral sense,' and the practice of 'self denial.'"<sup>13</sup> This understanding of "character" works well with Joe's complaints, as opposed to Donna's defense. True to a nineteenth-century understanding, Joe implies that manifestations of one's character must conform with moral values, and his "family values" leave no room for sluttish impersonations. Joe's insistence on a moral accountability for "character" also resonates with Raymond Williams' historical definition of the term; by the early eighteenth-century, according to Williams, "character" indicated "a strong or striking quality."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Joe insists that Donna's character show some kind of strength, or consistency, whereas she counterpoises with the notion that character instead makes room for play. Joe, then, locates character in a much more dated context, whereas Donna works from a distinctly twentieth-century definition: namely, in the context of Warren Susman's text, an evolutionary definition where interest in "character" collapses into "personality," thereby stressing values of "leisure" as opposed to the nineteenth-century's "austerity" and "sacrifice."<sup>15</sup> In other words, the new personality-infused character was and is expected to express the self through leisure activities. Susman talks about Ford's motor car as an example of a "machine for pleasure" through which one was encouraged to express the leisure-infused self. It is a small jump from the car as pleasure machine to the television. Modern definitions of "character" thereby structurally include a space for pleasure technology. This space gets accessed by the *90210* imperative that enjoyment of media is the mainstay of the *90210* character, and runs counter to Joe's fear that the character of Donna or of his family may be in jeopardy from media.

Additionally, Donna's claim upon a twentieth-century understanding of character renders the inclusion of pleasure technology into expressions of self a seemingly *inevitable* development. Another modern development in the denotation of "character" as it merges with "personality" is the understanding of the latter in what Susman terms a "performing self."<sup>16</sup> In other words, the expression of oneself becomes a public, exterior one, that depends upon the reaction of a social other to one's character.<sup>17</sup> This paradox of a publicly mediated, private personality likewise suggests itself in the definitions of earlier centuries. Even as writers like Emerson, for example, insist on the interiority and moral stability of character, they also claim that one must draw from publicly disseminated authority (like Emerson's text) to access this character.<sup>18</sup> If, then, as twentieth-century definitions claim (and earlier ones imply) that the constitution of private personality reads and/or refracts itself through public expression or public texts, then Donna's construction of her video character loses the transgressive status Joe

would assign it. Instead, her performance impulse stands as a modern means of character play, and one that, tellingly enough, cannot allow the private individual to remain fully isolated from public spheres (or their disseminations) at any time. Given such isolation—as in Joe’s retreat to the kitchen, and then his resulting “death” as a character—the character will have no means of reflecting itself, and hence cease existing. Thus, when understandings of “private” character depend upon the intake of media, then media politics triumph over any character’s personal disinclinations to the “special” sphere.

## NOTES

1. Gunther Kress, “Language in the Media: The Construction of the Domains of Public and Private,” *Media, Culture, and Society* 8 (October, 1986): 400.

2. Bo Reimer, “The Media in Public and Private Spheres,” *Youth Culture in Late Modernity*, eds. Johan Fornas and Goran Bolin (London, 1995), 64.

3. Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place* (New York, 1985), 146.

4. *Ibid.*

5. My claim here that *90210* performs a modern cultural absence of “actual” division between public and private spheres is informed by a number of authors on media theory. In addition to the citations already given for Kress, Reimer, and Meyrowitz, see also Simon Frith’s “Hearing Secret Harmonies,” *High Theory/Low Culture*, ed. Colin MacCabe (Manchester, 1986), 56; Peter Dahlgreen, *Television and the Public Sphere* (London, 1995), 87; and Richard Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time* (Durham, 1994), 58.

6. For a detailed discussion of the structure of music videos, see Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory* (Minneapolis, 1992). Relevant to my claim that music video viewing is “interruptable,” Goodwin writes that both the music and images of music videos engage in frequent repetitions—audio and visual “hooks”—in order to “inscribe the text with pleasure” (Goodwin, 90). While Goodwin suggests that these repetitions in fact work to encourage re-watching, I suggest that they also make possible a certain kind of watching; i.e., one in which the visual and audio narrative may be interrupted without critically disorienting the audience.

7. The notion of “re-reading” in order to obtain pleasure from media appears in various arguments within Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance* (Chapel Hill, 1991), 86-157. In her discussion of pulp romance structure and readership, Radway traces how the reader learns to re-read aggressive male behavior, and hence transform the romance hero’s potentially upsetting aggression into a source of pleasure (see Chapters 3 and 4).

8. Other examples of the *90210* text’s struggles with understanding oneself as simultaneously a “public” and “private” person work well in reference to Kelley’s character. Kelley is a student, like the rest of the gang, but also a sometime model whose character appeared on the cover of *Seventeen* magazine. In some of these modeling episodes, Kelley struggles with how to reconcile public ideals of beauty with her concerns about her appearance in “real,” everyday, private life. To reconcile the two, she decides to take some modeling jobs in order to *publicly exhibit her beauty to herself*, and thus feel confident about this beauty in her day to day life. The *90210* text thereby suggests that public images of the self do not produce cavernous, or anxiety-laden splits in one’s private personality, but instead enable a more “whole” view of the private self—a particularly ironic conclusion considering how fashion magazine articles and advertisements deftly inflame anxieties about personal appearance in order to sell products.

9. Joe’s decision to resist media by leaving the room—in effect, by metaphorically turning off the media—is a radically different kind of resistance than we find in a work like Radway’s *Reading the Romance*. In Radway’s work, she speaks of a romance reader who interprets popular culture narrative in a way satisfying to the individual’s politics; this type of reinterpretation likewise occurs in Susan’s “feminist” re-reading. Joe, however, refuses to engage at all with the media; he is a resistant viewer who places his resistance outside of the parameters of the “special sphere.”

10. For a discussion of how one’s objection to a social problem may get internalized, or “psychologized,” see Leslie Fishbein, “The Snake Pit,” *American Quarterly* 31 (Winter 1979), 641-665.

11. How does Joe's disaffinity for the intersection of public media and private family space get displaced so seamlessly as a psychologized problem on Joe's part? In the context of Meyrowitz's *No Sense of Place*, this displacement makes more sense. In his chapter on "The New Social Landscape," Meyrowitz speaks of how the modern citizen can no longer isolate her or himself in specific places, but is instead always "in range" of electronic media. In the context of this modern world, one who actively chooses to be "out of touch" appears "abnormal"(147). Psychologized vocabulary like "abnormal," then, appears linked to one's impulse to reject the public, media presence in any and every space.

12. Donna's refusal of Joe's marriage proposal acts out how the *90210* text consistently subjugates private politics to its agenda of promoting the inclusion of media in private life. Whereas Susan's feminist concerns are quashed (although given lip-service) by her atypical (for her character) approval of the video-Donna's specularized body, feminism revives here when Donna rejects Joe's proposal: she tells Joe she wants to remain single in order to pursue her "dreams," one of which is continuing her work in the music business. Here, then, Donna's choice to define herself through the public, business world as opposed to the private world of romantic love smacks of modern feminism. However, I suggest that such "feminism" is given space here only when compatible with the television text's primary agenda of inscribing public media in private life; by choosing video-making over marriage, the public world of media figures first and foremost in Donna's private decisions.

13. Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middle/Brow Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 8.

14. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York, 1983), 234.

15. Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1984), 276.

16. *Ibid.*, 280.

17. For a discussion of the modern self as an exteriorized, "other directed" self, see David Reisman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, 1967), 22-23.

18. Rubin, *Middle Brow Culture*, 8, 23.