Chapter 5: Researching Affect in Reality TV Text

This chapter addresses methodological reflections and research methods. Based on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 3, I consider the mechanism of reality TV as not just work on the plane of *signification* but also the plane of *affect*. These two planes do not exist in polarity but in constant interaction. Together they invite and engage the viewer into an affective relation with the audiovisual texts of reality TV. In order to investigate such an entangled and dynamic mechanism, I produce two levels of analysis: a micro level and a macro level. The micro level focuses on the media text itself, a synthesized analytic approach that combines methods of narrative, textual and film analysis is developed, in order to capture the *representational*, *experiential*, and *environmental* constitutions of the text. The macro level focuses on the "situatedness" of reality TV text within the larger institutional, social, historical, and political contexts, which follows the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA).

To be specific, in this chapter I first clarify the analytical challenges of performing qualitative television research with affect and emotion. Secondly, the synthetic analytic approach is elaborated. Finally, I illustrate how I select the Chinese reality television show *X-Change* as the case, and introduce the research design. As a whole, I approach affect not as prediscursive or precognitive somatic reactions but rather as "inextricably linked with meaning-making and with the semiotic (broadly defined)" (Wetherell, 2012, p. 20). This allows me to trace the becoming and transformation of affects in the multimodal text, as they are either integrated with ideological framing within the narrative structures that manage emotional performances or registered in and through a certain affective dynamic internal to the audiovisual images.

5.1 Rethinking affect and social structure

The renewed interest in affect has offered an opportunity to reconsider televisual culture. As noted in the theoretical chapter, the affective turn and the various theoretical strands it entails ask us to extend our analytic attention to focus on materiality, space, embodiment and ontology, often presented in contrast to contemporary theory, specifically, post-structuralist and social constructivist theories (Koivunen, 2010). In this sense, the dominant approach of television studies that focuses on questions of representation, ideology, and discourse should be re-examined. Indeed, media scholars have invested considerable time and energy into the ideological valences and influences of media texts. Baudrillard (1988) claimed that "all Western faith and good faith became engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange" (p. 170). In his canonical essay "Encoding/Decoding" (1980), Hall suggested that dominant ideologies are encoded into media texts and that audiences mainly decode them in three ways: the dominant/hegemony, where audiences accept the meaning as it was encoded; the negotiated, a mixture of accepting and rejecting the message; and the oppositional, where audiences decoding a message in a contrary way. Along this approach, academic attention has been paid to how reality TV texts are ideologically laden and how audiences interpret the ideological codes and hegemonic patterns of media forms. Correspondingly, detailed analyses have exhibited a strong discourse orientation, and to a large extent only focused on spoken or written language.

However, not just an ideological battleground, reality TV also offers a mediated field for affects and emotions to perform, communicate and accumulate. In the last chapter I reviewed literature about the role of emotion and affect in and by reality TV, revealing that the power of this television genre lies more in its ability to create affective resonances, rather than in the ideological implications. It functions similar to a "qualia machine" (Eder, 2016), inviting the audience to engage affectively with the represented world. Hence, the perspective of affect offers an alternative lens to break the limits of representational analysis, so that we can re-imagine the affective potentiality of media texts. As Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) proposed, "there is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)", being in every sense is entangled, connected, indefinite, impersonal, shifting into different

multiplicities and assemblages (p. 23). Therefore, from the perspective of relational affect, rather than merely discussing what the emotions in reality TV are and whether they are authentic or fake, I pay more attention to exploring the specific ways they articulate with signs, bodies, objects, etc., and how they work to maintain or challenge existing power relations and social identities.

How then, can we perform qualitative television research with affect and emotion? While a growing field of research has begun to develop methods for investigating emotions, mainly in media textual analysis and audience analysis focusing on the micro level of the inner psychological perception of viewers (as discussed in Chapter 3.3), academic research on the methodological implications of affect has remained rather limited. In many cases, the term affect is used to describe trans-subjective, non-representational, and immaterial intensities that are outside the social and resistant to structure, and difficult to grasp in any type of stabilized empirical material (cf. Massumi, 2002; Brennan, 2004; Clough, 2008). This division between dynamic affect and rigid structure in particular has often created what Margaret Wetherell has termed a "methodological nightmare" saturated with "blocks for empirical research" (2015, p. 152). In effect, it would lead us to the unexpected understanding that only socio-culturally constructed emotions are the appropriate field of social scientific research, and the core motives of affective phenomena are excluded (Brown & Tucker, 2010). As Hemmings (2005) also argues, "we are left with a riddle-like description of affect as something scientists can detect the loss of (in the anomaly), social scientists and cultural critics cannot interpret, but philosophers can imagine" (p. 563).

Furthermore, as I also mentioned in Chapter 3, when criticizing social constructionism and post-structuralism for being unable to grasp embodiment, the moment of becoming, ontogenesis and qualitative growth, some affect scholars have redirected their attentions to more body-centered, sometimes even psychological and physiological frameworks of analysis. Empirical-experimental evidence from scientific domains including biology, quantum physics, cognitive science, affective neuroscience, as well as developmental psychology have been appropriated to verify the "naturalized" organizations of affect. For example, the neuroscientific discovery of so-called "mirror neurons" are often drawn on to verify the capability of a person to understand intention, action, and also another's experience – which is what we typically mean by "empathy". However, some critics (cf. Hemmings, 2005; Leys, 2011; Papoulias & Callard, 2010) expressed their concern that this use of neuroscience is a strategic and rather dubious one. For Cromby (2012), "unless these

moves to the language of neuroscience actually add explanatory force, this is mere neurobabble" (p. 299).

In line with the theoretical framework of relational affect established in Chapter 3, my methodology in the study of affect and emotion in reality TV is based on the *working concept* "affective arrangement" proposed by Slaby, Mühlhoff and Wüschner (2019). It functions as a generative template that can facilitate micro-analyses of socio-material settings, relational affect, and their mutually formative combination. Accordingly, they propose to take *arrangement thinking* as a particular thought style and a methodological orientation for qualitative research:

> an affective arrangement is a *fragmentary*, *open-textured* formation…the concept only finds application when there is a characteristic 'intensive' mode of relatedness that holds the elements together, a specific *mode* of affecting and being affected. In such a dynamic interplay, the elements sustain a local sphere of affective intensity and thereby both initiate and give shape to characteristic affective relations and agentive routines. (p. 33–34, italics in original).

Orientated toward the situatedness of affect, arrangement thinking views the dimension of materiality and expression as operating independently but in an intimately connected manner. Affect is understood here not as opposed to social and semiotic structures of meaning, but as a process that involves biological, psychological and social dimensions, without privileging any one dimension. In this sense, it allows affect to be approached empirically, rather than being confined to the realm of intensity. Moreover, such thinking avoids a return to either biological essentialism or rational-structuralism because it emphasizes neither the individual nor the social structure, but the unfolding of affects in specific social and material arrangements. Indeed, "[t]he aim of affect theory is to get closer to the nebulous currents that animate everyday life", and it is more important to "find a suitable scope, be it of scale or temporality, with which to register and interrogate" (Barnwell, 2018, p. 32).

To take affective arrangement as "an explorative schema", I view my object of research, reality TV, as an affective-discursive site arranged with heterogeneous elements (material, bodily, practical, discursive, medial, imaginary etc.). Therefore, the analytical focus is on how interacting agents (both human and non-human) are interrelated in the affective arrangement of reality TV, and the dynamic effects triggered, mainly referring to the two counteracting tendencies that can be observed: "The first is a tendency towards the

consolidation – even, at times, ossification – of the arrangement into a stable pattern. The second tendency runs counter to the first towards transformation or even dissolution" (Slaby, Mühlhoff & Wüschner, 2019, p. 37).

5.2 Developing methods to analyze affects in reality TV

In order to analyze affect and emotion in the audiovisual texts of reality TV, I develop a synthesized approach that is based on a reflection of the advantages and limitations of discursive and textual analysis. As I have aligned human affects with the social and semiotic structures of meaning in the above, I do not assume a completely a-discursive analysis which is often adopted by some affect theorists who highlight the autonomous status of affect. Instead, I take the perspective of relational affect as an opportunity to supplement previously dominant methods, which put questions of representation, ideology and discourse in the foreground, and brings embodiment, materiality, relationality and dynamics more into focus. In this book I underscore the entanglement between affect and discourse by observing the multimodal and entangled dynamics of the affective and socio-semiotic processes in the mediated arrangement of reality TV.

5.2.1 Rethinking discourse analysis

Existing research on television texts is largely in line with the paradigm of discourse research, which is a well-established method that aims to identify and theorize the patterns, regularities and forms of order in talk and texts (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). However, emphasizing the linguistic features of the text, discourse analysis has been criticized for only allowing the study of expressions of emotions while being incapable of tackling affect. It is true that the discursive approach has its limitations. As reviewed by Berg et al. (2019, p. 41–42), discourse analysis to emotion can be roughly divided into two broad strands. One is linguistic ethnography and conversation analyses, focusing on the manifestation, interpretation, and communicative processes of emotions, or very specifically, how people talk about emotions (e.g. Fiehler, 2002). In these viewpoints, emotions are seen as a semantic domain, and the emphasis is on the meaning of language to signify and analyze emotional experiences. A second strand is a broader, Foucauldian influenced approach that concentrates on how subjects and subjectivities are formed in social processes (cf.

Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, Fairclough, 2003), with language as its core focus, has been widely used to decode ideology and power in emotional discourses.

Along these discursive and textual approaches, media texts like reality TV programs are often analyzed for the underlying meanings of narratives and images. This is usually achieved firstly by identifying the signs and symbols in the mediated representation and secondly, by relating those signs and symbols to socially constructed concepts such as race, culture, sexuality, and class, which helps to delve beneath the denotative elements of a scene. Finally, assumptions relating to the dominant ideologies are examined. By and large, researchers focus on the overall narrative, describe the main characters, or simply reproduce the main verbal statements. Emotion is reduced to discourse; living, embodied subjects are equated with speaking subjects; and what exceeds discourse in joint inter-subjective activities is either bracketed out or simply unrecognized (McAvoy, 2015). Furthermore, audiovisual moving images are not just linear texts, they activate intensities and affective energies that cannot be reproduced by language alone. But in this discourse approach, the main focus is on verbal texts, which leads to the neglect of audiovisual performance, or merely regard the audiovisual analysis as a supplementary explanation of the verbal text.

To fully understand the affective power (or the "sticky nature" coined by Ahmed (2004)) of reality TV, we need to move away from simply "reading" TV as a verbal text to treating it as the complex communication process that it is. While subjects and identities are structured through language and discourse, but without affect, an understanding of how this structuring process happened and why certain identifications prove to be more forceful and alluring than others cannot be comprehensive in the first place. Affect, in this sense, is a key component in the construction of meaning and subjectivity itself. The actualization of affects in reality TV shows include not only verbal utterances, but also non-verbal communications. Both are arranged in a three-dimensional space, captured by camera actions, and finally dynamically through cuts and montage, while sound effects and musical scores are simultaneously added. These carry both meanings and intensities, and prestructure the range of possibilities of reception by viewers.

Hence, I agree with Wetherell's argument that a combination of affect and discourse is helpful in addressing "the feel and patterning of bodies in action, the lively flow of social life and sticks closely to participants' perspectives" (Wetherell, 2013, p. 364). To restate my viewpoint in Chapter 3, I understand

affect as a cultural-material hybrid, which cannot be understood without its discursive productions, reflexive representations, and verbal articulation. Affect is not outside or in opposition to language but in tension with it. From this perspective, it is precisely because affect, body, cognition and language are indissociable that affects are therefore traceable; body and language are not solely expressional sites of affects (as external to affects), but are affects themselves (as an integral part of affects) – affects in process, in movement, and in becoming.

5.2.2 Toward a multimodal textual and filmic analysis

Accordingly, I propose a synthesized analytic approach which combines a focus on affect and discourse in the multimodal (language, images, and sounds) arrangement of reality TV. This is achieved, first of all, by taking reality TV as a multimodal text and an audiovisual synthesis. By using the term "multimodal text" I am following Wildfeuer and Bateman (2017) who take text not simply as a linguistic and verbal construct for symptomatic interpretations, but as a meaning-making entity that is "radically *multimodal*", "necessarily described in terms both of *dynamic inferential process* and at varying levels of abstraction and *time-depths*", and that is "grounded fundamentally in *materiality* and *embodied perception*" (p. 15, italics in original). This extended understanding allows me to view the text of reality TV as a fruitful surface to analyze the unfolding of affects in different communicative modes that work either individually or collectively to form meaningful wholes. As Kress (2011) also stated, "the meanings of the maker of a text as a whole reside in the meanings made jointly by all the modes in a text" (p. 37). The framework of multimodal analysis focuses on both the specific work of each mode and the interaction and synergy between the modes.

On the premise that reality TV is inherently a multimodal medium, I further integrate Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) methodology of "reading images" that focuses on the structures or "grammar" of visual design. The visual grammar, particularly in its depiction of how "elements—people, places and things—combine in visual 'statements' of greater or lesser complexity and extension" (p. 1), offers a means of approaching media texts as mediated discourses, with equal emphasis on patterns, systems, and dynamic processes. Among the ideas and concepts they present, I specifically integrate their statements on the dynamic dimensions/qualities of visual text, which helps me to capture narrative processes comprised of "vectors" that "realize the rela-

tion between participants by means of a spatial configuration" (p. 55). Camera shots, positions, and angles that make some elements more prominent than others can direct the gaze of viewers and establish an imaginary interactive relationship between the people on the screen and the viewer. In the following chapters, I will apply their grammar to the empirical analysis of moving images in reality TV shows. In general, my aim is to empirically explore the sense and meaning-making mechanisms in the tangled dynamic of the affective and socio-semiotic processes within the specific media arrangement of reality TV.

To this end, I have developed an analytic framework to (conceptually) separate the communication modalities of reality TV into three modes: discourse, figure, and ground. The aim is to clarify the specific object and scope of the empirical analysis of affect and emotion in reality TV, which will be further developed in the next section. This framework is advocated by Ott (2010) to analyze cinematic rhetoric, in which not only the symbolic and sensory aspects of the programs are taken into account, but the very technologies of communication that underlie them can be captured, as Table 5.1 shows:

Table 5.1: Analysis of the three modalities of reality TV text (adapted from Ott, 2010, p. 41)

Mode	Level	Entails	Enacted
Discourse	Representational	Signification & identification	Symbolic & narrative
Figure	Experiential	Sensation & feeling	Semiotic & aesthetics
Ground	Environmental	Space & presence	Medium & technology

First of all, the discourse layer refers to the question "what does the program say and mean?" and describes those rule-governed elements, namely narrative and language, that compose an orderly whole (Ott, 2010, p. 41). This layer is recognizable and functions with representational means to invite the viewers into a cognitive engagement with the program's story world. Secondly, the figure layer responds to the question "what does the program

do and incites viewers to do?" The term "figure", derived from Lyotard (1971), describes the unbounded energies and forces expressed and experienced through the semiotic and aesthetic (Kristeva, 2001).[1] This layer is closely intertwined with the work of the discourse layer and is crucial to understand how ideology and political ideas are subtly instilled in audiences. It is through these operations that the program not merely *represents* or *narrates* the social world, but more significantly, *affects*—charging and transmitting affects, "[swaying] viewers somatically as well as symbolically" (Ott, 2010, p. 41); yet also leading to the ambiguity and complexity of the show's meaning-making mechanism. The third layer, the ground[2], focuses on the question "what does the programme look and sound like?" This layer is concerned with the technological affordances that facilitate the specific discursive and affective practices of reality TV. Different semiotic materials are equipped with different affordances (Gibson, 1979), shaping (without determining) the conditions for different actors. Based on its audiovisual technologies, reality TV has shaped a specific form of watching and being watched across the screen, that created an environment that frames possible meanings and experiences. As such, I locate my analysis on affect and emotion in reality TV in the continuous interplay, melding, breaking, and transforming of these three modalities.

Moreover, I understand reality TV shows as highly intertextual and context-dependent, that is, I view reality TV as not merely audiovisual texts but also social practices embedded within specific sociocultural and historical conditions of production and reception. Hence the texts of reality television always include relations of *recontextualization*, "whereby texts (and the discourses, genres and arguments which they deploy) move between spatially and temporally different contexts and are subject to transformations whose nature depends upon the relationships and differences between spatially and

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1   The distinction between "the symbolic" and "the semiotic" is drawn from Kristeva (2001). While the symbolic is the rule-governed aspect of language, which shows itself in the grammatical structures and syntactic structures, the latter is defined as the matriarchal aspect of language that shows the speaker's inner drives and impulses, "These unconscious drives manifest themselves in character's tone, their rhythmical sentences and the images they use in order to express what they want to convey" (Sadehi, 2012, p. 1491).

2   According to Ott (2010), the term ground comes from the work of Marshall McLuhan (1988), who argues that media produces an environment that can unconsciously change the way we perceive the world.

temporally different contexts" (Wodak, 2011, p. 629). Thus, while I do not claim to fully follow the Discourse-Historical approach (DHA; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), I align with its premise that one can identify, understand and explain the process of meaning construction through tracing the specific context-dependency and discourse-historical trajectory of recontextualized elements, which are often manifested across four heuristic "levels of context", including:

(1) *intratextual* (text internal, the immediate text of the communicative event in question),
(2) *intertextual* (between utterances, texts, genres and discourses),
(3) extra linguistic social and environmental variables and institutional frames of *a specific "context or situation"*,
(4) the broader *sociopolitical and historical contexts* which discursive practices are embedded in and related to. (Wodak, 2011, p. 628–29).

Therefore, with its multi-level concept of context, the approach of DHA enables a systematic analysis that addresses both the unique text of the programme on the micro level (as regards what is displayed in the image and the specific design for this display), and the broader intertextual forces referenced by the programme, "without having to rely on purely hermeneutic interpretative procedures" (ibid., p. 629). I illustrate the multi-level context of reality television text as shown in the figure below:
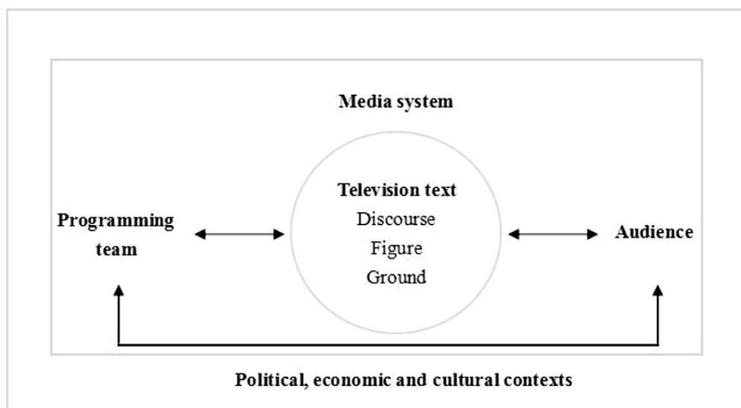
Accordingly, I produce two levels of analysis for the television materials with a particular focus on the affective-discursive mechanism: a micro level and a macro level. The first part of my analysis focuses on the main texts of emotionally charged moments extracted from the Chinese reality show X-Change, and locates them in the discourse-figure-ground framework, primarily addressing what the DHA regards as the intratexual and intertextual aspects of the segment. Then in the second part of the analysis, I focus on the "situatedness"/communication situation of reality television within larger institutional, social, historical, and political contexts, or what the DHA considers the third and fourth levels of analyses. This second mode of analysis is more aligned with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that helps to scrutinize relations among symbols, social settings, and power relations (e.g. Fairclough, 2003).

5.3 Case selection and research design

The basic research design is a case study. Case studies can articulate theory and practice through the study of a single case, and then form a specific, unique, and bounded system (cf. Stake, 2005). Therefore, although it is a single case, the in-depth analysis it allows can lead to a rich and comprehensive knowledge of a phenomenon or a problem that would not be achievable through other approaches. Yin (2003) suggests that the case study is particularly suitable for exploratory research questions and especially for interpreting meanings. For this reason, a case study was chosen to examine how affect and emotion are produced in Chinese reality TV in order to expand the understanding of the working mechanisms of reality TV.

In particular, the case I choose to deploy the analytic framework is the Chinese reality TV show *X-Change*, the first and most successful life-exchange reality show produced by Hunan TV in 2006. The show takes the form of a social experiment by primarily following two families from rural and urban areas swapping children for a limited period, exposing contrasts between social status, geography, family values, and lifestyles. These contrasts are typically linked to social factors as class, gender roles, and ethnicity, in addition to other determinants of social identity and distinction. Imitating the formats of *Wife Swap* and *Trading Spouses*, the show can be viewed as a variation of the "reality soap" subgenre – the *swap documentary* or "lifestyle experiment program" (Hill et al., 2007, p. 24). Accompanied by stationary cameras and live

shooting, the participants act in artificial settings under extraordinary conditions, and the plot is formed by their interactions in a new situation. They have to get along with themselves, with the other participants, and with the role of the camera crew in a new environment. The main idea of these formats is to confront different ways of life, which may result in conflict-laden or emotionally charged situations (Lünenborg et al., 2011, p. 30).

I consider the three versions of *X-Change* during three periods of 2006–2008, 2012–2015, and 2017–2019 as a perfect platform to not only investigate the effectiveness and becoming of affects and emotions in the televisual arena in a specific context, but also to perform a diachronic analysis on the dynamic processes through which affect mediates and transforms hegemonic power and ideology alongside the deepening of reform and opening up in China. A range of analytical tools are applied to identify the three modalities of communication:

First of all, narrative analysis provides a useful starting point. Like other reality TV shows, *X-Change* uses narrative structures as a frame to build up drama that enables the inputs of particular emotion-laden characters, dialogues, confessions, physical responses, and conflicting events while precluding others. Therefore, a structural-narrative analysis is applied to identify recurring patterns of storytelling and the dynamics in the three versions of *X-Change* respectively. While classic narrative analysis mainly concerns discourse represented (e.g. Labov, 1972), or uses Saussurean linguistics to understand narrative structure, here I follow Hogan (2011) who offers a systematic reflection on the role of emotion in narratives and extends classic narrative analysis to explore emotions built in recurring story structures and components. I offer a combined analysis to reveal the shifting narrative patterns of the show in order to reveal the ideologies and values it promotes.

Secondly, by recognizing the recurring emotionally charged scenes in these narrative structures, textual and filmic analyses are applied to address how the feelings and experiences of the participants are evoked, expressed, and represented, and, what ideology, class consciousness and values can be found in them. In line with the refined notion of "text" mentioned above, textual analysis here deals with both verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources, including:

(1) *figural emotional performances* in the text of immediate communicative events that can be found in the signs of language and body. Specifically, the following indicators are recorded: a) subject of emotional expression;

b) elicitors of emotion: person, event, expectation, memory, etc.; c) signs of emotional expression: bodily movements, bodily fluids, bodily sounds, facial expressions, verbal conflicts, verbal compassion, verbal confessions (besides the use of direct emotional words, specific language features, such as adjectives, adverbs or figures of speech, are also charged with emotions), voice intonation, speaking rhythm, "discourse bodies" (Berg et al., 2019),[3] etc.

(2) the *thematization* of experiences and emotions, which refers to the verbalization of an experience or an emotion and makes it the topic of the interaction (Fiehler, 2002, p. 86). This can often be observed in the show *X-Change* when participants comment on their interactions in confessional interviews, in the introduction narrative offered by the show's host and guests, and in interpretations and summaries by the voice-over. According to Fiehler (2002), people often use *a complex experience thematization* that involves more than one practice among the four that can be distinguished: a) verbal labeling of experiences and emotions, b) description of experiences and emotions, c) designation or description of the events and circumstances relevant to the experience and d) description or narration of the situational circumstances of an experience (p. 87). Through analyzing emotional *thematization*, it is also possible to identify the display rules of emotions (Hochschild, 1979)—rules that determine, to a great extent, how people feel, manifest, and process emotions—in reality TV.

Thirdly, emotions are also produced by television professionals through the use of audiovisual technologies. In this sense, cinematic techniques provide useful tools to analyze how images of emotional performance are portrayed. Bordwell and Thompson (2017) direct attention to some of the cinematic techniques that are central to the power of image: techniques of image, sound, and time:

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3   The term "discourse bodies" is used by Berg and her colleagues (2019) in referring to "the various transpersonal entities within discourse that are defined by their relations to other entities, either material or representational/ideational" (p. 50). I find this term analytically useful in opening up a new perspective to include the bodily and material dimensions of language into considerations on levels of discourse and text. Discourse and text analysis can not only be applied to analyze talk of emotions, but can also be extended to discuss the lived experience of emotions.

(1) there is the image whose composition relies on the following factors: camera angle, color schemes, mise-en-scène (literally, all that which is put into the picture: persons, costumes, makeup, props, lighting, setting).

(2) motion pictures usually contain acoustic signs including: music, sound effects and ambience sounds (either on-screen or off-screen).

(3) the dimension of time: motion pictures consist of a series of images shown in succession, slow motion, freezing, repetitions etc.—different styles of temporality are deployed. Hence the following shooting and editing techniques are taken into account: camera movements, montage, and cutting frequencies.

To make an interim summary, the above-mentioned analytical methods mainly focus on the intra-and inter-textual aspects of reality TV shows. These methods are applied in order to record emotions in the interweaving of narratives, discourses, bodies, images, and sounds. Based on arrangement thinking as the methodological orientation, I view the emotional performance of participants in reality TV not as personalized subjective expressions or a performance only played for the audience, but as a performative manifestation in the mediated arrangement of relational dynamics among (non-)human bodies, cultural, and technological components in a specified space and time. Crucially, this focus renders both sociocultural constructions of emotions and moments of affective intensification as symptoms of the underlying affective arrangement. I am attempting to avoid using the discourse, figure, and ground as rigid procedure and analytical method, for processes of becoming, transformation, consolidation, and dissolution of affect cannot be simply quantitatively measured. As I argued above, affect works inside and outside social constructs and always in tension with discourse. The way reality TV "touches" or moves an audience can reflect a synergy between affect and discourse, but sometimes the emotional performances, aesthetic constructs, and temporal dynamics that create embodied experiences may disrupt and even oppose the work of narrative and discourse.

    In the next part of the analysis, I focus on the third and fourth levels of the DHA. This is based on the understanding that the meaning construction of a single, individual text cannot be fully understood without an interpretation of its social contexts. First of all, *X-Change* is a television program presented by a collaborative group consisting of producers, directors, scriptwriters, editors, camera operators, etc. They are real authors who have the power to shape emotional performance in their routine production practices (Zhang, 2018).

Their actions are inevitably influenced by the nature of the channel or broadcaster, the media system, and the regulation of the industry (Moran & Keane, 2004). These intertextual elements are reflected in characteristics of the show. Secondly, the participants are not isolated individuals or only functional roles, but social roles inseparable from their social contexts. Based on these considerations, the following cultural dimensions were taken into account in the analysis: social identity (focusing on class, religion, age, gender), history, traditions, lifestyle, norms and values, etc.

To summarize, in the encounters among participants, producers, and actual/imagined audiences in the realm of reality TV, while social and medial forces try to elicit, define and regulate affective experience and expression, in Wetherell's (2012) words, "'forms of encounter' or social relationships arrive with the affective slots for actors already sketched" (p. 125). There exist the elusive, imprecise, shifting and contingent dimensions of affective experiences that have yet to be fully symbolized by figuratively or linguistically entailed speech, but nonetheless give rise to novel experiences, emotions, and are open for processes of becoming. I argue that an empirical analysis of this realm of experience is possible but requires looking for not only emotional performances and thematization in regular representational patterns, but also for the disruption, disfluency, and hesitation among these patterns, especially speech acts, bodily and material revelations that seem to be both affectively powerful and unruly. These manifest themselves in the temporal and formal dimensions of affective processes, and invite audiences to feel/experience without determining the type of discourse created. Such empirically grounded contextual research can reveal the complexities of texts, the resonances and dissonances between texts and contexts, and also helps to understand the emotional effects of reality TV (in a broad sense) on the living experiences of Chinese people.

As a supplement, I also collected a range of intertextual materials surround the show, from Internet sites, TV listing magazines, newspapers and the television programs that feed from reality television. Chiefly, I take the 14 year old television show *X-Change* as a vantage point from which to observe the "structures of feeling" of Chinese society. China has been exploring a distinctive path to development and has been experiencing drastic transformations during the reform and opening-up. In Deng Xiaoping's words, this is "to cross the river by feeling the stones"; these transformations not only concern political economic structures in society, but also the everyday life of all Chinese people. Taking relational affect as a critical optic to view affect

as a cultural-material hybrid and to trace both the consolidation and transformation of affects in the texts and how social forces try to colonize these emotions, I hope to understand not only individual experiences but also the social, cultural, and political frameworks in which they experience, perform, and narrate their emotions.