

A Companion to
Television

Edited by

Janet Wasko

A Companion to
Television

Advisory editor: David Theo Goldberg, University of California, Irvine

This series aims to provide theoretically ambitious but accessible volumes devoted to the major fields and subfields within cultural studies, whether as single disciplines (film studies) inspired and reconfigured by interventionist cultural studies approaches, or from broad interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives (gender studies, race and ethnic studies, postcolonial studies). Each volume sets out to ground and orientate the student through a broad range of specially commissioned articles and also to provide the more experienced scholar and teacher with a convenient and comprehensive overview of the latest trends and critical directions. An overarching *Companion to Cultural Studies* will map the territory as a whole.

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Introduction

Janet Wasko

te·le·vi·sion (pronunciation: tl-vzhn) *n.* [French *télévision*: télé-, *far* (from Greek *tele-*, *tele-*) + *vision*, *vision*]

- 1 The transmission of visual images of moving and stationary objects, generally with accompanying sound, as electromagnetic waves and the reconversion of received waves into visual images.
- 2
 - a. An electronic apparatus that receives electromagnetic waves and displays the reconverted images on a screen.
 - b. The integrated audible and visible content of the electromagnetic waves received and converted by such an apparatus.
- 3 The industry of producing and broadcasting television programs.
(*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, fourth edition, 2000)

Television? The word is half Greek, half Latin. No good can come of it.

C. P. Scott, English journalist (1846–1932)

What is television, how can we understand it, and why should we bother? Ultimately, these questions lie at the heart of this volume, which features original essays by an international collection of media scholars who have studied various aspects of television. But even these experts do not offer easy or conclusive answers to these key questions, for television presents a complex phenomenon that has become a ubiquitous feature of our modern world.

What is Television?

Television is a multifaceted apparatus. Most simply, it is a technological process, an electronic device, a system of distributing images and sounds. Although television as a form of mass communication did not emerge until the late 1940s and early 1950s, much of the technology of television was developed during the 1920s. As with many forms of media technology, the promises and expectations of the medium were optimistic and propitious. For instance, one of the often-overlooked inventors in the United States, Philo Farnsworth, was clearly hopeful about the future of television. One of his biographers explains:

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Philo began laying out his vision for what television could become. Above all else . . . television would become the world's greatest teaching tool. Illiteracy would be wiped out. The immediacy of television was the key. As news happened viewers would watch it unfold live; no longer would we have to rely on people interpreting and distorting the news for us. We would be watching sporting events and symphony orchestras. Instead of going to the movies, the movies would come to us. Television would also bring about world peace. If we were able to see people in other countries and learn about our differences, why would there be any misunderstandings? War would be a thing of the past. (Schwartz, 2002, p. 113)

Obviously, Farnsworth's full vision has not yet been realized, even though some parts of his dream have been more than fulfilled. Television has become a common household appliance that serves as a source of news, information, politics, entertainment, education, religion, art, culture, sports, weather, and music. Television is an industrial system that produces and distributes products, as well as (often) promoting other commodities and commerce. Hence, television is not only a technical device, but also a social, political, economic, and cultural force.

Of course, the way television is produced and received has changed over the years with changing political and economic climates, as well as the introduction of newer technologies – VCRs, cable systems, pay TV, satellite systems, digital and high-definition. In addition, other communication systems (such as computers and the Internet) increasingly challenge television's dominance as the primary mass medium. Television may also have a variety of meanings in different parts of the world, as is evident from the discussions in this volume.

These variations and changes make television an enigmatic "moving target," its future uncertain and contested. Nevertheless, we must still attempt to define its character and its influence.

Why Should We Bother to Understand Television?

Television continues to be a centrally important factor and an inescapable part of modern culture. Many would still call it the most important of all the mass media. As one television program about television concludes:

From its public marketing in the 1940s to the present day, television can be listed as one of the most profound, if not the most profound, influences on human history. Television has affected every aspect of our lives including history, science, politics, culture and social mores. It is impossible to imagine a world without television, and most of us take for granted the way television has shaped and defined our society, and our lives. (The History Channel, 1996)

The pervasiveness of television is hard to ignore. For instance, in the United States and Canada, 99 percent of households own at least one television set,

while the average number of sets is 2.93. In most cases, television is a central presence in individual homes – 66 percent of Americans supposedly watch television while eating dinner. But television sets are also prominent in other locations. We find them in schools, hospitals, prisons, bars, restaurants, shopping malls, waiting rooms . . . television seems to be (virtually) everywhere and often difficult to avoid. Obviously, television ownership and viewing may vary around the world – but the prevalence of television is a global, albeit varied, phenomenon.

We know that television is a fundamental part of everyday life for many people, although assessing television viewing is tainted with inevitable methodological problems. While computers may be luring some viewers away from the tube, it is claimed that the average American watches more than 4 hours of TV each day (that's 28 hours/week, or 2 months of nonstop TV watching per year). Of course, the American television diet may be more extensive than other countries. The point is that television often plays an important role in people's daily lives.

It might also be argued that television is central to the way that people learn about news and public events. Although the Internet may be increasingly providing citizens with news and information, television is still the primary source of news for many people. Events are now transmitted by television at the moment they are happening. In many countries, television is a key component in elections and campaigns, thus becoming part of the democratic process.

In addition to news and public affairs, television provides endless varieties of entertainment and diversion. Though the form and content may differ across time and space, the capacity of television to transmit sounds and images is potentially inexhaustible and seemingly unlimited. Thus, many have called television a storyteller, if not THE storyteller for society. As Signorelli and Bacue (1999, p. 527) explain:

Television's role in society is one of common storyteller – it is the mainstream of our popular culture. Its world shows and tells us about life – people, places, striving, power and fate. It lets us know who is good and who is bad, who wins and who loses, what works and what doesn't, and what it means to be a man or a woman. As such, television has joined the ranks of socialization agents in our society and in the world at large.

Obviously, television systems and content exist within social contexts and are shaped by a variety of forces. Through its distribution of information, entertainment, education, and culture, television inevitably is a fund of values, ideals, morals, and ethical standards. In other words, television is an ideological source that cannot be overlooked in modern societies.

Nevertheless, there are differing opinions about television's fundamental value. (Note the sampling of opinions in the quotes about television by public figures included at the end of this introduction.) Television has been praised as a

wondrous looking glass on the world, a valuable source of information, education, and entertainment. TV allows people to share cultural experiences, as well as allowing family members of all ages an opportunity to spend time together. Despite the disparaging comments about television's impact on print culture, some would point out that TV may serve as a catalyst for reading, as viewers may follow up on TV programs by getting books on the same subjects or reading authors whose work was adapted for the programs.

As envisioned by Farnsworth, television does indeed provide news, current events, and historical programming that can help make people more aware of other cultures and people. It is argued that "good television" can present the arts, science, and culture. Furthermore, good television can teach important values and life lessons, explore controversial or sensitive issues, and provide socialization and learning skills. Good television can help develop critical thinking about society and the world. More simply, many point out that television provides people with pleasure, as well as a welcome companion for lonely or isolated individuals.

The economic impact of television might also be noted. Manufacturers often depend on television to spread the word and encourage consumption of their products and services through commercial television. In 2001, total broadcast TV revenues in the United States were \$54.4 billion. Revenues are also generated from programming production and distribution, as well as hardware sales. It follows that television also provides employment – not huge numbers, but certainly a significant workforce that obviously plays an important role in economic systems.

On the other hand, many commentators have also disparaged television as being valueless, vulgar, and vacuous. Indeed, the discussions of television as a negative force in society are so widespread and varied that they are difficult to summarize. Television is blamed for everything from passivity and obesity to stimulating aggressive and violent behavior. It has been singled out as leading an attack on literate culture, as well as shriveling public discourse (see Postman, 1986).

One of the most often-cited assessments of television acknowledged its potential value, but was damning of its current state. In 1961, Newton Minow, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, proclaimed: "When television is good, nothing is better. But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite you to sit down in front of your TV set and keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland."

If television has become "a teaching tool," as envisioned by Farnsworth, this is not a positive development for many observers. For instance, John Silver, president of Boston University, recently declared "Television is the most important educational institution in the United States today." Silver went on to decry the

... degenerative effects of television and its indiscriminate advocacy of pleasure
... As television has ravenously consumed our attention, it has weakened the

formative institutions of church, family, and schools, thoroughly eroding the sense of individual obedience to the unenforceable on which manners and morals and ultimately the law depend. (Silver, 1995, p. 2)

The role of television in promoting consumption has been widely attacked, because commercial systems are fundamentally ruled by advertising.

But even without advertising, some have argued that television cannot be transformed or altered, but is inherently destructive and detrimental. Former advertising executive Jerry Mander (1977) presented this viewpoint years ago, when he argued that television is not a neutral technology and its very existence is destructive to human nature.

It might also be noted that there may be different values and importance associated with television in different cultures. Nevertheless, television's key role in many societies, as well as its global prevalence and importance, is undeniable and makes it a significant issue for research and reflection.

How Do We Understand Television?

Since its inception, television has attracted a good deal of reflection and analysis. Within academia, television has been part of the ongoing study of mass media in general, which has been influenced by many disciplines, including political science, sociology, economics, psychology, and literary studies.

But scholarly research has also concentrated specifically on television, insisting that the medium itself is a worthy focal point for academic research. While general approaches to television research might be characterized as social scientific or humanistic, areas of research specialization have also evolved. Several chapters in this volume offer general overviews of television research, detailing different perspectives and approaches, while other contributors summarize specific areas of television research.

Much early television research adhered to a media effects orientation, searching for quantitative measures of television's impact on audiences, especially the impact of violent content on behavior. For instance, according to one estimate, approximately 4,000 studies have examined TV's effects on children. Still, no conclusive results have been found.

Meanwhile, other scholars focused attention on television content from the purview of literary or dramatic criticism. The growth of television studies in the 1970s and 1980s drew on this orientation, and has been characterized by work that focuses mostly on television texts and audiences, often integrating cultural studies, feminist analysis and drawing on a range of qualitative methodologies.

More recently, historical studies of television have blossomed, as well as work that examines television's structure, organizations, and ownership, its connections to the state and other media, and its role in influencing public opinion and the public sphere.

Indeed, debates continue to rage about what should be studied and what methods should be used to study television, as many (if not, most) studies of television still represent “single perspectives” or “specific agendas.” However, numerous authors in this volume argue that interdisciplinary, multi-perspective approaches are needed. Horace Newcomb calls for “blended, melded research strategies,” while Doug Kellner describes “multidimensional” or “multiperspectival” approaches to understand television from a critical perspective. As Newcomb argues: “we can best understand television not as an entity – economic, technological, social, psychological, or cultural – but as a site, the point at which numerous questions and approaches intersect and inflect one another.”

Chapter Overview

The contributors to this volume offer a wide range of expertise on the study of television. They present overviews of the extensive research on television, as well as original insights into its development and significance in various regions of the world. Only a brief introduction to the chapters is presented here.

In the first section, Horace Newcomb traces the general development of television research and the growth of television studies, while Doug Kellner discusses critical perspectives on television from the 1930s through to the present day.

Perhaps surprisingly, historical dimensions of television are often overlooked in much of television studies. In the next section, Paddy Scannell discusses the histories of television, while Lynn Spigel explores television archives and the politics of television preservation.

Another neglected topic in typical television studies might be identified as the aesthetics of television. Julianne Newton considers television and “a moving aesthetic,” while Caren Deming explores the “televisual,” as exemplified in the Golden Age of American television. Meanwhile, Jane Shattuc examines the American TV production process and the question of authorship.

Analysis of structure and control is fundamental in examining television systems and a number of the contributors to this volume address these issues. Sylvia Harvey asks “Who Rules TV?” in her examination of the state, markets and the public interest. Graham Murdock looks at issues relating to public broadcasting and citizenship, while Stuart Cunningham analyzes changing television policies or policy regimes.

The prominence of American television also demands attention to the implications of commercial, privately owned television systems. Matthew McAllister discusses television advertising as a textual and economic system, while Eileen Meehan presents a political economic approach to the analysis of television viewing. Jack Banks looks at MTV as an exemplar of the development of media conglomerates, while Andrew Calabrese considers the trade in television news in the United States.

A good deal of research on television has focused on content, albeit using a variety of approaches and methodologies. In this section, Albert Moran introduces the new television landscape and explores the circulation of television formats. Reflections on specific types of programming or genres are presented by Christine Geraghty (soap operas), Jane Shattuc (talk shows), Michael Real (sports), and Gary Edgerton (historical programming). Meanwhile, issues relating to representation of specific social groups are considered by Bonnie Dow (women and feminism) and Sasha Torres (race).

Although a good deal of television research is devoted to audiences, a variety of approaches and methods have been used. Peter Dahlgren explores the reception of television in its broadest sense as he looks at its relationship to public spheres and civic cultures, while Justin Lewis examines television and public opinion. Specific audiences are considered in Annette Hill's discussion of audiences for reality television and David Buckingham's overview of the study of children and television.

In the final sections, discussions of the variety of television forms are presented. DeeDee Halleck outlines various alternative challenges to mainstream television, while television in different parts of the world is explored by John Sinclair (Latin America), Yuezhi Zhao and Zhenzhi Guo (China), Shunya Yoshimi (Japan), Ruth Teer-Tomaselli (South Africa), and Nabil Dajani (the Arab East).

Thus, contributors to this volume attempt to define television, consider why it is significant and present overviews of how it has been studied. Despite changes in television and in the world, no matter how difficult, we must endeavor to answer these questions. Welcome to the world of television at the dawn of the twenty-first century!

Acknowledgments

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Quotes about Television

It is interesting how many public figures have commented on the nature and significance of television over the years. Included here is a sampling of these quotes (many by people deeply involved in television) that may provide amusement or reflection, but are also relevant to the discussions that follow in this volume.

Richard P. Adler: "All television is children's television."

Fred Allen: "Imitation is the sincerest form of television."

Lucille Ball: "Television is the quickest form of recognition in the world."

Clive Barnes: "Television is the first truly democratic culture – the first culture available to everybody and entirely governed by what the people want. The most terrifying thing is what the people do want."

Daniel J. Boorstin: "Nothing is really real unless it happens on television."

Ray Bradbury: "The television, that insidious beast, that Medusa which freezes a billion people to stone every night, staring fixedly, that Siren which called and sang and promised so much and gave, after all, so little."

David Brinkley: "The one function TV news performs very well is that when there is no news we give it to you with the same emphasis as if there were."

Rita Mae Brown: "Art is a moral passion married to entertainment. Moral passion without entertainment is propaganda, and entertainment without moral passion is television."

Art Buchwald: "Every time you think television has hit its lowest ebb, a new program comes along to make you wonder where you thought the ebb was."

Carol Burnett: "The audience is never wrong."

Prince Charles: "There are now more TVs in British households than there are people – which is a bit of a worry."

Paddy Chayefsky: "It's the menace that everyone loves to hate but can't seem to live without."

Paddy Chayefsky: "Television is democracy at its ugliest."

Imogene Coca: "Television is the only way I know to entertain 20 million people at one time."

Alistair Cooke: "When television came roaring in after the war (World War II) they did a little school survey asking children which they preferred and why – television or radio. And there was this 7-year-old boy who said he preferred radio 'because the pictures were better'."

Alan Coren: "Television is more interesting than people. If it were not, we would have people standing in the corners of our rooms."

Salvador Dali: "What is a television apparatus to man, who has only to shut his eyes to see the most inaccessible regions of the seen and the never seen, who has only to imagine in order to pierce through walls and cause all the planetary Baghdads of his dreams to rise from the dust."

Ani Difranco: "Art may imitate life, but life imitates TV."

Hugh Downs: "Television is the medium of the 20th century."

Dwight D. Eisenhower: "I can think of nothing more boring for the American people than to have to sit in their living rooms for a whole half hour looking at my face on their television screens."

T. S. Eliot: "It is a medium of entertainment which permits millions of people to listen to the same joke at the same time and yet remain lonesome."

Tony Follari: "Karl Marx is wrong. Television is the opiate of the masses."

David Frost: "Television is an invention that permits you to be entertained in your living room by people you wouldn't have in your home."

Larry Gelbart: "Television is a weapon of mass distraction."

Samuel Goldwyn: "Television has raised writing to a new low."

S. I. Hayakawa: "In the age of television, image becomes more important than substance."

Janet Wasko

Jim Henson: "Television is basically teaching whether you want it to or not."

Alfred Hitchcock: "Television is like the American toaster, you push the button and the same thing pops up everytime."

Alfred Hitchcock: "Seeing a murder on television . . . can help work off one's antagonisms. And if you haven't any antagonisms, the commercials will give you some."

Steve Jobs: "You go to your TV to turn your brain off. You go to the computer when you want to turn your brain on."

Nicholas Johnson: "All television is educational television. The question is: what is it teaching?"

Ernie Kovacs: "Television – a medium. So called because it is neither rare nor well-done."

Ann Landers: "Television has proved that people will look at anything rather than at each other."

Lee Lovinger: "Television is simply automated day-dreaming."

Mignon McLaughlin: "Each day, the American housewife turns toward television as toward a lover. She feels guilty about it, and well she might, for he's covered with warts and is only after her money."

Miriam Makeba: "People in the United States still have a 'Tarzan' movie view of Africa. That's because in the movies all you see are jungles and animals . . . We [too] watch television and listen to the radio and go to dances and fall in love."

Marya Mannes: "It is television's primary damage that it provides ten million children with the same fantasy, ready-made and on a platter."

Daniel Marsh: "If the television craze continues with the present level of programs, we are destined to have a nation of morons."

Groucho Marx: "I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into the other room and read a book."

Marvin Minsky: "Imagine what it would be like if TV actually were good. It would be the end of everything we know."

Malcolm Muggeridge: "Television was not intended to make human beings vacuous, but it is an emanation of their vacuity."

Edwin Newman: “We live in a big and marvelously varied world. Television ought to reflect that.”

Camille Paglia: “Television is actually closer to reality than anything in books. The madness of TV is the madness of human life.”

Shimon Peres: “Television has made dictatorship impossible, but democracy unbearable.”

Gene Roddenberry: “They say that ninety percent of TV is junk. But, ninety percent of *everything* is junk.”

Rod Serling: “It is difficult to produce a television documentary that is both incisive and probing when every twelve minutes one is interrupted by twelve dancing rabbits singing about toilet paper.”

Homer Simpson: “Television! Teacher, mother, secret lover.”

Red Skelton: “I consider the television set as the American fireplace, around which the whole family will gather.”

Harriet van Horne: “There are days when any electrical appliance in the house, including the vacuum cleaner, seems to offer more entertainment possibilities than the TV set.”

Orson Welles: “I hate television. I hate it as much as peanuts. But I can’t stop eating peanuts.”

E. B. White: “I believe television is going to be the test of the modern world, and that in this new opportunity to see beyond the range of our vision, we shall discover a new and unbearable disturbance of the modern peace, or a saving radiance in the sky. We shall stand or fall by television – of that I am quite sure.”

E. B. White: “Television hangs on the questionable theory that whatever happens anywhere should be sensed everywhere. If everyone is going to be able to see everything, in the long run all sights may lose whatever rarity value they once possessed, and it may well turn out that people, being able to see and hear practically everything, will be specially interested in almost nothing.”

Frank Lloyd Wright: “Television is chewing gum for the eyes.”

Unknown, from *New York Times* 1939: “TV will never be a serious competitor for radio because people must sit and keep their eyes glued on a screen; the average American family hasn’t time for it.”

Janet Wasko

Unknown: "A television is a device you can sit in front of and watch people do things that you could be doing, if you weren't sitting there watching them do it."

Unknown: "Sex on television can't hurt you unless you fall off."

Unknown: "TV. If kids are entertained by two letters, imagine the fun they'll have with twenty-six. Open your child's imagination. Open a book."

Famous last words: "I've seen this done on TV."

Sources: www.quotegarden.com, www.basicquotations.com, <http://en.thinkexist.com/quotations>, and Alison Bullivant, ed. (2003) *The Little Book of Humorous Quotations*, New York: Barnes & Noble Books.

PART ONE

Theoretical Overviews

The Development of Television Studies

Horace Newcomb

Since the 1990s “Television Studies” has become a frequently applied term in academic settings. In departments devoted to examination of both media, it parallels “Film Studies.” In more broadly dispersed departments of “Communication Studies,” it supplements approaches to television variously described as “social science” or “quantitative” or “mass communication.” The term has become useful in identifying the work of scholars who participate in meetings of professional associations such as the recently renamed Society for Cinema and Media Studies as well as groups such as the National Communication Association (formerly the Speech Communication Association), the International Communication Association, the Broadcast Education Association, and the International Association of Media and Communication Research. These broad-based organizations have long regularly provided sites for the discussion of television and in some cases provided pages in sponsored scholarly journals for the publication of research related to the medium. In 2000, the *Journal of Television and New Media Studies*, the first scholarly journal to approximate the “television studies” designation, was launched.

Seen from these perspectives, “Television Studies” is useful primarily in an institutional sense. It can mark a division of labor inside academic departments (though not yet among them – so far as I know, no university has yet established a “Department of Television Studies”), a random occasion for gathering like-minded individuals, a journal title or keyword, or merely the main chance for attracting more funds, more students, more equipment – almost always at least an ancillary goal of terminological innovation in academic settings.

That the term could also potentially denote what some might call an “academic field,” or, more aggressively, “a discipline,” however, causes as many problems as it solves. Indeed, as Toby Miller cautions:

We need to view the screen through twin theoretical prisms. On the one hand, it can be understood as the newest component of sovereignty, a twentieth-century cultural addition to ideas of patrimony and rights that sits alongside such traditional

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topics as territory, language, history, and schooling. On the other hand, the screen is a cluster of culture industries. As such, it is subject to exactly the rent-seeking practices and exclusionary representational protocols that characterize liaisons between state and capital. We must avoid reproducing a thing called, for example, “cinema or TV studies or new media (urggh) studies,” and instead do work that studies the screen texts and contexts, regardless of its intellectual provenance. (*Politics and Culture*, Issue 1, 2002, <http://aspen.conncoll.edu/politicsandculture/arts.cfm?id=40>)

It is, of course, significant that Miller is also editor of *Television and New Media* (2002), and elsewhere, in the preface to a collection of commentary (boldly entitled *Television Studies*), on various aspects of the medium, has written:

can anyone seriously argue against seeking to understand how and why television and its audiences make meaning? Of course, people can and do object, and one aim of this book is to convince doubting siblings, peers, and hegemonies of the need for television studies. But the principal goal is to open up the field of thinking about television to students and show them how it can be analysed and changed. (BFI Publishing, 2002, p. vii)

I juxtapose these apparently varying statements not to “catch” Miller in “contradiction,” much less to make light of comments from a scholar I consider a central contributor to whatever we choose to designate under the heading in question. Rather, I cite Miller’s well-considered perspectives to indicate the troubling complexities encountered in any attempt to place this particular medium inside clearly defined boundaries. Miller’s latter phrase in the introduction to his handbook, “show them how it can be analysed and changed,” is indicative of a forceful motivation shared by many of us who have spent considerable time and effort in examining the complex phenomenon we call television. Indeed, that television needs changing is probably one of the most widely shared assumptions of the second half of the twentieth century, and certainly one that shows no signs of diminishing presence.

By contrast, the notion that television requires, or even that calls for change would somehow demand, “analysis,” is widely considered silly. As Miller’s comments indicate, the mere suggestion that television needs analysis itself requires supportive argument. “Everyone” knows how to think about, presumably how to “change” television. The sense that any change would either imply, or explicitly rely upon, *specific types* of analysis, *specific questions*, *particular bodies of knowledge*, flies in the face of our common and “commonsensical” experience of the ubiquitous appliance and its attendant “content.” And if some of these bodies of knowledge, these questions, these strategies for analysis might be contradictory, or subversive of one another, or perhaps internally incoherent, the waters are muddied more thickly.

Moreover, there is yet another angle on this topic that is preliminary to any thorough description of the “development” of “Television Studies.” It is impor-

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tant to recognize that “Television Studies” is not the same thing as “studying television.” Even the most skeptical or hostile critic of the former may have no hesitation in supporting the latter. Indeed, the skepticism and hostility emerge precisely with attempts to extract television from other “studiable” topics and problems inside which television, while perhaps hugely significant, remains subordinate. It is with these varied approaches to “studying television,” however, that any account of the development of the potentially institutionalized and focused designation must begin.

As I have indicated elsewhere, a number of those who paid early attention to the medium speculated in broad philosophical terms about its place in society and culture (see, for example, Newcomb, 1974). One example, Lee De Forest, will suffice. Best noted for contributions to the development of television technologies, De Forest was also deeply concerned – and broadly optimistic – about the sociocultural power of the medium. Television would, he believed, contribute to the rise of a particular social formation.

A population which once more centers its interest in the home will inherit the earth, and find it good. It will be a maturer population, with hours for leisure in small homes, away from today’s crowded apartments. Into such a picture ideally adapted to the benefits and physical limitations of television, this new magic will enter and become a vital element of daily life.

This new leisure, more wisely used, welcoming the gifts, entertaining, cultural, educational, which radio and television will bestow, shall eventually produce new outlooks on life, and new and more understanding attitudes toward living. (De Forest, 1942, p. 356)

Embedded, rather remarkably, in this brief commentary, are multiple versions of possibilities and problems that continue to motivate a variety of topics related to television studies. The domestic nature of the medium, its range of offerings, its relation to time and space, its ability to affect attitudes and behaviors – all these observations lead to questions still open to exploration. And, of course, this last cluster of implied topics in De Forest’s list, television’s “effects” on behavior and attitude, quickly came to the fore in the early years of the medium’s development as the “essential” questions to be addressed. But rather than exploring them within De Forest’s optimistic frame, as “gifts,” the effects were most often framed and examined as social problems. In this context, of television “as” social problem, a first wave of major studies of television came to prominence. And it is also the case that these questions were perceived as “essential” in two ways – as crucial questions for society, and as the “essence” of the medium itself. To try to think of “television” as other than the conduit for and/or cause of these problems required effort, if not audacity. One need only search under the keywords, “Television: Social Aspects,” in library catalogs to discover large numbers of books, many of them bibliographies containing far larger numbers of essays, to survey the results of approaches to television from this perspective.

Still, it would be a mistake to suggest that these materials suggest an overly simple dichotomy between “the social sciences” and “the humanities,” with the latter providing all the sources for newer uses of “television studies.” Many examinations of television by social psychologists, sociologists, economists, political scientists, and others began early and continue to address questions and provide information, even “data,” powerfully useful for any full understanding of the medium. It is also the case, as I shall suggest later, that “television studies” best understood implies (perhaps requires) the power of blended, melded research strategies that, while reshaping some of the issues and questions underpinning earlier work, profit by returning to them from new angles. Moreover, it is helpful to remember that much work from earlier periods was conducted by scholars for whom rigid divides among “fields,” “disciplines,” “approaches,” and “methods” were less important than they may have become in harsher circumstances driven by the meager reward systems afforded by academic institutions – departmental resources, personal prestige, or narrow requirements for individual advancement and personal job security. Television, like film and radio before it, was a subject, a topic, and a source of great intellectual interest, attracting attention from many scholars from many fields as a result of a sensed obligation to acknowledge potential change of great import. The famous exchanges and collaborations between Paul Lazarsfeld and Theodor Adorno can be taken as exemplary struggles over appropriate questions and approaches without demand for final divisions, even though this is rarely the case when terms such as “administrative” and “critical” are attached to “research” as categories in conflict. And it is certainly worth recalling that Wilbur Schramm, often cited as one of the founders of social scientific media research, began his career with the study of literature. The foreword to his book, *Two Creative Traditions in English Poetry* (1939), was written by the great literary scholar Norman Foerster. And with Foerster and others, Schramm served as co-editor of *Literary Scholarship: Its Aims and Methods* (1941). It was hardly likely to be the case that all concern for expressive culture disappeared when he and his colleagues developed their work on children and television, or on the media as related to national development strategies.

In spite of these multiple connections and relations, however, there is no need to ignore the fact that television has most often been approached from single perspectives. Such precisely focused questions, and attendant methods of analysis or argument, generally reflect deep interests directed toward specific agendas. Thus, for the social psychologist concerned with the welfare of children, any study of television must gather data of a certain sort, capable of securing a voice in the arena of public policy, or at least in the appropriate bodies of academic literature that might be cited in public debate. For the economist focused on international flows of media, however, children’s programming might be examined as a relatively inexpensive commodity best understood within the context of “public good” economic theory. Programming thus cited may be used as an

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example of why certain producing entities or nations have come to have particular influence in world markets. For the scholar of technology, the programs themselves might hold little or no interest, while processes of production and distribution could be fascinating. For the critic, whose approaches are grounded in a range of humanistic fields and who expresses interest in the history of fictional forms, the same body of programs might be “read” as versions of expressive culture, works that rely on familiar forms of narration, stories that can be placed within a very long tradition of “representation.” Many of these focused agendas have resulted from a perceived need to “fill gaps,” or to offer “new” perspectives on familiar phenomena. Thus, when humanities-based critics and scholars turned their attention to television’s fictional programming it was often with the goal of “supplementing” (or, perhaps more arrogantly, “correcting”), analyses conducted by social psychologists, economists, or technologists, and social psychologists turning to issues of large social effects may have intended to “extend” or “expand” work focused solely on television and children.

More interesting questions begin to emerge, however, when the critic suggests to the social psychologist that it is impossible to study children’s responses without some sophisticated notion of narrative theory, or when the economist is challenged by a political economist arguing that the relatively limited number of circulated forms and genres is the result of powerful interests in control of “storytelling” in all cultural and social contexts, or when a specialist in media technologies examines the roles of new media devices alter the processes and outcomes of producing works for children.

It is here, in my view, in the interstices of methodological facility and discipline or field grounded problematics that “Television Studies” begins to find its ground. But getting “here” can be mapped in a variety of configurations. In the introductory essay to *Television: The Critical View* (2000), I chart one pathway – typically, the one most influential in my own efforts – leading to current developments. In this account the first influential turn can be described as the rise of questions related to “popular culture studies,” a movement primarily grounded in varieties of “literary” analysis and determined to take seriously works considered underappreciated because of structured hierarchies involving the sociology of taste and the aims of humanistic education as molder of citizenship. In higher education settings in the United States in the late 1960s those who decided to study popular expressive culture – popular literature, comics, sport, popular music – made particular choices that would involve struggles for place within university curricula and charges of triviality in the general press. Film Studies had secured a foothold by focusing on international cinema as art, but also faced uphill battles when the field turned to American popular movies. Television was among the last topics for which legitimacy was sought.

That these events, decisions, and movements began at that particular time is telling. My argument suggests the following motivations, with specific attention to other developments in the United States.

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The choice to examine these “inferior” or “unappreciated” forms was motivated by a number of concerns. Philosophically, scholars in this movement often felt the works they wished to examine were more indicative of larger cultural preferences, expressive of a more “democratic” relationship between works and audiences than the “elite” works selected, archived, and taught as the traditional canon of humanistically valued forms of expression.

Politically, these same impulses suggested that it was important to study these works precisely because their exclusion from canonical systems also excluded their audiences, devalued large numbers of citizens, or saddled them with inferior intellectual or aesthetic judgment. (Newcomb, 2000, p. 2)

Despite the “political” motivation behind the study of popular culture, there was little overt analysis of “ideology.” The sense of “rescuing” the materials from complete dismissal was considered a form of activism, and certainly led to substantial political conflict in academic settings. But it was the development of “Cultural Studies” in Britain that began far more thorough analyses of the medium, among other “cultural” topics, with a fundamental commitment to ideology critique. This work drew heavily on a range of Marxist social and cultural theory, as well as on other “continental” philosophies. In this setting culturalists also engaged in debate with those championing stricter applications of Marxist political economy, who viewed cultural studies as, at times, myopic regarding issues of ownership and control of media industries. The cultural studies perspectives, and sometimes the attendant debates involving political economy, were quickly taken up in the United States and were a second, if not parallel influence on the development of television studies there. It should be noted here that while there was comparatively little influence flowing from the United States to Britain regarding these matters, it remained the case that British and other European scholars – and later, Asian and Latin American scholars as well – often focused on television produced in the United States as sites for analysis or theory development. Indeed, the powerful presence of US television throughout the world became a central topic of discussion in the cultural studies literatures and that content has undoubtedly had its own influence on various approaches to the medium at large.

Cultural studies also blended easily with a third strain of influence in television studies – critical sociology. Here, scholars drew on the work of the Frankfurt School of sociocultural analysis, and often viewed television as the latest in a line of “culture industries” spreading false consciousness, turning masses of popular culture users into mere fodder for pernicious political control (see Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972).

Academic critics working both from this tradition and from sharper versions of cultural studies frequently critiqued what they considered to be a central weakness in the earlier “popular culture” approach, its apparent reliance on a naïve notion of “liberal pluralism” when examining many expressive forms. The arrival of “British cultural studies” required and enabled some scholars working

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within the tradition of critical sociology to sharpen their own critiques, to recognize weaknesses and gaps in their work, and to move toward a more complex perspective on television and other topics by recognizing greater textual complexity in industrially produced expressive culture.

As suggested earlier, a fourth influence in this account must be the array of film studies expanding in academic settings. “Art” films, “foreign” films, often constituted the subject matter in some earlier classes devoted to film studies, and, as with television, many analytical approaches were modifications of literary studies. “Film appreciation” classes were also popular among students (and, because they enrolled large numbers, equally popular with administrators and teachers in liberal arts literature departments), as were the offerings, relatively few in number, devoted to the technical production of films. The push to study popular American film – to study “Hollywood” – drew many of the same negative responses as those leveled at the study of television. Still, with a degree of “support” from European scholars and critics/filmmakers who praised the unrecognized “artistry” of Hollywood film and filmmakers, American film topics found their place in the academy. The entire body of film studies quickly developed subdivisions and an array of analytical approaches, methods, and theories. In some quarters and some journals, the field also developed its own specialized languages, often cited by beginning students, journalists, or “visitors” from other fields of study as unduly arcane. By the 1980s a number of film scholars were also attending to television. In some cases the turn to the newer medium enriched approaches that were already being applied. In others, film theory and analysis foundered in encounters with features fundamentally distinct from those for which they were developed.

One area in which film scholars encountered difficult problems involved actual settings and behaviors surrounding the practices of viewing the media. While “spectatorship” had become a major topic of film analysis, the domestic aspects of television viewing, combined with its role as advertising medium, repetitive or serialized narrative structures, and genres merged within the television schedule, led to serious reconsideration or revision of notions regarding actual viewer experiences. In somewhat fortuitous fashion, British cultural studies had posited the study of audiences as a major topic within the study of mass media. Drawing on the model developed by Stuart Hall, analytical strategies had developed around notions of “encoding and decoding” television “texts.” By examining the professional/institutional/production process at one pole of this model and the activities of audiences at the other, emphasis on the “actual” audience became a central component of study of television. The notion of the “active audience” became a central tenet in much of this work, often used to counter earlier studies of “media effects” and a range of “ethnographic” approaches, drawn from anthropology replaced or amplified the “survey” and “experimental” methods of social psychologists.

This focus on audience activity became a major focus of the emerging television studies arena and was also central to yet another influential stream in the

development of television studies – the development of a range of feminist approaches to media and culture. Focus on gendered distinctions has ranged from studies of production and performance involving women to theories of narrative. And the focus on active audiences has been a basic strategy for redeeming such denigrated forms as the soap opera. Television has even been defined, problematically, as a more “feminine” medium, in part because of its domestic setting and, in the US industries, its constant flow of advertising, often directed at women as primary consumers in households. Feminist theory has cut through and across almost all previous approaches to television, altering or challenging basic assumptions at every juncture.

A number of these factors came together in several works in the mid-1980s, most notably in the work of John Fiske. That analysis began in collaboration with John Hartley, *Reading Television* (1978), a significant study grounded in literary theory and semiotics, but pushing those approaches to the study of television in exciting new ways. By 1987 Fiske had articulated an overarching approach in *Television Culture*, a work that began to develop ideas considered radical, even in cultural studies circles. The most prominent concept, one developed further in later studies, suggested that the ability – indeed, the power and authority – of viewers could perhaps match or even override that of television “texts,” and by implication the ideological authority in which those texts were grounded. In some instances Fiske suggested that viewers could perhaps subvert messages and, by creating meanings of their own, create a type of ideological response to dominant ideology. Fiske was soundly taken to task by those who found such a view far too “populist,” too naïve. (See, for example, McGuigan, 1992 and 1996.) In my own view, however, Fiske never lost sight of the applied power afforded by access to production, control of discursive systems, and political policies. Rather, his work reminds us that the results of such power is always uneven in its effectivity, couched in multiple and varying contexts, and significant to individuals and groups in very different ways. The debates sparked by this body of work continue.

The account presented thus far suggests only one version of the development of television studies. In it, various emphases, on television programs, industries, audiences, remain, in varying degree, discreet. Or, better put, they remain fundamental starting points for applied work. Similar starting points are also found in another survey of the development of television studies constructed by Charlotte Brunsdon:

Television studies emerges in the 1970s and 1980s from three major bodies of commentary on television: journalism, literary/dramatic criticism and the social sciences. The first, and most familiar, was daily and weekly journalism . . . The second body of commentary is also organized through ideas of authorship, but here it is the writer or dramatist who forms the legitimation for the attention to television. Critical method here is extrapolated from traditional literary and dramatic criticism, and television attracts serious critical attention as a “home theatre” . . .