TELEVISUAL CULTURE

After the Break

TELEVISION THEORY TODAY

EDITED BY
Marijke de Valck
Jan Teurlings

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

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The 'televisual' names a media culture generally in which television's multiple dimensions have shaped and continue to alter the coordinates through which we understand, theorize, intervene, and challenge contemporary media culture. Televisual culture is a culture which both encompasses and crosses all aspects of television from its experiential dimensions to its aesthetic strategies, from its technological developments to its crossmedial consequences. Concepts like liveness, media event, audiences, broadcasting need recasting as problematics around which the televisual will get interrogated within a dynamic media landscape. Rather than accept the narrative of television's obsolescence, the series aims at seriously analyzing both the contemporary specificity of the televisual and the challenges thrown up by new developments in technology and theory in an age where digitalization and convergence are redrawing the boundaries of media.

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Television Theory Today

Marijke de Valck and Jan Teurlings

Qu'est-ce que c'est la television? Perhaps it is telling that André Bazin's volumes on the ontology of cinema have become classics of film studies, while in television studies there is no equivalent search for the specificity of the televisual at the origin of the discipline. One could mention Raymond Wiliams' *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974) as a landmark study in which the influential concepts of *flow* and *mobile privatization* were coined, but this would ignore that the book's leading contribution is of a socio-political, rather than ontological nature: theorizing the role television played (or could play) by grounding the technology and cultural form in the society that had produced it – a position that must be understood in opposition to Marshall McLuhan's technological determinism. By emphasizing the agency of viewers, Williams paved the way for British cultural studies, which remained one of the two most popular academic traditions in the study of television until the 1990s. The other major tradition, political economy, did not concern itself much with the being of television either, but arose out of a left-wing anxiety for concentration of power in the hands of the few, contributing to our understanding of the ways in which broadcasters, media institutions and companies serve their own (class) interests with the production of mass media. Looking back, it seems as if academic attention for television has been displaced from the beginning, never focusing on the question of what the object of scrutiny defined, but always being lured away to study what appeared to be more urgent topics: the effects of mass media on society, the exploitation underlying media industries and their role in the creation of hegemonic projects; or, alternatively, the ways in which audiences appropriated TV and television shows to actively construct (social) identities.

This edited volume opens a new academic series on television. The timing of the series might raise eyebrows. It is an understatement to say that the media sector is undergoing profound technological and economic changes. Although the postwar period saw its fair share of technological change, the settlement between film, television, radio and music industries was relatively stable, or at least seems so in hindsight, as Markus Stauff and Judith Keilbach argue in this book. The emergence in the mid-1990s of digital technologies and the internet changed all that, having a profound impact on the existing media ecologies and their respective relations (see Fuller 2005; Goddard and Parikka 2011 for our understanding of media ecology). Why gather intellectual resources for a medium that runs the

risk of becoming obsolete, one could ask? Within television studies there seems to be a growing consensus that television as we knew it is irrevocably changing. Some are gleefully announcing the death of television, others have been less sanguine but insist that television is radically changing before our eyes, as a slew of recent publications testify (Katz and Scannell 2009; Lotz 2007; Spigel and Olson 2004; Gripsrud 2010; Bennett 2011; Turner and Jay 2009; Kackman et al. 2011). Perhaps paradoxically, the question 'what is television?' has gained relevance as the medium falls into demise. To talk about television's transformation, one is compelled to describe what characterized television before and what it has become or is becoming instead. Different terms have been used to interpret the tectonic shift: from network to multi-channel environment (Syvertsen 2003), from broadcasting to narrowcasting (Gripsrud 2004; Smith-Shomade 2004), from scarcity to plenty (Ellis 2000), from collectivist to individualist medium (Katz and Scannell 2009), from analogue to digital (Jenkins 2006; Sinclair and Turner 2004), from nationally oriented to globalized (Curtain 2004; Waisbord 2004), from programmers' flow to on-demand viewing and metadata protocols (Uricchio 2004), or as a mutation in regimes of immersion (Citton 2010). The transformations have urged media scholars to stop and reflect on the central frames through which television has been analysed so far. This has led to a particularly productive surge in the critical reflection on television, which, can be argued, in itself offers sufficient reason and grounds for a new academic series.

Such exclusive attention for television, however, does not come uncontested. At a time when media convergence and digitization are redrawing the boundaries of media and the disciplines that study them, it is up for discussion if the focus on one medium is still justified. The distinction between film studies, television studies and new media studies has come under pressure; now that television is digital and interactive, the filmic is something we can experience in our living rooms through large flat screens and surround systems, and music videos are watched on the train in handheld devices. From a technological point of view, it could be argued that digitization has made everything into 'new media'. Yet on a professional level, there are still huge differences between software developers and television producers, and most people keep on distinguishing between films, TV series, or software. For some, media convergence should accelerate the joined study of different media under the header of 'media studies'. Others rather emphasize the divergent disciplinary heritage associated with a particular medium, or take the distinctive positions held by film, television and new media forms in our society as vantage points for separate studies. This can lead to extreme positions, like the one advanced by Geert Lovink in a recent polemical piece. He argues that the time has come for new media studies to disengage itself from the rest of media studies, since the theoretical tools coming out of the latter tradition have nothing to say about 'the specificities of digital, networked modes of working, real-time pressures, and the mobile dimension of today's media experience' (Lovink 2012: 81). One need not go that far, however. The current transformations shake *all* media scholars out of their comfortable disciplinary ways and force us to rethink the relevance and accuracy of traditional approaches for objects that are changing as we write. It seems more productive to join forces and

engage in an entangled and cross-fertilized redefinition of the field of media studies, while at the same time also investing resources in understanding the medium-specific problems that – despite prophecies about an all-consuming convergence – continue to exist. This book will be part of the latter objective while in no way wanting to be detrimental to the legitimacy of the former.

At the heart of this book is the question, to what extent our theories are still apt to capture television as a medium in transition: should we invent new theoretical concepts or are our old ones still perfectly relevant? And given the current sense of crisis and instability, what new theoretical paradigms could be brought to shed their light on television? Lovink criticized media theory for beating a dead horse, arguing that 'there is no sense in applying McLuhan or Baudrillard to, for instance, Wikipedia,' (Ibid.: 79) because 'these concepts are ill prepared for the fluid media objects of our real-time era' (Ibid.: 78). The point is simple yet important; namely, that when a medium is in flux the theoretical concepts used until then might become inadequate for the task at hand. Many forms of theoretical disconnection are possible: concepts can become obsolete, inadequate or merely redundant; the urgent questions of the time may have moved into a different terrain that the existing theories no longer address; the changing medium might develop characteristics or cultural forms that are no longer addressed by the theories of old; and all of this happens in a media ecology where changes in one medium affect all the others, for example, when film had to reinvent itself due to television's introduction, or more recently where the arrival of the internet pushed some functions of TV to the side while foregrounding others.

But the reverse can also be true; namely, that the search for new concepts locks us into the rhetoric of the perennially new, blinding us to the fact that not only have things remained the same, but that the older concepts yield interesting insights. It is not because theoretical concepts have a history that their usefulness has been exhausted. Here, too, are several possibilities, some of which are taken up in the articles in this volume. The first is the enduring relevance of theoretical concepts. *The nation*, for example has a long theoretical history in television studies, one that is intimately related to television as a broadcast medium. As Graeme Turner has recently argued, it is nevertheless too early 'to write the obituary of national television broadcasting just yet' (Turner 2009: 54). The same goes for a concept like *everyday life*, which also emerged on the theoretical horizon due to television's planned flow interweaving with the flow of everyday life (Silverstone 1995). Yet, it is not because we have now moved from appointment television to 'networked video culture' (Marshall 2009: 41) that a concept like everyday life has become irrelevant as Herbert Schwaab argues in this volume.

Sometimes the relationship between 'old concepts' and 'new objects' is one of repurposed anachronism, as when a decidedly nineteenth century concept like *enclosure* leads Marc Andrejevic (2007) to describe the digital platforms through which we watch TV as 'digital enclosures', virtual spaces through which information and cultural artefacts are produced, surveilled and commodified. Or, as Joke Hermes argues in this volume, some concepts of old like *professionalism* or *social responsibility* continue to haunt the present because of the way audience members have become accustomed to appreciating TV shows. Here the anachronism

consists of the theoretical concepts of the mass communication paradigm having an afterlife outside of academia, in the daily decisions by audience members on what to watch, and on what grounds.

The essays gathered in this collection focus on the *theoretical* frames and concepts we need to understand the medium of television. The idea for a collection was first hatched during the Ends of Television conference that took place at the University of Amsterdam between 29 June and 1 July 2009. Apart from the drive to describe and analyse current media transformations, participants shared a commitment to reflect on their own position as television scholars, to debate the validity of established theories and methods, and to try different tools to study different manifestations of television today. Since then, several publications on the topic have appeared that address similar issues.

This book should be positioned as a continuation of earlier work published on the transformation of television. We specifically want to mention *Television After TV: Essays on a medium in transition* (2004) edited by Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, the first anthology that identified the major issues for television in the period of transition. Its essays were a valuable source of reference. Less important for this book, but worth mentioning because it was the first single-author book on the contemporary changes is Amanda Lotz' *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (2007). It draws on interviews with key players as well as trade publications and focuses almost exclusively on political economy, therefore remaining fairly descriptive.

Since 2009, a number of collections have been published that more or less cover the same terrain, although with different emphases. Two bundles need specific mentioning, because they come closest to what we had originally in mind when conceiving of this book: the special issue put together by Elihu Katz and Paddy Scannell titled *The End of Television? It's Impact on the World (So Far)* (2009), and Graeme Turner and Jinnay Tay's co-edited *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era* (2009). Both books focus specifically on the changes to television during the last decade or so, and use this to formulate what we have called an ontology of television, with the latter paying more attention to local variations in the reconfiguration of television in the post-broadcast era. *Flow TV: Television in the Age of Media Convergence* (2011) is a more recent bundle but with an almost exclusive focus on the US context, and Jostein Gripsrud's *Relocating Television: Television in the Digital Context* (2010) has a more European focus while focussing on the change from analogue to digital. This is also the approach of James Bennett and Niki Strange's *Television as Digital Media* (2011).

Our anthology undoubtedly covers some of the same terrain as the above books, but differs from them in its explicit commitment to think through the implications of television's transformations for television theory today. However, since theoretical concepts not only have a history but also a geography, a caveat is in place. Most of the authors gathered in this collection are writing about Western media phenomena, and thus the theoretical concepts they propose have a distinctly North-Atlantic flavour. Perhaps it would have been more accurate to subtitle the bundle, for example, 'European Television Theory Today', but since

none of the authors explicitly engaged with the 'Europeanness' of the theories it seemed an odd choice to do so. As a consequence, the chapters gathered here should not be read as claiming to represent a television theory that is global in reach, to the contrary. If anything, the articles gathered here give testimony to the necessary locatedness of theory, both in time and in space.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, called 'Questioning the Crisis', is reserved for articles that address the widespread idea that television is in crisis. The articles clustered here not only critically interrogate the idea that television is dead – in fact, most agree that this is not the case – but also use that occasion to make ontological claims about what television is, nowadays or in previous times. In the second part, 'New Paradigms', we test the hypothesis that while some research questions on television may not have dramatically changed, new academic paradigms can enrich television theory and/or generate new answers. The concluding part is named 'New Concepts'. Its contributors posit new concepts in an attempt to adequately deal with specific manifestations of contemporary television or to address (new) televisual characteristics. In what follows we will introduce the three parts and their contributions to make selective reading easier.

1. Questioning the crisis

Part one opens with a piece by Herbert Schwaab in which he turns a critical eye on the recent wave of academic publications on 'mature quality' television series, like *The Sopranos* and *The West Wing*. While one could argue that series such as *Reading Contemporary Television* point to the complete opposite of a crisis – never before did television seem such a worthy object of analysis – this particular turn in television theory only covers a very small and homogeneous section of today's television production. Schwaab emphasizes that the academic concern with obvious narrative and aesthetic complexity goes hand in hand with the inability to locate and appreciate a specific form of television complexity. This, he argues, finds its foundations in the volatile and everyday nature of television. He begins with a quote by Dennis Potter, who says that if television works, it can be extremely powerful, precisely because it is situated in the mundaneness of our everyday life. Schwaab draws on Stanley Cavell's writing on film to argue that the ordinary demands a specific form of attention from the viewer. Against the current trend in television studies, which prefers 'quality television', Schwaab poses the idea of 'unreading', a form of reading that is guided by experience instead of interpretation. In doing so, he also positions himself against cultural studies and fan scholarship, whose idea of active reading he rejects. We could see his argument as a plea to restore *everyday life* as a central concept in television studies.

Joke Hermes, in her contribution, argues that despite media studies 2.0 challenging cultural authority and unlocking new and utopian concepts of audiencehood, the ideas of media studies 1.0 remain highly relevant. Drawing on Foucaultian governmentality studies, she argues that the ideas and concepts associated with the 'mass communication paradigm' may have lost their theoretical

relevance for the scholarly community, but that they have also spread through society – the 'vernacularization' of academic thought, if you will. One of its consequences is that this set of ideas has come to define what audiences expect from television. In two case studies, she shows that the ideas centred around mass media continue to haunt the popular imagination and expectations as well as the audience's self-understanding, and that much-heralded features like interactivity, protoprofessionalism or audience productivity can come into conflict with these assumptions. Mass communication might be on its way out, but it has acquired a spectral quality by becoming a regulatory ideal by which television is judged in everyday life.

For Alexander Dhoest, the audience is an equally important factor in arguing for the continued relevance of an 'old' trope in television studies. With a case study on Flemish fiction, he sets out to prove that the idea of television as a (primarily) national medium is as valid today as it was in the golden age of broadcasting. He writes: 'Even after the age of monopolistic public broadcasting and its explicit policies of nation-making, broadcasting can contribute to the construction of an imagined community of the nation as a symbolic home'. The national remains an important organizing principle and frame of reference, not only in terms of production and within programmes, but especially for audiences, who still tend to prefer national programming. Dhoest uses the concept of cultural proximity to explain the preference for local shows despite the ubiquity of global formats and the multichannel-environment. His analysis of Flemish television proves that Flemish and Dutch series and sitcoms – which share the language – are indeed far more popular than their American counterparts.

The last two contributions in this section take a different stance in their critique on the idea of television in crisis, in that the existence of the crisis is simultaneously challenged and used for rethinking what television *is*. If, in the words of Paddy Scannell, television 'has been part of the world long enough to have accumulated a history' (2009: 222) this allows not only for mapping and stocktaking but also for media archaeological purposes. Here, television studies seems to be making a theoretical move not dissimilar to the one that film studies did in the 1980s: using historical excavations in order to open up the televisual object, uncovering forgotten ancestors and devising theoretical concepts to grasp television's ontology. William Uricchio predicts that the years between the 1950s and the 1980s will be considered but a 'blip' in the larger development of television. While these years have provided television studies with key references and concepts, the current transformations signal not the end of television, but a return to the flexible condition that already characterized television before.

Judith Keilbach and Markus Stauff move along similar lines of thinking. They argue that it is not only in the current situation that television is changing, but that television was continuously redefined throughout its whole history. Thus, television theory needs to take into account that it is dealing with media defined by ongoing processes of experimentation instead of distinct (historical) objects. Media theory is less apt at explaining transformations, Keilbach and Stauff argue, and they turn to the model of the laboratory – taken from the discipline of science and technology studies – in search for better tools. In doing so, their con-

tribution forms a bridge to our second part, in which we investigate what recent paradigms, like actor-network theory, can add to the already existing methodologies and vocabulary of television studies and media studies at large.

2. New paradigms

The field of television studies has a longer history of borrowing from and reworking theories and concepts from other fields. In particular, film studies, (cultural) sociology, linguistics and philosophy have contributed to the analysis of television. These linkages and the specific ways in which they were articulated have amounted to a disciplinary tradition of its own. In this part, the contributors turn to a number of different disciplines – disciplines that have been largely neglected in the literature on television's transformations until now – to assess their usefulness for understanding television and its transformations.

Jan Teurlings puts actor-network theory (ANT) to the test, and argues that it offers productive tools for understanding television in general, but especially television *production*, which until recently was largely ignored by cultural studies scholars. He positions his work among neo-Foucaultian and cultural economic responses to the hostilities between cultural studies and political economy. ANT contributes a vocabulary – 'translator-spokesperson', 'obligatory points of passage' and 'immutable mobiles' – that is able to capture the transformations of television as it moves to a post-broadcasting era. He also argues that it is no coincidence that actor-network theory has recently become popular amongst media studies scholars, because its 'mechanistic' vocabulary resonates well with the way the media culture at large has come to foreground its own functioning. His analysis, in other words, highlights the dialectical relationship between media object and theoretical concept mentioned before.

In the next chapter, Mark Hayward highlights the way cultural studies has a longer history of adopting and adapting elements from information theory. He seeks to understand how technological developments go hand in hand with media use and aims to move beyond cultural studies' classical Marxist and post-Marxist approaches. Instead, he situates contemporary theories on labouring audiences as emerging from the intersections between Marxism, cybernetics and information theory. Hayward argues that the historical links between labour and cybernetics in the constitution of media studies should make us aware that common terms like audiences, labour and producers are conceptually contingent and, consequently, that scholars' deployment of them is subject to variability. We should not just replace old models with new ones, he concludes, but rethink the way we work.

Finally, Juan Lozano's contribution bears witness to the influence of the newly forming paradigm of memory studies as well as the more established tradition of preservation and archival theory. He draws attention to the role of television memory, which manifests itself both collectively and individually. Audiovisual archives and broadcasters exploit the nostalgic taste of audiences with tailored programming: using material from the archives, broadcasting reruns or produc-

ing contemporary version of old popular shows. This type of television memory is a source for collective binding that has in fact gained importance with the advance of digital programming techniques such as on YouTube or Google. At the same time, thanks to social media, viewers play an ever more active role in keeping their individual television memories alive. Lozano argues that contemporary television theory will need to engage with these various manifestations of television memory. The recently launched peer reviewed, open access *Journal of European Television History and Culture* promises to offer a platform for the type of discussions Lozano has in mind. The first issue, with contributions by Sonja de Leeuw, John Ellis, Pell Snickar, Andreas Fickers and others, was aptly titled 'Making Sense of Digital Sources' (2012).

3. New concepts

In the third and final part of this anthology the contributors develop conceptual thinking for those aspects of television that fall outside or beyond what is considered television in classical television theory. Writing on video website Youtube, José Van Dijck takes up Raymond Williams' classic 1970s book and wonders what he would have to say about the website. Using Williams' concepts of broadcasting, social practice and cultural form, she argues that in the case of Youtube these amount to *homecasting*, *videosharing* and the *snippet*, thus showing the continuing relevance of Williams' work, not by endlessly repeating him but by staying true to his thought by employing it rather than reiterating. Her essay argues that the contemporary legal-economic context needs to be updated, based upon the three concepts that she proposes.

The other two pieces in this section prove that new conceptual thinking on television is not limited to its digital manifestations or hybridization. The final two authors of this volume find their inspiration to push television's theoretization in lesser-known uses of the medium. Margot Bouman's chapter breaks with the familiar association between television and popular culture – yet again one of those remnants of the broadcast era, and one that is cemented in countless introductions to television studies books. Instead, Bouman looks at how the 'high culture' art world has engaged with television. She uses two examples of public televisual art from the 1980s to rethink television as a medium of distraction. Bouman applies Žižek's *paradox of anamorphosis* to understand television viewing as a state of clarity as well as distortion and compares TV to other transient places like department stores, libraries, airplanes and parks. In a time when television is claimed to have become ubiquitous, Bouman argues that the twin pair of attention and distraction are not mutually exclusive, and that the psychoanalytical concept of fantasy as formulated by the paradox of anamorphosis is crucial in our understanding of it.

Finally, Mimi White turns her attention to one of the most marginal corners of television and coins the term *apparitional TV* to describe the contingency attached to viewing these shows in the age of plenty. Her case study is *Barry Chappell's fine art showcase*, a programme in which allegedly quality art is sold for

bargain prices. The show is literally hard to track down: irregularly broadcasted it does not rely on a regular schedule, and even its use of other media like a website only mitigates its apparitional aspects. White's analysis of what is essentially a particular show draws the attention to a whole range of television shows and genres that seem to fall outside of our assumptions of 'what TV is', and they therefore have not received the critical attention they deserve. Studying these under the rubric of apparitional TV, so argues White, will challenge many of the unexamined assumptions that TV studies holds about its object of study – which is precisely why it is an endeavour worth pursuing.

4. Concluding thoughts

The title *After the Break* refers to the recent digital disruptions as a breaking point in television studies. The debates on the end of television can be argued to have been a blessing for a discipline that – some excellent exceptions excluded – had become rather set and repetitive in its output. The different contributions to this book share a mission to rethink television theory in light of contemporary transformations. The result is a decidedly heterodox collection of positions, arguments and emphasis. The book does not advance one singular argument or make definitive claims about what new television theory ought to be. Some, like Mimi White or José Van Dijck, argue for the need for new theoretical concepts, while others like Joke Hermes or Alexander Dhoest argue that the old concepts are not only perfectly fine but they remain highly relevant. Some contributors, like Mark Hayward, use the current crisis for purposes of theoretical archaeology, while others like Judith Keilbach and Markus Stauff, or Wiliam Uricchio use it for arguing that television has never been such a stable object in the first place. Rather than seeing this lack of overarching argument as a weakness, we believe that the strength of the book lies precisely in the way these different chapters, at different levels of abstraction and by using different case studies, stimulate the reader to constantly reassess the previous contributions.

The pluralism of the essays collected here is not only a conscious decision on our part. It is also a sign of the times; moments of transition bring with them confusion, as the categories that we are used to seem no longer valid. Confusion may, however, hold great promise, since it enables new connections and the renewal of old friendships. It is only after the dust has settled that the newfound theoretical landscape seems logical and self-evident, even necessary. We hope this volume contributes to this process – if not in the settling, at least in the dusting up.

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Part I: Questioning the crisis

'Unreading' contemporary television

Herbert Schwaab

> When you watch television you don't dress for it, you don't go out for it, you don't pay for it, lights are on, and you do things and you talk, and all that is largely to the detriment of the experience – but if something is working it can be extraordinarily powerful – because it sits right in the middle of all that mundaneness (Dennis Potter, cited in Creeber 2005).

The current transformation of television could be regarded both ways, as a crisis or as the complete opposite of a crisis. The transformations of television are often referred to, using terms coined by John Ellis, as the three ages of television: scarcity, availability and plenty (see Ellis 2000). It is accompanied by a shift of emphasis in television studies 'from the TV I 'consensus narratives' with its casual viewer, through the target programming and 'avid fanship' that defined TV II and on to consumer satisfaction and consumer demand, which increasingly shapes contemporary TV landscape' (Akass and McCabe 2004: 3). Television is in crisis as the result of a reconfiguration of its audiences. The crisis would be due to the fact that television no longer addresses and unites a vast audience and loses its capacity to provide a cultural forum in the sense of Newcomb and Hirsch (2000). But it is also the opposite of a crisis because television has finally left behind its infancy. TV III age series like *The Sopranos* or *The West Wing* are assigned to the genre of the 'mature quality television' (Rushton and Chamberlain 2007: 15). The genre produces complex serial narratives, finds adult audiences no longer ashamed of watching television and receives critical and scholarly attention, best epitomized in the successful book series *Reading Contemporary Television* edited by Kim Akass and Janet McCabe and a myriad of other publications. This transformation caused by narrowcasting and the production of customized programmes addressing a specific populace, often via premium cable subscription channels like HBO or in the form of DVD-editions of a programme's seasons, diminishes our capacity to find something that arises out of the ordinariness of television as a medium embedded within the everyday. The obvious narrative and aesthetic complexity of quality television comes at the price of a cultural void and the loss of a specific form of televisual complexity that finds its grounds in the volatile and everyday nature of television.

This chapter is about the loss of the ordinariness of television. It is based on a philosophical concept of the ordinary as outlined in the writings of film philosopher Stanley Cavell, to whom I will return later in this text. I will argue

that within the everydayness of television lies its main potential as an art form, but that this potential is threatened with erasure by the reconfiguration of television in the TV III age and the way television studies address this transformation. Television studies contribute to this reconfiguration actively, turning television into something no longer ordinary. Because the mature quality television genre is repressing the ordinariness of television, this chapter finds its main impulse in a growing dissatisfaction with this genre. I like *The Sopranos*, but I do not like to like *The Sopranos*, I do not want to be considered as the consumer of customized programmes, neither as a scholar, nor as a viewer. I prefer more 'ordinary' forms of television entertainment. I am specifically interested in television series that are both relevant and complex and that address and unite a wide audience.

Television (still) has the potential to transgress boundaries of class and culture. I became aware of this potential at a high school reunion. Because I had already lectured on and written about the sitcom *King of Queens*, I used this programme to give my former schoolmates an idea of what a media scholar is doing all the time. Most of the people could remember the scenes of the sitcoms I mentioned. They would go on mentioning other moments that we all found amazing and also profound. We had experiences, pleasures and ideas to share as we were part of an audience or something like a cultural forum in the sense of Newcomb and Hirsch (2000). *King of Queens* does not address the niche audience of the TV III age, a simple reason why there was something that all of us could share. But the conversation was also about a greatness that sat right in the middle of all that mundaneness of television mentioned by Dennis Potter in the quote above. This corresponds with my idea of television as an art form that is closely linked to the ordinary.

This transformation of television goes hand in hand, as I will argue, with a growing sense of the 'readability' of television. It is more natural to write about television, some series are easy to 'read', some of them are even literally read and turned into books, as if they were the audiovisual counterparts to the nineteenth century 'great novel'. I will introduce the concept of 'unreading' television to point to the unstable, volatile, casual, domestic status of television and its programmes and to remind us of how demanding the reading of television once used to be. Regarding television series as books points to the ambition of quality series to be something other than television, something no longer caught in the televisual 'flow'. But television does not have to be set free from the 'flow', we do not have to read it like an object as stable as a film or a book – we (still) have to come to terms with the qualities television programmes receive from its volatile nature. Unreading does not mean 'not to read television', but to read it in a way more conscious of television's specific qualities, as being integrated into the everyday. I will use the *Reading Contemporary Television* books series as a point of reference for the growing readability of television and how this may run counter to the everydayness of television. Hegel once mentioned in his lectures on aesthetics that the end of arts, it no longer being a vivid and integral part of the everyday, was the very reason for the beginning of art criticism, for being able to talk and write about arts. Similarly, the disintegration of television series from the everyday seems to be one reason why there are more books than ever on television, why it is easier but also less relevant to write about television.

1. Analyzing quality television…and why it is redundant

'Reading Contemporary Television', which started with *Reading Sex and the City* in 2004, belongs to a new genre of books that could be called fan/scholar literature. It offers various essays by television scholars and critics on television series, mostly identified as quality television. In the editor's note Janet McCabe and Kim Akass promise to 'offer a varied, intellectually groundbreaking and often polemical response to what is happening in television today' (Lavery 2006: II). *Reading Contemporary Television* comments on the 'TV zeitgeist' and provides an intellectual and creative platform 'to establish a new space where new voices are heard […] fresh perspectives are offered, […] innovation is encouraged'. It is not explicitly mentioned that the books target scholars and fans alike, and that the essays are often written by scholars, who happen to be fans, but it becomes apparent when they note that their perspective is focused on 'our own responses to and pleasures with' a television series (Akass and McCabe 2004: 7). There is nothing wrong with this perspective as there are also interesting attempts to cross over from theory to fandom and to reconcile both realms, to find words for the pleasures of televisions. It could be regarded as a continuation of cultural studies' quest for the emancipation of the television viewer/spectator. In fact, the essays and the books share much of cultural studies main motives (race, class, gender), theory, approach and style.

But still, it feels completely different. Series like *Six Feet Under*, *The Sopranos*, *Sex and the City*, *Desperate Housewives* or *The L Word*, which all find the attention of *Reading Contemporary Television,* are the easiest and most rewarding targets for an approach that tries to prove the complexity of television. Quality TV is a genre not only marked by its aim to address a specific audience (see Feuer, Verhamagi and Kerr 1984) but also by distinctive features of style and content. Therefore, many quality television programmes resemble each other. Daniel Chamberlain and Scott Rushton provide a very comprehensive definition of the mature quality television genre:

> […] a decidedly cinematic visual style, hybridity of structure, a rich and complex character based narrative, a generally liberalist humanist outlook, the engagement of controversial and/or social issues, and a degree of textual self-reflexivity (2007: 15).

Most essays know that quality television is not a matter of good television, but a matter of promoting customized programmes for a niche audience in the TV III age. Nevertheless, I have the impression that some central issues in relation to why we are doing television studies are not addressed. Reading, in the sense of cultural studies and other scholarly works about television, had always meant to transgress a boundary that detained us from finding television significant. Once we did love objects but were not assured to have made the right choice. Although most of the texts seem to be inspired by cultural studies, their readings often miss this point. This becomes apparent in the many sections that are dedicated to character reading and to questions like, is Tony Soprano a racist? (Gibson 2006),

what does Carmela Soprano do for feminism? (McCabe 2006), what are the relations between Judith Butler, fashion and Carrie Bradshaw's multiple sexual identities in *Sex and the City* (Bruzzi and Church 2004)? It is too easy to write about characters which, due to the exigencies of this genre, are branded to be complex, contradictory or self-reflexive. It feels like repeating something self-evident, like affirming a status that had already been gained.

Turning back to the 'early days' of television studies, to John Fiske's epochal (but already dated) textbook *Television Culture*, one can still feel how much had to be invested to 'read' programmes like *Hart to Hart* or *Cagney and Lacey*. In his chapter on character reading Fiske questions the notion of realism and advocates a discursive reading strategy to focus on characters of primetime soaps allowing a complex interplay between distance and identification (Fiske 1987: 154). Jane Feuer's readings of *Dynasty* in *Seeing through the Eighties* invests theories and reading strategies in a similar way proving that the melodramatic television serial offers a very strong critique of the 1980s, with a deeply felt desperation lurking behind a glossy surface of beauty, luxury and glamour. Despair will never find a way out, because the serial nature will complicate matters endlessly (Feuer 1995: 128-129). Something is at stake in both, in the theories used to understand television and in the programmes read by Fiske or Feuer and other scholars in those days. But what is at stake reading *The Sopranos*, *Sex and the City* or *Desperate Housewives*? Everybody knows that Tony Soprano is a complex character, everybody notes the ironies involved in the construction of Carrie Bradshaw or in the nostalgia driven suburbia of Wisteria Lane. It is an extension of a pleasure already granted by the object in much more obvious ways than the pleasure granted by TV series before the remodelling of television culture. This easy to read television does no harm to anyone, it even puts the television scholar in a very stable position of repeating exactly what the authors and producers intended to achieve.

David Chase of *The Sopranos* speaks of his ambition to turn out a little movie with every episode (Lavery 2006: 5). The reference to the cinematic is, as Jane Feuer notes, part of the self-promotion of HBO and scholars like David Lavery do HBO the favour of highlighting the cinematic qualities of the series (Feuer 2007: 154). As there is no 'natural' quality that can be ascribed to the cinematic in television, it forms part of a discursive strategy, it is one '[…] of the more pretentious claims by which intellectuals and the *culturati* use cinema and theatre to denigrate television' (Ibid.: 146). But there is also a discursive strategy to contrast television with other forms of television. As Akass and McCabe note in *Reading Six Feet Under,* quality television could be regarded as an opposition to the cheaply made reality formats of the US broadcast television (Akass and McCabe 2005: 6). Reality TV is considered as the flip side of quality. But according to Jane Feuer, both forms, reality television and quality television 'have their authors and geniuses' (Akass and McCabe 2007: 157), both are recombined forms of television:

> The reality show merges certain forms of documentary with the game show and the soap opera. Quality drama merged soap operas with an established

genre such as the cop show or the medical series. HBO drama merges series or serialized TV with postmodern theatre or art cinema (Ibid.: 157).

There is no obvious difference between these forms of recombination, but to gain the label of quality and to attract the attention of a specific formation of scholars and viewers alike, only certain forms of recombination matter. This alludes to a logic of repression of some 'qualities' of television, which is to be regretted, a continuation of the neglect of the properties of the medium which are difficult to talk about, irritating and unrewarding for a specific 'class' of people. This formation seems to agree, all too easily, that reality TV signifies everything that is bad about television. Television itself once provided a negative point of reference for our culture: 'Television secures the distinction of all non-televisual cultural forms' (Brunsdon 1990: 61). Now, it is some forms of television that fulfil this function, indicating that the audience of television is changing, that popular television no longer provides a cultural forum. Put simply, the widely shared horror of reality TV and of those suspected of watching reality TV is a symptom of the fragmentation of the television audience. Television studies, which has been and is still advocating the study of all forms of television and especially of reality television, possibly suffers from the attention quality television series are given by scholars coming from media, film and literary studies. Maybe this explains why I have the impression that the study of quality television tends to dissociate itself from the mass audience of television and their appetite for reality television, sitcoms and other non-quality programmes. It is as if we no longer wanted to share experiences with other people and to be part of that mysterious mass audience of television. Many viewers and scholars alike want to be addressed as media literate individuals, as members of a new class of digital elite, endlessly downloading programmes to be the first and sometimes the last to get access to new quality series.

2. The complexities of television as medium

It is important to re-embed the study of programmes within the study of television. Some works on quality television prove that television studies can profit from the study of quality television, but fan/scholar literature often ignores the aesthetic properties of television itself. Writings on quality television tend to misinterpret or to neglect the history of television. Some critics writing about *The Sopranos*, *The Wire* or *Mad Men* write as if television was of interest for the first time in history, whereas a short glimpse at the history of television itself and of television studies tells us that there has always been art, ambition and complexity in television. John T. Caldwell introduces us to many examples of (mostly unintentional) vanguard, self-reflexive, disruptive moments in popular television formats of the 1940s and 1950s (Caldwell 1995: 45f). To really understand television we have to move our attention from the premium product of quality television to the complexities offered by the medium itself. At this point I will adopt a thought by Stanley Cavell about the significance of film: 'No event within a film

is as important as the event of film itself' (Cavell 1981: 208). Cavell reminds us of the fact that the invention of film itself was an aesthetic contribution. It allowed a new way to relate to human beings and to the everyday being projected on the screen. It is important what the makers of a film do with the 'facts of film', how they give meaning to the aesthetic properties of film itself.

Interestingly, one of the most insightful books of the *Reading Contemporary Television* book series is *Reading 24*, a programme totally set apart from most of the quality series. The generic formula of many quality series is realism and an ironic distancing of the viewer via the combination of comedy and drama. In readings of these programmes we are mostly offered the important insight that 'we know it's only a representation' (McCabe 2006: 79). Most quality products do not destabilize their viewers, they are smart and offer us a shelter from the impositions of television, its hybridity and banality. But *24*, as the most televisual of all the quality programmes, does not allow an ironic distancing of the characters. Its quality does not reside in cinema or literature or other arts, but in television itself. *24* is completely melodramatic and offers no comic release at all (not for a single second). For Chamberlain and Rushton, *24* is both quality television and the farthest thing from it, because its style foregrounds the videographic and not the cinematic (Chamberlain and Rushton 2007: 18). It also offers more irritation and causes more uneasiness than any other quality series; it therefore really challenges the concept of quality. *24* gives meaning to the liveness, segmentation and seriality of television; it gives new meaning to the sense of the televisual flow, of television's sometimes annoying capacity of a steady presence. The world does not come to a halt during the commercial breaks: we often see the horrible outcomes of things that happened during the commercial breaks (Peacock 2007: 29).

All these qualities point to television's specific relation to the everyday and to reality. But there is a quality of ordinariness itself. Television finds its place at home, within the daily routines of those inhabiting this space. It is not an art form that affords much investment: we do not dress up for it. Television is simply always there and connects us with a steady flow of images; we do not have to go to a specific place to watch television. This constant presence within the everyday seems to give television a sense of being ordinary in an unambiguous way, meaning ephemeral, taken for granted, unimportant, not really art. But within this ordinariness lies the potential to address the viewers in a specific way. We are often surprised, challenged but also irritated by television. It does not mean that within a vast variety of banal television programmes hides the one programme that rewards all the dull moments spent watching television. The extraordinariness of some moments or of some programmes is allied with the ordinariness of television.

Let us again turn to Cavell and his writings on film to understand how the ordinary demands our attention in a specific way: in film, 'everything passes and nothing is lost' (Cavell 2004: 402). Many things may pass unnoticed, but everything can be of importance as well. It is up to us to notice the significance of something in film, for so many things to which we can attribute significance are right before our eyes. Television affords us a similar capacity, and it rewards our attention and our patience; we may discover something that emanates out

of a constant flow of images. Most quality programmes opposing television are also opposing the irritating ordinariness of television, its temporal structure, its place at home, its volatile and ephemeral quality. This symptom of new forms of digital distribution does show minor effects in the *Reading Contemporary Television* books; it becomes most apparent in contributions treating programmes exclusively with a literary studies approach (see Blourde 2006; Bundy 2005) or in contributions that highlight, as mentioned above, cinematic references. But in other areas occupied with quality television it generates a significant discursive effect explicitly linked to the notion of the readability of television. Many (German) magazines that focus on digital culture often refer to quality programmes as the counterparts of the great novel. *The Sopranos* is regarded as a worthy successor of the Thomas Mann novel *Die Buddenbrocks* (Trojanov 2004). *The Wire* becomes the equivalent to a Dickens novel (Kim 2008). Christoph Dreher (2008) compares programmes produced by HBO again with Dickens and Mann, but also with Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. To compare the television series with the great novel not only indicates the invention of television as a clearly defined art object, overcoming the volatility of an art form that for a long time could not be accessed other than by watching television. It also means a more problematic return of the repressed, the nineteenth century notion of story-telling, realism and representation. It is as if there has never been a profound criticism of the narrative closure evoked by these forms of literature in the 1970s readings of film texts (see Wollen 1986: 122), as if there has never been a critical debate about repetitiveness and fragmentation as innovative and alternative models of story-telling, outlined in the chapter on realism in John Fiske's *Television Culture* (1987). All these debates and the specific qualities of the serial and segmented structure of television texts (which is definitively not the same as the story telling of Dickens) become erased by comparing television series with the great novel. The nineteenth century returns with a vengeance, undoing every contribution of cultural studies to the study of television. Whereas John Fiske and John Hartley wanted to prove in their 1978 edition of *Reading Television* that television could be read (but in a different way), television series now are just simply read like literature.

3. Unreading television

I am concerned about this because television studies should not advertise a specific form of television. *Reading Contemporary Television* is aware of how HBO (or Showtime, or AMC) promote their programmes, but it feels like their reference to the cultural logic of late capitalism is more like an excuse for their own promotion of HBO programmes. As Sarah Cardwell notes, quality television seems to secure the position from which programmes are evaluated:

> Relatively comfortable with the categorising of programmes as, 'quality television', even if uncomfortable with the connotations of that label, scholars have chosen to accept the notion of quality television while avoiding tricky claims about what is actually *good* (Cardwell 2007: 23f).

This approach permits a disinterested and neutral description that lists the distinctive marks of a genre. Cardwell pleads for a reading of television that refers to the own experience of a programme, not as quality television but as 'good' television. Cardwell's critic of the term quality television leads us to the concept of 'unreading' television. I use this concept, which emerges in my dissertation on Cavell, film and television (Schwaab 2010), to draw attention to a form of reading exposed to the effects of television, confused by its very ordinariness; not yet wholly prepared to find words for the experience of watching and loving television but trying hard to express oneself and to find these words. This form or reading is not in control of the process of interpretation but is open to the television text and guided by experience. Both cultural studies and fan/scholar literature focus more on the reading and not the experience of television programmes. Cultural studies may have once stood out to understand television as a medium that addresses a diverse audience. Because of its interest in the process of reception and in the active reader, the cultural studies concept of reading involves a sense of control over the television text. But there is as an important difference: cultural studies adopt its reading strategies to an open text which requires an active reader, whereas texts on quality television read an open text as if it was closed and requires an active reader who is aware of being active.

I will oppose this notion of active reading, because television could itself be regarded as a medium out of control. The ordinariness of television points to the hybridity of television, bringing together high and low culture, the invasion into our homes and the conflation of the private and the public. It also indicates the ambiguity and ambivalence of an art form and object of which its status remains indeterminate because it is structured as a flow of sounds and images, as highly segmented and fragmented texts. Television aesthetics, as Charlotte Brunsdon (1990) argued, has to come to terms with these irritations. It has to be an 'anti-aesthetics' (Brunsdon 1990: 63). Television is banal as well as irritating, but this is where the pleasures of television are grounded. Television always struggled for recognition; therefore, to like television always meant to overcome resistance, to move over to the shifting grounds of a vague terrain. I will further stress this sense of insecurity and instability with Stanley Cavell's concept of the ordinary and its application to popular cinema.

Cavell uses a Wittgensteinian notion of ordinariness, making us aware of the fact that we miss the significance of objects and phenomena that are 'hidden in plain sight'. Television could be regarded as something that remains unknown because it is too familiar, too close to us. It requires a change of perspective to find what is interesting about television in television itself, in its ordinariness not in its capacity to imitate other art forms. This is something Cavell does for popular film and for classical Hollywood cinema, especially in his readings of 1930s and 1940s romantic comedies in *Pursuits of Happiness* (1981) and melodramas in *Contesting Tears* (1996), but this 'reading strategy' can be adopted to television as well. Both, television and cinema, share some features connected to their integration into everyday and popular culture. This reading strategy affords an openness and readiness towards a film or a television text. It affords a 'mode of philosophical attention in which you are prepared to be taken by sur-

prise, stopped, thrown back as it were upon the text' (Cavell 2004: 15). Reading involves acts of transference and counter-transference. We are read by the text, as if the text was addressing us (Cavell 1984). We do not command or control television, but it commands us, granting us an aesthetic experience. 'It is not first of all the text that is subject of interpretation but we in the gaze and hearing of the text' (Ibid.: 52). We are in the gaze of television, meaning we have no control over what attracts or what repels us. We are animated by a television text, but we also animate the television text. This notion of the relation between television and viewer (or spectator) conflicts with the growing customization of television in the TV III age. To think of classical television narratives as 'consensus narratives' (Akass and McCabe 2004: 4) is not wholly accurate, and it is also misleading to relate the complexity of television objects to consumer demand. To find in the ordinariness of television itself something that challenges the viewer is more accurate to what is interesting about television.

I will offer two examples of how a 'more ordinary' television really challenges its viewers. One moment is about transition, the other about interruption. Cavell refers to a transitional, cinematic moment in his text 'Something out of the Ordinary'. The Fred Astaire Musical *The Band Wagon* from 1951 demonstrates how a popular film text crosses the boundary between reality and imagination and transforms the ordinary. In one dance number, Astaire, followed by the camera in a tracking shot, turns a movement of walking into a movement of dancing. Cavell reads this as an appropriate expression of the ordinary as the missable (Cavell 2005: 26), since we miss the transition from walking to dancing. This dance routine is 'something out of the ordinary,' it 'emblematizes a way of manifesting the ordinary,' as something we may miss (Ibid.: 25). At this point I will refer to a similar but televisual transition that involves the ordinary in a segment of the sitcom *King of Queens*. For a brief moment of the episode 'Walk, Man', Arthur Spooner is turned into a dog. He is waiting for Holly, a professional dog walker paid by his daughter Carrie and son-in-law Doug to keep him away from home for at least a few hours a week. Arthur is ignorant of Holly's real identity (he is made to believe that she goes on walks with him because she is interested in his World War Two memories). Arthur, who enjoys his walks with Holly, is impatiently awaiting her return. He leans his head on his arms, turning his eyes to the ceiling with the melancholic and unfocused anticipation only a dog's eyes could express. It is a very subtle transition from human to animal, a moment that may pass unnoticed, but also a moment to which the habitual viewer and fan of the sitcom may ascribe significance, rewarding all the repetitions and the serial nature of the sitcom which are, as I argue, also accurate representations of the everyday. I will refer to another moment from the episode 'Foe:Pa' of the sixth season of this sitcom as a moment of interruption. Carrie and Arthur Spooner have an argument about his egoism and how his eccentric behaviour had always interfered with all of his daughter's ambitions. This argument starts as a comedy and ends as a melodrama in an intimate and also revealing moment, adding much profundity to the characters. Many sitcoms have such rare moments of ending a scene not in laughter, interrupting the repetitions and the maintenance of a status quo for which the sitcom is so often reproached. In this hurtful and intimate moment we are in the gaze of the television text.

As much as I like *The Sopranos* I do not think that it is superior to *King of Queens* in creating such moments although the latter is definitively not quality television. Reading an object like *King of Queens* means having to come to terms with a 'quality' offered by the ordinary television text, as something coming out of the ordinariness of a mode of address or a way of creating narrative universes stimulating the fantasy and imagination of the television viewer. This form of reading will not succeed in finding and attributing significance the way it will succeed in attributing significance to quality television, which to me has become such a polished and clean space in so many ways. Reading as unreading is meant as a therapeutic reworking of the television experience. It is also meant as a mode of receptiveness towards television, being open to what attracts one's attention. Critics and fans of quality television often tend to champion the self-governed neo-liberal subject who wants to consume television at any time and at any place, set free from the constraints of the television schedule. But television is interesting because of its constraints; it still is and can be a vivid medium, marked with hybridity and diversity. And both, quality and non-quality programmes offer such diversity and hybridity. Quality programmes are not as authored and under control as the writing on quality television seems to imply. Therefore, I think of television as providing an arena for *King of Queens* and *The Sopranos* to meet on the same ground.

4. Conclusion

This is not meant as a general critique of *Reading Contemporary Television* and other variants of fan/scholar literature. The books offer many great contributions supporting an understanding of television and the transformative process of audiovisual culture, and many contributions succeed in providing a televisual context for the examination of quality series. The chapter referred to a transgressiveness of television as an object still embedded in the everyday, ignored by many works approaching mature quality programmes. The concept of the ordinariness of television could serve as a strategic objective to move into other areas of serial television, to find a perspective on what, unlike quality television, is hidden in plain sight and therefore invisible to us. There is still much to be done beyond narrowcasting and customized programmes for niche audiences. Television still provides a cultural forum and offers more than objects for media literate experts and connoisseurs of digital culture. It is much more fascinating to think about why we still find a common ground with others to discuss a sitcom like *King of Queens*, to articulate our feelings and our understanding of the world we live in. Television studies did profit from a cultural studies approach to *Dallas* or *Dynasty,* programmes that offered irritations and challenged commonly held views of television and culture. I miss the destabilizing effects of television programmes; I miss an approach towards television that finds its main impulse in the wish to understand why one is fascinated by a popular programme or by serial television at all. *Reading Contemporary Television* tends to support the view that the remapping of audiovisual culture has come full circle. Probably, broadcast

television has become a residual media, but still its importance by far exceeds the cultural impact of the mature quality television, which is mystified because of their obvious complexities.

Television is not a book-like object read in solitude and silence. I totally disagree with the notion that the DVD is the proper medium to watch contemporary series, for the simple fact that the DVD cannot surprise you the way television does. There is nothing coming right out of that mundaneness of television, there is nothing that affects one in a surrounding totally devoid of anything that prepares you for one of many great moments of television. Television is still experienced and not read. It probably is in a state of reconfiguration and maybe it will end some day; but, before it ends, television studies should not exclusively focus on programmes that are allied with this reconfiguration. Furthermore, it should search for these moments only a medium like television could provide and it should look back on how programmes once succeeded in bestowing us with these moments. Programmes like *The Singing Detective* by Dennis Potter or *Twin Peaks* offered many more irritations than the mature quality television genre as they were reflecting on television *as* television in many ways. *King of Queens* or other sitcoms may still be offering such irritations linked to the everydayness of television and still reach a relatively wide and diverse audience which I am proud to be a member of. Television is still ordinary in many ways, it still gives meaning to the casual viewer of the TV I age, it still provides material for the imagination of the avid fan of the TV II age, and even the most mature quality television series of the TV III age should be read as an object embedded in television culture and its viewer should be regarded as being part of an audience and not as consumer of customized products.

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Caught
Critical versus everyday perspectives on television

Joke Hermes

There is no denying that television viewing is not what it used to be. Multichannel choice, the alternatives offered by downloads and streaming video on the internet and, last but not least, the opportunity to make one's own television. High definition video cameras are available at reasonable prices; montage software can be downloaded for free. Any amateur who wishes to make television can do so. This has led optimists to argue that we are heading towards 'convergence culture' (Jenkins 2006) and a world in which media content production is no longer the prerogative of media corporations. Clearly, then, we are in need of evaluating what television is about and, perhaps also, of updating our theoretical framework to understand the medium.

In this chapter I will argue that most thinking about television implicitly or explicitly refers to 'the mass communication paradigm'. The mass communication paradigm consists of historically located theories and practices around television as the medium developed from the 1950s onwards. These theories and practices are often in discord. They share the notion that television is typically the medium of mass societies and that there is a centralized source and a multitude of dispersed viewers. In Western Europe, moreover, the state is understood as television's most important guardian and financier, with television a strong means for the nation state to reach entire populations (Gripsrud 1998). Debate in this paradigm often underscores the double nature of all mass media: they can work for the good, and present strong role models or empower citizens, but they can also corrupt (Jensen 1990). That makes the possible effects of television a contentious issue, as well as the medium's social responsibility. All of these elements – mass media, the nation state, effect thinking and social responsibility – coalesce in the mass communication paradigm.

Recent developments certainly seem to warrant a new or extended framework to understand television, but is this true for everyday talk of television? Reservations may well be in order when theorizing how audiences make sense of television. Existing frameworks might still be useful there. Although practices of use are changing, how television is understood may not be changing, or for that matter need to change, at the same rate or speed. While the utopian energy of, e.g. the '2.0' paradigm in media studies (see Gauntlett 2007; Merrin 2009) is unlocking new ways of understanding audiencehood as such. The 'old' mass communication paradigm, of which 'broadcast television' was a central tenet,

appears to have lost little of its heuristic potential in everyday life. That, at least, is what will be argued in this chapter based on two case studies that deal with television as a medium via the two routes of viewing and of making television. Despite and perhaps contrary to critical academic discussion, the mass media paradigm is still relevant to everyday understanding of television.

Paradigms rooted in science and critical thought spread to everyday life. They are, in fact, often encouraged to do so. Foucault used the term 'governmentality' to denote how power and knowledge strengthen regimes in modern society in this way (Dean 1999). Academic thought may thus 'protoprofessionalize' or 'vernacularize' and become a powerful force in the self-understanding and regulation of media audiences. This results in appropriate behaviour, which, in many cases, will be ritualized (Carey 1989). Television was mostly regulated via cultural means. Spigel shows how instruction for proper use of television as a family medium was given in advertisements in popular magazines (1992). News weeklies and later newspapers carried interviews with experts who discussed possible detrimental effects of violence on television for young viewers. Parents were warned not to have their children watch too much TV (Crone 2007). On the other hand, populations learnt to see watching the news as a 'civic duty' with all the ambivalences that implies (Hagen 1994). In exchange for dutiful citizenship, audiences were encouraged to feel that they should insist on professional craftsmanship, and quality standards in television news programmes. Such encouragement was double-faced. It suggests that audiences were in a reciprocal relationship with television producers and could have demands. In reality, the ideology of professionalism enclosed television production within the broadcasting institutions. For example, various forms of volunteer and open access television experiments floundered as they were felt to 'lack quality', both by viewers and, for instance, by local authorities.

Although established frames of reference provide room to manoeuvre in times of change, they mostly do so for powerful players. Despite the fact that new media will 'remediate' older ones, and take on some of their qualities, audiences understand content and technology through those (officially sanctioned) established frames of reference that they have easy access to (Bolter and Grusin 2000). As a result, 'standards' and 'quality' appear to still be meaningful terms whether new or old forms of television are discussed. Indeed, much audio-visual media content is still understood as if it were… broadcast television, Media Studies 2.0 notwithstanding.

This chapter is structured as a discussion of two case studies that both deal with the relationship audience members feel they have with television as a medium. The first case study discusses reactions to a local reality soap series. The second looks at a digital storytelling project that was intended to become an internet drama series. In starting from audience material, the chapter follows the old cultural studies dictum 'that we had better (empirically) 'ask the audience' before assuming their interpretation' (Dovey and Lister 2009: 132). It will argue that in evaluating the theoretical and analytical means we have at hand to understand what-used-to-be-television, available critical frameworks will be helpful in contextualizing and sharpening new concepts. Governmentality stud-

ies are an example. Before outlining the two cases, there is a short discussion of critical research and its relation to what, here, is called the paradigm of mass communication.

1. Media 2.0 and the cultural studies perspective on television

Before arguing what is entailed in respecting the *autonomy* of how television is understood in everyday life and how this is a different challenge for critical theory than actual technological or political developments, it should be clear that what, here, is called the paradigm of mass communication is part of a 'dispositif' or apparatus (Agamben 2009: 14) that has been severely criticized in cultural studies. A caricature of the mass communication paradigm would point to the strong focus on media effects, the reification of quantitative methods and its administrative orientation. From a critical perspective, there is little to be gained by a paradigm that favours a top-down view of audiences as 'masses' and that sharply distinguishes between proper and improper (e.g. dangerous) behaviour. Cultural studies, on the contrary, has argued that a bottom-up perspective of culture as the ways in which we make meaning, is more conducive to understanding how television functions and may effectuate different types of meanings (Morley 1980, 1986).

From a cultural studies perspective, issues of power and regulation are of paramount importance. Therefore, at the current conjuncture, we may need to reassess how broadcast television is still intimately connected with nation-building and the containment of diversity within the nation. Despite ongoing (economic) globalization, we are witnessing a new age of cultural protectionism and a strong decline in enthusiasm for new cultural forms and hybrid that appear to threaten national identity. 'New' voices are carefully screened. Conservative populism joins hands with a strong sense of cynicism and distrust. Such historical circumstance will cast its shadow over how television is understood. It is not unlikely that the nation-building quality of the medium will be more strongly revered as a result. As this is part of how audiences historically came to television, it may well pay to closely examine how, from an audience perspective, 'broadcast' television had and has its uses and pleasures. How and why audience came to love television as a medium, and negotiated its power remains an important and relevant question today that needs to include the type of knowledges that were deployed in this process. Here, I am referring again to the mass communication paradigm. It is not unlikely that exactly this way of thinking about the medium may help television survive the broadcast era. Beyond technologies of dissemination and production and beyond the family set in the living room, the paradigm of mass communication still offers 'programming' (the set menu that as a viewer one does not need to think about), 'liveness' (intimately connected with maintaining a sense of the national, e.g. in sports matches) and even particular types of narrative in national news programmes and in indigenous television fiction. Instead of focusing on new media forms and cultures, critical cultural studies ironically needs to pay more attention than ever to mainstream thinking about TV.

Coming from the tradition of cultural studies and qualitative audience research, I sincerely hope that 2.0 convergence culture will come into being and materialize into new, more open cultural practices. The 2.0 argument posits that if and when individuals truly start using the new options open to us under the rubric of 'convergence culture', a significant counter force may emerge against the media industry. Henry Jenkins foresees that media corporations will cease to wield an absolute form of control (Jenkins 2006: 18-19). Likewise, Jeff Jarvis, recently argued that brand integrity for instance is crucial to enduring commercial or public success and it is in the hands of consumer communities (Jarvis 2009; Jenkins 2006: 86). Integrity here can be taken to mean organizational reflexivity and responsiveness to users who are seen as partners, rather than as an anonymous entity from which money can be made.

This is romantic idealism. In practice, there have not been significant shifts. Despite the increase of media literacy and the availability of cheap video editing software, audience members have not moved in on television production (Janssen 2011). Young adults still watch significant amounts of hours of television.[1] Television producers interviewed by Janssen (Ibid.) in the Netherlands feel little need to open up production practice to audience members. Children's programming offers some examples of changing roles for television producers and more (controlled and supervised) initiative from viewers. In a first sketch, Berriman (2009) concludes as much for the BBC programme *Bamzooki*, which has firmly been repositioned as a 'multimedia' production, rather than a television programme. Peters looked at a Dutch public broadcasting programme based on uploads made by children themselves and sees only a very small number of really interesting short movies (Peters 2011). While Jenkins offers (inspiring) examples of viewer and user initiatives, they appear to come from exceptional individuals, rather than from 'the general audience'.

It could, of course, be the case that television has a stronger bulwark of professionals than other media and that it is just a matter of time before production relations are rewritten. Experiences in the world of game development (Nieborg and Van der Graaf 2008; Humphreys 2008) suggest otherwise. Even in the game industry, characterized by its tight bonds between gamers and the publishers and developers, new relations of power and dependence have not emerged. While, in many ways, the game industry is open to initiatives and the skills of gifted individuals, these individuals cannot really hope for more than to have their idea for a game or software improvement taken into (commercial) production. It is highly unlikely that they will reap much profit from this. While, evidently, within the gaming world this type of recognition is felt to be worthwhile, it can hardly be understood as a form of empowerment, such as claimed by media optimists.

To believe in empowerment is a good thing. To see possibilities and openings for other social, cultural and economic arrangements is surely of immense importance. This revolutionary idealism, however, is not shared broadly. 2.0 media optimism overlooks that it is exactly the 'mass'-ness of the mass media which make them exciting and of interest. The two case studies below will show that they are seen as a platform for and a place to check stardom and success, and, more mundanely, as a representational space where group identities and reputations may be either empowered or undermined.

2. The mass communication paradigm in its protoprofessionalized version

West Side

Two Dutch case studies may offer a more concrete sense of what is meant here by 'the mass communication paradigm'. The first case is of local reality soap. In 2006 and 2007, the city of Amsterdam co-financed a television series, produced by the regional Amsterdam television broadcaster AT5 and televised both on regional and on national television (AT5 and NPS in 2006 and 2007). The series, called *West Side*, was intended to defuse interethnic antagonist feelings in the city, which it was feared would come to a head after the murder of film maker Theo van Gogh by a fundamentalist Muslim in 2004 (Buruma 2006). *West Side* was one of the many initiatives that make up the city's 'We Amsterdammers' social cohesion programme to improve multicultural contact between citizens. In fact, *West Side* fulfils this function in a rather provocative way. The series portrays four families, as befits a soap, all four with a different background: one family is Moroccan, one Turkish, one Dutch, and one Surinamese. They move into the same block of houses because of urban renewal. Tensions regularly rise high, interethnic prejudice is thematized head on. The style of filming and the use of amateur actors and improvized dialogue give the series a strong and, for some, an initially confusing 'reality' feel. The content is sheer soap opera: tears, arguments, sorrow, and happiness all have their place in a world centred on the four families.

During the two seasons (2006/7 and 2007) of *West Side* that were televized,[2] a multi-ethnic team of student-interviewers spoke to more than 200 Amsterdam citizens in the street, half of whom were non-white.[3] Approximately 100 individuals took part in focus group and in-depth interviews. Of these people, a little less than half was non-white. The 20 forums on the *West Side* website (over 800 postings) were also examined. Overall, the various ethnic backgrounds were amply represented. We interviewed roughly the same number of men and women. (See Müller and Hermes 2010).

Evaluation of audience reactions to the show provided an unexpected number of unsolicited comments about 'the media' as a whole. In fact, 'the media' were a subject that respondents felt much more comfortable talking about than the series or citizenship in general. Clearly, as a topic, 'the media' allowed them to take up the position of lay experts. Moreover, the link between non-fiction media and citizenship, which appears endangered by the decline in newspaper usage and by the hybridization of fiction and non-fiction genres, is often made by our Amsterdam informants. Not only is it the case that the media and certainly the content of popular media are everybody's domain, there is a strong sense that the media have an obligation to represent ethnic and cultural groups in a fair and correct manner.

> Muslims, that arouses more sensation, they write more about them because it sells more (Peter, white, aged 32).

> The media create an image of foreigners as violent people (Erdinc, Turkish-Dutch, aged 24).

> The media, too, want us to pigeon-hole people, and that is exactly what we do (Janis, Surinamese, aged 23, group interview).
>
> The problem starts with the government; they don't know what to do with the foreigners. It's also the fault of the media that the foreigners are shown in a bad light (Italian-Dutch woman, aged 32, street interview).
>
> Such a pity that those Moroccan boys are shown in a bad light again. There is a Moroccan family just around the corner here, really, exemplary people. If that could be shown, just for a change, but no. (white Dutch woman, 40, street interview).
>
> But the Turks and Moroccans always are in the news in a negative way. Whether they have done it or not, every time they are portrayed negatively. The same goes for the Antilleans (Wouter, white, aged 30, group conversation).
>
> It has something to do with the way in which the government and the media depict foreigners, migrants – I hate that word 'foreigners' (Mohammed, aged 32, Egyptian-Dutch, in a group interview).
>
> I live in the Diamond neighbourhood [in Amsterdam]. Last year, there was so much fuss about it in the newspapers, but to be honest, I've never had any trouble. Moroccan boys were supposed to terrorize the neighbourhood and pester people until they left and so on. But I've never felt unsafe here. Not even after a night out, riding my bicycle home. As it happens, I read in the newspaper last week that the Diamond neighbourhood is safe again. Yoo-hoo! Ha ha, as if it wasn't safe already (Meike, white, aged 22).

It could well be the case that the provocative style of *West Side* suggested negative comments about the media in general for those respondents that had seen the series or saw an episode at the start of a group interview. The same mechanism, however, was seen to apply in street interviews with Amsterdam citizens who had only heard of the series and in 'mixed' viewer/non-viewer focus groups later on in the research process (in which we did not show an episode of the series but allowed the group to talk about it more freely. The series was better known by that time).

It is clear that condemning the media in a group interview provided a safe conversational option. For a long time, it has been customary to speak negatively of the media, rather than positively. The chances of being contradicted or making a bad impression by lashing out are slim. What we see reflected in the interview material might be the classical silencing spiral effect (Noelle-Neuman 1974, 1993). Viewpoints that fail to gain approval are marginalized and disappear. More likely, it signals a change in the codes of everyday talk about the media. From 'the window on the world', and positive expectations in television's early days, codes seem to have changed to cynicism. In the case of a television series

that is intended as an instrument of information and consciousness-raising, it is important to realize that citizens will understand a television show using these everyday codes, regardless of the style and content of the series itself. What we have here, then, is an interesting mix. On the one hand, media literacy is best shown as cynicism and disapproval of (commercial and sensationalist) media strategies. On the other, there is also strong evidence of one of the basic tenets of the paradigm of mass communication, as introduced in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. Among informants, the view is common that the media have a duty to represent all social groups equally and truthfully. Such a duty presumes centralized media organizations that can be held accountable.

Stronger 'proof', perhaps, of the mass communication paradigm was in the widespread, if mostly implicit use of another central notion, the concept of (role) socialization.

> Terrible, really terrible! I think I saw the first episode. I do really hope that foreigners will not think that all the Dutch are like that [racist] Mimi and that husband of hers. (street interview, white Dutch woman, 40)

> The media are causing a lot of prejudice (Lianne, 26, white woman in group interview).

> It is so exaggerated. Really, they shouldn't show these images. They will have a negative effect. This not how it should be (Sara, Iranian, 22 in group interview).

> The media should concentrate more on positive images (Mo, Iranian, 27 group interview).

The understanding that the media are a strong socializing force in society was broadly shared, as was the notion that this should be used to positive ends. Somewhat naïvely, it was widely believed that good media examples would be followed. In such cases cynicism does not come into play. When speakers suggest that negative representation and stereotyping will have serious social consequences, they do two things. They suggest that they understand the power of the media to shape social reality (and socialize us) but also that, because they are aware that this could happen, it will not happen to them but only to less-informed and more naïve others.

Davison (1983) called this 'the third person effect' (TPE). Whoever is capable of acknowledging the effects the media might generate, recognizes these and is less in danger of falling for them. According to Perloff (1999: 366): 'Self-perceived knowledge may lead individuals to believe that they are immune to message effects, whereas others are more vulnerable'. 'Others', by contrast, do run a risk because they are unaware of the danger. Perloff adds in his review of 'third person effect' research that:

> [w]hen messages are perceived as desirable, advocating outcomes that individuals perceive will benefit the self or agree with philosophically, people are not so likely to exhibit a TPE. Under these conditions (and perhaps also when messages are of high professional quality), participants will admit to being influenced (Perloff 1999: 369).

Issues of media influence and effects make up an important part of the mass communication paradigm. What happens, however, when media content is seen in a more favourable light than *West Side* was (or media representation of non-white Dutch in general)? If the paradigm of mass communication is on the way out, and a media 2.0 paradigm is taking its place, surely we would, at the very least, find a heavily nuanced version of the conclusion offered by Perloff; namely, that informants in cases of positively evaluated content would also understand themselves as being influenced. Such a conclusion offers further proof of the wish to recognize not just the power but also the *authority* of (mass) media. If, on the other hand, you see yourself as an active participant in practices of media use and of media production, would that not entail understanding media texts as voices in dialogue, rather than as an authoritative source of truth and enlightenment?

Meeting Point Tangiers

A second case study may shed more light on the self-understanding of audience members in relation to television. This is a participative design project in the general area of digital storytelling. As a project, it was inspired by media 2.0 notions. Within our team of researchers we call it a 'civic research' project, akin to civic journalism: by, for and with all parties involved (Hermes 2006).[4] In this case, ordinary young people we contacted via a sizable internet community called Marokko.nl, became script writers for an internet soap series that would also take on current affairs and social issues – a telenovela really. While we had hoped for them to also be actors and media producers, this never happened. Their fantasy was another one. They hoped for the show to become a success, for themselves to be famous and for the 'message' of their internet drama series to be a significant force in the acceptance of Dutch Moroccans as just another kind of ordinary citizens. 'I would so like to have a series that has people say: yes, they are Moroccans, but you hardly notice that they are' (email from one of the writers' group, 2009).

As in other digital storytelling projects (Lundby 2008), our project focused on identity and representation and on community building. Again, like many others, we may have fallen into the trap of unwarranted optimism about the possibilities offered by the new media (Pajnik 2005). The idea was to produce an intercultural internet soap series for the Dutch-language internet community Marokko.nl. Marokko.nl then counted a membership of around 150,000. On average, on a given day up to 50,000 members were online. The community offers an enormous variety of subjects from politics, education and Islam to 'the best Moroccan weddings' and the 'story corner'. The story corner consists of installments of long-running series and short stories written by community members. It is one of

the best loved areas of the site. Self-chosen nicknames of people posting messages and their discussions suggest that the community draws in what is often called an 'urban' mix of mostly younger people, among them a large number of Dutch Moroccans.

Over the course of three years, I observed attempts of our small team to draw in and connect with a group of writers, all active in the Marokko.nl 'story corner', to build characters, storylines and a script of such quality that it can be produced. While ambitions were fairly low at the start, they changed over time from a wish to do a series just above the level of amateur video to professional television. These ambitions were fed by the internal dynamic in the group of writers that matched their level of excitement about the project, and the will to work hard for it, with an increasingly strong wish to see it screened for a large audience. In turn, one of my colleagues, a researcher who doubled as writing coach would use these ambitions and the small steps ahead we made in negotiations with a production company to keep the writers going. Drawing in new parties, first the production company, then a professional scriptwriter paid out of a grant, then a public broadcasting organization, necessitated a continuous rebalancing and management of expectations.

While the research team felt strongly about the control over the series by the writers and the community, Marokko.nl, the writers themselves were far less keen to understand the process as one of a struggle for power. Although they had initially voiced the wish to redress the negative representation of Dutch Moroccan youth in the media, the possibility of seeing the series on national, broadcast television, gained a life of its own. They became, in a way, hypnotized by the machinery and the magic of the mass media, their initial disdain and criticism of national broadcast media all but forgotten. The issue of control over content was no longer discussed.

Achraf, for instance, one of the core group of writers, was reassured about the project when the professional scriptwriter was hired to teach a masterclass for the writers and to produce with them a first draft to be taken to a public broadcasting organization. The following are extracts from interviews with the core team of writers:

> Since Dick has joined us, I feel more confident. I think that can turn it into a success. […] because Dick has a name. (Achraf).

Most of all, Achraf is a realist who hopes working on the series will open doors for him. 'It is a good opportunity to meet people who do things in film. I'd like to develop as a scriptwriter, but what I really want to be is an actor. This project might be a good bet to do so.' Later on in the interview (conducted in 2009) he qualifies: 'It is an important topic of course, for the project. The way Muslims are branded as one thing, and the way they really are.' He does not hold high hopes for reaching problem youth:

> Whatever our message in the series, it could never be strong enough. It does not work that way. That is what I think at least. I have never seen a film that

had a message so strong that it totally changed how I think about things. And if I don't have that, fat chance that that would happen to those youth who ride their scooters and destroy bus stops and things like that. Plus, I don't think this series is only meant to have a message. It should be entertaining. It should be fun to watch. And maybe it'll work for others, in the grey area, as it were; who hear that it is a project by Moroccans with Moroccan actors. Maybe it'll do something for them.

Khalid is more of an idealist. He describes the project as an attempt to bring positive news and not just about Moroccans or about Muslims to the community and everybody else who is interested. 'There is so much negative news.' Like Achraf, he feels there is a need for a big media organization for the series to be a success, and he, too, is in two minds about the power of the media to change people. He suspects that negative representation has a stronger effect than positive images.

Noura is by far the strongest personality on the team. She understands the project to be unique because it will tell a story from an inside perspective:

> Marokko Media (the Publisher of Marokko.nl) has chosen to have this story written by people who are in the middle of that story themselves, who experience it daily. That is unique of course. And I do think young people will recognize that. It is not a top down tale. It is really bottom up, accessible. It is as if I can tell my story and share it with tens of thousands of others because there are so many things that are the same. What we are working on now is what connects young people. Questions about: who am I, why am I this way, how did I get to be this way? […]Questions that all young people have really. Young people from specific backgrounds or cultures really. We are trying to mix them. That remains the point of departure for the series. We mix and try to show the best of both worlds. We want to show what connects people, not what divides them.

Noura's vehement plea for a positive outlook and really mixed storylines, characters and cast, originates from her own criticism of the mass media:

> It is the dominant media. Really, you only have to turn on the TV and lots of crazy stuff is directed at you. It is television really. I remember when I left Morocco ten years ago, we had one foreign channel, with foreign movies and everybody was fascinated by this Mexican soap series. It was the only thing that was imported. And then we got a dish and everybody had thousands of channels. A revolution really. The Music channels came. Also from the Middle East, such as MTV. There are also Middle Eastern varieties. And suddenly the whole look in the streets changed. Literally. People started dressing like the people they saw in clips. That is what I mean. The media are so influential. Unbelievable really. It is as if we are colonized, if you want to be part of society. You have to think in a certain way. As prescribed really. It is like a secret message. All the media, every movie, every ad has a message. The better your make-up looks, the more you'll be accepted. If you are slender, and you

look good, then you are welcome. If you are just a bit overweight, you are a lazy good-for-nothing, who doesn't […] you are looked at in a different way.

Those who oppose these images are made to look like crazy people. We are a colony, really. You don't consciously think why would I want to wear the same dress that I saw on TV, you just think: I could try that. And then they've got you. People are lazy, they don't think for themselves. Easier to do what all those others are doing. You see that more and more. People are so easy to influence.

Marukh, who, like Noura, wears a headscarf, is less strident in her views but just as ambitious. Apart from writing stories for the web community, she is writing a novel. She primarily felt that it was a huge honour that she had been chosen. Like Achraf, she hopes that being part of the writer group will boost her career, in her case as a writer. 'It really is a very good way to gain experience.' As with all the others, including Nouria, the main character of the series is the one she feels closest to. He has been devised as a journalist-to-be. He is an ambitious truth seeker whose blog, called Faysal's News, is the way in which the series will address a range of issues, including social and political ones.

Marukh: The thing with Faysal is that he has aspirations. And that is what I see in myself. I would not mind becoming a journalist.

At first sight, these interview fragments present a mixed picture and a range of near incompatible notions about the mass media. In all encounters, however, what is most striking is the awe inspired by the mass media, whether negatively or positively. In the long process of getting pilot episodes made, it was the promise of a big audience that kept the writers going. In fact, scepticism and cynicism about the media and media influence, and about the gullibility of media audiences went hand in hand with the desire to have a real broadcasting organization take on the script. Indeed, most everything that was said about the (mass) media fits in with 'protoprofessionalized' versions of the mass media paradigm. Apart from Noura's insightful description of a series built out of the experiences of young people themselves, there was no reference at all to a sense of agency or ownership that could be recognized as central to the convergence culture paradigm. In the meetings we had with the production company and the broadcasting organization, the writers would frequently not show up, even though they had been invited and consulted about strategy. When they did, they would often not speak at all, and function mostly as icons of an audience that Dutch public broadcasters would really love to reach. Because that, of course, from the broadcasters' perspective, is the real problem. How to grab the hearts and minds of young viewers who lead the move to internet-based audiovisual news and entertainment. Who, perhaps, are slightly less easy to 'catch', than Noura darkly predicted.

3. Conclusion

The two case studies presented here are meant to illustrate an unexpected state of affairs. While television is changing, technologically and culturally, and critical scholars point to a whole new way of using and thinking media (Media 2.0 or convergence culture), in everyday life relatively old-fashioned notions of the media rule. I have used 'mass media paradigm' as a catch-all phrase to denote the entire complex of knowledges, practices and rules that came into being in the twentieth century and converged on television. The mass media paradigm has been, and still is, highly effective; so much so, in fact, that rethinking television or thinking beyond television (the broadcast, centrally produced and disseminated medium) might well be compromised from the start.

When the proponents of the media studies 2.0 discussion advocate that we find suitable terms to understand current changes in media technology and media culture, they appear to argue from a completely different understanding of today's everyday media use. Neither our amateur television producers, nor the viewers that were interviewed would agree. They did not feel in need of new terms or notions to give meaning or legitimacy to what they are doing. There is no urgency in everyday life to find new terms or ways of talking about television. The appropriate rhetorical question here, is whether media critics should leave the situation at that and accept that this is how television is thought about? Perhaps not. David Gauntlett borrows Ivan Illich's term 'convivial tools' to clarify what he feels media theory should be able to accomplish (in everyday life and elsewhere), which I, in turn, will use to suggest that critical audience research is in something of a conundrum. How, from a critical perspective, are we to meet the demands of the current time for strong and empowering ways to think about the media? Given that the paradigm of mass communication does not, by my reckoning, meet these demands.

> A convivial society should be designed to allow all its members the most autonomous action by means of tools least controlled by others. People feel joy, as opposed to mere pleasure, to the extent that their activities are creative; while the growth of tools beyond a certain point increases regimentation, dependence, exploitation, and impotence. (Illich 1973: 20, quoted in Gauntlett 2009: 156).

It would be difficult to find standards by which the paradigm of mass communication hands anyone a convivial tool. Fear and distinction appear to be its main mechanisms: fear of the possible effects of viewing (too much) television, and the means to project that fear onto others (the third person effect). Even when it comes to issues of representation, it is a discursive system that encourages a system to hold distant others responsible, rather than take responsibility themselves. Of course, that is also what makes it a highly comfortable mode of thought: beyond fairly easy forms of criticism there is not much required of a viewer to establish herself as a discerning individual.

The audience material presented here presents a mix of textual literacy, scepticism and only the easiest forms of media criticism. If there is a sense of 'ownership', it is an ideological form that pertains, strangely enough, to broadcast television and the standards set both by national television production and American quality series, rather than any more real or material form. The fact that nationally made series (still the best watched in the Netherlands, as is the case in other non-English speaking countries) fall short of 'quality TV standards', appears to reassure rather than upset informants. As if a medium that does not do too well is easier to 'own' and less of a threat. Noura's criticism was really exceptional, especially because she includes herself in it. 'As if we have become a colony', she said. In almost all other cases, informants and writers tended to be critical of media content and representation, but felt they were not at risk from it personally. If anything, our writers and non-white informants felt at risk from the effects of mass media representation on other people who would not be able to see through it and understand it as a sensationalist falsification.

As long as audiences take up Archimedean positions – outside, that is, of the field they discuss, neither tainted nor affected by it – it is hard to see how reflection on the choices we all make in viewing and talking about the media, in turn drive media production. The mass media paradigm thus makes co-optation of basically enabling technologies easy for corporate players who are able to guarantee the kind of 'quality' audiences feel they have a right to expect. The logic of broadcast media is to both please and surprise audiences, who are best pleased if they can maintain a balance between knocking down most of what they see (since that secures their own position) with an occasional exceptional moment of good television to produce as proof of their own discernment. Since there is hardly any sustained discussion of media texts other than in the academy and a few select discussion forums, discernment never has to be put to the test. That leaves only the option to follow in the steps of the paradigm of mass media and to use popular media with new types of advice and challenges to win over television viewers to a type of viewership that is not especially demanding of their own discernment but does invite them to challenge the industry. More and better television can be had.

Notes

1. Figures include watching digital television via a decoder or streams within a week from the original broadcast moment, DVDs, other recordings and downloads are not included. Schols, M., M. Duimel and J. de Haan (2011). *Hoe cultureel is de digitale generatie? Het internetgebruik voor culturele doeleinden onder schoolgaande tieners*. Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau.
2. This material was collected for two projects in which the Research Group Public Opinion Formation of INHolland University was a participant (in 2008 the name of the research group changed to Media, Culture and Citizenship). The first of these is a project of the Amsterdam Centre for Conflict Studies (Amsterdam University) commissioned by the municipality of Amsterdam. The second project is a collaboration between the Centre for Popular Culture (Amsterdam University) and the Research and Statistics Department of the municipality of Amsterdam. See Mueller and Hermes (2010).
3. See Dyer (2001) for the merits of defining ethnicity as white versus non-white in order to reflect dominant power relations.

4. The research group's key members were Christa de Graaf, Robert Adolfsson, Pauline Borghuis and myself.

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The persistence of national TV
Language and cultural proximity in Flemish fiction

Alexander Dhoest

There is an overwhelming sense, both in professional circles and in academic writing, that television as we knew it is no more (e.g. Spigel and Olsson 2004; Turner and Tay 2009). Undeniably, the era of broadcast television as the prime mass medium is crumbling, making way for a more complex broadcasting landscape where diverse (niche, global, digital, interactive) channels divide the market, competing with other devices, media and cross-media applications. However, there are important continuities so we should be cautious in declaring the 'end' or 'death' of television. Historical media research has taught us to be cautious in predicting the future impact of current changes, as differences and evolutions are more easily discernible than continuities. With the benefit of hindsight, the conclusion is often that, yes, the media have changed, but, no, not in the ways we expected, partly because some things have stayed the same.

In this paper, this point is made by drawing on the framework of television as a national medium, an old paradigm that is very persistent and still relevant. It provides a good example of the complex, seemingly contradictory combination of the old and the new in television. It urges us to be cautious when dealing with 'the new', not to underestimate it but to keep it in perspective. First, the classical argument about TV as a national medium is presented, followed by an assessment of its challenges and current value. It is argued that the national does remain an important organizing principle and frame of reference, not only in terms of production and within programmes but also for audiences, who still tend to prefer national programming. Using cultural proximity as a central concept, this claim is empirically explored in the Flemish (Dutch-speaking Belgian) case.

1. National television in a global era

From its start, European television was organized and regulated on the level of nation states, who sought to control the new medium, which they deemed important to support – but also to form – the nation as 'one people' (de Leeuw et al. 2008). Television was instrumental in uniting citizens into one 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991), creating unprecedented moments of simultaneously shared experiences, both exceptional media events such as royal coronations or weddings (Dayan and Katz 1992) and everyday programmes such as daily news

broadcasts, soaps and game shows (e.g. Cardiff and Scannell 1987; Bourdon 1992; Scannell 1996). If we view national identities as constructions in which representation plays a crucial role, television is clearly a powerful source of representations of national unity (Hall 1992). European public broadcasting was the prime model in this respect, but in an era of limited competition – Ellis (2000) calls it the 'era of scarcity' – commercial broadcasters could equally create imagined communities. While never truly encompassing the whole nation or completely erasing all internal differences, broadcast television in its first decades was probably the closest we ever got to actual 'imagined communities' of media users.

But, so the argument goes, over the years all kinds of changes have diminished this uniting force. Shifts from public broadcasting monopolies to duopolies and ever more open national broadcasting markets have fragmented audiences in the ages of 'availability' and 'plenty' (Ellis 2000). Local, regional, international and 'global' channels create alternative geographical delimitations of audiences, while specialized and niche channels divide the market in other, age-, gender- and lifestyle-related segments. In the age of flexible 'matrix media' (Curtin 2009), transnational players dominate the commercial broadcasting market, which is increasingly governed by international regulation. Technological changes – from antenna to cable and satellite reception, from analogue to digital signals – offer consumers ever increasing possibilities and choices, in the process further eroding the sense of a nationwide, shared viewing experience. Programmes and formats travel in ever expanding circles, creating a 'global' television marketplace (Moran 1998).

'Globalization' has been one of the buzzwords of media studies in the past decades. The increasing border-crossing has led some to predict the 'end of nations', while others are tempted to announce the 'death of national television'. However, many have subsequently questioned such statements, qualifying the claims of globalization theory and observing the persistence of both the national and national television. Contrary to early beliefs, globalization does not simply imply homogenization as there is a constant tension with powers of heterogenization (Sreberny-Mohammadi et al. 1997). The local does remain important and the global and the local are considered as 'mutually constitutive' (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1996). Globalization is now perceived as going hand in hand with heterogenization and the creation of hybrid 'glocal' forms of the global (Kraidy 2005). Cultural identities are not one-sidedly based on the national anymore, as other layers – global, regional, local – now simultaneously form part of complex, postmodern identities (Barker 1999; Sinclair 2004).

In this context, the nation does remain an important economic, political and socio-cultural entity mediating globalization (Sinclair 2004). Nations keep on providing social cohesion and references to shared memories and ethnic links, creating symbolical borders between 'self' and others (Smith 1990) – albeit sometimes in a defensive, counter-globalist way (Hall 1992; Featherstone 2003). Moreover, despite the general increase of mobility and border-crossing, a large proportion of the world population never leaves the confines of their nation (Golding 2005), which cautions against assumptions of a 'generalized nomadology' (Morley 2004). A powerful notion to describe the persistent omnipresence

and self-evidence of nations is Billig's 'banal nationalism', pointing at the continuous, largely unnoticed everyday references to and confirmations of the national (Billig 1995).

Together with the nation, national TV may have lost its self-evidence as TV signals, companies, programmes and formats readily cross national borders, but it has not become obsolete. This is confirmed, for instance, in comparative research, which discloses strong national differences in media content and organization and, in the process, illustrates the persistently national organization of social life (Sreberny 2004). According to Waisbord (2004), national identity remains a central form of cultural identity, which finds everyday confirmation in the media making available cultural forms identified with the nation, providing opportunities for shared media experiences and institutionalizing national cultures. Despite external (globalization) and internal (multiculturalism, hybridization) challenges, media still bring together the members of the nation around language, symbols and common experiences in an everyday context (Waisbord 2004). Mass media like television continue to provide a sense of 'home' and community, which should not automatically be regarded as reactionary or essentialist (Morley 2004). As pointed out by Turner (2009), television remains embedded in the patterns of everyday life and there is a continuing sense of the 'co-presence' of the national audience. Moreover, the 'global' questioning of the national organization of TV is mostly a Western matter, while television firmly remains national in other regions and countries such as China (Turner 2009).

The above argument does not deny the importance of globalization, nor does it claim that the national should remain the prime prism through which to study television. Indeed, we can question the limited attention to transnational collaborations and exchanges (Mihelj 2007) as well as the predominance of the Eurocentrist notion of the modern nation state in international media studies (McMillin 2007). Rather, in the face of dramatic changes leading to statements about the post-national nature of television, this paper aims to redress the balance by pointing at continuities within these changes. It wants to demonstrate that the national does remain important, not only at the level of television production and its institutional organization, but also in programmes and their reception.

Starting with programmes, until today diverse genres – fiction and non-fiction, information and entertainment – bear the mark of their national context and play a role in its discursive construction (Castelló, Dhoest and O'Donnell 2009). For instance, the predominance and pre-eminence of national over international news is well-known. News programmes also constitute discourses about the nation (Frosh and Wolfsfeld 2006), framing the news in nationally specific ways (Hall 2000). Fiction, too, is a programme category that is still closely linked to nationality, particularly in Europe where the strong import of American fiction has led to a focus on the own culture in domestic fiction (Newcomb 1997).[1] This leads to an important and growing output, fuelled by the audience preference for such fare (which will be addressed below). Soaps, in particular, are often considered as representations of 'ordinary', everyday life in the nation (Turner 2005; O'Donnell 1999), complementing universal conventions with 'local' elements such as stars, settings and iconography (Moran 1998), accents and

locations (Moran 2000), landscapes and lifestyles (Dunleavy 2005), (minority) languages and cultural assumptions (Franco 2001; O'Donnell 2001), and cultural values (Kreutzner and Seiter 1991). More generally, TV fiction can be used as an instrument in the construction of national images through references to national culture, history, language and national types (Dhoest 2004), and more broadly by showcasing national symbols, territory, institutions, religion, folklore, gastronomy, sports, etc. (Castelló 2007).

Entertainment television, too, may bear the marks of its national context of production. Contrary to fiction where the worldwide American presence is important, the majority of entertainment programming is nationally produced both in the US and abroad. As noted by Bonner (2003), 'ordinary television' – often unnoticed, lightweight entertainment programmes such as game shows, talk shows and food programmes – are generally 'local' and show everyday life in the nation. Even when entertainment programmes are based on international formats, as is often the case in reality TV, national elements are added in a process of customization or 'indigenization' (Moran 2009). Franco (2008) distinguishes local casts, programme titles, visual styles, and gender and class politics as 'national' ingredients, while Aslama and Pantti (2007) consider media rituals, settings, themes and communicative conventions, which are sometimes included in a calculated and intentional way, but also often in a banal, taken-for-granted way. Similarly, even adaptations of strongly scripted formats like *The Weakest Link* may contain numerous banal references to the nation, often bringing the questions 'home' to the nation (Van den Bulck and Sinardet 2005; see also Moran 1998).

2. National viewing

Moving from programmes to their viewers, there are many indications that viewers have a stronger connection with national TV and domestic programming than with imported programmes, as the discussion below will illustrate. As mentioned above, in the early years nationally organized broadcasting often had the explicit aim to unite the viewers in front of their screens. Even after the age of monopolistic public broadcasting and its explicit policies of nation-making, broadcasting can contribute to the construction of an imagined community of the nation as a symbolic home:

> It can link the peripheral to the centre; turn previously exclusive social events into mass experiences; and, above all, penetrate the domestic sphere by linking the national public into the private lives of its citizens through the creation of both sacred and quotidian moments of national communion(Morley 2004: 312).

As many have noted, this has become less self-evident over the past decades, as:

> [I]nternally differentiated, customized, interactive, and individuated audience segments would make their own choices, would increasingly act as produc-

> ers as well as consumers of mediated meanings, and would identify less with nation-states and more with constituencies of taste and affiliation that were local and international at once (Hartley 2004: 23).

However, audience figures show that viewers still tune in massively to watch at least some programmes and media events, and that the age of television audiences as collectivities is not quite over yet (Schulz 2000).

It is clear that viewers have a special bond with their 'own' programmes, especially fiction. Domestic fiction is generally more successful than imported fiction, which led to a growth of domestic production in most European countries from the 1990s (Buonanno 1998). The appeal of domestic fiction is mostly linked to the sense of recognition it evokes among audiences: 'People expect and are pleased to recognise themselves, their own social, individual and collective world, their customs and lifestyles, accents, faces, landscapes and everything else that they perceive as close and familiar' (Buonanno 2008: 96; see also Paterson 1997). The term most used to describe this close bond is 'cultural proximity', developed by Joseph Straubhaar (1991) to explain the preference for national or regional programmes that are closer to one's own culture. In more recent work, Straubhaar (2007) argues that even in the age of globalization, local, national and regional proximities dominate the consumption of television. National cultures, markets and television networks still dominate the viewing of most audiences, sometimes supplanted by smaller (local, sub-national) or larger (geo-cultural regions) entities. The international predominance of American fiction is particularly clear on younger or poorer (often commercial) channels, while established (particularly public) stations prefer to broadcast as much domestic fiction as possible.

According to Straubhaar (2007), language is the strongest marker of cultural proximity, as it entails shared cultural capital and references. This explains the importance of (geo-) linguistic regional markets for television, for instance in Latin America. However, cultural 'closeness' does not completely predict television viewing as there are other sources of proximity, such as genre proximity, thematic proximity and value proximity. This implies that even programmes from other cultures may have a high degree of 'cultural shareability' and therefore be popular abroad (Straubhaar 2007). They may have a limited degree of 'cultural discount', the term coined by Hoskins and Mirus (1989) to refer to the diminished appeal of programmes in a different culture. This is particularly true of American TV fiction as it is produced for a large and (ethnically) diverse market and worldwide audiences are very familiar with its codes, also through Hollywood cinema (Buonanno 2008). American fiction, therefore, is often a close second in terms of audience preferences in Europe, after domestic programming but before fiction from other European countries (Silj 1988).

In empirical studies on the appeal of domestic fiction, mostly qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups are used. For instance, Moran (1998) asked German viewers what they considered as 'national' in a German soap. He found that this was seldom explicit, national elements mostly appearing in the everyday lives of characters in an unexceptional and taken for

granted way – reminiscent of banal nationalism. The familiarity of German actors, the language used and some national character traits such as intolerance and small-mindedness were identified as 'German', but generally it was not very clear to respondents why they considered these soaps to be German. Similarly, Dhoest (2009) interviewed emerging adult viewers about Flemish fiction, and they also considered it to be 'typically Flemish' but could not quite pinpoint why that was, most of them mentioning the recognizable and quite realistic portrayal of everyday life and ordinary people. While the national character of their domestic fiction may not be very clear to many non-American viewers, it is generally linked to 'realism' and contrasted to imported, particularly American programmes. For instance, Griffiths (1996) observed an appreciation of realism among young viewers of a Welsh soap, which was contrasted with other 'more American' programming. Similarly, in a study on British viewers, Livingstone (1988) found a stress on escapism as a reason to watch American programmes as opposed to realism in British soaps. Strelitz (2002) found references to realism as a reason to watch local drama among black South African students, who thought it connected more with their lived reality. Finally, in a study of Flemish viewers, Biltereyst (1991) found a stronger involvement in Flemish fiction, which was more often related to the viewers' own lives than American fiction. All the studies above illustrate a strong 'referential' involvement with domestic fiction, which is more often connected to 'real life' (see Liebes and Katz 1990).

3. The Flemish case

In the last part of this paper, I will investigate these matters in the Flemish context. Flanders is the Dutch-speaking community in Belgium, a region with about 6 million inhabitants in a country of about 10.5 million. Belgium is a federalized state, with three cultural communities (Dutch, French and German) of which the Dutch-speaking Flemish is the largest and the one with the strongest nationalist aspirations. It is not a nation state, but a sub-national community that closely fits the characteristics of national cultures as described above. Indeed, as noted by O'Donnell (1999), in some cases regions may be the best level on which to study national cultural identity in television. From the very start, Belgian television was organized on the level of these regions, the Flemish monopolistic public broadcaster in particular having strong culturally nationalist aspirations (Van den Bulck 2001; Dhoest and Van den Bulck 2007). In different genres, notably fiction, the broadcasters aimed to stimulate Flemish culture and to create a community of Flemish viewers (Dhoest 2004). With the liberalization of the broadcasting market and the start of commercial broadcasting in 1989, this cultural logic of broadcasting was adapted to the more competitive context, but it did not disappear. After some years of market dominance by commercial channel VTM, from the mid-1990s the renewed public broadcasting VRT regained its audience and in 2002 it even became the market leader again.

Like its commercial competitor VMMa (Vlaamse Media Maatschappij – Flemish Media Company), public broadcaster VRT (Vlaamse Radio en Televisie

– Flemish Radio and Television) refers to Flanders both in its name and in its programmes. Domestic productions across all genres are the core of programming on both generalist channels, the public Eén and the commercial VTM. Indeed, as predicted and as observed across Europe, the liberalization of the market led to the growing influx and relative dominance of American fiction productions (71% of all European imports in 1997; Brants and De Bens 2000). However, this should be put in perspective, as American productions are mostly scheduled outside prime time and on commercial channels (De Bens and de Smaele 2000). Moreover, despite the small relative weight of Flemish fiction in the totality of the schedules, there is an important increase of domestic productions in absolute terms, which is hidden by the expansion of daytime broadcasting time: more Flemish fiction is made, but even more American fiction is imported. Focusing only on prime time, the rise of Flemish fiction becomes clear (De Bens 2000).

Looking at the figures for the 2009-2010 season, and breaking these down further between main and secondary channels, the importance of domestic fiction is even clearer. On the first public channel Eén, of the total 323 hours of serial fiction broadcast in prime time 64.9% is Flemish while only 2.2% is American. Most domestic fiction is scheduled on the first channel, the second public channel Canvas mostly scheduling British drama, beside the repeats of one old Flemish series (1.8%) in summer and 19.6% of American drama. For the prime commercial channel VTM fiction is even more important, with a total of 468 hours broadcast in prime time, 69.7% of which is Flemish and 15.3% American. On the second youth-oriented commercial channel 2Be, however, all serial fiction is American.[2] This clearly illustrates the secondary position of American fiction, which is most prominent on smaller commercial channels oriented towards younger viewers.

While Flemish viewers can now choose between tens of channels, over half of the population tunes in daily to the two main Flemish channels, the public Eén (market share of 32.4% in 2009) and the commercial VTM (20.9% in 2009; VRT 2009). It is ironic that the market mechanism that was expected to destroy domestic fiction production actually saved it. In a market that is more than ever oriented towards consumer tastes, domestic programming proved to be most popular. Even if expensive (particularly in a small market like Flanders), domestic fiction has proved to be a good investment, as it is consistently more popular with audiences than any imported fiction, despite its often limited production values. Similarly, if reality television has invaded both public and commercial channels, only domestic programmes or adaptations do well with national audiences. To illustrate: in 2009, the list of top 10 programmes contains no imported programmes and five out of the 10 top places are occupied by domestic fiction productions. As in the preceding years, the top 100 is all Flemish, apart from eight imported programmes: three documentary series, one British mini-series, two American movies and two Dutch series (source: CIM, http://www.cim.be/). Considering the average ratings in prime time for the 2009-2010 season, it is clear that domestic fiction scores best: on the first public channel Eén it reaches average ratings of 31.1% and on VTM 23.8%, as compared to the 11.5% of American fiction on Eén, 14.2% on VTM and 3.5% on the smaller channel 2Be.[3]

The general viewer preference for domestic fiction in Flanders is clear and

can, in broad terms, be explained through the concept of cultural proximity. As mentioned above, the Flemish top 100 for 2009 also includes two Dutch programmes, the police series *Baantjer* and law series *Keyzer & De Boer, advocaten*. Flanders shares a language and a border with the Netherlands, so one could expect the cultural proximity between both regions to be very high. While the Flemish ratings for the more popular Dutch channels were indeed high in the age of monopolistic public broadcasting (with a market share as high as 25% in 1988), since the start of VTM these have dramatically dropped to about 4% in 2006 (Bauwens 2007). The offer of Dutch programmes on Flemish channels is also limited, which questions, or at least qualifies, the model of cultural proximity, as the import of American fiction is much higher. However, Dutch fiction is quite popular, scoring somewhere between Flemish and American fiction. On Eén, it gets average ratings of 19.7% (as opposed to 31.1% for Flemish fiction and 11.5% for US fiction), on VTM 17.1% (as opposed to 23.8% for Flemish and 14.2% for US fiction).

The lower popularity of Dutch fiction in comparison to Flemish fiction indicates a degree of cultural discount. Indeed, despite the shared language, there is some cultural distance between Flanders and the Netherlands, which is mostly attributed to historical and religious differences (Droste 1993; Hofstede 1991). Moreover, the shared language is pronounced in a different way, which also creates some distance (which is often bridged through subtitling). In comparison, American fiction scores quite well. As noted above, throughout Europe American television is often a close second in terms of popularity, after domestic television but before other (European) fiction. According to Buonanno (2008: 97), there is a process of 'anticipatory socialization' at work, which, through Hollywood cinema, makes viewers extremely familiar with American fiction. Even the linguistic 'discount' is limited as Flemish viewers are familiar with English-language pronunciation because programmes are subtitled, not dubbed. Research among younger viewers (Dhoest 2009) actually shows that they often find English more 'natural' in fiction than Dutch.

Overall, the model of cultural proximity seems to retain its explanatory power: domestic fiction is most popular. One could argue that viewers do not have many options, as the main channels schedule a majority of domestic fiction in prime time, but this is beside the point as there are many imported alternative options on other channels, which are simply less popular. Moreover, domestic fiction gets such a prominent position in the schedules of the major channels because it is more popular compared to imported fiction scheduled in exactly the same time slot (which is often the case with Dutch series, filling the gap between two seasons of a Flemish show), so their popularity is not just the product of their advantageous position in the schedules. Domestic fiction is also not forced upon viewers through Flemish nationalist broadcasting policies. While this kind of 'culturally nationalist' production policy was present in the monopoly years of public broadcasting, and while the public broadcaster and its legislator (the Flemish government) still value the 'Flemishness' of programmes, viewer popularity is now the prime rationale for fiction production. There are no quotas or specific funding to stimulate domestic fiction production, only 'quality drama'

getting some financial aid. From an industry point of view, domestic fiction is important predominantly because it is so popular.

Further unravelling the workings of cultural proximity, it is important to note that the popularity of domestic fiction is not limited to particular genres. Flemish soaps are massively more popular than imported soaps, which is not surprising for they are often described as representations of everyday life in the nation, as discussed above (see also Dhoest 2007a). Similarly, Flemish sitcoms are generally more popular than imported (British or American) ones, even if they are often less well-scripted and acted. Of course, this success could be linked to the cultural specificity and linguistic basis of humour, which remains firmly attached to its national context. Finally, Flemish crime drama is also more popular, which is particularly interesting as this is a relatively expensive genre where the differences with imported (British and American) fiction in terms of production values are significant. Despite the lower visual appeal and the absence of spectacular action scenes, viewers prefer the Flemish shows. Because of budget limitations these focus more on characterization and dialogue than on action, which seems to work well as this adds to the 'everyday' nature of Flemish crime drama. Like Flemish soaps and sitcoms, rather than providing escape and spectacle, Flemish crime and police drama remains close to the reality of ordinary life.

This 'everday' character of the most popular TV fiction genres in Flanders is an important aspect of its viewer appeal. This is confirmed in viewer research, which shows a strong tendency for viewers to compare fiction with their own world, as mentioned in the theoretical framework. Throughout my research based on interviews with viewers, the dominant tendency is for viewers to judge Flemish fiction on its degree of realism, to compare it to (their own) reality and to comment on the level of recognition it evokes (Dhoest 2007b). Even younger viewers, who tend to think American fiction is more entertaining, do think Flemish fiction is more realistic and recognizable (Dhoest 2009).

Linking this preference for domestic drama to 'national' culture, we have to be careful not to overstress our point. There is nothing explicitly nationalist about this fiction; neither does it overtly support Flemish nationalism or separatism. However, as there is no French-language drama on Flemish television and there are hardly any institutional bonds between Flemish and French-language Belgian television, Flanders clearly is the relevant level for the analysis of fiction. It also seems justified to consider this level as (sub)national rather than just 'cultural', as television is produced and consumed within the geographical borders of the Flemish region, only some programmes crossing the borders to the Netherlands. This fiction is a perfect illustration of 'banal' nationalism, taken for granted and practically invisible references to everyday life in Flanders. Familiar cities, actors, dress styles and accents all add to a local feel and strengthen the bond with the viewers. While this fiction does not explicitly refer to Flanders, it creates a cluster of shared cultural symbols and images, thus both feeding into and contributing to a sense of Flemish identification among the viewers.

4. Conclusion

Rather than 'ending', television seems to be reinventing itself. While it has shed its old appearance of a uniform, self-imposed national institution, it still retains a lot of its uniting power. Based on cultural and linguistic bonds, nations remain the strongest entities in the market of television production and reception. For all the global transport of formats and programmes, it is within such geographically circumscribed regions that television primarily operates. Even 'global' television is mostly watched on domestic channels, dubbed or subtitled in the 'own' language, part of a national flow of programmes, framed by familiar presenters. This is certainly true in the Flemish case, which presents plenty of evidence that viewers remain faithful to domestic programming. While the opportunities for viewer selectivity have been growing over the past decades, the fragmentation of the market has never been quite as radical as predicted. Across the board, the preference for domestic or indigenized programming is striking. Therefore, reviewing the empirical evidence, it seems that claims about the 'end of national TV' are exaggerated.

However, a note of caution is necessary. The argument made above, or at least its strength, may be specific to the Flemish context – which, incidentally, would support the persistent importance of the national framework for television viewing. On the one hand, in such a small market, generalist channels aimed at the entire population have the best chance of surviving and they focus on national programming to attract a large cross-section of the population. On the other hand, Flanders is the equivalent of a region, sub-nation or stateless nation in other countries, and perhaps the argument developed above mostly holds true for this kind of culturally and linguistically (more or less) coherent regions. Moreover, Flanders has more than average national aspirations, which may explain the strong commitment to 'own' programmes – which, again, may not be typical.

To confirm these suspicions, it would be useful to do more comparative research, which could give us a clearer view on what is nationally specific about television systems, programmes and uses. For one, international comparative research may help to question the often universalizing claims inherent in much television theory and research, and the implied generalization from the British and American situation (McMillin 2007). Comparative research may even question the persistent use of 'the national' as a theoretical and research framework, but for the time being I would argue that it is still very useful and valid.

While further theoretical reflection on the 'national' character of television in the age of globalization and digitization is needed, hopefully the above account has also illustrated how an empirical 'reality check' may be useful to distinguish the possible from the actual state of television. We should not only look at what is new and exciting, but also at what is stable and widespread, possibly more conservative and therefore less appealing in television use. Although television now more than ever allows the transgression of national borders and individual choices, for many viewers it remains a safe haven of shared, familiar programmes, close to home.

Notes

1. 'Domestic fiction' is defined here as fiction produced in the country where it is broadcast.
2. Own calculations based on data provided by the VRT Research Department. The period covered is 1 September 2009-31 August 2010. All serial fiction (above 1 episode) starting between 7 and 11 PM is included, including repeats. Special thanks to Jo Martens from the research department for the rich data.
3. Own calculations based on data provided by the VRT Research Department.

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Constructing television
Thirty years that froze an otherwise dynamic medium[1]

William Uricchio

The history of television is a history of change. From vacuum tubes, to transistors, to chips; from broadcast, to narrowcast, to on-demand; from cathode ray tube receivers, to plasma flatscreens, to projection; from a programmer's vision, to the viewer's choice, to the interworkings of metadata protocols and 'smart agents' … we have witnessed an ongoing process of transformation in technology, textual organization, regulatory frameworks, and viewing practices. The pace of change has been as dramatic as it has been uneven. Regulation, infrastructure, national interest, and viewer expectation have all, at times, stimulated development, or suppressed it. Overall, the pace of television's change as a set of technologies and practices is striking when compared to the relative stasis of film, radio and print – all, certainly, media with their own developmental dynamics.

I write at a moment of accelerated change, a moment when in many nations, analogue broadcasting has officially ended, giving way to digital-only television. The change mandates modifications in the receiving apparatus, and offers the promise of not only 'more' but more interactive programming and services. It is a moment accompanied by new display technologies (flatscreen, PDAs, high definition), 'intelligent' interfaces (programmable DVR systems), and cross-platform production and viewing practices. It is a moment where we can ever more clearly anticipate the end of the thirty-second advertisement, the weakening of once monopolistic broadcasting networks (and their afterlife in cable and satellite distribution) thanks to Internet Protocol Television (IPTV), and the redefinition of traditional producing and consuming roles through developments such as YouTube. Add to this, advances in surveillance video (facial recognition), teleconferencing (virtual presence), large screen simulcast in our stadiums, concert halls and streets, and easy access to television from almost any producing national culture (mysoju.com), and once 'invisible' forms of television are adding to the noise. It is a moment of confusion, as much for viewers, who seem to have difficulties distinguishing among these new practices, as for the medium's industries, themselves in a state of flux, seeking to secure their market positions and to catch the 'next big thing'.

Rather more remarkable, considering the pervasive nature of these transformations, is the oasis of calm that lingers on in our memories in the form of the respectably solid broadcast era. Today's transformations seem all the more radical given this apparently stable past. In this essay, I will explore that brief moment

of stability (1950-1980), showing that it was a carefully constructed condition. This is a relevant point not only because it remains referential in our understanding of the television medium, but because some of its residues continue on in our fast-changing present as habits that seem difficult to break. Consider the business of audience metrics, for example, which has largely relied upon the same statistical extrapolations that accompanied television's earliest years as a true 'mass' medium. Despite the radical fragmentation of television audiences, and despite the potential availability in digital markets of data streams tracing every twitch of the viewer's thumb, the old methods persist. Like the gold standard, intrinsic notions of value seem less important than widespread acceptance of a uniform metric. The academic study of television and its effects, too, remains bound to a number of concepts and paradigms that emerged with the broadcast era. Sometimes, as in the case of the notion of 'flow', the meaning of a particular term has modulated to keep pace with shifting distribution and viewing practices, serving as a barometer of change. In other cases, such as notions of media effects, the basic model has been fine-tuned and its deployment technologically enhanced, but like the audience metrics industry, it has largely weathered the storms of change thanks to the supervening demands of institutional stasis. Here, the notion of reproduction so central to our academic institutions has played an important role, as have the demands of marketers and policymakers for clearly defined notions of agency, impact and effects (from the efficacy of advertising to the promotion of public discourse). The academic scene has of course responded to the medium's transformation by developing new theories and accreting modes of inquiry, but its traditions – bound, it would seem, to a historically particular configuration of the medium – nevertheless remain remarkably persistent.

I would like, briefly, to reflect upon this period of stability in the US and – broadly speaking – Europe. The years between roughly 1950 and 1980, it seems to me, have tended to provide something of a conceptual default to our thinking about television: they have offered stability to an unstable and not always comprehensible medium, they have generated a referent for our notions of medium specificity, they have helped to mask some of the medium's fundamental transformations, and they have continued to shape key assumptions about television's interactions with its audiences, whether on the part of the head-counters or some academics. At its extreme, this period provides a definitional border, beyond which we might well consider certain practices to be 'beyond' television, allowing us to ask the question of whether or not we are now facing (or have already survived!) the end of television. My contention is that these three decades are but a 'blip' in the larger developmental history of the medium. I readily concede that they are a profoundly important 'blip', but by slightly repositioning this era and some of its main assumptions about the medium, I hope to show that this constellation of factors and beliefs is as deforming as it was formative, blinding us in some ways to longer term continuities in the medium's history.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I take television to be a pluriform set of technologies and practices, anticipated and deployed well before the 1950s, and evident in the medium's latest set of transformations. I see the present changes not so much as the end of television, as a return to the pluriformity that has long

characterized the medium. I will not here rehearse the late nineteenth century visions that did so much to establish the medium's technologies and set its horizon of expectations (Uricchio 2008). And I will do little more than reference a segmentation of television's development from 1950 to our present put forward in different ways by Amanda Lotz (2009), as well as by the likes of John Ellis (Ellis 2000) and myself (Uricchio 2004), distinguishing among the scarcity of the broadcast era, the relative plenty of the deregulated cable era, and the vast access enabled by the on-demand, internet-like present. I will return to this periodization by the end of the essay, but for the moment I would simply like to underscore television's long-term interpretive flexibility as a way of highlighting the somewhat anomalous status of three decades of stability.

In the pages ahead, I'd like briefly to consider the notion of scarcity so characteristic of the broadcast era, arguing that scarcity was constructed and deployed in the service of the period's larger hegemonic goals. Space does not allow for a close consideration of these operations across television's various institutional and cultural settings, so instead I will consider two extreme cases as a way of bracketing a relevant range of meanings. The mobilization of scarcity, or what I will refer to as *constraint*, served very different goals, from the formation of an ideologically coherent national public, to the protection of economic self-interest, to the explicit promotion of products and messages. Often, these goals found themselves intertwined; moreover, they were deployed rather differently in the commercial American and state/public European spaces of television. Implicit in the understanding of how constraint could serve these goals were a number of assumptions that have persisted into our present, and that might well, given the very different structures of contemporary television, be repositioned. I will close by outlining the contours of that repositioning and sketching the implications for some of our theoretical and methodological defaults.

1. An era of constraint

The apparent stability of the decades in question can be characterized in different ways, and I am sympathetic to John Ellis' use of the term 'scarcity' to describe the period's programming (Ellis 2000). Whether we consider the oligopoly of the 'big three' networks in the US broadcasting scene, or the dominance of public service and state broadcasters in much of Europe, it is evident that relatively little of the broadcast spectrum was deployed for programming purposes. Scarcity is an apt – and aptly neutral – descriptor for the little that was available; but I will instead use the more loaded term 'constraint' in order to capture both limited programming availability and the notion of intentionality behind it. Constraint – or the manufactured condition of scarcity -- I will argue, was carefully and strategically constructed, reflecting neither technological, nor economic imperatives. Such an argument is complicated, of course, by the many motives behind television's cautious postwar decades, motives that differed across cultural contexts. But broadly speaking, we can see the constructed nature of scarcity by considering television's homologous relationship with radio, with which it generally shared organization-

al affiliations (business models, institutional settings, regulatory frameworks). Along with radio, television was shaped by long-standing institutional practices (commercial telegraph and telephone service in the US, centralized PTT control of the same services in most European contexts) and underlying beliefs regarding the construction of the public (crudely put, the US consumer versus the European citizen). Of course, the particular institutional and professional dynamics that shaped the emergence of television from radio culture (everything from status hierarchies, to the notion of programme formats and genres, to the very language used by engineers to describe their practice) also played a crucial role in articulating postwar televisual practice.

Scarcity, it is generally argued, reflects the technological realities of limited spectrum availability, driving, in turn, the need to control and oversee a limited public resource. The scarcity argument has been used to underpin the notion of the public airways, to justify state, public and commercial broadcasting monopolies, and to defend the highly constrained status of broadcast speech acts, so dramatically at odds with the protections afforded print and ordinary speech in most developed nations.[2] In this last regard, the ironies of increasing constraint on expression with the appearance of each new technology have been well noted by Ithiel de Sola Pool among others (Pool 1984). As Nicholas Garnham argued several decades ago with regard to public service television (Garnham 1983), 'channels have been limited, whether rightly or wrongly, for social and economic, not technical reasons'.[3]

In many national settings, radio entered the world as much a military affair as a grassroots, amateur, two-way medium. The emergence of broadcasting was sometimes related to hardware companies seeking to promote their wares (the US and UK), or to a combination of various commercial, public, and state institutions. Yet in most cases, government regulatory agencies quickly attempted to put the genie back into the bottle, constraining pluriform radio practices by claiming technical and national security reasons. Standardization and regulatory bodies with mandates to control technology, frequency and programme content prevailed. In France, for example, from radio's start in 1922 until the outbreak of the Second World War, 14 commercial and 12 public radio stations were in operation. Bracketing off the war and occupation as exceptional, what did liberation bring? The imposition of a broadcasting monopoly (by 1965, France I, II and III), which was maintained until 1981, when private and commercial radio was finally permitted to operate. The story is complicated by the success of extra-territorial radio transmissions (so called *radio périphériques*) from the likes of RTL (Luxembourg) and Europa-1 (Saarbrücken), but these, like the pirate stations that penetrated British and Dutch radio monopolies, were not sanctioned (and were sometimes even the subject of military attacks). In Britain, the BBC began its life as the British Broadcasting Company (1922), a private joint venture backed by Marconi, Western Electric, General Electric, Metropolitan-Vickers and British Thompson-Houston. By 1927, thanks to a Royal Charter, it left private hands to become the British Broadcasting Corporation, which in turn maintained a monopoly over radio until 1967. In the Netherlands, the public radio monopoly lasted until 1989, when foreign broadcasts (already available unofficially on the

airways) could be officially carried on cable, and 1992 when domestic commercial broadcasts were permitted. In the US, which lacked precedents for outright state or public ownership, the telegraph and telephone offered organizational models based both on commercial monopolization and the integration of hardware and service. And although the US gave rise to a relatively robust and even chaotic commercial radio environment, the Federal Radio Commission (1927) and later Federal Communications Commission (1934) imposed order, effectively strengthening the role of the national networks, the most prominent of which, like NBC-RCA and CBS-Columbia, were tied to manufacturers.

Each setting had its tales of signal interference and broadcaster malfeasance. And in each case, national interest was invoked to stabilize the broadcasting environment, albeit with the difference that in the state and public service zones, what was good for the public was good for the nation; while for the Americans, what was good for business and not harmful to the public, was good for the nation. In both cases, the medium was understood to be more than a source of information, a site of engagement with the public sphere, or even entertainment: its effects, whether on the construction of nation or the marketplace were held to be certain, if somewhat unspecified. Let us turn to several exemplary moments of constraint in television service as a way of exploring both the motives for limited programming availability and the sources of some of our persistent notions about the medium.

2. The public and the nation: lessons from the Third Reich

The March 1935 launch of Germany's daily television service, predicated upon a notion of one *Führer*, one *Volk* and one sender, would in some ways (leaving out the *Führer* bit) hyperbolize the shape of things to come in many postwar era television markets. As such, it offers a clear – if particularly dystopian – site to locate period broadcasting logics and their relation to the nation. Indeed, many other nations would deploy similar tactics but with far more utopian ends in mind. Rooted in the precedent of state monopolies in the postal, telegraph and radio sectors, television 'naturally' emerged as a concern of Germany's Post Ministry. Its post-1933 appearance gave rise to an important complication: the newly formed Propaganda Ministry asserted control over programme content (for radio and the private sector press and film industries as well) and content-sector hiring practices, leaving the Post Ministry with the task of coordinating hardware manufacturers and controlling broadcasting infrastructure and technological standards. This complication gave rise to considerable theorization about the role and effects of broadcasting, in addition to some distinctive practices. Television, like radio before it, was imagined as an instrument in the service of the nation. The Nazi German example is, of course, extreme – as the conflation of *Volk* and nation, or blood and earth (*Blut und Boden*) in the period's vernacular, might suggest. But the basic structure of state (PTT) operated infrastructure, user licence fee financing, and private sector hardware development, all in the interest of the nation, was hardly exceptional. More importantly, the German case offers an

extreme instance of the logics that were to define most instantiations of postwar European television (Uricchio 1992).

German broadcast operations were started as much out of a desire to claim technological primacy (they specifically sought to jump the gun on the British) because of a firmly embedded set of beliefs in the effects potential of the new medium. These latter beliefs were held by Propaganda Ministry specialists with backgrounds in radio and press 'persuasion' and were grounded in social science theory that had circulated since the turn of the century (evident, for example, in the first German PhD on the topic of film in 1913).[4] But the notion of effects was by no means limited to the functional interests of the Ministry or the advertising industry. One need only consider the work of Rudolf Arnheim, who wrote a remarkable essay on television just as daily broadcasting was about to begin in his native Germany (Arnheim 1935).[5] Looking ahead and making a number of – what seem in retrospect – salient predictions regarding the medium, Arnheim addressed such issues as the medium's superficiality (argued through its ontology, not programming), audience credulity ('seeing is believing'), sensory overload (hyperstimulation), and the threat of social fragmentation (in the sense of television-induced isolation in a mass society), concerns that would all find resonance in the decades of critical thinking and theorization that would accompany the postwar 'classical' notion of television. He feared that the simulated sense of collectivity made possible when viewers connected to events by way of their televisions would ultimately efface embodied collectivity, in the same way that representations of the world would supercede the real thing in importance and impact.

Television, however, was generally too ephemeral a media presence in the prewar years to command its own research profile, and in Germany at any rate, extraordinarily high levels of social control seem to have dampened public critiques of politically supported initiatives. It is nevertheless clear that a cluster of perceived – or desired – television effects motivated Germany's significant investment in the development of the medium, and stated positively, offered something of an inverse confirmation of Arnheim's perceptions. Eugen Hadamovsky, in his launch of the new service, spoke of television's sacred duty to 'plant the Führer's image indelibly in every German's heart,' (Hadamovsky 1935) and while selling Hitler was not quite the same as selling cars or toothpaste, the Propaganda Ministry's understanding of the medium on the Wilhemstrasse lined up well with the advertising industry's ideas on Madison Avenue. One can find ample corroborating discourse, both in Germany and the US, both by professionals (propagandists and advertisers) and academics (both in NS German's *Publizistik* institutes and the US-based Frankfurt School and the Rockefeller-sponsored Radio Project). But German thinking about broadcasting's effects had a far more radical dimension, one, moreover, responsible for a clearly motivated strategy of constraint. Rather than simply relying on radio and television for persuasive images and texts – as they had in the cases of the press and film –, theorists in the Ministry understood broadcasting as something closer to a 'neural network', electronically connecting the dispersed population into a coherent *Volkskörper*. The Reich's campaign to 'put a radio in every German house,' like its plans for national television, sought

to forge experiential unity, to extend simultaneous participation in important events to the entire nation, and to set 'the rhythms of daily life'.

In perhaps the clearest expression of these beliefs in the importance of defining the nation through one broadcast network, the Post Ministry – long at odds with its cultural adversary, the upstart Propaganda Ministry – prepared secret plans in 1943 for post-victory European television. The plan called for the construction of a single, live television network, linking greater Germany with occupied territories. Programming, normally the domain of the Propaganda Ministry, would be circumvented because the network would be dedicated to news, historically the domain of the Post (thanks to the deep history of wire news services). This 'Nazi news network', the Post argued, would do away with the need for the Propaganda Ministry since it would define the nation, its rhythms, and its spirit. The notion of persuasion, trickery and spin, seen as the domain of the Propaganda Ministry, would be rendered trivial in comparison to the broadcast-enabled articulation of *Volk*, nation and reality that the news network promised. While to my knowledge, no postwar nation adopted such rhetoric, or was even aware of these secret 'post-victory' German plans, one is tempted in hindsight to read, for example, France's turn from a prewar pluriform commercial-state broadcast model to a postwar state-only monopoly in terms that were equally concerned with the construction of nation and the control of national vision, although framed in utopian terms. And the relatively late date at which deregulation occurred, and commercial broadcasting was introduced into neighbouring countries' long-held domains of pure state or public broadcasting, might be seen through the same lens. In the German case, we can see that constraint was explicitly linked to a particular and monolithic vision of nation and media effect – the forging of nation through connectivity and shared experience. Postwar Europe seems to have largely shared the same assumptions regarding the hegemonic effects of a constrained broadcasting regime.

To be clear, despite my use of the German example for its clarity, I do not wish to argue that television in the service of the nation is somehow inherently fascist. The paternalist vision of British broadcasting under the BBC, or the pluriform assumptions behind the Dutch public broadcasting monopoly, for example, suggest very different deployments. Whether used for utopian or dystopian purposes, the question we must ask is why television is treated so differently from the printed word. Have these arguments been grounded in technology? Economics? Representational capacities? Perceived effects particular to television? Nation building at a unique historical juncture? The radio examples provided earlier suggest that ideologies of control, while diverse, have ultimately been determining in setting the regulatory configurations of broadcast media.

3. A television freeze and a Cold War

Let us turn to the US in order to consider a different constraint scenario. Despite highly diversified publishing industry and radio markets (admittedly, with syndicates and a strong network presence), despite a court-mandated break-up

of film studio monopolies (the Paramount decrees, which took full effect in the late 1940s), television managed to enter the scene as an oligopoly, albeit it fronted by an apparently diverse pattern of station ownership. America's distinctive alignment of hardware and software producers, of television manufacturers and broadcasters, together with the inroads made by the radio networks, helps to explain the curious shape of the television broadcasting environment in a landscape characterized by ritualistic celebrations of its freedoms of speech and press and its limitless opportunities for entrepreneurs. Of course, there were mom and pop affiliates, complications in spectrum access, sometimes uneasy network-affiliate relations, and transmedia wannabe's, with promising peripheral applications (cinema television, pay television, subscription television) (Hilmes 1990). These developments have been well charted by scholars such as William Boddy (Boddy 1990) and bear no repeating here; and they offer extremely interesting traces of resistance and negotiation with the dominant industrial practices of the period. But there was also an overriding cultural issue that emerged just as the television 'freeze' began in 1948, and that was full-blown in 1952 when the 'freeze' ended … and it was even colder.

The Cold War did many things, but one of its lesser-considered results was an acceleration of industrial concentration, particularly in sectors that had experienced the anti-trust actions of a more populist government in the 1930s, and whose practices were altered by war (Jezer 1982). Military 'cost-plus' contracts, limited competition, and massive scale production, all combined quietly to reshape many sectors, the electronics industry central among them. And a postwar redoubling of international expansion further stimulated these sectors, increasing their economic significance and political power. At the same time that key industries were concentrating, a burst of nationwide labour activity and record-breaking participation in strikes took place during 1946 and 1947, as workers sought to make up for the long-term wage losses incurred during the depression and bracketed off during the war years. The fear of communist subversion was quickly used to stifle any criticism of industry, whether 'Red' calls for higher wages, or 'Marxist-inspired' critiques of monopolization and unrestrained industrial growth.

An extreme level of concentration was actively encouraged in the case of postwar television because it was consistent with period industrial trends and with a wartime mentality, particularly for a government deeply concerned with information control and paranoid of communist infiltration of its message system. And it was consistent with the wishes of political power houses such as RCA and Columbia with diverse interests on the hardware and software side, and an ability to have things their own way. Concentration was in the economic interests of the hardware and broadcasting industry, of course, but it was also in the government's interest not to unleash television and potentially face the problems of an unruly airway as it did with radio. And, as suggested, the more paranoid contingent within the government had an even more compelling set of reasons to have a television industry that was easy to oversee.

Television broadcasting's first formal decades in the US can thus be read as an amalgam of profit maximization (greed) and message control (paranoia), twin

forces leveraging exceptional institutional coherence and control and stimulating political support … if not political collaboration. The result was more than twenty years of constraint, during which time the biggest technological ripple was the conversion to colour. Business models, network-affiliate relations, audience rating systems, programme format and supply chain, scheduling logics, even, to some extent, our own disciplinary paradigms as academics … all of these were refined and entrenched during this happy time. As a closed system, the operation ran smoothly, with each player knowing its part, each element working synergetically in support of the others. The reign of the 'big three' broadcasters, a handful of major advertising agencies, an agreed upon metric for audience measurement, and a circumscribed body of media theory, all combined to reinforce one another and confirm the 'rightness' of the configuration. In this closed system, the period's models of mass communication and their effects seemed to operate like a well-oiled machine, each piece fitting precisely with another to drive the whole.

4. Contextualizing constraint

The projects of constraint in these two very different cases emblematize certain features that remain basic to our understanding of the medium, despite the very distinct environmental conditions of the present. Constraint functioned hegemonically in the German (and European) case, providing the electronic nervous system for the nation – its publics and events – with the unspoken utopian or dystopian hope that all hearts would beat as one. In the American case, constraint was deployed for a hegemonic project that was as much about promoting the economic interests of an industrial class as it was maintaining strict message control. The latter motive, of course, harkened back to the long-standing theories that argued that mass media exposures could sell Hitler or the latest Ford, except that in this case, brand communism was denied advertising space and overwhelmed by the imperative to consume. These heuristic readings are obviously oversimplifications, and yet help to underscore notions of televisual effect that lurk like defaults in current popular and institutional understandings of the medium. My point is that they, like some of our theories and even our definitions of the medium, are historically specific – and contingent – notions, bound to particular configurations of the television medium, and enabled by the particular logics of programme scarcity as well as concomitant factors such as television's interface, the form of signal distribution, the nature of the audience, and the understanding of agency.

At least in the US context, the period's television receivers, with their manual dials and fine-tuning requirements, and the dominance of VHF instead of UHF, reinforced the reign of the network programmer and the notion of 'flow' put forward by Raymond Williams during his first encounter with the American system. As I have argued elsewhere, the timing of Williams' trip in the early 1970s enabled him to experience the end of an era (Uricchio 2004). Within a few years, many of the underlying structures of American television changed thanks to satellite and cable deregulation, rapidly growing household penetration of second

and third television sets, and the VCR – all symbolized by the remote control device. These conditions combined to allow viewers to take greater control of the medium, whether by taking advantage of expanded programme choice, viewing different programmes at the same time within a single household setting, or manipulating televisual time and text through zapping, recording and fast-forwarding. Video collections, enhanced use of television for film viewings, and even creative re-workings of broadcast texts, all attested to new uses of television, new consumption practices, and feelings of enhanced agency and even liberation on the part of viewers (Uricchio 2004; Kompare 2005; Lotz 2007).

These developments broke the grip of the 'big three' broadcasters, greatly increasing channel access; they enabled time shifting, enhanced the back-end incentive for independent producers, and provided 24 hour news/sports/ and local coverage. As if these threats to the software front were not enough, the quick penetration of the VCR and new television receiver technologies also attested to Asia's attack on the American hardware front. Low cost electronics, portability, and ubiquity would be the emblems of a new hardware regime – and this time, it would not be controlled by the usual US manufacturers. Low cost production and cheaper means of distribution, in turn, compounded competition on the already traumatized programme side. In short, the mid-1970s saw the beginning of the end of America's old hardware and software oligopoly, and the rapid increase in new programming sources and the adaptation of new television technologies. This was certainly *not* a technologically determined moment (although the embrace of technological change had dramatic economic effects and political implications in the hardware sector). Europe largely underwent a related set of technological adaptations without, as argued above, undergoing any significant modification of broadcasting organization until a much later date.

The implications of the slide from constraint to plenty to virtually unlimited programming choices are difficult to assess. It is certainly clear that television as an agent of social cohesion encouraged in the era of constraint has given way to television as an accessory, one of many media sources available across widely divergent lifestyles. A lost opportunity? Perhaps, but as I have tried to argue in this essay, only if we normalize the particular configuration forced upon the medium under historically specific circumstances, a configuration at odds not only with every other medium, but with television's deep history as well. Viewed from this perspective, television's latest transformation seems consistent with contemporary notions of the individual as 'bundled subjectivities', the dominance of taste niches over nation, and proclamations regarding the participatory fruits of cyberculture.

Looking back with historical hindsight, we can underscore the highly contingent nature of television as a technology and array of practices, and in the process relativize our definitional conceits and reframe some of our theoretical assumptions. The following chart roughly notes some of the changes that have taken place in the US television landscape, illustrating this notion of 'contingency' (in Europe, these technologies and practices aligned in a somewhat different manner). The dates are particularly rough, and these columns need to be understood as accretive – that is, some of the attributes of the broadcast era and 'remote con-

trol' era persist into the following eras. In some cases, this persistence is optional – although our TiVos can effectively programme an evening's worth of television, we can still abandon ourselves to the vision of a particular channel's programmer. And in other cases, it is stubborn – although audience formations and, increasingly, the technologies for measuring their activities have shifted dramatically, both undercutting the old metrics regime, we remain affixed to broadcast-era metrics, like the gold standard, for the stability they provide rather than any intrinsic value (or truth).

1950-1975 **dial television**	**1975-1999** **remote control**	**1999 +** **from TiVo to YouTube**
transmission	cable / satellite / vcr	dvr / vod / iptv / …
broadcasting	'narrowcasting'	'slivercasting'
national	transnational	global (incl. user-produced)
dial interface	remote control device	TiVo and its clones
'real time'	time shifting	on-demand
scarcity of content	plenty of content	unlimited content
programmer-dominated	viewer-controlled	metadata/filters
mass audiences	segmented audiences	niche audiences
stable metric regime	metrics under siege	complete data sets

We can perhaps add to these period-specific conditions a series of changes in the scientific approaches that have been deployed to understand television and its audiences. For example, the steady shift in interest from 'media's effects on audiences' to the 'uses that audiences make of media' maps well onto the shift from the era of 'programming scarcity and mass audiences' to the era of 'plenty of content and segmented audiences'. But as in the domain of audience metrics where the older, mass logics have persisted despite a fundamental change in the nature of the audience, many tenants of the old paradigm remain in place. This persistence might simply be a residual default in our thinking about the medium; or it might be driven by the logics of commercial television, in which advertising is sold because of its implied effects; or it might reflect our eagerness to find simple causes to explain life's complications. Regardless, we can identify a growing tension between certain television concepts and practices that emerged with one configuration of the medium, and the very different environment and demands made by a different configuration.

This relativistic or contingent approach to defining the medium is obviously at odds with a more essentialist approach, and essentialists might argue that it

leads us down a slippery slope to a point where we will be unable to distinguish between television and our computers. I take this point and embrace it, since my notions of the medium depend neither on the particular screen, nor cable, nor network of which television is a part. In previous publications, I have argued that we must take a long view of the medium, looking at its articulation as a set of clearly defined longings and possibilities that go back to the late nineteenth century. Albert Robida's sharply articulated visions of the 'telephonoscope' as a site of news, home entertainment, surveillance, person-to-person communication, and public information – published in 1883, the year before Paul Nipkow filed his crucial television-related patent – established a conceptual framework to which television has remained faithful. Robida and his nineteenth century contemporaries teased out a vision that was deployed in Germany in the 1930s and 40s (person-to-person, domestic, public and telepresence models of television), and has been with us since, although we have tended to make fundamental and implicit institutional distinctions between the 'Television' worthy of attention, and the many 'televisions' (surveillance, teleconferencing, etc.) that fall outside our interest. Nevertheless, precisely this wide range of historical televisual practices permits us to contextualize, and thus relativize, the latest transformations of the medium – and with them, the short twenty to thirty years of stability in the broadcast era that have emerged as our conceptual default definition for the medium.

The change and dynamism that so characterizes the present state of the medium is not new. Television, in contrast to its relatively stable sister media, has from the start demonstrated an unusually opportunistic potential with regard to technological platforms. Born with the telephone in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, developed through cinema-style exhibition (theatrical television in the 1930s through 1970s, and now evident in the very different developments of 'home theatre' and outdoor billboard-type displays), and broadcast to domestic settings in an emulation of radio, television is in the process of another transformation, this time to a computer-based model. These various technological entanglements are by no means determining, and indeed, have been driven by applications that preceded their existence. But they do offer particular affordances, and lend themselves to particular engagements. And, as I have suggested above, while they can be shackled to very different hegemonic projects, their particular historical configurations nevertheless bring with them sets of coherent and contingent practices and meanings.

The present in which I write this is very much in transition and, as such, contains residual structures going back to the 1950s as well as new practices antithetical to them. In the US, the big three networks persist, even though suffering from sliding market share and vastly outnumbered by cable outlets. The old advertising-driven and syndicated broadcast logics exist alongside emerging and emphatically cross-platform and participatory programme forms such as *Lost*. And the ongoing struggle between telephone and cable television companies for control of home internet delivery speaks to the computer's increasing importance as a televisual platform; one, moreover, with global access and a near infinity of programmes. The present is very much a period of contradiction, and while the

contours of the future are becoming more visible, established media industries are also doing their best to use any means possible (from regulation, to litigation, to outright acquisition) to reposition the new in terms of the old.

The end of television? Or simply the latest turn in a long history of assimilated technologies in search of ways to deliver a particular set of experiences? The answer turns on our frame of reference, and the strategies we wish to deploy either to select a particular thirty-year moment of stability as the embodiment of the medium, or to define a looser set of anticipations and practices as coherent, and embrace television as a medium in near constant transition.

Notes

1. This essay is a version of 'Contextualizing the broadcast era: Nation, commerce and constraint' first published in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 625:1 (2009): 60-73.
2. Depending on the national setting, scarcity also reflected such factors as the state of the electronics industry, leisure practices, attitudes towards image-based media, and entertainment infrastructures.
3. Garnham's and my own positions notwithstanding, strong arguments can be made for regulating the broadcast spectrum given their shared use by radio (including emergency, air, military and marine bands), wireless telephones, and even cordless microphones. But the fact that early television, like radio, was deployed by cable in many markets, and that most nations preferred limited VHF bands over the more extensive UHF bands that they also controlled, suggests the constructed nature of the argument for constraint.
4. Emile Altenloh's *Zur Soziologie des Kino: Die Kino-Unternehmung und die sozialen Schichten ihrer Besucher*, in large part a study of children's responses to film, published in 1913. Altenloh was a student of Alfred Weber.
5. Rudolf Arnheim was a perceptual psychologist with a strong interest in media; after moving from Germany, to Italy (where the television essay was written) and on to the US, he was appointed professor at Harvard and later, Michigan.

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When old media never stopped being new
Television's history as an ongoing experiment[1]

Judith Keilbach and Markus Stauff

In the 1990s, when new technologies and deregulation policies were emerging throughout television practices, the resulting changes were considered to be transitions that would lead to a completely different and enhanced form of television. Back then, everybody anticipated that digital television would evolve as a new, possibly interactive television standard. Today, as profound changes are still taking place, scholars refrain from determining television's future form, focusing instead on the process of its transformation. The features of contemporary television simply seem to undermine a coherent definition of the medium, which seems too complex, too heterogeneous, in constant flux.

Today, many critics proclaim the end of (the classical form of) television and speak of multiple transformations leading to a new era – be it 'the phase that comes after "TV"' (Spigel 2004: 2), the 'Post-Network Era' (Lotz 2009), the 'Post-Broadcast Era' (Turner and Tay 2009), or 'New Television' (Moran 2009). Although they focus on different aspects of the ongoing transformation, all distinguish the medium's current heterogeneity from television as it used to be – thereby implying that television once had a stable identity that is now being called into question. Given the 'multifaceted technologies and uses of television' (Lotz 2007: 78) it is no longer even sure if television is still a distinct medium. In her book *The television will be revolutionized*, Amanda Lotz articulates 'the need to think of the medium not as "Television" but as televisions' (Lotz 2007: 78) and Michael Curtin describes contemporary television as a 'flexible and dynamic mode of communication' that is better defined as a 'matrix medium' (Curtin and Shattuc 2009: 175).

However, looking at previous descriptions of television this common presumption of television's former stability and clear identity can be challenged. In the foreword to the 1990 edition of his *Tube of Plenty* (1975), Erik Barnouw looks back on his historical work, stating that 'not for one moment, in the intervening years, has the subject sat still for its portrait' and he predicts that 'the upheavals [will] continue' (Barnouw 1990: V). In 1985, the title *Television in transition* was used for an anthology dealing with 'new developments – for instance cable and satellite – [that] promise further to revolutionize a still infant medium' (Drummond and Patterson 1985: VII). Another ten years later, the editors of *Transmission: Toward a post-television culture* clarified the subtitle of their book by coining the phrase: 'Tomorrow, television again becomes some-

thing else' (d'Agostino and Tafler 1995: XIV). In light of these examples (and another from the 1960s, which will be discussed below) television seems to be a medium that always was in transition throughout its entire history.

The current discussion of television's transformation and the observation that the medium never 'sat still' serve as our starting points to scrutinize (broadcast/network) television's presumed stability and homogeneity. In what follows, we suggest understanding 'change' and 'transformation' not only as characteristics of the medium's current phase but more generally as one of television's integral features. Because it deals with a constantly changing object, we argue further, television studies has much to contribute to media theory more generally. Such a perspective enables us to rethink the established ideas about both television's historical development and its cultural and social impact, and it allows for a new evaluation of the recent transformations.

Discussing television as a heterogeneous and constantly transforming medium calls for more general questions such as: in which sense is it heterogeneous? Why is it constantly transforming? What is the cultural impact of a medium in constant transformation? We will start by briefly addressing the still-persistent idea that a medium's social impact is based on its stable institutionalization. To open up a different perspective, we will refer to the concept 'experimental system', as used in science and technology studies. To prove the relevance of this concept for understanding television, we will first analyze an actual television experiment from the 1960s and then expand the notion of the experimental system to television's broadcast/network mode more generally. At the end we will return to the current situation and briefly discuss the key features of post-network television as re-articulations of problems or potentials that have already incited constant transformations of broadcast/network television. Our main argument will be that television's impact is not adequately described by pointing to a stable and characteristic institutional structure of the medium. Part of the 'power of television' lies in its constant transformation process, enforced by a continuous reflection on the 'appropriate' use and an ongoing redefinition of television.

1. Always already new: the ongoing transformation of television

It is often argued that new media contribute to the reconceptualization of old media (e.g. Bolder and Grusin 2010; Winkler 1997). William Uricchio makes a similar point by referring to television's flexibility and 'unusually opportunistic potential' in his chapter in this volume. We want to take up his methodological remark that 'looking back with historical hindsight' allows us to 'relativize our definitional conceits and reframe some of our theoretical assumptions'. If television's current changes require and provoke new theoretical concepts, these new concepts should be considered less as apposite descriptions of contemporary television and more as possibilities to rethink the conceptualization of television generally.[2] As 'transformation' is one of the key terms used to describe the current state of television we suggest using this term to rethink television's past as one of *constant transformation*. Our concern is thus not the definition of television be-

fore or after a particular change. Rather, we are interested in the productivity, the power effects, and the rationalities of the *transformation processes themselves*. On the one hand, this allows for a reconceptualization of the latest developments from a historical point of view: how do the present transformations continue, re-articulate, or differ from previous changes? On the other hand, this approach also raises more general questions concerning the well-established theoretical and historical concepts of television, as well as those of its social or cultural impact.

The traditional idea of a medium as a coherent entity has already been questioned in a number of historical studies that explicitly explore the changing character and the heterogeneity of different media. But more often than not these insights are confined by at least two persistent assumptions: 1) The heterogeneity of media is analyzed with reference to the specific medium's formative years. This implies that after a phase of turbulent changes and redefinitions a medium will ultimately take on a stable form that lasts until a new technology completely redefines the field and causes the end of the medium's 'life cycle';[3] 2) Homogeneity remains the reference point when it comes to explaining a medium's social effects, which are mostly conceptualized as resulting from the implementation of a stable technological and institutional structure. Transformation, thus, is not considered to be a constant or decisive feature of the medium.

The persistence of these two assumptions, which also structure the discussion of television's current development, becomes especially evident in two seminal books explicitly aiming to historicize the 'newness' of new media: Lisa Gitelman's *Always already new* and Carolyn Marvin's *When old technologies were new*. Analyzing the upheaval resulting from the emergence of the telegraph and the telephone at the end of the nineteenth century, Marvin convincingly shows that many topics and sentiments, which seem so specific to today's new media, actually have a history of their own. Her analysis counters the idea of radical breaks in media history by pointing out the fractured identity of media resulting from the media's involvement in (and their dependency on) heterogeneous practices: 'Media are not fixed natural objects; they have no natural edges. They are constructed complexes of habits, beliefs, and procedures embedded in elaborate cultural codes of communication' (Marvin 1988: 8). In the end, however, she confines these heterogeneities (habits, beliefs, procedures) to the 'uncertainty of emerging and contested practices of communication', presupposing that the actual media practices, which guarantee a medium's all-encompassing effect, 'come later and point toward a resolution of these conflicts (or, more likely, a temporary truce)' (Marvin 1988: 5).

A similar argumentation can be found in Lisa Gitelman's book *Always already new*, a study that compares the introduction of the phonograph to the introduction of the internet. Gitelman convincingly criticizes the 'tendency to naturalize or essentialize media' (Gitelman 2008: 2) and tackles the 'oddly perennial newness of today's new media' (Ibid.: 3) by showing that 'the introduction of new media […] is never entirely revolutionary: […] they are socially embedded sites for the ongoing negotiation of meaning as such' (Ibid.: 6). However, she too considers these 'ongoing negotiations' as passing, characteristic of new media's early phase. By stating that 'the success of all media depends at some level on

inattention or "blindness" to the media technologies themselves' (Ibid.: 6), she implies that these struggles over the definition of media come to an end when they 'become self-evident' (Ibid.: 5), thereby suggesting that their social impact is based on a certain stability.

Although of major importance for the analysis of many aspects of television culture (not least of television's multifaceted features during its formative years), the two books exemplify a well-established and persistent pattern of thinking about media's historical development and cultural impact – a pattern that inhibits understanding transformation as a *constant* characteristic of television and supports (against the authors' intentions) the uncritical description of the current development as a major turning point. What is still missing is a more systematic discussion of how the medium's transformations have never halted and how they contribute to both the medium's productivity and its cultural impact.

2. Experimental systems

As most media theories adhere to the notion of stability (a phase which allegedly follows media's heterogeneous character during the formative years) when explaining the impact of a medium, we felt the need to look for models from other disciplines to get a better grip on television's constant transformations. In what follows, we suggest comparing television to a scientific laboratory, a strategy conceptualized in science and technology studies (and already applied to the analysis of museums by Tony Bennett (2005)). Similar to television, the laboratory is a complex constellation of practices and technologies: it produces (or makes visible) phenomena that can be scrutinized and manipulated by experimental procedures – just as television produces (and makes visible) audiences or cultural objects (moral panics, celebrities, etc.) that can be sold to advertisers or become objects of political endeavour. Moreover, and instrumental to our aims, the concept of the laboratory – or to be more specific: the 'experimental system' – opens a new perspective on processes of media transformation. Science and technology studies argue that it is precisely the constant transformation of a system (and not the rigour and stability of a constellation) that accounts for its efficiency.

It is striking that Gitelman explains media's 'self-evidence' by comparing them to scientific instruments. The pertinence and function of newly introduced scientific technology is often disputed until it eventually becomes accepted by the scientific community and, as a result, can be used without further reflection on it. Similarly, Gitelman argues, the success of mass media depends on a culture's blindness to the media after a process of habituation. Science and technology studies, however, has shown that a permanent attention to, and reflection on, the instruments is indispensable for scientific experiments (e.g. Latour 1990, 1999). People working in a laboratory must constantly reclarify whether the results of their experiments (e.g. visual patterns on a telescopic image or sudden changes on a statistically produced graph) are effects of the object they are studying or of the instruments they use.[4] If we take this perspective on scientific experiments as a starting point, the oft-repeated assumption that the deployment of instruments/

media more or less necessarily results in their automatic, unreflected, and highly conventionalized use becomes much less convincing. 'Blindness' and 'self-evidence' are not necessarily preconditions for the effective appliance of technology.

Moreover, given its many different elements and practices, we believe that television can better be compared to a laboratory or an 'experimental system', than to a single scientific instrument (as Gitelman suggests). As such a system, it is not only far from being self-evident, but it is also undergoing constant rearrangement. Experimental systems are defined as 'the working units a scientist or a group of scientists deals with' (Rheinberger 1998: 287). At certain moments the technical instruments of such an experimental system might be used in a stable and very mechanical manner, the system as a whole, however, never reaches a state of automatic use or self-evidence. It always remains a heterogeneous constellation of theories, objects, instruments and practices redefining each other constantly. The productivity of an experimental system is attributed to constant processes of 'articulation, dislocation, and reorientation,' which are 'governed by a kind of movement that has been described as a play of possibilities (*jeu de possibles*)' (Ibid.: 291). The heterogeneous elements and the possibilities of rearranging them jointly create a 'space of representation' (Ibid.: 287) that allows new phenomena to appear, be manipulated, and become objects of knowledge. It is one of the basic necessities of an experimental system to constantly try out new tools and integrate new, ambivalent objects, because: 'As soon as one knows exactly what it produces, it is no longer a research system'. (Ibid.: 291) This means that 'experimental systems' do not merely exist to solve problems but also enable the *problematization* of an object or a field of knowledge: the 'transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response' (Foucault [1984] 2010: 389).

Our examples will show that television similarly consists of heterogeneous elements, which allow for and incite a constant rearrangement – e.g. through technical or programmes innovations, changing economic strategies, political regulations, or viewing patterns. Some of television's elements are used as 'instruments' to question, scrutinize and transform other parts of the overall constellation. While such rearrangements are often connected to explicit strategies and objectives, their effects (how advertisers will react to changing viewing patterns, how the audiences will make use of the remote control) are never entirely clear and cannot be predicted – thereby producing new phenomena. Rearranging television's constellations also creates a 'space of representation' that makes certain 'objects' visible and accessible (e.g. a target audience). Television does not 'manipulate' behaviour but it surely 'problematizes' it by identifying patterns, posing questions and offering possible solutions.

In what follows, we will not systematically compare television to all the elements and procedures characteristic of a scientific experimental system. However, we will flesh out how the conception of an experimental system can be appropriated to explain television's cultural impact through 'the generation of differences' (Ibid.: 287). We will first discuss a historical example that quite literally deployed television as a laboratory, and then provide more theoretical elaborations on the consequences and insights of that approach for a reconceptualization of televi-

sion's past and present development. At certain points, our application of the term 'experimental system' might seem a bit too vague or farfetched. In the end, we do not only conceptualize television as an experimental system because of its shared characteristics with the laboratory, but also because of the concept's actual productivity in theorizing television's development. We thus adopt the insights of science and technology studies in Jonathan Culler's sense of theory: 'Texts become 'theory' because their visions or arguments have been suggestive or productive for people who are not studying those disciplines' (Culler 2009: 4f.).

3. Experiments in television

Rearranging the medium for educational needs

In television history, early forms of broadcasting – without regular programming and received by only a handful of people – are often explicitly called 'experiments'. These were not only conducted to test the technology, but also to search for appropriate programme forms and schedules. Yet, even after television had been properly institutionalized, the experimental mode continued to be crucial to television's development. Not only did literal experiments accompany broadcast/network television throughout its entire history, this established mode of television is itself constantly experimenting, thereby fuelling television's transformations – an argument we will pick up after we have explored one of television's many actual experiments.

In the 1960s, when broadcast/network television was already a settled institution, dissatisfaction with its established forms of usage incited continuing experimentation. Art projects combined the technical/scientific with an artistic notion of the 'experiment', making use of advanced image processing techniques like the video synthesizer to create surprising visual outcomes.[5] The 1960s saw a number of publicly funded television art projects like the work done at the *National Center for Experiments in Television* or at other TV labs in the US, or the West German experiments *Black Gate Cologne* and *Fernsehausstellung* (Dobbe 1994: 26), which were conducted by established television broadcasters.

There were more experiments in television, for example in the context of education: in 1968 Tony Gibson, director of the Television Research and Training Unit at London's Goldsmith College, published *Experiments in television*.[6] This book (followed by two others [Gibson 1970a, b]) summarizes a series of workshops[7] held to experiment on and with educational television. 'Experimenting' can be understood quite literally here: teachers from all over the world were invited to arrange a variety of television devices in a way most pertinent for their particular teaching purposes, methods, or subjects. Cameras and screens, conventional blackboards and overhead projectors, television producers, cameramen and teachers were 'arranged and re-arranged' (Gibson 1968: 14) in the most diverse ways to find out how television could increase students' curiosity, improve the teacher's supervision of the learning process, or provide insights into new objects of study. As in scientific experiments, television was first split into separate elements and then reconfigured in many different ways; the varying

configurations were tested for their practicability in different teaching situations, which in turn led to new insights and further modifications.

To endow his experiments with credibility and rationality, Gibson outlines some very general technical and aesthetic definitions of television's basic apparatuses[8] that guarantee its pertinence as an instrument of knowledge production. For him, the television screen has the twofold advantage of raising curiosity and supporting an analytic perspective: comparing television to 'the bundles of dirty washing that revolve' in a washing machine, he concludes that 'a small glass screen behind which things move' (Gibson 1970a: 11) always attracts attention; at the same time, the glass screen positions the spectator at an analytic distance (as does a sample under a microscope). In addition, the framing of the television image dissects and isolates whatever object it displays, thus supporting a scrutinizing point of view (Ibid.).

Notwithstanding these definitions of television's technical potential, the *Experiments in television* are based on the assumption that television is heterogeneous[9] as well as transformable and 'always already new'. Gibson's appropriation of the broadcast/network mode – then the dominant dispositif of television – reveals this belief in a permanent process of transformation. He refers to several conventions of the broadcast/network mode, some of them assisting, others limiting television's educational use.[10] However, constraints such as the fixed schedule of broadcast/network television and its too general addressing of a mass audience could be overcome by using recently invented technologies, especially VTR and CCTV.[11] In Gibson's view, everybody dealing with educational television can rely on (and will have to reckon with) the further development of television's technologies (e.g. Gibson 1968: 8).

Gibson does not confine himself to describing how one could use (the already established forms of) television for educational ends, he also re-arranges the elements of television again and again in order to gain new insights into television's educational potential. One of the experiments took a conventional television studio as its starting point. As a teacher combines the role of producer and presenter, the usually separated spaces of studio and control room were integrated into one unit; the presenter's desk was supplemented by additional 'display areas such as bench, blackboard, model table' (Gibson 1968: 15); complementing the three available cameras a mirror was subsequently put up 'above a working area in order to show things from the viewpoint of the craftsman' (Ibid.); a simplified image mixer was then added to enable the teachers to switch between camera views; finally, the use of lightweight equipment made it possible to put the whole studio in a van to set it up in different classrooms (Ibid.: 18).

Gibson describes (and illustrates) different set-ups of television equipment pertinent to particular learning situations and learning objects, each following and realizing a set of assumptions and provisional rules – that is a certain rationality: they aim to facilitate television-supported live teaching (see Fig. 1), to enable children to use the cameras themselves, to give instructions on how to arrange and supervise test lessons (see Fig. 2), to help with making an instructional video tape, and so on. Each constellation establishes a specific relation between the apparatuses of television, the teacher, the objects of knowledge, and the students.

One and the same technical element can thus acquire different strategic positions in these varying constellations. Sometimes a television monitor is a control monitor to observe the students, sometimes it is a display that helps students to watch themselves (Gibson 1970a: 25f.).

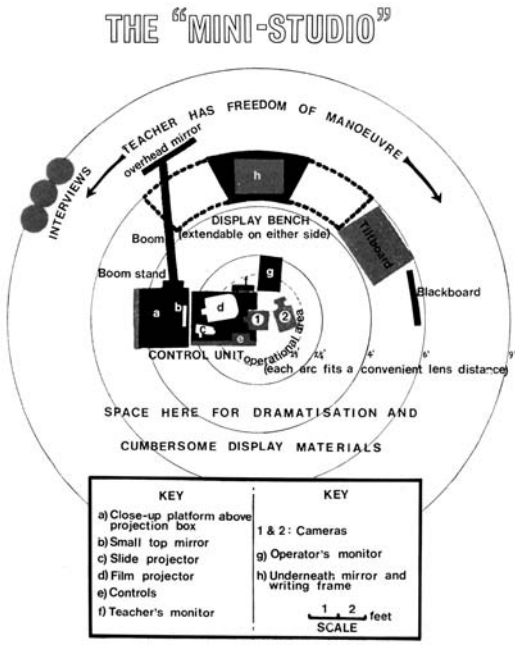

Fig. 1: Gibson, Tony. 1968. *Experiments in television*. London: National Committee for Audio-Visual Aids in Education; Educational Foundation for Visual Aids, page 17.

As is often the case in scientific laboratories, these television experiments were not conducted to solve one well-defined problem. Instead, the instigators' general interest in teaching/education meant their research question was rather vague: how can television support teaching? During the experimentation process, this question's focus shifted from television technology to teaching situation and back again; at certain moments some educational requirements provoked a closer inspection (and transformation) of television technology (e.g. how to position what type of microphone to record a classroom discussion); at other moments the technical constraints and capabilities supported the invention of new didactical strategies (e.g. the image mixer enabled the teacher to switch between a graphical model and the real object). As in a scientific laboratory, there was not one well-defined object of knowledge, but a set of questions, which could only be answered by problematizing – that is reflecting on and re-arranging – the involved objects, technologies, and practices.[12] Of course, unexpected things happened during this continuing re-arrangement process, providing insights into phenomena that were never part of the original experimental set-up, and inciting even

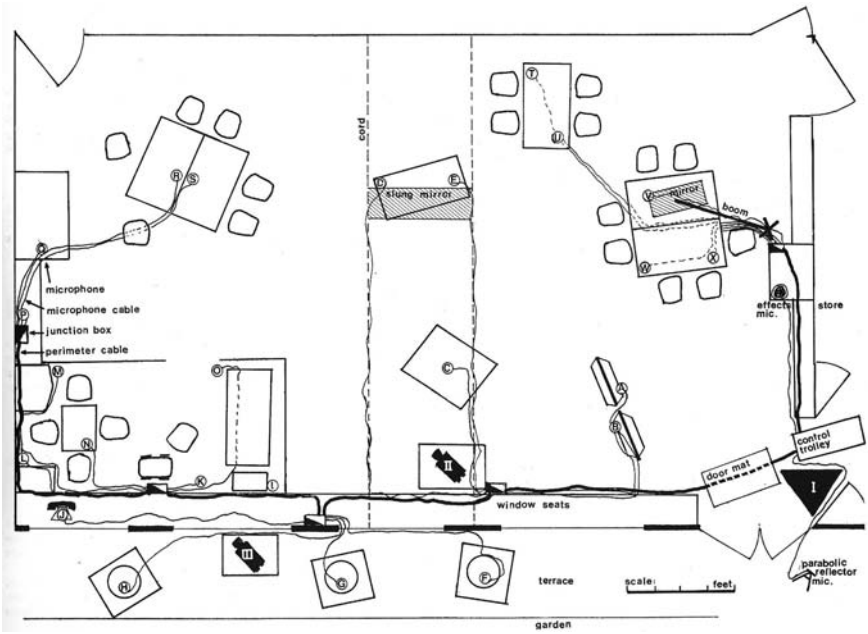

FIG. 2: Gibson, Tony 1970b. *The Practice of ETV*. London: Hutchinson Educational Ltd., page 47.

more re-arrangements. Gibson, for example, describes how a colleague in Italy discovered that older people, to whom educational TV was not addressed at all, had started to watch broadcasts of school television. This was reason enough to modify the dispositif with respect to the (presumed) needs and capabilities of seniors (Gibson 1970a: 93).

These *Experiments in Television* show that television was already 'in transition' in the 1960s. Taking the then-dominant broadcast/network mode of television and the contemporary technological developments (video, CCTV) as starting points, the experiments transformed television according to the rationalities of education. They are experimental in Rheinberger's sense because television technologies and teaching practices were combined in different ways to gain insight into television's educational potential. Television (or better: certain technologies of television) figures simultaneously as an *instrument* that guarantees the realization of the experiment (e.g. raising the attention of pupils), and as an *object* that itself has to be scrutinized and altered to gain insight into the phenomena under inspection.[13]

4. Experimental moments of broadcast/network television

The experimental transformation of a constellation of technologies, practices and objects, so obvious in the somewhat particular case of Gibson's *Experiments in television*, also characterizes the broadcast/network mode of television. Although

television became more institutionally and technically stable after its explicitly experimental formative phase, the experimental mode was never relegated to the fringe of educational or art projects. In fact, the success of broadcast/network television and its manifold cultural effects was and is, in a way, based on its functioning as an 'experimental system'. We will refer to a number of such experimental moments in broadcast/network history to show how they shaped television before arguing more generally that most of television's day-to-day practices can also be considered as experimental strategies.

Advocating the applicability of science and technology studies concepts to media studies, Lorenz Engell (2008) identifies specific experimental moments in television's history. One of his examples is the freeze of television licences in the US that the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) imposed between 1948 and 1952 to solve technical problems (interferences). This freeze transformed the chaotic proliferation of television stations into a (laboratory-like) controlled setting, which allowed for the scrutiny of both the institutional (allocation of channels) and technical (standards for colour television, usage of additional spectrum space) development of television. It also raised questions about programming (educational programmes) and about audience research (Ibid.: 29). But the freeze not only made it possible to try out different constellations under laboratory conditions, it eventually resulted in significant transformations of the media landscape through, for instance, the opening of the UHF band, the designation of NTSC as the colour standard, and the consolidation of the network system.

The moon landing is another example of network television's experimental character. On the first – and most literal – level, the transmission of the moon landing was an experiment to find out if and how television technology enables us to see the moon and outer space beyond. Very similarly to Gibson's experimental set-up, the technology that guaranteed the television transmission was also used to supervise and control the flight. Moreover, the domestic television screens constantly displayed the control images from Houston and the national television stations added illustrations to explain the technical challenges (Engell 2008: 35). On the second level, the moon landing experimented with addressing a global audience. The commentators addressed the topic of the global audience repeatedly and a global audience could thus watch itself watching: viewers could scrutinize how other viewers reacted to the events and were thus able to reflect on television's dependency on its audience (Ibid.: 37). Beyond this observational set-up, which led to a redefinition of television's ability to monitor the world, the moon landing also allowed for exploring different ways of programming television. As the event was a live transmission it had to deal with unexpected delays. At the same time, it was part of a whole series of transmissions about space exploration. This double character, as both series and live event, epitomizes basic features of television and provoked enquiries into the relations between programme and viewing patterns (Engell 2008: 37; 2009: 141), which in turn provoked adjustments to television programming.

The Gulf War (1990) and the reality show *Big Brother* are two other examples Engell mentions. All these experimental moments established a specific set-up of television relating technologies, programme forms and viewing practices in

a particular manner, thereby questioning a number of television's key elements (its visibility, its reality claim, its liveness, its audience, etc.). These experimental moments not only helped to understand television's functioning and impact, they also, in turn, triggered further transformations as these insights were integrated into the production of television (Engell 2008: 19).

The deployment of US television as *Citizen Machine* in the 1950s (Anna McCarthy 2010) and the introduction of public television in the US in the late 1960s (Laurie Ouellette 2002) can be similarly understood as re-arrangements of television's complex constellations to get better insight into its technologies, audiences or programmes. Though neither McCarthy, nor Ouellette uses the term, both describe television as a kind of 'experimental system' by analyzing how the attempts to educate and govern the American people led to specific well-controlled transformations of television. In each case the 'experiment' not only comprised newly introduced types of programmes addressing newly identified audience groups, but also institutional arrangements, political regulations, and economic strategies, all of which collectively contributed to a reformulation of what constitutes 'the public' and how it relates to television. Moreover, it is possible to discuss the introduction of the remote control and VCR – as well as many other 'moments of transition' – as experimental moments of broadcast/network television. Rather than just establishing a new (post-VCR) mode of television distinct from its prior (pre-VCR) mode, the VCR figures as a re-arrangement that raised new questions and offered new insights into audience behaviour, economic strategies, gender relations, and much more. One of the most comprehensive accounts of experiments in television is John Caldwell's book *Televisuality* (1995) that shows how new broadcasters (e.g., CNN, MTV), new production technology (e.g. digital editing), and new professionals (e.g. art students) contribute to a constant redefinition of what television is and how it addresses its audiences.

All these examples show that constant transformations were already an essential and effective feature of television during the reign of broadcast/network television. These transformations are characterized by procedures similar to Gibson's educational experiments: television is used (and gets reproduced) as a heterogeneous constellation whose elements can be transformed and re-arranged. This process is systematic in that some of the elements are always considered to have certain (more or less 'instrumentally') useful characteristics and capacities, while other elements are monitored for their unexpected/unforeseen variations – the experiment thus establishes its own 'rationality'.[14] The re-arrangement is strategic in that it follows certain interests, questions, and rationalities, but it also allows for gaining unexpected insights into different aspects of television. This means that these experiments do not answer a well-defined question, but instead establish and re-articulate a 'problematization'.[15]

5. Broadcast/network television as an ongoing experiment

Conceptualizing television as an experimental system leads to a different understanding of the daily routines of network as well as post-network television that we will briefly discuss on a more general level. There are at least two basic dynamics that support and enable television's functioning as an experimental system fuelling its constant transformations. As a technology television is generally predicated on the 'perfectibility of technology',[16] meaning that television is always considered to be 'improvable'— be that through brighter images, more channels, or more 'realistic' sound. Such expectations had always accompanied television and facilitated experiments. As an institution that indiscriminately reaches a vast but anonymous audience in public and in private spaces, television comes with the promise that these people might become accessible – but also with the urgency to make sure people are actually watching television. These technological and institutional expectations, promises, and insecurities are necessarily interrelated with political, economic, educational and other institutions that define and govern the following actions.

The competing and often contradictory rationalities of different practices, as well as the unforeseen effects of the re-arrangements of complex television constellations, guarantee the endlessness of this process. Policymakers or industry actors, for example, constantly discover audience segments they have not thought of before (and that maybe did not even ever exist as an identifiable group before), or they use a certain programme, genre, or technological device in a surprising way. Such discoveries are often capitalized on to enact laws, introduce new programmes, or install new technologies.[17]

Of course these day-to-day experiments in television produce a completely different kind of knowledge and are less systematic and controllable than the freeze, the moon landing, Gibson's educational experiments, or even 'real' scientific experiments. The constant re-arrangement of the constellation of broadcast/network television nevertheless follows certain experimental rationalities: it presupposes a definition of (and reflection on) the specific potential of some of television's elements, and it also produces phenomena (e.g., the 'target audience') which only 'make sense' as part of the experimental system that produces knowledge about these phenomena and enables their manipulation.[18]

The status of television as an experimental system (and of television history as a series of ongoing experiments) can thus be sketched out as follows: television consists of a constellation of heterogeneous elements (institutions, technologies, practices). The principal transformability of the constellation and its elements (which is most explicit in the idea of the '*perfectibility of technology*') promises the usefulness of television for many different applications and different practices. However, the specific requirements to each different practice do not only incite the constant transformation of television, but they also initiate a constant reflection on its uses and characteristics.

Although the broadcast/network mode of television had a stable institutional setting it nevertheless has to be conceptualized as a constellation consisting of a certain institutional structure *plus* the inseparable and constitutive transform-

ability. It is characterized by constant efforts of transforming television but also the wishes, promises, and demands that it could or should be transformed. The broadcast/network mode is – just like the scientific experimental system – less defined through a particular set-up than through a certain combination of questions, 'problematizations', and ambivalent objects that animate the transformation. To be effective and to continue as cultural machinery, television has to constantly produce differences that are used for its own reproduction.[19]

Such a re-conceptualization of television as a heterogeneous and constantly transforming constellation definitively affects the understanding of television's cultural and social impact. The 'power of television' lies less in its stable institution than its general transformability that establishes certain social and cultural concepts as natural, rational, desirable, or unavoidable. By functioning as an experimental system, television becomes a focal point for the formulation of certain problematizations whose plausibility and manageability is guaranteed by television because these problematizations conversely structure the transformation of television.[20] In contrast to the notion of cinema as a dispositif, which points at the rigid and unavoidable positioning of projector/screen/spectator as foundations of cinema's ideological effectiveness, television's dispositif is not defined by the spatial structure of its elements but by the logic (the 'problematizations' and 'rationalities') articulated by its re-arrangements.

To illustrate this rather abstract argument, we briefly want to touch on the 'nationwide audience'. Just like the fixed programming schedule, the nationwide audience was an important characteristic of broadcast/network television, but it was never a simple and unambiguous certainty – even not before it became less important in the 1990s (see Turner and Jay 2009). In fact, the 'nationwide audience' was one of many topics (or, better: problematizations) that structured policy and programming decisions, economic strategies, and viewing behaviour. This does not mean that it was not an important part of 'the power of television'; on the contrary, the 'nationwide audience' was of major importance *because* it was at stake, and reformulated again and again. It provoked changing strategies to realize, address, and change the 'nationwide audience', which thus became a plausible, self-evident phenomenon one had to (and could) reckon with.

6. Post-network experiments

Re-conceptualizing broadcast/network television also has consequences for our understanding of television's most recent transformations. There is no doubt that current post-network television is more heterogeneous, more difficult to define, and even subject to more dynamic transformations than broadcast/network television. However, conceptualizing television as an experimental system leads to a slightly different take on the recent transformations, since 1) the difference between network and post-network television becomes less clear; and 2) the key features of post-network television become more ambivalent if they are considered as 'problematizations' instead of straightforward 'characteristics'.

1) If we do not understand (broadcast/network) television as one stable entity,

but as an experimental constellation that consists of different strategies and articulates different problems, the difference between the current and the traditional modes of television gets blurry. The fact that television studies at certain moments discovered that its concepts (inspired by the broadcast/network mode) no longer fit the changing modes of television, does not guarantee that these concepts ever really fit all relevant aspects of traditional television. That we have now come to realize that notions of programme flow or mass audience do not describe the current mode of television, does not guarantee that current television is aptly described by access and classical television by programme flow.[21] Instead of comparing television now and television then (and thereby implicitly stipulating what constituted broadcast/network television), we consider it more productive to analyze the different topics, problematizations, or supposed 'potentials' as incentives that structure transformations, and to trace their respective emergence, development, and turning points. Most of the prominent (and far from inadequate) characterizations of current television have a history that goes back long before the transition to 'deregulation' (the 1980s), digital signal transmission (late 1990s), or online/convergence television (the 2000s): The target audience, mobility and flexibility of use, the multiplication of programmes, individualization of access – all these topics, problems, or 'potentials' of television have a very long and uneven history (e.g. Pearson 2011). They are not coherent elements of a single process (or moment) of transition to a post-network mode of television; rather, they are (and have always been) heterogeneous incentives for constant transformation, each with their own specific dynamic and history.

Instead of displacing old forms of television (and their related topics, problems, or 'potentials'), post-network television often re-articulates already existing topics, problematizations, or supposed 'potentials' with different emphases and strategies. The example of Gibson's *Experiments in television* showed that 'flexibility' and 'individual access' were already topics of concern in the 1960s. The current development thus does not form a clear change (or transition) from national audience to target audience, or from scheduled programme to individual access; rather, the long established tension between different forms of address (respectively of organizing and transmitting programmes) simply gets reorganized. Although the focus of experimentation shifted to the question of the individual, the 'nationwide audience' is still part of the experimental set-up (just as the individual was part of it in the 1960s and 1970s).

2) The most characteristic features of post-network television – plentiful programming, individual access, mobility, and so on – are not unique features or results of the new constellations but, just as the 'nationwide audience' of the broadcast/network mode, they figure as problematizations, as topics, or supposed 'potentials' that become plausible through the constant rearrangements that aim at producing them. Television might now be more individualized, but it still continues to redefine what 'individualized' means and to offer (together with other media) models and instruments to realize and articulate 'individuality'. As we have seen, Gibson used television technology of the

1960s, the VCR and CCTV, to articulate or 'realize' individual access. It is too simple to say that the constellations he set up were less individual than the ones of today; rather, they defined individuality in a different way. Similarly, today's TiVo, Hulu, IPTV, and so on, are neither simply fulfilling the 'dream' of individual access, nor do they merely disguise the cultural industry with the ideology of individuality; rather, they are 'experimenting' with individuality: their interfaces realize individual access by making it visible and manageable. This realization of individual access, however, is always accompanied by the promise of future modification and improvement.

Individual access, plentiful programming, and mobility are formulated as tasks and problems that structure the upcoming transformations. At the same time, they are all endowed with reality and plausibility through these transformations, as they help establish individuality, plentiful programming, and mobility as objects that can be improved and managed. This, by the way, also makes it clear that just because post-network television is more heterogeneous and dynamic, it is in no way less powerful than the broadcast/network mode. When the experimental system becomes more complex and allows for more flexible manipulations, this does not mean that the phenomena made plausible by these experiments have less of an impact.

7. Closing remark on television studies

Understanding television as an experimental system not only enables us to rethink the historical dynamics of television's development, but also its social and cultural impact. The distinction between network and post-network television can thus be readily re-conceptualized. While television is currently changing in a particularly dramatic fashion, this transformation cannot be reduced to a transition from one mode of television to another; the many different developments simply do not follow a coherent logic, nor are they synchronized – neither through the technological change from analogue to digital, nor through the economical tendency towards (further) commercialization. If we take Amanda Lotz' suggestion seriously and start to speak of televisions (instead of television), and if we also adopt it for broadcast/network television we have to describe which of the manifold problematizations that were established at different moments of the broadcast/network era are continued, transformed, or ended by post-network televisions – and which are indeed newly introduced (and for what reasons).

The notion of the experimental system can be more generally applied to mass media. All media that promise to reach an entire population and that principally allow for technological improvement provoke their constant rearrangement to acquire knowledge of phenomena 'outside' the media (knowledge of the people, circulation of money, etc.) and transform them through these insights. Compared to the newspaper or film/cinema, however, television sharpens this experimental fervour: television's ability to connect the most intimate domestic spheres with the most comprehensive (and temporally synchronized) reach of its transmis-

sions, the anonymity of its audience, the heterogeneous programme elements integrated into a structured schedule – all these features share an urgent need to gain knowledge and a particular strong promise to grant access to previously inaccessible spaces and behaviours.

We believe that television studies has developed a particular competence dealing with its strange and heterogeneous object. Television studies could make it one of its central tasks to describe and theorize how constellations of technologies, institutions, and practices become (mass) media by inciting and undergoing processes of transformation. In response to the emergence of new media cinema/film studies has changed into a discipline that not only claims responsibility for the subject of film, but also for the much broader phenomenon of 'moving images'. Film studies can nowadays weigh in on YouTube or media art as well. Its insights and perspectives may have emerged from dealing with the narrowly defined object film/cinema and its particular mode of illusion, but it is not restricted to it anymore (Koch 2009). Similarly, one of the aims of television studies could be to analyze the social and cultural effects of media through analyzing media's ongoing transformation. The constant redefinition of core features (or better: problematizations) of television – liveness, mass-audience, programming, etc. – are ideal test cases to develop appropriate concepts to analyze objects – without classifying them as television or not.

Notes

1. We thank the editors of this volume and Florian Duijsens for their insightful and constructive remarks that helped to improve this paper.
2. Amanda Lotz makes a similar argument: 'Current changes in the institutional and cultural functions of television do not indicate its demise but enable us to see more clearly the dominant industrial practices of the network era and the forms, texts, and cultural role of the medium in that formative period' (Lotz 2009: 51). However, her differentiation between the 'old' and the 'new' television is too clear-cut in our view. Thomas Elsaesser (1998: 222) suggested approaching new technological developments (e.g. digitization) less as new media, but rather as 'a new medium of "knowing" about […] media'. More generally, Critical Theory has pointed out that the task of concepts is not to be 'appropriate' to an object but to open up new – that is critical – perspectives (Horkheimer [1937] 1972).
3. A very explicit use of the lifecycle concept can be found in Alex Magoun's television history (2009).
4. This uncertainty in laboratories is one reason why scientific instruments are increasingly discussed as media and not as instruments – a development which turns Gitelman's comparison of media and scientific instruments upside down.
5. For an overview, see: www.rdlx.com/ncet/intro.html.
6. We owe not only the discovery but in fact our copy of that book to Ulrike Bergermann.
7. These workshops were organized between 1961 and 1967 in cooperation with, among others, the BBC, the National Committee for Audio-Visual Aids in Education and the Hertfordshire TV Experiment.
8. In contrast to the still customary translation of the French term *dispositif* as 'apparatus' we find it important to distinguish a medium's technical elements (*apparatuses*) from the relation between, and organization of, the technologies and practices which define its specific historical constellation: the *dispositif*.
9. The very first paragraph of *Experiments in television* compares television to the notorious elephant patted down by three blind people, one of them describing it as a snake, the other as a palm tree, and the third as a barrage balloon. Gibson continues: 'compare the uses made

of the medium by the producer of a long-established BBC or Independent television series; by a biologist televising dissection techniques for the benefit of his class; by a training college tutor using television to observe a learning situation' (Gibson 1968: 7).

10. 'At its best, broadcasting has the mastery and the means to create a work of art, to speak with power and authority, to widen horizons, to distil meaning from a wealth of knowledge and experience.' (Gibson 1970a: 24).
11. Already in the 1960s, Gibson used a vocabulary of individualization and (time-related) flexibility to describe the advantages of video tape and CCTV: 'Low-cost video-tape recorders now enable teachers to store broadcast material and re-use it at discretion, to fit their own timetables and to match their children's pace of learning. The development of versatile, portable closed-circuit television units, requiring modest space and manpower, brings the production of his own material within the teacher's reach' (Gibson 1970a: 7).
12. Here we again refer to Rheinberger's definition: 'I consider an experimental system to be a unit of research, designed to give answers to questions we are not yet able to ask clearly […] it shapes the questions to be answered. An experimental system is a device to materialize questions' (Rheinberger 1998: 288).
13. In his analysis of laboratory work in molecular biology, Rheinberger describes how 'epistemic objects' can become instruments in the process of experimenting (1998: 291).
14. Experiments always aim at adapting phenomena ('nature') to reasoning. However, they do not adhere to one ahistorical mode of reason but can be based on (and conversely support) very different 'rationalities'; that is, different ways of thinking about truth, cause and effect, and so on. (Rheinberger and Hagner 1997; Latour 1990).
15. A problematization defamiliarizes a given situation or object and 'develops the conditions in which possible responses can be given; it defines the elements that will constitute what the different solutions attempt to respond to. This development of a given into a question, this transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response, this is what constitutes the point of problematization and the specific work of thought' (Foucault [1984] 2010: 389).
16. Lorenz Engell (1998: 26) adapts this term from Ernst Jünger.
17. Just like an experimental system, television can also bestow a 'natural' reality on these unexpected phenomena: 'An epistemic thing may not even be imagined when an experimental arrangement is in the course of being established. But once a surprising result has emerged and has been sufficiently stabilized, it is difficult to avoid the illusion of a logic of thought and even a teleology of the experimental process.' (Rheinberger 1998: 290).
18. The fact that the causalities of television e.g. between a commercial and the success of a product or between demographic classifications and genre preferences – always remain unclear cannot be taken as proof of the non-experimental character. Ambivalent causality is one specific characteristic of experimental systems.
19. Rheinberger says of this experimental systems' 'differential reproduction': 'such systems must be capable of differential reproduction in order to behave as a device for producing epistemic things whose possibility is beyond our present knowledge, that is, to behave as a 'generator of surprises'. Differential reproduction refers to the allowance, if not to the necessity of shifts and displacements within the investigative process; in order to be productive, an experimental system has to be organized so that the generation of differences becomes the reproductive driving force of the whole experimental machinery' (Rheinberger 1998: 287).
20. Rheinberger and Hagner (1997: 20) similarly describe the experimental system.
21. For the changing meanings of television studies' key concepts see Jostein Grisprud (1998) and William Uricchio (2004).

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Part II: New paradigms

Unblackboxing production
What media studies can learn from actor-network theory

Jan Teurlings

In this chapter, I argue that actor-network theory, or ANT as it is commonly referred to, has much to offer media studies. I am not the first one to suggest so. A growing number of media scholars have commented upon ANT, or have used some of its concepts in their analysis of media (e.g. Couldry 2001 and 2008; Hemingway 2009; Kendall and Wickham 2001; De Valck 2006; Muecke 2009; Bennett 2005). This chapter aims to make a contribution to this burgeoning intersection of actor-network theory and media studies, and also explain why ANT seems to be such a productive framework for understanding contemporary media. The main argument is that ANT's highly original ontology of the social yields insights into how our contemporary media 'function', and can thus help us grasp them, especially regarding media *production*. In parallel, the article argues that ANT can bring together questions and issues that previously had been scattered across the divide between political economy and cultural studies.

Within cultural studies the category of production is something of a newcomer. The reason for the late arrival of production can be explained by cultural studies' feud with political economy during the 1980s and 1990s, exemplified by Grossberg (1995), Garnham (1995), or the essays collected in the *Cultural studies in question* reader (Ferguson and Golding 1997). The arguments are well-rehearsed and only need to be mentioned in passing. Based on different readings of Marx, both approaches constructed different analytical tools for understanding media. Cultural studies foregrounded the centrality of ideology or hegemony, a textualist approach to the media, and the interpretative freedom of the audience. Political economy, on the other hand, underscored questions of ownership, institutions and regulations, and was generally less attentive towards textuality and the reception side of things. This led to a division of labour: political economy studied production, whereas cultural studies focussed on texts and reception.

However, since 2000, we have witnessed a lull in the hostilities between the two approaches. This, in turn, has led to a resurgence of production as a field of study within cultural studies. From different theoretical and political perspectives, several strains of cultural studies started to study cultural production. Roughly two main approaches can be distinguished: neo-Foucaultians and the cultural economy tradition. The neo-Foucaultians draw mostly, but not exclusively, on the latter's governmentality period, e.g. Bennett (1995), Miller (1993), Bratich, Packer, and McCarthy (2003), Ouellette (2002), Nixon (1996), Carpen-

tier (2001) and Teurlings (2004). In Foucault they found a way to break with political economy's insistence that production was, first and foremost, an economic process, determined by property relations. So-called cultural policy analyses study how culture in general, and media in particular, are used as a means to govern populations at a distance by shaping their subjectivity (e.g. Bennett, Ouellette), thus focussing on how production takes place within institutions that have the explicit aim of 'improving' the population. Others drew on Foucault's work on disciplinary power in order to study the act of production as such, without falling back on the language of political economy. Thus, Carpentier (2001) analyzes how talk shows manage their 'guests' into a discourse about participation, whereas I have analyzed how the production team of dating shows manage the participants into performing 'strong identities' (Teurlings 2004). The second cultural studies approach to media production is what has come to be known as the cultural economy tradition. Like political economy, it studies the economic and institutional context in which media production takes place but it tries to avoid the latter's tendency towards reductionism, determinism and functionalism. Examples of this tradition include the work of scholars like du Gay (1996), Nixon (1996), and Hesmondhalgh (2002). In short, in the debate between political economy and cultural studies we see two reactions from the side of cultural studies scholars. One – the neo-Foucaultian approach – has been to twist the theoretical construction around Marxism towards an essentially Foucaultian problematic of power and governmentality. The other – the cultural economy approach – largely remains within the confines of an economic approach but complements it with terms like meaning and discourse. It is in these fields of study that I want to make my intervention.

The argument will proceed as follows: first I will describe ANT's unorthodox ontology of the social, followed by a section on ANT's qualities as an analytical tool. Next, we move to the media and describe them from an ANT perspective, which differs substantially from the 'transmission model' that has underpinned research in media studies. The last two sections then focus on what the introduction of ANT could mean to media studies.

1. ANT – a very short introduction

It is impossible to do full justice in the space of this chapter to the entirety of work that can be brought together under the rubric of actor-network theory. Nor is ANT as coherent a paradigm as I will present it here.[1] This introduction will, therefore, necessarily remain sketchy, and it will often gloss too easily over topics that require better explanation. The interested reader can turn to Teurlings (2004) for a more detailed description as well as a more thorough critique of ANT.

ANT starts from, and elaborates upon, the work of Bruno Latour, a French science and technology scholar, who published his first book in France in 1978, later translated as *Science in action* ([1978] 1987). Other scholars in the field, most notably Michel Callon and John Law, soon took up his work and fur-

ther developed the theoretical framework. Once the theoretical foundations had been consolidated, ANT attracted the attention of scholars from other disciplines that used its concepts in order to study topics that were not strictly scientific or technological. By 2000, ANT had mutated into a particular ontology as well as a mode of analysis that could encompass phenomena as diverse as the similar preparations music lovers and drug users make when engaging in their preferred activity (Gomart and Hennion 1999), or the way measuring devices and economic theory work together to produce strawberry markets (Garcia 1986). We can find ANT's influence in disciplines as diverse as organization sociology, art criticism, and metaphysics.

At the core of ANT is the idea that every existing phenomenon consists of actors that operate within a network. A network is not a given but is something that has to be established. It needs to be kept together; in other words, it is a *precarious achievement*. The reason for this is that the actors in the network work together but they also have the tendency to 'drift off', or go their own way. Even those phenomena that seem very solid and unshakeable consist of bits and pieces that have to be kept together. As John Law explains:

> Just occasionally we find ourselves watching on the sidelines as an order comes crashing down. Organizations or systems which we had always taken for granted – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or Continental Illinois – are swallowed up. Commissars, moguls, and captains of industry disappear from view. These dangerous moments offer more than political promise. For when the hidden trapdoors of the social spring open we suddenly learn that the masters of the universe may also have feet of clay (Law 1992: 379).

Insisting on the precarious nature of what appear to be 'solid structures' is not the only characteristic of ANT. It also does not distinguish between different types of actors – at least not a priori. It prides itself on being a *symmetric* approach: because, in principle, it treats all actors in the same way. Differences of scale (bigger/smaller actors), differences of kind (human/non-human actors), differences of power (more powerful/less powerful actors) are wilfully neglected and all types of actors are lumped together and analyzed as if they were all the same. The reason for this is that explanations that make a priori distinctions between actors are in danger of presupposing what has to be explained. For instance, if we presuppose that captains of industry are more powerful than a labourer that works in one of her factories, we do not understand exactly *how* this captain of industry becomes more powerful than the other.

Insisting on the fact that the less powerful also have agency within a given system or situation is a proposition most cultural studies scholars would not find difficult to agree with. After all, that is what the Fiske-de Certeau tradition has been arguing for a long time (e.g. de Certeau [1974] 1984; Fiske 1987, 1989). More controversial, however, is the argument that not only humans 'act' but that also non-humans (objects, theories, ideas, knowledges, competences) are actors in their own right. A moving car, for example, is usually seen as being driven by the driver behind the steering wheel. But think about that driving car and elimi-

nate the gasoline from the actor-network[2] 'driving car'. It is clear that the driver would not be doing much driving if there was no gasoline in the gas tank. Hence, for ANT, gasoline is an actor: it *does* something within the actor-network 'driving car', and this actor is indispensable in order for the actor-network to function. The same goes for the wheels: they are equally important actors, because without wheels the car would not be able to move forward (although wheels and gas do entirely different things in the network). Similarly, the embodied knowledge of how to drive a car is also an actor: if the driver would be a three-year old child, or a medieval journeyman miraculously transported to 2011, an otherwise perfectly capable car would not 'be driven'. In short, the actor-network 'driving car' consists of several actors, human and non-human alike, who all 'collaborate' and play their part. Networks are therefore always *materially heterogeneous*: they consist of humans and objects, but also of embodied knowledges or competences (knowing which pedal does what, coordination of hands and feet, ...).

The example of the driving car is simple but effective in that it shows how non-humans play their part in human activities. Moreover, it shows that every actor-network is a precarious achievement, since actors tend to drift off: gasoline has the tendency to be consumed while driving the car (destructive consumption), tyres are subject to wear and tear or need to be inflated, drivers tend to get tired, and engines require maintenance in order to remain functional. In other words, a driving car is not only an accomplishment, it also requires *work* in order to remain 'functioning'.[3] In ANT terms, this means that mobilization of actors is never final, and that even relatively stable actor-networks require work in order to keep their actors aligned. ANT's ontology comes close to an *entropic* viewpoint, in that it sees the world as being composed of bits and pieces that can be mobilized but they also have the tendency to drift off, dissent or form part of alternative actor-networks.

2. A mechanics of power

Apart from its surprising ontology, ANT has also developed a vocabulary that is particularly apt for describing how networks are kept together. The symmetrical approach should not be confused with the idea that every actor occupies equal power positions – to do so would make ANT a pluralist approach, which it is not. Instead, ANT uses concepts that analyse *how* certain actors are able to impose their definition of the network, thus keeping the other actors aligned. Because of this preference for how questions, rather than why questions, John Law describes ANT as 'a mechanics of power' (Law 1992: 380): it is a method that allows us to analyze and describe power relationships. For the purpose of this paper, we will examine three terms: the *translator-spokesperson*, *obligatory passage points* and *immutable mobiles*.

The *translator-spokesperson* is any actor who 'translates' other actors and tries to mobilize them in an actor-network. Translation is best described as the process of defining other actors, attributing roles to them, and the subsequent attempts to enrol them in a network. Examples of translator spokespersons are

the researcher writing a proposal and formulating some hypotheses on the readings audiences make of *Six Feet Under*, the doctor explaining a patient how the cancer cells will react to chemotherapy, or a US president claiming to speak for the oppressed Iraqi people. In each of these cases, we have an actor (a researcher, a doctor, a US president) claiming to speak for other actors (*Six Feet Under* viewers, cancer cells, the oppressed Iraqi people), and in the process the translator-spokesperson attributes roles to them: audience members need to be interviewed, cancer cells need to be treated, and oppressed Iraqi people need to be liberated.

From the translator-spokesperson's point of view, however, translation is a difficult and uncertain process, the outcome of which is not guaranteed. Therefore, translator-spokespersons will develop a number of strategies to reduce uncertainty and realize their programme. The construction of *obligatory passage points* (Callon 1986a, 1986b) is one such strategy. It is the processes through which certain actors make themselves indispensable in the network. Put simply, an actor will try to structure the network so that the other actors have to pass through it, thus making the obligatory passage point indispensable in the network. For example, the researcher will posit herself in the research proposal as an obligatory passage point ('if you want to know something about Six Feet Under viewers, I can provide it'), just like patients have to pass through the doctor's office if they want to do something about those cancer cells.

Another strategy that an actor can follow in order to maintain or set up a network is the use of what Latour (1987) calls *immutable mobiles*. These are knowledge technologies (surveys, questionnaires, accounting forms) that enable an actor to conquer time and space. Indeed, larger networks are often confronted with the spatial segregation of the different allies, so that it becomes impossible to directly control or manipulate them. The use of immutable mobiles then helps 'centres of calculation' (Latour 1987: 235) to monitor the state of the network, or as Latour puts it, they work by 'representing [the world] in its absence' (Ibid.: 247). What is important about immutable mobiles is that they are a) mobile, meaning that they can travel time and space easily; b) that they are immutable, meaning that they are standardized so that they give the calculation centre data that can be dealt with in a uniform way; and c) that the data gathered can be combined or aggregated. Immutable mobiles thus allow a centre of calculation to see a reality that was ungraspable before the advent of these knowledge technologies, and in this sense they do not merely represent reality but *enact* it.

3. Media from an ANT perspective

What would the media look like from an ANT perspective? The first point to note is that such an approach differs from the current models we – often implicitly – use for thinking about media. Despite the many criticisms of Shannon and Weaver's (1948) communication model, the extent to which the basic categories of media communication are already present in that first model are surprising: we have a sender, who sends a message, and this message arrives at a receiver. Although the terminology and theoretical concerns have considerably changed

over the last six decades the same categories have persisted throughout media studies in general, for example in the difference between textual analysis versus reception analysis, or in the categories of encoding and decoding. In other words, although many of the Shannon and Weaver's ideas about communication have been criticized (Hall's remarks in the encoding/decoding paper (1980) about 'perfectly transparent communication' were clearly aimed at them) there is nevertheless some categorical persistency on how we have thought about communication in the last sixty years. I will call this the *transmission approach* to media, because the underlying idea is that 'something' (a message, an impulse, a meaning, an ideology) is being transmitted between two partners, namely a sender and a receiver.

From an ANT perspective, with its insistence that actors need to be kept together, things look quite different. Communication is not so much the transmission of a message or an ideology; it is conceived as the establishment of a network. Or, to put it more precisely, *media communication entails the establishment of an actor-network between heterogeneous actors*. This sentence requires some explanation. First, the word 'actors'. We will focus first on what Amanda Lotz (2007) has called 'the network era' (although later on we will move to the post-network era as well). That network era is characterized by ad-funded media, a relatively low number of distribution channels and relatively large, undifferentiated mass audiences. In such an environment five types of human or organizational actors have to be patched together: a) broadcasters; b) producers; c) shows; d) audiences; and e) advertisers. Moreover, these actors are heterogeneous, or different in kind, because they differ in scale. Audiences, for example, are often counted in the hundred thousand or even millions and thus comprise many more individuals than the average production company, which typically averages around the fifties. Moreover, ANT reminds us that not only human actors play a role, and that we should also pay attention to the non-human actors, like money, shows, or audience ratings. Moreover, the actors also differ in what they *do* in the network: advertisers, for example, give money in return for contact with the audiences (or their representation in the infamous audience ratings), whereas production firms produce the programmes that consecutively attract audiences. In other words, every actor has a particular function within the network, and taking one out would change the dynamic of the network. Figure 1, below, displays schematically what the network approach looks like.

The third term that requires explanation is the idea that a network has to be *established*. Indeed, it is not a given that programme X will be able to attract large audiences – a wisdom reflected in the industry's dictum that 'you are only as good as your last success'. Similarly, if a broadcaster is unable to attract large audiences, advertisers will flock to the competition, and the broadcaster will not be able to pay a premium price to production companies, and so on. This is what I referred to earlier as the tendency of the bits and pieces of a given network to go 'their own way'. In this sense, the network-approach to media differs from a functionalist flow-chart. The latter represents a system without friction – every element 'miraculously' cooperates in the whole – whereas in a network, actors can cooperate but there is always the possibility of betrayal, as when viewers flock to the rival broadcaster, or producers sell a format to a higher bidder. In other

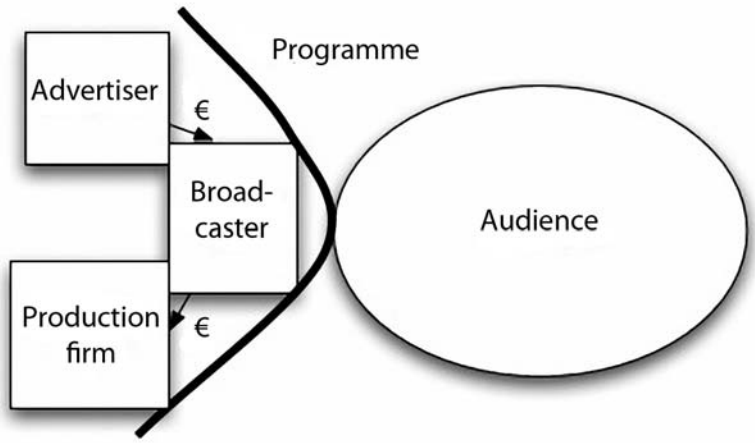

FIG. 1: A network approach to media.

words, the network approach to media production stresses that 'communication' is a precarious achievement that is easily disrupted.

4. The media's mechanics of power

If, up until now, we have *described* media from ANT's perspective, it is now time to explore what analytical purchase the theory has, and more specifically how it can help us media scholars in analyzing the relation between media and power. Take, for instance, the term *translator-spokesperson*. It is clear that Figure 1 is full of translation attempts and attempts to enrol actors. An executive producer doing a sales pitch in front of the programming director is actually constructing a programme (in the ANT meaning of the word), in which she tries to enrol, for example, the broadcaster and the audience. That is, she launches a programme in which she attributes roles to the audience ('such and such a demographic will love this show') and to the broadcaster ('if you broadcast this show you will be able to sell them to advertisers'). As said, the end result is not guaranteed: translation is first an endeavour, and only later might it become 'real'. Indeed, the history of television is scattered with shows that remained pilots and never made it onto the screen, or were never able to reach 'acceptable' audience ratings – acceptable to the broadcaster, that is. The broadcaster also functions as a translator-spokesperson, ordering shows that will fit the target demographics of a time slot (see Ellis 2000 and Einstein 2002 for detailed descriptions of how scheduling is done in commercial television), thus attributing not only roles to the viewers, but also to production companies and advertisers. In sum, the media network is full of *attempts at translation*, and actors habitually construct themselves as translator-spokespersons, claiming to speak for other actors.

However, if we look at the capacity to translate the other actors in the network, it is clear that not all actors are equal. Viewers, for example, only have two possibilities if they do not like a show: to change channel, or to switch off the TV. In other words, their translation capacity is very limited, or more precisely: it is merely reactive as they are not able to impact upon the show's 'content'. The broadcaster, on the other hand, is much more resourceful in translating the other actors. For example, it can force production companies to make changes to the content of a show that is low in the ratings. Similarly, advertisers have a more direct influence on the content of a show, in the form of product placements or pressure on broadcasters when a programme is deemed offensive.

The above description shows how the concept of translator-spokesperson brings differential power relationships in the media network to the fore. If it is true in principle that every actor translates the other actors in the network, it is nevertheless clear that the *institutional* actors (the broadcaster, the advertisers, the production companies) are far more successful in actualizing their projects. The non-institutional actors (mostly the dispersed viewers), to the contrary, have been assigned a place in the network that limits their capacity to translate and thus act upon the others. Already in 1974 Raymond Williams ([1974] 2003) commented upon this fundamental asymmetric structure of 'our' mass media – a structure that gives ownership of the network to institutionalized actors while limiting the options for viewers. Focusing on translation attempts, as well as the way some actors are muted at the same moment they are 'being spoken for', foregrounds these differential power relationships, and it all shows the contingency of such arrangements: there is nothing inherent in 'making television' that necessarily makes viewers into passive receivers who can only switch channels.

ANT also provides us with the means for distinguishing between the institutional actors: the concept of *obligatory passage points*. Although there is a fair degree of cooperation between the three institutional actors in Figure 1, it is clear that the broadcaster has positioned itself as the obligatory passage point through which the other two institutional actors must pass. The advertisers who want to reach viewers have to pass 'through' the broadcaster, who 'owns' both the content to attract these viewers, as well as the means for reaching them (a frequency on the analogue cable or digital network). Similarly, the production company that wants to sell its shows to viewers lacks the means to do so: the distribution channel that reaches into the homes of the viewers. What such a description shows is that the *broadcaster* occupies a particularly powerful position within the network. Through its different translation attempts it has managed to manoeuvre itself into position as the point through which the other actors have to pass.

Immutable mobile, finally, is another ANT concept that can be put to good use when analyzing production. In the media network, there are many immutable mobiles, but one in particular is rather interesting: the infamous audience ratings that are so important to broadcasters, production companies and advertisers alike. Remember that immutable mobiles are knowledge devices that allow a calculation centre to monitor the state of the network, conquering space and time and bringing the periphery into the centre. That is precisely what audience ratings do: they tell the institutional actors in the media network how many viewers are watching a show.

Moreover, audience ratings provide them with *standardized* and thus *combinable* data: rather than writing, for example, an ethnographic report of how the Jones family watched *Dexter* last night, it provides the media institutions with quantitative information on the audience (mostly the number of viewers and their social demographics) that later on can be aggregated at the level of 'the population'. And indeed, it is exactly because the information is gathered in a standardized way that it can be combined: the information retrieved from the Jones family can be combined with those of the Carpenters, allowing the institutional actors to aggregate the data and use them to extrapolate to the entirety of the population.

Note also how the audience ratings are indeed an expression of 'the will of the centre': they only produce the kind of knowledge institutional actors are interested in, namely whether viewers are watching a channel or not. Any other consideration, like likeability, irritability or democratizing potentiality of the content is relegated to the domain of useless information – useless, since it is not relevant for the advertisers, who are only interested in either the sheer quantity of viewers, or specific target groups. Ien Ang's *Desperately seeking the audience* (1991) already made this point twenty years ago, and the concept of immutable mobile allows us to better analyze how audience ratings function within the network, and what knowledge effects they have.

5. A teaching moment

The above description shows that ANT has a number of conceptual tools to offer to both political economy and cultural studies, allowing them to extend or deepen their respective analyses. For political economy, this would mean that it could use terms like obligatory passage points for analyzing what it now already does very well: investigating how the media industry 'functions' (in economic and organizational terms), how it is structured in such a way that some actors benefit from an arrangement more than others, as well as how they accomplish this. Stated less abstractly: consider the contemporary debate on technological convergence and how this affects the media industry (which many chapters of this book comment upon). Using ANT's vocabulary, it is clear that the impact of technological convergence is likely to come at the detriment of the broadcaster, whose position as an obligatory passage point is challenged. The increase in distribution channels – not only their number, but also the types – deprive broadcasters of the one thing in which they excelled during the network era: exclusive access to the homes of the dispersed audience. Consumers can still 'watch TV', but they can also do so on their computers, on their iPods, or through websites like Youtube.com or Hulu.com. As a consequence, the broadcasters lose their position as an obligatory passage point, and in this restructuring of the network dynamics all actors try to renegotiate (in ANT speak: translate) their position within the network, and new actors enter the field. This fundamentally alters the relationship between broadcaster and content producers: the role of the latter is no longer limited to the mere supply of content to be distributed (having no influence, for

example, on the place in the schedule); they now exert far more control, not only in the editorial sense but also in terms of packaging or scheduling.

The dispersed audience gets a less reactive role in the converged media landscape. For starters, digital technology allows audience members to escape or disrupt the planned flow of broadcasters in ways that the VCR did not allow (see Gray 1992). Not only can consumers now 'timeshift', that is to say, watch their favourite TV shows at a time of their liking, they can also circumvent the media industry's system of 'planned scarcity'. P2P file sharing software does exactly that: it allows audience members to watch TV shows from the moment they have been broadcast once, neglecting geographical barriers that underpinned so many of the artificially created and maintained markets. Everybody owning a broadband connection can watch the latest TV series only hours after it has been broadcast, allowing, for example, Europeans to watch *Heroes* instead of having to wait the extra year till the US market is saturated and the European one can be conquered. Software also allows cultural consumers to cut out 'those pesky advertisements', undermining the traditional broadcaster/advertiser model where advertisements are the main source of revenue. Finally, convergence also allows audience members to more easily produce and manipulate their own content, effectively obliterating the (carefully created and maintained) gap between producers and consumers.

Youtube and P2P software demonstrate that technological convergence indeed gives audiences more capacities to translate the products of the cultural industry into their own agenda (the processes of appropriation cultural studies scholars are so fond of). But it also shows that the institutional actors are aware of the threats as well as the opportunities, and they are busy devising strategies for retaining control – and profits, of course. One such strategy is a reorientation from the traditional broadcasting-advertising model towards a multimedia/advertiser integrated model (Magder 2004). Because digital technologies allow audiences to remove the advertisements, the importance of *product placement* is on the increase, since this form of advertising cannot be removed from the content.

Within a converged media industry, then, institutional actors have more difficulties in constructing themselves as obligatory passage points, and the industry is fully aware of this new state of affairs. What broadcasters and production companies alike are trying to do instead is to construct themselves as *full-spectrum gateways*: by using as many distribution channels as possible, the aim is to attain full dominance in the popular imagination. These attempts to establish oneself as a full-spectrum gateway are accompanied by the use of *branding* as a marketing strategy, since brands are about creating loyal customers (who find their way to the branded company *despite* the increase in channels). Moreover, brands are also about the creation of a community around a common interest or 'style,' (Arvidsson 2005) which combines well with converged media's interactive properties.

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What can cultural studies learn from ANT? Perhaps the single most contribution ANT has to offer is an approach that combines a view of audiences as 'resistant' or as not automatically complying with the roles attributed to them, while also paying attention to the *institutional* settings in which the media conduct their business. Indeed, the symmetric approach that characterizes ANT's ontology starts from the assumption that audience members are not fundamentally different from the supposedly powerful institutions they confront, and thus it fits well with those strands of audience studies that emphasize audience activity. But ANT is also attentive to the ways that the institutional actors try to mould and shape that behaviour, to the ways that these institutional actors structure the media network and how this allows for certain interactions while blocking others – all of this happening in a provisional, non-final way. Cultural studies has often been criticized for neglecting the institutional, and thus ANT allows it to fully engage with the latter while not reducing the audience to the status of 'cultural dupes' of the media industries.

More specifically, I think ANT can make a valuable contribution to *production studies*, the emerging field within cultural studies that this paper started with. It is no coincidence, I think, that those cultural studies scholars who turned their attention to the production side of things either engaged in a debate with political economy (the cultural economy tradition), or took up an entirely different theoretical tradition than the structuralist-Gramscian framework that dominated research at the time (see Bennett (1998: 60-84) for an eloquent elaboration of the differences between Gramscian and Foucaultian cultural studies). The neo-Foucaultians, as I have called them above, turned to Foucault precisely because his work allowed them to break with the Marxist tradition (see, e.g. Nixon 1998: 12-13). In other words: there is within cultural studies an already-established space for studying media from an institutional perspective that is not strictly political-economic, at least not in a straightforward way. And it is within this space that ANT should thrive well.

We have seen already some examples of how these neo-Foucaultians can benefit from ANT concepts: Ien Ang's work on audience ratings can be reread from an ANT perspective and expanded with the concept of immutable mobile; in a similar vein, ANT can and has been used to analyze the way media professionals maintain the differences between 'the ordinary world' and 'the media world', or between 'ordinary people' and 'media people' – namely by constructing themselves as an obligatory passage point (Couldry 2001; Teurlings 2004). *Governmentality* scholars like Tony Bennett or Laurie Ouellette can make good use of ANT in their analyses of governmental programmes, the ideals inscribed in them, and how they are implemented, as recent work on museums by Bennett (2004, 2005) illustrates. Indeed, what else is the museum than an immutable *im*mobile that tries to translate sections of the population according to the ideals of the progressive reformers? And if *Judge Judy* tries to instil neoliberal subjectivity into its viewers, is this not a translation attempt by Judith Scheindlin to 'govern at distance' and thus keep several actors aligned (see Ouellette 2004)? The same goes for those television shows that explicitly aim to educate and elevate its viewers, either in a public service context (Ouellette 2002) or in the context of com-

mercial entertainment (McCarthy 2002). In all these studies, ANT can make a contribution to understanding what the 'programme' is, how it is being achieved (or fails to do so) and what role human and non-human actors (the studio space, the museum space and art objects, the television text) play in it.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that political economy and cultural studies can make use of ANT's concepts without having to drastically change their respective theoretical assumptions. But ANT has a potentially more radical contribution to make in that it could make the debate between political economy and cultural studies irrelevant. In such a scenario, ANT would redefine media – and thus also how we study them – in entirely new terms, not unlike my description in sections 3 and 4. It showed that ANT's 'flat ontology' can be fruitfully applied to media, and that such an approach has the potential to incorporate 'the best of both worlds'. To be more precise: such an approach is particularly suited for analyzing power relations in *institutional* settings — the reason why production studies has most to benefit from the encounter with ANT. The attention to the institutional also combines well with political economy's tendency to focus on institutions. It does so, however, without privileging certain actors above others (powerful institutions versus weak viewers), since one of the basic assumptions of ANT is that even those actors that seem most powerful are dependent upon the will of others, and hence their victories are never final. Moreover, ANT does not discard the economic as a force structuring relationships in the network, but it does so without making it into the sole focus of attention. By doing so, ANT effectively incorporates and neutralizes the reciprocal critique of cultural studies and political economy. Making such a 'new and improved' media studies work, however, will require much theoretical and empirical work, and this article is intended as a first step towards it, mapping the terrain and the interconnections between approaches.[4]

Whether ANT will be taken up by media studies or not, I do not think it was picked up by accident in the current conjuncture, and that there is more to it than the latest theoretical fashion, having to do with the dramatic changes in the television industry during the last decade. Perhaps the most important of these is the proliferation of reality formats, since ordinary people often play an important role. But their participation stimulates viewers at home to question their behaviour, in terms of sincerity, authenticity or acceptability (Hill 2004; Ellis 2009). What is less noted, however, is that the very same suspicious viewer position makes viewers focus on the production process of the shows, a phenomenon I have elsewhere called 'seeing production through the text' (Teurlings 2010: 363-365). As a result, the television production process is opened up and made transparent, and viewers have become quite knowledgeable about how television works. If we add to this other changes in the wider culture industries, like the shifting of the burden of content production towards the users on websites like Facebook or Youtube (Van Dijck 2009), it is clear that the *zeitgeist* is focussed

on 'how media are made'. It is in this climate of increased attention for media production that ANT's *mechanics of power* thrives well.

Notes

1. Hetherington and Law (2000) distinguish between first and second wave ANT: whereas the first is rather managerial in orientation – the core question driving research being 'how are networks kept together?' – the second tries to soften ANT's 'male-like, hairy gorilla-like character'.
2. Every actor is always at the same time an actor-network in its own right: gasoline is composed of molecules, wheels are composed of alloy wheel hubs, rubber tyres, and so on.
3. It is for this reason that ANT scholars have a preference for case studies in which the project does not succeed, or when things disintegrate. As long as things work, actor-networks present themselves as a single functioning unity – an actor-network is then 'punctualized', as Law (1992) calls this. Put simply, a punctualized actor-network looks like a single entity by hiding from sight the different bits and pieces of which it is made. However, when things go wrong – e.g. the engine of the car stops functioning – what once seemed singular becomes complex: we wonder whether it is the carburettor, or the water-cooling, or the valves... In other words, the moment actor-networks disintegrate they expose the bits and pieces of which they are composed, and they reveal their heterogeneous nature. For examples of such studies, see, for instance, Latour 1996 or Law 2002.
4. This does not mean, however, that media studies *should* embark upon such a project. If this article appears to argue for the productivity of the encounter with Latour, I also want to stress that the project does not come without its dangers and pitfalls. This is not the time and place to elaborate upon these, but I hope that future work will take up the limitations of the Latourian approach, more specifically his rejection of 'critique' as a valid enterprise (see Latour 2004), which might sit uneasily with political economy and cultural studies' political stance. The future will show which scenario will be able to mobilize the most and more enduring allies.

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Convergence thinking, information theory and labour in 'end of television' studies

Mark Hayward

1. Introduction

The link between the future of media and labour is one that has become a common topic of research in discussions heralding the end of television. Critical media scholars are increasingly interested in, and concerned about, the kinds of labour that television viewers and media users more generally are asked and expected to contribute. In television studies, Mark Andrejevic's research is exemplary in this regard. In his work tracing the changing power relations between actors, producers and audiences, he positions reality television as a key site for observing the shifting of labour from the industry to audiences while allowing industry elites to retain control and profits. Contrasting his position with those who see such developments as promising a better, more democratic media experience, he writes,

> Spanning the extremes is the promise that interactivity will tear down the barriers associated with mass society: between audience and spectacle, consumer and producer, passive viewing and active participation […] However, the result has not been a transfer of power and control from the power elites of Hollywood to the masses but rather a shift in the burden of labour from paid actors and writers to the viewers from whose ranks the cast is drawn and whose few labour on fan sites helps add value and interest to often lacklustre performances (Andrejevic 2004: 89).

The power of Andrejevic's analysis comes from its ability to bring into focus the relationship between labour in the television industry, emergent generic forms and their associated viewing practices. It is a relationship that is often underplayed by champions of televisual interactivity. We see this, for example, in the work of Henry Jenkins whose research into 'convergence culture' documents the possible social and political benefits of the emergent media landscape. The future, as Jenkins explains, may be brighter than today since,

> consumers are learning how to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other consumers. The promises of this new media environment raise expectations of a freer flow of ideas and content. Inspired by those ideals, consumers are fighting for the right to participate more fully in their culture (Jenkins 2006: 18).

While Jenkins shows that audiences are expected to do more in order to facilitate the 'freer flow of ideas and content,' the degree to which these practices are the digital age equivalent of productive labour is effaced. Thus, the fact that both finding and producing content will entail labour is absorbed into the dream of the 'prosumer', a world where nobody ever thinks to mention exploitation.

These opposing visions of ongoing transformations in the location and organization of labour in an environment defined by ubiquitous media and communication technologies (otherwise known as the 'end of television') can be read as the most recent articulation of a long-standing debate over the nature of labour in the political economy of media and culture. While Andrejevic's work makes extensive use of Foucault's critique of power and institutions, it also has roots in the work of critical political economists such as Harry Braverman, as well as those whose work focused on the labour of media audiences like Dallas Smythe (Braverman 1975; Smythe and Guback 1994). Drawing on a different set of intellectual influences, the work of Jenkins continues a discourse that has received a wider circulation in the mainstream media, and sees a harmonious integration of media technology, profit and the well-being of users. Jenkins' project builds on the tradition of work on consumption and cultural representation of which the most well-known exemplar is John Fiske (Fiske 1991).

Given the background of this work in the emergence of post-Marxist debates over the place of communication in contemporary capitalism, it is useful to locate both visions of the relationship between media labour as attempts to negotiate different understandings of what Marxists commonly call 'alienation'. The debate on alienation has remained an impassioned and unresolved debate in media and cultural studies for several decades, serving as one of the key sites for debates about the possibility of an emancipatory politics. However, while this debate sets the stage for this article's engagement with labour and television in the age interactivity, the purpose of this chapter is not to rehash these debates, at least not directly.

Rather than focusing on debates about the nature of labour in the political economy of media using the language of alienation/resistance, this chapter seeks to re-examine (and hopefully re-imagine) these debates by drawing attention to the connections between these recent developments in media and cultural studies and a longer history involving the adoption and adaptation of information theory by researchers associated with television studies. By highlighting the 'other' conceptual and theoretical resources upon which this work draws, this chapter seeks to move beyond the well-worn paths of debates about media and labour that have emerged from Marxist and post-Marxist critiques of media as way of developing future paths for research on television in the age of convergent and interactive technology.

Histories of cultural studies' engagement with television and other media have downplayed or ignored its relationship with information theory. Indeed, the effacement of the connection between information theory and cultural studies has been so complete that the interest in cybernetics and information theory found in some recent research into media convergence often takes up this body of work as an historical artefact from a bygone period of the social sciences with no connection to cultural studies at all. However, contemporary interest in these concepts is more than just historical; as much as the interest in cybernetics and information theory has been the result of an attempt to produce a critical genealogy of contemporary interactive technology, they have also been used as concepts from 'the outside' in order to create some critical distance in analyzing the more recent trends in media studies, moving beyond the seemingly exhausted critique of representation. It is in the slippage between the historical and the critical that this chapter seeks to make its contribution to understanding television (and screen media more generally) today by suggesting that the elaboration of the history has foreclosed as many possible avenues for research as it has opened.

Therefore, this chapter is not a history of television studies, communication studies or the political economy of media. Rather, it engages in, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari, a kind of 'diagrammatic critique,[1] making sense of the axioms and concepts that have organized, generated, made material and perceivable the ways we think and experience of television audiences and users. This chapter examines how the adoption of models mapping information circulation that were developed as part of information theory have also played a role in the formation of the intellectual and political engagements of contemporary television studies.

The pages that follow trace a path (a circuit even) that includes the work of Claude Shannon to Stuart Hall to Jenkins' *Convergence culture*, exploring how the abstract sender/receiver of Shannon's mathematical theory of communication became linked to the labouring audience in the form of the interactive audience. In foregrounding one of the ways in which audience members came to be seen as working (sender/receiver = labourer), it will become apparent how, contrary to the customary presentation of this relationship in histories of television which place these debates firmly (and exclusively) on the terrain of (and surrounding) Marxist and other materialist media criticism, it is perhaps more accurate to see this as Marx *plus* Shannon in which debates about media are also seen to be deeply informed by this mostly neglected generation of social science in media. However, in the conclusion, I suggest that it is perhaps time to rework this equation.

2. The empirical tendency and information theory

In histories of cultural studies, the key contributions that cultural studies has made to the research agenda of media studies are often focused around two themes: an ongoing interrogation of how media in everyday life should be studied, a theme that has often focused on developing audience research and the

adoption of ethnography as a research method, and debates about how to translate Marxian concepts into studies of media representation (e.g. debates about false consciousness and ideology). This chapter begins its engagement with both of these themes by taking up some of the work that shaped early cultural studies work on television audiences. An engagement with audiences is a useful place from which to engage with these often raised questions about how to study what it is that television audiences do when they watch, as well as engaging simultaneously in a broader debate in the critical social sciences about ideology.

Central to both of these projects has been the problematization and clarification of the nature and significance of empirical research. At various moments over the past three decades this has involved powerful arguments in favour of the expansion of media studies beyond textual analysis and semiotics (Morley 1991; Ang 1991; Mankekar 1999). Often this has taken shape in the form of demands for media researchers to include a more rigorous engagement with viewers, moving beyond 'thin descriptions' of viewing diaries and set-top boxes and advocating a more robust contextualization of media in everyday life. These advances have been consolidated in histories of audience studies (Nightingale 1996) as well as received understandings of significant debates about audiences over the past twenty years, such as those involving the relevance and nature of ethnographic work in media studies.

The reason I raise the role that audience studies has played in keeping the question of different kinds of empirical research on the agenda of media scholars is not simply to pay debts to ethnographers. Instead, I would like to trouble this history some. The emphasis on debates about the empirical, field work and the adaptation of ethnography to the problematics of media studies has served to obscure other issues in the historical development of thinking about the audience that are worthy of attention. In particular, I would like to concentrate on the engagement with and adoption and adaptation of particular forms of thinking appropriated from information theory. So, alongside the history of increasing our attentiveness to everyday life, I want to draw attention to the models that were also being generated (albeit sometimes only implicitly) in order to conceptualize and organize this work.

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in the cybernetic moment as the concept of information has returned to the forefront of popular discourse. Gary Genosko (2008) and Ronald E. Day (2008) have both returned to this moment in the development of communication studies and information science in order to expand the conceptual and historical context for the models produced during this period. It is also a period that has piqued the interest of numerous scholars in relation to the formation of the social sciences more generally, most notably Philip Mirowski's fascinating discussion of economics and information theory (Mirowski 2002). However, as noted above, there remains a significant amount of detail to be teased out in the relationship between television studies and related sub-disciplines and this previous moment of social science orthodoxy.

Perhaps the most well-known example of the use of information theory in the study of audiences is the appropriation of Claude Shannon's model of communication (Mirowski 2002) by Stuart Hall in his seminal essay on 'encoding/

decoding' (Hall 1973, 1980). While the ubiquity of this model and its influence on a wide variety of social sciences in the period after World War Two is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth drawing greater attention to it in the context of studying audiences. The genealogy of this model is rarely, if ever, engaged with in histories of how audiences were studies. Nightingale, who gives its evolution some attention, suggests that Hall's decision to adopt Shannon's model was strategic, evidence of the uneasy alliance between international communications research and the emergent project around cultural studies in Birmingham.

What is more relevant for my purposes here, however, is the sense that the consequences of this choice had very little impact beyond being accommodating to a variety of different research projects. As Nightingale writes,

> In an uncanny quirk of fate, sender-message-receiver proved amenable to a variety of incommensurable theories, including Marxist materialist aesthetics [referencing directly Hall's work]. The 'encoding/decoding' model echoed preoccupations familiar from 'sender-message-receiver and accepted by American, British and European scholars of disparate persuasions (Nightingale 1996: 26).

That the model could be adapted with little or no impact on the research should strike any critic as surprising, if not downright dubious. What is even more striking, though, is the fact that Nightingale is one of the few historians of audience studies to interrogate the relationship between media studies, cultural studies, and the complex of concepts and theories that constituted cybernetics and information theory. Indeed, Julie D'Acci notes that Hall's model of 'encoding/decoding' emerges primarily, if not exclusively, in conversation with Marx's model of commodity production in the *Grundrisse* and *Kapital* and derives 'an elegance and staying power from this homology' (D'Acci 2004). Claude who?[2]

Perhaps as a response to the growing interest in cybernetics and information theory mentioned above, the relationship between Shannon and Hall has come to attract more interest in recent years. However, it remains a relationship that gives rise to contradictory interpretations. Gurevitch and Scannell, in their discussion of 'Encoding/Decoding' as canonical essay, note that 'For those raised in the American tradition of mass communication research, an initial reading of the essay may first trigger a sense of *déjà vu*', referring to Shannon's essay from 1948 (Gurevitch and Scannell 2003: 238). However, they foreclose any further consideration of what this connection might lead to, writing: 'Hall's use of the terminology of encoding and decoding looks superficially like a throwback to the Shannon and Schramm models. But that impression is misleading' (Ibid.).

Steven Maras, however, is more open to acknowledging this relationship, explaining that Shannon's model:

> persists as a substrate throughout Hall's text. Not simply in terms of the 'technical infrastructure' Hall writes into his diagram, but in terms of tools to think with […] it is as though Hall is working off, building on or improvising (in the Jazz sense) form an understanding of communication linked to transmission (Maras 2008).

According to Maras, Hall's model is the product of a more complex set of relations between television studies and information science rather than a radical break; it speaks to a relationship involving influence, dissent, recognition and forgetting but also creativity and invention.

Revisiting the historical record, there is evidence to suggest a relationship between early television studies and information theory and cybernetics that was simultaneously engaged and fraught with tension and dissent. In an interview about the encoding/decoding model given in 1989, Hall explains that the model was meant as a direct challenge to the researchers at the Centre for Mass Communications Research at the University of Leicester. As Hall explains in the interview,

> Now, the Centre for Mass Communications Research was a traditional center using traditional empirical, positivistic models of content analysis, audience-effects survey research, et cetera. So the paper, although you may not realize it, has a slightly polemical thrust[…] It's positioned against a certain unilinearity of that model, one-directional flow: sender originates the message, the message is itself pretty unidimensional, and the receiver receives it (Hall 1994: 253).

Hall's account of his earlier work is consistent with the beginning of the essay as initially published in 1973. Talking about it in terms of 'linearity', Hall writes:

> Traditionally, mass-communications research has conceptualized the process of communication in terms of a circulation circuit or loop. This model has been criticized for its linearity – sender/message/receiver – for its concentration on the level of message exchange and for the absence of a structured conception of the different moments as a complex structure of relations. But it is also possible (and useful) to think of this process in terms of a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments (Hall 1973).

These quotes seems to confirm, as Maras argues, that Hall begins the development of 'encoding/decoding' by complicating and critiquing the models inherited by mass communications research from information theory. However, the struggle for Hall was not simply one of the empirical against the theoretical (as though those unruly audiences were banging on the door of the sociology departments), but also within and against a particular model for the organization of knowledge. It was against the dominant model of communication itself that Hall was struggling at this moment and which presented itself in different forms.[3] In light of Hall's engagement and struggles with the models of information theory, I would now like to return to the recent discussions of audience labour with which I started this chapter in order to consider some of the ways in which this obvious, yet overlooked encounter between cultural studies and information might help us to make sense of the philosophical and political stakes in contemporary television studies.

Drawing on the preceding discussion of how mediated communication has been modelled in the past and present of television studies, I want to develop some aspects of what I call 'convergence thinking' using the work of the two authors cited at the beginning of the chapter (Jenkins and Andrejevic) as examples. Convergence thinking, which is to say theories and concepts that engage with the relationship between audiences and contemporary interactive media, often invokes concepts and ideas from cybernetics and information theory (Clarke and Hansen 2009; Hansen 2004). However, this invocation does not mark either a radical break with the past (a 'new' media studies for new media) and the importation of theoretical resources from information theory and cybernetics. Rather, as outlined in the previous section, it is part of the history of logics of information circulation that have long played a role in the evolution of television studies.

3. Convergence thinking

In spite of its tech-heavy cover, featuring an iPod surrounded by a multitude of screens, Jenkins' C*onvergence culture* builds on his previous work on fan cultures and focuses a great deal of attention on the behaviour of audiences and media consumers. As he points out early on in the text, 'Convergence does not occur through media appliances, however sophisticated they may become. Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others' (Jenkins 2006: 3). It is a point he returns to at various points throughout the text, including the conclusion where he calls for a more contextual understanding of 'convergence' that involves changes is technology, production techniques as well as audience behaviour, in other words the institutional, technical and subjective aspects of media culture. He summarizes the theme of the book as follows in another essay (co-authored with Joshua Green),

> That convergence is a cultural, rather than technological, process; that networking computing encourages collective intelligence; that a new form of participatory culture is emerging; and the skills acquired through 'leisure' activities are increasingly being applied in more 'serious' contexts. (Green and Jenkins 2008).

This summary further focuses the theme of the book around the developmental nature of the behaviours that constitute convergence culture.

The book itself is filled with descriptions of audience behaviour and the significance of consumer productivity to the emergent institutional and economic organization of media industries. Jenkins and Green sum up this aspect of his work in another essay that takes up the question of audiences more specifically. They write,

> Convergence culture brings with it a re-conceptualization of the audience – how it is comprised, how it is courted what it wants, and how to generate value from it […] The audience is no longer the end point along an industrial chain (Green and Jenkins 2008).

Later on in the same piece, they argue that the proliferation of terminology to describe the audience in recent times is part of the attempt to capture what is different about the era of convergence culture. 'Each label,' they explain,

> describes audience practices related to, but significantly different from, the construction of the active audience within media and cultural studies' discussions in the 1970s and 1980s. To talk about participatory audiences now is to talk about how differently-abled, differently resourced, and differently motivated media producers work in the same space (Green and Jenkins 2008).

Convergence culture, insofar as it is interested in providing a complete account of the audience's activity, is an attempt to describe/theorize a media system in which viewers are increasingly relied upon as producers of value. Yet, as in all mapping of media labour, this labour is also part of the circulation of information within the media as it is through the forms of creative production (fanfilms, role-playing, etc.) in which audiences engage that the labour of audience becomes most visible and most productive. We see here the echoes of the intersection between Marx and Shannon discussed above in relation to Hall's elaboration of media reception. Although, unlike Hall's interest in breaking apart of the moments that define the circulation of information within capitalism, Jenkins profiles the constitution of those forms of production that were traditionally read (i.e. in the work on 'active audiences') as a kind of feedback that provides a 'means of knowing how the message has been received' (Fiske 1983) as important sources of innovation and industrial development.

It is at this point that it is useful to turn to the work of Mark Andrejevic, whose work might seem to develop in the opposite direction from Jenkins even while concerning itself with the same problematics. For Andrejevic, the rise of interactivity does not necessarily lead to a more open and democratic society. Rather, interactivity has come to represent a variety of new techniques for watching and controlling audiences 'becoming synonymous with asymmetrical forms of monitoring, information gathering and surveillance' (Andrejevic 2007: 213). Unlike Jenkins, who makes no reference to information theory, Andrejevic develops the relationship between the contemporary interactive media and cybernetics at crucial part of his argument. At the end of the first chapter of *iSpy: Surveillance and power in the interactive era*, he explains that,

> Wiener's theories bear directly on contemporary examples of interactive technology: web sites that alter their appearance in response to viewer behavior, interactive billboards that customize their advertising appeals, TV shows that change their outcome based on viewer voting, smart homes that change climate conditions on the basis of the comfort level of residents, electronic 'newspapers' that sort content in response to reader preferences (Andrejevic 2007: 18).

Andrejevic is critical of the new interactive technologies that Jenkins praises in his research, noting that such relations of reciprocity, interactivity and exchange

are also implicated in processes of control. Rather than participatory culture, Andrejevic reminds us that Wiener warned us that, 'the use of cybernetic systems […] might result in a society in which entrenched economic and political powers consolidated their control by modifying messages based on audience feedback' (Andrejevic 2007: 20).

There is value in reading Jenkins and Andrejevic together, both belonging to a conceptual framework that could be called convergence thinking. In the work of both authors, the audience is similarly positioned as inside the system of media communication and feedback. Furthermore, we see the echoes of Hall's initial critique of the linear logics of the models of information theory. Jenkins research very much offers an update of Hall's initial critique, albeit updated to include more recent technologies and examples.

Andrejevic, on the other hand, positions himself very much as Hall did in the early 1970s, taking up a polemical position against the established orthodoxy of interactivity. Interestingly, his critique offers an almost contradictory double-step that both resonates and departs from Hall's early work on practices of encoding and decoding. For Andrejevic, the critique of interactivity must continue along the path initially traced by Hall, breaking down the orthodoxy of the model to recognize the non-linear complexity of the social relations engendered by media. For Hall, this entailed a turn towards a conjunctural approach to media, placing the circulation of representations, interpretations and capital in complex and non-reductive relation to one another. At the same time, however, Andrejevic also suggests that Hall (or, to be more accurate, those who took the encoding/decoding model as conceptual dogma) was mistaken in confusing the contextual complexity of these relations with the potential for a possibly emancipating political practice, arguing that the technical capabilities of contemporary media are able to reassert control over the previously decentred (and de-centring) practices of audiences.

The relationship between media audiences and labour has not played a major role in my consideration of convergence thinking so far, but this is only in order to avoid repeating the argument laid out at the beginning of this essay. The reader will recall that I started out by noting that the labour of media audiences had become a popular topic in media studies. I went on to note that, in spite of considerable differences over their understanding of audience labour, Jenkins and Andrejevic offered two visions of how best to study and understand the contemporary form and organization of labour in the media industry (which, they both agreed, was now centred around the activities of the audiences and users). It has been my goal to show the way in which these recent debates continue to be structured by the conceptual and ideological issues that have shaped the encounter between media studies, information theory and Marxism. In this way, the current moment moves (but actually returns) from Shannon vs. Marx to Shannon *plus* Marx.

4. Conclusion

More than simply presenting a historical curiosity, my aim in this chapter has been to develop a conceptual history, which takes seriously the claim that that the models for understanding the relations between audiences and media had consequences worth thinking through in greater detail. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, it is an attempt to develop what Deleuze and Guattari called 'diagrammatic critique'. Engaging with these models are more than simply epiphenomena that emerge from empirical work that is crucial for understanding the role they play in ordering and structuring knowledge and practice in thinking about television and other media. Thus, the 'truth or 'adequacy' of the models in describing the empirical data is only part of how they functioned. Indeed, the most relevant aspect of these models for my argument here stems from their role in the organization of knowledge in relation to itself rather than in reference to the 'outside world'.

The question of the labour of television audiences and media users is often posed as involving a series of concrete, empirical sites at which exploitation occurs. It is, for example, the common sense of Jenkins' examples that drive his development of the theory of *Convergence culture* as much as it is Andrejevic's case study of the *Television without pity* website that directs his elaboration of surveillance in media. But such framings of the concrete and empirical are also deeply involved in development and circulation of theoretical concepts and models. In this way, this work should be seen in conversation with the proliferation of language and concepts for describing the new ways of working (Lazzarato 1996; Virno 2003) that have been emerging recent years. Immaterial and affective labour are but two terms which have served as new tools for thinking about the forms of production and exploitation that characterize the contemporary configuration of media culture (Andrejevic 2007). My goal in drawing attention to the concepts and models that frame the analysis of labour in media studies is not to dismiss this work as insufficiently grounded in the real world. However, I do want to ask some questions about the status of the concept of labour as it is deployed in this new work. I want to do this in order to think more clearly about the politics of the concepts and models we use in making sense of the world around us and to engage with the particular common sense of critical approaches to convergence culture.

The common sense of seeing audience labour bound up with interactivity grounds the arguments of both Jenkins and Andrejevic, and draws (more or less directly) upon the logics of cybernetics and information theory to make their point. It is a common sense that, in bringing together media as well as also producers and consumers, elaborates an inextricable relationship between the unilinearity of the flow of information inherited from Shannon and the concept of labour borrowed from Marx that has emerged within television studies. The more integrated the circuit, the more visible the forms and products of audience labour become. The more people are watched and recorded, the more productive populations are seen to be. This economy of watching and working outlines the reciprocal relationship between the circuit of information flow and the making visible of audience labour.

My concern with such an approach is that these discussions of labour and television often ontologize politics, transposing the Marxist project into the realm of the universal and the unchangeable. The transposition of politics into ontology plays an important role in the articulation of a discourse through which scholars can articulate a critical humanism, a position that maintains television studies focus on human agency while attempting to grapple with the technological and social complexity of the medium itself. As part of this project for a critical humanist television studies, the concept of 'labour' often serves to resolve the gaps between theoretical, empirical and political work.

By recognizing the historical links between labour and cybernetics in the constitution of media studies, I want to suggest that we call into question the theoretical and conceptual grounds upon which we deploy common terms like 'audiences', 'media', 'labour', and 'producers'. This is to suggest that this relationship is not merely historical, but also contingent. By acknowledging and complicating the conceptual vocabulary of television studies, researchers might bring about a shift in ontological and conceptual frameworks of the field. This would not simply involve the replacement of old models for new, but would force scholars to realize the necessary fragility of our theorizations of media in context. It would require that television researchers recognize material objects and subject (and the relations between) as participating in and producing their own material and phenomenological variability. In her discussion of the relevance of information theory for study contemporary media, Tiziana Terranova calls for what she describes as 'informational materialism', an approach she sees as displacing the sender-receiver model of Shannon with one more adequately adapted to the present moment of complex (and chaotic) information systems (Terranova 2004). Following Terranova, perhaps we do not need models and audiences that work, but to think more about how not to work. By this I do not merely mean to move towards sites of leisure, but to un-think work and labour and engage with what Nancy has called the 'inoperative' (Nancy 2001).

Perhaps Michel Serres offers some clues about how this might be done. Working through the philosophical and historical landscape from which information theory emerged in his collection *Hermes II: L'interference,* he writes about the rise of communication theory coinciding with the expansion of productivity across the social sphere. 'That which is in the process of disappearing through the simultaneous revolutions of technology that we are living', he explains, 'is the problematic character of the idea of production, its conditional character in all praxis and every theory' (Serres 1972). Serres sees the ubiquity of production as marking a closure in how we think about the ways in which we inhabit our world, of the way in which we are open to innovation and change. What would it mean, then, if we were to reintroduce the 'problematic character' of production and, as it regards my argument here, labour into thinking about convergence? It would return us to the innovative and troubling encounter between Shannon and Marx that structured Hall's early work on media encoding and de-coding. The goal of the encounter was not merely to locate and map our pre-existing categories and concepts onto events, objects and experiences as they arise, but rather to understand concepts, models, experiences, and thoughts as emergent and unstable.

Such an approach puts forward a process of critique rather than a product, a critique that makes sense of how audiences, technology, representation are individuated and re-individuated from each other. This is not to depoliticize television studies, but to acknowledge that future possibilities do not arrive with the complete theory of everything, but with the ability to be open to the sites of innovation and imagination that are found in empirical and theoretical work.

Notes

1. 'The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality. Thus when it constitutes points of creation or potentiality it does not stand outside history but is instead always "prior to" history' Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (142).
2. It is worth noting that this claim is contradicted by the most widely diffused version of the essay, as published in the anthology *Culture, Media, Language*, where Hall begins the essay by using Marx to critique and expand 'mass communications research'.
3. Moreover, the adoption and adaptation of Shannon's model by Hall is not the only moment that might point us in the direction of information theory and the related field of cybernetics. As Nightingale points out in her study, the concept of 'feedback' – the defining concept of cybernetics for Norbert Weiner – was in some ways always part of the conceptual background leading to the theorization of the 'active audience'. It is along these lines that we can read Jonathan Fiske, who, in a brief description of *feedback*, simultaneously saves and dismisses the notion that will come to be central to our understanding of *'interactivity'* today and audience productivity in the old days.

   > A term from cybernetics, though now closely associated with communication models and communication theory. It is taken to be the process by which the decoder's reaction to the message is transmitted back to the encoder. It then becomes the encoder's means of knowing how the message has been received. Thus it allows for changes in transmission, encoding or medium to achieve the encoder's desired reaction [...] We should note that adding a feedback loop to a linear process model does not make that model circular or dynamic – it is there to increase the effectiveness of the linear process (Fiske 1983).

   Here, Fiske is clearly noting the formal similarities between 'dynamic' forms of communication, but blocks the relation as a means of blocking a particular kind of instrumentality of the relation within the model of communication.

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Television memory after the end of television history?

Juan Francisco Gutiérrez Lozano

At a time when television is undergoing significant transformations and scholars are rethinking television theory, it is also necessary to reflect on the key subjects, methodologies and concepts used for research on TV history. The aim of this article is to highlight and explain the significance of the concept of television memory for research on television and history. The reflections on television memory provided in this article will be useful both for media historians and media theorists. More specifically, I will discuss examples of nostalgic programming by contemporary television channels as well as the interactive (re)use of old television material by Internet and new media users, and ask what the notion of television memory brings to the analysis of these practices.

Television memory is always linked to a socially-shared televisual past, but can be manifested in a variety of ways, collective as well as individual. Looking firstly at collective manifestations, television memory is most visibly linked to the audiovisual archives of TV broadcasters and companies. In recent years, stations have introduced several formats that are based on an exploitation of the medium's past, using material from the archives, broadcasting reruns or producing contemporary versions of old popular shows. These types of programming appeal to viewers' curiosity and emotions by taking them on a nostalgic journey through their own recollections of TV and can be considered key contributory factors in the generation of today's collective television memory. As well as being used by professional media institutions, the material from these archives is now increasingly being made available for consultation by the public.

As individual manifestation, television memory can be understood as a construction process comprising the continuous recollections of TV viewers based on their experiences as members of a particular audience. If these memories of events and material perceived through television are expressed verbally and recorded analytically by researchers, then television memory becomes a valuable source of historical data. Academic study can use these personal recollections of television to generate aggregated knowledge on collective social processes.

It is my contention that the analysis of television memory in its multiple manifestations will provide us with a greater insight into both the history of television and its present day incarnations. The central thesis of this article is that television memory holds the key to understanding and analysing current TV phenomena, such as the varying popularity of certain types of programmes among different audiences and the means of sharing, discussing and exchanging material offered

by the new *social media*. At the same time, however, these media recollections also have an effect on collective memory in general. For this reason, I want to suggest that any attempt to conceptualize TV in theoretical terms and, indeed, any approach adopted for its investigation, must address the notion of television memory.

This contribution is divided into two main sections. The first examines television memory in relation to television history and audience research. The second section highlights the complexity of the concept of television memory, explaining how it is linked to the development of memory studies and looking at the directions in which it has evolved since. Here, I will include my reflections on 'nostalgic programming' and the new 'participatory' forms of cultivating television memory. Both practices have contributed to the heightened presence of television's past in the contemporary media landscape. If the ultimate aim of this edited volume is to rethink television theory, I argue that we need to begin by accounting for the intertwinement of present and past in television today.

1. Television memory and television history

I shall begin by explaining why, in view of the increased audience research now being carried out as part of television history studies, a deeper insight into television memory has become indispensable. Television memory is not merely a concept and research theme, it is also a valuable empirical source of information capable of significantly enriching any academic study into this particular area. Naturally, one can also use methodologies based on textual studies or TV programmes from the past to analyze television memory and explain how it has been built up over the years; alternatively, one can examine TV archives and the way in which they operate, or even focus on television's political economy. However, what I want to emphasize here is the importance of the audience itself: given that recollections of television are part of the collective memory of society as a whole, and that the process in question is one of continuous reconstruction in which the viewers play a prominent role, it is imperative that they remain at the forefront of any studies on TV history. In this part, I will present a number of projects from around the world that have employed this approach to underline the particular usefulness of such audience research.

The onset of globalization has shown much of what has been written about the history of television to date to be excessively descriptive in focus and too heavily reliant on local or national perspectives (Hilmes 2003: 1-3). The global world enables national identities to be transformed and reconstructed in a different context. The idea of nation itself thus ceases to be a stable, homogenous concept, and the new 'cosmopolitanism' generated by the various nationalisms to a certain extent even serves to promote the globalization of culture. In short, we might say that in spite of the 'nationalized' manner in which television has developed and been analyzed, it has made a key contribution to the achievement of international homogeneity.

This is not to say that national and regional studies undertaken so far should

be dismissed as insignificant. Indeed, the contribution by Alexander Dhoest in this volume deals precisely with the importance of national television. In the field of history, however, we must now seek the kind of historiographical progress that will broaden our perspective and facilitate analyses of the different developments that have taken place in the media, thus providing a comprehensive overview of the history of the broadcasting era, from its very beginnings right through to the present day transformation of the manner in which TV programmes are produced and, more significantly, transmitted and received throughout the planet. Among the challenges that await television historians are issues that so far have been largely neglected, such as the comparative study of how different international TV systems have evolved and a historical scrutiny of the viewers themselves. Both approaches have traditionally received considerably less attention from television historians than other perspectives, like institutional and technological angles or textual analysis (Gutiérrez 2007).

As Bourdon writes, interaction on an international scale has been a feature of television throughout most of its history, not only in the political and technological sense but also, and most visibly, in terms of the schedules themselves (Bourdon 2004). The exchange of TV programmes, notably the sale and broadcast of fiction series, has arguably been the most frequent focus of international research into television history.[1] One of the main shortcomings of the way in which TV's history has been charted over the years, however, has been the dearth of comparative studies on the development of different television systems. In recent years, some attempts have been made to fill this void with studies carried out in English-speaking, European and Latin American countries (Hilmes 2003; Bignell and Fickers 2008; Fickers and Johnson 2010; Orozco 2002). What is lacking in these existing international comparative studies, however, is attention for television memory, the recollections of the medium held by the viewers themselves. The similarities and differences that may be found between historical viewer experiences in different countries will surely aid scholars in formulating common international procedures underpinned by theoretical concepts. Moreover, if we combine existing work on national communities with new international comparative studies this would significantly reinforce the study of television memory.

2. Television memory and audience research

Though memory studies as a discipline is still in its infancy, the methodology of oral history has already provided rigorous analyses of television viewer reception and of the way in which media memory functions in contemporary societies. Oral history has in particular proven to be an effective tool in compiling biographies of television professionals and in drafting institutional histories of the television stations themselves. However, the recollections of stars, journalists and entrepreneurs involved in the production of television programmes in a variety of countries paint only a partial picture of television memory. I will argue that oral history can serve not only as an auxiliary tool, but also as a conceptual vantage point for the diachronic and historical analysis of television reception and that

the latter is essential if one wants to unravel the way television memory is formed.

The reconstruction of viewers' recollections of television has been the objective of a number of historical research projects. An important advantage of sources and approaches connected with oral history is that they can be employed in research on different television systems; studies have shown that despite structural differences between the European and American television systems, oral methodology is appropriate for the study of either (Podber 2001; Boddy 1995). In Europe, Tim O'Sullivan's research (1991) into British television between 1950 and 1965 used information gathered by interviewing octogenarian couples from three different regions of the United Kingdom in their own homes. Focusing on Spanish television, my own project entitled 'The social impact of television in Spain. Its origins in Andalusia through the memories of the first viewers', constituted a historical study of the social acceptance of television in Andalusia during the 1960s (Gutiérrez 2006).[2] Finally, while Latin American studies into television history have tended to focus either on political control of television or on its economic workings (Orozco 2002; Fernández 1987), there have also been scholars that turned to audience research. For example, Mirta Varela who reconstructed the memories of early TV audiences in Argentina by conducting some one hundred biographical interviews in which the country's first viewers were asked about the process via which television was introduced in the 1950s and how their own personal relationship with the medium was established (Varela 1999).

Some of the research projects described above were undertaken not only with the aim of providing new historiographical perspectives but also in response to the absence of any audiovisual texts that could be analyzed or, in some cases, the lack of access to the TV archives in which these were kept. Naturally, all these works must be integrated into and complemented by the models for interpreting reception and assessing message comprehension, such as developed by media studies, cultural studies or the Latin American critical approach.

In addition to oral history as a methodology, we must also draw on theoretical notions of the concept of social memory, however evasive, conflictive or ephemeral we may consider the term to be. As the historian Wulf Kansteiner pointed out, scholars in memory studies will have to continue to design innovative ways of understanding media reception in order to study past, contemporary, and future collective memories (2002). I fully agree with him when he underlines that 'the media, their structure, and the rituals of consumption they underwrite might represent the most important shared component of people's historical consciousness, although this non-confrontational, semi-conscious, non-referential, and decentralized process is extremely difficult to reconstruct after the fact' (Kansteiner 2002: 195). Having explained the importance of television memory to the study of television history in this first part, I will now move on to outline the difficulties involved in defining the concept of television memory in more comprehensive terms that do not focus purely on the past but instead embrace the field of television studies as a whole.

3. The complexity of the concept of television memory

Kansteiner defines the concept of collective memory as the result of the interaction between three types of historical factors: 'the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore or transform such artefacts according to their own interest' (Kansteiner 2002: 180). Following Kansteiner, I understand television memory as not limited to television (audience recollections of specific programmes or archive material), but also extending to ways in which television's past is utilized by various people. This includes both its institutional and commercial exploitation by the TV channels themselves and the more spontaneous consumption enjoyed by fans and viewers. Such usage is yet another symptom of a brand of television memory that is rooted, sociologically speaking, in the preoccupation with the past that characterizes contemporary Western society.

Jacques Le Goff has noted that our control over what we remember and forget, collective amnesia, has become a major cause for concern in all societies (Le Goff 1991: 133). This phenomenon, the memory trend, is rooted in what the French historian Pierre Nora has referred to as the 'era of commemoration' and in our fixation, from the standpoint of the present, with the past rather than the future. He believes that this fact is linked to the apparent speeding up of historical processes with what is known as the 'reheating of the present' (Nora 1984-1993). New media (including the post-broadcast age of television) are changing existing time structures, combining a return to the past and the present moment in equal parts. What role does television play in this phenomenon? A crucial one; so much so that Andrew Hoskins has noted that 'if television transcribes memory and history into artificial form, then what is required is a *re-transcription* of the media's lexical and visual imagery into something recognizable as new memory' (Hoskins 2001: 341).

While the task of defining and analyzing media memory, a concept linked to the ways in which individual and collective identities are forged by television's messages, journalistic or otherwise, is by no means an easy one, it is nevertheless an enormously appealing challenge. As Amy Holdsworth writes 'the relationship between television and memory is an underexplored area of study which stems perhaps from the familiar narrative in which television is seen as an 'amnesiac', responsible for the 'undermining' of memory' (Holdsworth 2010: 130). The critical view (Mellencamp 1990) has traditionally been that the neverending flux of television to which the viewer is exposed makes it impossible for the medium to be seen as a formative or contributory factor in memory construction, with the possible exception of television content related with historical experiences considered traumatic within the societies to which they are broadcast. However, the consolidation of research into the relationship between memory and the media casts serious doubts on that hypothesis: not only does television help create shared recollections within a given society, its own televized history also enables it to generate a common memory among viewers both of the actual television programmes and of the social uses made of the medium itself.

Research on memory, an activity which is establishing a new field of academic study that entails risk and opportunity alike, cannot eschew the key role played by the media in general, and by television in particular, in this process of continuously constructing the past. Though the theoretical and even metaphorical concepts employed to justify its influence are many and varied, those most frequently cited concern the 'mediation', 'pre-mediation' and even 'remediation' effects generated by television (Zierold 2008: 392-393; Erll et al. 2009; Van Dijck 2004: 271-272). For me it is undeniable that memory of the past and of what was shown on television is a binding element of collectiveness. The concept of 'collective memory' (Halbwachs [1925] 1994, [1950] 1968) is inexorably linked to a continuous, inter-subjective process of construction and reconstruction. In this line, I consider television memory as an emotive concept, linked to a combination of personal experience and fragments of historical recollection. It is a consciousness or memory that is even shared on an international scale in the Western world, though with obvious and certain differences in terms of national identity, social status, gender or other circumstances.

The complexity of defining the concept of 'television memory' and the way in which it is analyzed is without doubt one of the toughest challenges faced by the discipline of television studies. This complexity is bound up with the theoretical tensions and bases inherent to the new area of memory studies. Studies into collective or social memory are still in the stage of final consolidation and redefinition. Nevertheless, the interdisciplinary nature of research into social and cultural memory (Kansteiner 2002) has facilitated a swift interrelationship with media and cultural studies methodologies. However, and as Susanne Radstone concludes, given the lingering complications that continue to cloud the field of memory studies, it is expedient on occasion to turn to the same theoretical models and methodologies that were initially borrowed by cultural studies from the academic sphere and which played a key role in its earliest advances, such as those drawn from anthropology or literature. She argues:

> Both Cultural and Media studies are themselves interdisciplinary subjects that borrow their research methods from disciplines including anthropology, film and literary studies [...] Memory research might currently be most productively practiced within the disciplines from which Media and Cultural Studies borrow, rather than within the transdisciplinary space of "memory studies" (Radstone 2008: 35).

4. Representations of the past on television: television as memory maker

If the oral accounts given by viewers of their television memories have provided historians with an alternative source of data, then the past has been no less prolific in supplying material for many television programmes made in the last decade. The past has gradually become ever more present in television discourse through a variety of different genres. These are fine examples of how television memory is currently visible in different formats on television channels. In this way, televi-

sion becomes a memory maker with different intentions, cultural, political or simply economic. For instance, today the major national networks, particularly in Europe, are attempting to take advantage of their television archives by retro-digitizing material and providing internet sites where visitors can delve deep into their audiovisual heritage. At the same time, however, many of these channels are also slipping nostalgic hints and references to their own programmes into primetime schedules. Therefore, public television stations interest in old archives is not related exclusively to the historical value of audiovisual fund preservation, also it has also opened the way to the location of the public broadcasters in the new television context given by new technologies and digital channels via satellite, cable or terrestrial.

Two cases, the BBC in the United Kingdom and TVE in Spain, are unquestionably representative of this tendency to use the past of television in current channel programming. The BBC, for example, has broadcasted a series of programmes entitled 'I love the 1970s', 'the 80s' and 'the 90s' since 2000. These programmes emphasized the material memories, music and fashion of these decades through images from its archives.[3] Thanks to the success of these series, specific sites at the BBC webpage were dedicated to these programmes, while others referred to the landmarks and myths of the BBC programming or the history of this British company itself.[4] One of the most significant and recent projects of the British corporation with regard to the social construction of television memory is called *BBC Memoryshare*. The site is a living archive that blends memories from 1900 to the present day both of the audience and the different channels of the corporation. It allows users to share contents and comments across different platforms and social networks.[5] TVE, also a major European state public channel, created a thematic channel from the contents of its archive in the late nineties. From 1997 until 2005 *Canal Nostalgia* was devoted exclusively to fiction productions and programmes from TVE's history. Between 2005 and 2009, to celebrate the 50 anniversary of the Spanish state broadcaster, TVE launched other similar channel called *TVE-50*, one of the first channels of Spanish Digital Terrestrial Television. Like the BBC, TVE has made great efforts in digitization and facilitating public access to their archive. Since these projects require strong financial investment and are labour intensive, they are ongoing.

Television memory is not only visible in thematic channels. 'Traditional' television has used the past in a number of different genres to attract audience interest, like documentaries, fiction series and films. These have been joined more recently by the exploitation of television memories through magazines, shows, comedy and parody. In the case of Spain, the existence of an older audience with a generational interest in the past, combined with the influence of TV chiefs who in their day experienced television as children (not to mention the possible involvement of political interests), has helped to revitalize programmes about both the historical past and the past of television itself. Fiction series have enjoyed the greatest following. *Cuéntame como pasó* (Tell me how it was), produced by Televisión Española (TVE), attracted a weekly average of 6-7 million viewers and a 40 % share in its initial seasons and has been one of the country's biggest hits with viewers and critics alike since 2001. It narrates the adventures of a

typical Spanish family, the Alcántaras, during the 1960s and 1970s, in the midst of Franco's dictatorship. It is essentially a Spanish version of the US series *The wonder years* and similar adaptations have appeared in Italy and Portugal. *Cine de barrio* (Local cinema) is another fine Spanish example of a programme that relies heavily on the past. The format this time consists of weekly screenings of low-quality Spanish films, musicals and comedies that were popular during the 1960s and 70s. The programme is complemented by a discussion interspersed with old footage from television and cinema archives, along with the latest news about the lives of Spanish film stars. Both *Cuéntame* and *Cine de barrio* appeal not only to mature viewers but also to younger ones who are curious about their relatives' past.

Theses uses of memory are not exclusive to public television. Commercial channels now exploit media memories for pecuniary gain in much the same way as they use advertising itself, adapting them to formats more in keeping with both the tendency for dumbing down and with the popularity of celebrity gossip shows. The latest 'find' in this regard, and a format that is currently extremely popular on Spanish television, is the sensationalist documentary. Under the guise of serious investigation, this type of programme uses material drawn from old press cuttings and even from TVE's own audiovisual archives to chart the careers of the famous faces that habitually adorn the pages of the country's gossip magazines. Another example is the nostalgic chat show. Devoted to TV stars and to the retrieval of television memories rather than historical ones, this genre relies predominantly on comedy and on what Raphael Samuel refers to as 'retro chic', i.e. referring to the past in order to make jokes about it and take advantage of its lighter side (Samuel 1994: 95). The degree of indifference shown to the social significance of the past ranges from light to absolute. In the words of Joan Moran (2000: 158), the nostalgia to be found here is not intended to help us to recreate or reflect upon the past, but rather to paint a superficial picture that can be exploited for economic gain. Television chiefs are thus to be found among the 'memory merchants' that reap the benefits of the *mode retro* (Le Goff 1991: 178).

I believe that any exercises in nostalgia and memory undertaken by public and commercial television channels alike, through their sites as well as programming, should essentially contain an element of cultural and critical discernment. In order to achieve this, all viewers must be capable of making critical appraisals of television messages designed to appeal to their sense of nostalgia. We should proceed with caution, though: it must be stressed that while television (or televized) memory refers to the past, it is not actually the past itself, in the same way that the past is not history. Its very nature means that television content is capable of offering no more than a reconstruction of the past. Though individual memory is partially dependent on human intellect and reason, its roots are nevertheless firmly anchored in emotion. It is precisely to the emotions of its audience that the language of television seeks to appeal. For this reason, programmers have used the lure of nostalgia to awaken and arouse viewers' memories as a means of capturing their attention.

As audiences have become progressively fragmented, a number of once-hegemonic major channels have sacrificed their younger viewers and sought instead

to establish sentimental or emotional ties with the older generation through a variety of products. The re-running of old television series or the past used as a setting for the fictions is not in itself a new programming tactic, from *Bonanza* to *Mad Men* there have been countless examples of these uses of the history as an attraction to audiences. However, the fact that they are now coexisting and even integrating with the new formats and genres that characterize today's participative, interactive brand of television makes them worthy subjects of consideration and analysis for any study of television and its history. As Brian Ott writes, programmes in which the past plays a leading role ('nostalgia television') now share billing with others aimed at younger audiences more accustomed to the newer products of narrowcasting ('hyperconscious television'). Both can be seen as a response to the uncertainties generated by the Information Age:

> Hyperconscious television savages the past, shamelessly stealing and mixing pre-existing styles and genres. It revels in reference and reflexivity. Its impulse toward the present is one of reverie and it may therefore be thought of as belonging to realm of postmodern imagination. Nostalgia television, by contrast, salvages the past, rescuing it from obscurity and obliteration. It deals in sincerity and authenticity. Its impulse toward the present is pessimistic and it may therefore be thought of as belonging to the realm of postmodern nihilism (Ott 2007: 14).

5. Towards a new participative television memory

In the wake of the retrieval of television memory and the fresh uses to which this legacy has been turned by the internet, we must seek a more complex explanation of television's second lease of life and the new ways in which it is received. The TV historians of the future will need to explain why a brand of television that had been presumed dead is still very much alive and kicking, why certain things are forgotten but not others, and why our interest in history that is neither television-related nor televized appears supplementary rather than indispensable.

The concept of television memory is changing. Our experience of 'today' is also changed by this constant presence of yesteryear, due largely to the mass dissemination of the latter effected by the media, notably television and digital archives. The current traces of artificial memory present in collective recollections, combined with the new complexities brought by connectivity, an area in which Google, YouTube and Facebook exert as much influence as television itself – there is no need to remember anything because we can access everything at any given moment – have led to what Hoskins calls 'a 'collapse' of memory' (Hoskins 2004). However, we must not forget that televized memory is no more than a continuous rebuilding of incomplete, carefully-selected media images.

Traditional television now reigns supreme among the new breed of audiovisual broadcasting platforms. Interactivity has not only strengthened the fan base of old-style television content, whose members hold 'wakes' at which they swap memories of the series and programmes of yesteryear. These new social networks

also generate different modes of consumption in which TV's past is occasionally reviewed with irony, melancholy or even hope that the experiences revisited might one day be fully revived either on the big screen or by new television formats devoted to the task of trawling through the medium's golden age. Though the producers of TV and digital media keep a close watch on these fashions and trends, it may well be that they are more interested in exploiting the market than in offering faithful historical reconstructions.

The internet has turned products intended for ephemeral consumption only into collectable items. This same phenomenon applies to the programmes produced for modern television, a platform currently undergoing a process of transformation, and also to those originally shown on traditional TV which, paradoxically, are now being revived in small doses or digital resurrections. These resurrections often come from the 'mausoleums' where the traditional channels recover their own history and its archives in the shape of commemorative programmes, nostalgic broadcasts and the depictions of television's past offered by their Internet sites (Holdsworth 2010: 132). However, viewers themselves also 'desecrate' the vaults of television history by sharing – and discussing – their own stockpile of recordings, recollections and experiences related with television as we have known it thus far.

The unrepeatable and irretrievable nature of past television experiences has led to the adoption of new methods of production and, more significantly, of distribution and consumption (Lotz 2007). Though attempts are being made to recover audiovisual archives of the major TV stations and make them available to all, they are currently no more than a potential institutional source of television memory. Meanwhile, personal collections of material, many of them fragmented or pirated, are being uploaded to the internet. As Hoskins writes, 'the traditional materiality associated with the artefactual archive has been challenged by the fluidity, reproducibility and transferability of digital data' (Hoskins 2009b: 6).

Thanks to social networks and other digital platforms, most television viewers now have the opportunity to climb aboard the flagship of days gone by, bringing with them, in diverse but always enriching ways, fragments of a past that clearly reflects their own personal experiences. As media scholar José van Dijck explains, the circulation of audiovisual files which can be commented on and exchanged via internet has led to a merging of personal and collective memories in which users are 'individual agents as active producers and collectors of mediated memories' (Van Dijck 2004: 273). The driving force behind this desire to share, discuss and revisit the material broadcast by traditional television is undoubtedly emotion. In a process defined by Maffesoli as the imposition of 'the culture of feelings', emotions have become one of the keys to understanding present day society (Rodrigo 1995: 135-145). As Rodrigo asserts, the power of the media lies in their capacity for establishing emotive behaviours that can be emulated by the audience. I believe that this line of research is vital to the task of understanding the different brand of exploitation of viewer memory carried out by traditional television channels to date using a variety of formats, nostalgic or otherwise. At the same time, it should also lead us to consider the causes behind the consumption and enjoyment of the past now exercised by internet users.

As much as television on the internet may pay continuous homage to the present, the blurring of timescales is yet another ingredient of the simultaneity that currently holds sway among the interactive media and in the ecosystem of globalization. The past is woven into the products that these platforms offer the public; in those of a more serious, reliable nature, these hidden corners of yesteryear evoke shared emotions and create a sense of social cohesion and communal history. We coincide with Hoskins when he recognized that we could now speak of a 'diffused memory', 'a living memory that is articulated through the everyday digital connectivity of the self (with others and with the past) that can be continually produced, accessed and updated, but which is also subject to different although nonetheless highly significant modes of 'forgetting" (Hoskins 2010).

At the same time, however, we should not forget that the presence of this continuously reconstructed audiovisual memory is also conflictive: social networks do not establish scales of importance or provide a context for the content that is displayed and exchanged. Furthermore, the apparently transient nature of digital files is more likely to throw up further problems than to provide solutions; it might even become a significant factor in the construction of collective TV-linked memories (Hoskins 2009b: 12). For this reason, the state-financed public media must at least be urged to retrieve television's past in a stable, responsible manner that is both contextualized and compared with other international systems. This is the main aim of certain European research projects as Videoactive (http://videoactive.wordpress.com/) and EUSCREEN (www.euscreen.eu/). Perhaps these will help television to become a new medium that can provide a mature, civic construction of the past, rather than merely serving as a tool for creating public memories tainted by political bias or aimed at camouflaging specific periods in history. For this reason, it is essential that all viewers, the older ones included, and in their role as users of memory, be taught to view representations of the past critically. In the future, television historians and researchers will also need to delve deeper into the effects of mixing the currently omnipresent past of television – and, by extension, that of society itself – with the present.

6. Conclusion

The technological changes that affect television, coupled with the comparative youth of memory studies as an academic field of study, have significantly conditioned our understanding of the implications of television memory, of the various ways in which it is manifested, and of the contribution made by its active agents or users (TV channels, historians and viewers, not forgetting, of course, the role played by television's historical archives themselves). Nevertheless, though television is currently in a state of constant change, we cannot overlook the social importance of television memory to contemporary societies in general, and to television theory in particular.

In this article, I have argued that the understanding of the extent to which television memory is present today in various different guises should be an essential element when rethinking television theory. These guises range from the TV chan-

nels' own exploitation of bygone days (evident in those programmes which seek to attract viewers to eminently nostalgic products) to the presence of the past in the debates, formats and activities characteristic of the new digital era. The concept of television memory must not be understood as an encyclopedic memory, as it was during the times when audiovisual archives was closed to public access. Rather, it should be viewed in relation to the ongoing process of creation, closer to the new modes of 'Wikipedia age' participation, where the importance of institutional agents will coexist with individual contributions from audiences like memory users.

Within the new concept of the medium characterized by technological convergence, multiple channels, unlimited broadcasting and interactivity, the field of research that focuses on viewers and, more specifically, on the concept of television memory will be crucial to the study of television history, as well as providing vital clues, which will lead us to conclude that the contents associated to the television past are, in fact, still very much alive.

Notes

1. One of its weak points, however, has been the scant identification and assessment of the flow of news between countries, while the sharing of formats, ideas and even scheduling strategies is another aspect of international television's comparative history that has generally been overlooked (Cohen et al. 1996).
2. The project was based on a multi-method research system which combined a questionnaire, qualitative focus group interviews and the use of complementary articles from the period.
3. Before these programmes, a channel launched in 1992, UK Gold, as a joint venture between Thames Television and the BBC, began to show repeats of their classic archive programming. The offer based on the past changed through the years and it is now part of the different services of UKTV, a digital cable and satellite television network, a joint venture between BBC Worldwide and Virgin Media.
4. See for example, www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc (1 October 2010).
5. See www.bbc.co.uk/dna/memoryshare/ (25 September 2010).

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Part III: New concepts

YouTube beyond technology and cultural form

José van Dijck

1. Introduction

In his seminal work *Television: Technology and cultural form* (1974), Raymond Williams described television as a medium to be understood in its various dimensions: as a technology ('broadcasting'), as a social practice ('watching television') and as a cultural form ('programmes'). Williams deployed this multiple view of television to scaffold two broader concepts: the concept of 'flow' – an endless stream of concatenated programmes that glued the viewer to the screen – and the concept of 'mobile privatization' – referring to the way in which mass media makes mobility an endeavour that can be pursued in the privacy of one's own home, allowing people to see what happens in the world without having to leave their living room. Williams' theory has long been held up as a model of nuanced thinking: his perspective accounted for television's technology, in both its institutional and commercial manifestations, for its social use, regarding viewers as both active and passive subjects, and he connected these two aspects to the specific forms of audiovisual content. Albeit implicitly, Williams also tied in these developments to television's regulatory, hence political, context, as he compared American commercial television to British public broadcasting service (the BBC).

Williams, in 1974, could have never predicted the emergence of a novel 'tube' thirty years later. When YouTube was introduced in 2005, the media landscape was still dominated by television. The new platform that allowed people to share their self-produced videos online, was conceived in a Silicon Valley garage by Chad Hurley and his friends. Even if the technology was not as revolutionary as broadcast television was in the early 1950s, YouTube rapidly developed into the biggest user-generated content (UGC) platform available on the web 2.0. Five years after its start, YouTube, now a subsidiary of Google Inc., is the third most popular internet site in the world, boasting two billion videos a day and attracting 'nearly double the prime-time audience of all three major US television networks combined'.[1] Millions of users contribute and watch self-made videos, short TV-clips, music trailers, compilations, etc. on a daily basis. In a very short time, YouTube has become a significant presence in the global media landscape.

Evidently, Raymond Williams' theory far predates YouTube's emergence, and yet his basic model for understanding a novel media phenomenon is still useful today as a starting point. Looking through Williams' theoretical prism, YouTube will be defined in this chapter as a technology, a social practice, and a cultural

form; over the past five years, many terms have been launched to describe these aspects, but there has been no systematic attempt to define this new platform vis-à-vis television. First, I want to define YouTube's new technology as 'homecasting', and specify this concept in relation to broadcasting – a system historically cemented in centralized production, simultaneous programming, and individualized mass reception – and narrowcasting – aiming media messages at specific segments of the public. Next, I will discuss YouTube as a social practice, namely 'video-sharing'. The activities of uploading, watching and sharing videos online both expand and alter our rapport with the medium of television, while the systems of broadcasting and homecasting remain intimately intertwined. Third, I will explore the dominant cultural form engendered by YouTube: 'snippets', as I will call this form, refers both to the limited length of an average YouTube video and to the typical self-produced video content. A systematic distinct terminology helps name the *cultural* value of user-generated content – a strategy badly needed if we want to affect the dominant legal-economic paradigm in which most political and ideological debates concerning video-sharing's legitimacy are grounded.

It is precisely at this point where we have to upgrade and expand William's model to make it better suited for the web 2.0 era. The new media ecology is a rapidly changing media landscape where user-generated content platforms shake up the balance still dominated by the 'device formerly known as television' (Uricchio 2004). When considering platforms such as YouTube, we need to take into account that new platforms do not simply fit the old economic and legal logic because their technologies, social practices and cultural forms are vaguely defined, let alone accepted as valid parameters. New claimants seem to be trapped in the same vocabularies, showing the ultimate interdependency of television and YouTube. So, in order to critically analyze the full implications of this new platform, we have to expand Williams' model by fully integrating a legal-economic perspective in addition to the proven factors.

2. YouTube as technology: homecasting

When adopting new technological systems, it is not enough to establish a new institutional practice; it takes time for a technology to evolve in conjunction with its social use and cultural form while it simultaneously tries to nestle itself into a scheme of vested economic interests. It is important to keep this kind of complexity when defining a novel technology. Since 'YouTubing' never caught on as a brand-turned-verb the way 'Googling' did, I will introduce the concept of homecasting as a means to understand the platform's function in relation to already existing institutional practices such as broadcasting. YouTube is not, in any way, the equivalent or even a derivative of television. If anything, homecasting is derived from 'home video'. The neologism denotes the use of video-sharing websites to download and upload self-produced or preproduced audiovisual content via personal computers *from the home* and *to anybody's home* (that is, networked private spaces). The term homecasting betrays its kinship to broadcasting, on the one hand, and to home video, on the other. Like 'webcasting', the term indicates

the technological convergence of TV and PC in the homes of individual users (Ledoux Book and Barnett 2006; Ha, Dick and Ryu 2003), yet the word 'home' has more social and cultural connotations than the word 'web'.

Homecasting technologies are not the same as peer-to-peer technologies, but they are similar in at least one respect to the technologies of narrowcasting and microcasting: YouTube has a central server that holds the content collected by its users. In recent decades, the centralized point of television programming power has been complemented by the decentralized distribution of audiovisual content by production companies targeting specific niche audiences. Narrowcasting, as this phenomenon is called, was made possible by the proliferation of hundreds of cable outlets engendering the fragmentation of audiences and leading to socially splintered mediascapes (Smith-Shomade 2004). The explosion of digital channels in the early years of the new millennium added the possibility of personal viewing schedules and content targeted at specific consumer profiles of preferred lifestyles and cultural tastes. Lisa Parks (2004, 135) introduced the term 'flexible microcasting' to refer to this phenomenon as a 'set of industrial and technological practices that work to isolate the individual cultural tastes of viewers/consumers in order to refine direct marketing in television – that is, the process of delivering specific audiences to advertisers'. Narrowcasting and microcasting are defined in terms of reaching specific targeted audiences for specific audiovisual contents, a feature they have in common with homecasting.

However, the differences between broadcasting and narrowcasting – and, in its wake, 'microcasting' – on the one hand, and homecasting on the other, are more significant than their similarities. Couched in the rhetoric of technology, homecasting means two-way communication via the internet – a form of transmission in which both parties involved transmit information – as opposed to the one-way distribution of audiovisual content involved in broadcasting and narrowcasting. Platforms like YouTube, GoogleVideo, MySpace, Revver and Metacafe do not produce any content of their own, but only accommodate the distribution of content produced by their users. As connoted by YouTube's former logo 'Your Digital Video Repository' – which later gave way to the 'Broadcast Yourself' logo – the platform is a 'container' or an archive rather than a (broad)caster whose principle function is to send audiovisual content (Gehl 2009). While broadcasting and narrowcasting refer exclusively to the one-way direction of media messages sent, homecasting refers primarily, though not exclusively, to the way in which users can upload audiovisual messages to the site. Of course, not all uploaded content is homemade: much content on video-sharing sites consists of prerecorded works first broadcast on television.

In contrast to broadcasting, which is confined to a centralized space and a central agency that controls the supply and deliverance of signals, the internet connotes a space for purposeful activity where reception and production of signals occurs from numerous individual terminals in the network. The absence of a centralized sender and the potential for two-way signalling constitutes the most profound difference with conventional broadcast or narrowcast organizations. Families, political activists, and garage bands are equally capable of streaming their messages across the internet, be it person-to-person or worldwide. How-

ever, the distributed nature of homecast networks does not imply *absence* of control. As Galloway (2004: 7) states, control in distributed systems is defined by protocols – computer protocols which 'govern how specific technologies are agreed to, adopted, implemented, and ultimately used by people around the world'. Unlike broadcast networks, homecast platforms such as YouTube or GoogleVideo do not decide what viewers get to see at what time (a continuous flow of programmed content), but watching videos is a based on viewers decisions, facilitated by search engines and ranking algorithms. Through these automated systems, millions of videos can be searched and found; YouTube's interface design and organization determines to a large extent the popularity of specific videos. In other words, YouTube controls video-sharing traffic not by means of programming schedules but by means of metadata, search engines, ranking and profiling systems, which are all employed by users. On the one hand, homecasting systems like YouTube are video archives through which users tag, select, distribute and retrieve audio-visual content 'as they flow through any other library or collection' (Gehl 2009: 45). On the other hand, homecasting systems are social media platforms, where the technological features provided by the website (channels, comments, featured videos, rankings) allow users to form communities and connect to each other on the basis of connective algorithms.

In both its manifestations as video repository and social network, YouTube's technological system should be defined not in contrast with but in relation to (mainstream) broadcast technologies. Despite early technology gurus' prophesying the decline and eventual demise of broadcasting (Gilder 1994; Miller and Allen 1995), television has never changed its distinct technological and organizational base. Projections of a 'post-broadcasting age' tend to reduce 'broadcasting' to a technological system that is bound to affect social use. The phrase symbolizes the danger of subscribing to a simple replacement theory of consecutive media constellations, yet homecasting will never replace broadcasting, just as broadcasting never disappeared when narrowcasting gained popularity. By contrast, Jostein Gripsrud (2004) convincingly demonstrates the continued importance of broadcasting in its function to serve regional and national communities, even in a five-hundred-channel environment. Along the same lines, the distribution of user-generated content via sites such as YouTube will not further expedite television's obsolescence. If anything, the two systems are inextricably intertwined in the process of defining *each other's* distinct function; this interdependency becomes most manifest when we regard technological changes in conjunction to social use, cultural form and the economic infrastructure which gives rise to broadcasting's and homecasting's co-evolution.

3. YouTube as social practice: video-sharing

'Video-sharing' appears to be the most appropriate container-label for the social activity triggered by YouTube, yet it is essential to acknowledge a multiple number of activities subjugated by this term. 'Video-sharing' also means quoting, favouriting, commenting, responding, posting, downloading, viewing, archiving

and curating videos on this platform – activities that are all equally fundamental to the site's prolific usage, even if not *all* users engage in *all* these activities. In terms of usage, YouTube appears to be more akin to the social practice of making and distributing home videos than to the practice of (producing and) watching television programs and yet, both practices are intimately related.[2] For decades, people have spent their leisure time filming family life and showing off the results to selected neighbours or relatives. And long before the emergence of video-sharing sites, homemade audiovisual products were also distributed to anonymous television audiences, for instance through popular programmes such as *America's Funniest Home Videos* (AFHV), whose format has been franchised to many countries since the 1980s.

Watching television and video-sharing, the social uses associated with broadcasting and homecasting, even if distinctly different, are also mutually inclusive. Whereas 'watching television' conventionally signifies the medium's function to make essential information, knowledge and cultural experiences available to broad audiences, 'video-sharing' commonly relates to particular individuals wanting to exchange their audiovisually recorded experiences with a designated audience – by selecting a few individuals or a community of interested viewers. On YouTube, uploading activity either caters to specific audience groups – communities who have expressed common interests (equalling the intentions of narrowcasting) – or is geared toward the widest possible audience (equalling the intentions of broadcasting). YouTube's interface defaults users' inclination to open up their personal lives to the virtual universe and YouTube-users massively deploy the platform's distribution channels to open up their private content to the everyone who is interested. To bend a familiar cliché: if television broadcasts open up a window onto the world, homecast video-sharing deploys the looking-glass to have the world stare right back into the living room.

In terms of social attribution, watching TV is generally associated with the formation of national and regional identities, while also engendering viewers' identification with ethnic, lifestyle or special interest communities. Notably different from TV's habitual uses, video-sharing sites like YouTube capitalize on personal expression and identity formation by means of individuals posting their own creative content on the web. 'Broadcast yourself', YouTube's evocative logo, emphasizes the marriage between private information and public staging. However, identity building and individual expression do not take place outside the sphere of broadcast media: in fact, there is no space outside the world of media, but that mediated world is an integral part of everyday life, inundating the minds of people with numerous modes of identification. Not only have people's homemade audiovisual products, over the past decades, become integrated in the professional worlds of broadcast media (such as AFHV), but conventional media constantly provide models for people to shape their own expressive needs – exemplified, for instance, by the many videos of teenagers imitating their pop idols on YouTube. This double-bind of mediated dependency is part of a more general trend toward the public mediation of private life – a trend to which John Thompson (1995: 215) alerted us ten years *before* the emergence of YouTube. Video-sharing often appears to be a unique means for individual's ambitions to

become part of the professional media world of stars and fame; young singers are 'discovered' through YouTube, but massively plugged through conventional media. Broadcast and video-sharing platforms are becoming increasingly interlocked and their entanglement requires intensified scrutiny (Thompson 2005).

In yet another respect of social use, the relation between watching television and using YouTube is distinctly different yet closely interconnected. The notion of 'video-sharing' emphasizes the inherently reciprocal nature of the site's usage. Due to its function as a social network, YouTube, much like Facebook and MySpace, is geared towards the formation of communities and information exchange – a social platform rather than a mass medium. From this assumption, we would expect YouTube's users to be actively engaged participants, rather than the passive couch potatoes we have come to associate with television audiences. But just as the myth of the passive television consumer was dismantled by cultural studies theorists in the 1980s and 1990s (Ang 1991), the classification of the active YouTube user as someone who constantly uploads content, comments on featured videos and helps ranking videos is similarly in need of demystification. The large majority of users on YouTube consist of occasional viewers who have never uploaded a single video or never commented on a posted video (Van Dijck 2009). As Cheng, Dale & Liu (2008) observe 'this indicates that users are more willing to watch videos rather than to log in to rate and make comments'. In a sense, the majority of YouTube viewers are not very different from television viewers in that they lean back to consume audiovisual content on their screens, except that they have to click on a mouse to select the videos they want to see. Most users come to YouTube contents by means of referrals – either from other internet platforms (blogs, friends, news sites) or from automated referral systems on the YouTube homepage, but the active role of the *majority* of users are actually quite limited.

Just as television stations are eager to capture viewers' attention by programming a 'flow of content', as Raymond Williams typified the produced concatenation of television programmes, video-sharing sites are keen to keep their users glued to the screen. If YouTube was initially seen as television's potential competitor in becoming the audience's favourite pastime, five years after its emergence video-sharing still lags far behind in terms of the attention economy. Compared to the five hours a day Americans spend watching television, people spend fifteen minutes watching videos online (Stross 2010). Short videos averaging between three to four minutes in length are unlikely to hold interest when watched in long sequences. A typical user watches six videos a day and a typical sequence of videos is unlikely to hold the attention span of viewers as the short length of each video presents too many opportunities to leave the 'flow'. With regards to YouTube, we could call the sequence of videos a 'staccato flow', indicating the self-selected short videos sequenced by user's clicks.

Not surprisingly, YouTube's owners worry about the platform's economic viability if video-sharing as a social practice cannot compete with that other important leisure activity – watching TV. In order to boost video-sharing as a common social practice, platforms are launched to accommodate the large majority of rather 'passive' YouTube users. NowMov, a recent San Francisco start-up, offers a staccato flow experience by using Twitter feeds to determine which YouTube

videos are appearing with the greatest frequency in Tweets, and by automatically sending them to their users. The seamless flow of most-tweeted about videos provides and endless leanback experience, taking the selection effort out of the YouTube-activity. In addition, Google recently announced they will introduce 'YouTube Leanback', an attempt similar to NowMov's to take the dangerous decision points out of the staccato flow; the company will also introduce 'Google TV', an attempt to win over the living room as a strategic terrain for the parent company by directly enlisting hardware manufacturers and cable service providers in adopting Google-supplied technology to navigate television content and online video (Stross 2010).

In sum, YouTube's platform owner is competing with television on the latter's terms, as the attention economy for users is entirely defined by the broadcast industry's economic paradigm. With regards to its users and usage, YouTube appears to be distinctly different from television and yet the first cannot be seen separately from the latter. Video-sharing, the social practice promoted by this UGC-platform, evolves in close connection to the common activity of watching television, even if the two leisure experiences, at first sight, seemed to have little in common. This paradox is further enhanced if we look at YouTube's cultural forms.

4. YouTube as cultural form: snippets

Even though Raymond Williams launched the flow as television's most characteristic cultural form, it is in fact the programme that counts as the true legal definition of television's unique product. Television programmes have always been tradeable and consumable goods that were produced for specific markets and were preferably also sold to other (national, regional) markets. Cultural forms, including TV programmes, are considered end products and are hence protected by laws regulating ownership and copyrights. The new types of content produced and distributed by video-sharing sites like YouTube are different. First of all, the preferred cultural form engendered by this platform is *short*: its maximum allowed length is ten minutes, while a YouTube upload averages three minutes.[3] Second, video-sharing sites favour various general categories of content: original creations, transformative derivatives, and copied or 'ripped' content. From the articulation of these terms it occurs that one form of content is preying on another while obeying a succinct hierarchy: users can only 'quote' and 'derive' from television programmes. A corollary to this argument is that television programmes can never be derivatives of 'original content' created by individual users. However, this is pertinently untrue: television programmes have always also been 'derivatives' of users' creations – think, for instance, of AFHV – and YouTube movies are increasingly integrated into mainstream television (e.g. the news, TV shows).

Therefore, it is important to specify and label the type of content produced through YouTube on *its own terms* if we want to understand its preferred genre as an autonomous *cultural* form rather than as a derivative, and if we want to

catalogue the *cultural* dynamics by which user agency is encouraged or inhibited. So what would be an appropriate term to label YouTube's preferred cultural form? 'Fragment' and 'clip' are inadequate words to describe the kind of content contributed to video-sharing sites. Evidently, we can find many examples of clips and fragments posted on UGC-websites, but 'video clips' refers to ready-made cultural forms (usually music-videos) and 'fragments' fallaciously suggests that all uploads are cut from pre-existing content. The word 'snippet' seems best to characterize the new cultural form promoted by homecasting channels. In contrast to traditional TV programmes, snippets are of limited length, ranging from several seconds to ten minutes, but the bulk of postings average between three and six minutes.[4] 'Snippet' covers the limited length of most uploads, whether they imitate the begin-middle-end form of a polished audiovisual production or an unfinished piece (Burgess and Green 2009: 49). Although most snippets are one-time contributions, they may be accessed serially, for instance, when the same uploader posts a line of thematically connected videos. But arguably the most crucial feature of snippets is their status as *resources* rather than as products; they are meant for recycling in addition to storing, collecting, and sharing. Snippets, by common agreement, are posted on video-sharing sites to be shared, reused, reproduced, commented upon, or tinkered with. Their status as recyclable and unfinished products is thus an inherent characteristic of snippets, as also exemplified by music sampling in relation to recorded music.

The hybrid status of snippets seriously challenges the governing legal-economic order in which this new cultural form is trying to find its place. The first problem hinges on the fact that 'programmes' and 'snippets' represent two seemingly incommensurate legal schemes. Whereas programmes are copyrighted and owned by corporations, no one can claim ownership of snippets posted on videosharing sites which issue their use under a creative common licence, such as the original YouTube site did. Indeed, YouTube's terms of use contain explicit warnings against the illegal copying of broadcast content, but the same terms explicitly encourage video-sharers to regard *all* feeds as potential input – recyclable resources in the life cycles of creative culture.[5] The site's self-description says it 'hosts user-generated videos [and] includes network and professional content'. Strangely enough, YouTube sets the standards for a new type of cultural form – the snippet – while also inevitably inducing the appropriation of content produced under an adverse regulatory regime. The right to 'own' seems squarely at odds with the 'right to appropriate' audiovisual content. The stakes in this debate are high: the broadcast industry (Viacom, Disney) have been waging battles against YouTube to protect their 'legal property' as the only possible *type* of property in the audiovisual content market, by articulating the stakes of this debate in industrial-legal terms (Lessig 2008). Even fragments as short as two seconds cannot be 'recycled' in any other context without paying royalties to the copyright holder. But few contenders in this battle point at the other side of this coin: mainstream broadcast corporations are eager to include (free) snippets aired on YouTube in their own programmes, in order to attract new audiences to popularize their content.

The second hurdle for YouTube to create a legitimate type of content is not

legal but economic in nature, as it concerns the commercial-institutional context in which Google operates and trades its new cultural forms. Initially, in 2005, YouTube started out as a community-based website filled by volunteer users and operated on a non-profit basis. Since YouTube's takeover by Google, in 2006, the social practice of exchanging videos has gradually but notable changed from being community-based to being commercially based. Google's business strategy has been fought by the media moguls dominating the television branch, as they first did not know whether to see YouTube-Google as friend or foe: either to go after them and use their historic prowess in electronic media distribution to impose their rules on this newcomer, or side with them in creating new business and marketing models that help homecasting channels to create buzz for television programmes or films. What is clear, though, is that both broadcasters and homecasters like Google are after the same bounty: attention from advertisers and users. Not surprisingly, we may witness a growing interest on either side to closing deals for the mutual use of content and thus forego or settle expensive legal battles.

Over the past five years, established broadcast organizations have renegotiated their relationship with the new kids on the block, such as rapidly growing media mogul Google, not because they like this development per se, but because it is crystal clear that user-generated content (that is, self-produced video) is a value-adding product attracting the interest of advertisers.[6] Whereas broadcasters fashion channels to target specific audiences with programmes and commercials, homecasters enable groups of voluntary, active users to form their own 'communities' – users with like-minded tastes and lifestyles – a commercial asset whose value has not escaped the attention of advertising agencies. If NBC, ABC, CBS and PBS can be considered the construction companies of the media world, YouTube and MySpace are likely to become the Home Depots of the television industry. And even if they will fight each other's turf over copyright and intellectual property rights of snippets, they will not only reset power relationships in the mediascape, but also refurbish the meanings of commerce and commons, of individual and group identity (O'Brien and Fitzgerald 2006). As Burgess and Green (2009: 35) aptly sum up: 'What the copyright wars illustrate particularly well is the difficult dual identity that YouTube, Inc maintains. YouTube needs to be understood as both as a business – where the arguments of Viacom et al. might be legitimate – and as a cultural resource co-created by its users – where these arguments strain for credibility'.

Why is it important to define 'snippets' if this new cultural form is bound to operate under the same old legal-economic aegis as conventional programmes? There is an important reason for identifying distinct cultural forms, in addition to the technology of homecasting and the social practice of video-sharing. Naming and defining distinctive technologies, social practices and cultural forms is a deliberate strategy to assign distinct user agency in an increasingly complex media landscape. Extending the comparison between YouTube and Home Depot, it may be unthinkable for an organization of broadcasters to legally frustrate or thwart the activities of homecasters, just as it is unimaginable to conceive of a lobby of construction companies trying to prohibit home owners from remodelling,

renovating or even completely demolishing and rebuilding the house they once bought from these companies. To be sure, consumers who take a short clip from recorded television content or from the DVD they already paid for, and use it as a resource in their own creative product, are still liable to be prosecuted as a result of copyright laws that increasingly deny users the right to cite or rephrase parts of intellectual end products such as programmes, clips, or films. YouTube and GoogleVideo, who are currently defending their new cultural forms are forced to do so in a legal-economic paradigm set by the established broadcast industry. While the broadcast industry is preying after a new bounty (user-generated content), they fiercely protect the turf that legally limits their own cultural form (programmes) as the *only* standard in the business. They have a vested interest in warding off competing forms, because they need to point out that all alternatives are mere derivatives of the only legitimate cultural form. So the definition of a new socio-cultural paradigm implies an insistence on a different ideological (or normative) stance, which may help facilitate a change in the dominant economic framework in which this debate is grounded.

Over the past five years, heated debates about the validity of the dominant paradigm set by the broadcast industry have led to some changes, such as the Creative Commons movement (Lessig 2008). In this debate, homecasters need to strike a delicate balance between the claims of users as rightful creators and tinkerers of content, and the proprietary claims of broadcasters as legal owners of some of the content that is tinkered with. Therefore, it is crucial to not define the current debate on content exclusively in terms of legal ownership of programmes or fragments, but to launch a new terminology that helps rephrase the discussion in culturally relevant terms. Theorizing the terms *homecasting, videosharing* and *snippets* – as legitimate equivalents of *broadcasting, watching TV* and *programmes* – may provide a level playing field where socio-cultural values stand on equal footing with economic ones.

5. Conclusion

Raymond Williams' multi-layered prism, used to assess television as a complex of technology, social practice and cultural form, still turns out to provide a solid basis for evaluating television as a technology and cultural form. However, the emergence and development of a new phenomenon like YouTube requires a necessary update and expansion of his theoretical view to include the legal-economic context of a changing media landscape. Without such an inclusive approach, we miss out on critical aspects of the platform's meaning.

In the first five years of its existence, YouTube has itself evolved from an amateur-run platform for user-generated content to a substantial commercial player, closing deals with broadcast conglomerates and major media players. Arguably, YouTube has to adapt to the dominant legal-economic paradigm in which it evolves, because its content is intrinsically intertwined with mainstream television productions. On the other hand, YouTube's new gold is preyed on by established media owners. Self-produced audiovisual content, uploaded to popular

sites like YouTube, are eagerly integrated in the commercialized business model of broadcasting services. Indeed, television and home videos never belonged to entirely different spheres, but their firm interlocking in the web 2.0 economy positions 'home' in on the spotlights of global cameras, dispersed through video-sharing sites, social networking sites and search ranking systems. As Henry Jenkins has argued, the ultimate convergence of PC and TV aims at a technological fluidity of systems that lets audiovisual content flow across multiple channels, resulting in 'ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture' (Jenkins 2006: 243).

The paradoxical convergence of collaborative culture and commodity culture – of television broadcasting and YouTube homecasting – is applauded by entrepreneurs who welcome the 'collaborization' of commodity culture (Tapscott and Williams 2006) and reproved by media critics as the commodification of collaborative culture (Van Dijck and Nieborg 2009). The future implications of vertically integrated industries – combining content producers *and* search industries *and* advertising agencies *and* information aggregators – are typically the focus of political economists theorizing the macro-economics of the media industries, who are also updating their approach to include the new digital industries (Schiller 2007). And yet, political economy approaches generally tend to include technology instrumentally rather than integrate it analytically, and they more often than not completely gloss over the specific role of users and especially of cultural forms. My argument in this article, to introduce a new vocabulary to name and define YouTube's generic technology, social practice and cultural form, is a step towards the creation of a more transparent media logic in which new platforms are not analyzed *exclusively* in terms of economics, but where a legal-economic perspective is functionally paired off with an integrated techno-socio-cultural viewpoint.

In sum, what is needed for future media theory is a media approach that combines technology, social practice and cultural form – the way Williams integrated these aspects of culture – with a critical legal-economic perspective on media change. Media theorists and cultural critics need to pay more attention to the growing significance of user-generated content in a new media ecology (Croteau 2006), but they cannot simply accept the conventional models of the broadcast era. The case of YouTube is used here to exemplify the need for a theoretical framework that encompasses all five factors involved in the shaping of new media platforms. We can no longer afford a singular perspective on these related and interconnected phenomena. Perhaps this upgraded and expanded Williams 2.0 approach will help to construct a multi-layered analytical search light to scrutinize emerging phenomena in the culture of connectivity.

Notes

1. See a press release of May 16, 2010: www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jK-4sI9GfUTCKAkVGhDzpJ1ACZm9Q. The Alexa ranking (No. 3 worldwide, after Google and Facebook) was measured in May 2010.
2. As Burgess and Green (2009: 43) in their magnificent book on YouTube have shown, more

than half of YouTube's content consist of user-created content, while 42% comes from traditional (mainstream) media sources. Video-making and watching television are related activities, comparable to, for instance, sampling music and recorded music.

3. To be more precise: an average YouTube video lasts 2 minutes and 46 seconds. These numbers were found in 2008: http://mediatedcultures.net/ksudigg/?p=163.
4. According to Cheng, Dale and Liu (2008), who conducted a systematic and in-depth measurement study on the statistics of 77 million videos uploaded on YouTube, almost 98% of all video lengths are within 600 seconds, and the average length is between 3 and 4 minutes.
5. See YouTube's terms of use: www.youtube.com/t/terms.
6. In March of 2007, big players such as NBC Universal and News Corporation launched a new company to pool all their video content and like other players in the field (Viacom, Warner Brothers) they filed law suits to stop Google from allowing 'illegal postings' on YouTube and GoogleVideo.

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Move along folks, just move along, there's nothing to see
Transience, televisuality and the paradox of anamorphosis

Margot Bouman

How do we watch TV? Introduced into mass distribution after World War Two, in its first decade, economies of scale resulted in two concurrent sites of consumption for television: neighbourhood taverns, and the homes of the very wealthy (McCarthy 2001; Rose 1986). As prices for television sets fell, by the end of the 1950s television penetrated the homes of the middle class. The first wave of television scholarship consequently focused on the overwhelmingly domestic content of commercial broadcast network television (usually understood to be a family medium), the introduction of the public sphere into the home and thus the domestic sphere, and the experience of home viewing; much of it from a feminist perspective (Friedan 1964; Meehan 1983; Marc 1984, 1989; Lipsitz 1988; Hammamoto 1989; Haralovitch 1989; Boddy 1990; Leibman 1995; Mellencamp 1986). Largely absent is a systematic understanding of how the relationship between television's context (the home) and television's content (the programming) is contingent on a set of historical, institutional and economic conditions; conditions that have since changed, along with the way that television's audience watches TV.[1] What results is a set of assumptions about television's audience that continues to inform discussions of both television and its audience, even as television systematically occupies and subsequently alters new contexts.

Here is a more accurate way of asking the same question: how is the way we watch TV organized by where we are? Earlier scholarship and public commentary on television described certain contradictory experiences. First, television is watched. Second, watching television takes place inside the home in a dedicated, stable space, such as a family room, or the living room, or the bedroom.[2] Third, as a consequence of this domestic stability, watching television is something that a viewer can leave and return to repeatedly. Thus, 'watching' television becomes a different experience than going out to the movies, or a live theatrical event, or a dance performance, or the opera, where the audience is restricted from entering the building before the show's start, and prevented from staying after its end. Out of this emerges television programming that is structured on imperfect concentration—or flow and its interruptions—and the insight that domestic labour performed in a state of distraction, such as childcare and housekeeping, is facilitated by the structure of commercial network broadcast television (Williams [1974] 1992; Modleski 1984; Spigel 1992). Fourth – contrary to the third assumption – the viewer and the television set are both assumed to be stationary.

The way we have come to watch TV at home has had far-reaching consequences. Discourses produced by government policy, public health policy, adolescence studies and journalism, to name a few, all conflate the imperfectly focused way we watch television with family, domestic space, stupor, and a withdrawal from active citizenship.[3] Artists and art theorists echoed these assumptions, while joining them to the hope that artists could reconnect these audiences to a democratic impulse by awakening them from their stupor and making them absolutely attentive. Building on the programming structure of flow and its interruptions, the Korean artist Nam June Paik developed the concept of programming rupture in his early (1963) installation at the Parnass Gallery, in a letter to the New School for Social Research (1965), and then in a piece intended to be broadcast on WGBH Boston, *Electronic Opera #1* (1969). In her television action *Facing a Family* (1971), the Austrian artist Valie Export placed a family in the television studio where they sat staring into the camera, staring back at all the families in their living rooms. In *Reverse Television* (1984), the US artist Bill Viola videotaped a series of motionless 'viewers' staring into the camera, comfortably ensconced in their domestic settings. In collaboration with the Boston-area public broadcasting station WGBH, these portraits were inserted, unannounced, into the regular programming flow.

All of the above – especially Export's and Viola's work – presupposes a temporal relationship of stability between the home, its occupant and electronic media. The temporal dimension of home is better expressed through its synonym, dwelling, whose current definition derives from the Old Norse: to 'abide', or to 'stay'. In Middle English, 'dwell' shifted from 'hinder', to 'delay', to 'linger', and finally to 'make a home'. The contemporary meaning of dwelling, and home, carries forward this spatiotemporal dimension of a permanent relationship to place. All places that are 'not home', on the other hand, have in common a spatiotemporal relationship of transience with their users. The current formation of transient space finds its roots in the seventeenth century. Transient or transitional spaces describe built environments where nobody is permitted or expected to remain for very long: in the city, this includes department stores, public libraries, subway platforms, sidewalks, and public parks, as well as performance spaces. Richard Sennett writes that movement within a city was associated from the Baroque period onwards with health and good organization. Motion received even greater primacy when Enlightenment city planners made it an end unto itself, instead of, as Sennett observed, 'planning streets for the sake of ceremonies of movement toward an object […]' (Sennett 1994: 264). The net result of this is a city, and then a broader infrastructure of transportation, labour and domesticity, which becomes defined through a series of interlocking and interwoven transient spaces. The broader network includes highways, industrial parks, airplanes, airports and rest stops. Marc Augé coined the term *non-lieu* to describe architectural and technological spaces that were meant to be consumed in passing, leaving little or no trace of their users' engagement. These non-spaces, primarily associated with transportation and communication are, for Augé, the defining characteristic of our current moment, which he describes as 'supermodernity'. Where I depart from Augé is in my presumption that all spaces outside the home are transitional,

not just a particular class of space. Thus what Augé is describing is an extreme version of a broader spectrum of temporary occupation, not a new relationship between space and movement (2008).

The distinctions between the users of these transient spaces can also be expressed through temporal relationships. Workers return for a portion of each day to their place of work, depending on the duration and form of their employment. Commuters pass through a set combination of transitional spaces on a regular basis as well, albeit for shorter periods of time. Consumers on the other hand – of culture (tourists), goods (shoppers), services (client, patient), enter a country, shop or waiting room, linger, and do not regularly return. Not only is 'not home' defined as a place where people do not dwell, or cannot stay, but furthermore people who are exclusively defined by these places are themselves characterized as either transients, or homeless. Paul Virilio describes a further radicalization of the primacy of movement when he argues that the freedom of a pedestrian's coming and going was replaced in the twentieth century by an obligation to move (2009). Thus, what distinguishes one transient space from another is not only the speed at which movement takes place and how long the temporary stoppages are, but also how it is controlled, and who is controlled. This obligation is reinforced not just through passive vectors such as city planning and architecture, but more actively by corporate and government agents. Transience here acquires a particularly brutal overtone when a transit employee feels empowered to bring her baton smashing down on a subway seat beside a sleeping transient, forcing him

Fig. 1: Example of 'stop and release' herding pens used by the New York City Police Department for mass demonstrations. In this image the police have just pulled out the barricades to control the flow of the crowd following the appointed path in a protest against the looming war on Iraq that took place on February 15, 2003. Photo by author.

awake and into motion. And 'Move along folks, just move along, there's nothing to see' is a now-familiar phrase used by police both real and fictional to prevent the flow of pedestrian traffic from clustering around any number of unsanctioned or traumatic events: a political protest, unlicenced street performers and vendors, a recently committed crime, a wounded man. This phrase has been refined by the New York Police Department into a complex crowd control system of barricaded walkways and 'stop and release' herding pens that are brought out for mass protests, assemblies and celebrations. Used in 1998 on New Year's Eve around Times Square as part of a broader preparation for the millennium celebrations, they have been subsequently brought out for mass demonstrations protesting the World Trade Organization meetings in 2002, the looming war on Iraq in 2003, and the 2004 Republican convention.

These political, architectural and urban forces form the discursive environment that television enters when it expands into transient space. As I observed at the outset, notwithstanding the overwhelming focus on domestic content and context, since the 1940s, television has formed at the very least a minor part of these transient spaces (McCarthy 2001). However, on these surfaces television has more recently swelled into every imaginable space of commerce, labour, domesticity and transport. In coffee shops, restaurants, laundromats, bars, and waiting rooms, television sets are perched on shelves, suspended from ceilings, hung on walls. Across every form of transportation system, television has expanded and fragmented. LCD screens blanket the exterior and fenestrate the interiors of airports and train stations, airplanes, trains, and municipal buses. Televisions now punctuate the outdoor landscape of public thoroughfares.

Not only has television fully penetrated transient spaces, but the emulsifying effect of the televisual has altered the build environment. The commercial strip that springs up outside of mid-sized communities and clusters around highways; the shopping mall; the freeway, and the franchise hotel are all identified as televisual spaces for their reproduction of television's illusionistic production and modular structure. For example, Michael Sorkin describes a new type of exurban environment, defined by 'hermetically sealed atrium hotels cloned from coast to coast' and the 'disaggregated sprawl of endless new suburbs without cities' (Sorkin 1992: xi). For Sorkin, both share the structural forms of television – the modular interchangeability of its commercial programming – as well as what he identifies as television's placelessness. The alteration brought about by televisuality takes place psychically, as well as physically. Chris Rojek describes a process of 'restless movement' between virtual and actual, televisual and referent when writing about the manner in which 'cinematic events are dragged on to the physical landscape, and the physical landscape is then reinterpreted in terms of the cinematic events' (Rojek 1997: 54). In other words, both the televisual Times Square and the actual Times Square changes our interpretations of each.

Following Anna McCarthy's 2001 *Ambient Television*, scholarship has begun to focus on television found in what I describe as transient spaces, and others describe as public spaces. For example, Andrea Press and Camilla Johnson-Yale study how the content of the daytime talk show is integrated into African-American hair salons (2008). Joy Fuqua looks at the introduction of television into

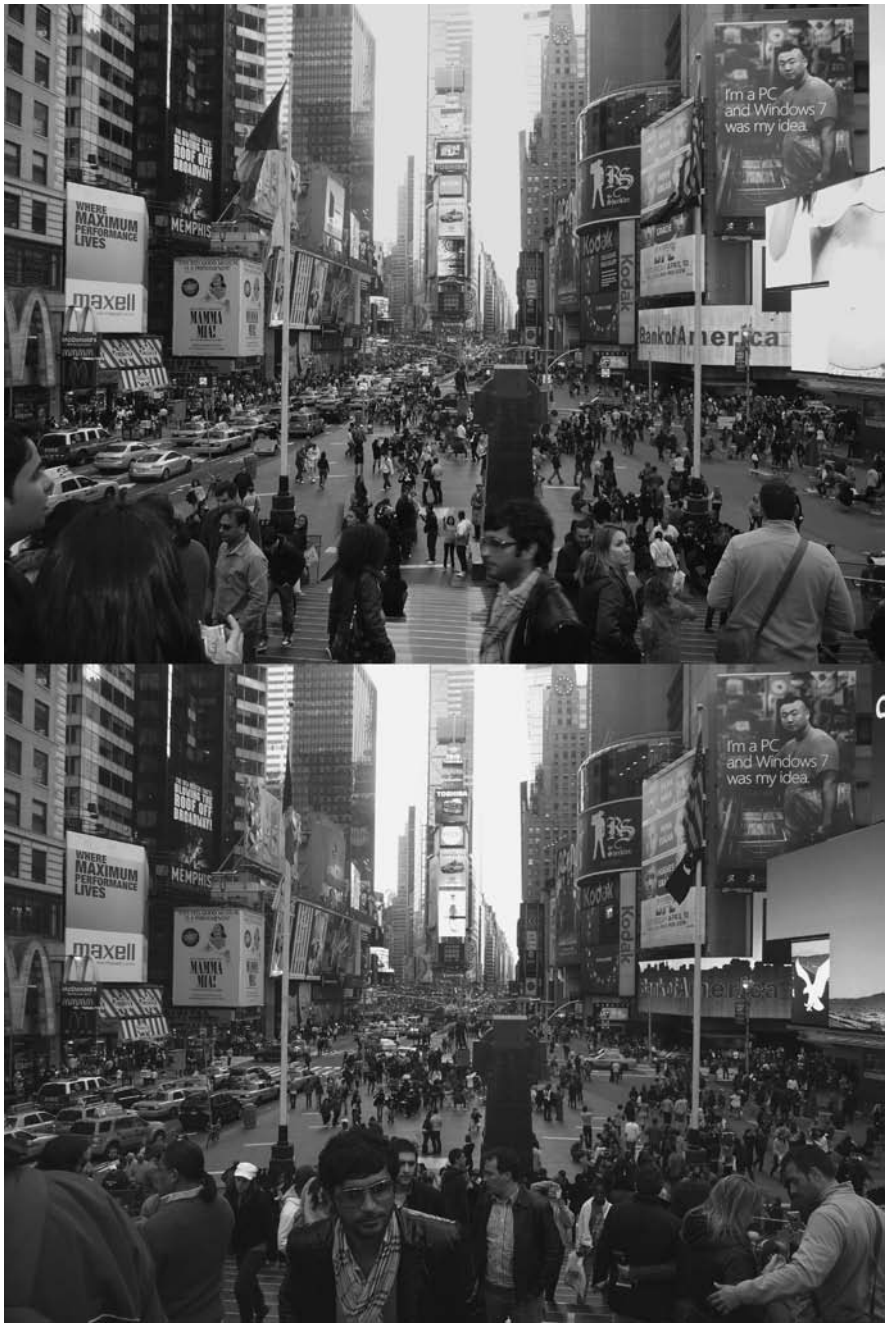

Fig. 2: The iconic example of expanded television, Times Square, NYC. Notable in these two photographs, taken within seconds of each other, is the transient nature of the foot traffic, motorized traffic, and images that fenestrate the surrounding architecture. Photo by author.

the hospital setting: by building on received notions about nurses' labour and patient comfort, manufacturers persuaded hospital administrators of the benefits of television (2003). Holly Kruse postulates that the recent and planned renovations of horse racetracks that incorporate simulcast monitor-viewing spaces accommodate different forms of social interaction that resemble sports bars. This, for Kruse, raises questions about how technology organizes space and about the nature of our experiences in physical spaces created to accommodate interactive media (2003). Given that transience controls and defines both people and spaces; determines who is watching whom, and what is being built; how outdoor spaces such as walkways and parks, squares and arcades are being designed, and for whom, television cannot be 'watched' in these new spaces the same way we watch it at home. However, McCarthy and these authors choose the stationary aspect of these spaces, when they focus on their temporal nature at all. While the very act of calling attention to the fact that users of these spaces are obliged to stop – and therefore watch television – indirectly assumes an a priori condition of movement and transience, they do not consider the new viewing conditions produced by the overriding obligation of people to move. McCarthy considers the corporate privatization of daily life through the deployment of television in waiting spaces such as doctor's offices, train terminals and airports. In these spaces, McCarthy argues, 'corporate television time' helps produce a spatial experience of 'publicness', while managing these captive populations with television, inoculating them against the frustration and boredom of waiting (2004). Like McCarthy, Peter Adey indirectly assumes a prior condition of transience by addressing the immobilities that airports impose on passengers in part through the strategic placement of television throughout the terminals and gate areas, and the resulting forms of spectatorship. Adey argues that the airport has become not a space merely to travel through, but is now also designed to hold people in specific spaces, a change that has in turn been dictated by airline and airport regulation and economics (2007). How does the transient nature of these new spaces shape our experience of television? The relationship between television and architecture? Television and urban planning? Television and transportation systems? If remaining still in an environment where movement is controlled acquires a different meaning, how does the merging of television into a built environment that is organized by transience produce new conditions of watching that goes beyond forced immobility? In these new contexts, where the viewer has limited control over a fixed space that is so necessary to the experience of 'watching' television at home, the televisual model of flow and its interruptions that originated from a domestic context acquires new dimensions, through the paradox of anamorphosis.

Anamorphosis is a perspective system that appears in a drawing by Leonardo da Vinci in the late fifteenth century. Anamorphic perspective manipulates the image in such a way as to make it appear illegible when viewed from the same vantage point as the one required by one-point perspective. One-point perspective had been developed in the early fifteenth century by the Italian architect Filippo Brunelleschi, and resulted in mathematical clarity and a sense of unity between the viewer and the image. As the apocryphal story goes, Brunelleschi conducted

an experiment in Florence, in which he had viewers look through a small hole in the door of the Duomo at a mirror in which was reflected the Baptistry. The mirror was removed, revealing Brunelleschi's painting of the same subject using one-point perspective. To the viewer, the painting and reflection were nearly indistinguishable. Frequently embedded in one-point perspective paintings, murals, prints and drawings, these anamorphic images can only be seen by 'looking awry', or by looking at an image from an angle that distorts the one-point perspective. Anamorphosis is most commonly associated with Renaissance and Baroque easel painting, Hans Holbein The Younger's *The Ambassadors* (1533) being the most prominent example.

In this double portrait of what is presumed to be Jean de Dinteville, Seigneur of Polisy on the left, and Georges de Selve, Bishop of Lavaur on the right, the two men stand front of a richly patterned green curtain, and on both sides of a wooden table. Over the table hangs a carpet thought to originate from central Anatolia, a region in modern day Turkey. On the table are objects associated

Fig. 3: Hans Holbein The Younger, *Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve ('The Ambassadors')*, 1533. © The National Gallery, London.

with science, exploration, music and religion: on the table top is a celestial globe, a quadrant, a torquetum and a polyhedral sundial. Among the objects on the lower shelf is a lute with a broken string, a Lutheran hymnbook, and a terrestrial globe. Objects, furniture and men are represented using one-point perspective. An image is also painted in using anamorphic perspective, and shows up initially as a grey and beige smear across the center of the bottom half of the painting. However, when viewed from an angle, or from awry, the smear transforms into a skull. The skull was an image frequently included in Renaissance painting, and was intended to remind the viewer that time was fleeting, and that all earthly accomplishments, wealth or rank would be washed away before the inevitability of death. Holbein does not introduce this *memento mori* in the primary perspectival system, but indirectly through anamorphosis, staining the viewer's awareness and causing her or him to shift their position in order to ease the itch, to solve the puzzle, to see what else is present in the image field.

Like anamorphic perspective in easel painting, television and the televisual introduces an incommensurable visual system into transient spaces. While it also does so in the home, because movement and stillness is more rigidly controlled, in transient spaces this incommensurability produces different outcomes. In a restaurant, when a cooking show is being broadcast at one end of the dining area and a football game at the other, the restaurant patron – immobilized in her seat –is torn between agreeing with the cooking show judges' assessment of a contestant's dish, following (or being irritated by) the progress of a football game, observing the inattention shown by other restaurant patrons to their families or their food, and making an extra effort to maintain her attention on her dish, and her dining companions. While walking down a street, a pedestrian will notice in passing a televisual advertisement screening above a subway information sign, but will miss either the beginning or the end of the narrative, prevented by the flow of pedestrian traffic and her desire to keep moving. Television in transient spaces would thus appear to exacerbate a pre-existing state of distraction by dividing attention across yet another media form. In addition to 'distraction', equivalent English terms are scattering, dispersal, and dispersion. A state of distraction is semi-conscious, its temporality is non-linear, and its context is the everyday and thus shared by leisure and labour. Described by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s, architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art that is absorbed by a collective in a state of distraction. Most importantly, Benjamin stresses that this form of reception is embedded in a routine: 'Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building', but instead must be understood as a familiarity that is acquired with the individual work of architecture, through the force of habit slowly established over time. Such an individual thus gains 'the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction' such as moving through transient spaces (Benjamin [1936] 1973: 240).

When writing about anamorphosis, Hanneke Grootenboer poses the first of two paradoxes that it produces: do we understand the deformation produced by anamorphic perspective to be secondary to the system of one-point perspective, or does the opposite hold true (Grootenboer 2005: 99)? In other words, the nar-

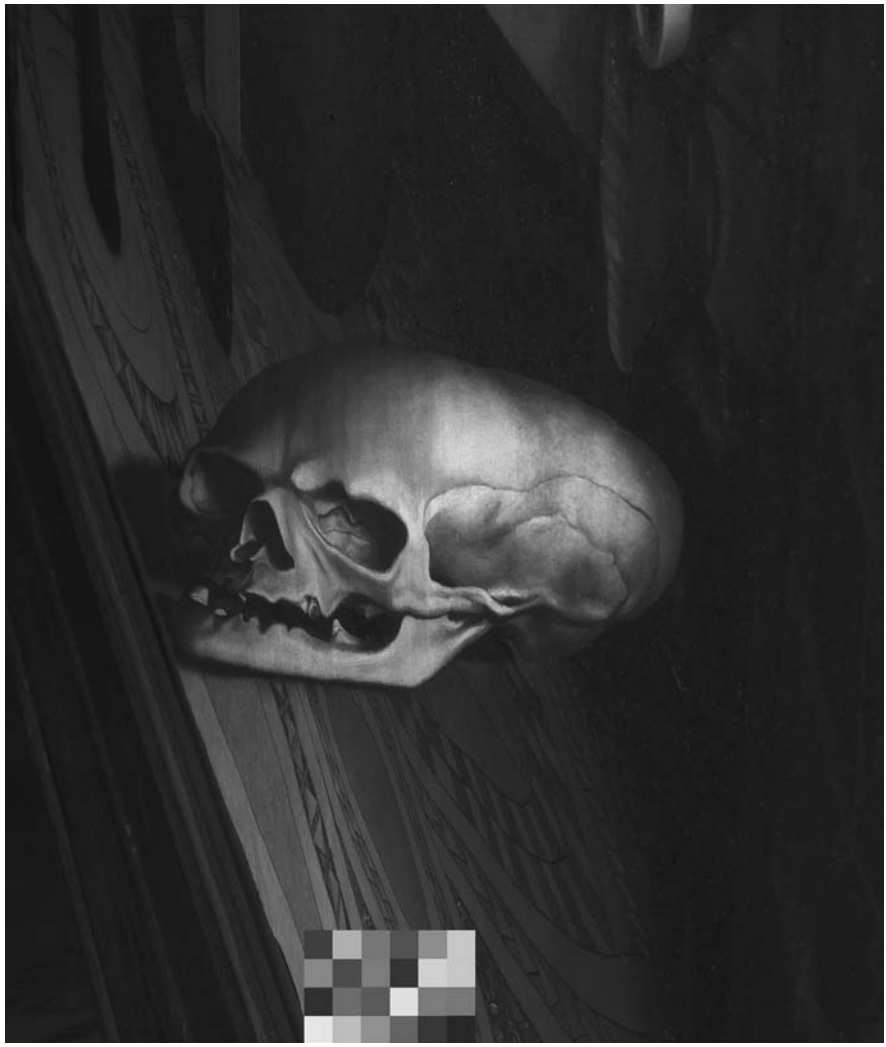

Fig. 4: Detail of Hans Holbein The Younger, *Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve ('The Ambassadors')*,1533. © The National Gallery, London.

rative of Holbein's *Ambassadors* that I provided does not necessarily stand. A visitor to the National Gallery in London, where the painting is on display, could approach it from another gallery and see the floating skull first, and then the men, the interior, the objects. What is true is that both perspectival systems are not simultaneously viewable. Either one or the other must produce a certain degree of confusion, of obfuscation. Or, as Grootenboer puts it: 'Leaving the standardized point of view will provide us with the capacity to unearth the distortion within this picture as well as in our perception' (Ibid.). As I observed, this confusion of meaning takes place in the interstices between the viewer's body and the image. Furthermore, anamorphosis is not confined to easel painting. Grootenboer

describes anamorphic perspective embedded into murals painted onto the walls of cloisters and corridors, such as Emmanuel Maignan's *St Francis of Paula*, a 1642 fresco painted in a corridor of the Trinità dei Monti church in Rome, Italy. These anamorphic images are only perceptible at the threshold of these corridors. Because of the transient nature of the space, the viewer would be obliged to only pause momentarily, absorb the anamorphic image, and then move on. Here, Grootenboer notes, 'the viewer makes the image move' (Ibid.: 106).

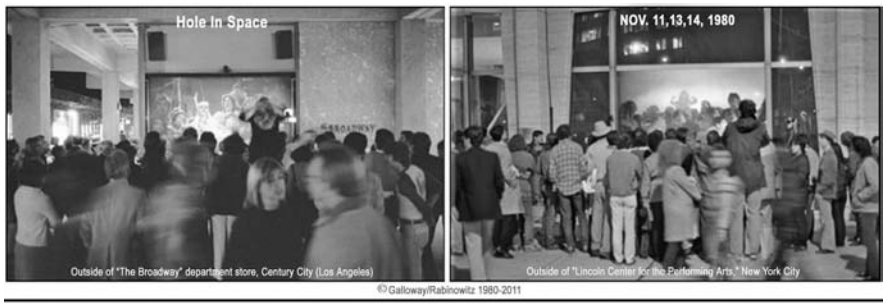

Fig. 5: Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz, Hole in Space: A Public Communication Sculpture, 1980. © Galloway/Rabinowitz, 1980-2011.

In transient spaces, the anamorphic paradox that results from the confusion between the two visual and haptic systems, or the televisual and the architectural, creates a sense of confusion between whether to stop or to move, to pay attention or not: does one ask for another seat at the restaurant away from the television, disturbing other patrons and the wait staff; or does one stop at the top of the stairs leading to a subway to watch the end of the advertisement's narrative, creating temporary chaos for the other commuters. Historically, anamorphosis also conceals dangerous political messages, or erotic imagery: with every secret there is a moment of revelation. Its perspectival logic, therefore, 'invests in revelation as much as obfuscation' (Grootenboer 2005: 102). In a similar fashion, refusing the obligation to move in order to watch TV produces its own revelations, and depending on the context, potentially political consequences. In times of collective crisis, or celebration, people gather around television screens in transient as well as domestic spaces to watch an unexpected disaster unfold, or historically momentous events such as election results. In 1980, Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz investigated this confusion between two systems with their public video installation *Hole in space: A public communication sculpture*. Galloway and Rabinowitz did not draw on the dominant model of distraction prevalent in transient spaces. Rather, they produce an interruption, or a rupture and a new model for the interrelationship between television, its new space, and audience *avant la lettre*. On November 11, 13 and 14, 1980 they established a two-way live satellite connection at street level between a site in the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City and the Broadway Century City department store in Los Angeles. Video cameras, speakers and rear projection screens were

installed in display windows at each location. Each screen displayed life-size images of passers-by from the other location. For two hours on each transmission evening, passers-by drawn to the work's window sites in each city discovered a peephole through which they could see, hear and talk with strangers 3,000 miles away. There was no initial publicity, and no signs or instructions were posted nearby for the pedestrians.

In the video compilation of the event exhibited after the fact, the artists screened a record of the work by cutting between showing the Los Angeles and New York City screens side by side, and highlighting a selection of the dialogues that took place between Los Angeles and New York City. The document stresses a series of reunions, chance encounters and games. The prevailing affect is one of wonder over live communication taking place between two points on either side of a continent. In the beginning of one such exchange, in the left-hand screen passersby from Los Angeles have paused, on the right a group in New York City. A woman to the far right of the Los Angeles group clustered around the shop window stands up on her toes and shouts, 'Where are you?' Overlapping replies ensue: One man: 'where are we?' Another: 'We're in front of Lincoln Centre in New York City.' Disbelieving, the woman in LA repeats: 'You're in New York? Are you, are you in New York?' Her pleasure over this revelation overcomes her, and she slaps her knee and whoops in wonder and disbelief. The rest of the segment is given over to interviews of pedestrians at the scene. A man in New York City compares the LA crowd to members of Broadway musical The Chorus Line. When asked to comment on the installation a woman in LA summarises the confusion produced by two incommensurate visual systems by replying: 'They're in New York? I'm in Los Angeles, right?'

For Rabinowitz, the 'video image becomes the real architecture for the performance because the image is a place. It's a real place and your image is your ambassador, and your two ambassadors meet in the image. […] It becomes visual architecture' (Durland 1987). With this comment, Rabinowitz merges the image with urban architecture, predating Beatriz Colomina's observation that modern architecture is an extension of electronic media and vice versa (1994). Commenting about *Hole in space*, the media theorist Gene Youngblood observed: 'People have kind of a phantom limb sensation, it's actually visceral' (Durland 1987). The act of wandering through the city fuses with what Samuel Weber distinguished as television's unique ontology, the jolt of experiencing temporal simultaneity across two different spaces, and predates the possibility of live mobile communication produced through cell phones, or internet-based video phones (Weber 1996).

On the second night of the three-night life of the work, participants begin experimenting with the interactive possibilities. A man and a woman flirtatiously 'pass' drinks back and forth between Los Angeles and New York City. Their exchange creates a social space that is, in the words of Elaine Ho, at once displaced and intimate.

(NYC): Hey where you goin'?
(LA): Huh?
(NYC): Where you goin'?

(LA): Where am I going? I'm staying right here with you!
(NYC): Oh I like that baby! Oh I like that girl, we gotta be together sometime!
(LA): Hey baby don't let me catch you!
(NYC): Say what baby?
(LA): Don't let me catch you inside my building.
(NYC): Hey girl I'm coming over to look for you personally baby.
(LA): Oh yeah?
(NYC): Oh yeah!
(LA): I got your number huh?
(NYC): I hope you do girl!

Ho goes on to observe that the 'the protective layer shielding city dwellers dissolves into an unabashed fascination with the other' (2011). Rather than describe it as a dissolution of layers, I would link the exchange to other urban social spaces such as a club or a festival where distraction is replaced by attention, movement slows, and exchanges become more complex. In other words, the work is not a departure from exchanges that take place in transient spaces, but rather a shift in temporality that results in a sense of hilarity, euphoria, and even transcendence.

As Grootenboer observed about anamorphic perspective more generally, 'Such art possesses the rare quality of being able to disrupt or even shock our accustomed ways of looking and of laying bare the prejudices such looking involves' (Grootenboer 2005: 100). The 1980s is an interstitial period between avant-garde television's explosion onto the countercultural and artistic scenes in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, and video installation art's institutional reification in the 1990s. In the early 1980s, Galloway, Rabinowitz and Youngblood were unblushingly enthusiastic about the utopic potential held out by *Hole in space*. For Galloway, *Hole in space* was a model designed to 'liberate people's imaginations,' a transgressive act that took the revolution into the marketplace (Durland 1987). By attaching revolutionary potential to a work that elicited fascinated attention from its audience, a work that stopped them in their tracks. Youngblood links *Hole in space* back to the earlier avant-gardist moment in video art, experimental television and Marshall McLuhan's communication revolution of the 1960s, and forward to an uncertain revolutionary future, when a 'decentralized, two-way, special-audience system' would be possible (Durland 1987).

That a decentralized, two-way, audience-specific form of communication has been realized in the interim period between 1980 and the present goes without saying. And that its consequences have been revolutionary also brooks no argument. However the revolution has gone in directions that were not predicted by Youngblood. Rather, one of the consequences has been the increasing privatization of transient spaces, which is itself made possible by a second paradox of anamorphosis. Without referring directly to television or architecture, Slavoj Žižek uses the paradox of anamorphosis to describe the influence of the backdrop against which our everyday movements take place.[4] We are not directly aware of our surroundings, yet they feed into and inflect the way in which we move, think, feel, and act. In addition to television and architecture, many forms of media are

currently woven through the fabric of transient spaces. This second paradox of anamorphosis results in a form of mobile privatization; not the corporate privatization of public space referred to by McCarthy and others, but also the partial disconnection of individuals from their immediate surroundings and their attendant responsibilities through daydreams. Michael Bull considers this through the use of the Sony Walkman and the relational qualities attached to sound. Through this, subjects relate to and gain a sense of control over their surroundings, others, and themselves (2004). Mimi Sheller and John Urry stress a paradigm shift in the interrelationship between public and private life that is physical (the dominant car-centred system whose spatial systems are simultaneously private and public), informational (in the form of electronic communication via data, visual images and texts) and mediatized (the exposure of 'private' lives on public screens and the public screening of media events) (Sheller and Urry 2003). Stephen Groening argues that the capacity for cell phones to receive and broadcast television programmes has created a set of contradictory impulses for its users. They move through the world, while disconnecting from it and its subjects and connecting to the corporations who provide the television programmes (Groening 2010). Likewise, Patrick Allen suggests that as a result of this plethora of alternate media, the subject is dissociated from their space as a 'real' or 'authentic' experience, and is 'caught up in a world of private messages which are not connected to any single location or scene' (Allen 2008: 29). This disconnect results from incommensurate visual systems. Margaret Morse uses Benjamin's term when she describes it as a 'phantasmagoria of the interior'.[5] Morse notes that the experience of watching television is related to the experience of driving on the freeway, as well as going to the mall. All three consist of interdependent two- or three-dimensional forms. In Morse's words, these act as loci of an attenuated 'fiction effect', where the partial loss of connection to the present is experienced (Morse 1990: 193). Scholarship considering the introduction of new forms of media into transient spaces emphasizes the shift in subjective understandings of public and private.

For Žižek, this form of anamorphosis is itself the form of fantasy through which subjective forms of reality are made available. Thanks to the subjective nature of this frame, it is saturated with desire, becoming Žižek describes as 'an element which 'sticks out', which cannot be integrated into the given symbolic structure, yet which, precisely as such, constitutes its identity' (Žižek 2001: 89). Thus, television, through anamorphosis telegraphs fantasy to the viewer, while leaving her or him barely aware that it has been communicated. As Tony Myers puts it: '[…] an anamorphosis is […] the materialization of a surplus knowledge. […] Anamorphosis is, therefore, a form of suspense – it suspends the ostensive meaning of a picture or situation' (Myers 2003: 99). In other words, the disengagement that takes place in these new televisual spaces results in an individual's interior narrative moving him or her away from the preexisting spatio-temporal context. This realm of fantasy compensates for the dislocation from both work and home.

Now that it can no longer be considered a medium consumed exclusively, or even primarily in the home, how do we 'watch' TV? Watching television and experiencing the televisual in transient spaces produces two outcomes that are dis-

tinctive to these spaces. On the one hand, television is not part of the routine(s) required by transience but rather stops people in their tracks so that they can pay attention. Depending on the context, this act of stopping either flouts the dominant imperative to 'move along', or it is used to help tolerate enforced stillness. On the other hand, television in transient spaces intensifies the state of distraction described by Benjamin by both making it impossible to fully concentrate on anything else, and by augmenting the fantasy life possible for users of these transient spaces. Both attention and distraction are best conceptualized through the paradoxes of anamorphosis described by Grootenboer and Žižek. Finally, the paradox of anamorphosis exposes the falsity of the historical opposition of attention and distraction.

Notes

1. Lynn Spigel has both contributed substantially to this literature on programming content, as well as proving to be an influential exception with her focus on context, or the spaces where we watch TV. Beginning with her study of how the arrangement of the domestic interior shifts to 'make room for TV,' Spigel denaturalizes domestic TV's primary spatial context (1992, 2001a).
2. With every rule there is an exception: in this instance portable television sets in the 1960s (Spigel 2001b). Notable is Spigel's assumption that 'domestic' space accompanies the television set beyond the confines of the home. This rests on her analysis of the programming content, which was in turn shaped with the domestic site in mind.
3. One of the most frequently repeated quotations is of course the former Federal Communications Commission chairman Newton Minow's introduction to his book, *Equal time*, in which he referred to the state of television programming as a 'vast wasteland' (1964). Behavioural studies on users of the internet refer back to the claims made about TV in the 1960s that television watching takes place at the expense of interpersonal and social interactions: 'The term *couch potato* has become part of our daily vernacular, with the implication that long hours spent viewing television are a trade-off for other activities, especially interpersonal and social ones' (Nie 2001). These associations between television, passivity and the viewer's exclusion from citizenship are drawn out in essays from journalism studies (Lewis and Wahl-Jorgensen 2005); and between television, bad food choices and passivity in adolescence studies (Van den Bulck 2000).
4. Žižek used this phrase when describing the backdrop against which the narrative action of the film *Children of men* takes place, and the manner in which it feeds into and shapes the primary narrative: 'If you look at the film too directly: the oppressive social dimension, you don't see it. You can see it in an oblique way only if it remains in the background […] it's against the background it throws the light on signs of social oppression and it's the same I think in this film. [...] this fate of the individual hero remains a kind of a prism through which you see the background even more sharply […]' (2006).
5. Morse might have been better served using Benjamin's phrase 'phantasmagoria of the marketplace,' which he uses to describe the Paris arcades, the precursor to the shopping center. A 'phantasmagoria of the interior,' Benjamin writes, is 'constituted by man's imperious need to leave the imprint of his private individual existence on the rooms he inhabits' (Benjamin [1939] 1999: 14).

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Barry Chappell's Fine Art Showcase
Apparitional TV, aesthetic value, and the art market

Mimi White

> The only thing I can say is that he sells cheap what no one else wants. The Dali's are ugly, the Royos are ugly, just about every artwork he sells is ugly. I think he buys in bulk cheap what no one else wants. And he doesn't know crap about art either.
>
> --Discworldjunkie in Wetcanvas forums, 23 June 2005.

> I am an artist and have enjoyed watching Barry on Directv [sic]. He is very informative and I have learned a lot about the art business end. He has shown many beautiful pieces of work. [...] I think Barry is making art affordable to the common man, and should keep doing the good work.
>
> --AnointedArtist in Wetcanvas forums, 23 June 2005.

1. The value of art on TV

Barry Chappell sells art on television. If you believe him, he sells fine, even museum quality art at bargain prices on *Barry Chappell's fine art showcase*. *Fine art showcase* is not a particularly well-known programme and in many ways it defies the most common models of understanding American television and TV programming. Indeed, it is sufficiently marginal that I sometimes wonder if it really counts as a television programme at all, even though it airs, live, on a recurrent basis. It also subsumes many of the familiar tropes of the medium, variously engaging liveness, self-reflexivity, education, entertainment, domesticity, public service, consumerism, repetition, direct address, intermediality, and convergence. These are deployed in the context of a constant discourse about art, as the programme participates in a much longer history of art on television.[1] In the process, it raises fundamental questions about art, commerce, value, and consumer culture, and offers useful ways of thinking about current, transitional formations of television.

Fine art showcase is a version of Direct Response Television (DRTV), the industry label for programmes that market products directly to viewers.[2] Infomercials and home shopping television services are the most familiar DRTV programmes. Infomercials are prerecorded programmes that air repeatedly to sell a specific product that viewers can order by mail, phone, or online.[3] TV shopping

networks (such as Home Shopping Club and QVC) sell a wide range of merchandise through live programming, accepting orders by telephone or through the internet.[4] DRTV is not supported by advertising or by any form of subscriber fees. Instead, companies buy time on existing stations, or operate their own channels which they fill with sales programmes, and the income generated from successful sales pays for both the products and the programming. Because they market directly to viewers, DRTV companies are far less concerned with aggregate audience numbers than they are with sales volume per hour.[5]

While *Fine art showcase* resembles these familiar DRTV formats, there are important differences between them. In distinction to prerecorded infomercials, the *Fine arts showcase* is a live programme that runs from two to six hours per episode. In contrast to the 24/7 shopping networks, *Fine art showcase* is one (of only two) live programmes that air on the Celebrity Shopping Network (CSN), a channel otherwise comprised of non-stop infomercials for a variety of products including celebrity-sponsored merchandise. CSN sells cosmetic and skin care regimens by Victoria Principal, Cindy Crawford, Susan Lucci, and Leeza Gibbons; DVD sets of branded exercise programmes and the *Dean Martin celebrity roast;* and a range of household cleaning products. This is the context in which *Barry Chappell's fine art showcase* appears on television, where it is inserted into the discrepant flow of infomercials that are the mainstay of the station with its signature identity grounded in celebrity culture and domesticity. Moreover, the conceit of the programme – fine art sales – involves a product seemingly at odds with the presumptive working and lower-middle class consumer taste associated with DRTV products. This disparity is amplified by the cost of the merchandise which is considerably higher than typical infomercial products. Prices on the *Fine art showcase* vary widely, but typically range between a few hundred and several thousand dollars (US).

Barry Chappell presides over the programme from Santa Monica, California, in a studio designed to efficiently convey the conceptual scope of the programme: art, domesticity, and the retail process that connects them. An easel sits on one side of the set to display individual works of art; the other side is furnished with a large desk in front, some upholstered seating, and a photographic cityscape in the draped window on the back wall. Barry easily moves between these two areas, and conjures up the unseen production and sales area behind the camera by conversing with his off-screen staff. Barry sells singular and multi-edition artwork. Singular works (oil paintings, drawings, watercolours, signed proof runs, and unique pieces of glass art) are auctioned while multiple-edition works (silkscreens, etchings, giclees, serigraphs, and lithographs) retail for a set price. The live TV auction highlights that only one person can own the unique work, and provides prospects for televisual drama as bidders call in and push the price higher. By contrast, multi-edition art can be sold to multiple buyers at the same time. Thus, the programme adapts the process of valuing, selling, and buying art to the distinctive context of live, direct sales television.

Fine art showcase sells work by an international array of artists. Andy Warhol and Salvador Dali are probably the most famous, though the appearance of their work is extremely rare. Some of the artists are well-known for their work

in other creative fields, including author Henry Miller and American comedian Jonathan Winters. Pierre Henri Matisse has fame by association, owing to his grandfather's renown. Barry constantly reminds viewers that some Guillaume Azoulay drawings are held in the permanent collection of the Louvre. In sum, there is just enough name recognition to support Barry's claims to be selling investment or museum quality art. Yet not all of the work seems to belong, or hang, in museums. More often, it veers in the direction of mass market decorative art, resembling that found in shopping mall galleries, community art fairs, or upscale furniture stores – proficient work, albeit with uncertain prospects when it comes to long term investment or aesthetic value.

Of course, this assessment raises larger questions about art worlds, taste cultures, class distinction, and commodity culture. Judgements about the value of art are fraught, changeable, and open to debate, including considerations of how art gets valued in the first place, as well as discrepancies between the personal taste of individuals buying art and the perspectives of the (high) art establishment. These differences emerge in the vernacular of my opening epigraphs that come from a discussion thread on an art-related website. Does Barry buy and sell cheap the ugly stuff that no one else wants, or does he show beautiful pieces and make art affordable to the common man? These sorts of question are addressed in more academic terms when scholars explore the social, aesthetic, and cultural contexts that are integral to determinations of the value of art.[6]

Questions of value area also at the heart of the show, which consistently characterizes the work being sold as 'fine', 'museum', or 'investment' calibre. Barry discusses value in at least four different ways: the aesthetics of the work (art appreciation); the artist's life work (art history); prospects for the work increasing in price over time (investment value); and his prices (bargain value). Reference materials clutter his desk. He routinely rifles through piles of art books, gallery catalogues, brochures, art collecting guides, and pages from websites of other dealers who sell similar work, evidence that other art experts show, sell, and appreciate the same work that he does. Sharing this information with viewers signals his expertise and professionalism, assuring the value of his judgement and the value of the work he sells.

And yet, the programme confounds efforts to assess its value, and the value of the art, because it presents the art in terms that immediately challenge the show's claims. If this is really museum quality work, why is it being sold on TV, on an infomercial channel to boot? If a particular print is in short supply, how can Barry sell multiple copies of it on show after show? At the same time, why assume the work is not worth the asking price? He may be selling the work at a fair market price. In fact, it may be a real bargain. There are even times when I wonder: if some recognized artists can turn ordinary household objects and popular culture icons into museum quality art, why can Barry Chappell not do the same with a run-of-the-mill oil painting?

2. The art of selling the work of art

Fine art showcase markets a disparate group of artists whose work appears again and again on the show, and individual episodes intensify the redundancy, as Barry typically sells works by one artist at a time. He introduces a painter and then points out their style in each work that he sells. The formal aspects of each artist are condensed into a fixed repertoire of attributes, presented as definitive signs of the artist's personal style, and of Barry's unique insight. With Dorit Levi, he begins by carefully enumerating the signature elements of her work – the inclusion of the painting's 'colour code', use of bright colours and gold leaf, bird and clock motifs, and textural, sculpted forms that protrude from the flat surface. Then, in an almost mechanical fashion, he identifies each of these traits in each painting and print, one after another, occasionally pausing to express something along the lines of a more sincere, personal response to the artistry: 'Isn't that beautiful?'

The repetition addresses some of the challenges of showing and selling art on television. His sales approach both demonstrates and educates, putting viewers in a position to see the art in the same way that he does. The details that Barry singles out are superficial insofar as they are the most obvious visual features of the work. But they are not necessarily readily apparent on television. By pointing out the traits, often with accompanying close-up shots, Barry helps his audience to literally see, and then appreciate, the distinctive motifs at the same time that it inscribes them as the definitive style of the artist. The programme hereby cultivates an eye for art, veering in an educational direction, and the very act of iteration turns the traits that appear in one individual work after another into the most memorable information about each artist that the show provides, as it moves through each episode.

As a result, considerations of singularity and multiplicity, originals and copies, and originality and banality loom large in the programme. The repetition of artworks with their common formal traits accrues broader resonance, evoking the rich history of modern and postmodern thought about art, images, spectacle, and simulation.[7] The programme provides a flow of individual works of art that bear striking resemblance to the equally unique works sold before and after. The works thus displayed, described, and sold one after another configure the art into a series of commodity-spectacle attractions.[8] At the same time, the programme transmits these art images – both one-of-a-kind and multiple-edition works – through television in ways that reproduce, multiply, and disperse their availability as images of works of art. But the work is reproduced and circulated in this way with the expressed aim of having many individual viewers each purchase their own unique, original works of art, a vertiginous trajectory that at once exacerbates, and undercuts ideas about the aura of the artwork (and the loss of aura) that occurs with changes in technologies of art production.[9] Multiples become singular; originals become copies. Even print editions that sell out on one show miraculously reappear for sale again weeks or months later. In many different ways, the programme submits theoretical perspectives on the artwork in the age of mechanical (and electronic, digital, and networked) reproduction to a series of dizzying material and representational contortions. This is intensi-

fied (or perhaps dialectically mitigated) by the conspicuous performativity of the programme's eponymous host.

Fine art showcase hinges on the unremitting, live presence of its namesake host and principal on-screen personality who orchestrates the proceedings. Barry Chappell comes across as equal parts carnival huckster, used car salesman, art dealer, art appreciator, street hustler, investment strategist, and performance artist. With his non-stop patter and deliberate control of the pace of the proceedings, he delivers something of a tour de force performance on every show. His success relies on his ability to persuasively communicate his authority and his authenticity in the arenas of television commerce and the art market that the programme commingles. He exerts mastery over art, sales, and television, as he explicitly directs the camera and the staff who are often heard off-screen, but rarely seen.

Barry's style is informal. He drinks Diet Mountain Dew and chews Nicorette at the same time, implying at once an air of casual disregard and urgency for the business at hand. Drinking soda from the can and chewing gum may convey a relaxed attitude. But the particular products indicate that his business requires the buzz that comes from the addictive supplementation of caffeine and nicotine. These are in turn consumed as reconstituted food/drug additives (in soda and gum), exacerbating the tensions between artifice and authenticity that characterize his performance. Barry alternates between the hard, fast sell and quiet, relaxed chat, between passionate engagement and nonchalant indifference. His energy and enthusiasm seem to wax and wane, modulations of tone and mood that strategically navigate the disparities between television marketing and fine art exhibition and sales.

Barry's sales spiels combine thoughtful analysis, raw wonder, and crude materialism, sliding through different registers of value. He studiously highlights the visual elements of a silkscreen print, and then swings right into wide-eyed awe at the artist's use of gold leaf, as if the work's value resides in the delicate tissue of the shiny metal on its surface instead of in the artistry he has exhaustively described. 'Look at all that gold!' he exclaims, as he gently curls a corner of the print to intensify the reflections of the studio lights off the gold leaf overlay. He frequently highlights gold leaf in this way, ambiguously crossing between aesthetic and economic terms of appreciation. It hardly seems coincidental that many of the artists he represents routinely embellish their work with gold leaf finishes.

In conjunction with his mastery of the artists' formal practices and the details of individual works, Barry presents broader contextual perspectives on the artists, establishing their value in the world of art history writ large. He displays the breadth and depth of his expertise in art history and art connoisseurship, readily identifying specific art movements, publishers, galleries, and museums, as well as universities and compatriots with whom the artist is affiliated. The art historical views help establish the value of the work. These are not just pretty pictures; they also have value and meaning because they are connected to significant trends, movements, and individuals in art. He harps on Henry Miller's literary stature, and solemnly asserts that Miller and Ernest Hemingway are the two most significant American writers of the twentieth century. As part of the sales pitch, he presents a commissioned study of investment prospects for Miller's paintings that

graphs substantial increases in sale prices since 1970, stressing that the report was written by a *professor* of business and finance with a *PhD*. (The emphasis is his, conveyed by intonation). He mentions that a PBS documentary about Henry Miller's visual art is airing soon, and will give national exposure to the work. Barry spends twenty or thirty minutes presenting all of this information before he starts selling, to verify that the posthumous, signed Miller prints that he is about to put on sale at bargain prices are an exceptional value in terms of aesthetics, art history, and investment prospects.

Barry rambles at length on Chinese artist Jiang Ti-Feng, describing him as the 'Picasso of China' and founder of the 'Yunan School' of modern Chinese painting. He confidently asserts that Jiang's work represents the biggest change in Asian art in seven hundred years. He also addresses geo-political conditions in the 'new China', where economic transformations have yielded a flourishing emergent middle class. These new Chinese consumers – one billion strong – want to invest their discretionary income in art by Chinese nationals. Work by artists like Jiang is going to be snapped up, and will be increasingly hard to find on the market; as a result, demand and prices will soar. In other words, Jiang is both an important artistic figure and a good prospect for financial speculation.

These are just two examples of how Barry marshals information to confirm the value of the art he sells. He achieves a delicate balance in these spiels, with sales patter that infers value as often as demonstrating it. While American literary scholars may question his assessment of Miller's stature as an author, Barry talks about Miller's literary preeminence and the value of his original paintings in the global art marketplace, even though he only sells posthumous, multi-edition print versions of the paintings. The increasing disposable income in China has led to a hot market in Chinese art, but it is not clear that Jiang is one of the artists whose work is being sought by collectors. He often ascertains an artist's reputation with apparent digressions, explaining that they trained under someone who also taught some other, well-known painter, even showing pictures of the work of these other artists, before he starts selling the work of the lesser-known figure.

All of this involves some hedging, even snake-oil salesmanship, but it also contributes to the global, art historical context he provides, integral to the educational and entertainment aspirations of the programme. Barry affiliates his television commerce in art with global art histories and global flows of capital. This sensibility extends into Barry's modest forays into philanthropy, when he dedicates the income from occasional episodes to Children, Incorporated, a charity that provides housing, schools, and related services for children on four continents. You can participate by watching the show and buying the art. But this is not necessarily as easy as it sounds.

3. Apparitional television

Despite its status as a DRTV programme that requires viewers to buy its products while it is on the air, despite its regular scheduled appearances on the Celebrity Shopping Network, despite its expansively performative host, *Fine art showcase*

is not easy to find. My husband first stumbled upon it while channel surfing, and thought I would find it interesting. But tracking it down so I could see it proved to be a minor ordeal. Over the course of several weeks, at difference times on different nights, he searched through the channels without success. The show was not listed in any printed television programme guide, not even in the detailed on-screen guide of our Comcast digital cable system.

When we finally found the programme, we discovered that Comcast only identified the channel with *Fine art showcase* as 'Leased Access'. This was the case all of the time, 24 hours a day. It did not matter what was showing on the channel, or even if anything was showing at all. (And, as often as not, that particular channel was not even leased; if you were channel surfing you were as likely to encounter a blank blue screen as you were an actual programme). Then, sometime in 2007, *Fine art showcase* disappeared from the Leased Access channel on our cable service. *Fine art showcase* was still on television, but only on DirecTV, which requires a private subscription and a proprietary satellite dish. And while it is listed in the satellite service's online programme guide, it is buried among a slew of infomercial titles, clustered with many other shopping networks, among several hundred channels available to DirecTV subscribers.

Certainly a live show on television two or three times a week counts as a television programme by anyone's reckoning. However, this particular programme is hard to find in schedule guides. It is only advertised, if ever, on the channel where it airs, a channel of infomercials; and is only available through private satellite subscription. It is hard to find, even when you are looking for it. If viewers have no way to know a programme exists in the first place, and no way to find it, how can it attract an audience, cultivate customers, build viewer loyalty, or develop a brand identity?[10] While *Fine art showcase* does not need to trade aggregate audience numbers for advertising revenue, it certainly needs viewers to watch the show, buy the art and, participate in the live auctions. Indeed, it needs an active, consuming audience more than almost any other show on television.[11] And yet, it hovers in a netherworld of rarefied accessibility. As such, *Fine art showcase* troubles fundamental ideas about how relationships are forged and maintained between stations, programmes, programming, and audiences, ideas that are considered the driving force of television systems, commercial and public, analogue and digital, broadcast and cable, mass and niche. In many different ways, *Fine art showcase* offers itself as a marginal or limit case that, nevertheless, offers new perspectives for thinking about television more generally.

'Apparitional television' is a term to account for programmes like *Fine art showcase*, whose appeal and conditions of access are narrow or precarious, despite their being embedded in established networks of media circulation. As a conceptual framework, apparitional television emphasizes a paradox: television can be fully available and present, at least readily on tap, yet somehow remain rarefied or elusive. While the apparitional qualities of *Fine art showcase* are distinctive, they extend beyond the particulars of the programme; indeed, all of television may be apparitional at one time or another. Nonetheless, you have to wonder just how apparitional a programme can be in the age of convergent, networked, digital, mobile, and interactive media. Making sense of *Fine art show-*

case in this context requires consideration of its place in the contemporary mediascape, and the implications for its modes of appearance, apparitional or not.

Fine art showcase straddles old and new media. It relies heavily on older media forms – most notably television and the telephone – to transact its business. People have to watch while it is on the air, live, and call in during the programme to purchase the art it sells. Even though it airs on a digital satellite service (rather than being an over-the-air broadcast), this seems like a quaint DRTV model. Moreover, the programme also has an official website, but ultimately, it hardly mitigates the programme's apparitional status. To be perfectly clear: the website is easy to access using the programme's title or 'Barry Chappell' as a search term. But you have to already know about the programme to find it this way in the first place. The more important question is whether, or how easily, you can get to the website without already knowing about the show, for example with broader or more generic search terms (e.g. 'art on television'), or through links on other websites. The short answer is not readily.

Under the heading of 'Art and coin TV', the programme website announces the current rubric branding the two live programmes on the Celebrity Shopping Channel.[12] It lists when the programme is showing on DirecTV and whose work is featured in upcoming episodes. It includes one page about Barry and profiles the artists he represents. You can see short videos about some of the artists; and when the show is on the air, you can watch streaming video on your computer. Occasionally, the website sells artwork at deep discounts, but only a fraction of the inventory available on the television show. In sum, it is effectively a digest of the television show, with basic information and pictures, a handful of multimedia features, and virtually no links to other sites. The main purpose seems to be to direct viewers back to the television show, even simply to confirm the programme's existence in an intermedial context, holding visitors within the conceptual and institutional confines of the programme.

In one way, it makes sense that the programme website restricts easy access to other websites with comparable merchandise, even though these sites are easy enough to find, and even though on TV Barry encourages viewers to Google the artists and see for themselves what other dealers charge for their work. The design constraints in this regard are instructive in situating the programme with respect to older and newer media. *Fine art showcase* may be marginal, eccentric, and precarious in the context of American television, while also requiring keenly interactive TV viewers. However, its strategies for showing and selling art remain tied to older business and media practices, more reminiscent of the hierarchical, one-way transmission of 'old' electronic media than the open-architecture, mobile, on-demand interactivity of 'new' digital media. But the show's sandboxed nature will only hold as long as the programme and its website can maintain these strategies of self-containment. How well this is working so far is best assessed by looking for signs of *Fine art showcase* across the internet.

Beyond the official programme website, *Fine art showcase* is an internet rarity. It gets mentioned in a handful of blogs; it is the topic of a couple of brief, intermittent forum discussions on two art websites; and occasionally, the *Fine art showcase* is referenced on the websites of the artists whose work is sold on the

programme, and in well-established open-source references such as Wikipedia. Some artwork purchased through the show shows up for sale on eBay. Overall, the nature and range of information on the web is surprisingly limited, and generally replicates the material found on the programme's official website, often in the exact same words. The information about Barry Chappell himself is precisely what you would learn from watching the show or consulting the programme's official website. The account of the programme on Wikipedia is terse. A number of online television guides have had unfulfilled requests for viewers familiar with the show to provide information. When it comes to Barry, the programme, and the artists he represents, it is almost impossible to find much on the web, and certainly nothing substantially different from what is provided by the programme and its official website.

In some cases, this constraint has salutary commercial and promotional implications, even if it limits the programme's broader visibility. One striking example is artist Lindsay Dawson's website. His homepage prominently features a quote about his work from Barry Chappell, the text lifted directly from the Dawson biography on the programme's website. Dawson's exhibitions listings include nine separate 'One man shows' at the Fine art showcase, Santa Monica, California, as if it were a brick-and-mortar gallery in a wealthy California ocean-front community. He separately lists seven interviews on the programme under the heading of 'television appearances'.[13] And he includes information about the programme among the Frequently Asked Questions about his art. 'What is the Fine Art Showcase?' The response echoes the programme's own publicity: 'The Fine Art Showcase (a.k.a. Barry Chappell's Fine Art Showcase) is the premier art program on television today'.[14] These references both reiterate the programme's own PR language, and situate Lindsay Dawson and the *Fine art showcase* in a mutually referential, dyadic relationship, in which each reconfirms the value of the other. And yet, there are no active links between the two sites. The evident mutual admiration and textual repetition do not extend to facilitating connections between *Fine art showcase* viewers and Lindsay Dawson devotees.

In other contexts, the same kind of repetition of material from the programme's website yields a different fate for *Fine art showcase*. Despite their scarcity, these idiosyncratic cases also involve copying from the programme website in ways that end up obscuring the programme. For example, an entry from Barry's summer 2006 travel blog was posted a year later in its entirety in the web journal of 'Evil Mr. Sock', with no comment apart from the cryptic title 'Saved for posterity'.[15] The text is a rambling account of Barry's return from a European trip, and subsequent visit to a Nevada mine. It details a boring trans-Atlantic flight, Barry's life-long interest in mining, camping in the desert, an encounter with a rattlesnake, and so on. *Fine art showcase* comes up in one incident among many others. By the time Barry's blog entry was pasted into Evil Mr. Sock's web journal, it had been removed from the programme website. Both *Fine art showcase* and its host are eclipsed through the very act of duplicating the text from the programme's website, severed from its original context.

Despite its increasing, if slow, dispersion through the online world, the *Fine art showcase* ultimately seems no less apparitional on the internet than it does

on television, at least so far.[16] The kinds of access, interconnectivity, dispersion, social networking, and knowledge networks enabled by new media are in short supply, leading instead to any number of digital dead ends, another version of apparitional media. Frankly, one can only speculate about the motives behind the programme's apparent sandboxing, or even whether there is even a decisive intentionality at work. However, the impact of these strategies is more apparent. By eschewing links that connect the programme's website to others, the programme and its web architecture contribute to its invisibility. Ultimately, the chances of finding any of these websites while web-surfing are about as slim as the chances of finding the show on television by channel surfing. The television programme, its official website, and its other web appearances seem to exist each as the trace of the others, apparitional echoes that are equally obscure, and equally unlikely to come to anyone's attention. The ways *Fine art showcase* appears on other websites extend the programme's own new media strategies in this regard: containment, isolated mentions, obscurity.

Even when you do find it, *Fine art showcase* seems to flaunt its apparitional status through the nexus of liveness, values, singularities, multiples, and duplicates that it generates. The programme encourages viewers to buy art by emphasizing the value of the work it sells in many different ways, including its rarity and singularity, at the very same time that it sells the same, or very similar work, by the same artists over and over again. As a result, even though the show is almost always live, Barry ends up repeating the same sales spiels over time, using the same stories, information, expertise, and even turns of phrase. One time, he was supposedly selling off the very last inventory from the Henry Miller estate, offering a handful of each of the rare, once-in-a-lifetime prints that had seemed to sell out several months earlier. On this occasion, he did not just repeat his previous sales patter. Instead, he started off live, and after a few minutes, he abruptly switched to tape from the earlier show on which he sold the same prints with a curt, 'Watch this'. He had lost considerable weight in the intervening months, and it was jarring to see the live, slimmer Barry seamlessly juxtaposed with his taped, paunchier version. The representational contortions to which the programme submits the artwork reverberate here in the double embodiment and multiple mediation of the live performer making the sales pitch (while echoing the before/after images for a weight loss regimen that might be part of the infomercial programming on the Celebrity Shopping Network). The present Barry was a shadow of his former self, in another twist on the vicissitudes of aura, authenticity, and availability that the programme unleashes.

The transition to tape was patently evident in the apparitional body of the programme host, and transparently revealed that he records his own programmes. Yet, it is hard to conceive a media afterlife (or long tail) for the programme. Since it sells things that can only be purchased while it is live, both reruns in syndication and DVD release seem ridiculous. Because the sales pitches ramble on, verging on the interminable, and lack any succinct punch, it is equally hard to imagine the show being appropriated by contemporary clip culture (e.g. on YouTube or as viral video). Nevertheless, Barry himself used a recording of previously aired programming – a rerun – to resell rare prints that supposedly sold out months before, reinforcing the apparitional conditions that haunt the show.

4. Conclusion

Television and its convergent, networked, new media successors are always prone to appear and disappear, to come into view and then recede from view, in a variety of ways. This is characteristic of apparitional television, and perhaps also of apparitional media more generally. Apparitional media are not easy to access even when they are in, or on, a network. Indeed, for three months in 2009, the *Fine art showcase* was not even on television at all, but was instead on summer hiatus with announced plans for a relaunch in September 2009. 'Now you see it, now you don't'. *Fine art showcase* is hardly unique in its status as apparitional television. However, it presents a particularly extreme case that throws into relief characteristic aspects of apparitional television as old and new media. As a case study, it points toward avenues for further consideration.

1) Apparitional television is not intended as a way to reclaim individual programmes as uniquely valuable in themselves, even if, as in the case with the *Fine art showcase*, value is a persistent, expressed theme. Rather, apparitional television calls attention to a wider range of television programming, past and present, than is commonly studied by television scholars.
2) Apparitional television is an analytic concept for assembling and thinking about different kinds of television programmes that are unlike the categories that attract considerably more critical attention, which are often described by a nomenclature that proclaims their patent visibility or evident ubiquity – e.g. must-see TV, viral video, tabloid television, beautiful television. Apparitional television is a call to look, and look carefully, beyond the first or most obvious things we see.
3) Apparitional television is more common and ubiquitous than realized, even if it is not always easy to see. Some examples are television programmes that air on small, local broadcast stations, stations that do not even get picked up by regional cable systems; shows produced for local access cable channels; primetime network programmes that fade from view because they are not widely redistributed (in syndication or on cable); programmes that are not readily available on DVD or on sites such as iTunes, YouTube, or Hulu. (Even these sites are only variably accessible, depending on where you are in the world, and the bandwidth capacity to which you have access).
4) Apparitional television engages familiar tropes, strategies, and discourses of television while also introducing reconfigurations, deviations, and mutations. Thus, it has the capacity to challenge what we think television is and how we think television works in the first place.
5) Apparitional television undermines common and largely untested assumptions about the ready availability of all media, past and present, in consideration of their often-precarious conditions of access, in spatial and temporal terms, whether you are talking about broadcast, cable, satellite, videotape, DVD, webcasts, downloading, streaming, or other technologies to come.
6) Apparitional television is not the same in all places at all times. Apparitional television has implications for thinking about television as we presently know

it. Because it signals tenuous aspects of the medium, including programmes that evanesce, it recognizes that in some ways television is always ending, or perhaps just beginning, even if it is not ending or beginning all at once, in the same ways, in all places. Thinking about apparitional television, especially in its interactions with other, newer media reminds us that despite their ubiquity, particular media are not always so easy to find. Once you do find them, they may not be all that they appear to be. But in the meantime, you do not necessarily know what you are missing, or even exactly what it is you are seeing.

Notes

1. For example, Lynn Spigel (2009) has explored the cultural dynamics between television and the visual arts in the early decades of the medium.
2. Wayne Hope and Rosser Johnson (2004) discuss DRTV with reference to infomercials.
3. In the United States, infomercials help fill the 24-hour programme day, often in fringe dayparts. Starting in the 1980s, infomercials flourished in the US, largely in response to broadcast and cable deregulation. The same deregulatory dynamics fuelled 24-hour TV shopping networks (Hope and Johnson 2004).
4. For analyses of home shopping television channels see Gary Gumpert and Susan J. Drucker (1992) and Mimi White (1992).
5. This point is also made by Hope and Johnson (2004).
6. Among the more prominent works in this regard are Howard Becker (1984) and Pierre Bourdieu (1987).
7. There is a vast amount of scholarly work across disciplines in this area (media/screen studies, art history and theory, literary theory, philosophy, history of science, etc.). Some of the signal work I am thinking of in this vein includes Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, and W. J. T. Mitchell.
8. Mimi White develops ideas about television attractions in the context of Home Shopping Network in *Tele-Advising*, chapter 3, Watching the girls go buy: Shop-at-home television.
9. This of course refers to the enquiry initiated by Walter Benjamin in, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction'.
10. Among others, Paddy Scannell (1996) develops perspectives on the importance of programme schedules to television broadcasting predictability for viewers, especially in chapters one and seven.
11. When it was still on the Leased Access cable channel, Barry once commented, during a really slow stretch of bidding, that the show was going up on the satellite in another twenty minutes, and that the bidding was sure to heat up then.
12. The website is www.fashowcase.com. ,*Treasure hunter* is the other live programme on the Celebrity Shopping Network, hosted by Jimmy Gerstel who sells collectible coins.
13. http://lindsaydawson.com/other2 (24 April 2009).
14. http://lindsaydawson.com/other1 (21 June 2009).
15. http://evilmrsock.livejournal.com/ (19 October 2007).
16. Even as I assert the programme's relative scarcity in this regard, I am fully aware that this assessment is provisional, almost by definition; Barry and the programme could suddenly go viral, or could at least develop more robust social networks, at almost any time. But over the course of its first five years on television, the programme's appearance and dispersion on the internet was sluggish.

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Index

TELEVISUAL CULTURE

Television as we knew it is irrevocably changing. Some are gleefully announcing the death of television, others have been less sanguine but insist that television is radically changing underneath our eyes. Several excellent publications have dealt with television's uncertain condition, but few have taken the specific question of what television's transformations mean for the discipline of Television Studies as a starting point. The essays collected in this volume aim to fill this void. Two fundamental questions string the various contributions together. First, is television really in crisis or is the present not so extraordinary when revisiting television's development? Second, should we invent new theoretical concepts or are our old ones still perfectly relevant? To answer such questions the authors in this volume take up diverse case studies, ranging from the academic series Reading Contemporary Television to Flemish Fiction, from nostalgic programming on broadcast television to YouTube, from tell-sell television shows to public television art in the 1980s.

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