Fourth Edition

An Introduction to Television Studies

Jonathan Bignell and Faye Woods

An Introduction to Television Studies

This comprehensive textbook, now substantially updated for its fourth edition, provides students with a framework for understanding the key concepts and main approaches to Television Studies, including audiences, representation, industry and global television, as well as the analytical study of individual programmes.

This new edition reflects the significant changes the television industry is undergoing in the streaming era with an explosion of new content and providers, whilst also identifying how many existing practices have endured. The book includes a glossary of key terms, with each chapter suggesting further reading.

New and updated material includes:

- Chapters on style and form, narrative, industry, and representation and identity
- Case studies on *Bon Appétit*'s YouTube channel, *Insecure*, British youth television, ABC and Disney+, fixed-rig observational documentary, streaming platforms' use of data to shape audience experience, *Chewing Gum*, Korean drama and *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel*
- Sections on medical drama, YouTube creators, *Skam* and scripted format sales, the global spread of streaming platforms, prestige TV and period drama

With individual chapters addressing television style and form, narrative, histories, industries, genres and formats, realities, production, audiences, representation and identity, and quality, this book is essential reading for both students and scholars of Television Studies.

Jonathan Bignell is Professor of Television and Film at the University of Reading, UK. He authored three previous editions of *An Introduction to Television Studies* and was co-author of *The Television Handbook*, second edition. His many other publications include co-editing the book *A European Television History*.

Faye Woods is Associate Professor of Film and Television at the University of Reading, UK. She is the author of the books *Period Drama* and *British Youth Television*.

Praise for the previous editions:

'At a time when the question of what constitutes "television" is being ever more keenly debated and as the medium continues to be reimagined, I can think of no other book to so adroitly meet the needs of students new to Television Studies. Engaging, accessible, and with a diverse series of activities and case studies that capture both the history and dynamism of this subject, Bignell's invaluable new edition provides a comprehensive entry into the most significant debates in the field.' **Dr Deborah Jermyn**, Reader in Film and Television, Roehampton University, UK

'In covering key areas of Television Studies, ranging across history, aesthetics, genre, production and reception, this book remains a key touchstone for students entering and studying the field. Accessibly written and well-illustrated with the addition of up-to-date examples, Bignell manages to span the core concepts and concerns of the discipline in an engaging and stimulating manner. At a time when the very idea of "television" as an object of study is undergoing significant shifts, *An Introduction to Television Studies* succeeds in taking us on a journey which maps out longstanding aspects of television (and Television Studies), whilst embracing the "new" context of television's dispersed screens and digital culture.' **Su Holmes**, Reader in Television Studies, University of East Anglia, UK

An Introduction to Television Studies

Fourth Edition

Jonathan Bignell and Faye Woods

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Cover image: Getty Images / Hector Roqueta Rivero

Fourth edition published 2023
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2023 Jonathan Bignell and Faye Woods

The right of Jonathan Bignell and Faye Woods to be identified as authors of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

First edition published by Routledge 2004

Third edition published by Routledge 2012

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-138-66581-1 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-66582-8 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-61967-5 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675

Typeset in Janson and Akzidenz Grotesk
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

Contents

List of illustrations ix
Acknowledgements xiii

Introduction **1**
Using this book 1
Television Studies 2
The organisation of chapters 5
Bibliography 9

1 Studying Television **11**
Introduction 12
Beyond broadcasting 13
Television nations 16
Studying programmes 17
Television and society 20
Television audiences 26
Case study: television past and present 29
Summary of key points 33
Bibliography 34

2 Television Style and Form **37**
The language of television 38
Connotations and codes 40
Mise-en-scène 41
Image 49
Sound 53
Structure and editing 56
Case study: *Bon Appétit’s Gourmet Makes* 62
Summary of key points 68
Bibliography 68

3 Television Narrative **69**
Introduction 70
Identification 71
Story/plot 73
Structure 75

Narrative forms – serial 75
Narrative forms – series 76
Narrative forms – hybrid 77
Transmedia storytelling 78
Case study: *Insecure* 79
Summary of key points 84
Bibliography 85

4 Television Histories 87
Introduction 88
Collecting the evidence 89
Inventing television technologies 92
Television institutions 94
Reception contexts 97
British approaches to commercial television 99
Professional cultures in a 'Golden Age' 101
Programmes and forms 103
The ten most popular programmes in March 1958 104
The ten most popular programmes in September 1964 104
The ten most popular programmes in November 1974 105
The ten most popular programmes in November 1984 105
Case study: a history of British youth television 107
Summary of key points 110
Bibliography 110

5 Television Industries 113
Introduction 114
The funding structures of television 114
Public service broadcasting in the British market 115
Television regulation in the UK 117
The structure of television industries 119
Channel brands in digital and cable 121
Streaming platforms 123
British public service streaming: BBC iPlayer 126
Case study: ABC and Disney 128
Summary of key points 132
Bibliography 132

6 Television Genres and Formats 135
Introduction 136
Identifying genre and format 138
The generic space of soap opera 140
The medical drama 142
Sitcom and the problem of humour 144
Genre hybridity and reality TV 147
Case study: adult animated series 150

Summary of key points 155
Bibliography 155

7 Television Realities 157
Introduction 158
Factual television 158
Realism and television technologies 160
British soap opera and realism 162
Realism and ideology 165
News and liveness 166
The documentary mode 169
Case study: docudrama 174
Summary of key points 177
Bibliography 177

8 Television Production 181
Introduction 182
Development 183
Pre-production 185
Production 191
Post-production 196
YouTube, user-generated content and the amateur-professional creator 198
Case study: 'fixed rig' observational documentary 201
Summary of key points 204
Bibliography 205

9 Television Audiences 207
Introduction 208
The economics of watching television 209
Ratings: measuring audiences 211
Targeting audiences 213
'Protecting' audiences 213
Active audiences 214
Attention and involvement 215
Qualitative audience research 217
Fan audiences 220
Case study: data, algorithms and interfaces – shaping streaming audiences 224
Summary of key points 228
Bibliography 229

10 Television Representation and Identity 231
Introduction 232
Intersectionality and othering 233
Representation and stereotype 235

Meaningful diversity and plastic representation 237
Ideology 239
Television as cultural forum 241
Reality television and identity 242
Who makes TV? 244
Diversity as brand management 246
Case study: *Chewing Gum* 249
Summary of key points 251
Bibliography 252

11 Television Cultures and Globalisation 255
Introduction 256
Global television 257
National television in global contexts 260
International unscripted format sales 262
The scripted format trade and localisation 265
Global power and streaming platforms 267
The global and local interrelationship 269
Case study: Hallyu and Korean drama 272
Summary of key points 276
Bibliography 276

12 Television and Quality 279
Introduction 280
Identifying 'quality' 282
Channels and brands in American television drama 285
Television and authorship 288
The 'cinematic', legitimating television and complex serial drama 291
Visual style and the *Doctor Who* brand 293
Period drama as prestige genre 296
Case study: *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* 298
Summary of key points 300
Bibliography 301

Glossary of key terms 303
Index 315

Illustrations

Figures

1.1 The wedding of Prince Harry to Meghan Markle, 19 May 2018 21
1.2 *Famous, Rich and Homeless* 22
1.3 A political debate during the 2019 General Election 22
1.4 Television rehearsals at Alexandra Palace, 1946. Photograph courtesy of the Daily Herald Archive/Science Museum Group 31
2.1 Krishnan Guru-Murthy delivers the Channel 4 News 40
2.2 The brothers' cramped apartment in *It's Okay to Not Be Okay* 42
2.3 Moon-young's large family mansion 43
2.4 ITV News reporting from outside the US Senate on 6 January 2021 44
2.5 Costume and colour signifying women's social categories in *The Handmaid's Tale* 44
2.6 Conventional late night chat show presenting on *Late Night With Seth Myers* 45
2.7 Laid back presenting style on *Desus & Mero* 46
2.8 Lighting in *The Great British Bake Off* allows contestants to be evenly lit as they bake 47
2.9 Low-key lighting in *Peaky Blinders* provides high contrast between light and dark 47
2.10 Unbalanced lighting of a Black actor in *Stranger Things* 48
2.11 *Insecure*'s use of reflected light in night scenes to accentuate Black skin 48
2.12 Establishing shot in *Happy Valley* 49
2.13 Long shot framing and blocking express emotional distance in *Master of None* 50
2.14 Close-up and shallow focus in *Normal People* 51
2.15 Low angle communicating Arabella's emotional state in *I May Destroy You* 51
2.16 High angle and unbalance framing communicated Issa's unsureness in *Insecure* 52
2.17 A point of view shot in *Peep Show* 52
2.18 A conversation between three characters in *Starstruck* 57
2.19 A conversation between three characters in *Starstruck* 57
2.20 A conversation between three characters in *Starstruck* 58
2.21 A conversation between three characters in *Starstruck* 58
2.22 Editing maintains the 180-degree rule in *Ru Paul's Drag Race* 59

2.23 Editing maintains the 180-degree rule in *Ru Paul's Drag Race* 59
2.24 Editing maintains the 180-degree rule in *Ru Paul's Drag Race* 59
2.25 Editing maintains the 180-degree rule in *Ru Paul's Drag Race* 60
2.26 *Sharp Objects* illustrates memory through fragmented flashbacks 61
2.27 *Sharp Objects* illustrates memory through fragmented flashbacks 61
2.28 *Sharp Objects* illustrates memory through fragmented flashbacks 61
2.29 *Sharp Objects* illustrates memory through fragmented flashbacks 62
2.30 The *Bon Appétit* Test Kitchen 63
2.31 Brad and Claire in the episode teaser 64
2.32 Claire holds a Snickers cross section to camera 65
2.33 Claire deconstructs the Snickers bar 66
2.34 Claire asks Andy for help, Rick Martinez can be seen in the depth of the frame 66
2.35 The reading of the ingredients 67
3.1 *Fleabag* gives the audience intimate access to its unnamed protagonist 72
3.2 *Sex Education* keeps its will-they-won't-they romance maintained in C plots 74
3.3 *Skam*'s website, featuring season 3 focused on Isak 79
3.4 Issa and her intern discuss the block party 82
3.5 Molly and Issa's awkward greeting 83
3.6 Molly and Issa do 'The Wobble' 83
3.7 Issa is left alone at the episode's close 84
4.1 In 2010, *The Road to Coronation Street* dramatised the creation of the ITV soap opera at the beginning of the 1960s 92
4.2 John Logie Baird with his experimental television receiver, 1926. Photograph courtesy of the Daily Herald Archive / Science Museum Group 94
4.3 The first episode of *Coronation Street* in 1960 106
4.4 Margherita Taylor and June Sarpong present T4 109
4.5 An awkward teenage house party in *The Inbetweeners* 109
5.1 *Ackley Bridge* on Channel 4 118
5.2 ITV2's reality dating show *Love Island* is made by ITV Entertainment 120
5.3 Privileged Los Angeles lifestyles displayed in MTV reality show *The Hills* 122
5.4 Jennifer Aniston is one of the big-name stars of *The Morning Show* on Apple TV+ 125
5.5 Romantic drama *Normal People* was 2020's most popular programme on BBC iPlayer 128
5.6 *The Mandalorian* drew on the Star Wars franchise's expansive transmedia storytelling and featured 'Baby Yoda' as a character 131
6.1 A dance routine on *Strictly Come Dancing* 140
6.2 Surgeons operate on a patient in *Grey's Anatomy* 144
6.3 The catholic schoolgirls of *Derry Girls* 145
6.4 *The Simpsons*' launch on Disney+ is advertised through a synergistic teaser promo 150

6.5 ‘A couch gag’ ends the opening credits of *The Simpsons* 151
6.6 Jessie and Connie her hormone monster in *Big Mouth* 152
7.1 Images of the 9/11 attacks in New York, in *102 Minutes That Changed America* 159
7.2 Documentary *Grenfell* uses video from social media to tell the story of the fire 160
7.3 The tower still smoking after the fire in a scene from *Grenfell* 170
7.4 Presenter Stephen Satterfield and food writer Dr Jessica B. Harris discuss okra in a Benin food market in *High on the Hog* 171
7.5 *Grenfell* uses interviews with residents and officials to tell the story of the fire and its aftermath 172
7.6 *High on the Hog* uses archive imagery to illustrate historian Gabin Diamassè’s outlining of the history of the slave trade in Benin 173
7.7 *Damilola: Our Loved Boy* recreates a public speech by Richard Taylor 175
7.8 Tensions in the Taylor family boil over in the private space of their home 176
7.9 A firefighter gazes at the inferno caused by the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear plant 176
8.1 Example of a storyboard. Courtesy of Jeremy Orlebar 188
8.2 By its final season the episode budget for HBO’s *Game of Thrones* had risen to $15 million 189
8.3 Visual effects in Disney+’s *Loki* 192
8.4 Steadicam operator Larry McConkey filming a long take in *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* 194
8.5 Vlogger Patricia Bright framed against her living room 200
8.6 A patient shot from an overhead camera in *24 Hours in A&E* 203
8.7 A camera is relatively unobtrusive amongst the medical equipment 203
9.1 Sponsorship bumper from an episode of *Love Island* 211
9.2 *Gogglebox* cast members react to a programme 216
9.3 The Doctor confronts a mass of Daleks in *Doctor Who* 221
9.4 Ofcom chart of average minutes of viewing per day per device in 2020. Courtesy of Ofcom Media Nations Report 2021 225
9.5 New and popular programmes are given a prominent position on the Netflix interface 227
10.1 Sisters Lyn and Emma gaze at their mother’s bar in *Vida* 234
10.2 *We Are Lady Parts* in their rehearsal room 235
10.3 Chabuddy G shows the camera around his office/living space in *People Just Do Nothing* 236
10.4 The cast of season twelve of *The Great British Bake Off* 241
10.5 *Parks and Recreation* derives comedy from Ron and Leslie’s opposing perspectives 242
10.6 *Broad City*’s ‘precarious girl’ comedy gives us intimate access to its protagonists 246
10.7 Comedian Adam Hills features in Channel 4’s Altogether Different branding campaign 248
10.8 Direct address in *Chewing Gum* 249

10.9 Tracey's naïve approach to sex is played for slapstick comedy 250
11.1 The blockbuster *His Dark Materials* adaptation is a BBC/HBO co-production 261
11.2 An outlandish character disguise in the US version of *The Masked Singer* 264
11.3 The UK version of *The Circle* 264
11.4 *Skam Austin* is produced for Facebook and uses the brand identity of the Norwegian original 266
11.5 The crime caper *Lupin* is a French Netflix Original 271
11.6 An intense focus on romantic tension in *My Love from the Star* 273
11.7 Players compete to the death in *Squid Game*'s violent survival game 275
12.1 Making *The Blue Planet* natural history series 282
12.2 Visual style in *Mad Men* 286
12.3 Sally Wainwright's crime drama *Happy Valley* 289
12.4 *Made in Chelsea*'s careful composition and soft champagne colour grade 292
12.5 The doctor dangles from the TARDIS in 'The Eleventh Hour' 295
12.6 *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* recreates 1950s New York on location 299

Table

5.1 Media conglomerates own the US major networks 120
5.2 Most popular programmes on BBC iPlayer 2020 (requests to stream = view of individual episode) 128
9.1 Comparison of characteristics of linear and non-linear television 226

Acknowledgements

Firstly, thank you to Jonathan Bignell for passing on the stewardship of this book and all his work on the previous editions. This fourth edition combines our voices. I would like to thank my colleagues past and present at the University of Reading who have taught Television Studies with me over the years and continue to inform my understanding of the discipline, as well as my non-TV colleagues who teach with and support me on a daily basis. Thanks also go to the Department of Film and Television at the University of Warwick and those I studied alongside there, who opened my eyes to Television Studies and made me the academic I am today, particularly Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Amy Holdsworth. The Northern Television Research Group have provided stimulating discussion and fun times, and the ladies of the Backchannel continue to support and inspire me every day on matters television-related and beyond. This book is dedicated to all of the students I have worked with across my academic career who continue to make unpicking this ever-expanding world of television a pleasure and a privilege, particularly Rhonda Cowell who now has students of her own.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Introduction

Using this book

This book is an introduction to Television Studies, aimed especially at those who are new to the study of the medium at college and university level. It describes some of the critical approaches to television that have become widely accepted in the subject. It also explains and makes use of key concepts in Television Studies that every student needs to know about. The book reevaluates the terms and ideas that have been significant in studying television, and tests out their limits, drawing attention to the strengths and weaknesses in the ways that television has been studied up to now. So the book draws together a collection of concepts and critical languages that are sometimes quite diverse, or even contradictory, and suggests how there are some ways of thinking about television that are more fruitful than others. Television Studies is a dynamic and rapidly changing field of work, as the next section explains. This makes the task of the student of television an open-ended and exciting one.

This book outlines significant strands of critical work in the field and provides worked-though case study examples of how critical approaches can be applied to actual problems, programmes and issues. It is organised into chapters that are suitable for use as preparatory reading for class study, or as follow-up reading to support classroom debate. Significant terms are highlighted in **bold** in the text when they are doing important work in the discussion. A definition of the highlighted term appears in the margin next to its first appearance in a chapter, and these definitions can also be found in alphabetical order in the glossary of key terms at the end of the book. The terms we have highlighted in this way are those that seem to require a specific definition. Some of them are part of the critical terminology of the academic discipline of Television Studies or one of the areas of research that has fed into the field. Some of them are terms used in the television industry in Britain or the US to describe an aspect of how television technology works, or how programme-making, broadcasting and streaming are carried out. Some terms are more widely known and are part of non-professional language, but may need a precise definition so that they can be understood and used accurately by readers and students of television. Readers of this book will already know some terms, will have heard but not understood others and will be introduced to some completely new vocabulary that we hope will enrich their capacity to talk and write about television.

Each chapter ends with a bibliography that also includes suggested further reading. The books, essays and articles chosen are often those we have quoted

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-1

from, but there are also some other books listed that deal with the topics covered in the chapter. This section can be a useful tool for looking at the range of the subject, and exploring sources for independent work. There is great insight to be gained from further exploration of how other voices have expressed ideas that we have written about here, and especially so if another writer has an alternative or even opposing attitude to a subject. Like any academic subject, Television Studies is diverse and evolving, and there are strongly held and articulately presented points of view within it that differ greatly in aims, assumptions, emphases and conclusions. Approaches to Television Studies are not a set of tools, but more like a group of different languages. They do not translate neatly one into another, and each defines its world in rather different ways. This book is concerned with the most commonly studied theoretical issues in television courses. The major differences between courses of study are in their focus on one or two of the following areas:

- Analytical study of television programmes as texts
- The television industry as an institution and its production practices and organisation
- Television in contemporary culture, its representations and the sociological study of audiences
- Television history and developments in broadcasting policy

This book provides introductory explanation, evaluation and routes for further study in each of these areas. We aim to show why these approaches have a significant role in Television Studies, to encourage students to participate in debates within and between these approaches, and to gain an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of particular theoretical models for studying television.

In each chapter the reader will discover references to work by others who have contributed to Television Studies. In a single volume it is impossible for us to note all of the significant ideas in the sources we have used, and readers have many opportunities to build on the brief discussions of existing research that we have included here by reading the source texts that we have cited. Indeed, the many directions that such further work can take indicate how Television Studies, like the industry it analyses, is always evolving. We hope that readers of this book will be encouraged to make their own contributions to the subject by identifying the gaps, new directions and even contradictions opened up in these pages.

Television Studies

Television Studies has tried to define how the medium communicates, and this has involved distinguishing between television communication and the media of cinema or radio, for example. But it has used methodologies for describing and analysing television texts that come from disciplines including Film Studies, methods of discussing audiences and television institutions that come from sociology and Cultural Studies, and ways of describing the development of television that amount to different histories of the medium.

Because television includes so many different programmes, channels, platforms and ways of addressing its audiences even at one point in time in a single geographical region, it has proved very difficult for critics and commentators to produce useful general insights into the medium. This is even more the case once the history of the medium and its regional variations across countries and regions of the world are considered.

Early predictions (in the 1930s, for instance) of what television would be emphasised its liveness, its ability to present to a mass audience images of what was happening in the real world. Commentators remarked on television's inability to compete with cinema as entertainment and therefore expected the medium to focus on information and actuality. These early thoughts conditioned the ways in which realism, connection to the contemporary and uneasiness about bringing controversial visions into the home were played out. The connection of television technology to immediacy and liveness distinguishes it from film. Television can record or relay events occurring in real time (qualities which it now shares with the internet). This has predisposed it to linear real-time progress, and the claim to report the real world. Film has been theorised in terms of space (what can be seen on the space of the screen), and this has led to theories about how individual film spectators identify with the usually fictional characters and points of view offered for spectators to see. Some of these ways of thinking from studying film have been deployed in Television Studies to explain how viewers make sense of the television medium. Analysing television's formal qualities and narrative structure has drawn from the study of film and literature, whilst also asserting television's difference from these forms. Time has also been an important frame for examining television. As a broadcast medium it is always 'on' – you switch on a television set and a broadcast is always in process. As a result, broadcast television has long been studied as a linear 'flow' of audio-visual material that, although divided up into programmes, runs on across a period of time without empty gaps in between. Discussing the linear 'flow' of broadcast television Charlotte Brunsdon has noted:

> Television is, for the most part, made as programmes or runs of programmes: series, serials and mini-series. However this is not necessarily how television is watched … It is precisely this possible 'drifting' through an evening's viewing that has come to seem … one of the unique features of television watching.
>
> (1998: 105–6)

Experiencing broadcast television as flow is different to the defined end point of a film. The rise of streaming platforms has continued viewing practices that had previously been enabled by VCRs, DVD and DVRs, shifting viewing towards a non-linear experience, with programmes as discrete units. However, the experience of flow is in part maintained through these streaming platforms' auto-play features, which select viewing and encourage 'binge watching' of entire seasons of television. Television Studies looks not only at individual programmes but also at the ways they link together. These links might be in terms of the similarities of one programme with another, where shared features of a genre tell us something about the persistence of some kinds of storytelling, sets of issues or ideas being explored or the conventions to which the makers of programmes adhere. The links might also be in the planning and organisation of a period of viewing within linear broadcast television, for example an evening's television schedule on a certain channel. These shared features and links can help shape the interfaces and suggestions of streaming platforms, which use data-driven algorithms to promote certain programmes and shape a viewer's personal schedule.

The viewing audience and its interests drives the organisation of television and shapes assumptions about how television is used and enjoyed. Viewers today may blend the scheduled flow of linear television with the personal selection enabled by DVRs and streaming platforms; however, the schedule has been the primary structuring device of viewers' experience of television for much of the medium's history. Planning a schedule means including a variety of programming, yet also creating a continuity of interest that can keep a viewer tuned to a single channel. The connections between programmes in a linear schedule or on a streaming platform's interface are the responsibility of the institutions that broadcast and stream them. Looking at how television institutions work has been important to Television Studies' understanding of the medium's role as an industrial product, made and organised in different ways in different parts of the world.

It's important to think about television as both a global and local experience. Even though television programmes and formats are distributed globally, its local forms are different. This can be seen immediately in the difference between commercial television in the US and the British tradition, which has a strong civic, 'public service' character. In Britain's blend of public service and commercially funded there has always been a tension between taking television's responsibility to society seriously and regarding television as entertainment for a consumer. Globally, the impact of different commercial and governmental structures has shaped television forms and industry in the past and present in a range of ways. Television Studies has also explored how television moves around the world through export and import flows, bringing cultural and political power with it. Television can also be remade and reformatted in the image of local cultures. We must remember that television does not have to take the form that it does in the places with which we might be familiar.

The ways in which television holds or transmits cultural power highlight its social significance. The questions of what and who is represented, in what ways and with what possible effects have been considered in Television Studies with particular attention to the representation of groups who are relatively lacking in social power. This kind of study can show how television can contribute to the ways that viewers understand and experience their own lives and those of the people around them. As well as looking at what can be seen and heard in the medium of television, how it is organised in different parts of the world and its relationship with the ways of thinking and experiencing the world in social contexts, Television Studies pays attention to the audiences of television and how they interact with the medium. This involves noting which programmes and kinds of programme are watched the most, using information that television institutions themselves collect in statistical form – in the form of ratings and increasingly data on audience choices and demographics. This also involves Television Studies researchers undertaking independent audience studies, observing groups of viewers and talking to them about how, what and why they watch, exploring how television fits into their everyday life. In recent years internet discussion forums and social media have also been a focus of researchers looking to understand how people think about and use television, how it shapes who they are and how they understand the world. Research that focuses on audiences attempts to engage with how viewers make sense of television, and how it is important (or perhaps unimportant) to them. In this way Television Studies aims to break down the boundaries between the academic agendas that it has developed for specialised work on the medium and the place of watching television in the lives of non-specialist viewers for whom television can function in a range of ways among other routines and everyday experiences.

As Catherine Johnson notes, 'television is a hybrid medium that has been subject to seemingly endless change … and whose definition has never been stable' (2019: 30). Each previous edition of this book charted significant shifts in the television industry and technology. The 2012 edition of this textbook was published at a transitional point where the UK and many other countries had converted to digital television and streaming platforms were on the rise. This new edition is written in a world where viewing video on mobile devices is a norm and streaming platforms are a dominant part of television life. A new wave of global streaming platforms launched in the late 2010s. Combined with the global impact of the coronavirus pandemic on television production and viewing behaviours, this has helped accelerate long-term shifts in viewing behaviour away from linear broadcast television. A sporting event can now be watched live via a linear television channel on digital, cable or satellite; on a subscription or advertising-supported streaming platform; or even on a social media platform. Live television remains a prominent part of many viewers' experience of television, so we must take care not to present streaming (which relies on high-speed internet via broadband or mobile data) as a universal experience. Particularly as the technological and financial barriers to access can be much more significant compared to a broadcast television signal captured by a television aerial. As a result of these changes the new edition of this book speaks of television channels and streaming platforms with the same prominence

The organisation of chapters

Studying Television

The first chapter sketches out the topics of study and critical approaches which can be found in academic Television Studies, noting its significant emphases and exclusions. Television Studies in Britain and the US, for example, is dominated by work on television in the English-speaking world. One dominant strand is the detailed textual analysis of programmes, with a preference for popular programmes in serial and series form, concentrating on drama, documentary and news programmes. This derives from the tradition in academic work of studying content and form in detail. It also reflects the dominance of English-language programmes in the world television market. There are other kinds of television to mention, however, which stimulate thinking about what television can include: trailers, commercials and channel idents, for instance. This chapter considers different understandings of what television is, and how Television Studies approaches are based on assumptions about the television text, the form of its transmission and who is watching where and when. The chapter includes a case study comparing and contrasting representations of television viewing in the 1950s and the 2020s, showing how the medium has been thought about in different ways at different times.

Television Style and Form

Chapter 2 explores how television programmes can be studied in close detail as ‘texts’, to reveal how their meanings are made. The techniques for undertaking this kind of close analysis, deriving from the methodologies of semiotics, are explained. The chapter includes detailed discussion of the style and formal structures of television, focusing on image and sound. It gives students the tools to produce detailed close textual analysis. The case study takes a segment of the YouTube series *Gourmet Makes* and conducts a close analysis of its images and sound, showing how textual approaches to television can be used in practice.

Television Narrative

Chapter 3 looks at the structure and organisation of television programmes’ narratives. It considers the role of identification in narrative focus and outlines how television is built as episodes and seasons. It pays attention to story structure, narrative problematics and arcs. Different narrative forms are outlined, defining the serial and series forms, as well as the blending of these aspects. The expansion of storytelling beyond the episode is considered through transmedia narrative. The case study breaks down the structure and storytelling of an episode of HBO comedy *Insecure*.

Television Histories

Chapter 4 describes and analyses the different approaches to the evolution of television from the 1930s to the 1990s, primarily focused on Britain and the US. This involves a discussion of state regulation of television, the increasing proliferation of channels and the introduction of cable and satellite broadcasting systems, competition and commerce. The chapter aims to introduce the subject of television history through an understanding of the changing social place of television in society, changes in television institutions and technologies, along with changing conceptions of the television audience and the nature of television viewing. The chapter explains a range of historical approaches to show different ways of approaching television history. The case study explores the history of British youth television, illustrating how we can analyse television history through programming targeting a particular demographic, considering how it has been impacted by social and industrial change.

Television Industries

Chapter 5 looks at the structure and organisation of the companies that make television. It considers the funding structures of television and how the industries in different nations are organised. It looks at how British television is shaped by public service broadcasting and television regulation. It lays out some of the ownership structures of US and global media companies, as well as highlighting the role of brand identity in digital and cable channels. The chapter considers the place of streaming platforms in global markets, and considers how public service broadcasters developed streaming in the UK. Its case study focuses on the Walt Disney Company, looking at the key moments in the history of the US network ABC and the launch of the Disney+ streaming platform.

Television Genres

Chapter 6 focuses on the significance of genre in television, showing how genres are relatively stable, but also how they can blend and change over time. The chapter explains theories of genre, and talks in more detail about the genres of medical drama, sitcom and reality TV, considering why some of these blur genre boundaries. The chapter explains the concept of television formats, suggesting that these display much less variability than genres. The case study looks at American adult animated series, analysing how they draw from a range of television genres and combine them in interesting ways to address different audiences.

Television Realities

Chapter 7 focuses on the ways that questions of realism can be addressed in Television Studies. This includes looking at what realism might mean in different programme genres, and the conventions used in various kinds of documentary and factual programmes. Television has a strong tradition of showing its viewers images of reality, using live footage and actuality in such diverse forms as news, documentary, docusoap and reality TV. The chapter debates the different understandings of reality and realism in television. It ends with a case study on dramatisations of real events in drama-documentary, also known as docudrama.

Television Production

Chapter 8 discusses the production practices and technologies that are used in bringing programmes to the screen, including the pitching, writing, production planning, production scheduling, shooting and post-production of programmes. It gives an account of the professional culture of television production in different kinds of broadcasting environments and in different genres and forms of programme. The chapter aims to provide a critical understanding of the television industry as a profession. Attention is paid to developments in technology, including the different kinds of equipment used in programme-making. The chapter also includes a discussion of YouTube and how developments in technology have opened up production to amateur creators. The chapter includes a case study of observational documentary's use of fixed-rig filming systems.

Television Audiences

Chapter 9 analyses the methods of understanding audiences, and how television institutions seek to control their viewing behaviours. It discusses methods used by British and US broadcasters and streaming platforms to gather information about television viewers and considers some of the changing industrial assumptions about viewers and television across its history. The chapter introduces different industry and academic approaches to audiences, and their implications. It addresses issues connected with the activity or ‘agency’ of viewers, including fandom, the role of academic television audience researchers and the ways that audiences make and resist the meanings of television programmes. The chapter concludes with a case study on streaming platforms’ use of data and algorithms to shape viewers’ experience of television.

Television, Representation and Identity

Chapter 10 outlines Television Studies’ interest in how the medium shapes viewers’ understanding of the world and other people. This includes industry and content analysis, as well as debates over fair and accurate representations of different groups of people. In this context television has participated in setting up, maintaining and also changing the cultural norms that underlie how members of society think about themselves and about people who seem different to them. It considers industrial initiatives around ‘diversity’ as well as how this is used as part of brand identities. The chapter’s case study looks at the sitcom *Chewing Gum*, and its intersectional engagement with gender, race and class, along with national specificity.

Television Cultures and Globalisation

Chapter 11 looks at the significance of national and international cultures of television broadcasting. It considers how the complexity of globalisation and television requires analysis of the structure of television industries, media regulation, funding practices, distribution and reception, and how particular programme types move around the world. It explores debates about television’s contribution to media imperialism as well as the power involved in international flows of television import and export. The chapter refers to inequalities in production funding and the role of imported programming and global streaming platforms in national television cultures. The chapter finishes with a case study of Korean drama and the Korean Wave, looking at how the form gained popularity internationally and the factors that influenced its global spread

Television and Quality

Chapter 12 discusses the social and cultural frameworks that confer value on some kinds of television, exploring academic discussions of ‘quality TV’ and how prestige TV is mobilised in the television industry. The 'quality TV' debate considers how cultural importance has been assigned to certain programmes or kinds of television, engaging in processes of legitimation. The chapter explains how understandings of prestige TV are shaped by authorship, aesthetics, genre and channel identity. The chapter's case study addresses period comedy drama *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel*, looking at how budget, authorship and genre worked to present it as prestige TV, identifying the programme's value for streaming platform Amazon Prime Video.

Bibliography

Allen, R. (ed.) (1992) *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*. London: Routledge.

Bennett, J. and Strange, N. (eds) (2011) *Television as Digital Media*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Brunsdon, C. (1998) 'What is the television of television studies?', in Geraghty, C and D. Lusted (eds), *The Television Studies Book*. London: Arnold, 1998, pp. 95–113.

Corner, J. (1999) *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Fiske, J. (1992) *Television Culture*. London: Routledge.

Geraghty, C. and Lusted, D. (eds) (1998) *The Television Studies Book*. London: Arnold.

Gillan, J. (2011) *Television and New Media*. London: Routledge.

Jenkins, H. (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Johnson, C. (2019) *Online TV*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lotz, A.D. (2018) 'Evolution or revolution? Television in transformation', *Critical Studies in Television*, 13(4), pp. 491–494.

Lury, K. (2005) *Interpreting Television*. London: Hodder Arnold.

Newcomb, H. (2005) 'The development of television studies', in Wasko, J. (ed.), *A Companion to Television*. Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 15–28.

Thompson E. and Mittell J. (eds) (2020) *How to Watch Television*, second edition. New York: New York University Press.

Wasko, J. (2005) 'Introduction', in Wasko J. (ed.), *A Companion to Television*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 1–8.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Studying Television

1

- Introduction 12
- Beyond broadcasting 13
- Television nations 16
- Studying programmes 17
- Television and society 20
- Television audiences 26
- Case study: television past and present 29
- Summary of key points 33
- Bibliography 34

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-2

Studying Television

Introduction

This chapter briefly maps out the topics of study and introduces some of the critical approaches that are central to academic Television Studies today, with emphasis on the approaches used in Britain and the United States. By doing this the chapter aims to provide an overview of the kinds of questions which students of television should carry with them as they use this book. Each of the chapters in the remainder of this book focuses on a particular aspect of the study of television, picking up the concerns and ways of thinking about television that are introduced here. The discipline of Television Studies is a relatively young academic subject, and in its short history the questions that have been asked about television, and the answers which researchers have discovered, have changed in interesting ways. Television Studies, like all academic subjects, is in a continual process of development. This is partly because researchers discover new information and respond to changes in what is happening in television in the present. Television Studies also changes because, as ways of thinking about television are discussed and their strengths and weaknesses discovered, new questions and problems in understanding television are found. One of the aims of this book is to involve readers in the debates and disagreements about television that animate Television Studies.

The study of television emerged out of the larger field of media education. Media education began in the 1930s on the assumption that mass media had negative effects on society, and that educating citizens about how media products are made would help to protect them from their impact. Television, beginning its history as a medium at about the same time, has long been regarded as a medium that has a special relationship with its viewers' everyday lives. Television is very familiar to most people and often taken for granted, so the scholarly study of television tries to examine familiar programmes in new ways, introduces unfamiliar programmes and aims to attain critical distance from television as a medium. The premise that underpins media education is that academic studies should engage with everyday media experiences that are understood as an aspect of everyday popular culture. Television and media studies encourage the questioning of media by means of the analysis of media products, media institutions and media technologies. The work of the literary and cultural critic Raymond Williams (1974) was crucial in establishing this breadth in the field, as a result of his interest in evaluating television as an aspect of contemporary culture. In Europe, media education is often referred to as **media literacy** and it was in Britain that the idea was first put into practice in the context of school and university teaching. Key issues that structure this curriculum include:

media literacy the skills and competence that viewers learn in order to understand easily the audio-visual 'languages' of media texts.

- Institutions and ownership: the patterns of ownership of media organisations, where the national and global holdings of corporations such as Disney, Comcast or Warner Media are assessed in terms of the concentration of media power in the hands of a few main players

- The laws and **regulation** of media industries: in relation to content, censorship, bias and assumptions about their influence
- Texts and their conventions: in addressing specific media texts like television programmes, films or magazine advertisements, media education asks what audience the text is addressed to, and how the conventions of a certain **genre** or form are used to target an audience
- Audiences: the study of media audiences is interested in how different groups of viewers or readers interpret media content in different ways according to (for example) age, race, gender, sexuality or economic status. Scholars of television have conducted studies of individual media users or audience groups, to provide a more finely textured understanding of how and why television and other media are used in the context of ordinary life.

Television Studies draws on each of these approaches, with different scholars adopting them to differing extents. In this book, aspects of each way of studying media are examined specifically in relation to television.

Beyond broadcasting

Clearly, an important place to start is to consider how wide or how narrow television might be as an object of study. Television Studies has until recently focused on **linear broadcast** television. Here programmes are watched at the time they are transmitted, in the home on a television set or recorded by a **VCR** or **DVR** to be viewed later. The transmission signals for broadcast television have been received by rooftop aerials (**terrestrial tv**) or satellite dishes, or along cables embedded in the ground. Many different broadcast signals may be available to be received at any one time, but all the television receivers tuned into a specific channel would receive the same broadcast programme at the same time. Since 2012 all British television has been broadcast **digitally** and the previous **'analogue'** system was switched off. This increased the number of channels available free to each home, rather than those received through a satellite or cable which must be paid for. Rooftop aerials still work after 2012 and receive digital signals that need to be decoded by television sets with digital receivers built into them. Across the late 2000s and the 2010s the availability of high-speed broadband and home wi-fi enabled **streaming platforms** to rise to prominence, delivering television on-demand via the internet and watched via websites and apps. Streaming platforms were initially only available on computers, but 'smart' television sets and **digital media players** (or streaming devices) attached to televisions now allow viewers to access streaming platforms alongside broadcast television. Mobile technologies allow television to be streamed on tablets and mobile phones inside and outside the home. Technologies such as DVRs and streaming platforms have helped to transition television from a 'mass' medium to an 'individualized' collection of niche audiences and personalised content viewed on demand. Yet despite this rapid pace of change many continuities remain, with traditional ways of watching and modes of programming continuing. Television has always borrowed from other media around it, and has been a hybrid medium – one that does some of

regulation the control of television institutions by laws, codes of practice or guidelines.

genre a kind or type of programme. Programmes of the same genre have shared characteristics.

linear television broadcast from a central source on a channel in a continuous flow, according to a prescribed schedule.

broadcasting the transmission of signals from a central source which can be received by dispersed receivers over a large geographical area.

DVR programmable machine connected to a television that records and plays back television from a hard drive.

VCR programmable machine connected to a television that played and recorded onto video cassettes.

terrestrial broadcasting from a ground-based transmission system, as opposed to broadcasting via satellite.

digital television television pictures and sound encoded into the ones and zeros of electronic data. Digital signals can also be sent back down cables by viewers, making possible interaction with television programmes.

analogue broadcasting signals in waves of varying frequency. Analogue signals require greater space or 'bandwidth' than digital signals, and do not allow interactive response from viewers.

streaming platform company that provides video on-demand via the internet, can be subscription-based or supported by advertising or a licence fee e.g. Disney+, BBC iPlayer.

digital media player (or streaming device) small internet-connected device attached to a television that accesses a range of streaming platforms in app form.

the same things as newspapers, radio, magazines, advertisements or films while adapting what they do into its own distinctive form.

Television is a hungry medium that borrows audio-visual content from a range of other places. For instance, a news programme might broadcast extracts from surveillance video in order to show a crime being committed and to identify the perpetrator so that television viewers can provide information to help catch the offender. Mobile phone footage appears in news programmes, when people witnessing an accident or a war provide footage of news events. 'Viral' videos regularly transition from social media platforms to provide content for a range of television genres, including news, magazine shows and light entertainment. Members of the public can also broadcast themselves live on the internet through social media and 'open' (Johnson 2019) streaming platforms like YouTube, removing the intermediary of the television programme altogether. In the case of both surveillance video and mobile video, the footage changes its meaning once it is put in a broadcast context. What was private becomes public. The fascination of **reality TV** programmes such as *Big Brother* derived partly from this contrast between the usually private behaviour – which would previously only have been recorded by surveillance or amateur cameras – and the very public broadcasting of the material on television. Since the 1960s visual artists have incorporated live or recorded video into artworks, to be seen in a gallery space, in a different location of viewing from conventional television and designed for different ways of watching (standing up rather than sitting down, in a gallery rather than in the home). Occasionally these art videos might be screened in a late-night compilation of **avant-garde** works, or as part of a television **documentary**, but like mobile videos these films change their meaning once they are transmitted to a different kind of audience. At large public events, such as football matches or music concerts, live video is shown on big screens. One convention of music videos is to recreate the kinds of images that are projected at concerts, by using lighting and editing effects to capture footage of singers, musicians and dancers performing. For a long time, television has borrowed the conventions of non-broadcast video to communicate the excitement of being at a live performance or sports event as well as offering a closer, more intimate experience than the 'live' audience can experience. Some of the distinguishing features of music video, talent shows or reality TV, for example, come from the ways in which they draw on non-broadcast television or video and make use of the **connotations** which they carry, such as

reality TV programmes where the unscripted behaviour of 'ordinary people' is the focus of interest.

avant-garde work aiming to challenge the norms and conventions of its medium, and the group of people making such work.

documentary a form aiming to record actual events, often with an explanatory purpose or to analyse and debate an issue.

connotations the term used in semiotic analysis for the meanings that are associated with a particular sign or combination of signs.

- Privacy (in reality TV, where private behaviour becomes public)
- Performance (in music video or talent shows, where television borrows the conventions of a live show)
- Evidence (where surveillance video or mobile phone footage confirms that something shocking or controversial has happened)

The hybridity of television becomes more visible when viewers do more than just watch programmes as they are transmitted. Updating your social media or making purchases on the same piece of technology that you use to watch *Friends* makes it obvious that television has become one among several interconnected aspects of digital media culture. But television has always looked outwards beyond the domestic living room to borrow and adapt aspects of social life. Popular entertainment programmes such as *Strictly Come Dancing* or *The Voice* work by connecting the **private sphere** of television viewership with the public world of celebrity performance. Television is a medium that is predominantly experienced in the home, but it has both adopted and transformed existing forms of popular entertainment that come from public, collective experiences. Light entertainment television negotiates between a 'here' and 'there' of home and public spaces of entertainment, between ordinariness and spectacle, between ordinary people ('us') and performers and stars ('them') (Dyer 1973). Each of these terms can blur into the other. *The Voice* has star performers acting as judges, but the television audience is also invited to judge by voting for their favourite contestant. Amateur 'ordinary' contestants perform as if they were stars, and seek to become one. So talent shows recognise how the television medium sits between domestic familiarity and a spectacular world of celebrity. The effect is to frame the programme as a mediating format. Light entertainment's presentation of the content of singing, comedy routines and entertainment acts in light entertainment comes originally from earlier forms of popular entertainment, such as vaudeville or music hall, which have been adapted into television for domestic and private consumption. Like music hall variety performances, talent shows are either really or apparently live, take place in an auditorium setting with an audience and are made up of a mix of types of content. But at the same time, on television their domesticity is signified by the placement of the programme within the routines of a schedule designed to match the rhythms of domestic life (mealtimes, work versus leisure time, etc.), modes of address that assume a home audience, and the use of multi-camera shooting techniques to edit the material into an event for television rather than a relayed performance. Television's hybridity is evident in how some genres of programme borrow and adapt cultural forms.

private sphere the domestic world of the home, family and personal life.

Television Studies has developed theoretical approaches to the distribution of programmes to different kinds of screen and to locations other than the home. Users are now as familiar with watching television streamed over the internet on a phone or tablet as watching programmes broadcast to a television set. This has meant traditional broadcasters have had to decide how they want to engage with the streaming platform YouTube, because users regularly upload clips of programmes illegally onto the website. Broadcasters commission programmes and show them as the basis of their business, so they have legal ownership of the copyright on the programmes that they show. Uploading content from these programmes to YouTube is viewed as threatening the revenue of television channels and programme makers. YouTube is owned by the technology company Google and it has responded to these concerns in two ways. It created a series of computer programmes that automatically search the internet to find illegally uploaded content. Google then informs the owners of the uploaded material and offers the choice of having Google delete the content or allow the placement of advertising on the page where the content is displayed. Broadcasters are constantly having to find ways of adapting to the new media landscape where control over content is hard to police, and where the boundaries of television are expanding to include these different ways of delivering and experiencing audio-visual content.

Television nations

The majority of the examples of television that are discussed in this book were made and shown in the English-speaking world, and most of the books which are used in courses in Television Studies in Britain refer to British and American television. One of the reasons for this is that English-language television programmes are exported around the world to many other countries whose national language is not English, where they are shown either with **subtitled** dialogue or with a **dubbed** soundtrack in another language, spoken by actors from the country in which the programme is broadcast or streamed. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 11, where television around the world is considered. Television advertisements are also sometimes shown in several different countries, with the same visual images but with a soundtrack made in another language. People in England are notoriously resistant to watching television programmes in languages other than English and are unwilling to read subtitles translating foreign-language dialogue (BBC Alba and S4C broadcast Gaelic and Welsh-language content respectively). However, this is relatively unusual internationally and dubbing of foreign-language programmes is standard in many European countries. Netflix's global growth has in part been driven by the range of subtitle and dubbing options it offers on many of its most prominent original and acquired programmes.

subtitle written text appearing on the television screen, normally to translate speech in a foreign language.

dubbing replacing the original speech in a programme, advertisement, etc. with speech added later, often to translate speech in a foreign language.

The experience of watching television in Britain is relatively unusual, in that almost all programmes are in English, originating either in Britain, the United States or Australia, countries with which Britain has had an historical 'special relationship'. However, recently, subtitled European drama (particularly Scandinavian crime drama) has had success on BBC4 and Channel 4. The situation is different in other countries, where imported television from Britain or the US is immediately marked as different because of its dubbed or subtitled dialogue. There are also countries where there are several commonly spoken languages and which broadcast television in each of these languages. For example, in Singapore there are television channels in English, Chinese and Malay and in the United States there are channels in English and Spanish. The sense of what a national television culture might be is different in these countries, and the experience of familiarity would be different from the experience in Britain.

culture the shared attitudes, ways of life and assumptions of a group of people.

Television has aimed to represent a relatively unified **culture** in the UK, though its division into the nations of England, Scotland and Wales along with Northern Ireland, means that television also has a regional character. The further division of terrestrial television broadcasting into regional areas (the south-west of England, the Midlands or East Anglia, for example) where there are news and current affairs programmes aimed at local audiences, makes this situation more marked. The issue of belonging to a region, nation or country complicates the assumption that British television can be referred to as a national television culture. Furthermore, since Britain is a multi-cultural society, there are cable and satellite channels aimed at people from international backgrounds and in languages other than English, such as channels in Chinese and the languages of the Indian sub-continent. Much of this content is now available online through free and subscription streaming apps. In 2017 Sky TV made a deal to incorporate South Asian channels such as Zee TV and Star TV in its basic satellite package rather than as an add-on package. The unity and diversity of contemporary television matches the co-existing forces of unification and diversification that are at work in ‘our’ society, and raise questions about who this ‘we’ might be.

Television has regional, national and transnational aspects, and is thus implicated in the concept of globalisation. As with other media at the present time, television is transnational but takes nationally specific forms. British television draws primarily on programmes by British programme-makers, but that consciousness of national identity in and through television is also constituted against imported programmes. However, the **glocalisation** involved in remaking formatted television – from gameshows to reality TV – means those originating from other cultures can be presented as purely British. The better-funded production cultures of Britain, the US, France and Germany produce programmes designed partly for export as well as for their national domestic audiences, and frequently work in co-production partnerships to fund high-end drama. Thus their national specificity exists in tension with conceptions of transnational marketability. For Britain in particular, the global spread of the English language offers opportunities for British television to be internationally popular and to rival US programmes in international trading.

glocalisation when a globally distributed product, company or programme is adjusted to fit a local market.

Studying programmes

An important component of many courses in Television Studies is the study of television programmes. Particular programmes might be chosen for study in each week of a course, and there are several reasons for this. Television Studies emerged in the 1970s and 1980s out of three ways of writing about television:

- The reviewing of programmes in newspapers and magazines (Caughie 1984, Rixon 2011)
- The criticism of programmes as works of art (like literature texts)
- The **sociology** of culture

sociology the academic study of society, aiming to describe and explain aspects of life in that society.

text an object such as a television programme, film or poem, considered as a network of meaningful signs that can be analysed and interpreted.

Journalists’ reviews and cultural criticism focus on television programmes as **texts**, where the method of discussing them is to closely study their structure, characters and themes, in ways similar to the study of literature and drama. The advantage for the students and teachers who adopt this way of studying television is that there is an example accessible to the class, who can watch and rewatch the programme, and focus on selected moments in it. Close analysis of a programme uncovers how the programme is structured and how it creates its meanings by using images and sound in certain ways; critical arguments about the programme can be tested out and proved by referring back to a concrete example. Chapters 2 and 3 of this book explore this method of study in detail, and introduce some of the methodologies that it uses.

Studying television by analysing programmes is useful for setting up categories and making distinctions between programmes. Making distinctions is a good way of discovering the rules and **conventions** which the makers of programmes use, and which television viewers learn to recognise, in order to make meaning in the television medium. As well as complete programmes, linear television also

conventions the frameworks and procedures used to make or interpret texts.

ident a short sequence containing a channel or streaming platform's logo (or that of a programming strand) which appears before a programme, reminding the viewer where they are watching it. A key part of communicating brand identity.

includes trailers, advertisements and channel **idents**. These elements are also present on streaming services, such as the pre-roll adverts on YouTube, the auto-play trailers on Netflix's main homepage and the idents that open All4 programmes and bumper their advert breaks. On commercial broadcast channels several minutes in each hour of broadcasting are taken up by these kinds of television, but they are not programmes and are not often studied. Nevertheless, trailers for forthcoming programmes have important functions:

- They inform the audience about what will be available to watch in the future
- They shape the viewer's expectations about what a future programme will be like
- They offer suggestions why it might be interesting and enjoyable

capitalism the organisation of an economy around the private ownership of accumulated wealth, involving the exploitation of labour to produce profit that creates such wealth.

brand recognition the ability of audiences to recognise the distinctive identity of a product, service or institution and the values and meanings associated with it.

Since television advertisements are the means of gaining income for many television broadcasters and some streaming platforms, who charge fees to advertisers to screen them, it could be argued that they are as significant to what television is as the programmes that they interrupt. Television advertisements frequently cost much more per minute of screentime to make than many programmes, and they are often innovative, memorable and amusing. The density and speed of information and meaning in television commercials make them rewarding objects of study, and show the conventions by which images and sounds can be put together in the television medium. Since our **capitalist** society is one where desiring, buying and owning products is important to our sense of identity and our place in society, it is also illuminating to see how products are brought to our attention in television advertisements, so studying them may also tell us much about how our society works. Channel idents are also moments of television that are frequently repeated and familiar, giving a **brand** identity to television broadcasters and streaming platforms, and they too are worthy of study. So it is not only programmes that can be analysed in Television Studies, though programmes have been the core of syllabuses in the subject for many years.

Studying programmes closely as single texts also has the disadvantage of separating a programme from its place in the schedule of the day in which it was broadcast. There are some television programmes which viewers might select and view with special attention ('must see' programmes) or record via DVRs. This kind of viewing is more common with streaming platforms where programmes can be selected for watching and re-watching at any time. Nearly all linear television channels have their own streaming platforms enabling on-demand viewing of their programmes, along with channel livestreams. Linear television can be experienced as a 'live' **flow**, a scheduled sequence of programmes, idents, adverts, trailers. Of course, viewers also switch channels, sometimes part-way through a programme, and their level of attention may vary considerably from moment to moment and programme to programme. Within programmes, high points or turning points are included by programme-makers where breaks for advertisements are to be included. This is done to encourage viewers to stay on the same channel to find out what the consequences or developments will be once the programme returns after the break.

flow the ways in which programmes, advertisements, etc. follow one another in an unbroken sequence across the day or part of the day, and the experience of watching the sequence of programmes, advertisements, trailers, etc.

The two consequences of studying programmes as individual units relate to the important Television Studies concept of 'flow' (Williams 1974). Selecting individual programmes for study means extracting them from the flow of material of which they are a part, and which might have important effects on their meaning. For example, a current affairs about childhood obesity might be followed by a commercial break including adverts for fast food, and then a cooking programme where time-saving, low-cost healthy recipes are targeted at busy working parents. While each programme or ad might be interesting to analyse in itself, more meanings relating to food cultures and household economics might arise because of the connections between the programmes and ads in this television flow.

Part of the textual study of television is an interest in **authorship**, considering who the authors of television programmes are – a writer, director or producer – and what the intended meanings of their work might be. 'Authored' dramatic television work has often featured as the ground for debates about the '**quality**' of television in Britain and whether a broadcaster's public service commitment is being fulfilled. In Britain television was established in the 1930s by the BBC, the broadcaster that operated all the radio broadcasting. The BBC's legal constitution requires it to fulfil a **public service** role through its radio and television. The meaning of public service television has shifted across the BBC's lifetime, with slight adjustments each time the corporation agrees a new **Royal Charter** with the government. The 2017 Royal Charter agreed that the BBC would 'act in the public interest' by providing 'impartial, high-quality and distinctive' content, which would 'inform, educate and entertain' all audiences. The BBC's central aims are:

- Provide programmes which are educative or improving
- Offer a range of different kinds of programme at different levels of accessibility
- Represent and serve the diverse communities of the nation
- Engage audiences in the significant events and issues occurring in the present

Graham Murdoch (1980: 25) wrote, in an early theoretical essay on television 'quality', 'The promotion of authorship and creativity lies at the heart of the broadcasters' presentation of themselves as guarantors of cultural diversity and patrons of the contemporary arts, elements which are central to their claims to responsibility and public service.'

Television drama has been regarded as the most culturally prestigious part of broadcast output. It is expensive to make, and often prominently scheduled and advertised. Its high profile has made it the subject of hype and controversy, orchestrated by the broadcasters themselves, the press or social media. In the late 2010s and early 2020s era of '**Peak TV**' high-budget prestige drama became central to the increased international competition for viewers. Television companies compete to land high-profile projects and to lock successful television creatives into big money production deals (this is sometimes called the 'TV arms race' by journalists). This has in part been driven by the huge programming budgets of new global streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV+, with whom less well-funded national broadcasters must now compete.

Authored drama has also been one of the main forms of television exported to other countries (for example the *Masterpiece* slot on US **public television** service PBS). There were and still are debates about public service television, seen either as:

authorship the question of who an author is, the role of the author as creator and the significance of the author's input into the material being studied.

quality in television, kinds of programmes that are perceived as more expensively produced and more culturally worthwhile than other programmes. The term can create cultural and gendered hierarchies that suggest television is otherwise 'low culture'.

public service in television, the provision of a mix of programmes that inform, educate and entertain in ways that encourage the betterment of audiences and society in general.

Royal Charter sets out the BBC's Object, Mission and Public Purposes. Renewed every ten years after a process of negotiation with the current government.

'Peak TV' industry term coined by US television executive John Landgraf to refer to the huge amount of scripted series produced by network, cable and streaming in the US in the second half of the 2010s.

public television television funded by government or by private supporters, rather than solely by advertising.

- An old-fashioned and monolithic system which prevents change, or as
- A space in which television that challenges commercial values and aspires to artistic quality might find an audience

In this context, the analysis of television programmes explores how a culture, government or the creative establishment has valued certain programmes over others, as more or less conducive of social change, or more or less worthy of consideration as a creative statement. A focus on authored television drama highlights television's historic connections to literary and theatre culture. In the early years of television broadcasting in Britain, in the years before and after the Second World War, many television plays were adaptations of theatre plays or extracts from them, sometimes using the same cast as productions being staged in London's West End theatres. But a drawback of this valuing television drama and its writers as if it were literature or written drama is a neglect of the importance of performers and performances in television. Although Film Studies has for many years had a critical interest in stardom and stars, Television Studies has not often considered the significance of how actors and television **personalities** affect the meanings that television programmes may have (Caughie 2000, Bennett 2010, Cantrell and Hogg 2018).

personalities people appearing on television who are recognised by audiences as celebrities with a media image and public status beyond the role they play in a particular programme.

The fact that a television single drama or **serial** can be considered a self-contained text, written by a single author, made this television form especially significant for researchers studying television from this perspective. Although there were some early studies of television (Williams 1968, Newcomb 1974) that discussed popular programmes such as **soap opera**, writing about television focused on the high-profile programmes regarded as 'quality television' (an idea discussed in Chapter 12). But Television Studies has in the last 30 years problematised assertions of 'quality' built on authorship (Newman and Levine 2012) as well as diversifying its focus beyond the close study of fictional programmes (although this is still an important part of the subject) to consider other aspects of analysis. Part of the reason for this is that Television Studies has established itself by breaking away from the study of literature and drama, so that the methods of analysis increasingly appear to be drawn from subjects outside of Television Studies itself. Rather than studying high-profile television fiction by authors whose names become nationally known (such as Sally Wainwright or David Simon), Television Studies academics have discussed programmes which fall solidly into factual **genres**, such as reality or lifestyle television, as well as fiction genres less tied a single author like **soap opera**, police drama and sitcom. These are also the programmes which attract the largest audiences, and which can be described as '**popular**' rather than 'elite' culture.

serial a television form where a developing narrative unfolds across a sequence of separate episodes.

soap opera a continuing drama serial involving a large number of characters in a specific location, focusing on relationships, emotions and reversals of fortune.

popular culture the texts created by ordinary people (as opposed to an elite group) or created for them, and the ways these are used.

Television and society

Unlike cinema, television has always placed emphasis on the witnessing of events in the real world. When television began, all of its programmes were broadcast live, because the technology to record television signals had not been invented. The thrill of watching television in its early days, and still occasionally now, is to see and hear representations of events, people and places distant from the viewer.

Indeed, the word 'television' literally means 'seeing from afar'. Television gives viewers access to the world with immediacy and credibility, because live television technology appears to transcribe or reproduce faithfully what is seen and heard. The ability of television to disseminate information widely, beyond the local and personal experience of its viewers, can be argued to broaden the experience and awareness of the television audience. The political effects of this might be for television to assist national institutions in involving citizens in social and political debate, so that television enhances public debate and participation in democratic decision-making.

Television broadcasting might therefore contribute to the '**public sphere**': to discussion and thought about issues which concern the direction of society as a whole, and have bearing on the lives of most people. Figure 1.1 is an image from the television coverage of the wedding of Prince Harry to Meghan Markle, at St George's Chapel in May 2018. As this image shows, the main purpose of the coverage was to give access to an event of public importance that only a small number of selected guests had been invited to see in person (particularly as the Chapel was much smaller than Westminster Abbey used for Prince William's wedding). The close-up in Figure 1.1 offers a privileged kind of view that guests in the chapel could not share. This notion of access underpinned a different use of television in BBC2's 2016 two-part documentary *Famous, Rich and Homeless*, a 'social experiment' in aid of Sport Relief, in which four celebrities spent a week living on the streets. The aim was to give the celebrities (snooker player Willi Thorne, TV personalities Kim Woodburn and Julia Bradbury and comedian Nick Hancock) and by extension the viewers, an insight into the lives of the long-term unhoused population, and to let the television audience see how they reacted to this experience.

public sphere the world of politics, economic affairs and national and international events, as opposed to the 'private sphere' of domestic life.

The Royal Wedding gave access to an event centred on Britain's social elite, whereas *Famous, Rich and Homeless* placed members of Britain's celebrity class in an experience many viewers had little direct experience or understanding of. Like many socially focused celebrity experiential 'challenge' programmes this sought to raise awareness of steep rises in Britain's unhoused population. It offered entertainment for the television audience through the celebrities' discomfort and endurance, whilst also educating as they lived alongside and learned from people

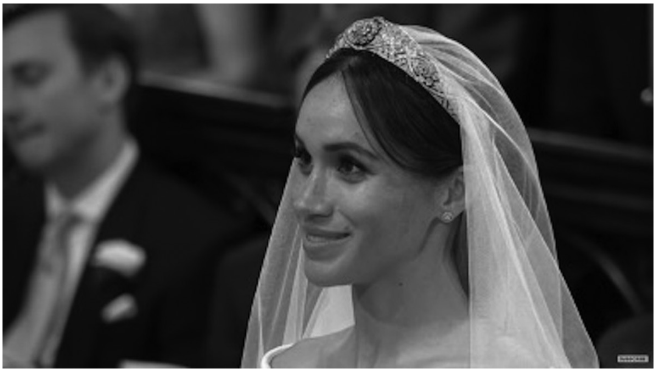


Figure 1.1 The wedding of Prince Harry to Meghan Markle, 19 May 2018

who lacked their social and cultural privilege. The isolating and dangerous experience of being unhoused is seen in the long shot of Nick Hancock in Figure 1.2 settling into his sleeping bag on the cold concrete floor of an underpass.

Figure 1.3 is from a television debate broadcast on ITV during the November 2019 General Election between the leaders of two of Britain's main political parties. At times the broadcast used split screen to show viewers how one politician listened and prepared to respond to the other's points, giving equal space in the frame to each party leader, and positioning them as if they were addressing the viewer. Since 2010 British General Elections have involved televised political debates of the style more common in the US, at times including leaders and MPs from up to seven parties. These were established due to concerns that British people were sceptical about the value of parliamentary politics and might not bother to vote in the election. The aim was to inform potential voters about the parties' policies and to encourage participation in the election and the political process more generally. So again, television was being used to provide access for

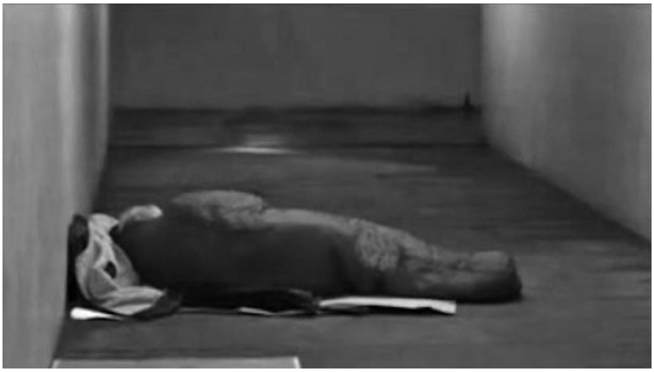


Figure 1.2 *Famous, Rich and Homeless*

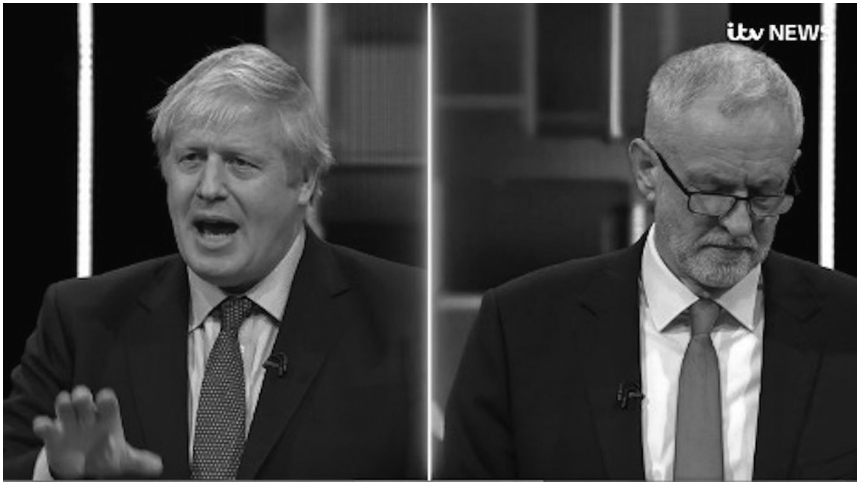


Figure 1.3 A political debate during the 2019 General Election

the audience to people, events and political issues that broadcasters considered important to the citizens of the nation.

The role of television in Britain has been, and still is, to offer a public service by informing and educating its audience, as well as entertaining viewers. But television can present only selected images and sounds, chosen by someone else, and present them according to the conventions of storytelling and reporting which are established by television institutions and by legal regulations. In a sense, television takes over the job of relating the viewer to the world around them and separates the viewer from their experience of reality. The political consequences of television from this point of view are negative. If television experiences the world on its audience's behalf, and substitutes mediated and partial versions of information and understanding for the authentic experience of people, then its effect is to dissuade people from involvement in discussion and debate. The television viewer might be disempowered and alone, with discussion and participation simulated by television rather than enabled by it. Watching the political question-and-answer programme *Question Time* or the commentaries by experts in current affairs and news programmes might allow viewers to feel involved in debates when they are not. This point of view positions television viewing as reproducing the apparent passivity of consumers and spectators, turning its audience into 'couch potatoes', and encourages it to continue. A key advantage of television's convergence with the internet is the possibility for viewers to respond to programmes via social media, to criticise what they see on television, resist arguments and occasionally to contribute ideas and audio-visual content that become part of the television experience.

Social science research in Television Studies considers how television has a role in reproducing the patterns of values and the divisions between different groups, ethnicities and **classes** of people in society, in other words how television represents and affects the social order. Part of this research concerns how television adopts the 'public speech' of institutions such as:

class a section of society defined by their relationship to economic activity, whether as workers (the working class) or possessors of economic power (the bourgeoisie), for example.

- Parliament
- Academia
- The judicial system

Social science is concerned with how this contrasts with adoptions of 'private speech' such as:

- Gossip
- Everyday talk
- The language of subcultural groups such as football fans or youth subcultures

By investigating these aspects of television, it can be seen how television gives different kinds of value and legitimacy to different facets of social life, and separates out or unifies people with each other. Since television is controlled by institutions, and governed by laws, questions of the regulation and ownership of television are also addressed by this strand of research. Social science research considers television as a form of mass communication, in relation to sociological and political issues rather than studies of textuality or the form of programmes. Because of their interest in the relations of social groups to each other, and the place of television in communicating social values and attitudes, researchers are frequently interested in news programming, popular genres such as television sports programmes, or kinds of content (especially violence and social disorder) represented in different kinds of programmes.

The ways in which broadcasting is organised in different nations are surprisingly different, and it is important to study broadcasting cultures in comparison and in contrast to each other. Although it might seem that American television is the dominant norm because of the worldwide export of such programmes as fantasy series *Game of Thrones*, the conventions, laws and assumptions about television differ in different countries because of the different evolution of television broadcasting and different conceptions of the nature and function of television. In Britain, for instance, broadcasting (first on radio) began as a monopoly business entrusted in 1922 to the British Broadcasting Company (a commercial organisation), paralleling the monopoly control over the supply of water or electricity in the Victorian period. Radio, and television when it appeared in the 1930s, was considered as if it were drinking water, on tap, which could be run by a national company as long as it was kept clean and available to everyone equally (Caughie 2000). Only later did commercial television and competition appear, and even now there is a strong body of opinion in Britain that television must be taken seriously and must fulfil its moral responsibility to an audience of citizens. In the United States, by contrast, television quickly developed as a form of commercial business, where the requirements of advertisers and the need for local relay stations to make profits from the programmes supplied by programme-makers have driven the development of television. To put this distinction crudely, there is a debate between two sets of assumptions about television:

- Television should provide resources to answer people’s needs and raise cultural standards, or
- Television should give people what the majority seem to want and what makes the most profit

ratings the number of viewers estimated to have watched certain programmes, as compared to the numbers watching other programmes

commercial television funded by the sale of advertising time or sponsorship of programmes

format the blueprint for a programme, including its setting, main characters, genre, form and main themes.

Television Studies has engaged frequently in this debate, most often by taking the perhaps impossible compromise position that broadcasting should be a public service but that it should not impose the cultural standards of the few upon a majority whose ‘popular’ tastes should not be denigrated.

The background to this position in Television Studies is closely bound up with the changes in how broadcasters have conceived of their audiences. The BBC shifted its conception of its relationship with the British public. Its initial aim sought to train its audience to understand and enjoy more and more ‘quality’ programmes, with ‘worthwhile’ levels of intellectual content and sophistication, requiring sustained and attentive viewing (Ang 1991). When the arrival of ITV introduced **commercial television** to Britain in 1955, the high **ratings** for the new channel forced the BBC to produce programmes that could compete against popular **formats** such as imported American drama series and quizzes. From the 1950s onwards, the conception of the audience as consumers able to exercise a free choice has become increasingly dominant in British broadcasting, and this both reflects and supports the view of society which has come to be familiar and natural today. Rather than thinking of British society as if it were a pyramid with a small cultural elite at the top, with sophisticated tastes, and a broad base of ordinary viewers underneath preferring undemanding entertainment, the image of society has changed to one of overlapping and scattered sets of viewers, or **niche audiences**, who have changing and diverse televisual preferences across many genres, forms and levels of complexity. Broadcasters no longer attempt to lead the nation to the top of the cultural pyramid, but instead reflect what they believe to be the demands of contemporary society. The audience is conceived as a collection of diverse and autonomous individuals whose viewing habits and interests are hard to discover and predict, and who can be as fickle as any other kind of consumer.

niche audiences particular groups of viewers defined by age group, gender or economic status, for example, who may be the target audience for a programme

The role of the academic discipline of Television Studies in political debates about the direction of television in Britain has always been rather peripheral. When the subject focused on making distinctions between progressive or conservative texts in the 1960s and 1970s, and valuing the progressive ones, the highly theoretical arguments about the form and meanings of programmes were largely inaccessible to readerships outside the lecturers and students who engaged in them. Despite the often-repeated claim that programmes could empower audiences to think in challenging and radical ways about their own lives and cultures, Television Studies had little engagement with programme-makers and policy-makers. The discipline of **Cultural Studies**, pioneered in Britain in the 1970s at the University of Birmingham, recognises the significance of popular television and studies how television contributes to the assumptions and attitudes of sectors of society, a set of ideas and emotions described as a '**structure of feeling**'. Key work in this field includes the books by Raymond Williams (1974) and John Ellis (1982), whose interest was in the flow of programmes in the television schedule, exploring how viewers rarely watched programmes singly but instead as part of flow of programmes and commercials over a period of hours. Viewers could also switch from one programme or channel to another, composing their own 'text' of television from these segments, which does not exhibit the bounded and unified qualities which derive from thinking of television as a series of individual texts to be analysed singly. In the 1980s the issue of the progressiveness of particular television texts was overtaken by interest in audiences, and how real viewers gained pleasure from their viewing (Morley 1980). This approach began to transfer to the US in the 1980s, and is evident in the work of Lawrence Grossberg (Grossberg *et al.* 1992). While still a political debate, because there could be progressive or conservative kinds of pleasure, this phase in Television Studies refused to identify some programmes as good and some as bad, preferring to value the different kinds of pleasure that different audience groups might gain from programmes. The **commissioners** and **producers** of programmes, let alone actors, politicians or journalists, have always made distinctions between good and bad programmes, in terms of their popularity, cost as compared to profit or the social status of their majority audience.

Cultural Studies the academic discipline devoted to studying culture, involving work on texts, institutions, audiences and economic contexts.

structure of feeling the assumptions, attitudes and ideas prevalent in a society, arising from the ideologies underpinning that society.

producer the person working for a television institution who is responsible for the budget, planning and making of a television programme or series of programmes.

Commissioning the UK process through which programmes are pitched, developed and selected for funding and broadcast. The US television industry's structure will see a similar process of a programme being 'picked up' or 'greenlit' by a network or streaming service.

The sophisticated arguments which led to the refusal to judge 'quality' in Television Studies meant that academic criticism has been largely unable to engage in the debates about television that can be seen expressed in different contexts, including:

- Newspapers
- Parliamentary debates
- Broadcasters' policy documents

Therefore, the issues which still concern viewers and commentators, such as whether violence in programmes affects the audience, whether there is more or less 'quality television' than there was and the standards of **taste and decency** in television, often remain absent from the books and articles written and read by Television Studies academics and students. So although Television Studies is crucially about the relationships between television and society, the topic can at times seem to be debated in a vacuum.

taste and decency conformity to the standards of good taste and acceptable language and behaviour represented on television, as required by regulations.

Television audiences

Because of the variety of the different kinds of programmes and advertisements on television, as a medium it appears to offer an almost unlimited range of information and entertainment. The different genres of programme, and the range of factual and fictional output on television channels and streaming platforms, appear to offer vast choice and to address the needs and desires of different viewers. This became even more evident with the emergence of themed channels on cable, satellite and digital television, which focus, for example, on:

- Sport
- Films
- Science
- Drama
- Comedy
- Shopping
- Lifestyle

Television companies are especially interested in who is watching which kinds of programme, when and why. Television broadcasters have always referred to audiences in order to back up their claims to give the public what it seems to want, to set the level of fees charged to advertisers and as an indication of which forms and genres of programme seem to 'work'. In the UK the BBC's channels are funded by a **licence fee**, needed to view live television and the iPlayer. ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 gain their income from charges made to advertisers to screen their advertisements. The various non-BBC digital, cable and satellite channels are funded either by **subscription** charges or by advertising, and often a combination of both. In the US networks and channels are funded by advertising, subscription, or a combination, asides from the public broadcaster PBS. In both the US and the UK streaming platforms are funded by subscription, advertising, or a combination of both. In all cases, information about audience size and composition is highly significant to television institutions.

licence fee an annual payment by all owners of television sets, which is the main source of income for the BBC.

subscription payment to a television broadcaster or streaming platform in exchange for the opportunity to view programmes on certain channels that are otherwise blocked.

Channels funded by commercial advertising need to attract audiences for their advertisers, subscription funded outlets need to attract and maintain subscribers, and BBC channels funded by the licence fee need to justify the payment of the licence fee by attracting audiences. The competition between terrestrial channels is measured by audience size (the ratings, calculated by multiplying the audience sizes in a representative sample of viewers), and by the proportion of the total available audience watching one channel rather than another (**audience share**). The television industry's methods of audience research derive from the methods used to identify new markets for consumer products, to survey current users of products and to measure the sales and reactions to products of all kinds, from washing powder to brands of lager. Increasingly this audience research is blended with data-based research processed by **algorithms**. Television Studies researchers working with methods deriving from the academic disciplines of the social sciences, such as sociology and **anthropology**, have a related interest in television audiences. But rather than finding out about audiences in order to target or maximise audiences in the interests of increasing profits for broadcasters, academic audience researchers seek to understand how television viewing fits into people's cultural life, and how pleasure, knowledge and opportunities for social interaction (but also boredom, anger and dissatisfaction) in television arise. The methods used to gain this information include:

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- **Focus groups**

The strand of work in Television Studies called '**uses and gratifications**' research describes the uses and pleasures which audiences derive from television, by focusing on how and why people use television. This approach is in contrast to the study of television's **effects** on its viewers (questioning whether they are more violent, or more informed about science, for example) in that studies of effects regard audiences as passive vessels waiting to be filled up by television messages. As Television Studies views audiences as active, effects-based research is not part of the field, and is now largely carried out by the social sciences. Uses and gratifications research shows how television is used as an information source, as entertainment and as a resource for constructing the viewer's sense of identity, often by identifying himself or herself as a member of a group. The drawback of this kind of work, however, is that it can neglect the specificity of the television programmes which viewers actually watch.

Academic audience researchers have been especially interested in understanding the ways television fits into the lives of people whose relatively unequal social position has led the programmes they watch to be denigrated, and their reactions to television belittled. When Television Studies researchers sought to analyse the politics of programme texts, they tended to mean how programmes dealt with 'national issues' such as law and order, work and political viewpoints, associated with the predominantly male spokespersons and leaders in party politics, trade unions and business. The **feminist** movement started to focus on television in the 1980s, and argued that 'the personal is political', meaning that people's private concerns with family life, shopping or relationships also had political implications, and these areas of life were traditionally associated with women. Feminist Television Studies took an interest both in programmes which represented the 'private sphere' of life, meaning the usually private goings on in the home, and in

audience share the percentage of viewers estimated to have watched one channel as opposed to another channel broadcasting at the same time.

algorithms calculations made by computer programmes using data collected by channels and streaming services. Used to analyse viewer behaviour and tastes based on their viewing practices.

anthropology the study of humankind, including the evolution of humans and the different kinds of human society existing in different times and places.

focus groups small groups of selected people representing larger social groupings such as people of a certain age group, gender or economic status, who take part in discussions about a topic chosen for investigation.

uses and gratifications a theoretical approach that assumes people engage in an activity because it provides them with a benefit of some kind.

effects measurable outcomes produced by watching television, such as becoming more violent or adopting a certain opinion.

feminism the political and theoretical investment in and exploration of women's place in society and culture, focused on a goal of equality.

the place of television in the lives of ordinary people, especially women. In particular, feminist academics studying television audiences directed attention to the often-disparaged genre of soap opera, and have explored in detail the ways that women viewers watched television in the real circumstances of their own homes (Brunsdon *et al.* 1997). Indeed the home is an important site of audience research in Television Studies, since television is usually watched there and it has been associated with domesticity.

One of the shifts that has taken place in television culture over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been the massive expansion of television ownership. Just a small proportion of homes in a few areas of the country had television in the 1930–50 period, but the present situation is one in which households may own several televisions, as well as computers, tablets, phones or games consoles which can show television. From being a collective experience shared with family, friends and neighbours, watching television can now take place simultaneously in different rooms in the same household, individually by members of the same family. The rise of mobile devices means that a family can sit together in the living room whilst watching different programmes. How people of different age groups, genders and daily routines use television in the home is a subject of interest to audience researchers seeking to discover how television integrates into the fabric of present-day life. Television Studies' interest in audiences and the programmes which most ordinary viewers watch attempts to understand the processes of how television engages its audiences in ways that the audience finds satisfying and valuable, rather than simply dismissing ordinary viewers' apparently shallow enthusiasms. When the pendulum of critical interest shifted in the direction of audience studies, popular programmes and relatively inattentive viewing, however, Television Studies somewhat lost sight of the programmes that are watched with concentration and intensity (such as prestige drama) until relatively recently.

A particular strand of audience research that places special emphasis on what viewers have to say about their relationships with television is the approach called television **ethnography**. Ethnographic studies draw on the methods developed in the discipline of anthropology, in gathering information through close and often lengthy interactions with and observations of small samples of viewers (Gillespie 1995, Skeggs and Wood 2012). Both mass communications research in Television Studies and the television industry have thought of audiences as homogeneous masses whose reactions and interests are broadly the same, and have investigated them by quantitative methods such as counting audience sizes. However, ethnographic audience research focuses on smaller-scale groupings, selected by factors such as locality, gender, age group or social class. The problem which ethnography faces is the challenge of selecting some information relevant to the research question while leaving out most of the responses that viewers give to the researcher's questions, and rearranging or 'translating' research information into a wider context that illuminates how television works as a medium (Geraghty 1998). The political project of granting legitimacy to ordinary viewers, their interests and pleasures, as well as involving them directly in Television Studies research as respondents to ethnographic researchers' questions, leads to the claim that audiences are active makers of meaning and negotiators with the television they watch. This celebration of the active audience is most associated with the work of John Fiske (1992, 1994) and with a body of research on television **fan culture**.

ethnography the detailed study of how people live, conducted by observing behaviour and talking to selected individuals about their attitudes and activities.

fan culture the activities of groups of fans, as distinct from 'ordinary' viewers.

Television fans (such as *Star Trek* fans, or *Doctor Who* fans) use programmes as the central resource for activities including:

- Constructing social networks
- Setting up social and commercial events (such as conventions)
- Creating new texts (such as songs, videos, fanzines or websites)

Studies of fan audiences show how some television viewers take hold of television and transform it into their own cultural text (Jenkins 1992, 2013). It is argued that all television viewers, though to a lesser extent than fans, make their own meanings and social relationships out of television. Fans and audiences in general appear to resist swallowing whole the meanings which television programmes may have, and instead they take and reshape the aspects of television programmes that make sense to them and offer them opportunities. Fans, and indeed all viewers to some extent, are **resistant** and **active audiences**.

active audience television audiences regarded not as passive consumers of meanings but as negotiating meanings for themselves that are often resistant to those meanings that are intended or that are discovered by close analysis.

resistance the ways in which audiences make meaning from television programmes that are counter to the meanings that are thought to be intended, or that are discovered by close analysis.

Case study: television past and present

2019 and 2020 saw the launch of several prominent streaming platforms in the US and major global markets. These were backed by giant US-based media and technology companies and included Disney+, AppleTV+ and HBO Max (the streaming arm of Warner Media) as well as the short-lived short-form platform Quibi. These new arrivals debuted to varied success in markets where Netflix and Amazon Prime Video had significant global power. The transition from linear television to streaming on-demand television is reaching a tipping point, with viewers able to select when, where, and what to watch from a huge range of channels and platforms. The UK media regulator **Ofcom**'s 2020 Media Nations report highlighted accelerating growth in streaming viewing and changing viewer behaviours in the UK. This was in part driven by the global lockdown and restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic. They also noted British broadcasters and traditions of linear television faced significant challenges in competing for audiences. British broadcasters' own streaming platforms faced intensified competition from global subscription streaming platforms with Disney+ seeing significant UK growth in its first year. In 2021 responding to the intensified international competition of the 'Peak TV' era legacy broadcasters such as the BBC and Channel 4 announced plans to reorientate their commissioning structures and executive ranks. This was part of a move away from prioritising the linear schedule when greenlighting new programming, instead positioning their streaming platforms iPlayer and All4 as a primary destination for viewers' interaction with their programming. Similar reorganisations were happening with US broadcasters and studios, responding to changes in viewing behaviours and attempting to compete with the global streaming giants for national audiences.

Ofcom the Office of Communications, a government body responsible for regulating television and other communications media in the UK.

The BBC has said that part of its role as a public service broadcaster is to offer 'public value' by enabling everyone in Britain to receive its services without direct payment, reflecting the traditional public service broadcasting principles of offering a wide range of different kinds of programmes to as many people as possible, to suit the needs and desires of the whole nation. Conflicts over the BBC's content and its role in the UK entertainment market have been ongoing since the institution's birth. The rise of streaming platforms has seen ongoing political and press debates over how the licence fee should be charged and whether the iPlayer should exist as a subscription service, with a fee charged for access. This would fundamentally change the universal access requirements of public service broadcasting, and these debates consistently neglect the BBC's need to fund independent news, online content, and particularly radio stations, which are freely available over the air as well as through the BBC Sounds platform. It is important to the survival of the concept of public service broadcasting that the BBC has appealing programme content and a trusted brand as Britain moves from linear to on-demand streaming as a dominant mode of receiving television. This case study contrasts the beginnings of television as a mass medium with its development today. In order to see and evaluate the present, it is necessary to understand the history of how television arrived at where it is now, tracking continuity and change.

Early predictions in the 1930s of what television would be emphasised its liveness, and its consequent ability to present images of what was happening in the real world to a mass audience. There was little sense that the new medium would compete with cinema as an entertainment medium, because of:

- The small size of early television screens
- Their poor definition of pictures and sound
- The location of the television set in the home

It seemed that the role of television would be similar to radio. Television would bring information to its audience, and relay images and sounds of events actually happening in distant places. These early thoughts conditioned the makers of television to think of the medium in terms of **realism**, since television would reflect society to itself. Television would focus on the contemporary, and as a new technology, having a television set was associated with being modern and engaged in the growing technological sophistication of Britain's industrial society. At the same time there were concerns about television's intrusiveness, because of the uneasiness or even shock which viewers might feel when the box in the corner invaded their private domestic space.

realism the aim for representations to reproduce reality faithfully, and the ways this is done.

The emphasis on liveness, on seeing things as they happen, made drama and performance important to the first television schedules (Caughie 2000). Plays performed live were fixed points in the BBC's evening television schedules and were very popular, as was a television version of the variety show, where singers, comedians, magicians and other performers from the stage music hall and radio shows of the time did their acts (Figure 1.4). There were some films on television, but very few because the film studios would not allow television broadcasters to screen them, for fear of competition with the cinema as a dominant medium for entertainment. Plays were performed live in the television studio, and could also be relayed live from a London theatre. So the function of television seemed to be to relay the live occasion of a performance (including one made for television) rather than to find programme forms which were different from what audiences might experience in other media such as radio, music hall or theatre. British television began broadcasting in 1936 to tiny audiences, but even in 1950 the television audience for the only broadcast channel in Britain, the BBC, was only about 300,000. Television was available only in London and the Midlands, and viewers paid a £2 licence fee which covered the reception of programming via television and radio sets. Programmes were broadcast each weekday morning and every afternoon, but stopped in the early evening so that children could be put to bed. Programmes began again at 8pm (after the closedown period known as 'the toddlers' truce' was over) and there was no set closedown time, since **outside broadcasts** of sporting events, for instance, could extend

outside broadcast the television transmission of outdoor events such as sport or ceremonial occasions, using equipment set up in advance for the purpose. Abbreviated as OB.

the day's viewing hours. On a typical day in 1950, nine hours of television were broadcast altogether.

There was a widespread anxiety that watching television might disrupt family routines and waste people's time, especially if it was too entertaining. Writing in the *BBC Year Book 1951* (an annual collection of reports and essays about the doings of the BBC over the year), Ivor Brown (1951: 17) responded to this concern by arguing that

> People who view do not stop going to the play or the films or the cricket-match. Television, at two pounds a year for a whole household and friends, does not, after the initial purchase, seriously affect the family's allotment of cash to fun and games.

Brown was somewhat on the defensive, protecting television from the accusation that people had to make a choice between staying in to watch their expensive new television sets or going out and doing something healthier instead. It is important to notice too that Brown considers the television audience to be 'household and friends', a collective audience rather than a lone viewer in front of the screen. For most people the experience of watching television was collective, and they gathered in friends' and neighbours' houses to watch television as an event in itself. So rather than being a distraction from other ways of spending time, or a means of filling in dead time, the television set could be a magnet around which social interaction could take place.

In the years following the end of the Second World War in 1945 a relatively prosperous middle class was living in the expanding suburbs around Britain's major cities, and it was

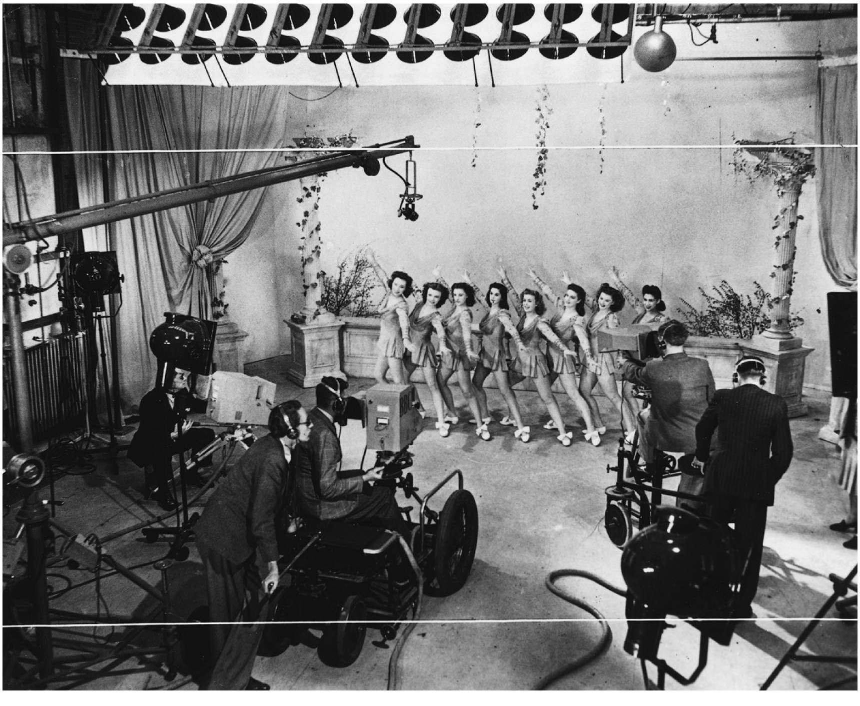


Figure 1.4 Television rehearsals at Alexandra Palace, 1946. Photograph courtesy of the Daily Herald Archive/Science Museum Group

these people who could most easily afford the time and expense of watching television. On one hand, the new suburban semi-detached houses offered people more private space than they had ever had before (larger rooms, more bedrooms and big gardens, for example), but also potential loneliness in the recently created suburban estates populated by people who were strangers to each other, and intensely conscious of the social status they and those around them possessed. Ivor Brown (1951: 17) saw television as a remedy for these problems: 'In the suburb, television is plainly acting as a cohesive force'. Owners of television sets invited people round to watch their televisions, to show them off, to make friends, and to enjoy being an audience for programmes.

The television of the 1950s was aimed at community and family. Television sets were placed near the fire in the family living room, and being warm and cosy together suited the communal experience of watching television as a family group. Families with television sets engaged in social talk that was given new interest by the television programmes they could watch together. This has to be seen in the context of the BBC's public service ideals, which were to encourage people to expose themselves to a range of programmes, some of them requiring concentration and an aim of self-improvement.

Ivor Brown considered television watching to be a rather special event, and thought that television would support the raising of cultural standards among viewers, with 'viewing a planned and intelligent exercise' (1951: 19). This conception of television is probably very different from the ways most people think of television viewing now. Brown (ibid.: 19) was concerned about the directions that viewing might take:

> What I most dread for the future is television available at all hours and the coming of the portable plug-in T.V. set which will destroy the isolation and concentration now imposed by the fixing of the mechanism in one corner of the room.

His worries about the invention of the portable television were not only that it would lead to more distracted viewing but also that the television would follow viewers around the house to different rooms, breaking up the collectivity and sociability which television involved.

The proliferation of televisions, computers and mobile devices in contemporary homes means that it is now common for different age groups and genders within the home to view different programmes in different rooms in different ways. Research by Ofcom has shown how the increase in smartphone and tablet ownership has shifted the traditional living room into a 'digital hub'. Households still come together in the living room to watch TV on the main set, but multi-task or 'media-mesh' – watching different content on multiple devices. Other activities such as video games, social media and online shopping challenge television's place at the centre of home leisure and the collective experience of television viewing. A major question for broadcasters, for Television Studies researchers and for journalists is how streaming will change television culture.

In the UK the public service broadcasters have been at the forefront of this streaming revolution, just as the BBC had been with digital television in the 2000s, due to public service remits to drive technological innovation. Elizabeth Evans points out that as part of the BBC's Charter Review in 2006 'Digital media technologies, including the internet and mobile phone, were explicitly placed under the remit of the BBC, with the role of public service broadcasting changing to account for developments in both technology and audience behaviour' (2011: 34). The BBC's iPlayer debuted in 2005 (with an official launch in 2007) and Channel 4's 4OD platform (later renamed All4) in 2006. These streaming platforms are extensions of television channels, another means of distributing BBC and

Channel 4 content. They were initially conceived of as **catch-up services**, serving the same role as Hulu and more recently Peacock would do in the US. These streaming platforms helped acclimate British viewers to streaming television via trusted PSB brands before the UK arrival of US-based global platforms Netflix in 2012 and Amazon Prime Video in 2014.

Catch-up services streaming services and websites that allowed viewers to view programmes on-demand after their broadcast on linear television, for a certain period of time.

In the 2010s the BBC began to debut new programming on iPlayer before linear broadcast, such as Peter Kay's sitcom *Car Share* in 2015 and teen drama *Normal People* in 2020. It currently makes a 'box set' of the whole season of most high-profile new dramas and documentaries available on iPlayer as soon as the first episode airs on linear television. Both BBC and Channel 4 now acquire international programming that is exclusively available on these platforms, such as All 4's 'Walter Presents' strand featuring foreign-language drama. In 2016 the BBC closed its youth-focused channel BBC Three as a linear channel, transitioning it to an online-only channel available via iPlayer and increasing its production of 'spreadable' short-form content. Many of BBC Three's documentary programmes are now freely available on YouTube in a bid to reach the channel's target audience beyond the boundaries of the BBC's linear channels and iPlayer.

Despite all these changes, the distinguishing features of past television are still evident today, there is more continuity than change. Indeed, in 2022 BBC Three returned as a linear channel. BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 still broadcast live television programmes, with Saturday night light entertainment programmes gaining some of the UK's largest audiences. The collective live television experience of cultural 'events' such as a Royal Wedding, a sporting or political event is now shared with social media platforms. Here the power of these events is built from the 'live' collective experience of television, whether experienced through broadcast or streaming. Yet liveness is no longer the preserve of television, as in an 'always on' culture, viewers can broadcast themselves live online via Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. In an era where television 'prestige' is signalled by ever soaring budgets and special effects that rival cinematic blockbusters, television drama spectacle can still be drawn from liveness. The 2010s saw British evening soap operas *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* celebrate big anniversaries by airing special live episodes as television 'events', incorporating stunts and increasingly complex logistics. Here liveness is used to signify production skill as a televisual 'event'.

The issues of how television is delivered, how it is watched, financed and organised into schedules and channels are matters of major concern to broadcasters, government and cultural commentators. The rise of new platforms across the first decades of the twenty-first century has required viewers and television institutions to think in new ways about how, where and what to watch. This is an era spoken of as one of 'disruption' but there are many continuities with television's history. Across its nearly 100 years lifetime the television landscape has adjusted to constant change, the pace of which has accelerated over the last 30. Studying television in the early twenty-first century is demanding, as we must keep pace with perpetual change, but an important part of understanding culture and society in the past, present and future.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Television Studies focuses on both broadcast and streaming television. New ways of delivering television to viewers pose questions about television's place in society.

- Television has aimed to represent relatively unified cultures, though it also has regional and ethnic characteristics
- British television has an important emphasis on public service functions, and representing society to itself
- Television Studies has emphasised the study of particular programmes
- The flow of programming, and audiences' experience of this flow, is a way of distinguishing television viewing from that of other media such as cinema
- The study of audiences and their responses to television has become increasingly significant, both to television institutions and to theorists of television

Bibliography

Ang, I. (1991) *Desperately Seeking the Audience*. London: Routledge.

Bennett, J. (2010) *Television Personalities: Stardom and the Small Screen*. London: Routledge.

Bennett, J. and Strange N. (eds) (2011) *Television as Digital Media*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Brown, I. (1951) 'T.V. in the Englishman's castle', *BBC Year Book 1951*. London: BBC, pp. 17–19.

Brown, M.E. (1994) *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasure of Resistance*. London: Sage.

Brunsdon, C., D'Acci, J. and Spigel, L. (1997) 'Introduction', in Brunsdon, C., D'Acci, J., and Spigel, L. (eds), *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reade*r. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–16.

Cantrell, T. and Hogg, C. (eds) (2018) *Exploring Television Acting*. London: Methuen.

Caughie, J. (1984) 'Television criticism: a discourse in search of an object', *Screen*, 25(4–5), pp. 109–20.

Caughie, J. (2000) *Television Drama: Realism*, *Modernism*, *and British Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Corner, J. (1999) *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Dyer, R. (1973) *Light Entertainment*. London: BFI.

Ellis, J. (1982) *Visible Fictions: Cinema*, *Television*, Video. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Evans, E. (2011) *Transmedia Television: Audiences*, *New Media and Daily Life*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Fiske, J. (1992) *Television Culture*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Fiske, J. (1994) *Media Matters*. Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Geraghty, C. (1998) 'Audiences and 'ethnography': questions of practice', in Geraghty, C. and Lusted, D. (eds), *The Television Studies Book*. London: Arnold, pp. 141–57.

Gillespie, M. (1995) *Television*, *Ethnicity and Cultural Change*. London: Routledge.

Grainge, P. and Johnson, C. (2015) *Promotional Screen Industries*. London: Routledge.

Grossberg, L., Nelson, C. and Treichler, P. with Baughman L. and Macgregor Wise, J. (eds) (1992) *Cultural Studies*.

Jenkins, H. (2013) *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (updated 20th anniversary edition). London: Routledge.

Johnson, C. (2019) *Online TV*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Morley, D. (1980) *The 'Nationwide' Audience*. London: BFI.

Morley, D. (1992) *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.

Murdoch, G. (1980) 'Authorship and organization', *Screen Education*, 35, pp. 19–34.

Newcomb, H. (1974) *TV: The Most Popular Art*. New York: Anchor.

Newman, M. and Levine, E. (2012) *Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Rixon, P. (2011) *TV Critics and Popular Culture*. London: I. B. Tauris.

Skeggs, B. and Wood, H. (2012) *Reacting to Reality Television: Performance, Audience and Value*. London: Routledge.

Wasko, J. (ed.) (2005) *A Companion to Television*. Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell.

Williams, R. (1968) *Drama in Performance*. London: C. A. Watts.

Williams, R. (1974) *Television, Technology and Cultural Form*. London: Collins.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Television Style and Form

2

- The language of television 38
- Connotations and codes 40
- Mise-en-scène 41
- Image 49
- Sound 53
- Structure and editing 56
- Case study: *Bon Appétit's Gourmet Makes* 62
- Summary of key points 68
- Bibliography 68

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-3

Television Style and Form

text an object such as a television programme, film or poem, considered as a network of meaningful signs that can be analysed and interpreted.

textual analysis a critical approach which seeks to understand a television text's meanings by undertaking detailed analysis of its image and sound components, and the relationships between those components.

This chapter sets out theoretical frameworks for studying television programmes, advertisements, etc. as '**texts**', including semiotic approaches to relations between image and sound. It explores the components of the televisual image, sound and editing, providing the tools for detailed **textual analysis**. Rather than being devised specifically for the study of television, these ideas began in the discipline of Film Studies. Textual approaches to television are powerful ways of discussing the meanings made of television by viewers, but they also have some drawbacks. Textual approaches tend to focus on textual detail at the expense of institutional context and history, and to neglect the ways in which television is understood by audiences. A productive analysis of a programme would combine close textual analysis with some of these approaches to produce a depth of analysis. The chapter ranges widely across different television genres and forms, showing how textual approaches to television can explain how meanings are made in them, where these meanings come from and how they might be understood critically. It ends with a case study of an episode of the YouTube series *Gourmet Makes* from the Bon Appétit channel, showing how close textual analysis can be used to explore a text in detail.

The language of television

semiotics the study of signs and their meanings, initially developed for the study of spoken language, and now used also to study the visual and aural 'languages' of other media such as television.

sign in semiotics, something which communicates meaning, such as a word, an image or a sound.

Semiotic approaches to television, as to any other kind of meaning-making activity in society, begin by identifying the different kinds of **sign** that convey meaning in the medium (Bignell 2002). The principle of semiotic analysis is to begin from the assumption that television has a 'language' that producers and audiences of television have learnt to use. One of the twentieth-century founders of semiotics, the Swiss linguistics professor Ferdinand de Saussure, regarded spoken language as the most fundamental of human meaning-making practices, and argued that all other media could be understood analogously with spoken language. He sought to explain the functioning of spoken language at a particular point in time, describing the system of language as *langue* (which means 'language' in French) and any instance of language use as *parole* (which means 'speech' in French). The 'language' of television would be the whole body of conventions and rules for conveying meaning in the medium, while any example of a particular shot or sequence of television would be an instance of *parole*, an example of this system in use. The language of television consists of visual and aural signs. Television's visual signs include all the images and graphics that are seen on the screen. Aural signs consist of the speech, sound and music which television produces.

Many of television's visual signs closely resemble the people, things and places that they represent in both fictional and non-fictional programmes. Signs that resemble their object in this way are called **iconic signs**, to distinguish them from signs which themselves have no necessary relationship to what they signify. The word 'cat', for example, is a **symbolic sign**, meaning that the letters on the page or the sound of the spoken word 'cat' is arbitrarily used in English to signify a particular type of furry four-legged animal. A television image of a cat, however, closely resembles the real cat that it represents, and is thus an iconic sign. The conventions of representation in television most often rely on the iconic nature of television images to convey an impression of **realism** whereby viewers accept that the television image **denotes** people, places or cats, for example, which exist in the real world. But this acceptance of the realism of television's denotative signs is reliant on the conventions of composition, perspective and framing which are so embedded in Western culture that the two-dimensional image seems simply to convey three-dimensional reality. The power of these conventions can be seen when television represents objects that do not exist in the real world, such as alien spacecrafts in *Doctor Who* or the dragons in *Game of Thrones*. Often these images are not images of real objects, or models, but are created entirely by computer generated imagery (CGI). Yet because the images of them obey the conventions that audiences recognise from the language of television and other visual mediums, viewers can both recognise what they are and accept them as if they were real. These conventions include:

iconic sign in semiotics, a sign that resembles its referent. Photographs, for example, contain iconic signs resembling the objects they represent.

symbolic sign in semiotics, a sign which is connected arbitrarily to its referent rather than because the sign resembles its referent. For example, a photograph of a cat resembles it, whereas the word 'cat' does not: the word is a symbolic sign.

realism the aim for representations to reproduce reality faithfully, and the ways this is done.

denotation in semiotics, the function of signs to portray or refer to something in the real world.

- Perspective
- Proportion
- Light and shade
- Shot composition

Semiotics therefore has a particular interest in the conventions such as these, called **codes**, which govern how signs are used in conventional ways to represent or denote believable worlds.

code in semiotics, a system or set of rules that shapes how signs can be used, and therefore how meanings can be made and understood.

Television signs that denote speech, the ambient noises of a represented environment or the music accompanying a visual sequence are also used according to codes in the language of television. The analysis of television using semiotic methods has tended to focus more on image than sound, but sound is important to the viewer's relationship with what is on the screen. Until recently television screens have been relatively small, so sound has played an important role in communicating story information. Compared to the immersive experience of cinema, the domestic experience of watching television often competes with other activities in the same room (such as talking, eating, doing chores or using a tablet or mobile phone). In order to grab the distracted viewer's attention, sound is used to call out to the viewer. This is very noticeable in television news programmes, which are punctuated with loud brass music to draw the attention of the viewer, as well as to connote the importance of news as a programme genre. Although television images and sounds are often iconic and denotative, seeming simply to convey what the camera and sound recording equipment have captured, these signs have been processed through the various professional norms, industry practices and conventions of meaning-making that have been consciously or unconsciously adopted by both the makers and audiences of television. These ways of working and ways of understanding are among the codes that structure the language of television.

Connotations and codes

connotations the term used in semiotic analysis for the meanings that are associated with a particular sign or combination of signs.

close-up a camera shot where the frame is filled by the face of a person or a detail of a face. Close-ups may also show details of an object or place.

title sequence the sequence at the opening of a television programme in which the programme title and performers' names may appear along with other information, accompanied by images, sound and music introducing the programme.

The iconic and symbolic signs in the language of television are often presented simply as denoting an object, place or person. But signs rarely simply denote something, since signs are produced and understood in a cultural context that enriches them with much more meaning than this. These cultural associations and connections which signs have are called **connotations**. When we analyse a piece of television we think about this as denotation – what do we see? – and connotation – what does it mean? For example, the head-on shots of newsreaders, wearing business clothes, seated behind a desk in news programmes not only denote the newsreader in a studio, but have connotations of authority, seriousness and formality which derive from the connotations of desks, office clothes and head-on address to the camera. These connotations derive partly from social codes that are in circulation in Western society, but also from television codes of news programmes that have been conventionalised over time. Newsreaders speak in a neutral and even tone, which is itself a sign connoting the objectivity and authority of both the newsreader and the news organisation that they represent. News presenters are usually shot in medium **close-up**, full face, under neutral lighting. This code conventionally positions the newsreader as a mediator of events, who addresses the audience and connects them with the news organisation's reporters, and with the people who are the subjects of the news (Figure 2.1). The mediator functions as a bridge between the domestic world of the viewer and the public worlds of news. Even though news programmes now feature newsreaders sitting on desks with their scripts in their hands, or standing up and walking around in the studio to connote a degree of informality, the desk, their clothes and the head-on address to camera remain because they are so much a part of the coding of news programmes.

Television news programmes use music with loud major chords played on brass instruments in their **title sequences**, and these signs carry connotations of importance, dignity and drama. These title sequences also feature computer

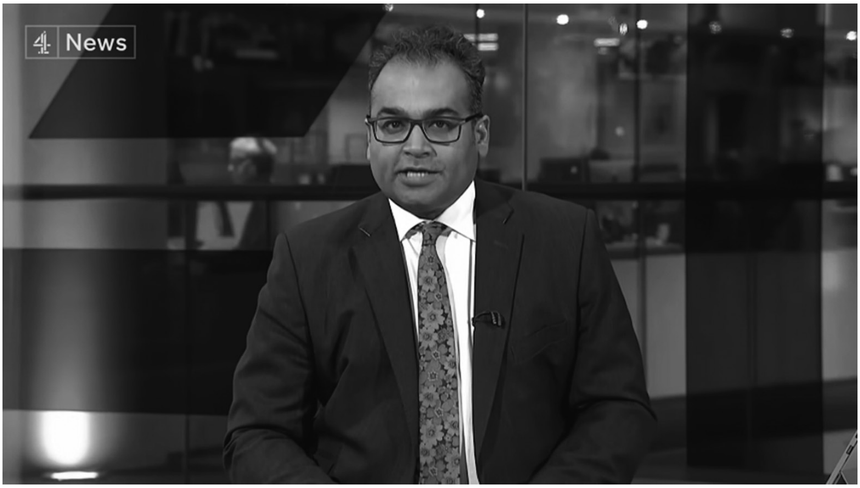


Figure 2.1 Krishnan Guru-Murthy delivers the Channel 4 News

graphics in fast-moving sequences, **syntagms** in semiotic terminology, connoting technological sophistication. The function of title sequences in television news programmes is to establish the status of news as significant and authoritative, and also to differentiate one channel's news programme from another, providing **brand recognition**.

syntagm in semiotics, a linked sequence of signs existing at a certain point in time. Written or spoken sentences and television sequences are examples of syntagms.

brand recognition the ability of audiences to recognise the distinctive identity of a product, service or institution and the values and meanings associated with it.

It is important to remember that the meanings of television images and sounds are not naturally attached to signs. The pleasure and understanding which viewers gain from television often depend on the significance of how signs relate to each other in a particular context, and it is often misleading to carry over the connotations of a sign in one context into another. In the long-running police drama series *Inspector Morse*, for example, Inspector Morse drove a red Jaguar Mark II saloon. In combination with the connotations of Morse's affection for real ale, codes of politeness and love of classical opera, the car had connotations of tradition, 'classicness' and Britishness. By contrast, in the police series of the 1970s (such as *The Sweeney*, in which the Morse actor John Thaw played a main character), Jaguar Mark II saloons were often driven by gangsters and had connotations of the criminal underworld, the glamour of crime and bravado. In analysing a television programme semiotically, signs gain their meanings in three main ways:

- By their similarity with other signs in the same programme
- By their difference from these surrounding signs
- By their relationships with uses of the sign in other contexts

Television relies on its viewers' often unconscious knowledge of codes and their ability to decode signs and their connotations, and assemble them into meaningful scenes, sequences and stories.

Close textual analysis of television draws on the techniques developed in Film Studies, as seen in David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film Art: An Introduction* (2019). When performing close textual analysis of television we look in detail at style and form in a shot, sequence or scene, thinking about how it is organised and structured. We ask ourselves what do we see (denotation) and what does it mean (connotation)? To walk through the components of television style and form this chapter breaks television down into different components. Choices by a programme's creative and technical team about the use of **mise-en-scène**, sound, image and editing shape and convey a programme's meaning.

mise-en-scène literally meaning 'putting on stage', all the elements of a shot or sequence that contribute to its meanings, such as lighting, camera position and setting.

Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène refers to 'the contents of the frame and how they are organised' (Gibbs 2002: 5). In Television Studies this term is at times used to refer to a range of creative components, including camerawork. As we separate camerawork out in this chapter, this section on mise-en-scène follows Jeremy Butler (2018) in including the organisation of setting, costuming, lighting and actor movement.

When considering setting we are thinking about how the world of the action is organised and staged to create meaning. Television can be shot on **location** or in a studio, with these spaces used in different ways in different genres. For example a chat show will include comfy armchair seats for its guests and often a desk for the

location any place in which television images are shot, except inside a television studio.

host, but these are positioned within a deliberately artificial, sparsely decorated and brightly lit performance space. The chat show's set and its action – interview, stand-up comedy, musical performances or silly games – is orientated towards the cameras, which are arranged in a **multi-camera** set-up with a live audience positioned behind them; whereas a drama will use codes of realism to shape the studio set into a space for characters to interact as if it were a real-world space. Here the setting and production design will tell us things about these characters' world: an armchair can be part of a naturalistically-lit living room cluttered with the accumulated objects of a family, a desk part of an stylishly appointed corporate office. Television's serialised storytelling and ability to tell a story across many years means audiences become as familiar with a character's home as their own homes. Karen Lury highlights how in long-running series such as **soap opera** these studio sets can come to be 'imbued with a series of visually-inspired memories of different characters and plot lines' (2005: 16). Long-time viewers of *EastEnders* will remember particularly dramatic or emotional moments that occurred behind the bar of the Queen Vic pub or on the bench in the square.

multi-camera set-up arranges action and studio space in a proscenium arch style towards multiple cameras. These cameras are recording at the same time.

soap opera a continuing drama serial involving a large number of characters in a specific location, focusing on relationships, emotions and reversals of fortune.

These are examples of interior space, but studio sets can be used for exterior shooting, with studio backlots representing city space in US sitcoms like *Friends* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. Large exterior sets can communicate a **prestige drama**'s high budget and investment in world-building, as with US-Italian co-production *My Brilliant Friend*, which constructed a working-class 1950s Naples housing complex in a vast studio lot. This created an immersive space for shooting and aided the production's attention to verisimilitude as a **period drama**. Setting and production design can efficiently communicate characters' lives and personalities to viewers. In Korean romance *It's Okay to Not Be Okay* Gang-tae is the guardian of his autistic older brother Sang-tae and they live in a series of very small apartments. These cramped spaces communicate Gang-tae's struggle to provide for his brother, but the bright colours and warm lighting of this domestic space communicate the safety of their family bond (Figure 2.2). In contrast the mansion of Gang-tae's love interest, wealthy author Moon-young has vast empty rooms,

prestige TV critical and industry term to describe high-budget flagship drama and comedy. Term aims to remove hierarchical/judgemental connotations of the term 'quality television'.

period drama television fiction set in the past, most often the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

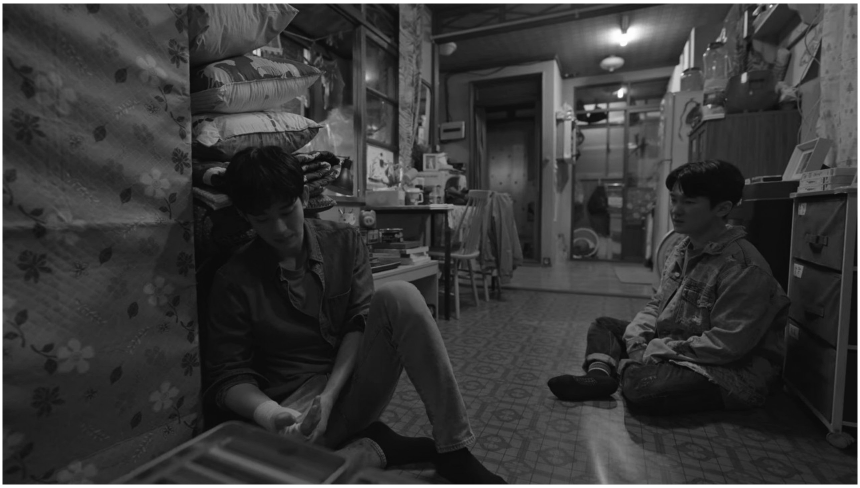


Figure 2.2 The brothers' cramped apartment in *It's Okay to Not Be Okay*

is sparsely lit and dominated by blues and blacks with heavy wood accents. The gothic style of this space communicates her isolation and cold personality, but also gives the feeling she is trapped like a princess in a fairytale castle (Figure 2.3)

Location shooting gives fiction programmes a sense of realism and communicates immediacy in factual programming. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* uses a Los Angeles studio backlot to represent the New York streets where its detective ensemble work, as the non-**naturalism** of this space is less important to a light-hearted sitcom. Whereas the police procedural *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* uses codes of realism to signal the serious nature of its storytelling by shooting on location in the streets of New York. A news correspondent could give their report on an event from the same studio as the news anchor, but reporting 'live' from a location codes their reporting as 'authentic'. A prerecorded report from a reporter who was present at an event can serve as a first-hand witness, as when ITV correspondent Robert Moore reported from alongside pro-Trump rioters as they broke into the US Senate on 6 January 2021 (Figure 2.4). This report brought some of the first official recordings of the rioters' actions from inside the building (although many streamed their activities live on social media platforms). Sporting events are broadcast live on location, with the cameras capturing events from a stadium or arena that allows the viewer at home a close look at the action. Live location broadcasts create a co-presence, allowing the home viewer to experience a goal in a football match at the same time as the real-life spectator. During BBC broadcasts from the Wimbledon tennis tournament a presenter will often preview a match standing right next to the grass on Centre Court, in conversation with a pundit as players warm up in the background. This signals both liveness and the exclusive access the broadcaster has, showcasing their authority as a public service broadcaster.

naturalism originally having a very specific meaning in literature and drama, this term is now used more loosely to denote television fiction that adopts realistic conventions of character portrayal, linear cause and effect narrative, and a consistent and recognisable fictional world.

Just as production design communicates story detail and characterisation, costume also contributes to storytelling. When we are first introduced to a character their costume helps define them quickly for an audience. In Spanish teen drama *Élite*, how each character wears and accessorises the uniform of their elite private

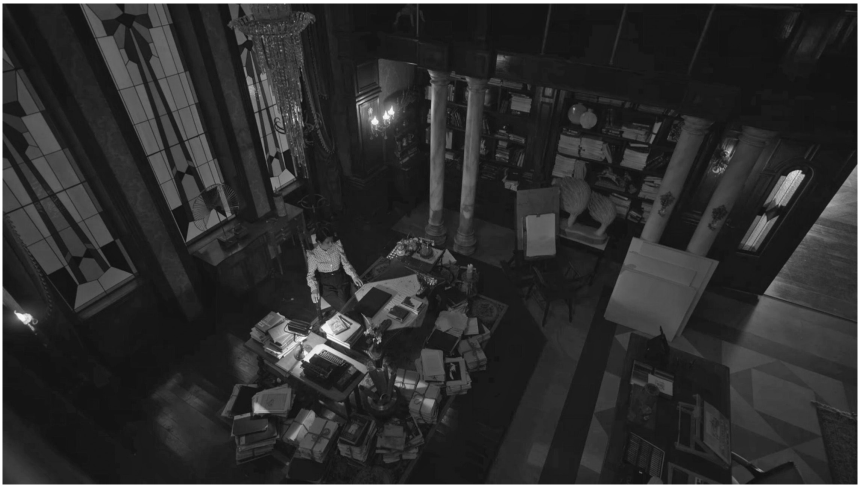


Figure 2.3 Moon-young's large family mansion

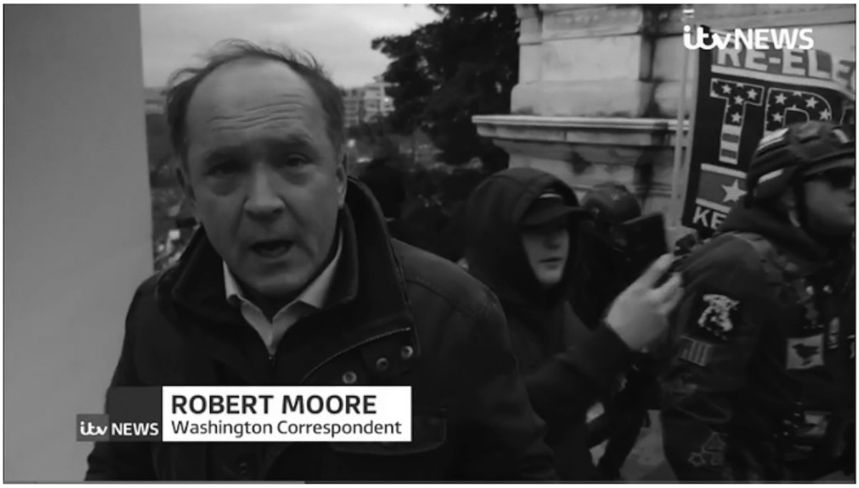


Figure 2.4 ITV News reporting from outside the US Senate on 6 January 2021

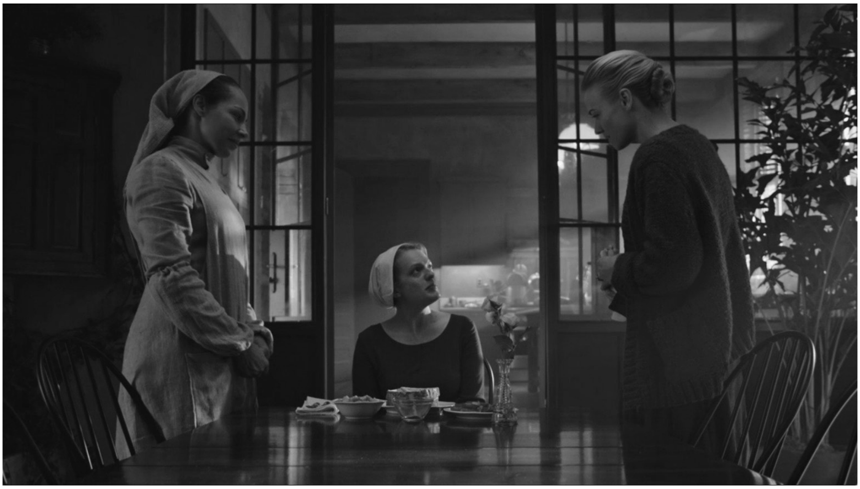


Figure 2.5 Costume and colour signifying women's social categories in *The Handmaid's Tale*

school helps communicate their personality to viewers. A heavily stylised costume can work alongside set design and cinematography to contribute to world-building, as in the dystopian thriller *The Handmaid's Tale*. Here the colour-coded uniforms of Gilead's wives, 'Handmaids', 'Marthas' and 'Aunts' separate the society's women into highly controlled social categories (Figure 2.5). The reproductive importance of the Handmaids is signified by their long blood-red cloaks (whose colour costume designer Anna Crabtree called 'lifeblood'). These cloaks are accentuated through colour-grading to stand out from their surroundings and contrast with the cool teal blue finely tailored dresses of the privileged wives and the neutral tones and natural fabrics of the Martha domestic servants. Character dynamics are also signalled by costume, as with the central duo of *Killing Eve*, whose cat and mouse chase becomes a mutual obsession. Intelligence agent Eve wears unobtrusive clothing in neutral colours, signalling her practical nature. In contrast Villanelle, the amoral assassin she pursues, favours statement-making high-fashion outfits that signal her flamboyant personality and love of luxury. When Villanelle becomes fascinated with Eve she courts her by gifting a suitcase of expensive yet refined luxury items that Eve touches gently in fascination. Here clothing signals the women's complex mutual fascination.

Performers contribute significantly to television's meaning, so when we look at a scene we should pay attention to how action is organised, how the performers move and what they express. Consider the physicality and verbal delivery of a performer or presenter, their movement, gestures and vocal delivery. Villanelle's self-control and technical mastery is indicated by her confident, choreographed movement during her hits. Eve is also a highly competent professional but her looser physicality and slightly stumbling speech patterns signal her less assertive nature. A presenter's performance style will indicate the tone of programme. On *Late Night With Seth Myers* the host Seth Myers uses long-established codes of performance in US late night talk shows, delivering his opening monologue or comedy segments sitting up straight at a desk, leaning forwards with his elbows on the desk to address the camera conspiratorially when emphasising a joke (Figure 2.6). On the other hand, the hosting duo of late night talk show *Desus & Mero* deliver their show-opening segment 'The Warm Up' sitting back in two low armchairs in relaxed poses, crouching forward for emphasis (Figure 2.7). In contrast to established performance conventions of late night hosts, the physicality of Desus Nice and The Kid Mero communicates their laid-back personas and their improvisatory, free-wheeling presenting style.

To consider the spatial arrangement of performers in the frame we use a term from theatre, 'blocking'. How are characters positioned in relation to each other? What does this tell us about their relationships? Who is the most important person in the scene, who has been positioned to draw our eye? Where are they positioned in the space? Deep space blocking uses the depth of the frame to organise

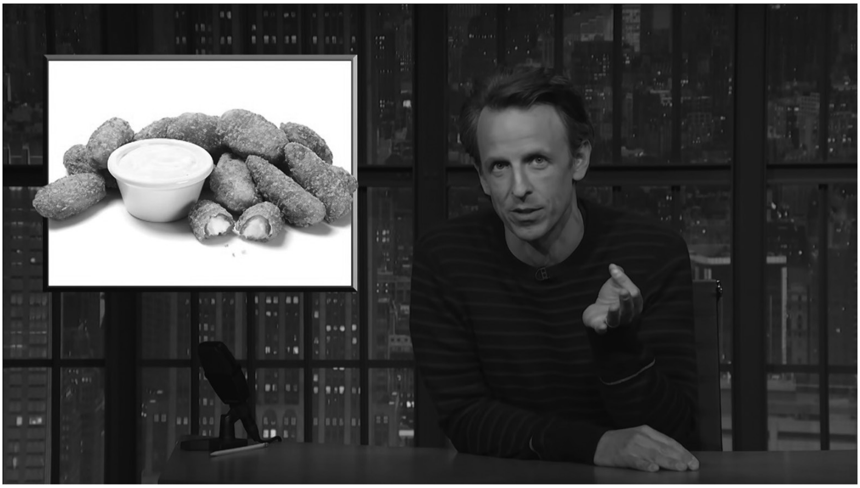


Figure 2.6 Conventional late night chat show presenting on *Late Night With Seth Myers*

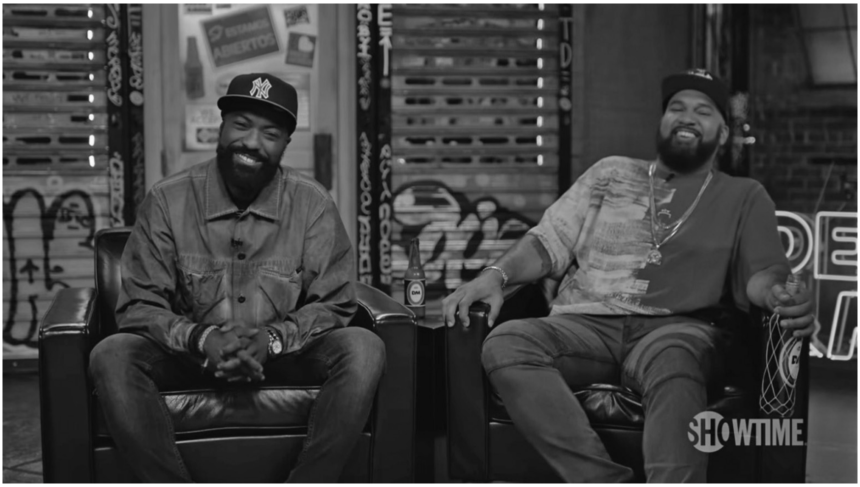


Figure 2.7 Laid back presenting style on *Desus & Mero*

characters' actions, with actors or areas of attention positioned in the background farther from the camera. Multi-camera sitcoms filmed in a studio tend to stage action in a relatively shallow space across the frame. Their actors are positioned within a three-walled set orientated towards both the cameras and behind them, a live audience, who take the place of the fourth wall. Here the **axis of action** is angled so that the important performance moments in a scene can be captured from different angles at once, as multiple cameras are recording at the same time.

axis of action or 180-degree line, the imaginary line connecting two main actors in a scene.

A key part of shaping a programme's mise-en-scène is lighting. This can shape our understanding of a sequence, direct our attention or bring a certain tone. Three-point lighting is a standard lighting practice when illuminating a person. A 'key' light is orientated from the front, which is the main source of light to highlight the face. One 'fill' light counteracts shadows from the key light and a 'back' light creates a subtle outline to distinguish the person from the background. Television uses more than three lights, often using complex lighting rigs in studios and on locations, but this principle covers the standard shape of lighting. Karen Lury highlights the practice of 'beautiful light' on actors' faces, where three-point lighting with warmer colour tones and softer bounced light enhance the visual appeal of a performer (2005: 38).

High-key lighting is a standard practice in multi-camera programmes such as chat shows, game shows and soap opera. Here action is captured by multiple cameras at the same time, in a continuous flow of action. The lighting needs to be the same from each camera angle so a sequence can be edited or vision-mixed seamlessly. This is an efficient, economical form of programme-making as single shots are not lit closely in detail, as they are on a drama series or 'single-camera' sitcom, where camera set-ups can be very time-consuming. This does not present a naturalistic form of lighting, instead a bright, even, attractive wash of light with minimal key lighting is provided by expansive rigs in the studio ceiling. Competitive baking show *The Great British Bake Off* is filmed in a tent on a lawn and uses high-key lighting blended with natural fill light from the large side windows of the tent to blanket light the bakers and their cooking stations (Figure 2.8). This

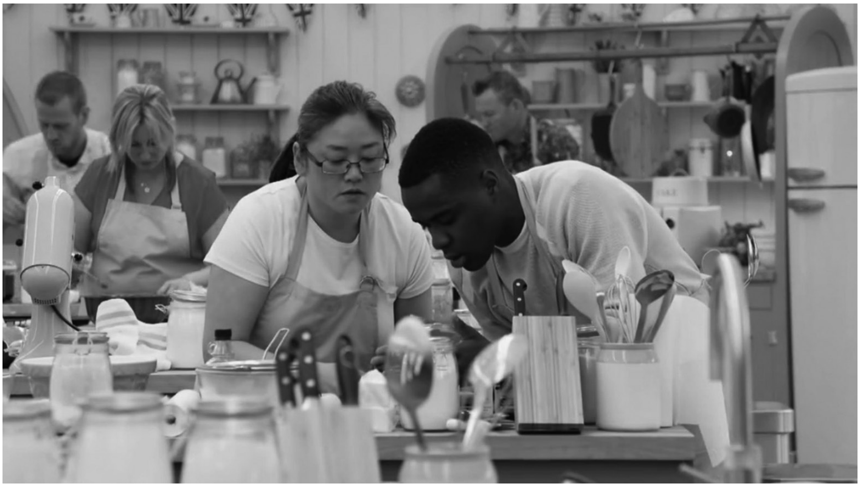


Figure 2.8 Lighting in *The Great British Bake Off* allows contestants to be evenly lit as they bake

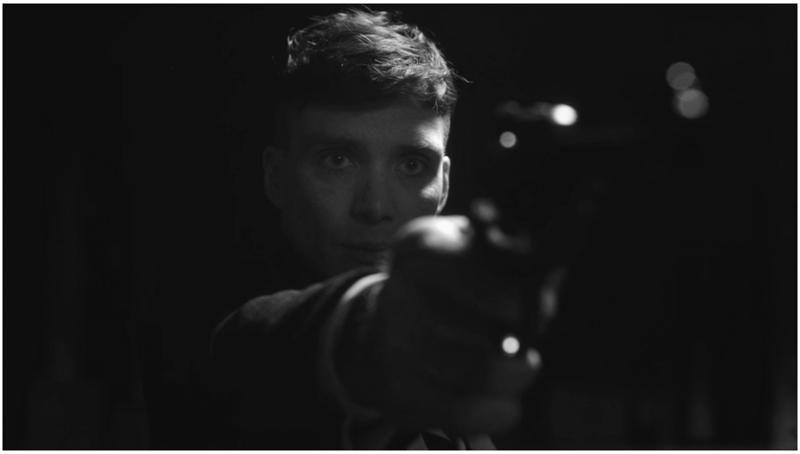


Figure 2.9 Low-key lighting in *Peaky Blinders* provides high contrast between light and dark

allows the contestants to move around freely and the roaming camera operators to capture action as it happens.

In contrast, low-key lighting accentuates shadows and provides high contrast between light and dark. Here key or **back light** are emphasised and fill lights are dialled down. This is seen in the British period crime drama *Peaky Blinders*, where it contributes to the programme's stylised tone, which plays with stark shadows (Figure 2.9). US supernatural thriller *Stranger Things* frequently employs dramatically scaled low-key lighting as part of its use of horror genre conventions. The programme's first season highlighted a widespread issue in film and television's lighting of performers of colour. In scenes set in the deep shadows of a night-time suburban basement the scene's low-key lighting causes the programme's

back lighting lighting the subject of a shot from behind to provide depth by separating the subject from the background.

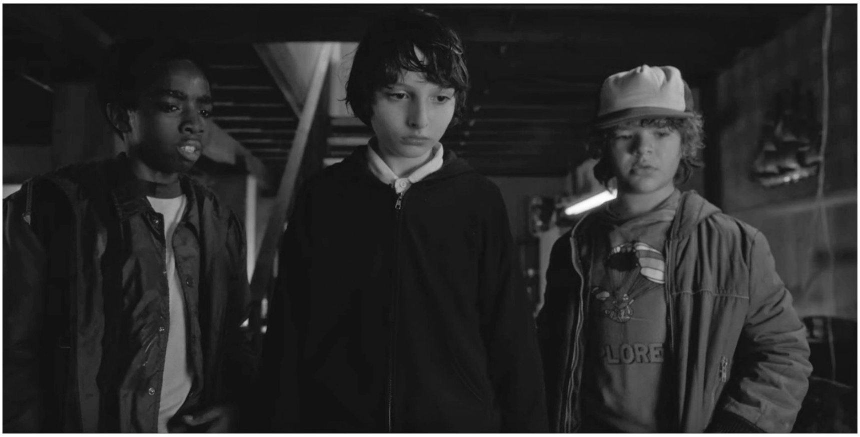


Figure 2.10 Unbalanced lighting of a Black actor in *Stranger Things*

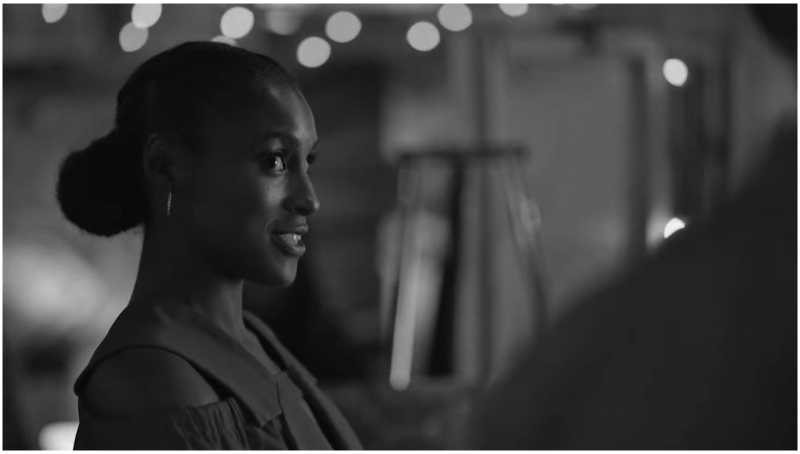


Figure 2.11 *Insecure*'s use of reflected light in night scenes to accentuate Black skin

one Black cast member to be underlit and almost disappear (Figure 2.10). This is because the scene's lighting scheme was organised around the white skin of the other actors in the scene. This illustrates how part of television's push to bring greater diversity to its storytelling requires production teams to rethink standard industry practices that default to light skin tones as a technical norm. The cinematographer for US dramedy *Insecure*, Ava Berkofsky, highlighted the importance of filtered, polarised and reflected light to bright out the complexity of Black skin tones, 'Rather than pound someone's face with light, [I] have the light reflect off them…I always use a white or [canvas-like] muslin, so instead of adding more light, the skin can reflect it' (Harding 2017).

Both *Insecure* and *I May Destroy You* use neon-toned light in night scenes to shape the faces of their Black actors, illustrating how the colour of light can affect televisual images (Figure 2.11). Overall, colour is a key component of mise-en-scène, with production design, costumes and lighting contributing to a programme's colour palette. A programme's colour scheme is frequently accentuated through post-production colour-grading. This can be subtle and barely noticeable, matching and balancing small differences across shots and scenes. It can also be heavily stylised, particularly in prestige drama, where it draws attention to itself as creative choice. Colour grading can contribute to a programme's tone or that of an individual scene by removing and heightening certain colours, as *The Handmaid's Tale*'s accentuation of the coloured uniforms illustrates.

Image

Continuing on from mise-en-scène, we now look at how the camera image organises space and action within the frame. The camera shapes the viewer's experience of the action through shot choice, composition and camera movement. An establishing shot sets out the location of a scene or sequence. It introduces us to a landscape or a building, usually in a static or **panning** extreme long shot. This can be a crane shot sweeping over the excitedly applauding audience on a chat show, or the tilt up the exterior of the apartment building on *Friends* following a commercial break. British crime drama *Happy Valley* is set in the Calder Valley, Yorkshire and often uses brief montages of extreme long shots of the town to transition between scenes. Here the camera looks down on a location in the town from a crane shot or high on a hill, other shots pick out the town within the valley surrounded by moorland. These sequences identify a space where action will unfold whilst also providing the serial with a strong sense of place, with the valley's hills signifying the underlying feeling of entrapment felt by many characters (Figure 2.12).

pan a shot where the camera is turned to the left or turned to the right. The term derives from the word 'panorama', suggesting the wide visual field that a pan can reveal.

A **long shot** features the whole of a character's body. This kind of shot is more common in an action sequence, dance number or sporting event, when we need to see bodies interacting and their movement. In contrast to its use in film, the long shot has been less common in television as the small size of television

long shot a camera shot taking in the whole body of a performer, or more generally a shot with a wide field of vision.

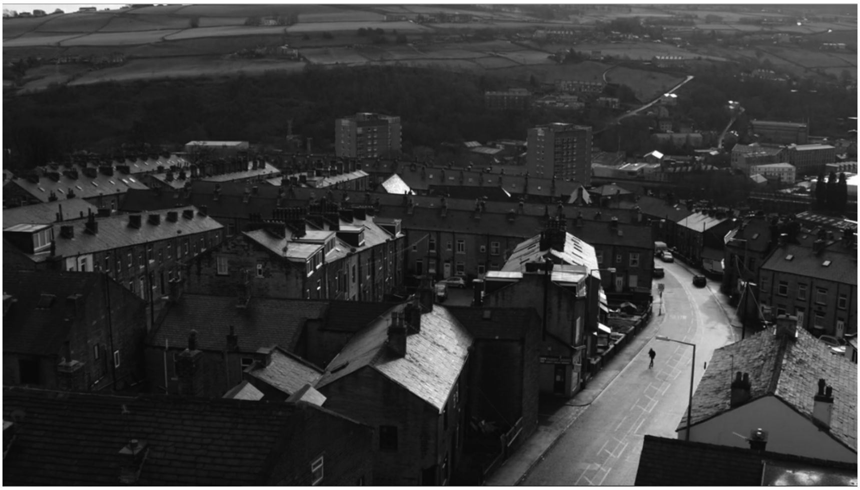


Figure 2.12 Establishing shot in *Happy Valley*

sets compared to the cinema screen made it difficult to see the details of characters' faces. However, the increase in television set size in recent years has enabled directors to employ this shot size more frequently, as well as use deep focus to draw attention to characters or objects in the back of shots. Season three of *Master of None* focuses on a couple's failing marriage in a countryside cottage and is frequently filmed in lengthy long shots that are static or move very little (Figure 2.13). These showcase the quirky architecture of the wood-beamed cottage and make the viewers focus on body language. Long shots organised as two shots communicate the unspoken feelings and emotional distance between Denise and Alicia and single shots maroon each character in the space of the house, communicating their feelings of isolation.

shot-reverse-shot the convention of alternating a shot of one character and a shot of another character in a scene, producing a back-and-forth movement which represents their interaction visually.

A medium shot frames a performer from the waist up, which focuses attention on the character's face and gestures, as well as their relationship to other people in the scene. These are constructed in two shots or **shot-reverse-shot** editing patterns. Medium and medium long shots are common in sitcom as they highlight comic physicality. Presenters in news programmes or light entertainment are frequently framed in medium shots as they address the viewer at home, as are reality show contestants in 'confessional' interview segments. The medium shot and close-up are the most common shots in television storytelling as they make the most of its smaller screen. This contributes to the intimacy of television's address. In a close-up the face fills the screen, drawing the viewer's attention to 'the drama of the human face' (Lury 2005: 17). It can linger on an object, giving the viewer time to contemplate it and see detail, as when the camera tracks across an archive photo in a documentary as if searching for clues, or tracks in on a vase brought to *Antiques Roadshow*. Close-up reaction shots are the staple of genres like

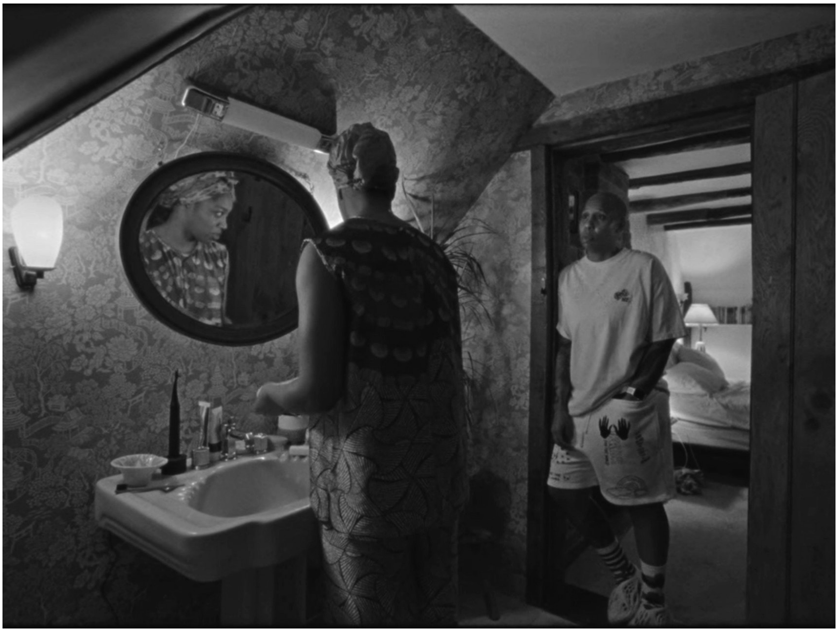


Figure 2.13 Long shot framing and blocking express emotional distance in *Master of None*

reality TV and soap opera that trade on emotional intensity. Romantic drama *Normal People* uses close-ups and shallow focus to draw viewers into the faces of its young couple, where the actors' performances communicate the intensity of the emotions its young couple struggle to express verbally (Figure 2.14). An extreme close-up fragments the image, emphasising detail by tightly focusing viewers' attention, such as the delicacy or strangeness of an unfurling plant or peculiar insect in a nature programme.

reality TV programmes where the unscripted behaviour of 'ordinary people' is the focus of interest.

Camera angles can contribute to storytelling, although we should be careful not to generalise about the power dynamics involved in **high-angle** and **low-angle** shots – often slight differences in angle are being used to manage height differences between performers. Angled shots can communicate characters' emotions, as in Figure 2.15 from *I May Destroy You* where an extreme low-angle signifies Arabella's experience of trauma as she begins to recall that she was sexually assaulted. Figure 2.16 shows a higher angled shot with unbalanced composition from *Insecure*, which communicates a moment of unsureness during Issa's dinner

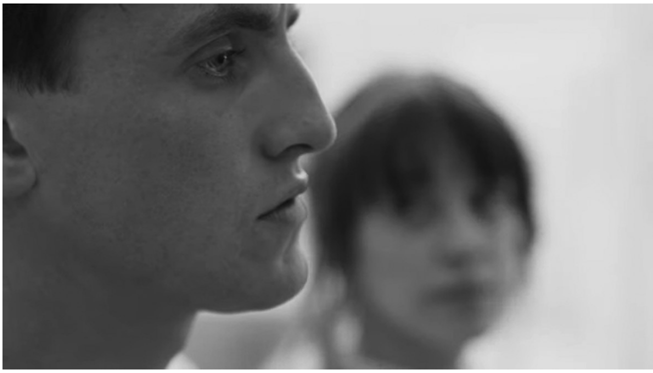


Figure 2.14 Close-up and shallow focus in *Normal People*

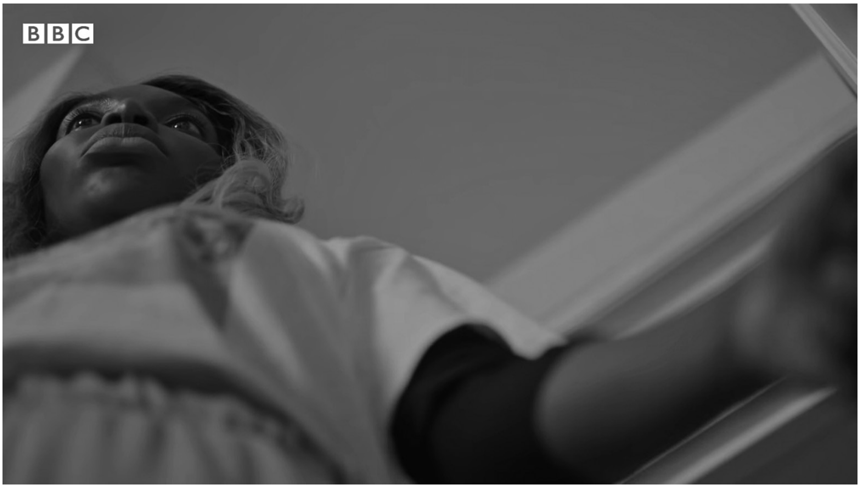


Figure 2.15 Low angle communicating Arabella's emotional state in *I May Destroy You*

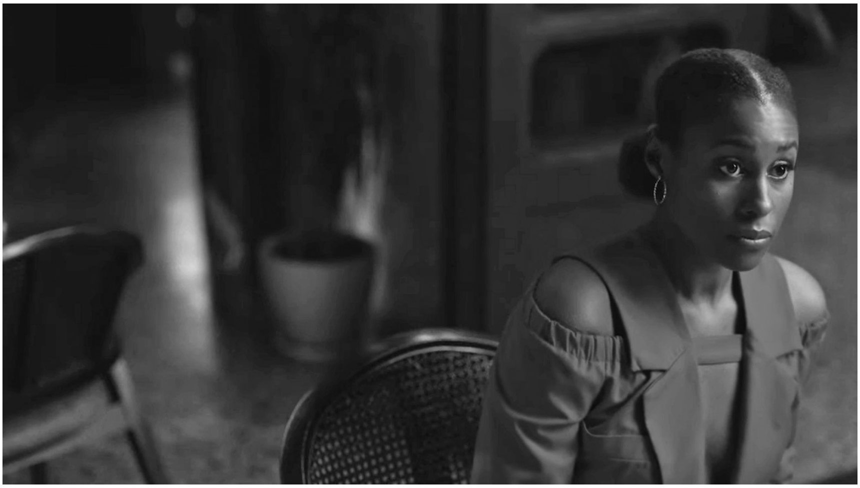


Figure 2.16 High angle and unbalance framing communicated Issa's unsureness in *Insecure*

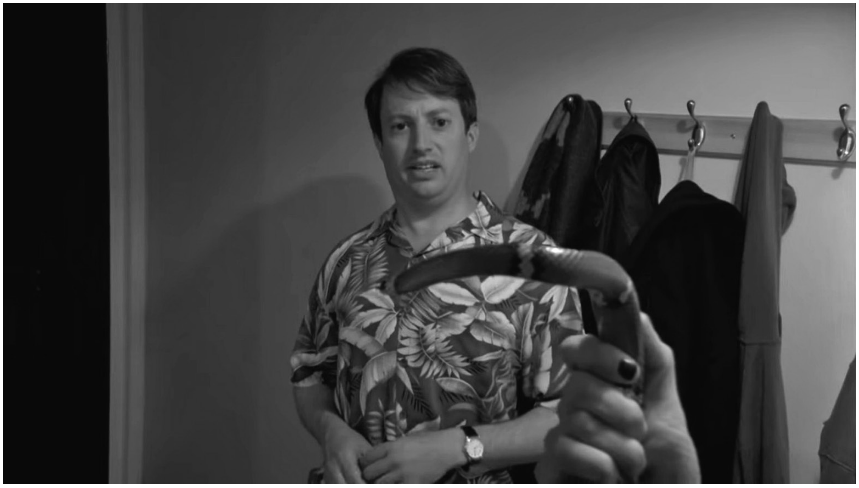


Figure 2.17 A point of view shot in *Peep Show*

rule of thirds guideline that divides image into thirds and ninths, allowing compositions to be well-balanced, often the subject is placed to the left or right.

point of view shot a camera shot where the camera is placed in, or close to, the position from where a previously seen character might look.

with her ex-boyfriend, as the angle shifts from the sequence's established well-balanced shot-reverse shots. Unbalanced compositions use the human eye and brain's familiarity with the **rule of thirds** to unsettle the viewer.

British sitcom *Peep Show* uses **point of view** shots along with internal monologue to place viewers in the perspective of its odd couple flatmates Mark and Jeremy, and occasionally other characters (Figure 2.17). Characters talk directly to the camera as if it were the character. The programme is shot using a camera attached to the body of a camera operator to evoke the feeling of seeing through a character's eyes, with the camera lurching and pivoting as if it were a head. Camera movement shapes our experience of action, whether it is subtly reframing to keep an actor's performance in close-up or arcing in a spectacular crane shot, where the camera is attached to a rig that moves it through the air. A pan sees the camera twist sideways from a static position on a tripod, a tilt is an angled movement up and down. When a camera moves forward, back and sideways this is a **tracking shot** or **dolly** shot. A track-in changes the size of the camera's image as the camera moves towards the object, with the movement from a medium shot to a close-up to an extreme close-up in a single shot increasing the intensity of a moment. A track-in is different from a zoom, which is an adjustment of the focal length of the camera. This magnifies or demagnifies the image whilst the camera stays in the same position.

Where a track or dolly is a smooth movement, a handheld camera can communicate unsteadiness. As handheld camera movement has longstanding links with documentary and news footage it has connotations of immediacy and spontaneity. The camera's physical movements makes the presence of the cameraperson visible and in factual genres it suggests the camera is following action as it unfolds, rather than action being presented for the camera to capture as in drama. Dramas draw on handheld's connotations of 'realism' to communicate immediacy and 'gritty' action. In contrast, a Steadicam shot is a smooth tracking shot that uses a stabilised rig attached to the camera operator's body. This produces a smooth floating feeling as the cameraperson walks, which provides greater flexibility in movement and staging. On light entertainment show *Strictly Come Dancing* Steadicam operators swirl around the floor with the dancers, communicating the feeling of their movement to the viewers at home. Steadicam enables lengthy 'walk and talk' sequences in programmes that make spectacle of their actors' ability to handle fast-paced dialogue and movement like medical drama *ER* and screwball period comedy *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel*.

dolly a wheeled camera platform. A 'dolly shot' is a camera shot where the camera is moved forward or back using this platform.

tracking shot a camera shot where the camera is moved along (often on a miniature railway track) parallel to a moving subject of the shot while photographing it.

Sound

Television sound directs the viewer's attention and smooths the joins of its storytelling. As television is a domestic medium it can serve as background accompaniment, competing for our attention with other tasks and media devices. Sound is frequently used to signal that viewers should pay attention, through a sound effect, an accentuated piece of dialogue or a score providing musical emphasis. Sound, particularly music, can support or contrast with the image, helping to shape tone and emotion. Sound helps construct spatial relationships, for example an echo makes a space feel big. Sound directs our attention in a scene, as we are unable to hear characters in the back of shot speaking as their voices are indistinguishable from atmospheric sound, but those closer to camera are louder so we pay attention to them. Sound works with editing to maintain continuity, as it continues over the image as shots change. A sound bridge helps smooth edits between scenes, with sound from the following scene heard before the edit **cuts** to it, or the previous scene's sound lingers into the next. **Diegetic** sound or music clearly has a source within the story, as dialogue, sound effects or music from a radio. This is sound that characters could hear. Non-diegetic sound, such as **narration** and score, has no source in the story world and characters cannot hear it. Sound that we can't see the source of but has a clear connection to the world is off-screen sound, for example the sound of a car crash or a breaking glass will cause a

cut the moment at which one camera shot ceases and another begins, where no transitional visual effect (such as a fade or a dissolve) is used.

diegesis the telling of events as narrative. Diegetic sound is sound emanating from the represented environment, and extra-diegetic sound comes from outside that environment.

narration the process of telling a story through image and sound. Narration can also refer to the spoken text accompanying television images.

character to turn and look. This also signals the presence of off-screen space, the space beyond the frame.

Television is a medium of talk; the human voice is found everywhere. The factors offering connotations in recorded speech include:

- The apparent acoustic source of speech (within the represented world, or from outside it)
- The gender of the voice
- The accent of the voice
- The relative volume of the voice
- The speed of the speech
- The timbre or tone of the voice

Dialogue is the most common form of speech in television, two or more people talking to each other. In a fiction programming, dialogue is contained in the story world as a conversation between characters and doesn't break the fourth wall. Meanwhile, a talk show host's conversation with the guest will be for the benefit of the studio audience and viewer at home and they frequently recognise their presence. But when a character in a fiction programme breaks the fourth wall to address the audience this breaks the realism of the programme. Whilst relatively rare in fiction, direct address is more comfortably experienced in comedy than drama due to the genre's slightly elastic reality and the tradition of the comic aside inherited from comedy's vaudeville theatre roots. Direct address creates a conspiratorial connection between viewer and protagonist, in *Chewing Gum* and *Fleabag* only the audience can hear the protagonists' comic asides and longer monologues. We are more comfortable hearing monologues from non-fiction presenters, who always talk directly to the audience at home. For example, late night talk show hosts begin each episode with a joke-filled monologue delivered directly to camera. In a documentary, an interview is a conversation, but the questioner can be edited out to leave only the interview subject's responses. This creates a pseudo-monologue, a 'talking head' where it feels like the interview subject is talking to the viewer.

subtitle written text appearing on the television screen, normally to translate speech in a foreign language.

dubbing replacing the original speech in a programme, advertisement, etc. with speech added later, often to translate speech in a foreign language.

As television is exported globally its voices are frequently **dubbed** or **subtitled** for local audiences. Christine Adamou and Simone Knox note that 'Not only does each (source and target) language bring its own characteristics, aesthetics and texture to the text, but each version is also created for a particular target market and specific national (television) culture' (2011: 1). Dubbing is a standard practice in many countries, with local language dubbing modifying imported television for broadcast, so audiences accept a lack of synchronisation with voice and body. However, due to the historic international domination of English-language media, English-speaking audiences lack familiarity with dubbing and 'have come to expect that the "norm" will be that voices will always be in synch with the visual performance' (Lury 2005: 69). Instead, in Britain and the US foreign language programming is conventionally subtitled. Children's animation has a long history of dubbing, enabling both East Asian and British programming to easily circulate internationally. Chapter 11 talks more about how streaming platforms use dubbing and subtitling as a key element of their global expansion (Lobato 2019).

Dialogue and monologues are attached to bodies, whereas voiceover narration is a voice disconnected from a visual source. Narration serves a range of functions across both fiction and factual television, providing information, guiding storytelling and shaping audience understanding. In fiction programming narration can be linked to a character or be provided by a non-diegetic voice. US family sitcom *The Goldbergs* uses a retrospective narration from adult Adam, this shapes the family's experiences as their teenage son's memories, which are occasionally unreliable. Narration can provide a character's internal monologue, often for comic effect. Teen comedy *Never Have I Ever* features an Indian-American teen girl protagonist Devi and uses ex-tennis player John McEnroe to provide her internal monologue in the third person. The programme derives comedy from the juxtaposition of this famous white male voice linked to angry outbursts and Devi's teenage girl body and her experiences.

Non-fiction narration largely has an instructional function. Sports commentary is narration that interprets the action for the viewer live, shaping the narrative of the event and its athletes. This is so enshrined in the experience of televised sport that it can be hard to follow a match or a race without a commentator. Documentary voiceover similarly shapes our understanding of what we are seeing. When a documentary-maker narrates their own programme it brings a sense of authorship and connection as it can frame the filmmaking process as their personal experience. An unseen male narrator with no authorial connection to a documentary is sometimes referred to as the 'voice of God'. British television documentaries have moved away from the detached, authoritarian connotations of the voice of God, instead using actors with warmer regional accents. Yorkshire actor Shaun Dooley narrates BBC Three's *Our War* documentary series. His gruff but soft Yorkshire accent has connotations of working-class masculinity that aligns with the programme's focus on young British soldiers. In reality TV a narrator can have a playfully detached attitude towards a programme's content that signals to the viewer the action is not to be taken seriously. British comedian Ian Stirling provides a sarcastic narration for dating reality show *Love Island* that fondly mocks its formal conventions, tropes and contestants.

The sound of the live studio audience stands in for the audience at home. Multi-camera sitcoms and light entertainment shows use the studio audience to bring energy to performances and to cue the responses of the audience at home through laughs, gasps and groans. During 2020 and 2021 national restrictions in response to the Coronavirus pandemic meant many genres of television had to record with no or minimal live audiences. The eery silence that greeted late night talk show hosts delivering their monologues to crew members in echoey, audience-less studios on the day that New York went into lockdown in February 2020 communicated the strange and fearful situation the city found itself in. The live response of the multi-camera sitcom's studio audience emphasises jokes and helps build the energy of comic sequences. Sitcom recordings produce an interactive experience much like theatre, where the actors' performances generate and respond to audience laughter. However, episodes of multi-camera sitcoms are not performed uninterrupted like theatre, instead they require production to stop and start for scene resets, retakes and the insertion of new jokes. The term 'laugh track' signals the need to rework sound in post-production, as the chosen takes and the audience's reaction are edited together into a seamless whole.

Alongside voice, the other primary element of television sound is music. This exists in a range of forms. One often unnoticed element of television music is the **ident**, which serves as **branding** for a channel or service, welcoming the viewer and reminding them where they are (Johnson 2012). For example, the brassy fanfare that accompanied the swirling blocks of the classic Channel 4 logo, or the short drum beats and string sustain that plays over the Netflix logo. Similarly, the theme tune accompanying a programme's title sequence contributes to a programme brand, establishing tone and theme. Opening titles have become increasingly squeezed in US network television, as broadcasters maximise time for adverts. In *Lost*'s brief title card the wavering atonal whine and swirly electronic strings signalled its mystery theme and tone of unease and instability. Subscription cable channels like HBO signal their prestige through elaborate title sequences. Comic family melodrama *Succession* uses a theme tune composed by Nicholas Britell, an Oscar-winning composer that accompanies imagery evoking the Roy family's home moves. As the titles progress the piano-led theme becomes increasingly elaborate and intense, signalling the self-regard, heightened stakes and complex business manoeuvres that are about to unfold.

ident a short sequence containing a channel or streaming platform's logo (or that of a programming strand) which appears before a programme, reminding the viewer where they are watching it. A key part of communicating brand identity.

brand recognition the ability of audiences to recognise the distinctive identity of a product, service or institution and the values and meanings associated with it.

Just as a theme tune tells the viewer about the programme they are about to watch, a programme's original score plays a key role in storytelling. Television is rarely silent, with a musical score accompanying and responding to emotion and narrative shifts. A score cues an audience to respond, a sting will emphasise a punchline or a jump-scare, a string sustain can provoke tears. Where a composer will create original music cues for an entire film, this is rarely the case for television episodes due to the larger narrative space of a multi-episode season and the ongoing nature of its production. A composer will combine cues and themes composed for the pilot with new material for each episode. Programmes also frequently use pop songs as score, to signal character, tone or time period. A music supervisor selects and licences new music or well-known tracks to accompany the narrative. Programmes such as *The O.C.* and *Grey's Anatomy* gained a reputation for integrating pop music, using it to enhance their emotion-led storytelling, at times helping songs become hits. Time loop comedy *Russian Doll* uses Harry Nilsson's 'Gotta Get Up' to signal the resetting of Nadia's time loop. As she is repeatedly resurrected and reset back to her friend's bathroom the song's jaunty piano chords become a taunting refrain as she stares in anger and despair at the mirror. The song's acoustics are first non-diegetic, serving as score, then as she leaves the bathroom the song dips down in the sound mix, signalling it has become diegetic music at the party she is attending.

Structure and editing

Editing organises television's space and time so that it makes sense for the viewer. It takes recorded images and sounds and assembles them into the final programme, building shots into scenes, scenes into acts and acts into episodes. In the majority of genres editing occurs in post-production. Live television and some light-entertainment shows edit live using a vision-mixing system where shots are selected from multiple cameras recording at the same time. Post-production editing assembles shots recorded on different days and in different locations or sets and assembles them into an episode with a coherent narrative whose spatial dynamics and timeline make sense. Classical Hollywood filmmaking normalised the continuity editing system, which television continued. This follows a set of rules that make action feel continuous and the organisation of space clear, even though the shots are constantly changing. This has become so naturalised our brains process this editing style as 'invisible', it does not draw attention to itself.

Continuity editing organises a scene's space around the **180-degree rule**, where the cameras stay on one side of an axis of action. To maintain a consistent screen direction and avoid confusing the viewer the camera angles need to be arranged within the semi-circle (a 180-degree arc) on one side of this line. Consider a simple conversation between two characters as recorded by two cameras, one character looks screen left and the other screen right. Our brain processes this as them talking to each other. If one character was shot from the other side of axis of action they would both be looking in the same direction, which would be confusing. Figures 2.18 to 2.21 show a shot sequence from romantic comedy *Starstruck* where the axis of action is first established between Jessie and Tom, and her flatmate Kate through shot-reverse-shots. It then shifts 90 degrees

180-degree rule the convention that cameras are positioned only on one side of an imaginary line drawn to connect two performers in a scene. This produces a coherent sense of space for the viewer.

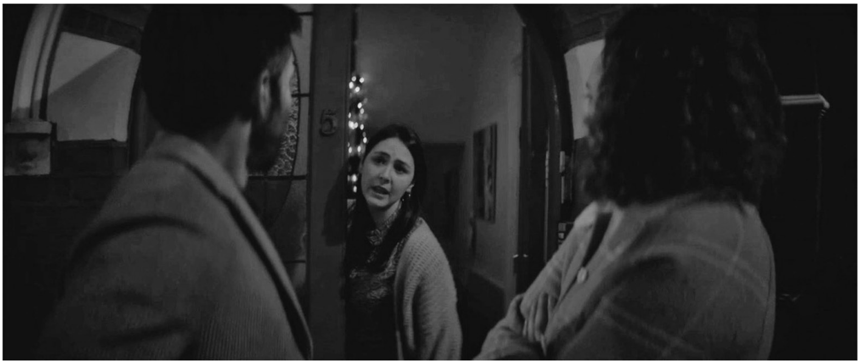


Figure 2.18 A conversation between three characters in *Starstruck*

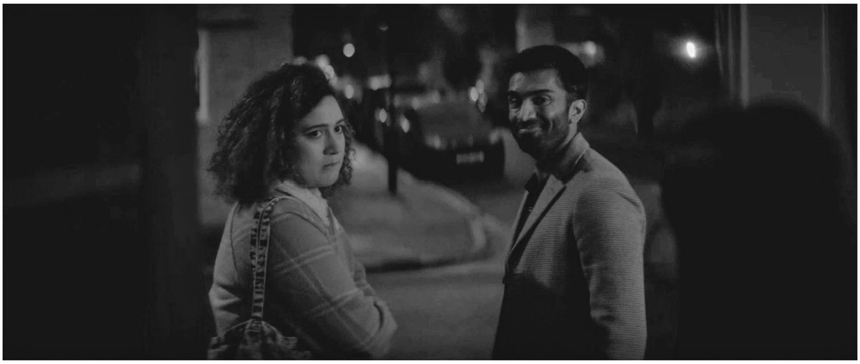


Figure 2.19 A conversation between three characters in *Starstruck*

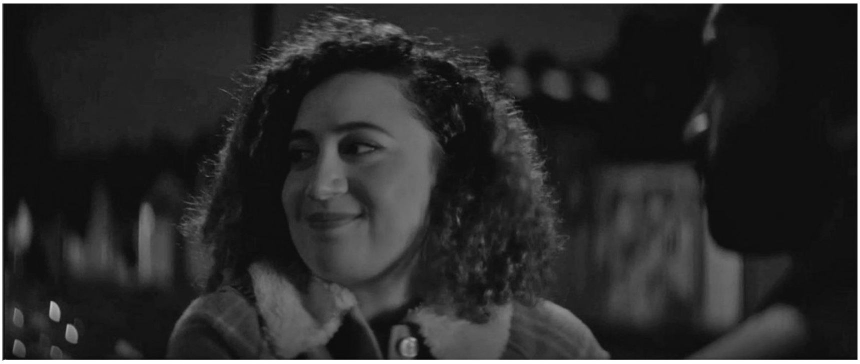


Figure 2.20 A conversation between three characters in *Starstruck*

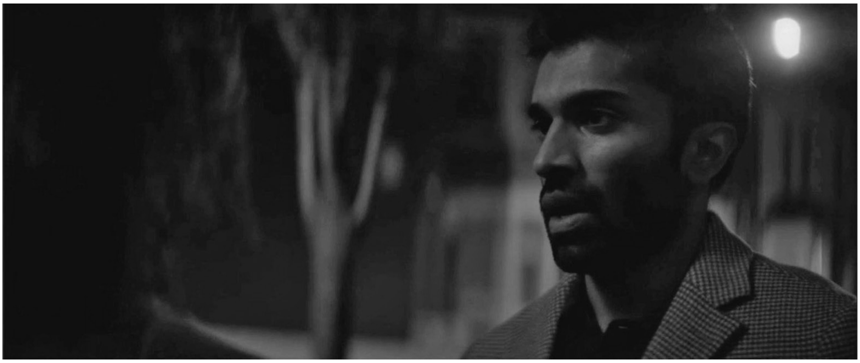


Figure 2.21 A conversation between three characters in *Starstruck*

to shot-reverse-shots between Jessie and Tom. As this is a single-camera comedy the camera can shoot from both sides of the door without seeing the other camera.

In a multi-camera studio if a camera shot from the other side of the axis of action it would capture the other cameras and crew. The workroom scenes of competitive reality show *Ru Paul's Drag Race* are shot in a three-walled studio, with the cameras in the position of the fourth wall. When the contestants gather round the table to discuss the upcoming challenge, they are arranged around three sides of the table, maintaining the axis of action. Figures 2.22 to 2.25 follow a typical sequence of shots using continuity editing. An establishing shot situates the contestants in the space in a long shot, then a series of medium close-ups follow the conversation. Shot-reverse shots are used to construct the spacial dynamics of the conversation and establish which contestants are the focus of the sequence, with reaction shots used for comic or dramatic punctuation. The 180-degree rule is maintained throughout. Like many reality TV shows, *Ru Paul's Drag Race* uses 'confessional' interviews shot after the event, which are edited into the action as commentary or comic asides, which connect two different spaces and times.

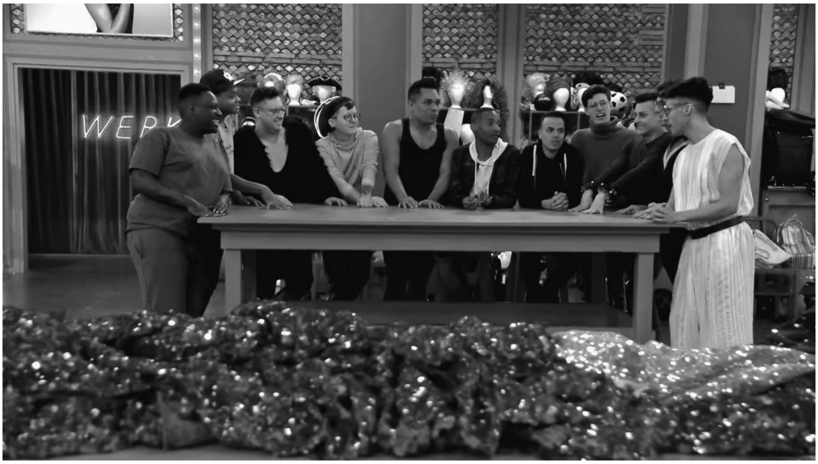


Figure 2.22 Editing maintains the 180-degree rule in *Ru Paul's Drag Race*

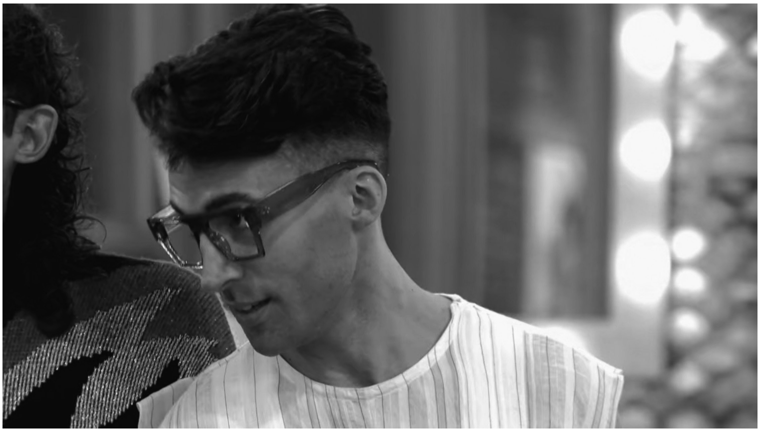


Figure 2.23 Editing maintains the 180-degree rule in *Ru Paul's Drag Race*

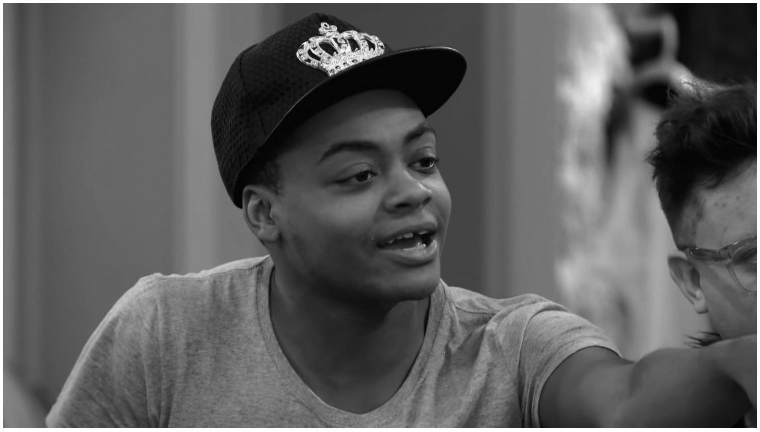


Figure 2.24 Editing maintains the 180-degree rule in *Ru Paul's Drag Race*

Figure 2.25 Editing maintains the 180-degree rule in *Ru Paul's Drag Race*

In a documentary associative editing can construct the director's argument even when there is no narration. Associative editing builds connections between a range of evidence in different forms, including interviews, photographs, archive material and observational footage. The connections and associations made by the editing builds the fragments of evidence into a coherent narrative, with the goal of persuading the viewer to agree with its argument. Editing can create fluid connections between different time periods through **flashbacks**. Mystery drama *Sharp Objects* uses a complex editing system to evoke its frequently intoxicated protagonist's interiority as she returns to her family home. The editing process constantly cuts fragments of flashbacks to Camille's teenage life and confusing abstract images into scenes, triggered by spaces and sounds. Figures 2.26 to 2.29 are very brief shots drawn from a sequence where Camille remembers her mother making her take medicine when she was ill in bed. These flashes of memory place us within Camille's confused perspective as she struggles to cope with the resurfacing trauma the memories represent and untangle her family's dysfunction.

flashback a television sequence marked as representing events that happened in a time previous to the programme's present.

Cross-cutting between different spaces can create suspense or anticipation. Political thriller *Scandal* features a scene where President Fitzgerald has chosen his mistress Olivia, the programme's protagonist, over his wife Mellie. The scene cross-cuts between Fitz and Olivia in her living room and Mellie at home alone, both looking at clocks that tick down to a 9pm deadline that Fitz chooses to break by staying with Olivia. The cross-cutting builds anticipation and emotion, which is intensified by intense shot-reverse-shots between Fitz and Olivia, with the tension finally released when they passionately kiss as the deadline passes.

Editing combines with camerawork to construct rhythm and pace, guiding the emotional engagement of viewers. A frenetic pace can be constructed through a montage of short shots that move us quickly through time and space or create a dynamic fight scene (whilst helping to camouflage stunt performers).

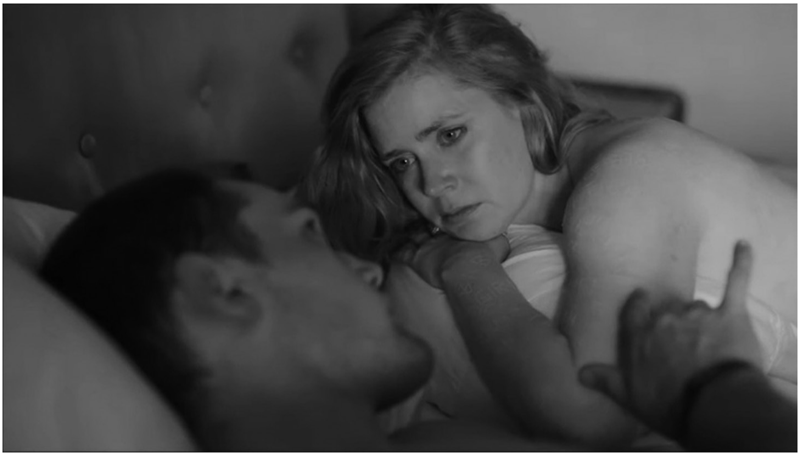


Figure 2.26 *Sharp Objects* illustrates memory through fragmented flashbacks

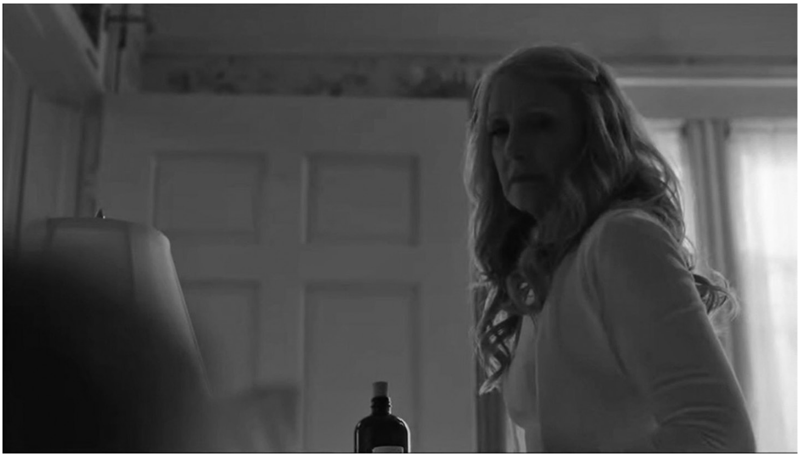


Figure 2.27 *Sharp Objects* illustrates memory through fragmented flashbacks

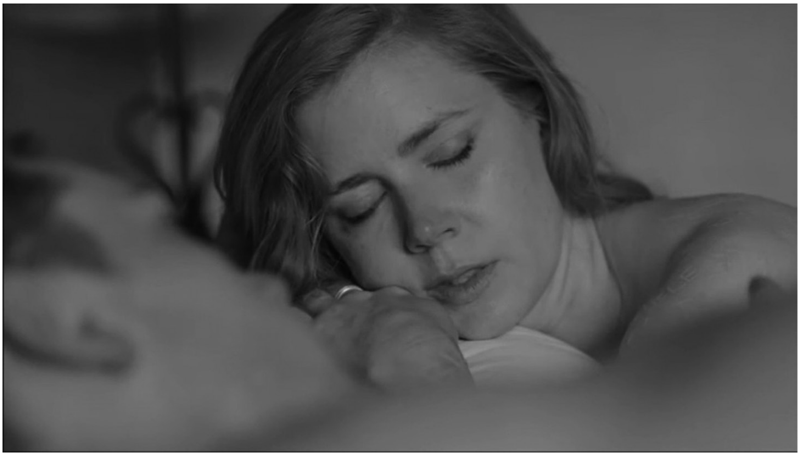


Figure 2.28 *Sharp Objects* illustrates memory through fragmented flashbacks

Figure 2.29 *Sharp Objects* illustrates memory through fragmented flashbacks

Russian Doll uses a series of fast montage sequences to show Nadia repeatedly die by falling down a set of stairs at a party, only to be time looped back to her start point in the bathroom each time. The sequences comic beats are emphasised through the rhythmic repetition of the montages and her increasing fury. The sequence's final punchline is a longer take of Nadia slowly descending the stairs grasping the bannister and demanding partygoers get out of her way, before taking a slightly different tumble to another death. Where this example speeds up time, a **long take** can slow action right down, making the viewer pay attention to a performance or composition. However, a complexly articulated long take can also produce dynamic spectacle. Complexly choreographed long takes became a feature of prestige TV in the late 2010s and 2020s, including *Scandal*, *Game of Thrones* and *True Detective*. Here long takes support storytelling but also serve as spectacle, drawing attention to a programme's technical achievements enabled by its high budget. Chapter 8 discusses the use of the Steadicam and long takes. Where continuity editing seeks to make editing invisible, a long take produces production spectacle by foregrounding editing's absence.

long take an imprecise term denoting a longer than usual uninterrupted camera shot.

Case study: *Bon Appétit's Gourmet Makes*

This piece of close textual analysis brings together many of the different elements of television **aesthetics** that this chapter has discussed. It illustrates how you can look in detail at a piece of television, thinking about how meaning is created through creative choices. It looks at the *Gourmet Makes* cooking show produced for the *Bon Appétit* YouTube channel, focusing on the first four minutes of the 2018 episode 'Pastry Chef Attempts to Make Gourmet Snickers'. Hosted by food writer and recipe developer Claire Saffitz, *Gourmet Makes* is structured as a mystery challenge format. Claire attempts to produce a handmade 'gourmet'

aesthetic a specific artistic form. Aesthetics means the study of art and beauty.

version of a mass-produced American junk food. She replicates and improves upon the original, using her skills and food knowledge as a chef trained in French culinary school. As this is a fast-moving programme we won't provide a shot-by-shot analysis, but will pick out key aesthetic elements.

Like all the series on the channel, *Gourmet Makes* is filmed on location in the test kitchen of the *Bon Appétit* food magazine, at the One World Trade Center in New York. We will use 'Test Kitchen' to refer to both the location and cast of *Bon Appétit*'s channel, as the process of filming transforms this workspace into televisual space. The location is a working kitchen and filming takes place at one end of it, allowing the background of the shot to often be filled with layers of people cooking at a series of workstations and row of ovens (Figure 2.30). Like other programmes on the channel, this episode features guest appearances from other Bon Appétit employees, many of whom are programme hosts and make up the larger 'cast' of the Test Kitchen. The depth of frame provides visual interest, with the mise-en-scène signalling this as a dynamic working environment, bringing a sense of liveness and spontaneity to a recorded series. The space confers 'authenticity' upon the Test Kitchen hosts, positioning them as skilled professional co-workers within a team environment, rather than presenters in a studio kitchen. The large windows to frame left provide a large amount of diegetic fill light, supplemented by high-key lighting from behind the camera. This allows Claire to move around the space freely and stay evenly lit. The windows also signal the progression of time as *Gourmet Makes* episodes are filmed across three to four days. This highlights the labour-intensive nature of Claire's challenge, and her working process of repeated testing and failure.

The episode begins with a teaser, part of a conversation between Claire and Brad Leon, another *Bon Appétit* host, from later in the episode. It opens with a close-up of a tray of nougat that Claire is trying to spread with a spatula, then alternates between a handheld medium two shot (Figure 2.31) and medium close-ups of Brad and Claire functioning as shot-reverse shots. They talk about the failed nougat and Claire threatens to quit. The scene highlights the pair's rapport and teases Brad's presence in the episode,

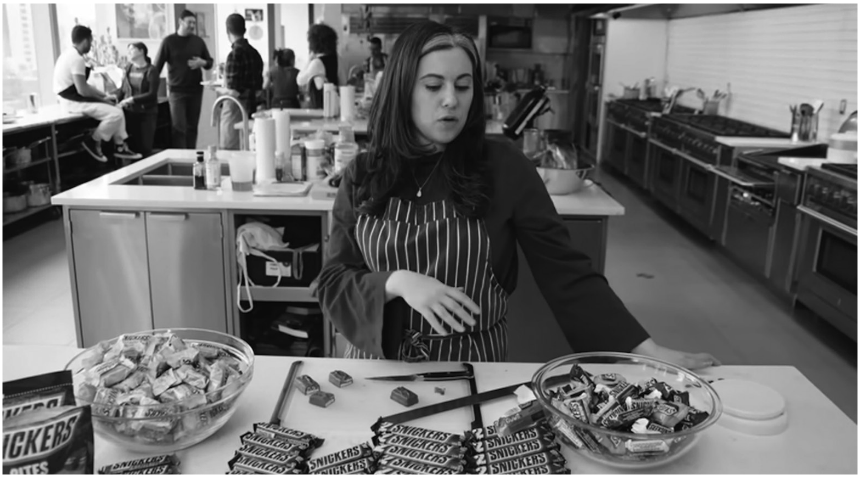


Figure 2.30 The *Bon Appétit* Test Kitchen

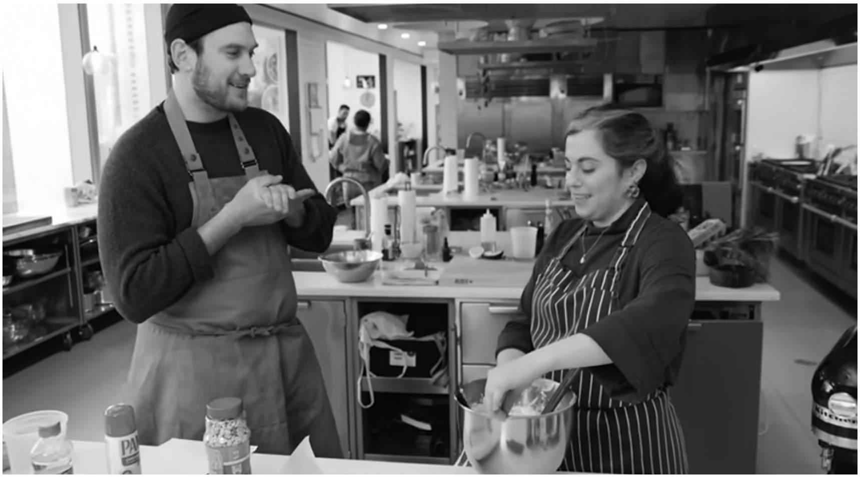


Figure 2.31 Brad and Claire in the episode teaser

whilst also signalling Claire's repeated failure and frustration will be a key narrative point. The medium shot, with Brad and Claire positioned on opposite sides of the frame, allows the test kitchen to be visible in the depth of frame between them, its messiness signalling this space as a working environment. This teaser introduces the visual language of the *Gourmet Makes* series, which combines a focus on food and cooking processes in close-ups and extreme close ups, with medium shots that showcase Claire's performance style and interaction with co-workers. Her physical labour, gestures, and speech – talking to the audience, the crew and her colleagues – communicates her dedication to (yet frustration at) her challenge. The episode's theme is introduced in a brief credit sequence, accompanied by a rhythmic drum and cymbal score. Fun-size Snickers bars are poured onto a white surface in slow motion overlaid with the graphics 'Bon Appétit. Make me a Snickers'. This is followed by a montage of four very short sharp shots in a fast rhythm, edited to the drum beat, that shows three close-ups of different cooking techniques then Claire sighing in frustration and swearing. This introduces a repeated transitional editing pattern employed by the episode, showcasing technique, repetition, and the comedy of Claire's outsized reaction to her failures.

Claire opens the episode, centred in a medium shot addressing the camera and the audience directly. In contrast to the messy ponytail seen in the teaser, her hair is straight and neat, signalling this as a happy, positive Claire because her challenge has not yet begun. As she introduces Snickers as the topic a snap zoom out reframes to a medium long shot, revealing an array of different size Snicker bars set out before her on the worktop. As Claire only needs a few bars to test and deconstruct, this mass of sweets serves as small-scale spectacle of consumption. Each episode shows that Claire has an unlimited amount of Test Kitchen equipment and ingredients at her fingertips to help her pursue her challenge, and this Snickers array begins the subtle display of *Bon Appétit*'s wealth as a media company. It is clear this is a professional production (*Bon Appétit* is part of the Condé Nast media empire), not a video from an amateur home cook. A drum fill accompanies the title card 'Part 1: What is a Snickers', then Claire introduces the Snickers bars, holding up a bar in its wrapper to the camera in close-up then talking through its features.

The episode then moves onto Claire's deconstruction of the bar and deduction of its ingredients and cooking techniques through taste and touch. Here visual techniques position the bar as the focus of an investigation. Claire's curiosity, skill and food knowledge is displayed through her monologues to the camera and conversations with her crew and co-workers. A brief, carefully composed close-up of two bars in a beauty shot racks focus, then a medium close-up from a higher angle shows Claire cutting into the bar on a cutting board. She holds a cross-section up to the camera, the shallow focus blurring her face and body to focus attention on the bar and its component parts (Figure 2.32). This visual detail could be achieved through an extreme close up on the workbench, but this choice – used throughout the series – to have Claire hold the cross-section sees a professional crew emulate a visual convention created by YouTube's amateur vloggers. When filming demonstration vlogs solo, YouTube creators will bring an object close to camera and allow the camera to auto-focus, producing close-ups without an edit that would disrupt the flow of their labour. Here a professional production employs the visual lexicon of its platform.

Claire investigates the bar through taste and touch. As she tastes a range of Snickers bars and talks about them to the camera, jump cuts edit between tightly framed medium-close-ups of her head and shoulders and slightly high angled medium shots. As seen in Figure 2.30, the medium shots frame her between the workspace crowded with bars in the bottom of frame and the Test Kitchen behind her. This loose framing shows workers milling about in the deep background of the shot. This is intercut with close-ups that focus on her tactile engagement with the bar as she deconstructs it, showing her hands cutting into it as she works out its component parts (Figure 2.33). The handheld camera continually reframes to follow her movement and centre her in the frame, with sound bridges smoothing the constant use of jump cuts. These compress time and fragment her delivery. The jump cuts movement between close up and medium shots brings a dynamic energy to the sequence, compounded by Claire's fast, confident delivery of information. She is talking to the viewer, but her eyeline constantly flickers between the camera and up and out of frame to address the crew behind it. Here we see the use of off-screen space as the viewer rarely sees these crew members in episodes, yet their presence is signalled through voice as they talk to and tease Claire. As the episode progresses, they will be her constant companions on her quest

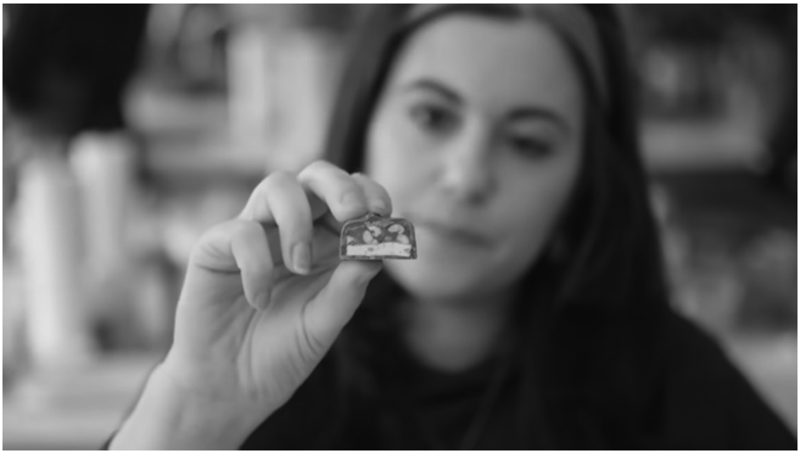


Figure 2.32 Claire holds a Snickers cross section to camera

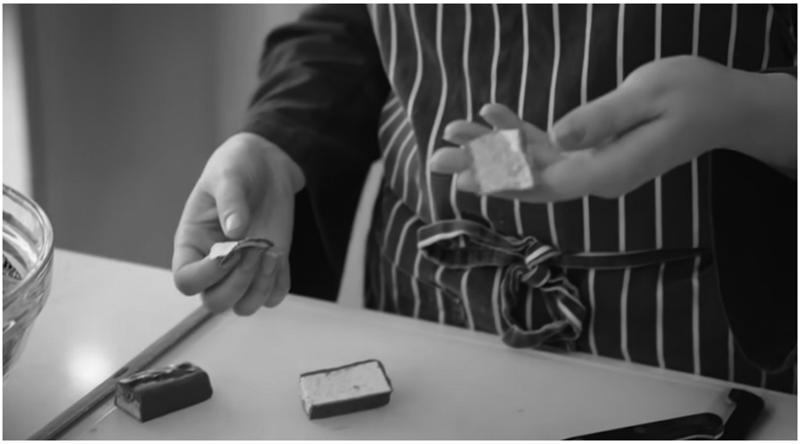


Figure 2.33 Claire deconstructs the Snickers bar

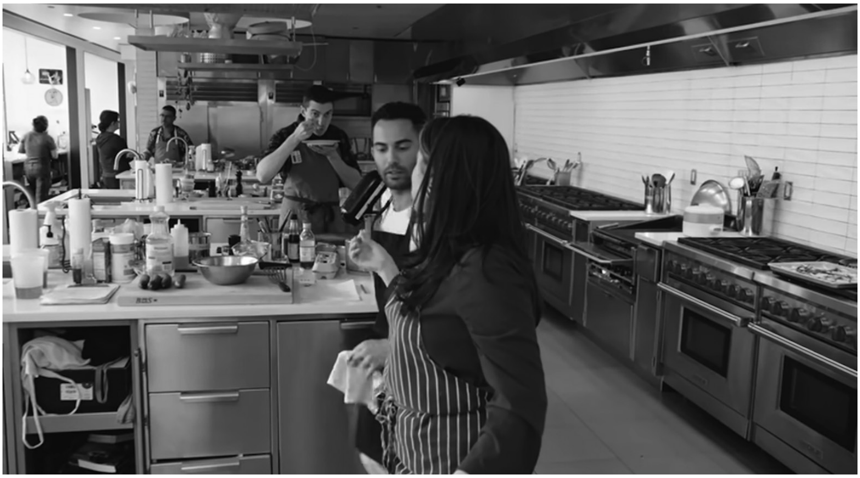


Figure 2.34 Claire asks Andy for help, Rick Martinez can be seen in the depth of the frame

and the programme's self-reflexivity is signalled by this constant recognition of the filming processes.

Claire then turns to a colleague behind her for help, who is working at a workstation in quick sharp movements with his back to camera. The casual blocking of this shot gives it a sense of spontaneity (Figure 2.34). She doesn't introduce Andy Baraghani to the camera, instead text on screen identifies him, along with his job title at *Bon Appetit* magazine. He thoughtfully chews the nougat in a close-up that focuses attention on this action and its connotations of a skilled professional palate, then a medium two-shot positions him alongside Claire at her bench as he provides suggestions for how to make her 'gourmet' version better. This brings a feeling of spontaneity to Claire's actions, suggesting she has interrupted a colleague from his work, instead of formally bringing on a guest. She then calls to Rick Martinez who is working in the deep background of the shot at the back of the kitchen and he is brought up to taste and provide feedback, followed by other colleagues in a pacey montage.

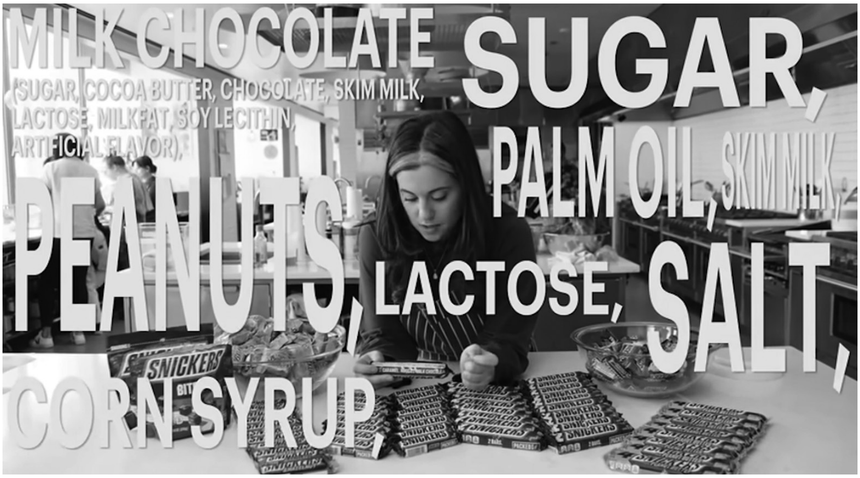


Figure 2.35 The reading of the ingredients

This use of space and performance style serves to introduce the supporting ensemble of characters who will move in and out of the episode, providing assistance and feedback as Claire continues in her quest. The sequence signals the Test Kitchen as a collegial professional world, presenting Claire's programme as just part of its busy daily activities, rather than a professional television shoot. Again the Test Kitchen is positioned as an 'authentic' space of food creativity, rather than a studio set.

After outlining her plans to camera in medium shot, a jump cut to a loose medium long shot sees Claire lean against the workstation holding a bar. She performatively introduces the next section with 'And now it's time for my favourite part, reading the ingredients', signalling this as a repeated device in the series. As she rapidly reads from the packaging, her voice is slightly double layered on the soundtrack through rapid tiny jump cuts. The image is overlaid with the name of each ingredient she lists with the space around her in the frame steadily filled up with different sized words until they are squeezing into the space (Figure 2.35). This shot is part of Claire's process as it gives her more clues to the construction and techniques used. But it also identifies the artificial ingredients and food chemicals in the mass-produced bar, signalling Claire's handmade version will be a purer, more elite form of cooking. A handheld tracking shot then follows Claire as she walks down to a computer at the back of the kitchen to research further information on Snickers' manufacturing process. A medium shot positions her against the window revealing a skyline of skyscrapers, signalling the elevated position and privileged location of the kitchen, in the heart of downtown Manhattan. An edit positions Claire back at her workstation and the scene jump-cuts between medium and medium close-up, compressing the pace as Claire explains the chocolate, nougat and peanut components she will create, outlining the process ahead and identifying the key taste and textures she is aiming for.

This opening sequence – four minutes of a 20-minute episode – establishes the world of the Test Kitchen, together with Claire's presenter persona and her cookery skill. The use of different frame sizes and the fast paced edit with liberal use of jump-cuts brings pace to her delivery, compressing the time of the discovery phase of her challenge. This reflexive style makes the filming process highly visible by drawing attention to the camera and editing.

The spacial dynamics and reflexive filming style brings a feeling of transparency emphasised by Claire's casual yet professional presenting style. By positioning the filming space at one end of the kitchen the programme uses the depth of the frame to provide visual interest and presents the kitchen as professional working environment. This connotes authenticity, despite the programme's position as branded entertainment content produced by a prestigious media company. The teaser at the opening informs the viewer that Claire won't be as in control as she seems in this opening sequence, bringing pleasure in the anticipation of her inevitable failures yet her determination to succeed.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Methods of close analysis can show how meanings are constructed in television texts
- This approach to close analysis relies on analysing the audio-visual 'language' of television
- This language is made up of the mise-en-scène, image, sound and editing
- The meanings that can be made from television depend on relationships between viewers and text
- Television programmes use conventions and codes to structure their meanings, and television viewers become expert in recognising conventions and decoding meanings

Bibliography

Adamou, C. and Knox, S. (2011) 'Transforming Television Drama through Dubbing and Subtitling: Sex and the Cities', *Critical Studies in Television*, 6(1), pp. 1–21.

Bignell, J. (2003) *Media Semiotics: An Introduction*, second edition. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bordwell, D. and Thompson, K. (2019) *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.

Butler, J. (2018) *Television: Visual Storytelling and Screen Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Gibbs, J. (2002) *Mise-en-scene*: *Film Style and Interpretation*. London: Wallflower.

Harding, X. (2017) 'Keeping 'Insecure' lit: HBO cinematographer Ava Berkofsky on properly lighting black faces', *mic*, 6 September 20. Available at: www.mic.com/articles/184244/keeping-insecure-lit-hbo-cinematographer-berkofsky-on-properly-lighting-black-faces#.q6fKFGEFQ

Johnson, C. (2012) *Branding Television*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lobato, R. (2019) *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution*. New York: New York University Press.

Lury, K. (2005) *Interpreting Television*. London: Hodder Arnold.

Television Narrative

3

- Introduction 70
- Identification 71
- Story/plot 73
- Structure 75
- Narrative forms – serial 75
- Narrative forms – series 76
- Narrative forms – hybrid 77
- Transmedia storytelling 78
- Case study: *Insecure* 79
- Summary of key points 84
- Bibliography 85

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-4

Television Narrative

Introduction

narrative an ordered sequence of images and sound that tells a fictional or factual story.

This chapter explores the structure of television **narrative**, providing tools for its analysis. When we analyse television narrative, we are thinking about how television organises its storytelling. As Chapter 2 showed, aesthetic elements play a role in storytelling. In this chapter we look at how narrative structures guide viewers and help them understand and follow a programme. We look at how television builds connections with characters, the main formal structures of television programmes and how seasons and individual episodes are organised. John Fiske explains that narrative is a 'grand signifying pattern' that takes character and setting and makes sense of them as a chain of events, '[n]arrative structure demonstrates that people and places are not anarchic and random, but *sensible*' (1987: 129).

Narrative is often thought of as something employed in fiction, but narrative structure is essential for non-fiction forms like news, documentary and sports. Consider the breadth of sports and large number of athletes competing in a single day at an Olympic Games. The BBC will set aside hours of each day's schedule for live and 'as live' coverage of the Games, across one or more of its channels, along with the iPlayer. But this is still not enough space to cover everything that is happening. The broadcaster chooses which sports to follow on BBC1 and BBC2 and structures those sports into a series of narratives. These unfold as sections within a live broadcast flow, with the movement between events and identification of key narrative threads shaped by presenters in the studio. The quest for the gold medal is the narrative, the home athletes and the international stars are its characters, their lifelong quest to achieve their dream the backstory filled in by presenters, pundits and commentators. Come the evening, highlights programmes feature the key moments and climactic action of lengthy sporting events that played out across the day, structured into short concise story packages by programme-makers.

serial a television form where a developing narrative unfolds across a sequence of separate episodes.

Where films exist as self-contained narratives unfolding over two hours, **seriality** is a defining element of television. Structured around a repeated return to recurring characters, locations and situations, television enables the telling of a story across multiple self-contained, interconnected episodes. Many programmes introduce and conclude a story within a single episode. However, the narrative space offered by seriality – whether within a single season of six to ten hours or across multiple seasons – allows for the construction of complex story worlds and character psychologies, building an intimate connection with regular viewers. In long-running programmes like soap operas, viewers can watch a character grow up, marry and have children of their own, as they do the same.

Identification

Television viewers can make sense of television only by taking up a position in relation to it, constituting themselves as an audience. What the audience is watching must seem to be 'for them', and a relationship can then be constructed with it (whether this relationship to television is marked by pleasure, boredom, anger or frustration). So narrative depends on a shifting pattern of **identification** between the viewer and the programme. Viewers can identify with both fictional and non-fictional performers but also distance themselves from a performer (in order to find him or her funny, for instance, in a sitcom). Viewers can also identify with the studio audience denoted by laughter on the soundtrack (in sitcoms and chat shows for example), taking up a shared position in relation to what the studio audience and home audience have seen. Narrative requires the shifting of the viewer's position into and out of the television programme, and a rhythm of identification and disavowal of identification. But the positioning and repositioning of the viewer as an audience member might succeed or fail for individual viewers in different programmes or parts of the same programme. We explore the audience's position further in Chapter 9. Narrative lays out positions for its viewers, offering signs and codes that invite the viewers to make sense of and enjoy what they see and hear, but whether or not viewers actually occupy the position of being-an-audience, and how they inhabit this position, depends on the many variables which compose each viewer's social and psychological identity.

identification a term deriving from psychoanalytic theories of cinema, which describes the viewer's conscious or unconscious wish to take the place of someone or something in a television text.

The psychoanalytic account of pleasure in watching television argues that there are several identifications which viewers make from moment to moment. The first of these is an identification with the television medium, as something which delivers images of other people, places and times. These images offer to satisfy viewers' desire to experience life differently, as another person or in another place. There are also identifications with all the figures who are presented on the screen, the performers who stand in for the viewer and play out the roles which the viewer might desire to play for himself or herself. There are identifications throughout television narratives with the fictional and non-fictional worlds presented in them, just as in a daydream or fantasy we might imagine worlds where we play all the parts in an imaginary story. The movement of television narrative in this way is analogous to daydream fantasies that allow for identifications with different people and things (imagining being a person, a car, a bird, etc.), including identifications with different **gender** identities. All the possible roles in the narrative are available to the viewing **subject**: they can imagine being either the subject or object of a look, and can even occupy a position outside the scene, looking on from a spectator's point of view. The importance of an analogy with fantasy is that the disjuncture of looks and positions in its scenarios appears parallel to the way that television form cuts and juxtaposes different shots and different camera looks. Television narrative holds back complete knowledge and total vision to the viewer, thereby maintaining the desire to keep on looking. These narratives align us with different characters and their experiences, and limit our access to others, this constructs identifications and propels the plot.

gender the social and cultural division of people into masculine, feminine or non-binary individuals. This is different from sex, which refers to the biological difference between male and female bodies.

subject in psychoanalysis, the term for the individual self whose identity has both conscious and unconscious components.

Narratives are built around the relationships between events and characters. Events move a story forward and they can ebb and flow in their intensity.

Narrative theorist Roland Barthes (1977: 93) presented a hierarchy of events, differentiating between those pivotal for narrative progression and those of lesser importance. Characters have agency, they make decisions and act on them, and viewers come to know them through how they respond to events. The long-running nature of many television programmes allows viewers to get to know characters well, so pleasure and fear can come from our anticipation of how they will react to an event. The ability of television narratives to unfold across multiple seasons means characters can shift and change. A fan-favourite character can be promoted from the ensemble to a main cast member. A hero can become a morally ambiguous anti-hero – the trajectory of Walter White in *Breaking Bad* or June in *A Handmaid's Tale*. An antagonist can become a protagonist, for example soap operas can introduce a character as a villain but over time can introduce storylines and other characters that humanise them, transitioning them into a main cast member.

Film frequently centres upon a single protagonist, the hero or anti-hero of a story. The ongoing nature of television's storytelling makes it difficult to maintain the narrative drive of a single goal or personal conflict. A single protagonist is usually only seen in a single drama (which will have a runtime of under two hours) or individual episodes of an anthology (*Black Mirror*, *High Maintenance*), both of which tell a complete story in an episode. Typically television uses an ensemble, although this can be orientated around and support a central protagonist. Science-fiction Western *The Mandalorian* is centred on the missions and overarching quest of bounty hunter Din Djarin, who interacts with recurring supporting characters along the way. Dramedy *Fleabag* uses direct address to give the viewer intimate access to its unnamed protagonist, with her family and romantic partners moving in and out of her orbit (Figure 3.1). Trisha Dunleavy notes that in the high-end serial a lead character's presence drives and is essential to resolving the overarching story, whereas peripheral characters progress the story or drive smaller story arcs (2018: 102–3).

A programme may be invested in the psychological state and inner life of its protagonist, but viewers might struggle to identify with them or believe in their actions, particularly if they are constructed as anti-heroes. An ensemble cast offers space for multiple identifications and audience entry positions. This makes them particularly important for soap operas and the long seasons of drama and

Figure 3.1 *Fleabag* gives the audience intimate access to its unnamed protagonist

sitcoms common to US network television, as characters can take on the protagonist role at different points in time. Large ensembles allow characters to play lead or supporting roles in an episode's multiple story arcs. For example, each episode of medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* combines up to three medical cases that feature different combinations of its ensemble, whilst interpersonal storylines foreground and develop individual characters' personal arcs.

Story/plot

Analysing narrative requires the distinction between story, plot and **discourse**. Story is the set of events that are represented, whether they are seen on screen or not. The plot is how the story is told, and the information presented on screen. We will not see the incident that brings a patient to *Grey's Anatomy*'s emergency room, but this event is part of the character's story. The patient becomes part of the episode's plot once they interact with the surgical staff, filling in their backstory as they are assessed. Narrative relies on the viewer taking narrative exposition and filling in the gaps in their mind to complete the story world (or diegesis). Reality dating show *Love Island* airs nightly episodes that condense the story of the contestants' entire day in the house into a few plots. These feature the events – romantic and conflict-driven – that producers deem important to progress the programme's narrative of romantic coupling and uncoupling. Exposition is provided by the narration along with the contestants' conversation and gossip. A programme's first episode is all exposition as it is setting up the story and characters for the audience. Discourse is the entire narrating process that puts story events in an order, shaping and directing them, including the arrangement of camera shots, sound and music that deliver the story. Narrative time can be shifted through flashbacks, scenes presented out of chronological order, a sports event's instant replay. The plot doesn't necessarily follow the events of the story, as plot structure often withholds story information from the audience, to be revealed for maximum emotional benefit.

discourse a particular use of language for a certain purpose in a certain context (such as academic discourse or poetic discourse), and similarly in television, a particular usage of television's audio-visual 'language' (news programme discourse or nature documentary discourse, for instance).

A story is driven by a 'problematic', a question, situation or dilemma that allows for conflict and sustains and fuels the narrative (Ellis 1982: 154). The narrative problematic of *The Mandalorian* is 'can Din Djarin keep Baby Yoda safe?', in *Game of Thrones* it is 'who will control the Iron Throne?'. Each season of police drama *Line of Duty* is a serialised narrative following a single internal affairs case. Here the season's narrative problematic is 'can we trust this person, are they telling the truth?'. Each season interconnects to an overarching narrative problematic, 'who is the mysterious H controlling the conspiracy?' Sitcoms tend to be built on a looser situation, the romantic will-they-won't-they, or the interpersonal conflict of the workplace sitcom. For example, *Parks and Recreation* uses different narrative problematics across its run: can the Parks Department officemates be friends? Will Ben and Leslie get together? Will Leslie succeed as a city councillor?

A programme's plots then progress – within an episode and across a season – through a process of cause and effect. An episode will typically interweave multiple plots of varying importance, which can be self-contained or ongoing. The most important plot is the A plot, the central conflict involving one or more main characters to which a large number of scenes are devoted. This is supported by the B and C plots, which are given a smaller amount of scenes. These can contrast with A plots, providing comic relief or romance, or follow another set of characters within an ensemble. B and C plots are often used to keep tabs on ongoing narrative arcs that continue across many episodes. A scene can interweave multiple plots at once. *Grey's Anatomy* uses thematic counterpoint where the plot of a patient's case can echo the plot of a doctor's interpersonal dilemma. The balance of plots is often shaped by genre, with a police procedural weighted heavily towards an A plot, with small amounts of B and C, whereas a sitcom or British evening soap opera will generally have three or more equal plots per episode. When a British soap opera devotes an episode to a single plot this serves as a narrative event that focuses the audience's attention.

Narrative arcs inform television's longer-term, serialised storytelling as they follow plots that extend beyond a single episode and can be foregrounded or minimised in any given episode. They can be plot- or character-focused, short-term or long-term. They allow programmes to blend self-contained and ongoing stories and are particularly important to serialised narratives, but are present in the more episodic forms of sitcoms and procedurals. The will-they-won't-they romance is a key example of a narrative arc, maintained through C plots of individual episodes that develop the larger arc, shifting to A or B status at a climactic moment. In season one of *Sex Education* the will-they-won't-they romance between Otis and Maeve remains B or C plot status across most of the season (Figure 3.2). However, a romantic comedy like *Starstruck* sees the will-they-won't-they romance maintain A plot status across a season. Michael Newman highlights how narrative arcs contribute to character development, stating '[a]rc is to character as plot is to story. Put slightly differently, arc is plot stated in terms of character' (2006: 23). Narrative arcs help organise storytelling across soap opera's ongoing narratives, and the lengthy seasons of US network television. As viewers' brains cannot hold 12 to 24 episodes (the average size of a network season) worth of plots, a programme needs several overlapping shorter arcs to unfold and resolve across a season.

Figure 3.2 *Sex Education* keeps its will-they-won't-they romance maintained in C plots

Structure

The structure of an episode is shaped by narrative beats, the key events and character actions that drive its plots. Television writers build an episode by segmenting its plots into beats, unfolding these piece by piece to intensify audience engagement, 'each beat tells us something new, something we want – need – to know, and amplifies our desire to know more' (Newman 2006: 18). (The writing process is discussed further in Chapter 8). It is useful to think about television as structured through segmentation. John Ellis set out a segment as 'a unit of sequential, tightly organised images and sounds which cohere to produce a specific meaning' (1982: 148–9). A programme can be built out as a series of segments:

- Beat
- Scene
- Acts
- Episode
- Season

Segmentation is amenable to the ad breaks of commercial television and encourages a flexible style of storytelling that allows cross-cutting between plots. This shows how television's industrial nature impacted the development of its storytelling style, with acts building to a mini climax at each ad break to encourage audiences to stay watching. In the 1990s Robin Nelson identified an intensification of segmentation in drama series. This segmentation enabled a complex interweaving between an increased number of plots, a structure he termed 'flexi-narrative' (1997: 30–49). This was a response to commercial pressures as well as a bid to reach new audiences demanding a more fast-paced, sophisticated story structure.

Like film, television episodes use the classical narrative structure of three acts, moving through narrative equilibrium, disruption, then restoration of equilibrium. UK commercial television has three advert breaks and four acts, whereas US network television devotes a larger amount of each hour to advertising, breaking an hour-long episode into a teaser followed by five or six acts. Classical narrative structure shapes televisual storytelling even when a programme airs on a channel or platform without adverts (e.g. BBC1, HBO or Amazon Prime Video) as this drives the audience's desire for resolution. Television's main narrative forms have different relationships to resolution; a serial will delay story resolution beyond an episode whereas in a **series** a story will come to a conclusion within an episode.

series a television form where each programme in the series has a different story or topic, though settings, main characters or performers remain the same.

soap opera a continuing drama serial involving a large number of characters in a specific location, focusing on relationships, emotions and reversals of fortune.

prestige TV critical and industry term to describe high-budget flagship drama and comedy. Term aims to remove hierarchical/judgemental connotations of the term 'quality television'.

Narrative forms – serial

The serial form encompasses both the televisual everyday in the **soap opera** and the event in **prestige TV**'s high-end serial drama. Both are slow-release narrative forms that tell an overarching story across multiple episodes that often end in cliff-hangers. A serial requires audience commitment, they are unwelcoming to a new viewer joining mid-season as they rely on the audience's knowledge of previous events to interpret the action. Serials can be open or closed in form. The

telenovela a fictional continuing melodrama on television that lasts for a specific number of episodes. Telenovelas are particularly associated with South American television.

soap opera and the Latin American **telenovela** are open narrative forms, with stories continuing across many episodes. Resolution is not deferred indefinitely in these ongoing serials, with telenovelas telling a single story that concludes after around 120 episodes. A soap opera such as *EastEnders* continues a storyline across weeks and months and even years of episodes, but will ultimately conclude it. As each episode features up to three storylines, as one story concludes others continue and new ones can begin. (Soap opera and telenovela are discussed further in Chapter 6.)

The closed form of the serial tells its story in a single season, with the narrative enigma resolved at the conclusion. Serials are more common in British television, whose broadcast culture has historically enabled short runs from three to ten episodes. British serial dramas range across genres and target popular and prestige audiences, including crime dramas (*Prime Suspect*), thrillers (*Bodyguard*), literary adaptation (*Wolf Hall*) and 'authored' prestige drama (*I May Destroy You*). South Korean dramas (colloquially referred to as K-dramas) employ a serial format across longer runs of up to 24 episodes, with two episodes airing each week. In US television the mini-series format has traditionally been promoted as a televisual event, such as slavery epic *Roots* and romance *The Thorn Birds*. Popular in the 1970s and 1980s these short serials were often scheduled to air nightly across one week. Their shorter episode runs enabled higher budgets and production values than weekly network dramas.

The mini-series' popularity faded in the late 1980s, but it returned as the 'limited series' in the 2010s, a prestige form of US serial produced by subscription cable channels and streaming services (British serials are framed as 'limited series' when imported to the US). Like the mini-series the shorter run of these high-end serials – six to ten episodes – enables high budgets and production values. Limited series are frequently 'authored' serials, gaining critical praise for their creative ambition and sophisticated storytelling. The prestige status and shorter commitment to a project (compared to the three to seven years required for a multi-season series) attracts high-profile actors and creatives often better known for their work in cinema such as actors Cate Blanchett with *Mrs. America* and Amy Adams with *Sharp Objects*, or director Barry Jenkins with *The Underground Railroad*.

Narrative forms – series

Where the serial is ongoing, the series is a self-contained episodic form. It presents a consistent story world and set of characters but each episode's plots are introduced and resolved at the end of the episode. The sitcom's comic mishap is resolved, a contestant wins the game show, the criminal case is resolved, the medical problem is diagnosed and treated. Each new episode returns to a steady state, so series are marked by stasis. This is particularly so in animated family sitcoms like *The Simpsons* and *Bob's Burgers* as the children never age. Series formats never resolve their underlying narrative problematic until they reach a planned end of the programme's run, as in the *Friends* series finale when the characters leave the programme's central apartments with plans to move out of New York City. The series form is built around repetition and novelty. Each episode repeats the characters, setting, situation and narrative formula, with guest characters and new events catalysing each episode's narrative. In each episode of *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* there are new crimes for the detectives to solve. In *Friday Night Dinner* something disrupts the Goodman family's weekly Friday dinner. This makes the series form accessible to new and occasional viewers, as they do not need to understand what has happened in earlier episodes to follow the plot. This makes it particularly valuable as repeats in US television's **syndication** market**.** These features have made the series a dominant form in US network television, particularly the sitcom and the medical or crime procedural narrative. Since the 1990s the series form has increasingly drawn on serial elements, with multi-episode character arcs incorporated to reward long-term viewers, such as Detective Olivia Benson's family life in *Law & Order: SVU* and Mark's complicated romantic relationship with Sophie in *Peep Show*.

syndication the sale of programmes to US cable television and to regional television broadcasters to transmit within their territory.

Narrative forms – hybrid

Although we have set out the serial and series as separate forms, these divisions are frequently blurred. Since the 1990s a combination of the forms has become a dominant style of televisual storytelling, particularly on US networks and cable television. This has been termed the prime-time serial (Newman 2006) or episodic serial (Mittell 2010: 230) and is a response to increasing competition in a multi-channel environment. Combining plots introduced in a single episode with multi-episode narrative arcs the form can both satisfy the casual viewer and reward the regular viewer. Ensemble storytelling helps programmes to carry a multiplicity of story arcs at any one time and the form is invested in character development across episodes and seasons. It rewards regular viewers with a depth of understanding gained through a long-term investment in characters. Here we can see the serial influence of soap opera's interweaving of multiple plots and long-term interpersonal storytelling combined with the episodic series form of single-episode resolution. Medical dramas *Grey's Anatomy* and *Call the Midwife* combine case-of-the-week plots with longer-running arcs related to the surgeons' and midwives' personal and professional lives. Family dramas *Last Tango in Halifax* and *This is Us* shape the longer-term arcs of their family dynamics through smaller episodic stories. Competitive reality shows *The Great British Bake Off* and *Ru Paul's Drag Race* have challenges each episode that remove losing contestants, as part of a season-long arc of competing for the crown.

Where US network dramas need to remain open to more causal viewers, US prestige cable channels HBO, Showtime, AMC and FX asserted their difference by offering a heightened level of long-form serialised storytelling and density of plots. Trisha Dunleavy calls this form of prestige drama 'complex serial drama' (2018), designed for longevity but distinct from the continuing serial form of soap opera and the high-end 'limited serials' that conclude their narratives after a short run of episodes. Cable channels use prestige, strongly serialised dramas such as *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, *The Americans*, *Game of Thrones* and *Succession* to pursue 'high-value' audiences, that Chapter 12 discusses further. Complex serial drama's use of 'narrative complexity' (Mittell 2015) assumes a more dedicated, attentive viewer. This narrative style benefited from the boom in DVD

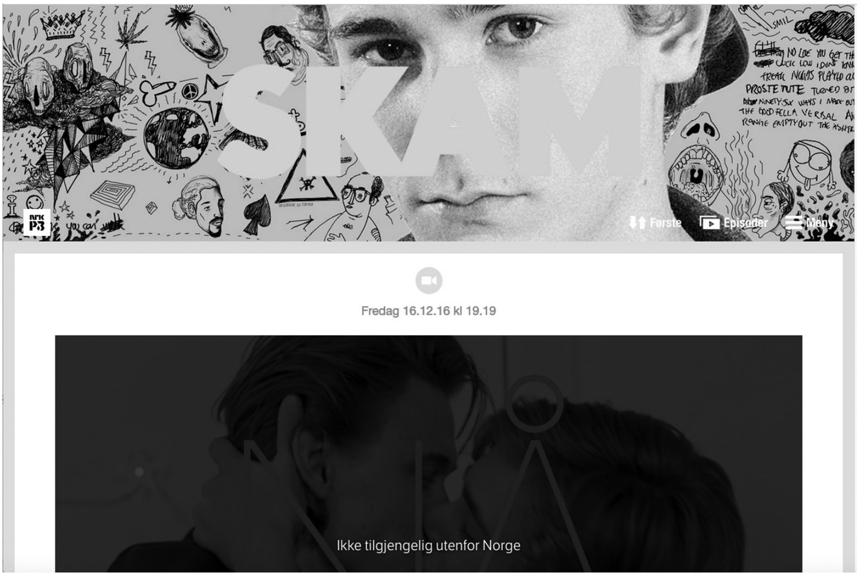
binge-watching the viewing of multiple episodes of a programme sequentially, popularised by DVD box sets and streaming platforms.

box sets in the 2000s, which enabled '**binge-watching**', where sequential viewing and devoted attention help viewers follow dense plots and complex characterisation (Kompare 2006, Brunsdon 2010). Streaming platforms made on-demand viewing of complete seasons easily accessible, expanding programme-makers' use of serialisation beyond complex serial dramas, as they could be assured viewers would watch each episode of a season in order. Serialisation and autoplay practices also help hook viewers into a passive flow of sequential viewing, watching 'just one more episode'.

Transmedia storytelling

Dedicated and attentive viewers are also courted through transmedia storytelling, where a programme's story world is expanded through online content. This builds a 'coherent narrative world' across multiple platforms (Evans 2011: 173), which is designed to encourage fan participation. Supernatural mystery *Lost* chronicled the experiences of a group of castaways on a mysterious island and its storytelling is shaped by a complex tangle of narrative enigmas. The programme drew fans into online games and hidden websites that offered further information and backstories to the island's mysteries. Transmedia storytelling frequently serves as viral marketing. Ahead of the second season of *Westworld* websites connected to the fictional shadowy corporation at the centre of the sci-fi drama introduced puzzles and clues for avid fans to track and solve. These expanded the story world, teasing content and encouraging speculation.

Transmedia storytelling through social media was a key part of Norwegian teen drama *Skam*. The programme-makers wanted it to feel as close as possible to the real lives of its target audience of 16-year-old teenage girls, supporting public service broadcaster NRK's goal to help them manage the range of social and educational pressures they were dealing with (Sundet 2020). They set up Instagram and Facebook accounts for its main ensemble, with some characters also having YouTube channels. This sought to blur the line between reality and fiction by bringing the fictional characters into the real online lives of the audience, with the accounts updated in real time across the programme's run. *Skam* unfolded as a 'real-time' drama distributed online via a special website. Instead of airing weekly as a self-contained episode, short video clips of between two and 20 minutes dropped on the website at irregular intervals. These daily video clips were released in real-time. Scenes set in school dropped during the day, parties on weekend evenings, with a clip about insomnia dropping in the middle of the night. The programme's website provided an ongoing feed of fragments of narrative, interspersing the video clips with screen grabs of chat messages and pictures from the social media accounts of that season's protagonist (Figure 3.3). Each season of *Skam* focuses on a different character from the core friendship group, so as season three aired the messages and images were from Isak's account. *Skam* could also be consumed as a conventional episodic serial, as the video clips were assembled into standard 30-minute episodes at the end of each week, available on NRK's streaming platform and linear youth channel NRK3. However, when consumed online, the unpredictable rhythm of the release of narrative information encouraged ongoing and intensive engagement by fans. Transmedia storytelling



Fredag 16.12.16 kl 19.19

Ikke tilgjengelig utenfor Norge

Figure 3.3 *Skam*'s website, featuring season 3 focused on Isak

encouraged them to track down further fragments of narrative across characters' social media accounts, and discuss information in comment sections and social media, creating an immersive experience built around immediacy and intimacy.

Case study: *Insecure*

This case study provides a narrative analysis of *Insecure*, an HBO comedy created by Issa Rae and Larry Wilmore and starring Rae. Breaking down an episode's structure through its plots and acts illustrates some of this chapter's points about how television storytelling is organised, at the level of both episode and season. *Insecure* is set in South Los Angeles and is centred on the personal and professional struggles of Issa, her best friend Molly and their social group as they begin their thirties. The programme is part of a 2010s cycle of British and US half-hour comedies with dramatic elements, created by and starring women. These were episodic serials that featured protagonists who struggled with messy personal and professional lives, frequently making bad choices. *Insecure* is one of the few programmes in this cycle to centre the lives of Black women. Like much of the cycle, it does not have a strong narrative problematic, rather a central overarching story (Dunleavy 2018: 99). This is catalysed by the women's personal struggles and charts their growth. Issa searches for her place in life, a fulfilling professional role and relationship. Her best friend Molly succeeds in her career as a corporate lawyer but struggles to balance this with her personal life and ability to sustain romantic relationships.

Insecure has features of the 'complex serial'. Issa and Molly are its protagonists, central characters with fleshed out psychologies 'whose presence is vital to resolving the overarching story' (102). A supporting ensemble of friends and love interests serve as peripheral characters 'whose narrative role is to progress the overarching story or smaller story arcs' (103), with Issa's ex-boyfriend Lawrence at times having significant personal and professional arcs as a sub-protagonist. The programme employs seriality over episodicity (99). Each episode has a defined narrative, but is strongly serialised, with its events developing the season's ongoing narrative and character arcs. A season-long thematic arc is partially resolved at the end of the season, but each season finale leaves Issa and Molly in somewhat unstable positions with lingering questions or a cliff-hanger. Their story is not complete until the season finale which sees them settled in their careers and romantic relationships. Dunleavy notes that complex serials serve the brand ambitions of cable channels and streaming platforms. Rae's heavily promoted role as star and showrunner – the only Black woman showrunner on HBO for much of the programme's run – shapes the programme through discourses of authorship that are a key part of HBO's prestige brand (Chapters 5 and 12 discuss HBO's brand further). *Insecure*'s seriality helps its characters' struggles with bad choices and precarious personal lives 'foster a notably intense form of audience engagement' (99) on social media platforms.

We focus here on episode 4.5 'Lowkey Movin' On', from the middle of season 4. This brings Issa's professional arc of the first half of the season to a close, intertwined with a climactic event in Issa and Molly's season-long personal arc. The season-long arc charting the break-up of their friendship builds on tensions and frustrations established in season three and concludes with their tentative reconciliation in the season four finale. Issa's professional arc of season four's first half follows her struggle to put together a block party to promote and celebrate the Black community and businesses of her Inglewood neighbourhood. This arc also highlights the ongoing gentrification of the long-time Black neighbourhood that has been visually tracked across the programme's run and through minor plot points. The season's premiere had opened with a brief flash-forward featuring a shot of Issa explaining she was done with Molly and a shot of a dark empty block party, then reset to 'four months earlier'. The flash-forward sets up a narrative enigma questioning what happened to Issa and Molly's friendship and the block party Issa had begun working towards in season three, establishing the key narrative arcs of the season. Episode 4.5 is set at the block party and resolves the narrative enigma, with the shots featured in the flash-forward bookending the episode. The block party climaxes in an explosive argument that both finalises Issa and Molly's breakup and ends up ruining the event, drawing together the season arcs.

The episode is set on the day of Issa's block party and is made up of 23 scenes that build into five acts as the day progresses. It has two major plots and seven supporting plots which each serve different purposes. Some are episodic and only part of this episode, but most are serialised plot lines, with the events of the episode developing their narrative arcs.

A plot: Issa's block party

- The primary narrative driver of this episode is whether Issa's event will be a success
- This is the location of the episode and intertwines with all the other plots of the episode

B plot: the breakdown of Molly and Issa's friendship

- This is the primary narrative arc of the season with tensions brought to a climax in this episode
- It intersects with A and C plots, as in episode 4.4 Molly had refused to ask her boyfriend to connect Issa with a potential music headliner. This further damaged their friendship.

C plot: Molly and Andrew's relationship

- This romance is another major season four narrative arc
- Across the episode Andrew tries to convince Molly her split with Issa can be repaired

D plot: Issa and Nathan's relationship

- Nathan is Andrew's roommate and was a season three love interest for Issa until he abruptly left town
- It intersects with A plot as Issa has reconnected with Nathan to get help securing the block party's headliner. There are signs they could rekindle their relationship.

E plot: Tiffany's baby

- Tiffany is excited to be out of the house partying and away from her newborn baby
- Her behaviour hints at her struggles with motherhood. This is returned to in the season finale.

F plot: Kelli puts on a British accent all day as she lied to her date

- This comic plot provides light relief and continues Kelli's ongoing feud with Issa's brother Ahmal

G plot: Issa and Condola and Lawrence

- Condola had been Issa's business partner on the block party and was also dating Issa's ex-boyfriend. She appears in one scene to conclude her role in Issa's professional arc and confirm her break-up with Lawrence, exiting the Issa–Lawrence on-off romantic arc that spans the series.

These plots illustrate the programme's complex interpersonal storytelling and show how the episode plays a pivotal role in the structure of the season. It progresses multiple serialised plots and most scenes interweave two or more plots. The episode's five acts build to the climax of Issa and Molly's argument. As a serialised narrative *Insecure*'s episodes do not follow the classic narrative structure of narrative equilibrium, disruption, then a restoration of equilibrium. The episode ends with only the A plot concluded. Nor does it follow the model of narrative theorist Tsvetan Todorov (1977), whose five-part narrative structure Nick Lacey (2000: 29) summarises as

- Equilibrium
- Disruption of equilibrium
- Recognition of disruption
- Attempt to repair disruption
- Reinstatement of equilibrium

Instead, a version of this five-part structure plays out across the season through the arc of Issa and Molly's friendship breakdown. The season ends with a reinstatement of equilibrium through a tentative reconciliation. Episode 4.5 sees the recognition of the disruption, as both women make small attempts to breach the distance between them, but tensions escalate into an unsurmountable rift. This leaves Issa alone on the street in the final scene. The episode is built around steadily rising action propelled by the narrative enigmas 'Will Issa's event be a success?' and 'Can Issa and Molly save their relationship'?

Act 1: a pair of mirroring scenes use expositional dialogue to remind viewers of the episode's stakes and the tension between the estranged best friends. Unable to sleep, Issa calls Nathan at 3.30am to catastrophise about the block party and thank him for helping her. This sets the A plot in motion and cues up the B plot as she hints at tensions with Molly, explaining she is no longer 'her girl'. Later that morning Molly talks with Andrew in her apartment, revealing her reluctance to attend the block party and providing exposition by identifying off-screen events that further escalated her tensions with Issa. She confesses that while she loves Issa she doesn't really like her, setting out the emotional stakes of the B plot.

Act 2: this charts the beginning of the block party, with Issa's comic anxiety over the white patrons continuing the programme's thread about Inglewood's gentrification (Figure 3.4). Issa's hyper-competent intern is introduced as a single episode character and Condola's scene resolves her narrative arc from the season's first half. Plots E and F are set in motion with the arrival of Kelli and Tiffany and the act ends on a comic beat when Issa's excitement at a press interview is undercut by the reveal the 'reporter' doesn't have a real job.

Act 3: this slowly escalates the action as Molly, Andrew and Ahmal arrive (Figure 3.5). The A plot is developed by two music performances that mark the progression of the day and the slowly growing crowds. E and F plots provide comic relief from the further complications of Kelli's lie and sow the seeds of Tiffany not connecting with her baby. Blending the B and A plots, Andrew convinces Molly that her lack of connection with Issa is due to the hard work involved with event, and Molly begrudgingly admits the event is a success, allowing the act to end on the potential of a resolution between the friends.

Act 4: the A plot is brought to a climactic success. Issa delights in the arrival of more Black patrons, crowds grow at the music performances, and a feeling

Figure 3.4 Issa and her intern discuss the block party

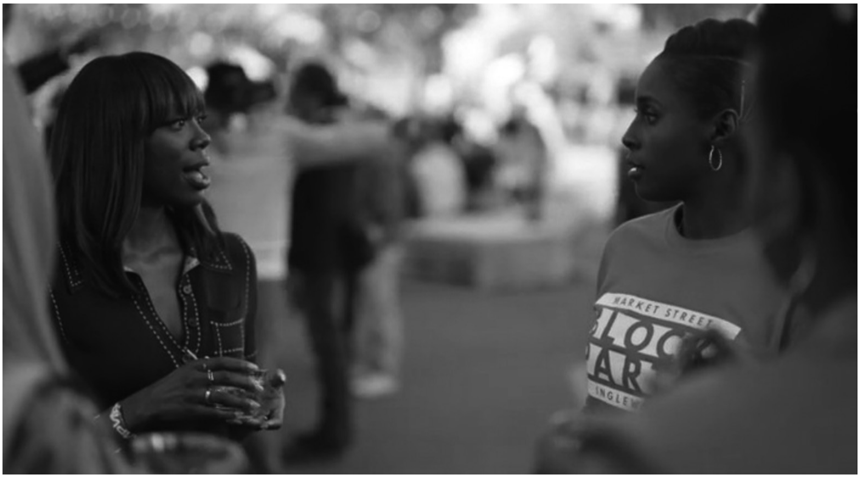


Figure 3.5 Molly and Issa's awkward greeting

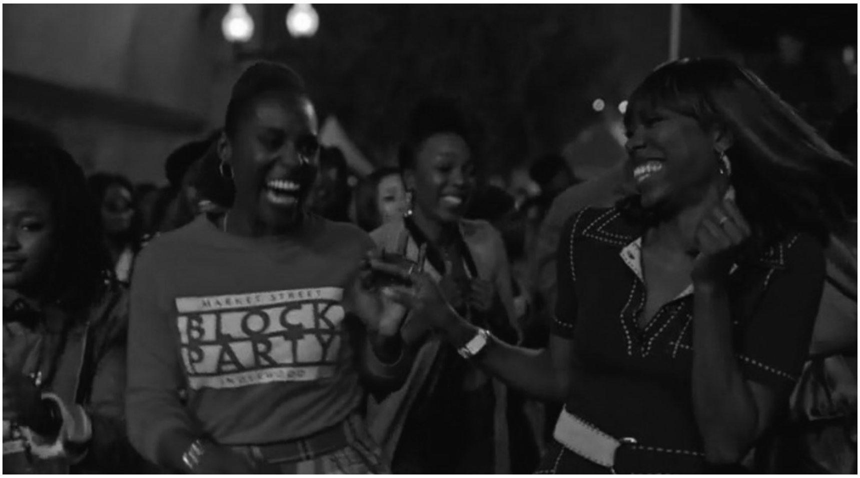


Figure 3.6 Molly and Issa do 'The Wobble'

of community is displayed as the large crowd dance the synchronised Black party dance 'The Wobble'. Her star performer Vince Staples finally arrives and delights the crowd. The B plot is intertwined with Issa's success, as Molly gives her food as a peace offering and later the pair find themselves next to each other during the wobble, sharing tentative smiles and then laughter (Figure 3.6). It seems that the A and B plots have been brought to a happy resolution but this is a false sense of closure.

Act 5: the promise of a resolution is dashed as Molly and Issa argue after Andrew reveals he helped Issa book Vince. Molly accuses Issa of going behind her back and the argument's rising intensity releases the frustrations the season has built. Someone in the crowd mistakes the argument for a violent fight and screams about a gun, the crowd scatters in comic fear and the block party ends in farcical

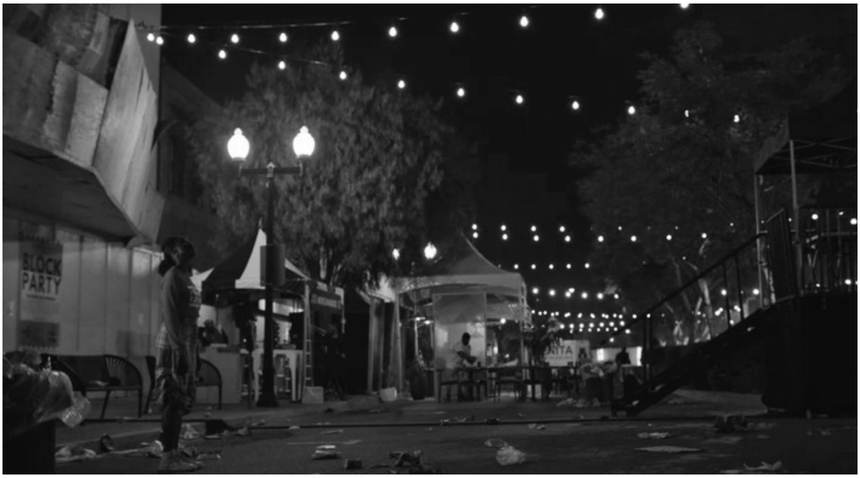


Figure 3.7 Issa is left alone at the episode's close

> chaos. Andrew apologises to Molly, Issa refuses Nathan's offer of help and is left alone amongst the detritus of the event (Figure 3.7).

The episode's end resolves the narrative enigma of 'Will Issa's event be a success?', as she achieves her dream. But in the comic conventions of the programme this success is undercut by the block party's chaotic end. 'Can Issa and Molly save their relationship?' is resolved with an emotionally stark 'no'. Episode 4.5 uses the block party to develop the season's ongoing narratives and provide a mid-season climax, resolving some of the season's arcs and setting a new equilibrium of Issa alone. This narrative breakdown has shown how a 'complex serial' comedy uses each episode to advance a series of intersecting, ongoing storylines. *Insecure*'s storytelling is focused on Issa and Molly's emotional and psychological development. The block party tells a complete story within an episode, whilst progressing the larger series arc of their personal growth. Serialised storylines are left unresolved, drawing the audience back for the next episode.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Seriality is a defining feature of televisual storytelling
- Programmes use identification to build audiences engagement with protagonists. Ensembles provide multiple opportunities for audience entry points and support long-form storytelling.
- A narrative problematic presents a question, situation or dilemma that allows for conflict and sustains and fuels a programme's overarching narrative
- Different narrative forms see plots resolved within an episode or extended across multiple episodes
- Transmedia storytelling expands a narrative world out into other media platforms, encouraging fan engagement

Bibliography

Barthes, R. (1977) *Image/Music/Text*, translated by Heath, S. New York: Hill & Wang.

Brunsdon, C. (2010) ‘Bingeing on the box-sets: the national and the digital in television crime drama’, in Gripsrud, J. (ed), *Relocating Television: Television in the Digital Context*, pp. 63–75.

Christie, I. and van den Oever, A. (eds) (2018) *Stories: Screen Narrative in the Digital Age*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Creeber, G. (2004) *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen*. London: BFI.

Dunleavy, T. (2009) *Television Drama: Form, Agency, Innovation*. London: Palgrave.

Dunleavy, T. (2018) *Complex Serial Drama and Multiplatform Television*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ellis, J. (1982) *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television*, Video. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ellis, J. (1999) *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Evans, E. (2011) *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Everyday Life*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Fiske, J. (1987) *Television Culture*. London: Routledge.

Kompare, D. (2006) *Publishing Flow: DVD Box Sets and the Reconceptualisation of Television and New Media*, 7(4), pp. 335–360.

Lacey, N. (2000) *Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Mittell, J. (2010) *Television and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mittell, J. (2015) *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York: New York University Press.

Nelson, R. (1997) *TV Drama in Transition: Forms, Values and Cultural Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Newman, M. Z. (2006) ‘From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative’, *The Velvet Light Trap*, 58, pp. 16–28.

Sundet, V. S. (2020) ‘From “secret” online teen drama to international cult phenomenon: The global expansion of SKAM and its public service mission’, *Critical Studies in Television*, 15(1), pp. 69–90.

Thompson, E. and Mittell, J. (eds) (2020) *How to Watch Television*, second edition. New York: New York University Press.

VanArendok, K. (2019) ‘Theorising the Television Episode’, *Narrative*, 27(1), pp. 65–82.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Television Histories

4

- Introduction 88
- Collecting the evidence 89
- Inventing television technologies 92
- Television institutions 94
- Reception contexts 97
- British approaches to commercial television 99
- Professional cultures in a ‘Golden Age’ 101
- Programmes and forms 103
- The ten most popular programmes in March 1958 104
- The ten most popular programmes in September 1964 104
- The ten most popular programmes in November 1974 105
- The ten most popular programmes in November 1984 105
- Case study: a history of British youth television 107
- Summary of key points 110
- Bibliography 110

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-5

Television Histories

Introduction

This chapter discusses ways of approaching the history of television, focusing on Britain but with a comparison with and contrast to other countries. Television Studies has historically focused on television in national contexts. But the assumption that programmes would be viewed and discussed by a significant proportion of a national population is now proving less secure than before. The three factors that have given rise to this change in the nature of television are:

- The proliferation of channels and streaming platforms
- The presence of several television sets and a range of viewing devices in a single household
- The increasing control of television production and distribution by corporations and institutions whose activities cross national boundaries

So it is important in thinking about television now to understand that many of the theoretical and critical approaches to the medium derive from a television history that is undergoing significant change. While the methods of analysis proposed by Television Studies in the past remain significant and useful, it is important to pay attention to the present and the possibilities for television that are being shaped for the future. Although this chapter aims to provide information about some moments in the development and change in television across the period from the 1930s to the 2000s, it is concerned less with providing a consistent story and a set of key facts, than with how the history of television can be approached critically. This is because the historical study of any subject involves making assumptions and value judgements about what is important, how links between events and processes are explained, and what the implications of a history might be. New scholarship can also push us to think again about television history and whose stories were privileged. History is always a process of narration, which makes sense by including some information and excluding other information, by linking causes and effects and by implying a direction to the ways that events unfold. So this chapter does tell parts of several stories, but tries to suggest that the history of television can be told in many alternative ways.

Collecting the evidence

Histories of television face numerous problems in relation to the evidence on which they are based. Relatively inexpensive video cassette recording became available only in the early 1980s. Until that time, studying television from the past relied on gaining access to the archives of material held by television broadcasting institutions themselves. Only in the past few decades could students and academics studying television collect examples to work on easily. Yet much television of the past is also becoming less commercially available in the age of streaming, compared to the archive availability offered in the DVD era. Even when massive libraries of DVDs or digital files can be assembled by interested individuals, by academic institutions or in national archives, it is not easy to know how these resources should be used. When there is plenty of stored television from the past to look at, what principles should be brought to bear in order to decide what to study? Perhaps whole days or even weeks of the output of a particular channel or channels should be studied. Perhaps programmes of a similar **genre** broadcast on different channels should be collected, having decided how the boundaries of a genre should be defined. Perhaps the most popular programmes in a given month or a year should be analysed, on the basis of the audience **ratings** that show which programmes were watched by the most people. Perhaps all the programmes shown by all the channels at a certain time, such as on Friday evenings, for example, should be compared and contrasted with each other. Perhaps it is not programmes at all that should be a focus of interest, but instead the different television advertisements, links and trailers that connect them together, since these are the stitches which hold a **flow** of television together as an object for study.

genre a kind or type of programme. Programmes of the same genre have shared characteristics.

ratings the number of viewers estimated to have watched certain programmes, as compared to the numbers watching other programmes.

flow the ways that programmes, advertisements, etc. follow one another in an unbroken sequence across the day or part of the day, and the experience of watching the sequence of programmes, advertisements, trailers, etc.

Writing a history of television over the past 40 years or so looks easy, since it is not so difficult to gather evidence, but paradoxically this produces the problem that there is simply too much that could be investigated. To write the history of earlier decades of television is difficult in other ways. Some broadcasting organisations such as the BBC or Granada Television in Britain maintained archives of programmes on tape or film. But these are far from complete. A few programmes were recorded on film from the 1930s, and more programmes were recorded on videotape after its invention in the late 1950s. But the purpose of recording programmes was not primarily to preserve them for future television students and scholars, but instead:

- To train staff in how to produce, direct and shoot television
- To make recorded repeats possible
- To make programmes available for export

Often, such practical difficulties as lack of storage space meant that institutions such as the BBC found it too expensive and difficult to keep sizeable programme archives. Tapes and film copies were simply thrown away, or expensive videotape was used again for recording a newer programme, meaning many programmes have been lost. The technologies to record programmes on film or videotape were attractive to television institutions because they made it easier to make programmes. Film inserts could be used during live broadcasts, and videotape made special effects much easier to achieve than during a live recording. So the copies of programmes that can be found in broadcasters' archives represent a fragmentary patchwork that was not intended as an objective record or even as a collection of television programmes that could sum up a decade or a channel's output. A further difficulty is that where programmes were preserved they were usually those that had acquired some status and importance. There are few existing copies of light entertainment programmes made before the 1960s, since news programmes, documentaries and some high-profile drama were the kinds of television thought useful to preserve. The low cultural status and sheer mass of episodes of **soap opera** – particularly daily episodes of US daytime soap – results in a fragmented archive of the genre, particularly its early decades (Levine 2020).

soap opera a continuing drama serial involving a large number of characters in a specific location, focusing on relationships, emotions and reversals of fortune.

Contemporary Television Studies has focused on the study of programmes in their original audio-visual form. So this section has so far considered the writing of television history in terms of the possibilities of watching television programmes as they were broadcast in some earlier time. Other kinds of history writing can be undertaken by using other kinds of evidence, and some of the recent historical work on television uses written sources to gain an understanding of the television of the past. For example, looking back at the pages of the BBC's listings magazine *Radio Times*, or ITV's *TV Times*, can be instructive in understanding how programmes and programme **schedules** were offered and advertised to their audiences. These magazines also contain features such as interviews with actors and **producers**, and articles by journalistic commentators. They can reveal much about the attitudes to television that were assumed, and the balance between information, education and entertainment in the television of particular periods. These listings publications also contain letters pages with viewers' questions, comments and evaluations of programmes. Although they are hardly representative, these sources give a partial snapshot of the ways that viewers established a relationship with broadcasters, and reveal some of the attitudes to programmes that might have been significant in a particular period.

schedule the arrangement of programmes, advertisements and other material into a sequential order within a certain period of time, such as an evening, day or week.

producer the person working for a television institution who is responsible for the budget, planning and making of a television programme or series of programmes.

The archives of broadcasting institutions, especially the BBC, also contain some records of viewer responses to programmes. Some producers kept the letters that viewers wrote to them about programmes, and broadcasters have always engaged in various kinds of audience research. The BBC had an Audience Research department, doing similar things to what **focus groups** do now by gathering information by questionnaire and interview in order to gauge what viewers like or dislike, and what they approve of or do not approve of about programmes. As well as raw numerical information about audience sizes, these sources provide another glimpse of how people responded to the television they watched in the past. The unofficial archives created by fans – including off-air recordings, personal records of broadcasts or collected objects – can provide information and programmes missing from official archives as well as shape understandings of audience relationships. In broadcasters' archives, as well as the personal collections of programme-makers donated to public and university archives there are also numerous paper records about the making of programmes. The BBC in particular has maintained extensive archives of letters, memos, reports and policy documents that give insight into how and why programmes were made. So the

focus groups small groups of selected people representing larger social groupings such as people of a certain age group, gender or economic status, who take part in discussions about a topic chosen for investigation.

issue of evidence in television history is a complex one, since it involves these questions:

- What are the different kinds of evidence available about television in the past?
- How does the selection of evidence make some kinds of history writing possible, and others extremely difficult?
- How does one kind of evidence (such as recordings of programmes) relate to other kinds (such as broadcasters' archives or commercial printed publications)?
- How can the attitudes and responses of audiences be reconstructed, and what do they tell us?
- How have television institutions' attitudes to their programmes shaped the evidence available?

As John Caughie (2000) has argued, the inability to record early television encourages the view that television is ephemeral by nature. Until the multi-channel era enabled by free-to-air **digital** television, the versions of British television's own past that were aired from time to time (in reruns of old black-and-white programmes, compilation programmes of old television advertisements or brief clips from old programmes in quiz shows) were frequently presented in a humorous context. Television from the past was used like a family photo album, which invited the audience to be amazed, embarrassed and amused by what television was. Programmes such as Channel 4's *TV's 100 Greatest Moments* (1999) represented television's memory of itself, and the audience's fondness for programmes of the past (Holdsworth 2011). But the history of television that appeared on television was almost exclusively told in terms of memorable programmes, and was often derided and made the subject of comedy. Television in Britain seemed unable to take its history seriously (in comparison to television coverage of other histories such as those of architecture or cinema). But the increased demand for programme content in the multi-channel age makes the repeating of past programmes a notable feature of the schedules.

Derek Kompare (2005) has explored how US television's practice of **syndication** has long seen repeats of older programmes, particularly sitcoms and science fiction, incorporated into the afternoon schedules of local television channels. With the proliferation of **cable**, **satellite** and digital channels, the archives of old programmes that broadcasters have preserved have gained some economic value. Specialised US cable channels like TV Land, the Sci-Fi Channel and the programming block Nick at Nite built their schedules from repeats of older programming, shaping US popular culture's understanding of television history. In 1995 the BBC gained income from its vast library of old programmes by making business deals with the American cable and satellite company Flextech and the media corporation Pearson to screen programmes from its archives. The export of new BBC programmes, another source of revenue, was also made possible by links with the American Discovery Channel in 1996 and the start of BBC World transmitting programmes internationally. The UK pay channel Gold shows repeats of 'classic' British comedy. The arrival of digital television brought a range of **free-to-air** BBC and ITV digital channels whose brand identities are shaped around certain genres or demographics, with schedules that blend new

digital television television pictures and sound encoded into the ones and zeros of electronic data. Digital signals can also be sent back down cables by viewers, making possible interaction with television programmes.

syndication US television industry practice of selling the rights to repeat a programme to local stations and cable channels. A key part of the US classic network business model as huge profits could be made from selling the rights to hit programmes.

cable television originally called Community Antenna Television (CATV). Transmission of television signals along cables in the ground.

satellite television television signals beamed from a ground transmitter to a stationary satellite that broadcasts the signal to a specific area (called the 'footprint') below it.

free-to-air television programming for which viewers make no direct payment.

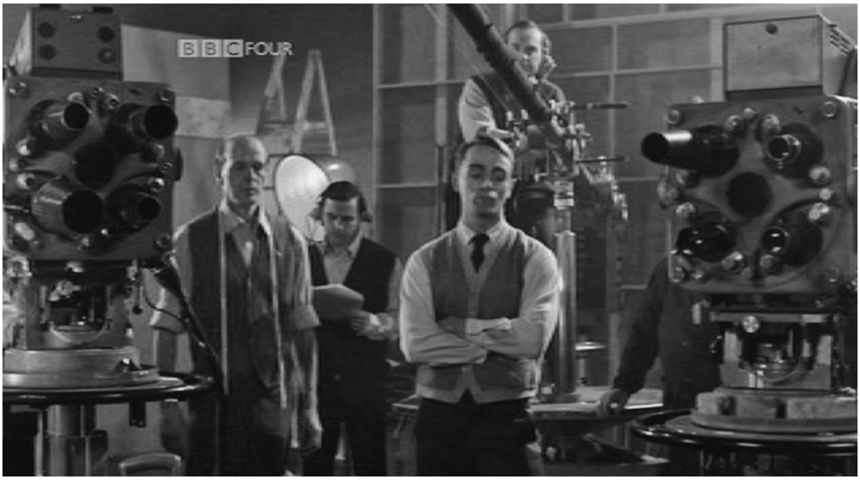


Figure 4.1 In 2010, *The Road to Coronation Street* dramatised the creation of the ITV soap opera at the beginning of the 1960s

and archive programming. ITV3 shows repeats of drama series that previously aired on ITV, particularly crime drama and soap opera. BBC Four began as an arts, culture and music channel, blending archive and new programming. It has since been reshaped to showcase the BBC's archive with a focus on documentaries, with a small number of new programmes and imported foreign-language crime drama.

BBC Four has also screened newly made dramas that are set at landmark moments in British television history or around the careers of important television stars and programme-makers. Figure 4.1 is an image from *The Road to Coronation Street*, a 2010 drama written by Daran Little about the creation of the longest-running British television soap opera. First broadcast in 1960 on ITV and still running today, *Coronation Street* was an innovative programme in its time. Daran Little's play lovingly recreates the efforts of the soap opera's creator, Tony Warren, to get the programme made and the shooting techniques used to make its first episodes. In Figure 4.1 we see a detailed creation of a 1960 television studio, with Warren in the centre as he learns the techniques of production. Presenting television from the past and programmes about television's past shows how important television is to the shared memories and experiences of generations of viewers, and for **culture** in general. While television as a medium has always placed great emphasis on the moment of 'now', partly because live broadcasting has been so significant throughout the development of the medium, both the television industry and the discipline of Television Studies have an awareness of the significance of television history.

culture the shared attitudes, ways of life and assumptions of a group of people.

Inventing television technologies

The history of television can be thought of in terms of progressive technological development, from the earliest mechanical devices for broadcasting pictures, through the invention of magnetic tape to transmit prerecorded material, to the invention of cable television, satellite transmission and now **streaming platforms** delivering programmes via broadband internet. But technologies cannot be seen in themselves as the drivers of the development of television. The development of technical innovations requires the resources of large organisations, and the will to implement technologies that can be sold to a public. They require the stimulation of demand for new technologies, and a framework of **regulation** and law to govern their implementation. For example, the level of satellite dish ownership rose to five million homes in 1996, largely because of the exclusive rights to football matches. Sky Television had bought these rights for its **subscription** Sky Sports channel using money gained from its majority shareholder Rupert Murdoch's non-television media interests. The recognition of a potential market, and programme content that can be sold to this market, is a precondition for the successful introduction of a new television technology.

streaming platform company that provides video on-demand via the internet, can be subscription-based or supported by advertising or a licence fee e.g. Disney+, BBC iPlayer.

regulation the control of television institutions by laws, codes of practice or guidelines.

subscription payment to a television broadcaster or streaming platform in exchange for the opportunity to view programmes on certain channels that are otherwise blocked.

The idea of television goes back to the late nineteenth century, when after radio had been invented it seemed a natural next step to transmit pictures to accompany sound. Scientists across the developed world were aware that the way to transmit pictures would be to find a way of breaking down a camera's visual image into tiny areas of black, white or shades of grey. These tiny areas could be reassembled on a television screen to reproduce the original image as a series of tiny dots. The principle is the same as the way that newspaper photographs had been transmitted by telephone wires since the beginning of the 1900s, by decomposing an image into clusters of larger or smaller black dots, producing areas of darker or lighter space which together added up to the shades and outlines of a photograph. The discovery of the chemical element selenium enabled this vision of television to seem closer, since a bank of selenium sensors in an electronic camera would turn the different amounts of light falling on them into different strengths of electrical current. If the changing signals for each tiny selenium receptor were sent to a receiver, the changing light and dark of a television picture would result. Inventors in Britain, Russia and Germany worked on different methods of scanning images with selenium sensors in the years before and after 1900, but without perfecting a workable system. The British inventor John Logie Baird, and engineers at the Marconi EMI company, worked separately on competing systems of television broadcasting in the 1920s, with government and BBC support given to Baird (Figure 4.2). British television formally began on 2 November 1936, trying out both the Baird and Marconi systems and broadcasting to only about 300 receivers in the London area.

terrestrial broadcasting from a ground-based transmission system, as opposed to broadcasting via satellite.

network a television institution that transmits programmes through local or regional broadcasting stations that are owned by or affiliated to that institution.

We can chart television's history through a series of eras defined by technology and industrial shifts. John Ellis (2000) suggests a periodisation of television into eras of scarcity, availability and choice. The era of 'scarcity' is the broadcast era, taking us from television's inception to the 1970s. **Terrestrial** television was broadcast by a small number of outlets: the BBC 1, BBC2 and ITV channels in the UK and the CBS, NBC and ABC **networks** in the US. This meant programmes needed to have a broad family appeal. Here television was received by antenna over the air, and was characterised by liveness, if you missed a programme you couldn't see it again until it was repeated.

The era of 'availability' is the 1970s to the 1990s, this is the cable and satellite era with new technologies of distribution enabling viewers to pay a subscription fee to access to hundreds of new channels. This allowed channels to target smaller segments of viewers rather than the broad address of the broadcast era.

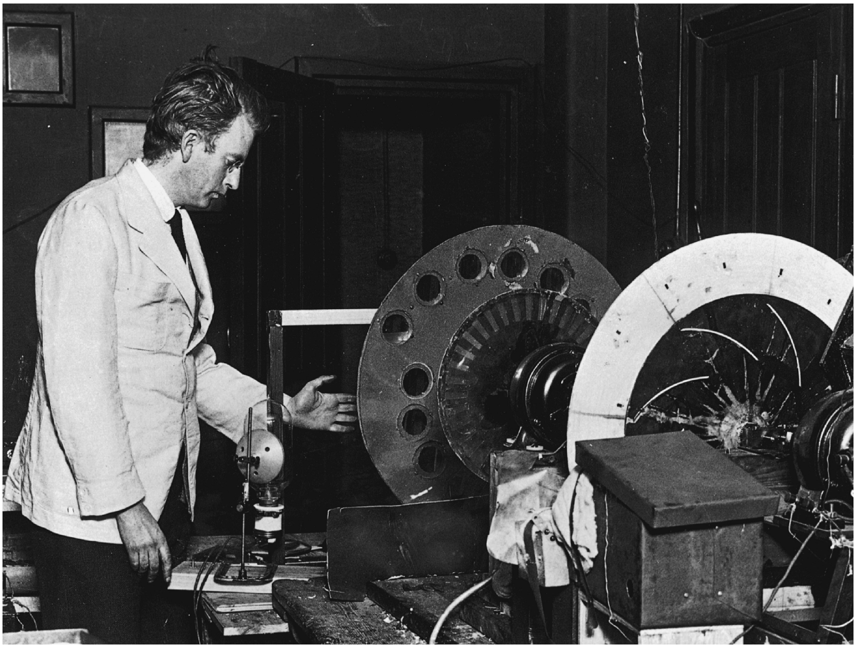


Figure 4.2 John Logie Baird with his experimental television receiver, 1926. Photograph courtesy of the Daily Herald Archive / Science Museum Group

VCR programmable machine connected to a television that played and recorded onto video cassettes.

niche audiences particular groups of viewers defined by age group, gender or economic status, for example, who may be the target audience for a programme.

Channels such as news channel CNN, music channel MTV and sports channels ESPN and Sky Sports targeted **niche audiences**. **VCRs** allowed viewers to record programmes to video tapes, introducing time-shifting and increasing viewer independence. This is the beginning of the deregulation of media ownership, allowing for media companies to merge and own more parts of the television industry.

media conglomerate a large media company that owns businesses in different media. It increases its size through mergers with and acquisition of other companies.

DVR programmable machine connected to a television that records and plays back television from a hard drive.

The era of 'choice' or abundance is post-2000. We might call this the digital era in the UK or the post-network era (Amanda Lotz (2007)) in the US context. Industrially this is an era of fragmenting audiences, **media conglomerates** and global media markets. Technologically this is the era of digital television expanding free-to-air channels in the UK and enabling more interaction by viewers, with **DVRs** making it easier for viewers to record and store large amounts of programming, making their own schedules on demand. Broadband internet and video compression enable streaming video to become mainstreamed after 2005. These technologies initially enabled the purchase of individual episodes through iTunes, and saw broadcasters build websites that allowed viewers to catch up on missed viewing online, which evolved into on-demand platforms.

Television institutions

Television today is a centralised business. Large corporations and institutions own the equipment and facilities to make television programmes, and these are distributed from central transmission sources to the huge number of receiving aerials, cable television ports and internet connections that serve the homes of the television audience. So production and distribution involve a small number of powerful and centralised organisations, whereas reception is differentiated and distributed across a very broad and relatively powerless constituency of viewers. Television did not need to develop in this way. In the late nineteenth century, commentators speculated about television technologies that would be more like telephone systems (Gripsrud 1998: 20–1). People equipped with small and convenient television recording devices imagined making and sending pictures and sound to domestic receivers. Television might have been much more personal, unregulated and cheaper to make. Open-access platforms such as YouTube and social media have realised this dream on the internet, but not in conventional television broadcasting. Another way of putting this alternative development of television would be to say that television could have been a popular medium, in the sense that it could have been made and received by people themselves, and the making of television could have been embedded within their own lives. Instead, television became big business, where national governments co-operated to set up technical standards to control the mass-production of television equipment. A professional community of highly trained technicians and production staff undertook the making of programmes.

The British government and BBC gave no serious consideration to advertising as a means of support when the work of John Logie Baird was being completed in Britain, and plans for a television service were actively developed. The thinking behind the organisation of the BBC as a semi-autonomous public corporation was inherited from the late Victorian corporations that had **monopolies** to provide services such as gas, electricity and water. Their control of supply and freedom from competition was granted in exchange for a remit to operate for the public good. The BBC took seriously its aims to raise the standards of the entire national audience in terms of sophistication of taste, intellectual appetite and levels of knowledge: television as **public service** broadcasting. In the United States big corporations such as RCA and General Electric took over the development of television equipment during the 1920s. This was an important development, in that it was not the government, the Hollywood film studios or individual entrepreneurs who took television forward but the companies behind the production of radio equipment.

Television in the USA would be modelled on the organisation of radio broadcasting, rather than the cinema industry or the public services. Like radio, a system of affiliation was structured around national networks, who supplied programmes to local stations that paid to broadcast them, gaining income from commercials and the **sponsorship** of programmes. In the late 1920s experimental television broadcasts were made in New York, Boston and Chicago, backed by electronics manufacturers hoping to sell the television sets to receive them. The radio broadcasters NBC and CBS were promoting television and could supply programmes to broadcast. By the time America entered the Second World War in 1941, the regulator, the **Federal Communications Commission** (FCC), had licensed 32 local **commercial television** stations, broadcasting to the few thousand owners of television sets in America's largest cities. ABC was created as a radio station in 1943 and moved into television in 1948, when the three major radio networks became the three major television networks. NBC, CBS and ABC

monopoly control over the provision of a service or product by one institution or business.

public service in television, the provision of a mix of programmes that inform, educate and entertain in ways that encourage the betterment of audiences and society in general.

sponsorship the funding of programmes or channels by businesses, whose name is usually prominently displayed in the programme or channel as a means of advertising.

commercial television television funded by the sale of advertising time or sponsorship of programmes.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) the government body in the US which regulates the operations and output of television companies and other broadcasters.

developed into the ‘classic network system’, with each network supplying a set schedule of programmes and promotions to its affiliated local station in each major city or region. The three largest stations in each local market carried these three major networks, allowing them to dominate the national television market by restricting competition. If a production company wanted to get a programme to a national audience, it had to be via these three companies.

In the very different television culture of China, the history, purposes and institutions of television are interesting to compare and contrast with those of Britain and the US. Broadcasting in China was established by the ruling Communist Party that took power in 1949, using it to disseminate government policy, news and entertainment sanctioned by the state. Television began in 1958 with one television station in Beijing, the capital city, but expanded slowly, with only 30 stations in operation by 1970, based in cities and reaching only part of the population. After 1976 television grew faster than any other communications medium in the country, with over 600 transmitting stations by 1995. In addition to these terrestrial transmitters, 11 million Chinese people could receive satellite television signals, and 1,800 cable systems were operating. The institutions of television in China have been closely controlled by government, so that the prospect of Chinese people watching programmes and channels made abroad or beamed to them by satellites operated by foreign corporations has led to the licensing of cable television systems and attempts to ban the use of satellite dishes. The historical basis of this suspicion of commercial and foreign television in China comes from the principles set out by the revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, who argued that the purposes of broadcasting were:

- To publicise the decisions made by the ruling Communist Party
- To educate the population
- To establish a channel of communication between the Party and the people

In practice, however, ownership of satellite dishes became common and services beamed by satellite, notably Star TV, carried channels such as MTV and CNN. In China the streaming era has coincided with increasing government restrictions on media. The Chinese television industry has its own platforms and enforces a range of restrictions on foreign-run apps and websites, which leads many viewers to use encrypted connections (VPNs) to view foreign streaming platforms via the internet. The history of television in China can be framed as a gradual movement from state control, with an emphasis on information, political programming and entertainment programmes based in state-approved national values, to increasing commercialisation and diversity bounded by governmental restriction. This brief reference to China shows how the political and cultural histories of a country can take widely different forms as they affect the establishment and development of television.

The role of television institutions underwent gradual change across the twentieth century, and conceptions of the purposes of television and its relationship with its audiences developed with different emphases. The history of television involves placing the production and distribution of television in a context informed by the cultural pressures on governments, television institutions and audiences, all of which affect each other.

Reception contexts

Television is still predominantly watched in the private space of the home, but in the early days of British broadcasting this was by no means the dominant way that viewers experienced the new medium. Philip Corrigan (1990) discovered that in 1937, the year after BBC television broadcasting started, there were more than a hundred public venues for watching television. These included railway stations, restaurants and department stores. Audiences sometimes as large as a hundred people could gather to watch television pictures collectively. In the United States a similar situation was evident in the 1930s, and for a short time television looked like a possible competitor with cinema as a medium of public entertainment experienced in buildings set aside for watching. The Nazi government in Germany in the 1930s was interested partly in the propaganda value of television broadcasting, and partly in competing with the large American corporations that were investing in television production and television sets. The fact that the Olympic Games of 1936 took place in Berlin was a stimulus to German television, and broadcasts were received not in individual homes but in viewing rooms established in cities. Once again, television was being thought of as a medium for collective viewing of pictures and sound relayed live from major public events. Some of the buildings in which German television broadcasts were watched could hold audiences as large as 400 people. But industrial corporations in Germany had considerable political influence during the Nazi era. So the corporations' plans to develop domestic television sets to be watched in individual homes, and thus to develop a consumer market for television sets, meant that these public screenings were to give way to domestic viewing when the Second World War began in 1939 (Uricchio 1989).

When the pattern of centralised production and dispersed individual reception of television stabilised as the norm after the war, the form of television that we know in Western countries today had been established. There are two different and sometimes conflicting results of this pattern. First, central control of production and private individual reception set up a structure that matches the democratic organisation of developed societies such as those of Europe and the United States. When governments have a direct role in broadcasting, or set up a legal framework of ownership and regulation for private autonomous institutions to make television, there is a basis for universal access to information and culture that might promote a fairer society. Mass populations, watching television in their own homes and with members of their families, could be supplied with the information and ideas they need to participate in a national or regional society. Informed viewers would be given the resources to take part in political and social debates, to vote in elections on the basis of a level playing field of information about the issues at stake. The centralised production of television and its dispersed reception suit the concept of public service broadcasting quite well as it has developed in Britain and other European countries. Although there is a more questionable side to this, since there is a chance that government propaganda and the manipulation of audiences could also be a part of this broadcasting landscape, the structure of broadcasting as we know it is associated with attempts to raise the cultural, educational and social standards of societies.

The second result of centralised production and dispersed reception of television is its connection with the culture of the home. Standards of living and proportions of surplus income available for investment in leisure and entertainment rose steadily through the twentieth century in the industrial nations of the Western world. People's houses were not only places to live but also places where consumer goods could be accumulated, and new patterns of domestic leisure could develop. British commentators in the 1940s and 50s were concerned about how television might prove a disruptive force in the home, disturbing the family routines of eating, conversation and children's bedtimes. To watch could be regarded as a waste of time (compared to reading, doing jobs around the house or engaging in conversation), especially if television was focused on entertainment. However, for most viewers the experience of watching was not the solitary experience it often is today. Because only a small proportion of homes had invested in the new and expensive technology, most viewing was collective as people gathered in friends' and neighbours' houses to watch. Watching television was a social event in its own right, and in some respects helped to form communities. This was especially the case in the newly built suburbs of the major cities where people had chosen to uproot themselves from the close-knit but overcrowded Victorian housing of older towns and city centres. Separated by the hedges and front gardens of their new semidetached houses, people were able to socialise and display their relative wealth and status to their neighbours by holding informal gatherings around their televisions. The television set became an important part of the culture of the home, as the prices of television sets fell through the 1950s and they could be acquired not only by the affluent middle class but increasingly by everyone. Television sets became a central feature of the household living room, often positioned next to the fireplace, where families would gather in the evening together both to keep warm (in the age before central heating) and to share the entertainment experiences offered to them by television. As well as experiencing entertainment outside the home, at the cinema for example, or at the pub, television enabled people to take their leisure indoors with their friends and their families. Radio had already fulfilled a similar function, and as the mass ownership of television sets extended in the 1950s in Europe and the United States this continued the drive to make the home the primary site of leisure and consumerism.

It was in the 1950s that what we would now describe as mass audiences for television began in Britain. But television sets were still expensive, costing more than £80 in the early 1950s, equivalent to about eight weeks' wages for the average employed man. Between 1952 and 1959 in Britain the number of combined television and radio licences increased from 2.1 million to ten million. The single television programme with the greatest effect on creating this wider ownership of television sets was the live coverage of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

Overall, then, the pattern of television broadcasting that dominated the twentieth and early twenty-first century was neither natural nor necessary. But it suited the developing forms of society characterised by these key features:

- The promotion of democracy and citizenship
- Participation in a modern consumer society
- The centrality of the home as the location of private leisure and family life
- Access by government and industry to private space and private life

The significance of this narrative of television history is that it is a cultural history: it emphasises the ways in which television became embedded in people's lives according to the places where they lived, the social classes to which they belonged and the expectations about home, work and leisure that they held.

British approaches to commercial television

In the UK the monopoly of the BBC, a public service broadcaster funded by the licence fee, became a duopoly with the arrival of ITV, which was funded by advertising. Independent commercial television began broadcasting on 22 September 1955, available first only in the London region but expanding to nearly all of the country over the next six years through regional **franchises**. Many influential figures resisted ITV, including the BBC Director-General John Reith, who compared commercial television to bubonic plague. Concern was fuelled by the American commercial television coverage of the Coronation in 1953, when messages from programme sponsors frequently interrupted the Westminster Abbey service. But the Conservative government was keen to break the BBC monopoly and passed the Television Bill of 1954, which set up the **Independent Television Authority**, though the language of the Bill revealed concerns over the lowering of standards which commercial television might entail. It was to be predominantly British in tone and style and of high quality, and nothing was to be included which offended good taste or decency or which was likely to incite crime, lead to disorder or be offensive to public feeling. This illustrates a desire to preserve Britain's national television culture and by inference, to protect it from the commercialism and triviality associated with the broadcasting culture of the United States. In a history of television, this reaction to the start of ITV is evidence of an anxiety about what British television might become.

franchise the right to broadcast on the terrestrial ITV channel for a set number of years, secured by paying a fee to government.

Independent Television Authority (ITA) the official body set up to regulate commercial television in Britain.

As Andrew Crisell (1997: 84) has written, 'commercial television was set up as an extension of the public service concept … The ITA required the contractors to inform, educate and entertain – to produce programmes of balance, quality and variety'. Regionality was also central to ITV's organisation, with each part of the country having its own broadcasting provider. Each regional company made programmes specifically for its local audience, and also offered programmes to the national network. The BBC was also divided into regions for television production and broadcasting, just as its radio services had been. Viewers who could receive the new commercial channel (and initially this was by no means everyone in Britain) were immediately keen on ITV, and by 1957 those viewers who could get both BBC and ITV watched ITV two-thirds of the time. In December 1955, for example, 84 per cent of viewers with access to ITV watched its **variety** programme *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*.

variety programmes entertainment programmes containing a mix of material such as songs and comedy sketches.

The formation of large audiences for popular programmes was necessary for the profitability of the ITV companies. On its first night 170,000 sets were able to receive ITV, and, of these, 100,000 were tuned to ITV, while a quarter of households watched BBC instead. The first ITV commercial break was at 8.12pm during the first evening's variety programme, and there were 23 commercials that night altogether. Advertisers paid about £1,500 for a slot, a 50 per cent premium above normal rates, and demand led to a ballot to select those ads that would be accommodated. The products advertised were like those of today: toothpaste, tyres, drinking chocolate, soap, cars and breakfast cereal. Advertisements were not allowed to concern politics or religion and had to conform to the standards of good taste overseen by two committees. They could appear only in 'natural breaks' of up to six minutes per hour, and there had to be a two-minute interval between an advertisement and any appearance by a member of the royal family, state occasion, church service or royal ceremony.

As the British television sector grew it meant that it was no longer necessary for each channel to expose the audience to the full range of both 'accessible' and 'difficult' programmes. BBC2, a second public service broadcasting channel arrived in 1964, becoming the first British channel to broadcast in colour in 1966. The 1970s marked the beginnings of the notion that some channels would direct their resources to some types of programme more than others, leaving viewers to choose for themselves the programmes that catered for their existing tastes. The **Annan Committee** report of 1977 put into question the role of television broadcasters as moral and intellectual leaders of society, illustrating how television was increasingly considered as a market in which providers of programmes would give their public what they seemed to want.

Annan Committee a committee reporting in 1977 to government on the future of broadcasting. It supported public service broadcasting, the funding of the BBC by licence fee, and the planned introduction of a fourth television channel.

The setting-up in 1982 of Britain's fourth **terrestrial** channel, Channel 4, was the result of a combination of inherited and traditional views of broadcasting with the new imperatives of the 1979 Conservative government and its allies. The channel would be an advertising-funded public service broadcaster, with a commitment to educational and cultural programmes, as well as providing programming for underserved and minority audiences. Conservative policies in the 1980s attempted to introduce the principles of the market into all aspects of British life. So Channel 4 was conceived as a publisher-broadcaster, meaning it didn't make its own programming. It was to make no significant investment in production facilities or training. Instead, the channel supported the growth of the British **independent production sector**, buying its programmes from independent programme-makers, who had to compete with each other for commissions, as well as importing international programmes. The channel's funding derived from advertising revenue through a levy on the ITV companies profits, who sold advertising time on Channel 4 in their regions and was therefore reliant on the buoyancy of the British economy. The Broadcasting Act of 1980 that established Channel 4 required it to 'encourage innovation and experiment in the form and content of programmes'. As part of its public service remit, the channel invested in films for domestic and foreign television screening and cinema release. There were programmes for British Asian viewers, Black British communities and gay and lesbian viewers, as well as members of trade unions, while in Wales the companion channel S4C (Sianel Pedwar Cymru) broadcast Welsh-language programmes. Channel 4 was required by the Broadcasting Act to provide 'a distinctive service', but attracted criticism for its 'bad language' and apparent left-wing political bias.

terrestrial broadcasting from a ground-based transmission system, as opposed to broadcasting via satellite.

independent production companies businesses making television programmes which can be sold to television networks that transmit and distribute them.

The first night of Channel 4 was on Tuesday, 2 November 1982. The programme schedule ran from 4.45pm to 11.50pm, with the two most popular programmes being its new soap opera, *Brookside* (4.1 million viewers), and the first specially commissioned television film for the channel, *Film on Four: Walter* (3.75 million viewers), directed by Stephen Frears. These audiences were low by comparison with the traditional channels, as the highest-rated programme in November 1982 was ITV's soap opera *Coronation Street* with 15.7 million viewers. But Channel 4 introduced significant changes to several programme forms, as well as opening up the independent production sector in Britain. *Brookside* was the first British soap opera to be made entirely on location, on a new estate in Liverpool. *Channel 4 News* (made by ITN) was Britain's first hour-long news programme and set standards for news analysis. One of Channel 4's aims was to export programmes in order to maximise revenue, and financing film-length dramas for television that could be sold to foreign broadcasters was one way of achieving this. In the 1980s Channel 4 entered the art cinema market and began to release its films in cinemas, as a way of raising their profile and creating publicity before their television transmission.

Professional cultures in a 'Golden Age'

In its early decades television was orientated around transmitting programmes live, with the technology to record television pictures and sound to tape introduced slowly in Britain in the 1950s. Both BBC and ITV made use of it for training purposes, but rarely for transmitting programmes made and recorded on tape. Instead, the medium of film was the preferred method of recording programmes for preservation, for foreign sale or for brief sequences (such as film shot in exterior locations) that would be played into programmes recorded live in a television studio. It was expensive to transfer programmes shot on film to tape, to buy the tape itself, to store it and to buy and maintain the machines that transcribed from film to tape. This meant that television programmes that used tape were more expensive to make. The people working in television were also required to become expert and professional in new ways once tape and film became as significant as live broadcasting. The mastery of these technologies led to the development of highly trained and specialist personnel with specific tasks to perform in the production process. By the 1960s the increase in broadcasting hours and the presence of three television channels in Britain changed the culture of television production. The sector became more professionalised, moving away from the pioneering amateurism that characterised the early years of television.

director the person responsible for the creative process of turning a script or idea into a finished programme, by working with a technical crew, performers and an editor.

producer the person working for a television institution who is responsible for the budget, planning and making of a television programme or series of programmes.

The first **producers** and **directors** in the 1930s and 1940s were somewhat making up television as they went along, with some of the open-mindedness, but also some of the blinkered cosiness of a public school or university drama society. The professionalism and large scale of television production in the 1960s and after encouraged programmes to be made more like an industrial product. Professional writers and directors, most of whose working time was spent in television, worked according to consistent schedules and guidelines, and developed skills, professional codes of conduct and shared expectations. However, gender and race largely restricted access to these roles, with some pioneering exceptions. In the 1960s and 1970s the producer came to have an authorial role, as they commissioned programmes, ran the production process, including selecting the directors and technical staff, and oversaw projects to completion. The producer was also relatively free from the interference of department heads and television executives.

status quo a Latin term meaning the ways that culture and society are currently organised.

culture the shared attitudes, ways of life and assumptions of a group of people.

class a section of society defined by their relationship to economic activity, whether as workers (the working class) or possessors of economic power (the bourgeoisie), for example.

Marxism the political and economic theories associated with the German nineteenth-century theorist Karl Marx, who described and critiqued capitalist societies and proposed Communism as a revolutionary alternative.

realism the aim for representations to reproduce reality faithfully, and the ways this is done.

satire a mode of critical commentary about society or an aspect of it, using humour to attack people or ideas.

The period from the late 1950s to the 1970s has gained the label of British Television's 'Golden Age' because this was a time when the cultural and political **status quo** changed. New values were being put in place, and inherited traditions were confronted by new forms and new pressures. It is important to recognise that professional workers in the television industry do not live in a separate cultural world from the rest of their society. Currents of ideas circulating among people of similar interests, social class and educational background have influences on the ways these people conceive of their social and cultural position, along with their professional role. In Britain popular books of the 1950s and 1960s by left-wing intellectuals such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and E. P. Thompson encouraged the belief that **culture** (television, radio, popular music, home decoration or sport, for example) was significant in shaping people's **class** position and personal identity, and that these cultural activities were connected to the economics of British society. These theories derived in part from **Marxist** thinking, which argues that the forms of everyday life derive from the ways people are positioned as workers in, or owners of, the industries and businesses that produce the wealth of the nation. For these writers the improvement of social structures and people's everyday conditions of existence could come about through changing people's relationships to work and wealth, but also through debate and struggles for change in culture itself. To change television might also change society, and the influence of this view was seen in **realistic** and often pessimistic drama series such as *Z Cars* (a police series), and controversial **satire** programmes such as *That Was the Week That Was*, which challenged the conventions of television and also representations of British society.

These ideas were familiar to the new generation of school leavers and university graduates emerging in the late 1950s and early 1960s, often people from working-class backgrounds who had been given the opportunity to gain a good education through scholarships and the expansion of universities. These people were often resistant to the elitism, conservatism and traditionalism that had dominated the Establishment (the civil service, the BBC, the institutions of the churches, universities and the law) in the past. Television was a young medium, and some of these people saw opportunities to carry forward their radical ideas in the television industry. To produce vigorous and authentic television it was felt that the television business and its programming needed to accommodate and represent people from working-class backgrounds. In drama a new kind of realism was needed to reflect the lives of ordinary people beyond London and the Home Counties, and television documentary should present the different regions and social classes of the nation to the television audience. Television producers, directors and writers were often resistant to the bureaucracy of television companies and rejected the stoical and submissive attitudes to authority which characterised the older generation who had lived through the Second World War. This worldview was channelled into the isolated young outsider figures found in many television fictions of the 1950s and 1960s, echoing similar protagonists in theatre, film and literature. These characters were often moving between social classes, struggling to find authentic personal meaning in their apparently absurd and empty lives. The independent outsider and rebel was always male, however, and the heroic vigour of the 1960s hero is often opposed to the entrapping seductiveness of marriage, family and consumption of consumer goods represented by women.

Across the 1980s and 1990s the culture of television professionals in Britain changed because of the structural changes made to the television industry as a result of new broadcasting regulations imposed by government, as well as new working practices introduced by television executives. The introduction of Channel 4 boosted the British independent production sector. Since the 1980s the use of temporary contracts by British broadcasters and the **outsourcing** of production to independent producers has helped establish freelancing as an industry employment norm. For example, the BBC reduced its staff by 7,000 between 1986 and 1990. The corporation also sold off many of its programme production and technical facilities in the early 1990s and increased the proportion of programmes commissioned from independent producers rather than made in-house. The rise of the independent sector and the introduction of an internal market at the BBC have shifted decision-making powers from programme-makers to schedulers and commissioners and made the career paths of programme-makers much more unstable. The effect of this market-like situation is that the executive who commissions programmes and the producer who oversees the making of television programmes have become powerful figures, to the exclusion of the writer or the director. This is because the producer and executive are answerable to the demands of the television institution for audiences and cost-effectiveness. Chapters 5 and 8 further explore the current industry make-up.

outsourcing obtaining services from an independent business rather than from within a television institution, usually as a means of cutting costs.

Programmes and forms

Writing the history of television by choosing significant programmes to exemplify a year, decade or longer period clearly raises difficult problems. This produces a narrative of television history strongly determined by the choice of the examples used to back it up. There is the risk of creating a ‘canon’ of popular or critically praised examples which can ignore the diversity of programmes, genres and televisual trends that don’t fit easily into a chronological narrative of televisual development. Since television in Britain has a public service function, one way to consider the medium’s history is through the ceremonies, state occasions and major sporting events through which it has brought a national audience together as members of a common culture. When the BBC was Britain’s only television broadcaster (from 1936 to 1955), it emphasised the live broadcasting of these kinds of events from the start and set up **outside broadcast** units to cover such public and ceremonial events as the coronation of King George VI in 1937, the annual Wimbledon tennis championships and the Armistice Day ceremony commemorating the end of the First World War. British writers in the 1930s who predicted the future of television emphasised its ability to relay events (such as sporting events, royal events and general elections) live across the country, thus keeping people in touch with what happened beyond their immediate experience and neighbourhood. It was felt that television would not compete with cinema as entertainment because of its domestic setting and lack of a sense of occasion and would therefore focus on information.

outside broadcast the television transmission of outdoor events such as sport or ceremonial occasions, using equipment set up in advance for the purpose. Abbreviated as OB.

A live event relayed by television suits the construction of a certain kind of history. This history regards television as a medium preoccupied with the present, and with live coverage. The importance of live televised events is signalled by the impact of the 1953 Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on the growth of television ownership. A state occasion such as the Coronation is an example of a television event that addresses a national public (and an international one since in the 1950s Britain still had extensive contacts with and responsibilities for countries that had formed part of its empire). It connects television viewing with the formation of a national culture defined in part by its relationship with the royal family, heritage, tradition and ceremony. More than 20 years later, in 1974, the wedding of Princess Anne and Captain Mark Philips was broadcast live, and seen by an audience of around 25 million, representing about half of the UK population. Television covered the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer in July 1981, showing five and a half hours of live coverage on BBC and ITV. In the UK 39 million viewers watched live, and it was broadcast live to 74 countries. The BBC used about 60 cameras, including 12 in St Paul's Cathedral.

The reasons that genres of television programmes are created and become significantly popular are varied and complex, so looking at the selection of programmes with the largest audiences in a particular year can be misleading as well as informative. The following lists set out the ten most popular programmes in Britain from four different years, measuring popularity according to the size of the audience calculated by broadcasters' audience research figures. Some of the critical points that could be made about what these lists reveal are suggested after the lists, together with some issues that complicate possible interpretations of the meaning of the figures.

The ten most popular programmes in March 1958

The ten most popular programmes were all on ITV. At this time audience sizes were measured in millions of homes, though of course the number of viewers in each home could vary widely. *Emergency Ward 10* appears twice in this list because two of its episodes in March made the top ten programmes.

1. *Take Your Pick* (game show, 4.1 million homes)
2. *The Army Game* (sitcom, 4.1m)
3. *Armchair Theatre* (one-off drama, 3.8m)
4. *Emergency Ward 10* (soap opera, 3.8m)
5. *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* (variety show, 3.7m)
6. *Double Your Money* (game show, 3.6m)
7. *TV Playhouse* (one-off drama, 3.6m)
8. *Emergency Ward 10* (3.5m)
9. *Shadow Squad* (thriller series, 3.1m)
10. *Play of the Week* (one-off drama, 3.1m)

The ten most popular programmes in September 1964

The ten most popular programmes were all shown on ITV. Audience sizes were still measured in millions of viewing homes, where of course the number of people viewing could vary considerably. *Coronation Street* and *Emergency Ward*

10 appear twice in this list because two episodes from each series made the top ten programmes.

1 *Coronation Street* (soap opera, 8.1 million homes)
2 *Coronation Street* (7.8m)
3 *No Hiding Place* (drama series, 7.8m)
4 *Sunday Palladium* (variety show, 7.4m)
5 *Emergency Ward 10* (soap opera, 7.2m)
6 *Emergency Ward 10* (7.0m)
7 *Take Your Pick* (game show, 6.9m)
8 *Love Story* (drama series, 6.8m)
9 *Drama 64* (one-off drama, 6.8m)
10 *Double Your Money* (game show, 6.7m)

The ten most popular programmes in November 1974

Audience sizes were still measured in millions of homes. Both *Coronation Street* and *Crossroads* appear twice in this list because different episodes of each of them gained large audiences during the month.

1 *Bless This House* (ITV sitcom, 8.6 million homes)
2 *Coronation Street* (ITV soap opera, 7.8m)
3 *Man About the House* (ITV sitcom, 7.8m)
4 *The Generation Game* (BBC game show, 7.5m)
5 *Coronation Street* (ITV soap opera, 7.4m)
6 *Crossroads* (ITV soap opera, 7.4m)
7 *Crossroads* (ITV soap opera, 7.4m)
8 *Upstairs Downstairs* (ITV drama series, 7.3m)
9 *Jennie* (ITV drama series, 7.2m)
10 *Opportunity Knocks* (ITV game show, 7.1m)

The ten most popular programmes in November 1984

Audiences are now measured in millions of viewers.

1 *Coronation Street* (ITV soap opera, 19.0 million viewers)
2 *Give Us a Clue* (ITV game show, 15.5m)
3 *Tenko* (BBC drama serial, 15.3m)
4 *Just Good Friends* (BBC sitcom, 15.1m)
5 *Crossroads* (ITV soap opera, 14.8m)
6 *Name That Tune* (ITV game show, 14.6m)
7 *Dallas* (BBC imported US soap opera, 14.6m)
8 *Hi-De-Hi* (BBC sitcom, 14.5m)
9 *Play Your Cards Right* (ITV game show, 14.5m)
10 *Surprise Surprise* (ITV light entertainment, 13.7m)

format the blueprint for a programme, including its setting, main characters, genre, form and main themes.

adaptation transferring a novel, theatre play, poem, etc. from its original medium into another medium such as television.

When ITV began broadcasting, the pace and style of British television changed somewhat because in order to compete with and distinguish itself from the BBC the new channel showed imported American programmes and used American **formats**, such as the action drama series *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In this competitive environment research into audience sizes and preferences became more significant, and television viewers began to be seen as consumers seeking entertainment. Nevertheless, ITV followed the BBC in making **adaptations** of theatre plays, and drama from Europe translated into English (*TV Playhouse*, *Drama 64*), as well as the populist gameshows (*Take Your Pick*, *Double Your Money*) and variety shows (*Sunday Night at the London Palladium*) which the channel is credited with bringing to prominence. Looking at the lists, though, it seems that ITV had considerable success in attracting large audiences by broadcasting programmes in the forms that are still considered popular entertainment today. Soap operas *Emergency Ward 10* and *Coronation Street* (Figure 4.3) were key audience drivers and the latter, launched in 1960, remains the channel's most iconic programme and is still the heart of its early evening schedule.

It is important to remember that these programme forms on ITV were designed to deliver audiences to advertisers, who had paid to screen television commercials between programme segments. Both ITV and BBC channels used popular formats such as quiz shows, one-off dramas, variety and adventure series to keep their hold on their audiences, with ITV generally catering for more popular tastes. The BBC's audience fell with the arrival of ITV, and it responded by increasing its broadcast hours from 41 per week to 50. It introduced its first soap opera, *The Grove Family*, in 1954. This was broadcast in weekly 15-minute episodes and centred on a suburban middle-class family, resulting in a deluge of approving letters and massive press coverage.

serial a television form where a developing narrative unfolds across a sequence of separate episodes.

series a television form where each programme in the series has a different story or topic, though settings, main characters or performers remain the same.

The lists show that light entertainment programmes such as game shows and sitcoms, as well as long-running **series** and **serials**, had become the mainstay of the output of the channels. Where single drama (or the TV play, as it was then known) anthologies like *Drama 64* needed a new cast, sets and costumes

Figure 4.3 The first episode of *Coronation Street* in 1960

each week, series and serials reduced costs by using the same crew, performers, sets, costumes and studios for each episode. Series and serials can be sold to overseas broadcasters in ready-made seasons. One of the effects of this is to marginalise programmes like single drama anthologies, whose content may be more unconventional in form, or more challenging in social and political content. The promise that a continuing series or serial has of holding onto an audience for the duration of the programme's run offers the prospect of a consistent audience whose **demographic** appeal and/or large size may be attractive to advertisers. Genre television (such as soap opera, police or hospital drama, or game shows) is attractive to television executives because a popular generic programme has a brand identity. In the same way as casting a known television **personality** or performer, the recognition and familiarity of the forms and **conventions** of the programmes provide both security and appeal. Genre television also provides a sense of control and ownership to the audience, who have a stake in the programmes rather than being offered a new narrative and characters each week, as with single drama anthologies. As well as being constrained by repetition, genre allows for innovation within and between genres, and programmes can gain large audiences by producing novel twists on established conventions. Generic categories are no longer separate, and such newer formats as **docusoaps**, hospital thrillers and dramedy (comedy drama) feed off the rich history and audience knowledge of television to mix realism with **reflexivity**. Chapter 6 discusses genre further.

demography the study of population, and the groupings of people (demographic groups) within the whole population.

conventions the frameworks and procedures used to make or interpret texts.

personalities people appearing on television who are recognised by audiences as celebrities with a media image and public status beyond the role they play in a particular programme.

Case study: a history of British youth television

One way to look at television history is through the development of a particular type of television, a genre, format or programming **strand**. Through this we chart programming trends as well as demonstrate how programmes are shaped by scheduling, industrial change and social contexts. This case study looks at British factual and fiction television produced for the 16–24 demographic, tracking the key phases and genres in the development of the form. Youth television is distinct from children's television, although its development includes 1980s and 1990s children's dramas such as *Grange Hill*, *Byker Grove* and *Press Gang*. These focused on younger teenagers and aired at the end of the post-school children's programming blocks on BBC1 and ITV.

The early evening **timeslot** of 6–7pm has been a key space for youth programming, as this marks the transition between children's and adult programming. In the 1950s changes in the regulation of television helped develop a space for youth television by ending the Toddlers' Truce. This scheduling policy saw the BBC and ITV suspend broadcasting between 6–7pm so as not to distract homework and children's bedtime. Removing the Toddlers' Truce freed up this slot for new television formats, which included pop programming targeted at the growing teenage demographic and reflecting a changing pop culture. The BBC's pop music programme *Six-Five Special* debuted on Saturday 16 February 1957, formally ending the Toddlers' Truce. However, with only two channels in operation, these early evening programmes still needed to be appropriate viewing for the family. The generation-defining *Ready, Steady, Go!* Debuted on ITV in 1963, its Friday evening slot signalling the beginning of the weekend for the youth audience and starting a tradition of Friday night

docusoap a television form combining documentary's depiction of non-actors in ordinary situations with soap opera's continuing narratives about selected characters.

reflexivity a text's reflection on its own status as a text, for example drawing attention to generic conventions, or revealing the technologies used to make a programme.

strand a linked series of programmes, sharing a common title.

slot the position in a television schedule where a programme is shown.

music programming that continued through Channel 4's *The Tube* in the 1980s and its scandalously anarchic late night entertainment show *The Word* in the 1990s.

The early 1980s saw the 6pm slot on BBC2 developed as a youth programming space. Youth drama was very limited during this period but those scheduled in this slot were signalled as distinct from children's television and daytime 'educational' drama. Like ITV's *Going Out* (which aired in unstable slots in the night-time schedule as the channel didn't have a defined youth scheduling space) BBC2's *Maggie* and *Tucker's Luck* (the latter a spin-off of children's drama *Grange Hill*) featured working-class protagonists finding their way after compulsory schooling, choosing between further education or pursuing limited job opportunities. Rachel Moseley suggests that these dramas illustrated the social anxiety that surrounded teenagers in the early 1980s due to high unemployment and fears of antisocial behaviour (2007: 190).

Later in the 1980s a defined youth programming strand took up residence in BBC2's 6pm slot. DEF II was a **branded flow**, defined through its logo and idents, together with the style and form of its programmes. It scheduled original British factual and entertainment programmes such as current affairs series *Reportage* (BBC2, 1988–1994), alternative travel hybrid *Rough Guide to…* (BBC2, 1989–1999) and music show *Dance Energy* (BBC2, 1990–1992) alongside imported North American drama and documentary. The DEF II brand identity and programming were influenced by the style and form of satellite channel MTV Europe, which was seen to be 'the source of a new kind of television' (Lury 2001: 39). Like MTV, DEF II's programmes used a fast-paced, deconstructive style and its presenters displayed an anarchic, irreverent attitude. Channel 4 established late-night Friday and Sunday lunchtime as youth programming slots, homes for its own irreverent and self-reflexive youth entertainment, music and magazine shows, helping establish the style and form of 1980s and 1990s British youth television.

brand recognition the ability of audiences to recognise the distinctive identity of a product, service or institution and the values and meanings associated with it.

ident a short sequence containing a channel or streaming platform's logo (or that of a programming strand) which appears before a programme, reminding the viewer where they are watching it. A key part of communicating brand identity.

flow the ways in which programmes, advertisements, etc. follow one another in an unbroken sequence across the day or part of the day, and the experience of watching the sequence of programmes, advertisements, trailers, etc.

In 1995 Channel 4 debuted its youth-focused weekday soap opera *Hollyoaks* in the 6–7pm slot. Created by Phil Redmond, creator of *Going Out* and *Brookside*, the soap was built around a teenage ensemble and became a valuable space for Channel 4 to address social and personal issues for youth audiences, a key component of its public service remit. Channel 4 established its own youth programming strand T4 in 1998, built around repeats of that week's *Hollyoaks* episodes on Sunday mornings, later expanding to Sunday afternoon and Saturday morning. Like DEFII T4 was a branded flow that incorporated British programmes and US imports, but didn't include the current affairs and documentary content of its BBC2 predecessor. T4's blend of entertainment, reality tv, sitcoms and drama was anchored by youthful presenters whose style of address shaped the strand's cheeky, fun-loving tone (Figure 4.4).

T4's brand identity influenced the rebranding of Channel 4's pay-TV channel E4 as a youth entertainment channel when it became a free-to-air digital channel in 2004. Digital television expanded the availability of free-to-air channels in the UK, with new channels targeting niche audiences rather than the broad audiences of the major territorial channels. This helped the growth of British youth television as the major terrestrial broadcasters each developed a youth-focused sister channel – BBC Three, ITV2 and E4 – that competed for the commercially valuable and increasingly hard-to-reach 16- to 34-year-olds. British youth television now had dedicated programming budgets that helped develop British youth drama and sitcom as nationally distinct forms in the 2000s. These were influenced by, yet positioned themselves against, the glossily aspirational US teen TV imports that had been long been part of British youth strands. Drawing on British televisual traditions of realism and comedy they asserted their difference as messy, anarchic, and 'authentic' (yet often still fantastical) representations of British teen and twenty-something life (Woods 2016). For example, E4's ensemble

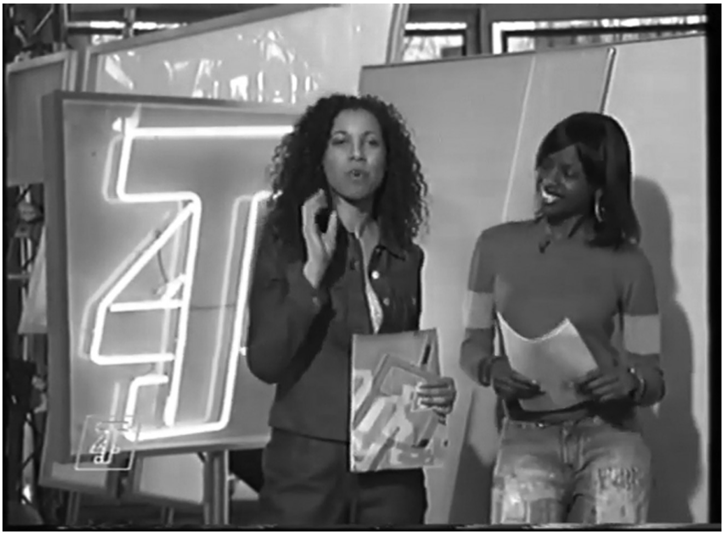


Figure 4.4 Margherita Taylor and June Sarpong present T4

Figure 4.5 An awkward teenage house party in *The Inbetweeners*

comedy-drama *Skins* branded itself as an edgy exposé of teenage life that was distinct from US imports *Dawson's Creek* and *The O.C.*, in part through its use of a teenage advisory team that helped develop storylines. In contrast to the at times fantastical debauchery and rebellion of *Skins*, the schoolboy sitcom *The Inbetweeners* drew cringe comedy from the everyday, subjecting its clueless teen quartet to farcical humiliations (Figure 4.5). The success of these programmes catalysed a boom in British youth drama and comedy across the late 2000s and early 2010s.

Overall, we can see how the historical development of British youth television has been shaped by industrial shifts and a growing awareness of the importance of the teenage audience. Changes to scheduling policy opened up space for music programming targeting the new teenage market in the 1950s and 60s. The 1980s saw a limited collection of dramas addressing public and political anxieties over the opportunities available for working-class youth. Youth strands DEF II and T4 carved out space for youth audiences within the broad-address schedules of terrestrial broadcasters. These strands blended original British programming and US imports under strongly branded identities. The arrival of digital television enabled niche-targeted, youth-focused digital channels to make space for the development of British youth drama and comedy as a nationally distinct form.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- The history of television can be told in many different ways, depending on which evidence is selected and how it is approached
- The evidence for writing television history includes audio-visual records of programmes, and also printed sources and archival documents
- Television institutions have rarely preserved historical material, though new opportunities for repeating programmes of the past are changing this situation
- The invention of television, and the development of television institutions, need not have happened in the ways they did
- The political, economic and cultural conditions in which television developed affect the ways it is made, watched and organised

Bibliography

Allen, J. (1983) ‘The social matrix of television: invention in the United States’, in Kaplan, E. A. (ed.), *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches – An Anthology*. Los Angeles, CA: AFI, pp. 109–19.

Bignell, J., Lacey, S. and Macmurraugh-Kavanagh M. (eds) (2000) *British Television Drama: Past, Present and Future*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Born, G. (2004) *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Bryant, S. (1989) *The Television Heritage: Television Archiving Now and in an Uncertain Future*. London: British Film Institute, 1989.

Caughie, J. (2000) *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cooke, L. (2003) *British Television Drama: A History*. London: British Film Institute.

Corner, J. (ed.) (1991) *Popular Television in Britain*. London: British Film Institute.

Corner, J. (1999) *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Corrigan, P. (1990) ‘On the difficulty of being sociological (historical materialist) in the study of television: the “moment” of English television, 1936–1939’, in Syvertsen, T. (ed.), *1992 and After: Nordic Television in Transition*. Bergen: University of Bergen, pp. 130–60.

Crisell, A. (1997) *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*. London: Routledge.

Edgerton, G. (2007) *The Columbia History of American Television*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ellis, J. (2000) *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Gripsrud, J. (1998) 'Television, broadcasting, flow: key metaphors in TV theory', in C. Geraghty, C. and Lusted, D. (eds), *The Television Studies Book*. London: Arnold, pp. 17–32.

Harvey, S. (1994) 'Channel 4 television from Annan to Grade', in S. Hood (ed.), *Behind the Screens*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 102–29.

Hilmes, M. (2003) *The Television History Book*. London: British Film Institute.

Hilmes, M. (2012) *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and America Broadcasting*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Holdsworth, A. (2011) *Television, Memory and Nostalgia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Hood, S. (ed.) (1994) *Behind the Screens: The Structure of British Television in the Nineties*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Johnson, C. and Turnock, R. (eds) (2005) *ITV Cultures: Independent Television over Fifty Years*. London: Open University Press.

Kompare, D. (2005) *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television*. London: Routledge.

Lacey, S. (2007) *Tony Garnett*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Levine, E. (2020) *Her Stories: Daytime Soap Opera and US Television History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.

Lotz, A. (2007) *The Television Will Be Revolutionised*. London: New York University Press.

Lury, K. (2001) *British Youth Television: Cynicism and Enchantment*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Moseley, R. (2007) 'Inform, educate, regulate: Teenagers and television drama in Britain, 1978–1982', in H. Wheatley (ed.) *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*. London: I.B. Tauris, pp. 184–97.

O'Sullivan, T. (1991) 'Television, memories and cultures of viewing 1950–65', in Corner, J. (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 159–81.

Scannell, P. (1990) 'Public service broadcasting; the history of a concept', in Goodwin, A. and Whannel, G. (eds), *Understanding Television*. London: Routledge, pp. 11–29.

Scannell, P. (2005) 'Television and history', in Wasko, J. (ed.), *A Companion to Television*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 51–66.

Smith, A. (1998) *Television: An International History*, second edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Uricchio, W. (1989) 'Rituals of reception, patterns of neglect: Nazi television and its postwar representation', *Wide Angle*, 11(1), pp. 48–66.

Woods, F. (2013) 'Teen TV meets T4: Assimilating *The O.C.* into British youth television', *Critical Studies in Television*, 8(1), pp. 14–35.

Woods, F. (2016) *British Youth Television: Transnational Teens, Industry, Genre*. London: Palgrave.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Television Industries

5

- Introduction 114
- The funding structures of television 114
- Public service broadcasting in the British market 115
- Television regulation in the UK 117
- The structure of television industries 119
- Channel brands in digital and cable 121
- Streaming platforms 123
- British public service streaming: BBC iPlayer 126
- Case study: ABC and Disney 128
- Summary of key points 132
- Bibliography 132

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-6

linear television broadcast on a channel in a continuous flow, according to a prescribed schedule.

non-linear television television consumed outside of its scheduled broadcasts, either via DVRs or on-demand platforms.

streaming platform company that provides video on-demand via the internet, can be subscription-based or supported by advertising or a licence fee e.g. Hulu, BBC iPlayer.

Media conglomerate a large media company that owns businesses in different media. It increases its size through mergers with and acquisition of other companies.

terrestrial broadcasting from a ground-based transmission system, as opposed to broadcasting via satellite.

commercial television television funded by the sale of advertising time or sponsorship of programmes.

public service in television, the provision of a mix of programmes that inform, educate and entertain in ways that encourage the betterment of audiences and society in general.

licence fee an annual payment required to watch or record programmes on a TV, computer or other device as they are broadcast, as well as download or watch BBC programmes on iPlayer. The main source of income for the BBC.

Television Industries

Introduction

This chapter looks at the structure and organisation of television industries. It is important to think about who controls, makes and distributes television, along with how it is funded. It primarily focuses on the UK and US, but many of the concepts and forms can be mapped onto other national contexts. Many of the companies discussed here have global reach. The past three decades have seen television transform from nation-based industries that also look to global markets, to the growing dominance of complex multinational organisations. This raises important questions about ownership and power. This chapter explores the organisation of television's production, distribution and exhibition across **linear** and **non-linear** television, looking at broadcast television, cable and satellite, and **streaming platforms**.

With the pace of change accelerating in recent years it's important to think about television industries as unstable, always in a process of flux. The current era of television industries is shaped by the arrival of new technologies such as broadband internet, digital compression and streaming video, as well as new devices and platforms through which to view television. It is defined by multiplicity rather than replacement, with new technologies and expansion of ways to watch. The 2010s and early 2020s are an era of evolution and adaptation as legacy media responds to new competitors and national industries must manage the threat of powerful US-based multinational **media conglomerates** and streaming platforms. International streaming platforms have marketed themselves as 'disruptors' of linear television's production and distribution practices, but it's important to recognise that there are many continuities between the practices of linear broadcast and non-linear, on-demand television (Lotz 2018: 491).

The funding structures of television

The television industries of different nations are funded by different combinations of advertising, public funding and subscriptions. Here we use the US and UK industries as examples.

- ***Terrestrial broadcasters***: UK television was built around **public service** broadcasting, which was joined by **commercial television.** BBC1 and 2 are publicly owned and funded by a **licence fee**, with ITV and Channel 5 privately owned and funded by advertising. Channel 4 is publicly owned and funded by advertising. These are all free at the point of access, with a licence fee required to watch live television – broadcast or streamed – and use the BBC iPlayer to view television on-demand. All five target a mass audience and are required by law to have public service commitments of different levels. The US 'classic network system' was built as a commercial system funded by advertising. **Networks** CBS, NBC, ABC and FOX sell viewers' attention to advertisers, making the major networks free at point of access. These all target the mass audience. This chapter terms these terrestrial broadcasters the 'major' channels and networks, to define them against narrowcast digital channels.

- ***Cable*** and ***satellite***: these companies charge fees to access their technologies, which allow viewers to view hundreds of channels. These channels are funded by a combination of advertising and carriage fees paid by the cable and satellite companies, who package and distribute the channels to customers. These channels frequently target smaller audience demographics that are valuable to advertisers. **Subscription** cable channels in the US, such as HBO, have no advertising and as a result charge a fee for access.
- *Digital television*: since 2012 all over-the-air linear television in the UK has been delivered digitally. This opened up space for more free channels to be received by aerials, via the Freeview system. All except the BBC's are funded through advertising. The major UK broadcasters launched a range of sister channels, allowing them to target **niche demographics**, which can be valuable to advertisers.
- *Streaming platforms*: broadband internet enables viewers to access on-demand platforms, either linked to broadcasters (BBC iPlayer, All4) or standalone services (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video). Some are funded by subscription, some by advertising, some offer packages at different fee levels that blend the two. The BBC's iPlayer is covered by the licence fee.

As more viewers move away from cable and satellite packages towards direct-to-consumer streaming platforms the television industry is being reshaped in multiple ways, as this chapter will demonstrate. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that many viewers still receive only linear broadcast television. In linear television systems built around advertising, live television's declining viewing figures over the last two decades has had a significant impact on commercial channels' funding. Advertisers have also diversified their spending beyond television and are spending more of their budgets online. Television companies have been reshaping their businesses to deprioritise linear television, looking towards a future dominated by on-demand, as well as considering revenue streams beyond advertising.

network a television institution – usually American – that transmits programmes through local or regional broadcasting stations that are owned by or affiliated to that institution.

cable television originally called Community Antenna Television (CATV). Transmission of television signals along cables in the ground.

satellite television television signals beamed from a ground transmitter to a stationary satellite that broadcasts the signal to a specific area (called the 'footprint') below it.

subscription payment to a television broadcaster or streaming platform in exchange for the opportunity to view programmes on certain channels that are otherwise blocked.

niche audiences particular groups of viewers defined by age group, gender or economic status, for example, who may be the target audience for a programme.

Public service broadcasting in the British market

Public service broadcasting (PSB) plays different roles in national television industries and is funded in different ways internationally. For example, in Australia ABC and SBS are directly funded by the government through grants, with SBS including some advertising, whereas in the US the Public Broadcasting System is funded by a combination of station fees, government grants and donations. We can think of public service broadcasting as a form of government and state intervention in television. Broadcasting organisations are ultimately dependent on government, for example in the UK it controls the level of the BBC licence fee and the renewal of the commercial channels' licences to broadcast. So television companies are reluctant to bring themselves into confrontation with government.

But importantly, PSB channels are not government-owned. They are independent of government control, and are owned by and serve the public. Georgina Born (2018) identifies the key responsibilities of public service media, particularly in a British context as:

- Independence
- Universality – of access, genre, social and culture
- Citizenship
- Quality
- Diversity

Ofcom the Office of Communications, a government body responsible for regulating television and other communications media in the UK.

quota a proportion of television programming, such as a proportion of programmes made in a particular nation.

independent production company businesses making television programmes which can be sold to television networks that transmit and distribute them.

format the blueprint for a programme, including its setting, main characters, genre, form and main themes.

In the UK the five major terrestrial broadcasters all have a certain amount of public service responsibilities, regulated by **Ofcom**. ITV and Channel 5 have minimal amounts, including quotas for commissions from **independent production companies**, responsibilities for providing news and regional programming and in Channel 5's case children's programmes. The BBC (licence fee funding) and Channel 4 (advertisement funding) are the UK's main public service broadcasters. They both have remits – a set of guidelines for their content and organisation – set through negotiations with the government. Both broadcasters need to produce popular programmes that attract audiences to show they are doing their jobs as PSBs, and in the case of Channel 4 gain advertising revenue. However, this must be balanced with their remit to provide 'distinctive', high-quality programmes, with Channel 4 also required to innovate and take risks.

Balancing attracting an audience and a PSB remit can be a struggle, particularly with the fragmented audiences of the multi-channel and streaming era. Falling audiences pose a threat to public service broadcasters' right to funding, as viewers may feel they should not pay the television licence fee if they are rarely watching linear television 'as live' or BBC programmes. This is of particular concern with younger audiences, the licence fee payers of the future, turning to streaming platforms and YouTube (Ofcom 2021). But to try to attract audiences by imitating the programme **formats** and audience address of commercial television programmes causes another problem since duplicating the programme forms of their rivals lessens BBC and Channel 4's claim to being a 'distinctive' alternative to commercial television.

The licence fee makes up 75% of the BBC's funding, with the corporation supplementing this income in three ways. Its 'global content company' BBC Studios makes and distributes programmes and other content both for the BBC and a range of other clients. BBC Studioworks provides studios and post-production facilities. BBC Global News operates the international, commercially funded arm of BBC News, which provides the channel BBC World News along with news and sports websites and apps. The BBC also has the international, subscription-funded streaming platform BritBox, a joint venture with ITV. Similarly, ITV supplements its revenue from advertising through diversified sources, including its production company ITV Studios, other digital media subsiduaries, subscriptions from streaming platforms (with ITVX offering an advertising-free subscription), voting, live entertainment, gaming and pay-per-view ventures.

It's important to highlight that the licence fee doesn't only pay for the BBC's television channels and iPlayer. The BBC is a media corporation that provides a whole range of content through different media to service its remit. This includes a suite of national television channels (including BBC1, BBC2, BBC4, children's channels CBBC and CBeebies, online youth channel BBC3, Scottish Gaelic channel BBC Alba), ten national radio stations and over 40 local ones. Streaming platforms iPlayer and Sounds deliver on-demand television and audio content respectively, with BBC Online including news, weather and education content. As part of its negotiations with the British government over the renewal of its Royal Charter, the BBC has been required to take over the funding of the World Service and free licence for the over-75s, both previously funded by the government. Along with government-enforced licence-fee freezes, this has impacted its budgets for content.

Decreases in funding from licence-fees and advertising rates can impact the British production sector as well as the national distinction that is at the heart of public service broadcasting. British broadcasters now rely on international co-production to fund higher-budget prestige dramas, frequently genres such as telefantasy, glossy thrillers and **period dramas**. As co-production partners are most often US channels and global streaming platforms these programmes need to appeal to both a national and international audience. This leaves questions over whether programming that appeals to international viewers can also sufficiently address national concerns and representations (co-production is discussed further in Chapters 11 and 12). The public service broadcasters play a significant role in representing the nation. They also support the British production sector, as they commission a diverse range of genres and budget-levels. Television production funded by international media companies has increased significantly in the UK in recent years, attracted by tax breaks for high-budget drama. But it is commissions from the public service broadcasters, particularly Channel 4, that play a significant role in supporting the British small and medium independent production companies (Oliver & Ohlbaum 2020). For example, Channel 4 comedy drama *Ackley Bridge* is set in a school that integrates the white and Pakistani communities of a fictional Yorkshire town (Figure 5.1) and is made by independent production company The Forge on location in Yorkshire.

period drama television fiction set in the past, most often the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

Television regulation in the UK

Broadcasting in the UK is largely self-**regulated** on the basis of codes and guidelines drawn up and interpreted by **Ofcom**, a body appointed by the government to oversee the activities of all broadcasters to 'further the interests of citizens in communication matters' and was set up by the Communications Act of 2003. Ofcom was created to reduce the confusion that broadcasters and the public felt in dealing with different television regulators – Ofcom regulates television programmes, radio and telecommunications technology including phones and the internet. It establishes rules for the mergers of media companies and investigates complaints. Ofcom is required to 'further the interests of consumers', so it requires broadcasters to include a diverse range of genres, programmes of 'quality', regional and educational programmes, and to maintain standards of political

regulation the control of television institutions by laws, codes of practice or guidelines.

Figure 5.1 *Ackley Bridge* on Channel 4

neutrality. Ofcom has been involved in long-term research into the future of public service media in the UK, making recommendations to the government in December 2020 to help shape future media legislation.

Ofcom's Broadcast Code shapes the content of British television, protecting viewers and listeners from harmful and offensive content. It also protects the creative freedom of broadcasters and their ability to make challenging programmes. This includes aspects such as impartiality and accuracy in programme content, as well as overseeing offensive language (including hate speech), violence, abusive content and sexual material, as well as commercial funding aspects like sponsorship and product placement. There are severe penalties such as fines, or, in the case of commercial companies, the withdrawal of their licence to broadcast that can be applied if broadcasters commit serious offences against regulation. The effect of this is to introduce a culture of self-**censorship** among programme-makers, who know that regulators will review potentially controversial programmes and are required to investigate serious complaints made by viewers. Probably the best-known of its rules is the way that children are protected from harm that may be caused by screening violent or sexual content at times when they might be viewing. Broadcasters have for a long time agreed on a 9.00pm '**watershed**', before which time programmes that could be offensive or disturbing to children will not be broadcast.

censorship the omission of sensitive, prohibited or disturbing material at any stage in the production process from the initial idea to its transmission.

watershed the time in the day (conventionally 9pm) after which programmes with content that may disturb children can be shown.

Harm and offence can refer to many different things and in 2006 the government asked Ofcom to investigate the health implications of a ban on advertising 'junk food' during commercial children's television programming. Ofcom's research calculated that a ban on junk food advertising would reduce child obesity and therefore save about £1 billion currently spent on medical treatment for overweight children. The independent producers and makers of animated programmes for children were concerned that these proposals would make children's television a loss-making programme type. Without this advertising revenue commercial broadcasters were concerned they would not be able to cover the cost of making programmes, since the profit margins on children's programmes were already relatively small. Although programmes for children have been part of the British television landscape since the beginning of the medium, commercial pressures, competition between the large numbers of channels now available, and wider political concerns about public health impact this genre's position on the main terrestrial broadcasters.

As a result of the junk food ban and reduction in advertising revenue, ITV sought to reduce its public service commitment to providing children's programmes. the broadcaster has long campaigned to reduce its public service remit to provide children's, religious and regional programmes, three genres which attract low audience numbers and make it very little money from advertisers, compared to high-advertising revenue genres like light entertainment, drama and **reality TV**. ITV wanted to reduce the number of hours of children's programming on ITV1 from eight hours per week to two hours. The regulator, Ofcom, had to find a compromise between the widely supported idea that children's programmes are a good thing and beneficial to society, and the realities of multi-channel television. The outcome was that ITV moved children's programmes to its digital channel CITV, leaving the BBC as the main provider of children's programmes via its CBBC and CBeebies channels.

reality TV programmes where the unscripted behaviour of 'ordinary people' is the focus of interest.

interface the visual frame through which a streaming platform organises and promotes its programming.

brand recognition the ability of audiences to recognise the distinctive identity of a product, service or institution and the values and meanings associated with it.

The structure of television industries

Across the world, national television industries are shaped by three processes that work together to deliver programmes to audiences: production, distribution and reception. In its most simple form a production company makes programmes for a channel or streamer (the process of production is explored in Chapter 8). The production company can be a Hollywood studio, a studio linked to the broadcaster or streamer, or an independent production company. The channel or streamer pays a licence to air the programme. If they are funded by advertising, this will be sold around the programme. They incorporate the programme into their **brand identity** by positioning it in a **schedule** or **interface** and promoting it to viewers. The channel or streamer is then transmitted to a viewer's television, received via antenna, cable or satellite dish or broadband internet.

schedule the arrangement of programmes, advertisements and other material into a sequential order on linear television, within a certain period of time, such as an evening, day or week.

The channel has historically been the most powerful part in this system, as it chooses which programmes to commission, and is able to air programmes made by a range of studios or production companies. In the UK the regulations governing public service broadcasters set quotas for how much programming must come from independent production companies. For Channel 4 this is all its programming and for the BBC it is 25% of the programming for BBC1 and BBC2. Both the BBC and ITV own their own production studios from which they commission programming. For example, reality dating show *Love Island* is made by the Entertainment division of ITV Studios and broadcast on ITV2 and the streaming platform ITVX (Figure 5.2). ITV Studios does not only make British programmes for ITV channels, for example it also makes the reboot of reality makeover show *Queer Eye* for Netflix.

horizontal integration the control by a media corporation of companies from different media forms, such as television, film, digital and music.

vertical integration the control by media institutions of all levels of a business, from the production of products to their distribution and means of reception.

Across the last 40 years huge media companies have been created by media companies acquiring or merging with others, enabling strategies of **vertical integration** and **horizontal integration**. Each of the US major networks is owned

Figure 5.2 ITV2's reality dating show *Love Island* is made by ITV Entertainment

by a media conglomerate that also owns a range of cable channels. These conglomerates also own Hollywood studios and production companies that make television. All own local stations in large markets and in some cases the parent companies are cable or telecom giants, so they also own the means of reception. These media conglomerates now have their own streaming platforms, funded by subscription and in some cases advertising. These are additional revenue streams and follow audiences as they increasingly move from linear to on-demand viewing habits. These business practices mean media conglomerates gain profits from each part of the television industry, including licensing programmes, advertising, carriage and subscription fees. This market concentration means significant power in the television industry is concentrated in the hands of a few, restricting the ability of smaller or new companies to compete. A channel or streamer is more likely to commission a programme from the studio owned by its corporate parent, keeping all the profits within the same company (Table 5.1).

The hugely successful sitcoms *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory* help to explain these systems of media ownership. Both were made by the studio Warner Bros Television, the television production arm of the WarnerMedia conglomerate (acquired by the AT&T telecom company in 2018 and later renamed Warner Bros. Discovery after a 2022 merger with media conglomerate Discovery, inc.). During their runs they were the US's highest rated sitcoms and made huge profits from advertising for their US networks NBC and CBS, with the programmes playing

Table 5.1 Media conglomerates own the US major networks

US network	*CBS*	*NBC*	*ABC*	*FOX*	*The CW*
Parent conglomerate	Paramount (formerly ViacomCBS)	Comcast	The Walt Disney Company	Fox Corporation	Warner Bros. Discovery / Paramount

a key role in each channel's brand identity. Although viewers and the press conceived of *Friends* as an NBC sitcom and *The Big Bang Theory* as a CBS sitcom, the networks didn't own the programmes. Instead WarnerMedia earned huge profits selling the licence to broadcast the sitcoms to these networks, as well as hundreds of channels internationally including Channel 4 and Sky One in the UK. DVDs, **syndication** and streaming rights were further revenue streams. When WarnerMedia's streaming platform HBO Max launched in 2019, the exclusive US streaming rights to *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory* were key titles in the platform's marketing to potential subscribers.

syndication the sale of programmes to US cable television and to regional television broadcasters to transmit within their territory.

Ownership of valuable film and media content, brands and franchises (which the industry terms 'IP' – intellectual property) have become an essential part of contemporary television industries. Warner Bros. Discovery shares ownership of US network the CW with Paramount, which means it can gain revenue from both licensing and advertising when programmes produced by Warner Bros Television air on the CW. Warner Bros Television makes programmes that reimagine DC comic characters for the CW, including *Arrow*, *The Flash*, *Supergirl* and *Batwoman*. This is an example of horizontal integration and synergy as Warner Bros. Discovery is exploiting IP from its corporate asset DC Entertainment. The acquisition of significant libraries of content and key brands are a dominant driver of media conglomeration, gaining IP for potential spin-offs and reboots as well as revenue from rights sales. Subscription cable channel HBO and Warner Bros's extensive library of media content were the crown jewels in AT&T's purchase of Time Warner in 2018. In 2022 retail and technology giant Amazon completed its purchase on Hollywood studio MGM studio. The potential to exploit its valuable library of film and television, including the James Bond franchise, was cited as a key factor in the sale.

The years 2019–2021 saw media conglomerates launch their own streaming platforms (Disney+, HBO Max, Peacock, Paramount+) built around the exclusive availability of their deep libraries of film and television content and launching new programmes built on key brands and IP. Media conglomeration has given huge US-based companies significant power in the international television market. The global rollout of these platforms has been supported by the exclusive streaming rights for hit programmes and library content, where previously distributors would have made individual deals in each country, with local broadcasters competing for hit US programmes. Chapter 11 considers US streaming giants such as Netflix in terms of global culture, but it's useful to highlight here how media conglomerates have expanded their global power by buying up independent production companies, digital media companies and merging with media conglomerates internationally. This gives US-based companies power in national and regional television industries, as was seen with telecommunications conglomerate Comcast's acquisition of British and European satellite broadcaster Sky in 2018, giving it access to these television markets.

Channel brands in digital and cable

Branding creates and manages the relationship between producer and consumer, seeking to build a connection that results in customer loyalty. Clearly defined channel brands seek to align the channel's symbolic values with the viewer's

ident a short sequence containing a channel or streaming platform's logo (or that of a programming strand) which appears before a programme, reminding the viewer where they are watching it. A key part of communicating brand identity.

emotions and psychological needs (Johnson 2012). A channel brand is communicated through logos, **idents** and advertising (both on-screen and off) as well as its programming. Digital and cable channels have smaller audience shares than the major broadcasters, so they need to create distinctive brand identities to stand out in a crowded marketplace, build connections with audiences and make themselves attractive to advertisers. They can define themselves by focusing on a particular genre, such as sports for ESPN and Sky Sports, comedy for Comedy Central and Dave, home construction and interior design for HGTV and More 4. Or they appeal to a particular audience demographic, with MTV, Freeform, BBC Three and E4 targeting youth audiences, a demographic particularly valuable to advertisers.

US cable channel MTV launched in 1981 with a brand identity built around music videos, with its 24-hour stream of videos anchored by hip presenters or 'VJs'. Its niche audience focus was white suburban teens. MTV's graffiti-style logo presented the channel as an edgy and rebellious alternative to the network TV establishment. Its iconic ident featured black and white footage of astronaut Neil Armstrong planting a flag on the moon, with the American flag replaced by the MTV logo in colour. The marketing slogan 'I want my MTV' encouraged teenage audiences to demand their local cable company carry the channel, presenting it as part of their lifestyle and identity (Goodwin 1993). In the 1990s MTV responded to falling viewing figures by diversifying beyond music videos. After launching the genre-defining reality TV hit *The Real World* in 1992 the channel gradually shifted its brand identity towards reality television, culminating in a wholesale rebranding in the 2000s. This pivot to reality TV responded to generational change in MTV's target demographic, from Generation X to Millennials. Amanda Ann Klein (2021) identifies MTV's 'reality identity' programming cycle as operating across the 2000s and 2010s. Growing from the casting practices of *The Real World* and catalysed by the success of structured reality series *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* in 2004, and its hugely popular spin-off *The Hills* (Figure 5.3), this cycle of programmes informed twentieth-first-century American

Figure 5.3 Privileged Los Angeles lifestyles displayed in MTV reality show *The Hills*

discourses surrounding youth and identity, contributing 'to the contemporary, sometimes liberatory, sometimes contentious, conversations that Americans, and American youth are having about who and what they are' (6). MTV's hit reality shows such as *The Real World*, *The Hills*, *Teen Mom* and *Jersey Shore* addressed a predominantly white, suburban Millennial audience, offering different youth identities and identity norms that audiences and participants alike could adopt or remove as needed (8). This programming cycle defined MTV's channel identity during this period and helped shape how Millennial youth and selfhood were perceived in American society.

Some US cable channels such as Showtime, Starz and HBO position themselves as 'premium' channels, charging an extra subscription fee. This sets them apart from the networks and basic cable channels as they carry no advertising and have no **FCC** restrictions on sex, violence or profanity. As they must persuade a viewer to pay a premium, these channels build brand identities that establish a strong connection with potential subscribers (Johnson 2012: 29). HBO launched in 1972 as a sports and first-run film channel. It later looked to original programming to distinguish itself in response to competition from other film channels. In the late 1990s a series of critically acclaimed, award-winning original programmes helped HBO assert a brand identity built around 'risk'. High-brow original programming featuring sex, profanity and disturbing content positioned the channel as edgy, mature and often controversial (Fuller 2010: 286). A run of high budget, authored, strongly serialised programmes that tackled adult themes in richly textured storytelling became cultural talking points. *Oz* (HBO 1997–2003), *Sex & the City* (HBO 1998–2004), *The Sopranos* (HBO 1999–2007) and *Six Feet Under* (HBO 2001–5) established HBO as the home of a new 'Golden Age' of television.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) the government body in the USA which regulates the operations and output of television companies and other broadcasters.

The channel targeted a privileged, urban, educated demographic that could afford to pay extra for its subscription. In cultivating a brand of exclusivity, Kim Akass and Janet McCabe suggest that by 'building its reputation through "limited access" and "elite art", HBO turned potential commercial liabilities – restricted availability, additional cost – into cultural and symbolic capital' (2018: 6). HBO's channel brand of risk-taking **prestige TV** was established through promotion and supported by favourable press coverage of its original programming that set the channel apart from network and basic cable television. As more cable channels began to produce their own edgy, adult prestige television (discussed further in Chapter 12), HBO's brand identity became less distinct. Yet in 2019 its brand still had sufficient power and recognisability for corporate parent WarnerMedia to name the company's new streaming platform HBO Max. The conglomerate's vast film and television holdings were corralled under the tagline 'where HBO meets so much more'.

prestige TV critical and industry term to describe high-budget flagship drama and comedy. Term aims to remove hierarchical/judgemental connotations of the term 'quality television'.

Streaming platforms

The streaming era offers new platforms for the distribution and exhibition of television, enabled by broadband internet and connected devices, accessed via websites and apps. Rather than a move away from the television set this has seen a diversification of the ways we can view television. Streaming platforms make television mobile, viewable on phones, tablets and laptops as well as televisions.

set-top box the electronic decoding equipment connected to home television sets that allows access to digital television signals and the internet.

digital media player (or streaming device) small internet-connected device attached to a television that accesses a range of streaming platforms in app form.

The television set itself has become an internet-connected device, combining linear with on-demand television with the aid of smart TVs, **set-top boxes** and **digital media players** such as Roku, Amazon Fire Stick and Apple TV. Cable and satellite providers had introduced on-demand viewing of programmes via set-top boxes. However, streaming platforms used the internet to deliver television on-demand directly to consumers without the need for a costly cable or satellite subscription. Although it must be noted that the high-speed broadband internet needed to access such platforms is still a considerable expense for households and unreachable for many.

The year 2005 was the tipping point of streaming video as advances in high-speed broadband internet and compression technologies made it easier to share and sell video content online. Online video sharing platform YouTube's launch the same year (selling to Google in 2006) helped catalyse television providers' interest in streaming as a distribution method. In late 2005 ABC and NBC made episodes of popular shows with sizeable online audiences, such as *Lost* and *The Office*, available to buy on Apple's iTunes platform.

Streaming platforms exist in a diversity of forms and funding models. Some are national and regionally specific, such as iQIYI in East Asia and Stan in Australia. Others have global reach, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. Catherine Johnson (2019) divides streamers into 'TV natives' that are connected to legacy media, either broadcasters or cable and telecom conglomerates (iPlayer, Now TV, Peacock, Disney+), and 'online natives' connected to technology and digital media companies (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+). Many streamers operate like major terrestrial broadcasters and target a broad demographic through a mix of genres, others are smaller 'boutique' products or genre-specific. Hayu carries US reality TV, Discovery+ carries lifestyle and reality shows, Acorn carries gentle English language crime dramas and thrillers, WoW Presents Plus carries the *Ru Paul's Drag Race* international franchise and reality shows spin-offs. Some streamers' content is only on-demand (Netflix), whilst others include channel livestreams (ITVX, BBC iPlayer). Some are funded by subscription (Disney+, Now TV), others advertising (All4, Pluto) and some combine both through different subscription packages (Peacock, Hulu, HBO Max). All4 and ITVX offer ad-free versions via subscription, Peacock offers a free-to-air version with advertising but keeps its high-profile content for two subscription tiers. The BBC iPlayer is funded by the licence fee.

Catherine Johnson distinguishes between open and closed platforms (2019: 38–39). Open platforms enable users to upload content and combine amateur and professional video. For example, YouTube is a participatory platform that facilitates interaction, allowing users to upload and comment on content. It has developed a range of native programming genres (vlogging, hauls, gaming playthroughs, make-up tutorials) as well as drawing on genres familiar to television (sketch comedy, travelogues, cooking). However, the majority of streaming platforms are closed forms as they do not depend on their viewers for programming. Most streamers in the West allow only limited interaction through scrolling and selection, some allow viewers to assign ratings. Typically, the interface of Chinese streaming platforms such as iQiyi and Youku include viewer comments.

The period 2019–2021 saw a range of new streaming platforms enter an already crowded US market alongside established brands Netflix, Amazon

Prime Video and Hulu. Linear channels and established streamers were already locked in the 'TV arms race' of **Peak TV**, spending huge amounts on new programmes and splashy deals with high profile creatives. These new platforms intensified this competition for audiences and cultural prestige, which industry press hyped as the 'streaming wars'. The highest profile streaming platforms (and their parent companies) launched in the US market during this period were

'Peak TV' industry term coined by US television executive John Landgraf to refer to the huge amount of scripted series produced by network, cable and streaming in the US in the second half of the 2010s.

- Disney+ (The Walt Disney Company)
- Apple TV+ (Apple)
- HBO Max (WarnerMedia)
- Peacock (NBC Universal)
- Quibi (Private investors), closed 2020
- Discovery+ (Discovery)
- Paramount+ (Paramount (previously ViacomCBS))

US-based media conglomerates like The Walt Disney Company and NBC Universal had previously focused on their broadcast and cable channels, gaining significant revenue from sales of their valuable library content's streaming rights to established streamers like Hulu and Netflix. With the earning potential of their linear channels challenged by falling audiences and advertising revenue, media giants pivoted to add streaming to their business models, launching their own direct-to-consumer platforms with plans for global expansion. Technology giant Apple debuted Apple TV+ in 2019, which built on the company's rental and sales platform iTunes and its Apple TV streaming device.

Apple TV+ is distinctive among streaming platforms in focusing its budget only on original content, offering no licensed (or acquired) library content. This meant it launched with only a few programmes – including extremely expensive flagship drama, the star-driven *The Morning Show* (Figure 5.4) – and has slowly built up its library of original programmes. Most streamers offer a blend of

Figures 5.4 Jennifer Aniston is one of the big-name stars of *The Morning Show* on Apple TV+

content made up of original and licensed programmes, with exclusive acquisitions sometimes blurring this boundary. We can break this content down into licensed, exclusive and 'original' categories.

Licensed content refers to programmes that have previously aired on broadcast or cable, which the streamer has bought the rights to (or 'acquired'). This works in the same way as linear channels buying the rights to air a new international programme or repeats of an older programme. For example, UK Netflix streams US sitcom *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (originally broadcast on Fox and NBC) and *The Big Bang Theory* (originally broadcast on CBS), which both also air on UK digital channel E4. This is referred to as 'library content' or 'acquisitions' and makes up the bulk of programmes found on global streaming platforms. Rights to well-established hit programmes can be extremely valuable for a streamer. NBC sitcoms *Friends* and *The Office* have been some of the most popular programmes on Netflix. This was demonstrated in 2019 when Warner Media paid $425 million in a five-year deal for *Friends* that gave it the exclusive US streaming rights for new streaming platform HBO Max. As Netflix's previous licensing deal ran out in 2019 and HBO Max wasn't launching until 2020, Netflix paid an estimated $80 to $100 million to keep the programme for one year.

A sub-category of licenced content is *exclusive content*. These are high-profile international acquisitions of programmes that are currently airing on linear TV or a nationally specific streamer. A global streamer will acquire the exclusive global rights to a programme outside of its country of origin. These can be big audience draws and are usually made available weekly straight after their home broadcast rather than released as a whole season. Netflix built its audience in the UK in part through its exclusive rights to cult US hit *Breaking Bad*, from cable channel AMC. Streamers will sometimes misleadingly label exclusives as 'Originals', a common practice at Netflix with programmes such as *Breaking Bad* and the CW's *Riverdale*.

Originals are programmes commissioned and funded by the streamer or made in co-production with a national channel. Originals are frequently flagship programming and as exclusive access to them is used to tempt potential subscribers streamers can make considerable investment in their production. For example, sci-fi *Stranger Things* and period drama *The Crown* have been key programme brands for Netflix with budgets in the hundreds of millions, and Amazon Prime Video's telefantasy *The Rings of Power* drawn from the world of *The Lord of the Rings* is rumoured to be the most expensive drama ever, with a first season costing over $460 million. Originals are valuable to the international expansion of streaming platforms, as they maintain consistency in a platform's library in each country and lessen the need to compete for high-profile 'exclusive' acquisitions in local markets.

British public service streaming: BBC iPlayer

The development of streaming television in the UK was shaped by the public service broadcasters BBC and Channel 4. The development of digital media technologies was a part of their public service remits during the 2000s and early

2010s, with 'the role of public broadcasting changed to account for developments in both technology and audience behaviour' (Evans 2011: 34). Their streaming platforms arrived soon after the 2005 streaming video tipping point, with BBC iPlayer trialled in beta from 2005 then launched in 2007 and 4OD (rebranded as All4 in 2015) launching in 2006. Both services predate Netflix's launch in the US and its arrival on the UK market. iPlayer began as a website-based catch-up service marketed as 'making the unmissable unmissable', with previously broadcast programmes available on-demand for a short period. A mobile app launched in 2011 was part of a second wave of growth and by 2014 the iPlayer was being marketed as an everyday mode of viewing the BBC. The platform was reconceptualised as an entertainment destination and the online home of the corporation, with Director General Tony Hall calling it the 'front door of the BBC' (Grainge and Johnson 2018). Needing to compete with global streaming platforms' growth in the UK, the BBC sought to increase the on-demand availability of its own programmes from 30 days post-broadcast to one year in 2014. This saw some conflict with the independent sector as it impacted production companies' ability to sell their programmes to other outlets following a BBC broadcast. As part of the 2016 charter renewal the licence fee was extended to cover live and on-demand viewing on iPlayer, further positioning the platform as a central way to experience the BBC's programmes.

During this period the BBC positioned the iPlayer as public service media, a service that used editorial skill to shape the audience's television journey through a selection of programmes from the broadcaster's linear schedules, guided by curation, recommendation and discovery (Grainge and Johnson 2018). By framing data and personalisation through public service, the BBC attempted to distinguish its platform from the data-driven consumer address of international streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, which recommended a viewer more of the same (2018: 33).

Like all the streaming platforms linked to the UK's major broadcasters – ITVX (previously ITV Hub), All4, My5 – the iPlayer is free at point of access (like all these platforms it requires a sign-in, which in 2022 is accompanied by a reminder that a licence fee is required to view). These platforms are hybrid linear/non-linear spaces that host on-demand programmes alongside live streams of all the broadcaster's linear channels. The BBC uses iPlayer in combination with its terrestrial channels to provide hybrid modes of viewing catering to different audience preference. A programme airs weekly on a linear channel following the classic schedule model, whilst a 'box set' of the entire season is made available on iPlayer after the first episode's broadcast. This enables weekly appointment viewing or 'binge' viewing at viewers' own pace. In 2020 select programmes were also available on iPlayer before their linear broadcast. Episodes of high-profile US co-productions *I May Destroy You* (an HBO co-production) and season three of *Killing Eve* (a BBC America co-production) were available weekly on iPlayer previous to their BBC1 broadcast. The full season of Hulu-BBC Three co-production *Normal People* debuted as an iPlayer box set ahead of its weekly linear double bill on BBC1 (Figure 5.5). All three programmes appeared in the platform's top ten most popular programmes for 2020, illustrating the impact of this exclusive early access (Table 5.2).

Figure 5.5 Romantic drama *Normal People* was 2020's most popular programme on BBC iPlayer

Table 5.2 **Most popular programmes on BBC iPlayer 2020** (requests to stream = view of individual episode)

	Programme	*Genre*	*Number of 'requests to stream'*
1	*Normal People*	Romantic drama	62.7 million
2	*Killing Eve*	Thriller drama	39.3 million
3	*Masterchef*	Competitive reality TV	22.2 million
4	*The Split*	Family/legal drama	18.9 million
5	*Silent Witness*	Crime drama	17.1 million
6	*The Secrets She Keeps*	Thriller drama	16.8 million
7	*Life*	Nature documentary	15.8 million
8	*I May Destroy You*	Drama	15.7 million
9	*This Country*	Sitcom	15.3 million
10	*The Nest*	Thriller drama	14.6 million

Case study: ABC and Disney

This case study focuses on US network ABC and streaming platform Disney+, which are both owned by The Walt Disney Company. The media conglomerate is a useful illustration of the structure of and developments within the US television system as its vast web of media ownership includes a US broadcast network, cable channels and a global streaming platform.

ABC (American Broadcasting Company) is a major broadcast network funded by advertising. It began life as a radio station in 1943 and moved into television in 1948, expanding through a merger with the United Paramount Theatres cinema chain in 1953. ABC is one of the original 'big three' networks that made up the classic network system from the 1950s to the 1970s and dominated the production and distribution of US television. As the networks needed to attract as broad an audience as possible to appeal to advertisers they minimised risk through a strategy of 'least objectionable programming', relying on tried and tested formulas. ABC made some of its own programming, such as news, sports and special events like variety shows, but primarily commissioned programmes from studios and production companies. This minimised the network's financial risk over a show failing, as it had only paid to license it. The arrival of cable in the 1970s broke the distribution bottleneck of the classic network system. Now production companies had other channels to sell their programming to, so the major networks no longer had complete control over the nation's viewing.

As the US is too big for terrestrial signals to reach across the country, major networks broadcast to local **affiliate** stations. Like the other major networks ABC bought up their affiliate stations in the biggest local markets, including New York City, Chicago, LA, Houston, Philadelphia and San Francisco, gaining further profits from advertising. Here we see vertical integration in practice, with ABC owning part of the production, distribution and exhibition of television, a practice that would expand with conglomeration. This became a key industry trend across the 1980s and 1990s, aided by government deregulation of media ownership laws. Television power became consolidated into the hands of a few large corporations through horizontal and vertical integration as they purchased film studios, TV networks and cable channels. ABC expanded into cable in 1984, buying controlling interests in niche-focused channels A&E (arts and documentaries), Lifetime (female-focused programming), and ESPN (sports). This increased its power in the television industry and expanded its revenue streams to include cable channel fees alongside advertising. ESPN developed into one of the company's most valuable brands due to its ability to attract the hard-to-reach younger male demographic prized by advertisers. The year 1985 saw ABC merge with Capital Cities Communications, which owned TV and radio stations and newspapers, with the resulting company gaining further media power through horizontal and vertical integration.

affiliates local television stations (normally in the USA) that have made agreements (affiliations) with a network to broadcast programmes offered by that network rather than another.

In 1996 The Walt Disney Company bought ABC and its related television stations and cable channels. This created a huge media conglomerate owning film studios, television channels, amusement parks, retail stores and a range of other media companies. Through vertical and horizontal integration Disney could keep profits in-house, as its film studios could produce programmes for ABC and its other cable channels, ABC could advertise its cinema releases, and film and television programmes could be marketed across its other media companies. Further mergers and acquisitions across the following decades resulted in Disney's current dominant place in global media, achieved through the acquisition of key media brands in the Pixar, Marvel and Lucasfilm (Star Wars franchise) companies. After a protracted process that stretched from 2017 to 2019, the company acquired the 21st Century Fox media corporation. These acquisitions have given Disney control of much of the most valuable IP in the contemporary global media industry, as well as expanding the potential for cross-promotion and synergy across its many media and entertainment holdings.

Joseph Turow (1984) frames television networks as systems characterised by a tension between innovation and control; they must balance developing new programming to attract audiences with the need to keep down costs and maximise profits. He argues networks look to reduce risk and failure as much as possible by sticking to formulas and routines. Disney's acquisitions of key brands illustrate this on a larger scale, across film, television and other mediums. However, points of crisis can push networks to take on more risk by shifting to different programming strategies. In 2004 ABC was in fourth place amongst the major networks and hadn't made a profit in seven years. This led to the 2004–5 season, where the network took a risk launching several innovative new shows produced by Disney-owned production companies (Warner 2018). That season debuted female-led comic melodrama *Desperate Housewives* and medical drama *Grey's Anatomy*, adventure mystery *Lost* – whose rumoured $12 million pilot was one of network television's most expensive to date – along with competitive dance show, *Dancing with the Stars*. These all went on to become hits with significant cultural buzz. The risk paid off as the network finished the season in second place among the coveted 18–49-year-old demographic and established two of its longest running shows, with *Grey's Anatomy* and *Dancing with the Stars* still on air in 2022.

After this brief period of innovation ABC returned to control, managing risk and re-establishing norms. The relatively diverse ensemble casts of *Lost* and *Grey's Anatomy*, along with *Desperate Housewives*'s female ensemble led ABC to cultivate white women and women of colour as target demographics. Over the next decade the network expanded its relationship with *Grey's Anatomy* **showrunner** Shonda Rhimes and her production company Shondaland, due to their success in drawing these audiences. Rhimes created *Grey's Anatomy* spin-off *Private Practice* in 2007 and went on to produce a series of glossy, upscale melodramas for the network catalysed by the success of political thriller *Scandal* in 2012. *Scandal* featured a rare network television Black female lead in Kerry Washington and maintained cultural buzz through an intense social media connection with its fans. ABC's Shondaland-produced melodramas mitigated risk by relying on the brand name of Rhimes and what became a winning formula. Each featured diverse ensembles built around a highly competent female protagonist, glamorous professional settings and deployed fast-paced, episodic serial storytelling that blended procedural elements with serialised storytelling. Thursdays are the most valuable nights in US network television in terms of advertising revenue, and in 2014 as ABC once again began to struggle in the ratings it began marketing a full Thursday programming block of Shondaland programmes under the tagline TGIT – 'Thank God It's Thursday'. These included *Grey's Anatomy*, *Scandal*, *How to Get Away with Murder* and *The Catch*, which were moved in and out of the **slot** in blocks of new episodes. Kristen Warner (2018, 30) notes that during this period manageable risk was introduced through a diverse and inclusive channel brand centred on the Shondaland programming, which extended out into Black and Asian-American family sitcoms *black-ish* and *Fresh Off the Boat*.

showrunner the writer-producer in charge of the day-to-day running of a television programme, who is also tasked with the shaping and maintaining of that programme's 'voice'.

slot the position in a television schedule where a programme is shown.

During the 2010s ABC also tried to balanced innovation and control by drawing on Disney-owned IP in characters and concepts familiar from the company's films. The fantasy series *Once Upon a Time* featured characters drawn from European fairytales, including many familiar from classic and contemporary Disney animated films. *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* was set within the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), which was developing into one of Disney's most valuable cinema franchises. The programme integrated characters from Marvel comics but was more loosely connected to the MCU than later Disney+ programmes would be. Its larger storytelling arcs were impacted by events in the franchise films, although its storytelling was largely self-contained. The period fantasy *Agent Carter* spun off a character featured in hit film *Captain America: The First Avenger*, following Agent Peggy Carter after the events of the film, working as a secret agent in post-war New York and Los Angeles. These programmes were a small part of ABC's programming strategy and never became breakout hits. However, managing risk through corporate synergy became the key programming strategy of Disney's streaming platform Disney+, which sought to attract audiences by basing its Original programming on Disney IP.

Disney+ launched in November 2019 and became an immediate streaming juggernaut, reaching over 60 million global subscribers in under a year. It achieved this through a range of strategies, aided by the captive audiences of the global lockdowns in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The platform's aggressive pricing significantly undercut Netflix, with Disney also able to exploit its international holdings as a media conglomerate to bundle Disney+ with existing streaming platforms, such as ESPN+ and Hulu in the US and Hotstar in India. Disney+ launched with a family-friendly brand built around some of the biggest global media brands in Marvel, Star Wars, Pixar and Disney animation, as well as the natural history brand National Geographic, which Disney had a significant ownership stake in. Here we can see the benefit of years of corporate acquisitions and a library-focused launch strategy. Unlike Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ did not need to make deals to acquire film and TV from other studios or build audiences for original programming from the ground up. The Disney brand and library were already built.

Disney+ relied on its key brands for its first set of original programmes, a strategy that continued across its first two years. It launched with *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series* a mockumentary spin-off from the *High School Musical* franchise and *The Mandalorian*, set within the Star Wars universe. In January 2021 these were joined by *WandaVision*, starring characters introduced in Marvel's *Avengers* film franchise. *The Mandalorian* and *WandaVision* draw on the expansive transmedia storytelling of their franchises, built through decades of comics, novelisations and films. Both programmes were marketed as flagships for the platform through their high budgets and retention of key production personnel from the film franchises. Promotional behind-the-scenes videos saw these and upcoming Marvel and Star Wars programmes described as '10 hour movies'. By positioning this programming as 'not TV', the marketing sought to confer prestige through an alignment with cinema (a wider industry strategy discussed further in Chapter 12). Whereas streaming platforms Netflix and Amazon Prime Video had normalised the full season-drop method of release, Disney+ original programming followed the scheduling practice of linear television with weekly episode releases. This concealed the streamer's thin programming slate and maintained buzz for its original programming over multiple weeks.

Here we can see how Disney+ original programming minimises risk by relying on Disney IP and practicing innovation and control. *The Mandalorian*'s episodic adventure plots and wandering hero echoes the Western and action-adventure programme styles familiar since the early years of US television. Whilst the character of the Din Djarin the Mandalorian was unfamiliar to audiences, his position of bounty hunter is familiar from the film franchise. He becomes the guardian of Grogu, a child belonging to the same species as the iconic *Star Wars* franchise character Yoda (Figure 5.6). Grogu became the programme's breakout character, with instant viral fame bestowing the nickname 'Baby Yoda'. *WandaVision* used two Avengers who had largely existed as secondary characters in the film franchise and drew on US television history. The programme's experimental form saw superheroes Wanda Maximoff

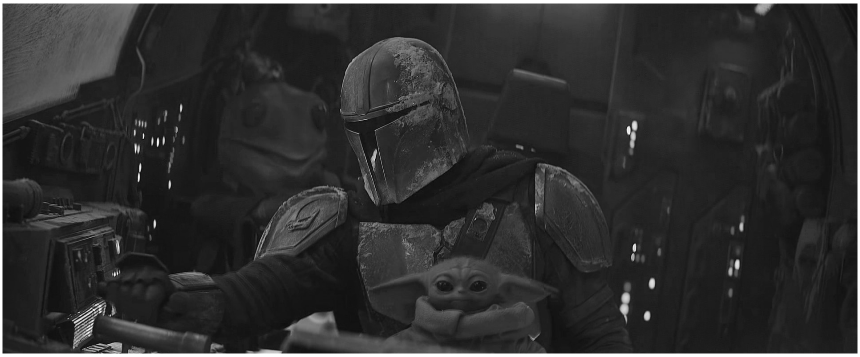


Figure 5.6 *The Mandalorian* drew on the Star Wars franchise's expansive transmedia storytelling and featured 'Baby Yoda' as a character

and Vision living a quiet suburban lifestyle in a mystery box narrative, with each episode drawing on the aesthetics and performance styles of a series of classic network sitcoms.

Disney+ was positioned as a family-focused service, which caused problems for some of the programming originally commissioned for the service. New York-set romantic comedy *High Fidelity* and queer teen romance *Love, Victor* were both moved to the streaming service Hulu, which Disney had acquired a majority stake in following its acquisition of 21st Century Fox. These moves raised questions over the inherent conservatism of the Disney family brand. However, Hulu is a US streaming platform that has very little international spread or name recognition, which limited Disney's ability to globally exploit the adult-focused films and programmes in its library. In 2021 Star was launched as a sub-brand within the Disney+ platform outside the US, drawing on a recognisable brand within Disney's portfolio of media companies in Europe and Asia. Star functions as 'international Hulu', allowing Disney to maintain global streaming control of original programmes and valuable library content targeting adults and older teens, instead of licensing this content internationally to other channels and streaming platforms. Star would become the exclusive global streaming home of *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives*, as well as new programmes from ABC and prestige cable channel FX. This shows how vertical and horizontal integration enables Disney to consolidate its considerable global power in the streaming domain.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Television industries are difficult to study as they are always in a state of flux
- National television industries have developed in different ways based on different regulatory structures and funding models
- Rather than disruption and replacement it more productive to think of the streaming era through multiplicity, evolution and adaptation
- Powerful media conglomerates have progressively reshaped global television through vertical and horizontal integration
- Channel branding has played an important role in the increased competition of the multi-channel era
- Public service broadcasters have been central to the development of streaming in the UK

Bibliography

Akass, K. and McCabe, J. (2018) 'HBO and the aristocracy of contemporary TV culture: affiliations and legitimatising television culture, post-2007', *Mise au point*, 10. Available at: https://journals.openedition.org/map/2472

Born, G. (2018) 'Principles of public service for the 21st century', in Freedman, D. and Goblot, V. (eds), *A Future for Public Service Broadcasting*. London: Goldsmiths Press, pp. 130–40.

Doyle, G. (2016) 'Television production, funding models and exploitation of content', *Icono 14*, 13(2), pp. 75–96.

Evans, E. (2011) *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Daily Life*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Freeman, D. and Goblot, V. (eds) (2018) *A Future for Public Service Broadcasting*. London: Goldsmiths Press.

Fuller, J. (2010) 'Branding blackness on US cable television – Jennifer Fuller', *Media Culture & Society*, 32(10), pp. 285–305.

Goodwin, A. (1993) *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Television*. London: Routledge.

Grainge, P. and Johnson, C. (2018) 'From catch-up TV to online TV: Digital broadcasting and the case of BBC iPlayer', *Screen*, 59(1), pp. 21–40.

Johnson, C. (2012) *Branding Television*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Johnson, C. (2019) *Online TV*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Klein, A. (2021) *Millennials Killed the Video Star: MTV's Transition to Reality Programming*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Lotz, A.D. (2018) 'Evolution or revolution? Television in transformation', *Critical Studies in Television*, 13(4), pp. 491–4.

Lotz, A.D., Potter, A., Johnson C. (2021) 'Understanding the changing television market: A comparison of the macroeconomy of the United States, United Kingdom and Australia', *Convergence*, 28(1), pp. 272–90.

Mittell, J. (2003) 'The "Classic Network System" in the US', in Hilmes, M. (ed.), *The Television History Book*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 44–9.

Mittell, J. (2013) *Television and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ofcom (2021) *Media Nations 2021*, 5 August. Available at www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand/media-nations-reports/media-nations-2021

Oliver & Ohlbaum (2020) UK Television Production Survey: Final Census 2020. Available at: www.pact.co.uk/news-detail.html?id.huge-international-growth-generates-record-revenues-forindependent-tv-production-sector

Turow, J. (1984) *Media Industries: The Production of News and Entertainment*. New York: Longman.

Warner, K. (2018) 'ABC: Crisis, risk, and the logics of change', in Johnson, D. (ed.), *From Networks to Netflix: A Guide to Changing Channels*. London: Routledge, pp. 25–34.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Television Genres and Formats

6

- Introduction 136
- Identifying genre and format 138
- The generic space of soap opera 140
- The medical drama 142
- Sitcom and the problem of humour 144
- Genre hybridity and reality TV 147
- Case study: adult animated series 150
- Summary of key points 155
- Bibliography 155

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-7

Television Genres and Formats

Introduction

genre a kind or type of programme. Programmes of the same genre have shared characteristics.

serial a television form where a developing narrative unfolds across a sequence of separate episodes.

soap opera a continuing drama serial involving a large number of characters in a specific location, focusing on relationships, emotions and reversals of fortune.

news value the degree of significance attributed to a news story, where items with high news value are deemed most significant to the audience.

interface the visual frame through which a streaming platform organises and promotes its programming.

streaming platform company that provides video on-demand via the internet, can be subscription-based or supported by advertising or a licence fee e.g. Disney+, BBC iPlayer.

Genre derives from the French word meaning ‘type’, and the study of genre has been carried out in relation to television using approaches and terms deriving from the study of genre in film, literature and other cultural forms. This is appropriate since some of the most established television genres derive from types found in other media. For example, the genre of **soap opera** began in radio broadcasting, where continuing **serials** focusing on the emotional relationships of a group of characters were created to address the mainly female audience that listened during the daytime. These radio programmes were called soap operas because they were sponsored by companies producing domestic products such as detergents and soaps. Drama is of course a form deriving from theatre, and in the early years of television broadcasting many fiction programmes were television adaptations of theatre plays. News and current affairs television share conceptions of **news value** and the institutional structures of reporters and editors with newspapers and news radio broadcasting. Entertainment genres such as sketch shows and situation comedy also have theatrical roots in live music hall and variety performance, which were adapted for radio and later became established in television.

The study of genre is based on the identification of the conventions and key features that distinguish one kind of text from another, such as the characteristics of westerns, musicals and thrillers in cinema. Theorists link genre conventions and the norms found in a group of texts with the expectations and understandings of audiences. Genre analysis explores how individual programmes engage with repetition and innovation in the use of these conventions. In this respect the study of genre aims to explain how theorists and audiences classify what they see and hear on television according to:

- Features of the text itself – character types, narrative structure, setting and iconography, what feelings they arouse in audiences (laughter, terror, sadness)
- Generic cues which appear in programme titles
- Supporting information in television guides, advertising and the menu categories of **streaming platform interfaces**
- The presence of performers associated with a particular genre (for example, in the way that Claudia Winkleman and Dermot O’Leary are associated with television entertainment programmes in the UK)

As Steve Neale (Neale and Turner 2001: 1) notes: 'Most theorists of genre argue that generic norms and conventions are recognised and shared not only by theorists themselves, but also by audiences, readers and viewers.' Theorists working on genre have disagreed about where genre categories come from:

- Do genre forms arise naturally from the properties of texts?
- Are they categories used by the producers of programmes?
- Are they categories brought by audiences to the programmes they watch?

The answer is that our understanding of genre is shaped by all these aspects. Our understanding of a genre is shaped by how the television industry and we as a culture talk about it, and the programmes that get positioned as its defining texts. Jason Mittell presents genre as 'constantly in flux' (2004: xi), with its boundaries, investments and representations shifting to reflect cultural and industrial contexts and the tastes of its audiences.

Furthermore, there is disagreement about whether the task of the theorist is to identify genres so that programmes can be evaluated, or whether the task is to describe how actual audiences make use of genre in their understanding of programmes. From an evaluative point of view, both television theorists and television fans might regard some programmes as transgressing the rules of genre. For example, some fans of science fiction regard *Star Trek* as lacking the scientific basis of 'true' science fiction and so consider it an adventure series that is simply dressed up with an outer space setting. By contrast, some television theorists might argue that programmes that transgress the boundaries of a genre are more valuable because they potentially draw the audience's attention to the conventional norms of television genre and therefore have a critical dimension. This argument derives from the perception that genre applies most neatly to mass-market **popular culture** texts, so that programmes which are firmly within the boundaries of a genre are regarded as formulaic whereas texts that mix genres are more interesting. For example, both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Stranger Things* blend coming-of-age drama with horror and supernatural elements. The programmes show their tween and teen protagonists battling the supernatural beings that threaten their small towns, but also use horror and supernatural themes as metaphors for the social and bodily struggles of coming-of-age.

popular culture the texts created by ordinary people (as opposed to an elite group) or created for them, and the ways these are used.

All texts participate in genre to some extent, and often participate in several genres simultaneously. We must take care not to be rigid in our application of genre conventions and norms, particularly as genre hybridity is a feature of television. Laura Stempel-Mumford argues that television's genre borrowings and hybrid formats mean it is 'resistant *as a medium* to the rigidity that [genre] categorisations are thought to require' (1995: 20). The study of genre is not only a way of categorising programmes but also a way of explaining how programmes become interesting and pleasurable by working against genre conventions as well as with them. As genres are shaped by both industrial and social change, looking at the history of a genre can show us how its form and meanings have changed over time. This can be connected to industrial innovations and trends or responding to changing cultural attitudes.

Identifying genre and format

title sequence the sequence at the opening of a television programme in which the programme title and performers' names may appear along with other information, accompanied by images, sound and music introducing the programme.

sign in semiotics, something which communicates meaning, such as a word, an image or a sound.

The **title sequences** of programmes, no matter how brief, offer cues to viewers that help them identify the genre and tone of a programme. There are many different kinds of **sign** that a title sequence might contain, which will signal to a viewer what to expect from a programme. For example, the title sequences of news programmes often contain:

- Dramatic orchestral music
- Images signifying the global coverage of news events
- The immediacy of news signified by a time of day or a clock
- Signifiers of the institutions such as Parliament that are the producers of newsworthy events

One of the difficulties in the study of genre in television is identifying which features of programmes are unique to a particular genre, to the extent that these features could form a list enabling the critic to establish the boundaries of a genre. Television police series personalise law and order in the personas of detectives and policemen, similarly medical dramas frame illness and injury through the experiences of doctors and nurses. Much of the pleasure in studying genre comes from how exploring how different programmes within the same genre exhibit continuity and difference. However, as many programmes blend multiple genres clear definitions are not always available and we must recognise that the boundaries of genres are leaky and malleable.

voice-over speech accompanying visual images but not presumed to derive from the same place or time as the images.

actuality footage television pictures representing an event that was filmed live. The term usually refers to pictures of news events.

documentary a form aiming to record actual events, often with an explanatory purpose or to analyse and debate an issue.

format the blueprint for a programme, including its setting, main characters, genre, form and main themes.

intertextuality how one text draws on the meanings of another by referring to it by allusion, quotation or parody, for example.

It is rare for the components of programmes to belong exclusively to a single genre. In news, for example, there are interviews between presenters and experts or officials that are coded in the same ways as interviews in sports programmes. The address to camera found in news programmes can also be seen in sports programmes, weather forecasts, talent shows or quiz programmes. News programmes contain sequences of **actuality footage** accompanied by a **voice-over**, but similar sequences can be found in **documentary** and current affairs programmes, wildlife programmes and other factual genres. Although the content of news programmes is necessarily different in each programme because, by definition, the events in the news are new, the **format** of news programmes exhibits a strong degree of continuity. The separation of news programmes into separate news stories and reports, the importance of the news presenter and reporters as a team which appears regularly in programmes, and the consistent use of settings such as the news studio, logos and graphics make today's news programme look very similar to yesterday's and tomorrow's news.

As discussed throughout this chapter, programmes borrow **intertextually** from a variety of genres and blur the boundaries between them. As Steve Neale (Neale and Turner 2001: 2) argues, 'The degree of hybridity and overlap among and between genres and areas has all too often been underplayed.' But, on the other hand, Neale goes on to note that 'Underplayed, too, has been the degree to which texts of all kinds necessarily "participate" in genre … and the extent to which they are likely to participate in more than one genre at once'. To make sense of the complexity of the contemporary television landscape, viewers become experts in recognising genre, also deriving pleasure from the manipulation of genre and from the ways that television plays with its boundaries.

Televisions programmes have **ideological** functions that can cross the boundaries between genres. Police series are structured around the opposition between legality and criminality. Narratives are organised by establishing the central character of the detective or policemen as a personal representative of legality, against whom the otherness of crime and its perpetrators is measured. The television audience is encouraged to identify with the central figure, whereas the criminal is established as an 'other' (an outsider) responsible for disruption. In television news a similar opposition is established between the public, the news presenter and the institution of television news on one hand, and on the other hand the nations, public institutions, perpetrators of crime and the impersonal forces of chance, the weather and natural processes that produce the disruptions and disorder reported in the news. Although audiences recognise television news and police series as different genres, the ideological oppositions between order and disorder, continuity and disruption animate both genres at the level of structure and narrative. Within television news itself, internal boundaries separate news events into different genres. Separate news items and separate teams of reporters and presenters may be devoted to categories of news event such as party politics, economic affairs and sport. These categories are also arranged in a hierarchy, where party politics and economic affairs are generally considered more newsworthy and significant than sport, for instance. The representation of society in television news depends on the use of a principle of categorisation to make sense of events. News could potentially include any event but depends on a basic categorisation that divides those events considered to be of importance, those events which are newsworthy, from those events that are not.

Just as categorisation is used in television news to make sense of the potentially infinite events occurring each day, genre categories are used in Television Studies to make sense of the differences between television content and arrange it into hierarchies and groupings. The study of genre in Television Studies has tended to begin from the assumption that what is being studied are complete individual programmes. This is because genre study borrows its methodology from other disciplines such as literary criticism where discrete and complete works (like novels or films) are the basic units. An evening's viewing choices will often include multiple different genres and types of television. As discussed earlier in this book, linear television consists of a **flow** of segments where programmes are interrupted by ads, **trailers** and **idents** and where **teasers** may precede the title sequences that declare the beginnings of programmes. Viewers have autonomy to move between different linear channels via remote control or select on-demand television via DVRs and streaming platforms, or blend the two. Genre helps organise the viewing experience. The major terrestrial broadcasters offer **schedules** made up of a mix of genres, whereas some cable and digital channels are devoted to one genre of programme, on the Syfy Channel, History or the Cartoon Network. The interface of a streaming platform will guide viewers through their often huge library of content by presenting a selection of available programmes shaped by data-driven personalisation. These selections are organised into categories connected to genres and sub-genres.

ideology the set of beliefs, attitudes and assumptions arising from the economic and class divisions in a culture, underlying the ways of life accepted as normal in that culture.

flow the ways in which programmes, advertisements, etc. follow one another in an unbroken sequence across the day or part of the day, and the experience of watching the sequence of programmes, advertisements, trailers, etc.

teaser a very short television sequence advertising a forthcoming programme, often puzzling or teasing to viewers because it contains little information and encourages curiosity and interest.

ident a short sequence containing a channel or streaming platform's logo (or that of a programming strand) which appears before a programme, reminding the viewer where they are watching it. A key part of communicating brand identity.

trailer a short television sequence advertising a forthcoming programme, usually containing selected 'highlights' from the programme.

schedule the arrangement of programmes, advertisements and other material into a sequential order within a certain period of time, such as an evening, day or week.

Because genre is unstable and has leaky boundaries, it can be useful to consider the significance of format, since formats are more stable. Format specifies the ingredients of a programme, to the extent that the programme could be made by another television production company if that company combines the ingredients in the same way. A format is like a recipe and can be the legal property of its creator. So, if another company makes a similar programme the makers of the new version could be taken to court for 'stealing' the programme idea. For example, the format of *Doctor Who* would include the main character travelling in time and space with a companion by means of a futuristic technology, encountering alien societies and dealing with problems of the non-recurring characters that the main characters meet there. The format of *Strictly Come Dancing* would include the ingredients of the host, the judges and contestants who learn to dance and are voted for by the judges and the public (Figure 6.1).

The generic space of soap opera

adaptation transferring a novel, theatre play, poem, etc. from its original medium into another medium such as television.

It has been customary in Television Studies to define genres by their content and form, but an alternative set of genres could be established by focusing on the representation of fictional space, geographic region or basis in another source text (there could be a genre of literary **adaptation**, for example). It would be possible to divide up television programmes in different ways from the categories customarily used to describe television genres if attention is paid less to the content of programmes and more to their ideology. For example, a genre could be constructed of television programmes focusing on community. This could include the communities of people inhabiting a shared space in television soap opera or teen TV, the communities working together in television hospital drama or police and detective fiction. Within this large generic category, further distinctions could be made to establish sub-genres in which communities are bound together primarily by family and emotional relationships (as in British soap opera), by an

Figure 6.1 A dance routine on *Strictly Come Dancing*

institutional hierarchy (as in hospital and police drama) or by the pressure of an external threat (as in teen telefantasy's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Stranger Things*).

The significance of space and setting to the definition of a recognised television genre can be seen in the importance of setting in British soap opera. The titles of *Coronation Street*, *Hollyoaks*, *Emmerdale* and *EastEnders* demonstrate how location functions as a force linking characters with each other, not only as a positive basis for community but also as a boundary which characters find difficult to transgress. Characters in soap opera are in a sense trapped by their location, and their proximity to each other within the space creates not only alliances but also rivalries and friction. The categorisations that link characters together in soap opera such as:

- Family relationship
- Working relationship
- Age group
- Race
- Gender

function in a similar way as either a positive ground for connection or a source of rivalry and tension. The overlapping of these categories with each other also produces possible stories in soap opera, since one character is likely to belong to several different categories, perhaps working in the local shop, belonging to a family and socialising with other characters of the same age group. Soap opera narrative manipulates these connections and distinctions, changing them over time, thus producing different permutations of connection and distinction that form the basis of storylines.

In the genre of soap opera the large group of characters living in the same location allow multiple storylines to unfold in parallel, and occasionally intersect. These draw on the network of relationships that connects the characters. The scenes and sequences in any one episode are likely to involve several different combinations of characters and locations. Short scenes involving different combinations of characters follow each other rapidly, producing forward movement in the storylines. But on the other hand, any one episode of a soap opera usually occurs in a very short space of represented time such as one day or even just a few hours, so storylines can feel like they take a long time to progress. The long-running nature of soap opera produces a deep narrative history that informs characterisation and interactions, enabling viewers to anticipate how characters will react to events. The exchange of information between characters through gossip and conversation, and the withholding of information which has been revealed to the audience allows the viewer to experience pleasurable uncertainty and anticipation, waiting for a climatic reveal.

The ways that soap opera works in terms of form have been used as the components to define this genre, but many of the features discussed here are also evident in other programmes which are not in the genre of soap opera but share some of the same elements. For example, many prestige cable dramas such as *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men* and *The Wire* share many of the same features as soap. They exhibit complex relationships and tensions between characters, serialised intersecting narrative threads, the exploitation of the audience's memory of the narrative past and the encouragement of speculation about future events. Similarly, medical dramas take place in a restricted location where a relatively large group of characters enables the tensions in relationships to be explored. Narrative structure distinguishes soap opera from these programmes, as its serialised narrative is ongoing and open-ended, with British soap operas airing year-round. Prestige dramas tell serialised narratives but are structured around shorter seasons with individual episode and season narrative arcs. Medical dramas combine ongoing serialised storylines with new cases each episode.

The medical drama

Medical dramas have been a reliable part of the television schedules since the 1950s and 1960s, with *Emergency Ward 10* in the UK and *Doctor Kildare* in the US. This is a workplace genre that combines soap opera's serialised storytelling featuring an ensemble of characters in a restricted location, with a procedural narrative style of weekly cases familiar from police and legal dramas. Where a detective must solve a crime, the medical drama is focused on the medical professionals' attempts to diagnose or treat a patient. The doctor-patient relationship privileges the medical practitioner, as narratives are centred around their experiences, with new patients introduced and treated each week. Most medical dramas interweave up to three cases each episode, attached to different members of the medical ensemble. The high-paced *ER*, located in an inner-city Chicago hospital, frequently cycled through more.

As many medical dramas are socially conscious, the patient can represent topical issues or social problems, with the medical professionals at times gaining greater understandings of these concerns through their interactions with the patient. The patient arrives at the medical practice or hospital with their personal narrative already in progress, so exposition must be provided. This emerges through dialogue with the patient or a family member in the case of an emergency room drama like *ER*. Here medical professionals must gain an awareness of their patient's experiences as well as their body in order to diagnose and treat a condition or injury. Set on a surgical ward, *Grey's Anatomy* provides exposition through the initial presentation of the case, further shaded with personal narrative as the episode develops. *House* leaned into the detecting nature of the procedural, centring its narrative on a 'maverick genius' protagonist who solved medical mysteries in a case-of-the-week structure.

The medical drama is a valuable genre for broadcast television because of the repetition and innovation of its procedural structure. The patients of the week allow the satisfaction of episodic narrative closure, whilst the personal and professional lives of the medical staff provide the serialised narrative arcs that cohere the large amount of episodes within a season of network television. We can split the genre into those centred-on hospital departments (usually surgery or the emergency room) and those following doctors and nurses based in the community. Hospital dramas can be long-running staples for channels, providing a stable location where cast members can be introduced and replaced through narratives of professional development. In long-running dramas the spaces of fictional hospitals such as County General in *ER*, Seattle Grace (later Grey Sloan) in *Grey's Anatomy* and Holby City in *Casualty* retain extensive memories for audiences.

The career progression of a doctor at teaching hospitals enables viewers to track characters through professional developments across multiple seasons, with the long-running *ER* and *Grey's Anatomy* following John Carter and Meredith Grey from medical students through to attending physicians and eventually, department heads. This structure allows the ensemble to include characters at a range of seniority and in different roles which leads to productive tensions between different ranks of medical practitioners as well as nurses and administrators. Recurring dynamics include the class- and skill-based tensions between doctors and nurses, and the power differentials between medical students and those who teach them. A recurring character type is the egotistical 'maverick' doctor – frequently male – who is highly skilled yet struggles to work within or respect the bureaucracy of the medical system. Conflicts between administrators and medical staff are often central narrative drivers of hospital dramas. Programmes set in underfunded public hospitals in the US and NHS hospitals in the UK present these pressures as a battle between the responsibility to the budget and the responsibility to the patient.

Community-based medical practitioners such as the NHS nurses of **period drama** *Call the Midwife* or the private concierge doctor of *Royal Pains* see the home lives of patients play a stronger role. As *Call the Midwife* is set in a post-war working-class London community, the midwives' cases frequently foreground the impact of poor housing, financial struggle and family dynamics. The vulnerability of patients and the vocational nature of the medical profession mean care is a central theme of medical drama. Storylines feature overworked doctors unable to devote enough time to patients, the rationing of care in a busy emergency room, and the impact of medical costs on a patient's treatment in the US medical system. Programmes can present an aspirational level of care, such as the innovative procedures and technologies showcased by *Grey's Anatomy*'s surgeons. Hannah Hamad suggests that *Call the Midwife* valorises the work of the NHS, with its midwives embodying an ideal of community-based nursing and 'care'. Yet in presenting the 1950s as a golden age of NHS care it unwittingly contributes to contemporary political critiques of falling standards in the health service, as the contemporary centralised, underfunding NHS is unable to provide the same level of community care (2016: 146).

period drama television fiction set in the past, most often the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

Bodies are central to medical drama. The body is frequently a mystery, as the doctor works to diagnose and treat a patient's condition. It can also be a grotesque **spectacle**, deformed by an injury or cut open on the operating table. In the operating theatres of *Grey's Anatomy* surgeons work on the torso or brain of a patient who has become an abstracted anonymous body (Figure 6.2). In the emergency room of *ER* a patient's body is pummelled by emergency medical procedures as doctors and nurses attempt to save a life, with a circling Steadicam camera driving the tension and pace of the task. Sound is as important as images in medical drama. We hear the crunch of bone as a rib spreader is inserted, the slop of a blood-soaked gauze into a metal basin, the beeps of machinery tracking a patient's vitals. Technology can also be a spectacle, with innovative procedures or expensive equipment the average viewer will likely be unable to access.

spectacle a fascinating image which draws attention to its immediate surface meanings and offers visual pleasure for its own sake.

Figure 6.2 Surgeons operate on a patient in *Grey's Anatomy*

Where medical dramas frequently focus on moments of tension and spectacle with heroic medical professionals treating patients-of-the-week, medical comedies tend to focus on routine. Here patients become background characters in the everyday life of the workplace experienced by the medical professionals. The overwork and mundane repetition of nursing life is given dark comedy in *Getting On* and *Nurse Jackie*, whilst hospital life is shaped by surreal slapstick in *Green Wing* and *Scrubs*.

Sitcom and the problem of humour

Theorists of television genre have found it very difficult to establish clearly how television comedy programmes, especially sitcoms, work. Obviously, the primary characteristic of television sitcom is that it is funny, it is designed to produce laughter in the viewer at home through the relationship between the programme text and the audience. Brett Mills frames humour as the sitcom's 'comic impetus', the 'force that drives sitcom as an industrial project and genre' (2009: 6). The moments when the studio audience's laughter breaks into the soundtrack of a multi-camera sitcom provide cues for the audience about what is expected to be funny. The presence of a studio audience is one of the differences between the 'multi-camera' and 'single-camera' sitcom forms. The studio audience's laughter also provides feedback on the comic timing of the performers, producing a kinetic exchange of energy similar to the relationship between theatre performers and audiences. This feeling of 'liveness' creates a social experience, even when viewed in a domestic environment. The studio laughter encourages the **identification** of the television audience with the live audience.

identification a term deriving from psychoanalytic theories of cinema, which describes the viewer's conscious or unconscious wish to take the place of someone or something in a television text.

sign in semiotics, something which communicates meaning, such as a word, an image or a sound.

Within the programme text, jokes and comic actions can be identified to some extent as **signs** of comedy. How characters react to each other's actions creates humour. The comic 'beat' of the reaction shot allows two laughs, at the joke line and at the reaction. In a scene involving two or more characters, misunderstandings or conflicts of interpretation can become comic. Heightened performance elements such as slapstick or pretend violence can also function in this way. Comedy can be derived from contrasts, between what characters say and what they do, how they view themselves and how others perceive them. A key sitcom archetype is the buffoon, a character with an inflated sense of self at odds with their environment, such as David Brent in the UK version of *The Office* or the entire Schitt family in *Schitt's Creek*.

Yet sitcom is not the only television genre where each of these textual elements can be found, since much of light entertainment features live audiences, whilst cartoons, sketch comedy and panel shows can also exhibit several of the same performance characteristics. The genre of sitcom is composed of a particular combination of elements such as:

- A fictional narrative
- Comic tone and performance
- A 'situation' returned to each episode – a stable set of characters, location and premise
- Twenty to 30-minute episodes

Using Northern Irish teen sitcom *Derry Girls* as an example, we can see that it is a fictional narrative shot in single-camera style, set in 1990s Derry (Figure 6.3). The Channel 4 sitcom's 'situation' is the rituals of teenage life for the central group of friends. Pompous Erin, eccentric Orla, anxious Clare and troublemaker Michelle are joined by Michelle's passive English cousin James, who as the only boy at the all-girls Catholic school becomes an adopted 'Derry girl'. Humour is drawn from the ensemble's characterisations and their everyday school and family life, including their interactions with Erin's family and the girls' sarcastic headteacher Sister Michael. This set-up is familiar from previous British teen sitcoms such as *The Inbetweeners* and *Some Girls*, bringing the familiarity and comfort of genre's repetition. Variation is provided by the setting of 1990s Northern Ireland and the background of the Troubles – the country's religious divisions and the

Figure 6.3 The catholic schoolgirls of *Derry Girls*

British army's occupation of the city – which is largely treated by the characters as a mundane nuisance.

Sitcoms can generally be grouped into three dominant types based on their locations: domestic, workplace and hang-out. *Derry Girls* combines two, with Erin's family home providing elements of domestic sitcom and the school offering a version of a workplace sitcom. Domestic sitcoms such as *black-ish* and *Friday Night Dinners* focus on the family home, deriving comic tensions from the interpersonal dynamics, along with **gender** and generational divides. Here the family itself is the 'situation', the sitcom's narrative generator, whereas the location – an office, shop, hospital – is the 'situation' in the workplace sitcom. Workplace sitcoms such as *The Office* and *Parks and Recreation* feature unrelated characters, although long-running programmes can track romantic developments through to marriage and beyond. Here the narrative generator is 'how do these people work together?' Whilst family sitcoms limit diversity, workplace sitcoms draw comic tensions from the colleagues' different backgrounds and personalities. The success of *Friends* led to the development of the 'hang-out' sitcom as the other US networks tried to build their own versions of NBC's hit show. These sitcoms centre on a group of twenty- or thirty-somethings connected through friendship, with the 'situation' based on maintaining these bonds, rather than family or workplace conflicts. In these sitcoms a bar or cafe features as a main location. As flatmates are a common way of bringing disparate characters together into friendship groups, domestic storylines and settings feature strongly.

gender the social and cultural division of people into masculine, feminine, or non-binary individuals. This is different from sex, which refers to the biological difference between male and female bodies.

For much of the genre's lifetime, 'multi-camera' sitcoms have been the dominant mode, from classic 1950s and 1960s sitcoms *I Love Lucy* and *Steptoe and Son*, through 1980s and 1990s hits *Roseanne* and *Only Fools and Horses* to more recent successes *The IT Crowd* and *The Big Bang Theory*. 'Single-camera' sitcoms such as *Parks and Recreation*, *Friday Night Dinner* and *black-ish* have grown in popularity since the late 1990s to become the dominant form of contemporary sitcom. Both sitcom modes are filmed in studios, and 'single-camera' is often a misnomer as frequently more than one camera is set up to record a take. The differences are in their production styles.

In multi-camera sitcom the performances and action are orientated towards two audiences, the live studio audience and the audience at home. Sets are organised in a three-walled proscenium style like a theatre, towards the 'fourth-wall' of the cameras and behind them a studio audience. Three (occasionally more) cameras record a scene at once, capturing the action from multiple angles and frame sizes. Multi-camera's performance style feeds off the energy exchange with the live audience, with performances incorporating brief pauses for laughter. The continuous performance style and presence of the studio audience gives a multi-camera sitcom an aura of liveness. However, episodes take multiple hours to record with multiple takes of scenes, including alternate line deliveries and pauses for writers to 'punch up' jokes that aren't landing. This is a time-efficient and economic style of filming, with the recording of an episode taking place in one day, following a week of rehearsals.

Single-camera is less time-efficient than multi-camera as it shares a filming style with drama, setting up the camera and lighting for individual shots. Here the performance is focused on the camera, with no audience providing feedback for comic timing. In this mode cameras can move into the performance space, which allows for a more dynamic use of space, as unlike multi-camera there is no risk that they will be captured by another camera recording at the same time. Whereas time is largely continuous in a multi-camera scene, single-camera can take advantage of the manipulation of time in post-production. This is seen in fast-paced and joke-dense sitcoms *30 Rock* and *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* that produce comic beats from cutaways and flashbacks often only a few seconds long. The single-camera mode is often considered a more subtle or sophisticated form of humour and performance, as there is no need to draw laughs from a studio audience. This leads it to be positioned as a more prestige form than multi-camera, which has a lower cultural status (Newman and Levine 2012). However, many single-camera sitcoms use heightened performance styles, such as *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and *Friday Night Dinner* so this distinction is not clean-cut.

Television comedy depends more than most kinds of television on the self-consciousness of performance, and the willingness of the audience to engage with the heightened speech and behaviour of characters. This is designed to cue the recognition of a social norm and to push or cross its boundaries it in a manner that becomes comic, provoking reactions from other characters and the audience. Martin in *Friday Night Dinner* and Sheldon in *The Big Bang Theory* draw comedy from their odd behaviour and disregard for social norms. The comic archetype of the 'unruly woman' (Rowe Karlyn 1995) features female characters whose behaviour, physicality or desires exceed conservative norms of female propriety, from *I Love Lucy*'s Lucy Ricardo to *Chewing Gum*'s Tracey Gordon. Focusing on performance in this way and considering a programme's attitude towards a character – are they the joke-maker or the butt of the joke? – discourages the audience from judging speech and behaviour according to our expectations of normality. Instead sitcom suspends these norms, allowing them to be reacted against for comic purposes.

Analysis of sitcom's humour can be tricky, as what is funny to one viewer may be quite different from what is funny to another, since humour depends on social **codes** and cultural understandings, which may not function the same way across a broad age group, nation or region, or gender. In order to appeal to different humour styles sitcoms frequently construct their ensembles from a variety of comic archetypes and performance styles. What is funny also depends on the numerous and largely undiscoverable variables that make up an individual **subject**'s personality. So, when analysing sitcom, rather than focusing on what is 'funny', we need to look at how the humour is being constructed. How are the comic beats set out and comic tension built? By paying attention to the programme's attitude towards a character or situation we can explore how comedy is being drawn from their actions, speech and physicality.

code in semiotics, a system or set of rules that shapes how signs can be used, and therefore how meanings can be made and understood.

subject in psychoanalysis, the term for the individual self whose identity has both conscious and unconscious components.

Genre hybridity and reality TV

reality TV programmes where the unscripted behaviour of 'ordinary people' is the focus of interest.

Reality TV is a genre of factual television defined by its hybridity. It is quite difficult to define reality TV even though it is a widely used term within television industries and popular culture. This is because so many different types of programmes are included within its boundaries that it exhibits what Misha Kavka calls a 'generic haziness' (2012: 2). Reality TV intermixes with talent shows, game shows, soap opera, lifestyle programmes and dating shows. We might define it as an unscripted genre that features non-professional performers, illustrating its distant roots in documentary. Yet reality TV also has strong links with light entertainment as well as celebrity (evolving to feature celebrities as contestants and cast members). It is often strongly formatted, with elements of construction problematising the connections with actuality that are central to documentary. Different strands of reality TV also emerge from different televisual roots, including documentary in the **docusoap**, daytime TV in lifestyle programmes and the gameshow and talent show in competitive reality.

docusoap a television form combining documentary's depiction of non-actors in ordinary situations with soap opera's continuing narratives about selected characters.

Reality television retains features of observation and interaction central to television documentary, as well a certain inquisitiveness about the lives of people and how they react to certain situations. Television documentary as a genre is associated with documenting the life of society, generating revelation and political intervention from observation. Documentary programming has a long history of making social comment and has therefore sometimes been a subject of political controversy. Documentaries that claim this level of significance are part of evening programming and connected to prestige genres of news and current affairs. Yet reality TV's docusoap and lifestyle strands grew out of apparently insignificant parts of the daily schedule, namely daytime programming with its low cultural status and connection with female audiences. Reality TV in the form of docusoaps and lifestyle television became very popular with British audiences in the late 1990s, as part of an overall televisual fascination with everyday life, a 'popular ethnography of the everyday' (Dovey 2000: 138). One part of the broadcasting day was transplanted to another, with docusoaps and lifestyle displacing conventional documentary in the evening schedule, challenging popular drama and light entertainment's previously dominant positions in these slots.

The genre term 'reality TV' has been used differently over time. It was first connected to ideas of surveillance due to the use of CCTV and camcorders in programmes centred on law and order, such as *Crimewatch*, *America's Most Wanted* and *Cops*, which exhibited varying degrees of sensationalism. The term was extended to docusoaps, a key British television factual format in the late 1990s. Programmes like *Airport* and *Vets in Practice* use the **observational documentary** mode to chronicle the everyday lives of real people. But their serialised storytelling draws on the conventions of soap opera, including character-focused narrative structure, and basis in a single geographical space and community. These strands of surveillance, a fascination with the everyday and a character-focused narrative structure were all present in MTV's ground-breaking *The Real World*. Debuting in 1992 it helped introduce the constructed environment format into 1990s reality TV by selecting 'seven strangers' to live together in a New York loft and observed what happened. Without a script, casting was key to creating the conflict that drove the programme's narrative.

observational documentary a documentary form in which the programme-maker aims to observe neutrally what would have happened even if they had not been present.

Casting for conflict is a production strategy of reality TV and was central to the success of competitive reality shows *Big Brother* and *Survivor*. These programmes escalated the surveillance element of previous programming, creating total surveillance in a constructed environment with a cast isolated in a purpose built house or remote tropical location. They also introduced competition, which became a central strand of reality TV. Drawing from gameshows they featured the narrowing down of contestants to a final winner through voting by the audience or cast members. This made both programmes social games of popularity and strategy. Competitive reality remains a popular strand of the genre, with success based on a social game or a defined skill. *The Circle* continues the constructed environment social game using a format similar to *Big Brother.* Instead of living together in a house, the contestants live in individual flats in a block and can only communicate with each other through a social media app 'the Circle'. They compete to be voted the highest rated contestant but can construct entirely fake personas to fool other competitors. Competitive reality has hybridised with other genres such as dating shows in *The Bachelor*, *Flavour of Love*, *Love Island* and *Love is Blind*, where contestants compete for success in love. Skills-based competitive reality blends lifestyle and talent shows, with contestants in *America's Next Top Model*, *RuPaul's Drag Race* and *The Great British Bake Off* set weekly challenges judged by a set of expert judges.

Despite the claims to the real evoked by its name, reality TV has evolved to exhibit a self-conscious and playful tension between authenticity and construction. Performance and spectacle, particularly emotional spectacle, are at the heart of the genre. Both contestants and audiences are invested in questions of who or what is 'real' or 'playing a game' (a question exploited in the format of *The Circle*). Annette Hill suggested that the reality TV-literate audience raised on *Big Brother* engages in a search for moments of authenticity, when real people are really themselves in a constructed environment (2002: 324). When MTV shifted their programming strategy towards reality TV in the early 2000s it targeted this genre-literate audience. The channel revived the docusoap format as 'structured reality', a form that leaned into artifice in a real-life setting. *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* and its spin-off *The Hills* centred on the interpersonal relationships and careers of young white Californians living privileged lifestyles. These programmes blended docusoap's observational style with the high production values, continuity editing and carefully composed mise-en-scène of prime-time drama (Schlotterbeck 2008). British youth channels modified this US form to appeal to British sensibilities, foregrounding class dynamics through the regional locations of *The Only Way is Essex* and *Made in Chelsea*. Where the US programmes were aspirational in tone British structured reality emphasised a playful artificiality in performance and situation, producing a pleasurable tension with the soap-like emotional intimacy of their storytelling. The British programmes used creative teams experienced in soap opera production to draw out gossip and interpersonal tensions amongst the cast, structuring situations to provoke conflict and emotional revelation (Woods 2014).

The hybrid nature of contemporary reality TV programmes complicates the relationship between realism, 'authenticity', construction and artificiality, with their blurring of boundaries between these elements driving much of viewers' pleasure in the genre. Many examples of reality TV programmes emphasise intimacy and invite viewers to assess how far the lives and experiences of participants mirror their own lives. Like drama, the intimacy of many reality TV programmes comes from their focus on character, social interaction and emotion. By mixing the ingredients from many different genres, reality TV has found a prominent place in the television schedule.

Case study: adult animated series

This case study focuses on US adult animated comedy series, which is distinct from animation targeting children. It focuses on FOX's *The Simpsons*, created by Matt Groening, a long-running programme that debuted in 1989, and Netflix's *Big Mouth*, which debuted in 2017 and is created by the team of Andrew Goldman, Jennifer Flackett, Mark Levin and Nick Kroll. *The Simpsons* centres on the Simpson family, their friends and neighbours and other characters in the fictional town of Springfield. *Big Mouth* follows a group of 12-year-old school students entering puberty and features fantastical 'hormone monsters' who somewhat ineptly guide them through their physical and emotional struggles.

syndication the sale of programmes to US cable television and to regional television broadcasters to transmit within their territory.

Running for over 30 seasons *The Simpsons* has been widely syndicated in the US and overseas, airing on Sky One, BBC2 and Channel 4 in the UK. This has made it a hugely profitable programme brand for its studio 21st Century Fox, via **syndication** and merchandising revenue. The programme was a valuable component in the 2019 mega deal that saw 21st Century Fox acquired by The Walt Disney Company. When streaming platform Disney+ launched later that year it became *The Simpsons*' exclusive streaming home. This was announced by a teaser that drew on corporate synergy, featuring the Simpson family in fancy dress as characters from Disney franchises (Figure 6.4).

The main emphasis of this case study is how animated series work in dialogue with the convention of the sitcom genre. But although these animated series have much in common with other sitcoms, they are created from drawn images and do not feature human performers on screen. Therefore, it is necessary to think about the implications and possibilities of two-dimensional, 'flat' images in relation to the sitcom's visual space and narrative. In animated series, 'impossible' things can happen, because drawn images offer many more possibilities than live-action sitcoms. Characters, objects and settings are literally flexible in the animated series. They can be distorted, expanded or contracted, subjected to all kinds of violence, and made to act in ways that are contrary to the laws of physics. The fictional worlds of animated series are much more open than the fictional worlds of conventional sitcom for this reason, but it is also the case that there are genre conventions that place

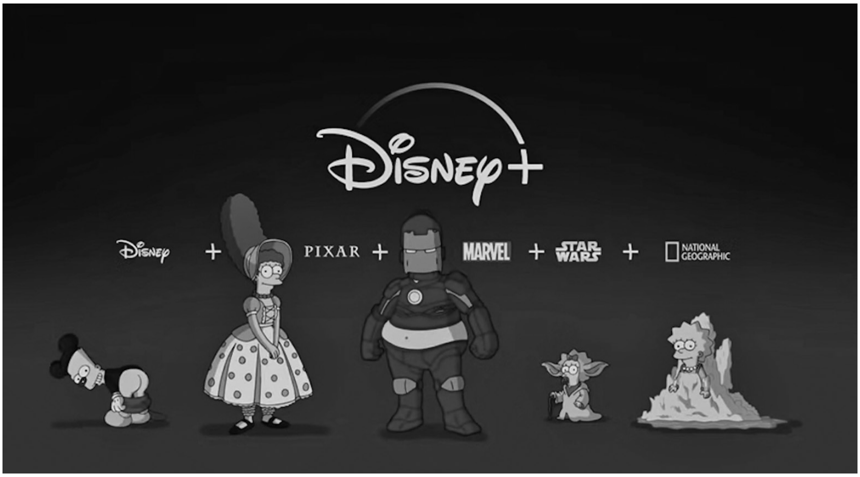

Disney+
Disney + PIXAR + MARVEL + STAR WARS + NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Figure 6.4 *The Simpsons*' launch on Disney+ is advertised through a synergistic teaser promo

boundaries on what the animated series can do. This case study looks at how the animated series exploits the possibilities of drawn images, and at how these possibilities are given structure and coherence by the conventions of genre.

The individual frames of an animated series are static, drawn images that are made to appear to move because they are placed next to one another in a sequence. A scene in an animated series is composed of drawings that are similar to each other, but where some elements of the image are changed in one image compared to the previous one. An impression of movement results, and the drawings seem to come to life. They become 'animated', in other words they are given life by their movement, and this is how animation gets its name (Wells 1998). This is the same principle that is used in filmmaking to create the impression of movement as one film frame is rapidly replaced by the next, and so on. What is different in the case of animated series is that in filmed sequences the viewer will usually assume that something real was in front of the camera, whereas in animated series there are drawings in front of the camera. Animated series are representations that are constructed out of representations.

Like the sitcom, the animated series has a stable 'situation', characters and location. As in the domestic and workplace sitcom, comedy is drawn from the relationships between the characters brought together in a shared setting, and the tensions produced by differences of sex, age and status. *The Simpsons* returns to the familiar settings of the family's home, Homer's workplace, the children's school and other town establishments. The ordinariness of the family's domestic lives combined with animation's flexibility is signified by the repeated return to the family watching television on the sofa at the end of the opening credits. The credits illustrate genre's use of repetition and innovation, with each episode featuring a different visual joke centred around the sofa (Figure 6.5). Like other teen sitcoms *Boy Meets World*, *The Inbetweeners* and *Derry Girls*, *Big Mouth* uses the school and the family homes of main characters Nick, Andrew, Jessie, Jay and Missy as primary locations. The ordinariness of its suburban setting blends with the surreal elements enabled by animation's elastic reality. The hormone monsters and other fantastical characters and objects manifest the desires, confusions and insecurities of the middle schoolers. This blend of mundane space and fantastical beings communicates the surreal and humiliating experiences of puberty,

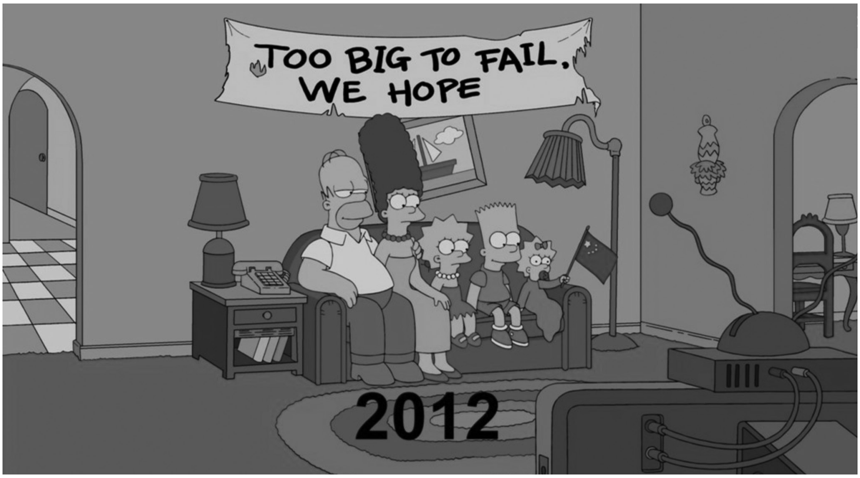

TOO BIG TO FAIL, WE HOPE
2012

Figure 6.5 'A couch gag' ends the opening credits of *The Simpsons* with its confusing physical and emotional changes. The preteens feel bewildered and alone as their familiar worlds are transformed by bodies they can't control.

Television animated series adhere to the conventions of visual realism that viewers are familiar with from live-action programmes. Although the images are two-dimensional drawings, they keep to the rules of perspective, where people and objects in the foreground are larger than people or objects in the background. When the separate frames are edited together into a sequence, the space that is represented has continuity from one frame to the next, rather than jumping too quickly from one point of view to the next. Narratives tell stories that have main characters, settings, beginnings and endings. Moments where extraordinary things happen contrast with a fictional world where most of what happens is ordinary and could even be called 'realistic'. In these ways, animated series can work hard to draw the viewer's attention away from the fact that they are drawings. *The Simpsons* and *Big Mouth* contrast animation's ability to evoke conventions of realism with a self-consciousness about the fact that they are drawn. Having established an apparently ordinary fictional world, animated series disturb this world.

Since the characters, objects, settings and narratives of animated series are drawn, extraordinary things can happen to them. The law of physics does not apply, so time and space can be manipulated. Although *Big Mouth* is specifically about the trials of aging, animation's ability to arrest characters in time makes it a very stable form of sitcom to produce, as child characters can never grow up – Lisa and Bart Simpson have remained eight and ten years old for 30 years. Animation can showcase spectacle and the surreal. This is particularly seen in science-fiction animation series like *Futurama* and *Rick and Morty*, which feature otherworldly characters, locations and events. It is quite possible for characters to explode, be flattened by a steamroller, or be stretched as if they were made out of elastic. Homer Simpson is frequently injured to no lasting effect. Animated series contrast the ordinary and the extraordinary to comic effect, in terms of what happens in their narratives and what happens visually to the characters, objects and settings that the drawings represent. The elastic reality of animation enables *Big Mouth* to draw raunchy comedy from the hormone monsters' manifestation of hormone-charged desires and fears, which have a disrupting impact on the preteens' everyday school and home life (Figure 6.6). Animation allows the programme to depict emotions as physical manifestations, including Tito the Anxiety Mosquito and the Shame Wizard, as well as anthropomorphising parts of the preteens' bodies in scenes where Andrew's pubic hairs and Jessie's vagina speak to them.

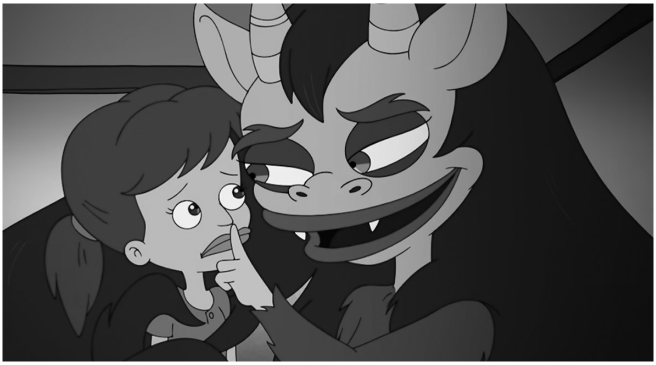


Figure 6.6 Jessie and Connie her hormone monster in *Big Mouth*

The settings of *The Simpsons* and *Big Mouth* exhibit similar tensions between restriction and freedom. As Alison Crawford (2009) has demonstrated, the use of conventions from the sitcom and from animation are different in this respect, because animation can potentially represent any place and any situation whereas live-action sitcoms are set in a very limited range of locations because of the cost of producing physical sets. *Big Mouth* can manipulate the spatial dimensions of its otherwise naturalistic spaces in fantasy sequences and musical numbers. The locations of *The Simpsons* include a nuclear plant, the shops, school and meeting places of Springfield, but also neighbouring towns such as Shelbyville, Ogdenville and Cypress Creek, and distant places like London, Paris, Japan or even outer space. However, it is never revealed which state Springfield is in, and in different episodes its physical location appears to change when its closeness or distance from neighbouring towns is shown in quite different ways. The representations of place and space in *The Simpsons* are driven by the requirements of each episode's storyline, rather than each space remaining a part of a fictional world that is consistent between episodes. This allows the series to invoke settings without much consistency from one episode to another (Wood and Todd 2005). For example, Moe's Tavern is at times inconsistent in its location; usually positioned next to King Toot's music shop, it is sometimes adjacent to a warehouse and at other times next to Barney's Bowl-A-Rama. The common factor is the sitcom narrative form, where linkages between characters and situations are the motor of the storylines and so the places associated with that storyline can suddenly be as close together or as far apart as the storyline demands.

Animation condenses movement into the minimal amount of imagery needed to express meaning. In *The Simpsons* the facial expressions and movements of the characters' lips when they talk are expressed by simple changes communicated through flat and curved lives. *Big Mouth* offers more complex facial expressions than *The Simpsons* as its characters are closer representations of human bodies than the yellow-skinned *Simpsons* characters, albeit with oversized heads. Yet the characters' facial expressions also use a limited amount of mouth and eye shapes. The opening credit sequence of *The Simpsons* moves rapidly from place to place to place and person to person, introducing the location of Springfield and the main characters. The point of view moves from ground level to high up in the sky, swooping around as it follows Bart on his way home from school. But in the main body of each episode, the alternation of points of view is much more stable and conforms to the conventions for live action most of the time, so that visually extraordinary moments are more strongly marked. The bodies of the characters in *The Simpsons* and *Big Mouth* remain relatively static and their skin and clothing are not shaded but instead consist of blocks of single colours. Black outlines surround the edges of the characters' bodies and the objects in the frame. The backgrounds in the images are as much in focus as the foreground, and the colours of the backgrounds are as rich as those of the people and objects in the foreground. The movements of the 'camera' are relatively simple, outside of moments of spectacle such as *Big Mouth*'s musical numbers. The introduction of computers into the workflow of animators and the move from cell animation to digital ink and paint has enabled more complex staging and use of space than in the early years of *The Simpsons*. However, simplified movement and animation styles make for more efficient workflows for television's compressed production schedules, compared to the detail allowed by the years-long production of animated features for cinema.

The implication of these animation styles is that the viewer is set at a distance from the images on the screen when watching *The Simpsons*, *Rick and Morty*, *Big Mouth* or *BoJack Horseman*. This distanced visual style allows for a kind of realism that comes about because of the series' relationship with genre conventions. Jason Mittell (2004: 188–94) argues that the realism of *The Simpsons* comes from a tension between animation's possibilities for extraordinary things to happen and the sitcom's conventions of narrative closure at the end of each episode. The conventions of sitcom include the idea that each episode will introduce a new storyline that raises a problem for its characters, and then this problem is resolved. For Mittell, *The Simpsons*' realism comes from the way that it parodies the lack of realism in sitcom. *Big Mouth* and *The Simpsons* exhibit the kind of realism that Ien Ang (1985: 41–50) has described as emotional realism, where viewers understand and empathise with the emotions and psychological situations of soap opera characters even if their lifestyles are distant from their own experiences. Despite its fantastical and surreal elements *Big Mouth*'s focus on the emotional struggles of preteens and the access it provides to their interiority produces an intimate engagement with the characters' experiences. Alongside its transgressive, raunchy comedy its storylines offer an education in a range of issues affecting preteens and teenagers. In *The Simpsons*, the characters are used to explore large-scale social issues like the dangers of nuclear energy, or the idea that television 'dumbs down' the population and desensitises people to violence. Mittell (2004: 190) suggests that the series

> uses its cartoon form to pose problems, more akin to those of real life, that simply cannot be solved within a half-hour. The show then regularly solves these unsolvable problems in spite of itself, both parodying the artificiality of the sitcom tradition and demonstrating the power of animation to represent "realities" which cannot be captured in a three-camera studio or before a live audience.

The problems faced by conventional sitcom characters are relatively minor ones, whereas in *The Simpsons*, for example, Homer several times blows up the nuclear plant where he works and is drawn into an evil mastermind's plans for world domination. Animation can be transgressive in ways that conventional sitcom cannot, because it is distanced from the laws of physics and the consequences of the events that occur. It can take the conventions of domestic sitcom to an extreme by exaggerating the narrative structure of posing problems and solving them, and so at the same time animation can expose the absurdity of those conventions.

postmodernism the most recent phase of capitalist culture, the aesthetic forms and styles associated with it, and the theoretical approaches developed to understand it.

This play with the conventions of genre is the reason why *The Simpsons* has been described as **postmodern** television. Postmodernism refers to the way that texts in various cultural forms including fine art, film, literature and television use parody, irony and playfulness, both to take part in and to criticise consumer society. Paul Wells (2002: 24) argues that animation has taken on the methods of the artists of the early twentieth century who wanted to explore means of visual expression and perspective by borrowing ideas from advertising images or developing non-representational, abstract ways of painting. This draws attention to the means used to make representations, rather than their content, and in painting this meant drawing the viewer's attention to the flat surface of a work of art rather than thinking of the picture as a window through which the viewer could look into a version of the world. In *The Simpsons* and *Big Mouth* there are still representations of the world (people, houses, trees, etc) and organised storylines. But visually, the programmes keep the flat two-dimensionality of their drawn images in the viewer's awareness, rather than trying to conceal it. Whereas animation has been understood as a medium for children, the self-consciousness, reflexivity and parody that *The Simpsons* and *Big Mouth* exhibit works together with their commentaries on significant social issues to shift them away from an address to children and instead positions them as something worthy of adults' attention. As Simone Knox (2006) argues, *The Simpsons* both adopts and comments on its own narratives, allusions and place in popular culture, so that it is both commercially successful as a product and also praised as a critique of commercial media.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Genre study is a way of dividing up and classifying groups of television programmes, and also understanding how viewers make use of genre in order to understand and enjoy programmes
- Television theorists have debated whether genre is a property of television texts themselves, or a way for viewers and critics to understand them
- All television texts participate in genre to some extent, and often participate in several genres simultaneously
- Different genres of television programme address their audiences in different ways, and reveal different assumptions about the interests, pleasures and social meanings of programmes in that genre
- Comparing and contrasting programmes from different genres can illuminate the similarities and differences in how television deals with related ideas and themes

Bibliography

Allen, R. (1985) *Speaking of Soap Operas*. Chapel Hill, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

Ang, I. (1985) *Watching Dallas: Soap Operas and the Melodramatic Imagination*, trans. D. Couling, revised edition. London: Routledge.

Bignell, J. (2005) *Big Brother: Reality TV in the Twenty-First Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Corner, J. (1999) *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Creeber, G. (ed.) (2001) *The Television Genre Book*. London: British Film Institute.

Crawford, A. (2009) '"Oh Yeah!": *Family Guy* as magical realism?', *Journal of Film and Video*, 61(2), pp. 52–69.

Dovey, J. (2000) *Freakshow*: *First Person Media and Factual Television*. Cambridge: Polity.

Dyer, R., Geraghty, C., Jordan, M., Lovell, T., Paterson, R. and Stewart, J (1981) *Coronation Street*. London: British Film Institute.

Falvey, E. (2020) 'Situating Netflix's original adult animation: Observing taste cultures and the legacies of "quality" television through *BoJack Horseman* and *Big Mouth*', *Animation*, 15(2), pp. 116–29.

Feuer, J. (1992) 'Genre study and television', in Allen R. (ed.), *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*. London: Routledge, pp. 138–60.

Geraghty, C. (1991) *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime Time Soaps*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hamad, H. (2016) ‘Contemporary medical television and crisis in the NHS’, *Critical Studies in Television*, 11(2), pp. 136–50.

Hill, A. (2002) ‘Big Brother: The real audience’, *Television & New Media*, 3(3), pp. 323–40.

Jacobs, J. (2003) *Body Trauma TV: The New Hospital Dramas*. London.

Kavka, M. (2012) *Reality TV*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Klein, A. (2021) *Millennials Killed the Video Star: MTV’s Transition to Reality Programming*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Knox, S. (2006) ‘Reading the ungraspable double-codedness of *The Simpsons*’, *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 34(2), pp. 72–81.

Lacey, N. (2000) *Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Levine, E. (2020) *Her Stories: Daytime Soap Opera and US Television History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.

Mills, B. (2009) *The Sitcom*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Mittell, J. (2004) *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. London: Routledge.

Neale, S. and Krutnik, F. (1990) *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. London: Routledge.

Neale, S. and Turner, G. (2001) ‘Introduction: what is genre?’, in Creeber, G. (ed.), *The Television Genre Book*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 1–7.

Newman, M. and Levine, E. (2012) *Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Rowe, K. (1995) *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Schlotterbeck, J. (2008) ‘What happens when real people start getting cinematic: Laguna Beach and contemporary T.V. aesthetics’, *Scope*, 12. Available at www.scope.nottingham. ac.uk/article.php?issue=12&id=1081.

Stempel-Mumford, L. (1995) *Love and Ideology in the Afternoon: Soap Opera, Women and Television Genre*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Wagg, S. (ed.) (1998) *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference*. London: Routledge.

Wells, P. (1998) *Understanding Animation*. London: Routledge.

Wells, P. (2002) *Animation and America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Wood, A. and Todd, A. M. (2005) ‘“Are we there yet?” Searching for Springfield and *The Simpsons*’ rhetoric of Omnitopia’, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 22(3), pp. 207–22.

Woods, F. (2014) ‘Classed femininity, performativity, and camp in British structured reality programming’, *Television & New Media*, pp. 197–214.

Television Realities

7

- Introduction 158
- Factual television 158
- Realism and television technologies 160
- British soap opera and realism 162
- Realism and ideology 165
- News and liveness 166
- The documentary mode 169
- Case study: docudrama 174
- Summary of key points 177
- Bibliography 177

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-8

Television Realities

realism the aim for representations to reproduce reality faithfully, and the ways this is done.

code in semiotics, a system or set of rules that shapes how signs can be used, and therefore how meanings can be made and understood.

genre a kind or type of programme. Programmes of the same genre have shared characteristics.

drama-documentary a television form combining dramatised storytelling with the 'objective' informational techniques of documentary. Abbreviated as 'dramadoc' or 'docudrama'.

documentary a form aiming to record actual events, often with an explanatory purpose or to analyse and debate an issue.

docusoap a television form combining documentary's depiction of non-actors in ordinary situations with soap opera's continuing narratives about selected characters.

reality TV programmes where the unscripted behviour of 'ordinary people' is the focus of interest.

denotation in semiotics, the function of signs to portray or refer to something in the real world.

Introduction

Realism is a particularly ambiguous term in the analysis of television. One meaning focuses on what is represented: that actual scenes, places and people are represented rather than imagined or fictional ones. A second meaning refers to television's representation of recognisable and often contemporary experience, such as in the representation of characters in whom the audience can believe, or apparently likely chains of events. This meaning of realism relies on the familiarity of the forms and conventions, the **codes** that represent a reality. But, finally, another meaning of realism would reject the conventions of established realistic forms, and look for new and different forms to give access to the real. In each of these meanings, however, realism assumes the separation of the text from a reality which pre-exists it. This chapter discusses the different ways that television represents the real, in a range of different **genres**. This involves considering the different methodologies that can be used in Television Studies to approach these issues, and the strengths and weaknesses of different means of answering related questions. The chapter includes a case study on a hybrid of fictional and factual television, the **drama-documentary** or docudrama, and explores the critical arguments advanced about this form of programme.

Factual television

In the television industry, the non-fiction programmes discussed in this chapter fit into the category of 'factual' television. This category includes programmes which feature non-actors on screen, in the modes of:

- **Documentary**
- Drama-documentary (also called docudrama)
- **Docusoap**
- **Reality TV**

Programmes such as these aim to represent reality, to dramatise events which occurred in the past, or **denote** real people in a continuing serial. A clear example is the documentary *102 Minutes That Changed America* (Figure 7.1) in which sequences shot on 11 September 2001 were assembled to document the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. In this image, amateur footage captures a moment when pedestrians in Times Square in New York stood watching live pictures of one of the Twin Towers burning. The shot conveys the immediacy of a real event, and the responses of those who were in Manhattan on that day.

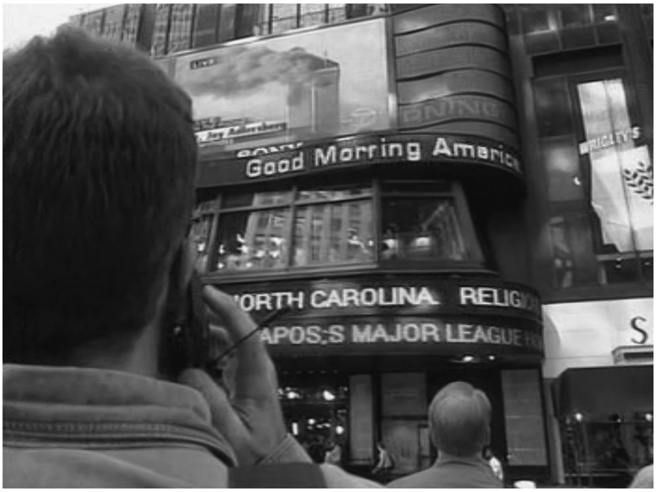


Figure 7.1 Images of the 9/11 attacks in New York, in *102 Minutes That Changed America*

It might seem that television technology and the conventions of television programme-making are used in these examples as neutral media for representing personalities and situations that already existed, or would have existed even if the programme were not being made. But many programmes that appear to be factual cross into the territory of fictional entertainment because they are based in situations constructed for television. *Big Brother* is the best-known example of this type of television, a reality TV programme where members of the public are cast to live in a house specifically built for the programme and are aware that they are being recorded 24 hours a day. Similarly, some programmes aim to reconstruct events which actually happened but use actors performing scripted action and dialogue to do this. Documentaries that cover historical time periods or events where no archive footage is available will sometimes use re-enactment sequences for illustrative purposes. Live television broadcasts of real events – such as the Olympics or a royal wedding – can be highly structured and planned, with presenters' speech scripted. Television drama can be filmed using the codes of realism linked to documentary aesthetics or employ performance styles that bring the feeling of realism to a fictional story.

Television realism is a flexible category, containing at one end of the spectrum news footage which claims to document events occurring independently of the fact that they are being recorded, and at the other end drama entertainment programmes which claim to be realistic but are constructed for television. Television realism is a matter both of content and of the conventions or codes which structure the representation seen on the screen. It is the interaction between what is on television and the ways in which an audience understands a programme that is at the heart of television realism. Television has a 'language of realism' which programme-makers and audiences share.

In relation to forms of realism, factual programmes aim to present information about the diverse ways in which people live and to broaden the horizons of understanding for the audience. The BBC single documentary *Grenfell* tells the stories of some of the residents of the London tower block destroyed in 2017's catastrophic fire. Using observational footage, interviews, archive and social media content to tell the events of the fire it then tracks surviving residents and the official investigation into the disaster in the year that follows (Figure 7.2). Constructed factual series *Old People's Home For 4 Year Olds* creates a 'social experiment' where nursery children spent time with elderly residents of a retirement village. The Channel 4 series used the intergenerational relationships that developed to raise awareness of social isolation amongst the elderly. In Netflix documentary serial *High on the Hog* presenter Stephen Satterfield tells a history of America through African-American food cultures. Travelling to West Africa to trace the origins of these food cultures, then the American South and across the nation, he interviews food writers, historians, farmers and chefs who are preserving African-American food traditions. All these programmes seek to tell viewers something of the world, using a combination of documentary techniques.

Factual television forms invite audiences to experience the lives of others, so we can see how television realism carries an assumption of social responsibility. We might also consider how television realism negotiates between ideas of similarity and difference, the familiar and unfamiliar, and thus performs an **ideological** role in shaping the norms of society. We in part judge a programme's realism through our own experiences, along with its use of codes and conventions. This is also why we must take care in calling something 'realistic' as this is a subjective experience – according to whose experiences is this being judged as realistic?

ideology the set of beliefs, attitudes and assumptions arising from the economic and class divisions in a culture, underlying the ways of life accepted as normal in that culture.

Realism and television technologies

Television uses technologies of recording and distributing images that seem to transcribe realities 'objectively', or in **semiotic** terminology 'denotatively'. As a result, factual television images can acquire the status of evidence. However,

semiotics the study of signs and their meanings, initially developed for the study of spoken language, and now used also to study the visual and aural 'languages' of other media such as television.

Figure 7.2 Documentary *Grenfell* uses video from social media to tell the story of the fire

there is a separation between the objects or people which are recorded and the recording itself, as a transformation happens in the recording process. Choices are made over what to record, how to record it, how to structure it through editing and narrative. Because of this separation, because they are representations of realities rather than realities themselves, television representations are ideological: they encode social points of view that condense, displace or forget social relationships.

Programmes often conceal the work of their production, just as other kinds of product made for our mass society (such as tins of soup, cars, newspapers or clothes) are abstracted from the work processes and institutional arrangements which created them. Products like these are called **commodities**, and in the early twentieth century the German theorist Walter Benjamin argued that mechanical reproduction processes which give rise to the media of photography, cinema and now television substitute ‘a plurality of copies for a unique existence’ (1969: 212). Television images are ‘copies’ of reality not in the sense that they are fakes, but in that they are the result of a mechanical and digital process and circulate remotely from the physical body of their producer. Television’s ‘copies’ of reality can be distributed widely, and are seen at the same time by mass audiences either alone or in groups. Despite the **iconic** relationship between those people, places and events and the images themselves, media images created through this process of reproduction remove what has been recorded from its social and historical environment, and (to some extent) from control by the state or elite groups. The interpretation of television images is not controlled by these contexts and social relationships, either.

commodity a raw material or product whose economic value is established by market price rather than the intrinsic qualities or usefulness of the material or product itself.

iconic sign in semiotics, a sign which resembles its referent. Photographs, for example, contain iconic signs resembling the objects they represent.

Contemporary digital technologies for recording and editing television, and for transmitting it over data networks, pose a potential challenge to the iconic realism of the medium. These digital processes extend the process of unfixing the image from its referent, its maker and its social and historical determinants. Digitisation:

- Increases the ease of manipulating images
- Allows the transmission of images as electronic units of data along cables in the global communications system at high speed and across national boundaries
- Permits the digitisation of existing footage into electronic data which can be stored and accessed remotely
- Allows the **convergence** of television with interactive technologies

convergence the process whereby previously separate media technologies merge together. For example, a mobile phone can now be used to take calls, send messages, take photos, browse the internet, store and stream video content and music.

New technologies have modified the realist claims of television, so that digital images can connote immediacy, such as the grain of video in a surveillance video or the juddery, handheld footage recorded on a mobile phone. These technologies have connotations of realism as they infer transparency, the simultaneity in time and space of the person who made the recording and the event which has been recorded, claiming to show reality as it occurred. Images of an event captured as it happens by professional news cameras or the mobile phone footage of a member of the public carry connotations of witness. The internet and social media allow for the instant circulation of footage captured as an event happens, and live transmission is no longer only found in the official space of a news broadcast. But we also know that post-production effects can be used to alter images, as digital recording, images and sound are converted into numerical values which can be easily manipulated in the computer. We have greater access to a wider amount of images of the real, but we are also aware of the possibility an image may not be all it seems.

There is a correspondence between thinking of realism as a set of codes that document recognisable realities and thinking of society as constituted by the exchanges of speech and expression between individuals. Realist television forms assume the transparency of the television medium, just as society assumes transparent communication between individuals. In the same way that different kinds of people use different **discourses** deriving from their social class, gender, religion or political outlook, so television realisms represent realities in ways that are recognisable to some viewers and not others. If television realism can never match its codes and conventions to the different versions of reality which actual viewers experience, we need to ask how the notion of realism has become such a widely understood and widely used criterion for discussing and evaluating television. The answer to this problem is to understand how some forms of realism have become dominant codes, and why.

discourse a particular use of language for a certain purpose in a certain context (such as academic discourse, or poetic discourse), and similarly in television, a particular usage of television's audiovisual 'language' (news programme discourse or nature documentary discourse, for instance).

The dominant form of realism in television, labelled by theorists 'classic realism', roughly coincides with the epoch of modern industrial society. It can be seen in the majority of television fiction programmes, and also affects the representation of people in factual television programmes and documentary. An individual's personality and morals determines their choices and actions, and human nature is seen as a pattern of personality and moral differences. These differences permit the viewer to share the hopes and fears of a wide range of characters. The comparisons and judgements about identifiable human figures represented on television are reliant on a common code of judgement, a notion of 'normality', which is the terrain on which the viewer's relationships with characters can occur. Classic realism represents a world of psychologically consistent individual **subjects**, and addresses its viewers as the same kind of rational and psychologically consistent individual. The action of the television text is to establish communication and offer involving **identification** with the images it shows. Individual television texts need to be constructed as wholes that promise intelligibility and significance. The realist assumption of the match between the television text and a pre-existing reality underlies this process, by posing the image as equivalent to a real perception of recognisable social space. This depends on the equivalence between what and how the viewer might see and be seen, and what and how the television point of view might see and be seen. There is a connecting assumption shared by the viewer and television, and by their world and the world represented on television. The viewer's varied and ordered pattern of identifications makes **narrative** crucial to classic realism, for the different kinds of look, point of view, sound and speech in narrative are the forms through which this communication between text and audience is produced.

subject in psychoanalysis, the term for the individual self whose identity has both conscious and unconscious components.

identification a term deriving from psychoanalytic theories of cinema, which describes the viewer's conscious or unconscious wish to take the place of someone or something in a television text.

narrative an ordered sequence of images and sound that tells a fictional or factual story.

British soap opera and realism

The television form of British soap opera exhibits several kinds of realism, for it is a continuing form, flowing onward like our conventional experience of time in reality. British soap opera's social realism derives from the cultural context within which the first regular British soap, *Coronation Street*, was created in 1960. The programme's portrayal of urban Northern working-class life contained the same nostalgia for community, as well as tensions between traditions and social change that were being dramatised in the films, theatre plays and television's single dramas at the turn of the 1960s. At the time British culture was beginning to undergo significant social and cultural change, with *Coronation Street* representing a community that was becoming less a feature of everyday British life. The community focus of British soap opera persists as the impossible dream of binding separated families and groups together.

Soaps are multi-character dramas, and their stories, settings and concerns are embedded in the mythologies of community in national popular culture. They appear to 'reflect' the real experience of being part of a community, with their fictional worlds functioning as a microcosm of 'ordinary life'. The continuing production of soaps and their mapping onto seasonal events – the World Cup, the LGBTQ+ festival of Pride and Christmas happen at the same time on *EastEnders* as they do in viewers lives – helps to support the creation of a continuous present in their narratives. But the condensation and narrative progress that are necessary to television fiction mean that soaps do more than 'reflect'. There are very frequent breaking points in soap opera families and communities (such as divorce, birth, death, gossip and antagonism between characters), which enable new stories to begin. So while the foundations of soap opera reflect ideological norms through their investment in the family, community and regional identity, it is the disturbance or lack of these structures that drives the narrative. Charlotte Brunsdon has explained that

> The coherence of the serial does not come from the subordination of space and time to linear narrativity, as it does in classical narrative cinema, but from the continuities of moral and ideological frameworks which inform the dialogue … although soap opera narrative may seem to ask 'What will happen next?' as its dominant question, the terrain on which this question is posed is determined by a prior question – 'What kind of person is this?' And in the ineluctable posing of this question, of all characters, whatever their social position, soap opera poses a potential moral equality of all individuals.
>
> (1981: 35)

The action in soaps takes place within a set of values that provide the norms for characters' lives, and even though characters continually violate these norms, they remain bound by them and have to learn to adjust to them or suffer the consequences. While the narrative of soap opera poses moral questions of its characters, the leakage of these questions out of and back into the realities of the viewer's life, and out of and into other media discourses, such as newspaper stories, spreads them across society as a whole. It is soap opera realism that allows this transfer between fiction and reality, and enables soaps to claim social responsibility and public service functions.

Soaps are an arena for debates about morality and social behaviour in modern societies. The domestic intimacy and emotional realism of British soap opera helps it play an educational role. Characters that viewers know and care for provide intimate experience of social issues such as domestic abuse, knife crime and mental health crises. In this way British television institutions can position themselves as socially responsible and responding to their public service remit, with programmes promoting their research with charities and advocacy groups and how this informs storytelling. The production team of *EastEnders* worked with domestic abuse charity Women's Aid in the development and production of a long-running domestic abuse storyline across 2019–2020, which climaxed in the murder of Chantelle by her abusive husband Gray. Women's Aid also worked with *Coronation Street* on a storyline featuring coercive control. The charity highlighted how these storylines both educate viewers and help victims recognise behaviours in their own relationships, prompting contact with charities for support (Parker 2020). We can see here how the realism of soaps depends not only on their construction and form within their television genre but on the discourse generated around them. How the press and the public talk about a soap opera's storytelling contributes to perceptions of its realism. An important question for Television Studies becomes how particular forms of address and representational form are used to 'reflect' and respond 'responsibly' to social life.

melodrama a form of drama characterised by heightened performance styles, a focus on reversals of fortune and intense emotional reactions to events.

Melodrama informs soap opera's storytelling and the genre's performances and narrative structure of cliff-hangers produce heightened emotions, with British soap opera in particular operating a complex balance between melodrama and realism. The viewer's pleasure must therefore partly depend on their recognition of the programme's mediation of realism and melodrama. Ien Ang's (1985) study of international viewers of US primetime soap opera *Dallas* found several viewers viewed the programme as 'realistic', despite the glamorous and wealthy lifestyles on display being distant from their own. This 'emotional realism' saw viewers connect to the psychological and emotional experiences of the characters, which they judged as 'real'. The television theorist Robert Allen (1985: 85) has argued that 'soap opera trades narrative closure for paradigmatic complexity', meaning that although soaps, like life, continue across many years without end, the result of this is that very large numbers of narrative strands can be kept going in parallel. For any one character, change and unpredictability are the norm, but in the long run this has no effect on the programme's community as a whole. Yet, at any one moment, the experiences and actions of any character will affect all the other characters with whom they come into contact. The realism of soap opera refers not only to this apparent unpredictability and change but to the programme's consistently represented world and fidelity to its own fictional identity.

The shifting relations of characters in soap opera are paralleled by the shifting of the camera's points of view, that give access to the widely differing people and locations that appear in each episode. *EastEnders*, like all British soaps, represents a community with a regional identity. Like *Coronation Street* it has a residential setting in an urban area, here the fictional Walford in the East End of London. The programme blends private domestic space with the communal public space of Albert Square and its pub, clubs, shops and market. Issues that characterise the lives of London residents, such as gentrification and rising house prices, rarely impact the characters of the Square. However, as it is a soap with many working-class characters, the struggle to earn a living and provide a home for your family are recurring influences on storylines. Characters feel tied to Albert Square, where they work and live, but the roads into it also lead outwards, to Walford and the rest of London, allowing the diffusion of the action towards the edge of the represented space and the invasion of that space from the outside. When long-running actors leave *EastEnders* without their characters being killed off, their character's final scene frequently sees them walking or driving out of the Square.

Realism and ideology

Television realism places the viewer in the position of a unified subject 'interpellated' with, or folded into, the discourses of a dominant ideology (Althusser 1971). Here they are subjected (made into a subject, and subject to the ideology) to a version of reality in which they misrecognise that reality and misrecognise themselves. This theory of how ideology in television separates the subject from their 'real' self shares its structure with the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's theory of subjectivity. For Lacan (1977) the subject is the result of a division between their 'real' self and the means (such as words, photographs or other representations) through which the subject comes to know themselves. Theorists of television have therefore turned to **psychoanalytic** theory in order to explain how individuals are hailed into ideology and subjectivity by the experience of watching television. One of the consequences of the ideologies of television realism is a contradiction between the viewer's working activity, where they are a producer, and their leisure activity, in which they are positioned as a consumer. Althusser makes the point that ideology is not just a question of ideas circulating in people's heads but is inscribed in certain material practices. The reactionary practice of television realism involves the entrapment of the viewer in a position of apparent dominance and control over the represented reality offered by television's discourses about reality. Realist television discourse resolves contradictions by representing a unified and rational world of causes and effects, actions and consequences, moral choices and rewards or punishments. It distances the viewer from the contradictory and ambiguous dynamics of reality and suggests that political action to intervene in the ways that reality is produced from day to day is unnecessary.

psychoanalysis the study of human mental life, including not only conscious thoughts, wishes and fears but also unconscious ones. Psychoanalysis is an analytical and theoretical set of ideas as well as a therapeutic treatment.

If television, particularly realist television, is performing ideological work in concealing a more correct vision of social and political realities, the makers of television might be under an obligation to draw the attention of the viewer to the non-equivalence of television and reality. According to this view, television cannot be a 'true' representation, but it may be a medium in which the beginnings of a recognition of the true state of affairs could occur. In this context realism is no longer a reflection of an exterior reality but one of the forms in which representations and audiences connect with each other. The makers of television must draw the viewer's attention to their relationship with the medium in order to make them recognise the social relations that this relationship involves. So perhaps the strangeness or unrealistic nature of television versions of reality might draw the viewer's attention to the fact that they are watching a representation and not a reality. When familiar recognitions and identifications break down, viewers might grasp what it is that the relations between television and audience, and between real and representation, involve. This strategy is known as 'critical realism', and involves recognising a relationship between the television text and material social realities, yet resisting the television text's transcription of reality as if television were a neutral medium, so that the work of the forms through which representation takes place is recognised as not natural but cultural and constructed.

News and liveness

Liveness is a central feature of broadcast television, as John Ellis (2000: 32) points out:

> The separation and absence that characterised the cinema, and made it such a suitable vehicle for fiction, were not a necessary part of television; far from it. Television allowed its viewers to witness remote events as they happened. Television provided its audiences with a powerful sense of co-presence with the events it showed. It provided them with a sense of togetherness in separation with their fellow audience members. It reached its audience in their homes. Television made the act of witness into an intimate and domestic act.

The codes and conventions of television and the ideologies of realism enable televisual liveness to encourage us to believe what we see is accurate, rather than constructed and mediated. This is 'real' because it is broadcast as it unfolds and we experience it directly. But although live coverage presents itself as direct and 'real', we must always remember it is 'mediated'**.** It is shaped by choices of the programme-makers into a narrative the viewer can understand. Stephanie Marriott points out that live broadcasting uses mediation to effect 'transformation of the stuff of the world into the material of the broadcast event' (2007: 3). These ideas of witness and the real make news one of television's genres most closely connected with ideas of realism. Television usurped newspapers as the dominant source of news in Britain and other developed nations, although it has recently been somewhat eclipsed by internet sources. In the UK television news's position as a trusted authority is partly due to public service broadcasting regulations that require 'impartiality', '**balance**' and 'objectivity' from the news provided by the major terrestrial channels, but not newspaper publishing or internet sources such as blogs and social media. Another key consideration is the value of immediacy in television news, derived from its incorporation of **actuality** pictures and live reporting, a feature now shared by social media. The internet's status as always 'live' is a threat to television's longstanding claims on immediacy.

balance the requirement in television news and current affairs to present both sides of an argument or issue.

actuality footage television pictures representing an event that was filmed live. The term usually refers to pictures of news events.

Television news programmes can incorporate live footage, with advances in satellite and mobile technology enabling live contact with reporters in distant locations. Since television news attracts its audience with the promise of seeing and hearing news events happen, especially when they are happening live, there is both a professional pride for broadcasters and a hook for potential audiences in using actuality footage. Stephanie Marriott points out that news programmes 'sometimes repeatedly foreground, in moments of high self-reflexivity, the central significance of immediacy to the broadcast' (2007: 60). This is communicated through presenters' speech, on-screen markers signalling the broadcast is 'LIVE' and reporters introduced as 'live' from their location.

24-hour news channels enable breaking news footage of 'media events' (Dayan and Katz 1992) to be broadcast live, for example from a natural disaster, war zone, public protest or ceremonial event. Here the event is shaped by newscasters and reporters' commentary, who provide informed speculation and context as events unfold. As more material and expert commentary is available, the event is further shaped by the programme-makers, then cleanly packaged into a coherent narrative for an evening news bulletin. Mobile phone footage recorded by members of the public and shared via social media has seen 'citizen journalism' become an important source for news reports. Witnesses capture footage on their phones as an event happens, with these videos enabling television news to show actuality footage of events before news journalists can access the scene, or where they are prevented from accessing an event due to governmental or geographic restrictions. Actuality images like these ground news stories in visual evidence. But in the case of video shot by individuals witnessing the event, an added layer of authenticity is created because of the opportunity for nonprofessional video makers to generate the images themselves.

news value the degree of significance attributed to a news story, where items with high news value are deemed most significant to the audience.

There is a hierarchy of **news value**, in which live actuality pictures are the most attractive to the producers of television news programmes, followed by actuality pictures which have been pre-recorded, and finally those stories which cannot be illustrated by actuality footage or other visual forms, such as an interview, and which are the stories least likely to appear in the producer's running order for a programme. News programmes depend on a mythology in which the television audience can apparently directly witness any significant events occurring anywhere in the world. Television news claims to denote events objectively and immediately, offering a neutral and transparent channel of communication. The iconic quality of television images, which appear simply to record what is unfolding in front of the camera, are key signifiers of this mythology of transparency in television news and in other television factual genres. The word 'television' means 'seeing at a distance', and television news is a central example of the mythology underlying the medium. For almost everyone in the television audience, the public world of politics, war, business and natural catastrophe is distant, but television news advertises its ability to connect the relatively isolated and disengaged viewer with this more dramatic and apparently important reality. Television news bridges the gap between public space and private space, which has ambivalent ideological effects:

- On one hand, the audience is linked by the medium of television with the wider public world
- On the other hand, this wider world is shaped according to the codes and conventions of television news, and necessarily remains at a distance from the audience

The institutional and representational structures of television news simultaneously involve the audience and disempower them. The internet and social media offer the chance to circumvent the institutions and professional practices of television news. This can be valuable in representing conflict and war, especially where national governments restrict their citizens' access to traditional media. But there is also the danger of creating 'bubbles' where viewers only consume media content that confirms their own viewpoints, rather than news programmes shaped by requirements of balance and impartiality such as those produced by major UK broadcasters.

The news must deal with events which are by definition new each day, and to do this it has powerful codes for giving shape and meaning to news reports. Reports make use of four narrative functions (Hartley 1982: 118–19):

- Framing
- Focusing
- Realising
- Closing

register a term in the study of language for the kinds of speech or writing used to represent a particular kind of idea or to address a certain audience.

Framing is the activity of establishing the news topic, its headline concerns, usually done by the mediating figure of the newsreader who invokes the narrative code in which the report will be presented. For example, political news is usually coded as an adversarial debate. Although mediators such as news presenters speak in a neutral **register** and establish themselves and the news broadcasting organisation as neutral too, the effect of this is to make the setting-up of the narrative code appear invisible to viewers: it seems to arise from the news itself rather than from how it is being presented.

voice-over speech accompanying visual images but not presumed to derive from the same place or time as the images.

Focusing refers to the opening out of the news report into further detail, conveyed by reporters and correspondents who speak for the news broadcasting institution (Hartley [1982: 110–11] calls them 'institutional voices'). These institutional voices develop the narrative by providing background information, explaining what is at stake in the news event, and introducing comment and actuality footage that illustrates this. The interviews, reports and comment by people involved in the news event are part of the function known as realising, whereby evidence of the news event and reactions to it from interested individuals and groups are presented. The availability of actuality footage gives important added value to news reports because it is crucial to the narrative function of realising the story. But although actuality footage might seem to be the dominant type of sign in television news programmes, its visual signs never appear without accompanying **voice-over** commentary. While it is possible for visual sequences to narrate on their own, the multiple meanings that images always have can be contained and directed by the reporter's institutional voice on the soundtrack. Realisation therefore tends to confirm the work of the news reporters' framing and focusing activities.

Moving out of the news studio to focus and realise news stories allows room for the visual and aural signs in the programme to differ from and affect the news presenter's framing activities. For instance, the connotations of the signs in news programmes have significant empowering or disempowering effects in the meanings of news reports. The authority of the newsreaders and commentators in the studio can contrast with the much less empowering presence of a member of the public in the street, or a reporter struggling to speak over the voices of a crowd, for example. Closing refers to the way that a news report moves towards a condensed encapsulation of the report, likely to be repeated in the closing headlines of the news programme, and which presents the **preferred reading** of the report. Closure might involve discounting some of the points of view on the news event that have been represented in the report, or repeating the point of view already connoted by the frame or focus. This movement towards closure is confirmed at the end of reports, but the report as a whole will involve it throughout.

preferred reading an interpretation of a text that seems to be the one most encouraged by the text, the 'correct' interpretation.

Television technologies are not neutral, and the capacity to circulate images denoting realities has political effects. One example of this is the perception of the Middle East and parts of the Global South by Western television audiences, where political and military violence and natural disasters are the most frequent versions of reality denoted in news and current affairs television coverage. Media theorists have studied the patterns of regional and global news coverage, and discovered that, although the greater part of news imagery relates to the country in which news is made or to the neighbouring countries, it is the United States and other Western nations which appear in news coverage as the active makers of news, while countries in other regions are portrayed as the passive suffering objects of news events. These divisions between active makers of the news and passive sufferers of news events are parallel to the division between the rich, largely Western nations which intervene in world affairs and control world institutions such as the World Bank or United Nations, and other relatively impoverished and politically disempowered nations.

The documentary mode

Factual programmes represent society, and inform and educate the audience both about aspects of life with which they are familiar, and aspects signified as unfamiliar. Factual programmes aim to make the 'other' into the familiar, and make the familiar seem 'other' by presenting it in unfamiliar ways. Their representations and narratives can persuade, analyse and argue. Factual television can provide testimony and act as a form of witness, making viewers into second-hand witnesses. This is in part because the communication of different aspects of society through factual programmes is part of television's public service function.

Documentary is a factual form that presents images and sounds recorded directly from the world. However, a complex relationship exists between the action that is recorded and its representation in the final product. This makes 'realism' a contested form in theoretical discussions of documentary. A documentary cannot present raw footage, what we see is always shaped by the maker's perspective and point of view. Michael Renov talks about the 'truth claim' – 'what you see and hear is of the world' – as a defining condition of documentary discourse (1993: 26). Some documentary conventions connote unmediated reality, such as hand-held camera, 'natural' rather than expressive lighting and imperfect sound, while other conventions connote drama, argument and interpretation, such as voice-over, interview, re-enactment and contrastive editing. Documentaries frequently use many of these elements in their bid to document and persuade. '**Observational**' documentary form brings connotations of transparency and spontaneity as it is characterised by a following camera capturing continuous action seemingly beyond the control of the crew. Figure 7.3 shows an observational sequence from *Grenfell*, when the director visits the tower hours after the fire. There is paradox

observational documentary a documentary form in which the programme-maker aims to observe neutrally what would have happened even if they had not been present.

Figure 7.3 The tower still smoking after the fire in a scene from *Grenfell*

at the heart of observational form, whose aesthetics connote a lack of directorial intervention, with its subjects sometimes directed to act as if the camera is not present. Yet the action and behaviour being recorded is inevitably affected by the presence of the filmmaker. Thus, the phrase ‘fly-on-the-wall’, often used to describe observational documentary form, is a misnomer as the camera cannot be as unobtrusive as a fly.

Whilst documentary is frequently presented as an objective form, we must be careful to recognise its imagery and storytelling is inevitably shaped by the subjectivity of the programme-maker and their interpretations. Every documentary is shaped by the perspective of its maker and the requirements of the channel or streamer that commissions it. A programme commissioned for BBC Three targeting a British youth audience will have a different perspective on a subject to one commissioned for ITV1 targeting a broad family audience. A documentary presents an argument, a point of view. It shapes ‘the real’ into a narrative that the audience can follow and understand. This is what makes it a frequently controversial form dogged by questions about construction, distortion, and perhaps even manipulation. There is a tension between producing a documentary that is representative and ‘accurate’ and providing the audience with a programme that conforms to the conventions of argument or storytelling. It is this tension that gives rise to the complaints and occasionally legal cases brought by documentary subjects against documentary-makers, where the subject claims that they have been misrepresented or made to look foolish.

In her study of documentary Stella Bruzzi fruitfully centres the relationship between subject and camera and director, arguing that documentary be viewed as ‘a performative act whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming’ (2006: 10). Even when it is presented through observational form, a documentary is always produced through a process of interaction, despite a director removing their presence from the final product, such as their voice asking questions or shots where the subject talks to them. *High on the Hog* is an example of participatory documentary form, which foregrounds interaction and its production of knowledge. As presenter Stephen Satterfield journeys through Benin, West Africa and across America his conversations with a series of experts and food professionals build a history of African-American food traditions told through the stories and experiences of ancestors and historical figures (Figure 7.4).

Complaints about a documentary's 'bias' suggests documentary should be entirely objective and impartial, which is impossible. A documentarian cannot include every single piece of information about a subject, instead they must make decisions about what to include and how to present it. This allows them to construct a coherent narrative that guides the viewer's understanding of the subject. John Corner (1995: 79–81) usefully presents documentary as a constructive practice, the result of a series of creative transformations. This foregrounds how decisions by the creative team work to shape actuality into the final documentary.

- Planning – choices are made over what to film, when and how to film it
- Shooting – choices are made over where to point the camera, what to light and what sound to record, how to organise the frame
- Editing – this is arguably the most important creative stage as the programme-maker assembles a substantial amount of raw footage into a coherent narrative; any **narration** is recorded and illustrative imagery incorporated
- Reception – viewers' responses to a documentary's representations and 'truth claims' based on their own personal experiences and beliefs

narration the process of telling a story through image and sound. Narration can also refer to the spoken text accompanying television images.

Each documentary has a point of view, a perspective on the world. Even when voice-over narration isn't present, a documentary's editing will construct a narrative, a process of judgement. It does this through the connections it makes through editing, the selection of images and how they are arranged. We can think about this point of view as documentary's 'voice' (Nichols 2001). *Grenfell* tells the story of the tower block fire, the immediate aftermath and the year that followed as residents

Figure 7.4 Presenter Stephen Satterfield and food writer Dr Jessica B. Harris discuss okra in a Benin food market in *High on the Hog*

Figure 7.5 *Grenfell* uses interviews with residents and officials to tell the story of the fire and its aftermath

fought for justice. It does not use a voiceover, instead interweaving observational footage and interviews with residents and community members, as well as officials involved in the investigation (Figure 7.5). This documentary's argument is constructed through choices in editing over how these interviews and footage are shaped, whose voices are prioritised and how these are contrasted with each other. Here interviews provide witness, the recollections of the interviewee are presented as a form of testimony, through which the documentary makes the viewers into witnesses. Interviews are a form of documentary interaction, as they are a conversation between the documentary-maker and subject. Here the director has edited his questions out of these conversations, to give the feeling of testimony.

To attract viewers and guide their understanding, storytelling has always been important to documentary. It can be created in a range of ways (Corner 2006: 92–4). Re-enactment can show the unfolding of events that occurred in the past and were not observed by a camera. A voice-over commentary can describe, explain, or make an argument that has a sequence and a story-like flow. The presenter can seem to find things out, leading the viewer through a story of discovery and understanding. It is not only the observation of the documentary subject that provides an impression of reality in documentary television but also the inclusion of supporting narration, testimony or expert commentary. For example, episode one of *High on the Hog* uses Stephen's conversation with historian Gabin Djamassè to outline the history of the slave trade in Benin. Djamassè words are illustrated with archive imagery – paintings and sketches. Stephen then walks on the same road that was used to transport the enslaved, discussing with Djamassè the importance of this experience as remembrance and witness (Figure 7.6).

These documentary devices have links with other factual genres, for example, sports programmes, science programmes, nature programmes and current affairs where:

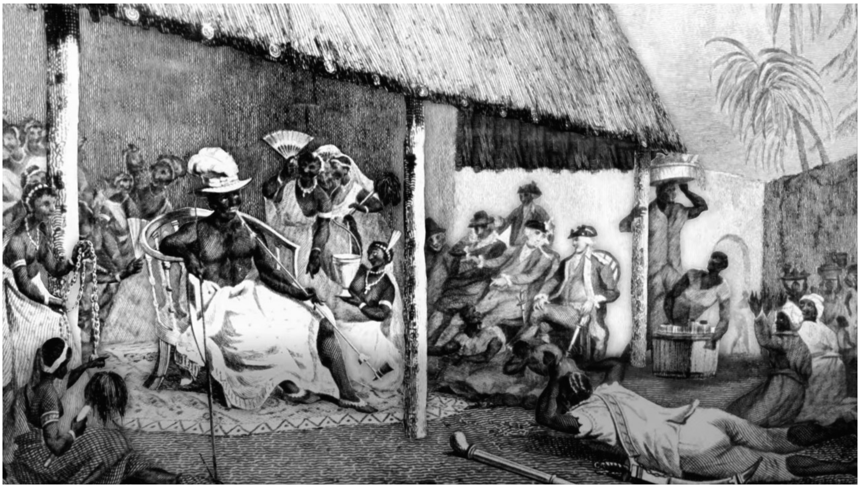


Figure 7.6 *High on the Hog* uses archive imagery to illustrate historian Gabin Diamassè's outlining of the history of the slave trade in Benin

- The authority of a narrator provides coherence and continuity
- Testimony of members of the public supports the authenticity of the programme
- Expert commentary provides backing for the assertions and arguments of the programme-maker or the figures appearing in the programme

It is always the case that television programmes gain their meanings by their similarity to and difference from each other, and the overlap of codes and conventions among them.

The device of **metonymy** in documentary enables part of reality to stand for the larger real world that it represents. One day in the life of a hotel metonymically stands for any other day. The work of an inner-city social worker stands metonymically for that of all inner-city social workers. Specific images or sequences, or specific documentary subjects, have metonymic relationships with the reality of which they are a part. *High on the Hog* uses Benin as an example of the practices of the slave trade across the African continent. *Grenfell* uses the story of the residents interviewed to speak for the experiences of all those living in the tower that night. The tower's fire is used to stand for wider governmental neglect of social housing and its inhabitants. Metonymy is one of the unstated assumptions that enables television programmes to claim implicitly that they represent society to itself, and connect the specific subjects of programmes to larger social contexts. But the impression of realism in television depends on the relationship between the codes of the programme and the codes available to the audience for interpreting it. Kilborn and Izod (1997: 39) use the term 'accommodation' to describe the shaping of documentary programmes to accord with the assumed knowledge of the audience. Television's claim to present the real rests on the ideologies shaping that reality for the audience.

metonymy the substitution of one thing for another, either because one is part of the other or because one is connected with the other. For example, 'the Crown' can be a metonym for the British state.

Case study: docudrama

Television docudrama (which is sometimes called drama-documentary) retells events, often recent events, in order to review or celebrate them. It is one among many ways for television to 'work through' reality, processing it in order to explain, tell stories about, investigate or speculate about reality (Ellis 1999). The key figures and turning points of the story are often familiar to the audience, with opening statements and captions making clear the factual basis of docudramas, while disclaimers may state that some events and characters have been changed, amalgamated or invented. Derek Paget's (1998: 82) definition of drama-documentary is that it

> uses the sequence of events from a real historical occurrence or situation and the identities of the protagonists to underpin a film script intended to provoke debate … The resultant film usually follows a cinematic narrative structure and employs the standard naturalist/realist performance techniques of screen drama.

Docudrama offers a single and personalised view of a dramatic situation, in which identification with central figures allows access for the audience, but where the documentation of a historical situation 'objectively' sets these identifications into a social and political context. Narrative provides the linkage between the forms of documentary and of drama, as John Caughie (1980: 30) describes: 'If the rhetoric of the drama inscribes the document within narrative and experience, the rhetoric of the documentary establishes the experience as an experience of the real, and places it within a system of guarantees and confirmations'. British docudrama is based in carefully researched journalistic investigation, and follows the conventions of journalistic discourse such as the sequential unfolding of events and the use of captions to identify key figures.

It has become common in recent years for channels to call programmes 'factual drama' rather than docudrama. This enables writers to create fictional characters that are drawn from their research into real cases. This is seen in a set of single dramas from digital youth channel BBC Three. *Murdered by My Boyfriend* focused on domestic abuse and *Murdered by My Father* looked at an honour killing, both creating fictional characters based on real cases. *My Murder* explored a 'honey trap' gang killing and *Killed by My Debt* charted the impact of financial struggles on a young man's suicide and were both based on real people. These programmes were high-profile prestige projects for the channel, which produces a large number of documentaries. The dramas used attention-grabbing titles but press coverage foregrounded the research of the writers and directors, their close links with the families of victims and work with charities. The dramas were positioned as educational projects for the channel's youth audience, where an intimate focus on individuals, their social contexts and decision-making looked beyond the sensationalist press headlines that covered similar cases.

Docudrama is scripted and acted, so it makes performance into its primary and acknowledged focus of interest, within a narrative that aims to inform its audience and to make events accessible (Bignell 2010). The criteria that viewers bring with them centre on questions of authenticity, but authenticity depends on the match or mismatch between the expressive performance techniques used by witnesses or actors and the factual base that legitimates them. Docudramas draw on performance modes from fictional television forms and invite audiences to deploy their knowledge of fiction codes, while the factual base invites the viewer to evaluate narrative in relation to the real events, settings and people represented, and also in relation to other media representations. But as Tobias Ebbrecht has commented in making a similar argument around docudramas based on witness testimony about the Second World War, actors validate docudrama narrative by inhabiting the identity of a person from the past, while the people whose lives they are re-enacting validate the docudrama's promise of authenticity. Actors 'become part of contemporary memory culture' and the programme 'takes part in the construction of a national culture of public memory' (Ebbrecht 2007: 37). Viewers' existing knowledge about past events and people works together with television docudrama narrative.

Key events or figures function as hooks around which docudrama programmes can be marketed. For example, *Damilola: Our Loved Boy* explored the fatal stabbing of the ten-year-old London schoolboy Damilola Taylor in 2000 and the six-year fight to bring his killers to justice, focusing on the experiences of his parents and siblings. The case became front page news, used as an example of youth violence in British cities. Damilola's parents Gloria and Richard became public figures through the press coverage of their fight for justice and their later charity work to combat knife crime. Figure 7.7 shows actors Babou Ceesay and Wunmi Mosaku recreating Richard Taylor's speech at the launch of the Damilola Taylor Centre. Such dramas are promoted as factual documents of their main characters' personal struggles, revealing their private lives and their private reactions to public events, often events in the **public sphere**. The programme combined scenes and images familiar from the 'public sphere' of press coverage such as Richard's speech with the 'private sphere' of the family's domestic life before and after the murder. In doing so it showed how the family struggled to deal with their guilt and anger, as well as Richard's devotion to activism. Patterns of speech and gesture that are familiar from television news footage are recreated in action representing public appearances of the Taylors in law and order spaces. This is counterposed and given significance through scenes of psychological and emotional turmoil in their domestic spaces (Figure 7.8).

public sphere the world of politics, economic affairs and national and international events, as opposed to the 'private sphere' of domestic life.

Figure 7.9 is from the first episode of docudrama serial *Chernobyl*, where a firefighter fearfully looks at the enormous fire created by an explosion at a nuclear plant in Soviet Ukraine in 1986. The nuclear meltdown was not recorded by news cameras and government officials

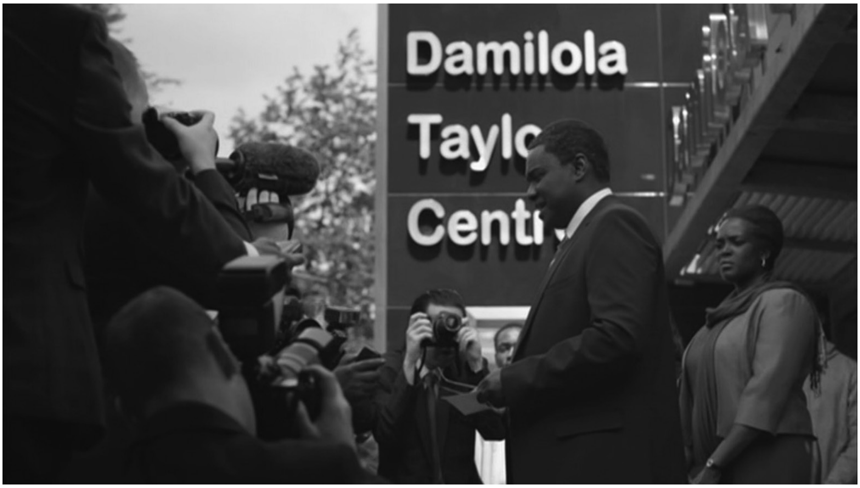


Figure 7.7 *Damilola: Our Loved Boy* recreates a public speech by Richard Taylor

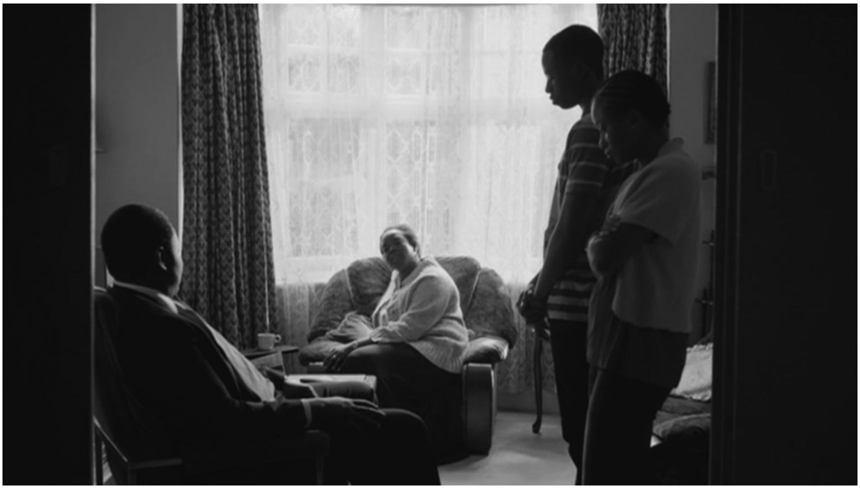


Figure 7.8 Tensions in the Taylor family boil over in the private space of their home

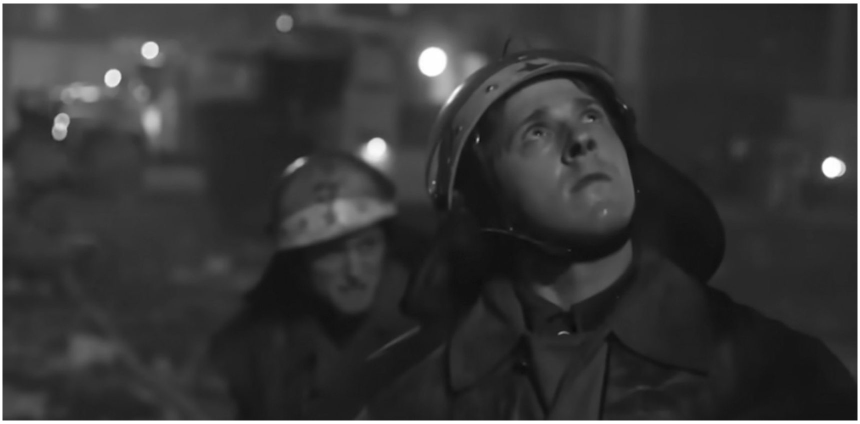


Figure 7.9 A firefighter gazes at the inferno caused by the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear plant

sought to cover up the disaster by limiting the spread of information about the event and its aftermath. So the docudrama provides a fictionalised reconstruction of what the disaster could have looked like. Its characters and plots are drawn from Svetlana Alexievich's book *Voices from Chernobyl*, which built an oral history of the event and its impact on the region through personal accounts of the disaster and its aftermath. The programme presented itself as telling the lesser-known stories of workers and the local community, attempts to clean up the contaminated region and a team of scientists' investigation into the cause of the disaster.

The framing of characters in Figure 7.9, with lighting emphasising their faces and expressions, demonstrates that this is a docudrama about individuals' experience of the disaster. The documentary base in docudramas is signalled by press interviews, where production teams discuss the accuracy of the content. *Chernobyl* was accompanied by a podcast series where creator and showrunner Craig Mazan provided a detailed explanation of his research process for each episode, along with his choices over when to fictionalise certain aspects of the story. Where *Damilola: Our Beloved Boy* used figures somewhat known to the public, *Chernobyl* depicted people – or fictional composite characters – who were not public figures, and events not widely known to the British and US audiences the programme targeted, so had more creative license in its dramatising of events.

Docudramas bear witness to public events at the same time as they promise an insight into personality and private psychology. They reference media representations of events and sometimes incorporate actuality footage alongside reconstruction, emphasising moments of crisis or transformation. The aim is to allow the audience to reflect on the forces impacting individuals, and on how individuals respond to those forces. The question audiences are invited to ask is ‘What was it like to be there?’ As a subset of the documentary mode, docudrama can emphasise immediacy, where television offers a window onto the world around its viewers and represents public affairs. However, many docudramas are interested in intimacy and character, as seen in *Damilola: Our Beloved Boy* and *Chernobyl*. They aim to set up a mirroring relationship between the viewer and the people featured in the programme, where the viewer can imagine what they might do in the same situation that the characters face.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Realism in television can refer to the conventions used in particular forms of programme to convey the impression that something real is being represented adequately
- Television audiences are accustomed to realist conventions and expect realism from some kinds of programme, such as news and documentary, more than others
- The codes and conventions of the news see it claim to denote events objectively and immediately, offering a neutral and transparent channel of communication
- Documentary’s representation of the world is framed by cultural expectations of objectivity, derived in part through its filming choices and aesthetics. However, its storytelling and ‘voice’ is shaped by mediation and subjectivity.
- The factual genres of television have a special relationship to realism because they seem to represent something that would have happened anyway. But fictional programmes also make use of realist conventions, in their representations of place, character and narrative. Docudrama mixes the two modes together.

Bibliography

Allen, R. (1985) *Speaking of Soap Operas*. Chapel Hill, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

Althusser, L. (1971) ‘Ideology and ideological state apparatuses: notes towards an investigation’, in *Lenin and Philosophy*. London: New Left Books, pp. 121–73.

Ang, I. (1985) *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Methuen.

Benjamin, W. (1969) 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in Arendt, H. (ed.), *Illuminations*, trans. Zohn, H. New York: Schocken Books, pp. 219–54.

Bignell, J. (2005) *Big Brother: Reality TV in the Twenty-first Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bignell, J. (2010) 'Docudrama performance: realism, recognition and representation', in Cornea, C. (ed.), *Genre and Performance: Film and Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 59–75.

Brunsdon, C. (1981) 'Crossroads – notes on soap opera', *Screen*, 22(4), pp. 32–7.

Bruzzi, S. (2006) *The New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*, second edition. London: Routledge.

Buckingham, D. (1987) *Public Secrets: EastEnders and Its Audience*. London: British Film Institute.

Caughie, J. (1980) 'Progressive television and documentary drama', *Screen*, 21(3), pp. 9–35.

Corner, J. (1992) 'Presumption as theory: "realism" in Television Studies', *Screen*, 33(1), pp. 97–102.

Corner, J. (1995) *Television Form and Public Address*. London: Arnold.

Corner, J. (2006) '"A fiction (un)like any other"?', *Critical Studies in Television*, 1(1), pp. 89–96.

Dayan, D. and Katz, E. (1992) *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dovey, J. (2000) *Freakshow*: *First Person Media and Factual Television*. Cambridge: Polity.

Ebbrecht, T. (2007) 'Docudramatizing history on TV: German and British docudrama and historical event television in the memorial year 2005', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(1), pp. 35–55.

Ellis, J. (1999) 'Television as working through', in J. Gripsrud (ed.), *Television and Common Knowledge*. London: Routledge, pp. 55–7.

Ellis, J. (2000) *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Geraghty, C. (1991) *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime Time Soaps*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hartley, J. (1982) *Understanding News*. London: Routledge.

Holmes, S. and Jermyn, D. (eds) (2004) *Understanding Reality Television*. London: Routledge.

Kilborn, R. and Izod, J. (1997) *An Introduction to Television Documentary: Confronting Reality*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lacan, J. (1977) 'The mirror stage', in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Sheridan, A. London: Tavistock, pp. 1–7.

Lipkin, S. (2002) *Real Emotional Logic: Film and Television Docudrama as Persuasive Practice*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Marriott, S. (2007) *Live Television: Time, Space and the Broadcast Event*. London: Sage.

Nichols, B. (1991) *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Nichols, B. (1994) *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Nichols, B. (2001) *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Paget, D. (1998) *No Other Way to Tell It: Dramadoc/Docudrama on Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Paget, D. (2002) 'Acting a part: performing docudrama', *Media International Australia*, 104, pp. 30–41.

Paget, D. (2011) *No Other Way to Tell It: Docudrama on Film and Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Parker, Teresa (2020) 'The reality of domestic abuse beyond the soap opera', *Womens Aid*, 9 September, www.womensaid.org.uk/the-reality-of-domestic-abuse-beyond-the-soap-opera/

Piper, H. (2004) 'Reality TV, *Wife Swap* and the drama of banality', *Screen*, 54(4), pp. 273–86.

Reno, M. (1993) *Theorising Documentary*. London: Routledge.

Roscoe, J. and Hight, C. (2001) *Faking It: Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Rosenthal, A. (ed.) (1999) *Why Docudrama?: Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Thornham, S. and Purvis, T. (2005) *Television Drama: Theories and Identities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Winston, B. (1995) *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited*. London: British Film Institute.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Television Production

8

- Introduction 182
- Development 183
- Pre-production 185
- Production 191
- Post-production 196
- YouTube, user-generated content and the amateur-professional creator 198
- Case study: ‘fixed rig’ observational documentary 201
- Summary of key points 204
- Bibliography 205

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-9

Television Production

Introduction

The stages in television programme production discussed in this chapter are:

- *Development*, where programme ideas are being worked out, researched and planned in an audio-visual form appropriate to a certain television **genre**, channel or **streaming platform**, position in the **schedule** (where relevant) and size of **budget**. Where key creative talent (writers, directors, star performers) are attached and where the **treatment**, budgets and **pitch** are devised
- *Pre-production*, where after commissioning further scripts are written, research is conducted for **locations**, cast and crew are selected, **storyboards** and production schedules are drawn up, and the design, props, costumes and music are selected.
- *Production*, when the shooting takes place, following the plan outlined in the budget and schedule, using the **director**, performers, presenters, contributors and the technical crew that have been selected and organised at the preproduction stage.
- *Post-production*, when editing takes place, formerly **off-line** at below broadcast quality, then **online** editing is completed, the score is composed and soundtracks assembled, when effects, colour grading and sound mixing are achieved. At the end of this process final accounts are prepared.

The chapter discusses the many professional roles involved in making television, with emphasis on the creative and managerial roles of producer, director, screenwriter, editor and camera operator. It is not possible in the space available here to provide as much detailed descriptive information about these roles, or the competences needed to carry them out to professional standards, as can be found in the many ‘how-to’ books on the market about television production. A few such books are listed in the Bibliography section at the end of the chapter. Nevertheless, the chapter considers the different roles in television programme-making and gives an overview of the different stages of the production process, including some of its key terminology. It also considers YouTube content creators, their production process and position on the streaming platform, and how they can straddle the amateur/professional divide. It concludes with a case study of fixed-rig documentary production. The aim of this chapter is to develop an analytical understanding of how television production communicates with audiences through the skills and techniques used by professional television-makers. The assumption behind it is that learning about television is not only a critical and theoretical enterprise: television is an industry, a technology and a set of working practices. So the student

genre a kind or type of programme. Programmes of the same genre have shared characteristics.

schedule the arrangement of programmes, advertisements and other material into a sequential order on linear television, within a certain period of time, such as an evening, day or week.

streaming platform company that provides video on-demand via the internet, can be subscription-based or supported by advertising or a licence fee e.g. Disney+, BBC iPlayer.

budget the money allocated to the making of a particular programme or series of programmes, which is controlled by the producer.

location any place in which television images are shot, except inside a television studio.

storyboard a sequence of drawn images showing the shots to be used in a programme.

treatment a short, written outline for a programme, usually written for a commissioning executive to read, specifying how the programme will tell its story or address its subject.

pitch a very short written or spoken outline for a programme, perhaps only a few sentences, often used to persuade a commissioning executive to commission the programme.

director the person responsible for the creative process of turning a script or idea into a finished programme, by working with a technical crew, performers and an editor.

off-line editing the first stage of editing a completed programme, where the sequence of shots, sounds and music is established.

online editing the final stage of editing a completed programme, where effects are added, colour grading and sound mixing takes place, and a high-quality version of the programme is produced.

of television should understand the broad principles of the production practices that bring programmes into being.

Television has long been regarded as a producer's medium, meaning that the television producer has the predominant authority over and responsibility for television-making. While there are several other roles that could claim such creative and managerial authority, particularly those of director and scriptwriter, this chapter devotes the greatest space to the key elements of the producer's role. The producer contributes to the process of selecting and working with writers, controls the process of making a programme and fulfils a responsibility to the television company that has commissioned the programme by overseeing budgets, personnel, the production schedule and the delivery of the programme. The chapter explains how producers work with creative personnel on the production such as the director, performers, designers and editors. As far as possible, the chapter offers a discussion that can apply across the genres of factual and fictional television production, but there are specific discussions of genres that have particular patterns of organisation and production. News is not discussed in this chapter (for news production, Allen 2010 and Keller 2019), nor is the making of television commercials.

Development

Although the production of television programmes is a linear process from the initial idea to the final broadcast of the programme, making programmes demands anticipation of later stages at every point in the process. An initial idea will need to be shaped so that it will appeal to the audience imagined by the programme-maker. A programme pitch needs to balance formula and innovation, aligning with types of programme familiar to audiences, but different enough to stand out, offering a twist on an established norm. Right from the start the programme-maker will have an audience in mind for the subject, style, genre, aesthetic form and pace of the programme. As the production continues, this sense of the audience may be modified, but it will always be present as a check on the probable effectiveness of each individual decision. Programmes will be pitched to development executives at production companies, then to commissioning executives at channels and streaming platforms. So the idea and the intended process of its realisation will also need to appeal to those people, their tastes and understanding of their audiences. There is potential for conflict at this point, as the scriptwriter's sense of the audience appeal of their project may not be shared by the executive. In practice there is always a process of negotiation between all the parties involved in making a television programme, and it is the responsibility of all the parties involved to maintain the integrity of their ideas yet also to be persuaded by the ideas of the others. Tensions, power-struggles and ulterior motives are endemic to television production, as well as the more positive factors of teamwork, creative co-operation and pride in one's expertise.

Whereas cinema has been a medium in which the director has creative control over the film, in television considerably more power is wielded by the producer and in **prestige TV**, the writer. Producers are primarily managers, but they also work closely with creative staff and require a broad range of knowledge. The

prestige TV critical and industry term to describe high-budget flagship drama and comedy. Term aims to remove hierarchical/judgemental connotations of the term 'quality television'.

producer will manage all the staff involved in the making, including the director, and have traditionally enjoyed a more secure position in employment as they oversee the planning, shooting and post-production of television programmes. In the contemporary US industry and increasingly within other television markets, this production role in drama and comedy is referred to as the '**showrunner**'. The showrunner is a creative writer-producer responsible for the creative direction of the programme. They frequently work alongside non-creative producers responsible for logistical and financial aspects of production. In the lengthy seasons of US television, long-running television programmes can be expansive productions that employ hundreds of people. The showrunner oversees the 'writers' room' and guides the production of episodes through development, production and editing. This is often, but not always the programme's creator. The showrunner maintains the programme's 'voice' and creative direction and is frequently assigned authorship of the programme in marketing, press and cultural discourse (authorship is discussed further in Chapter 12). The showrunner takes on the authorial role attributed to the director in cinema, as in television directors are employed freelance for individual or a short set of episodes. However, prestige serials with short episode runs can employ one or two directors across a season. Prestige cable dramas and high-profile network dramas will frequently employ a high-profile director (often with an established reputation in cinema) to direct their pilot episode. This director will help develop the project and establish the programme's aesthetic sensibility and tone. They retain an 'executive producer' credit but rarely continue working on the production.

showrunner the writer-producer in charge of the day-to-day running of a television programme, who is also tasked with the shaping and maintaining of that programme's 'voice'.

The producer's primary role is to lead the team making a programme, to deliver that programme to a deadline imposed by the institution that has commissioned it and to maintain a standard of quality that will ensure approval from industry colleagues and prospects of further work. The skills needed to achieve this include:

- Management skills of wielding authority effectively while maintaining the coherence and harmony of the production team
- Commitment to the project's vision
- An ability to understand and evaluate the work of others

Since television programmes are subject to a range of legal considerations such as **copyright**, health and safety, and libel and defamation, the producer also needs to know the basics of these legal frameworks as well as the guidelines provided by broadcasting organisations. As producers will be managing technical specialists, such as camera operators, lighting and sound technicians, graphic artists, designers and editors, they need to know enough about these areas of expertise in order to recruit individuals, manage and evaluate their work, or in large-scale productions to employ department heads with the requisite knowledge.

copyright the legal right of ownership over written, visual or aural material, including the prohibition on copying this material without permission from its owner.

In many television genres the producer will need writing skills in order to advise scriptwriters and to edit and sometimes rewrite their work, and an understanding of the visual and sound qualities of television that will be used to realise a programme idea or script. In drama the relationships built up between producers and writers are crucial to the success of television programmes. In factual genres such as **documentary**, even though a programme will not be scripted for

documentary a form aiming to record actual events, often with an explanatory purpose or to analyse and debate an issue.

performance in the same way as a drama, nevertheless producers are required to have some skill in writing. Whilst producers guide the creative process in documentary series, single documentaries see directors take primary creative control. Documentaries also require scripts, often including written sequences of voice-over, and will be pitched and commissioned on the basis of written outlines. Documentary producers need to be aware of **narrative** structure, structures of argument and the production of dramatic effects, all of which are skills inherited from and connected with the written forms of journalism, drama and literature.

narrative an ordered sequence of images and sound that tells a fictional or factual story.

Pre-production

Production planning will typically begin more than a year before any shooting takes place, and at this stage storylines and scripts need to be commissioned and approved. For drama productions, maintaining connections with writers and finding new writers to contribute are important aspects of the producer's job. During the pre-production process producers will often spend considerable amounts of time in discussions with writers, developing ideas and scripts. In the UK, the short season lengths of sitcoms and prestige drama – three to six episodes – means programmes have often been written by a single writer or writing duo. However, long-running programmes that have longer seasons such as *Doctor Who* use multiple freelance writers each season, each scripting individual episodes. Scripts are delivered before production takes place.

The long seasons of US television, running eight to 13 episodes for cable and streaming and up to 24 episodes for network programmes, means each season is written by a team of writers. The season arc and each episode's story beats are developed collectively in the 'writers' room' before individual episodes are assigned to a writer to script solo. In sitcoms the script then returns to the writers' room for 'punch-up' where the episode and its jokes are rewritten by the team. In US television the writing process begins before production and continues as the programme enters production, with new scripts being written whilst previous scripts are in production. However, streaming platforms have begun to make cost savings by taking on a version of the British system where writers' rooms are only employed in pre-production and scripts delivered before production begin. In the US a showrunner will frequently give each script a 'final pass' rewrite and in the UK even when scripts have been delivered, the producer and the script editor will continue to work on them. Revisions may be required in order to make the script shootable within the agreed budget. Rewriting or polishing of the script can be necessary in order to:

- Maintain continuity of story, character and tone
- Adapt scripts to the strengths or weaknesses of performers
- Add or remove special design elements or effects

Because of the numerous other demands on producers, in the UK script editors often do much of the detailed work in revising scripts and consulting with writers. Script editors play an important role in British soap opera, as they are in a process of continuous production with multiple episodes airing each week. Script editors must track multiple ongoing storylines and manage a large team of regular and freelance writers. This extensive experience enables script editors to build up expertise and contacts which later enable them to become producers themselves. It is conventionally agreed in the television industry that writers retain credit for the scripts they produce, although in practice the script used during the shooting itself may well have been extensively revised by a script editor or producer, and in the case of US sitcom the whole writing team. The authorship of television programmes is therefore difficult to assign to one person: in practice, authorship is a collective activity involving the whole production team.

The theatrical inheritance in television production leads to the privilege granted to the writer and the notion of creativity. In television, some prestige drama serials and comedies are marked by the prominent display of the author's name in the credits and marketing material, such as Sally Wainwright, writer of *Last Tango in Halifax*, *Happy Valley* and *Gentleman Jack*. Writer-performers who star in and write every episode of their programme have particular prominence as a televisual 'author', such as Sharon Horgan and Rob Delaney with *Catastrophe* and Michaela Coel with *Chewing Gum* and *I May Destroy You*. Programmes are usually commissioned for a contractually agreed number of scripts, from a single author or showrunner who are working with a production company. Throughout the production process a script may be altered or drastically changed. This is because it is not simply a transcription of dialogue but also an interrelated set of instructions for all the professional workers involved in production. For the production team and performers, the script directs and restricts their activities. It is the authority to which interpretative and expressive questions are referred, through the figure of the director, who controls the process of realising the written word, such that the script is finally exhausted by being 'translated' into a television programme. In this sense the script is unlike a play text, which not only is performed more than once, but can be transferred between theatre companies and is subject to entirely different interpretations when different directors are in charge of performing it.

Although a producer may have the initial idea for a programme in factual genres such as documentary, they rely on researchers to flesh out the details of the topic and find contributors. Researchers in factual television are normally young people with a background or interest in journalism, who are often aiming to move up the professional hierarchy into the role of producer or director. The sources of programme research are varied and include not only resources in the control of television institutions but numerous outside sources, most of which can be accessed free of charge. Researchers will commonly rely on a list of contacts established in earlier projects, such as experts based in academic institutions, government-funded policy units and charities, and a varied collection of people who have contributed to research for previous programmes or appeared in them. They can also build connections with witnesses of and participants in events that will be discussed in a factual programme, for programme-makers to interview. These sources do not normally require payment, though researchers can spend a lot of time on the telephone attempting to contact them and to shape their contribution into a form that is useful to a programme.

Computer databases provide access to a broadcasting institution's own archives, including previous programmes and news coverage. However, since programme-making is increasingly contracted out to independent companies who must conduct research at their own expense and using their own facilities, the resources built up by large organisations such as the BBC are not accessible to the researchers working on many contemporary programmes. Research sources such as newspaper archives, libraries and the internet can be important to programme research, but the pressure of time and the requirement to travel make it more likely for today's programme researchers to contact people directly and request instant information. Working in this way demands various skills from researchers, particularly persistence, diplomacy and persuasion, since information sources will normally see their contribution as an additional unpaid responsibility outside their normal work. But organisations that have a vested interest in providing information to publicise or support their cause can be very helpful: for example, charities may be willing to supply packs of information, documents and spokespeople, and may be keen to contribute directly to programmes by providing experts. Clearly, the ulterior motives of research sources and contributors need to be assessed carefully by researchers, and potential problems referred upward to the producer for whom they are working.

New programmes are commissioned on the basis of a treatment. This is a short document that organises the ideas on which the programme is based, and provides an indication of its structure, cost and target audience. A treatment normally begins with one or two sentences stating the idea of the programme, followed by an indication of the target audience. Then the style of the production will be outlined, including the creative approach to be taken (for example genre and aesthetic style, documentary or drama, location or studio, narrator or presenter, **observational** or expositional documentary). The structure and content section of the treatment is in effect a condensation of the script, where scenes and sequences are briefly described. A storyboard or computer pre-visualisation can be used to give a more precise indication of the key visual sequences in the programme (Figure 8.1). The treatment will specify the level of equipment used to shoot and edit the programme and provide background information on the creative team and the skills of the technical staff to be used. The budget completes the treatment. Writing production budgets is a skilled and complex task, but the basic principles are to establish the number of days required to shoot the programme and the editing time required to complete it. These facts will determine the cost of employing the people in front of the camera and behind it, who are employed at daily or hourly rates, along with equipment hire costs. Shooting days on location are more difficult to estimate because of such factors as travel to and from locations and between locations, and variables such as weather. Editing time is also difficult to estimate, since interview contributions to a documentary programme or dialogue scenes in fiction can be edited relatively easily, but montage sequences can be very complex.

observational documentary a documentary form in which the programme-maker aims to observe neutrally what would have happened even if they had not been present.

Television budgets vary immensely, from small budgets for documentaries and daytime factual or lifestyle programmes to the huge budgets of prestige drama. The intense competition of the **Peak TV** era and the deep pockets of streaming platforms drove budgets for prestige drama to huge levels in the 2010s, equal to and at times beyond that of similar cinema productions. In 1995 the budget for BBC1's blockbusting six-part adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* was £6 million. At the time this was a very high budget for UK drama, necessitating a US co-funder, but in the Peak TV era that could well be an episode budget. Across the

'Peak TV' industry term coined by US television executive John Landgraf to refer to the huge amount of scripted series produced by network, cable and streaming in the US in the second half of the 2010s.

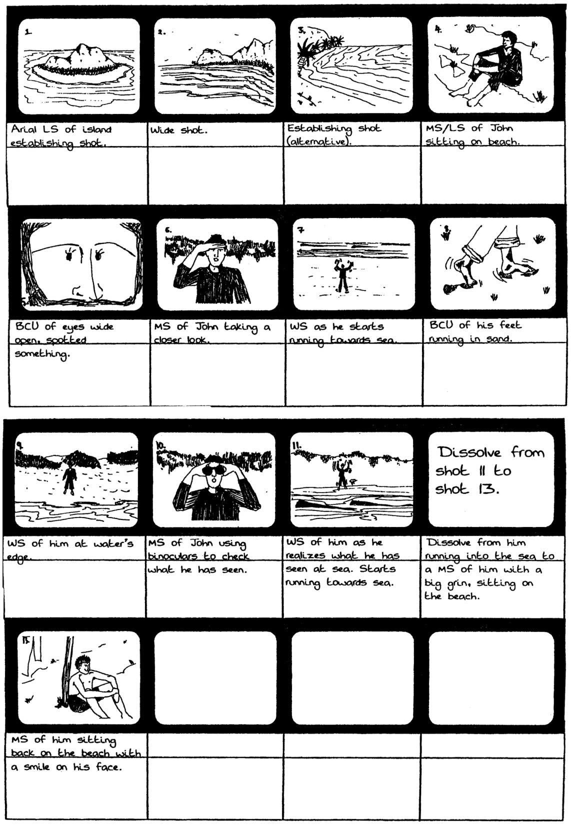

Arial LS of island establishing shot.
Wide shot.
Establishing shot (alternative).
MS/LS of John sitting on beach.
BCU of eyes wide open, spotted something.
MS of John taking a closer look.
WS as he starts running towards sea.
BCU of his feet running in sand.
Dissolve from shot 11 to shot 13.
WS of him at water's edge.
MS of John using binoculars to check what he has seen.
WS of him as he realizes what he has seen at sea. Starts running towards sea.
Dissolve from him running into the sea to a MS of him with a big grin, sitting on the beach.
MS of him sitting back on the beach with a smile on his face.

Figure 8.1 Example of a storyboard. Courtesy of Jeremy Orlebar

eight-season run of HBO's fantasy epic *Game of Thrones* the episode budget rose from $6 million to $15 million (Figure 8.2). As Netflix sought to establish its place in the 2010s television market, it asserted its financial power through the £100 million budget it provided for the first two seasons of both *House of Cards* and *The Crown*. In comparison, in the 2000s the average cost of a US network drama hour was $3 million.

High-profile directors and performers moving over to TV from film have also increased budgets, with television companies competing to land star creatives and rights to valuable intellectual property (IP). For example, Amazon Prime Video paid £250 million for the rights to make prequel programmes based on the world of *The Lord of The Rings* novels, with the budget for the first season estimated to be over $460 million (Hibberd 2021). Government subsidies contribute to high-end television budgets through 'tax credits' provided by countries and US states to entice productions to shoot in their region. In 2013 the UK introduced a high-end television tax relief programme that allowed programmes with episode budgets of over £1 million to claim back up to 25% of their budgets from the government.

There are two main models of funding television production, deficit financing and cost-plus. With deficit financing, the production company and the channel

Figure 8.2 By its final season the episode budget for HBO's *Game of Thrones* had risen to $15 million

or streamer share the risk. Here the production company funds a programme's production, which is why large production companies such as Hollywood studios with significant financial backing dominate the production of high-budget US drama. The channel or streamer then pays less than the full costs for the rights to air the programme and in exchange the production company retains the rights to sell the programme internationally or in secondary markets (to other channels or streamers) after its initial broadcast. This economic model of television is based on speculation as many programmes fail, but a hit will enable a production company to make significant profits from selling the rights to a programme many times over after its initial broadcast. The cost-plus model sees the channel or streamer pay the full cost up-front, plus a small profit. Here they take on all the risk, but retain all rights and can sell the programme in other markets. This funding model has become one of the ways for streaming giants such as Netflix to expand globally, as it enables them to hold global rights for their 'original' programmes. But it significantly reduces the ability of production companies to make ongoing profits from successful programmes. However, cost-plus also helps smaller independent production companies who may not have the funding available to produce programmes.

Because of the very high costs of production for genres such as prestige drama or flagship nature documentaries, co-production deals with broadcasters or production companies in the US or Europe are a frequent means of support for British programmes. Due to the high budgets of the Peak TV era co-production is now common in all genres of prestige TV. This is not only the case with major broadcasters such as the BBC, which has a long-standing track record of co-production agreements with broadcasters in the US (Arts and Entertainment Network, the Discovery Channel, PBS) and European countries. Independent production companies in Britain also seek to finance drama by making agreements with programme financiers in a range of countries, such as Canal+ in France, the ABC network in Australia and a range of smaller institutions worldwide. In factual television certain genres, such as the nature documentary, have well-established co-production relationships. In nature programmes the key production expense is filming on location, spending large amounts of time and money to capture animal behaviour despite difficulties in locating and reaching rare animals, coping with difficult weather conditions, and recruiting local staff on an ad hoc basis to support the production. But if good-quality footage can be obtained, the resulting programme will be easily adaptable for international distribution, requiring only the translation of its commentary into innumerable languages. Some genres are more difficult to translate and appeal to a wide range of markets, which can limit international sales, including documentaries and dramas focusing on British social problems. This can impact British television's ability to represent the nation, as broadcasters must bear the costs of these projects alone. Even if a co-production deal is forthcoming, producers need considerable expertise in negotiating the legal contractual arrangements. As a result, negotiating with co-production partners for rights to broadcast in particular territories, or for worldwide rights, and making agreements about such potentially lucrative income streams as **merchandising**, and the distribution rights of programmes are the focus of specialist executives and legal teams.

merchandising the sale of products associated with a television programme, such as toys, books or clothing.

Television directors are appointed by the producer. This is usually based on the producer's previous contact with the director, or knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses as exhibited in earlier work. A director may be known for work in a particular genre, or work that involves the use of particular television forms. For example, some directors specialise in working closely with actors, and may be best suited to television drama where there is the budget and time to develop performances and explore the possibilities of the script prior to shooting. Other directors may be particularly skilled in working quickly on productions with a limited budget and time, where their effectiveness in getting several pages of script shot in a small number of takes would be the primary reason for the producer to employ them. Television drama such as soap opera clearly needs directors with these skills, since performers and characters are already established and the main requirement is to complete the required number of scenes in only a few days' filming. Yet other directors may be schooled in integrating particular technical processes or services into a production. Working with stunts in action-adventure series or performances in green screen studios and post-produced digital effects for science fiction television is a particular directorial skill. Directing in inhospitable locations far from base or working with unpredictable animals may be important for the director of a nature documentary programme. When directing a pilot the director will be involved in further script work, extensive discussions with the producer about the choices of performers, members of the technical team and the selection of music and costumes, for example. Because the director is responsible for the final look of the programme, and the aesthetic style achieved through vision and sound, they have considerable input into the production process. This is particularly the case in pilot episodes for long-running series, where the directors that follow will emulate the 'house style' developed by the pilot director. As directors most frequently rotate in for a single episode or small block, they must be able to work effectively with an already established aesthetic, cast and production team. Ultimately the responsibility and control of the production will rest with the producer.

Production

Human vision is binocular, meaning that having two eyes close to each other but in different positions provides two slightly different images of the world that the brain interprets as a three-dimensional image that has depth and perspective. While cameras are designed to mimic many features of human vision, television pictures are noticeably flatter, so techniques of lighting, sound and shot composition are used to produce the impression of depth and coherence in the space which is shot. In the past, television pictures were much less visually sharp than those of cinema and the small size of retail television sets impaired the ability to see visual detail. The quest for greater and greater sharpness of image and detail (the resolution of the television picture) led to the introduction of High Definition (HD) cameras, which the BBC began using on the prestige drama series *Bleak House* in 2005 and flagship nature documentary series *Planet Earth* in 2006 before gradually introducing it for all drama productions. Digital television enabled the major UK terrestrial channels to broadcast on HD channels as well as standard definition ones, with high-speed broadband internet enabling HD on streaming platforms. New technologies have increased the size of retail television sets in recent decades, and they now have the screen resolution to display the greater detail visible in programmes shot in HD, with many able to display 4K and UltraHD pictures. Once again, the BBC used nature programming to experiment with UHD, used to film *Planet Earth II*. Streaming platforms have facilitated the take-up of UHD, with ultra-fast broadband enabling the transmission of the large amount of data needed for these images.

The resolution of television pictures depends on how many lines make up the picture, scanning back and forth horizontally across the screen. Standard definition terrestrial television pictures in Britain are made up of 625 horizontal lines, but HD pictures are made up of at least 720 vertical and 1280 horizontal lines, eliminating much of the fuzziness that can be seen if you looked very closely at a conventional television screen. HD also eliminates the flickering effect of conventional 625-line television and produces a very stable and clear picture. UHD (with an aspect ratio of 16:9) and 4K (1.9:1) use even more data to make up the image, using four times as much as HD. An HD image is made up of 1920 × 1080 pixels (2,073,600) and UHD uses 3840 × 2160 pixels (8,294,400). This means the image is incredibly sharp, able to capture a high degree of detail with rich and vibrant colour, hence the BBC experimented with nature documentaries. The more data that is captured, the more an image can be manipulated in post-production and the easier it is to integrate visual effects, seen here in the Disney+ Marvel series *Loki* (Figure 8.3). The take-up of UHD is one of the reasons for the increasing budgets of prestige drama, as the production and post-production equipment required to shoot in UHD can be extremely expensive to hire or purchase. However, digital production has enabled even low-budget television to look good and opened up access to produce television-quality video content outside of the television industry. Consumer-level cameras and editing equipment enable skilled amateur programme-makers to produce content of a high quality and distribute it through open-access streaming platforms such as YouTube.

During production programme-makers must have in mind the relationships of one shot to another, and when they talk about shots which ‘will cut’ or shots

Figure 8.3 Visual effects in Disney+'s *Loki*

which 'won't cut' they are describing shots that will connect with the previous and subsequent sequences or not. Shots which will cut are those where the point of view of the camera and the relationships that comprise the shot composition fit the conventions of editing to be used in the programme. Shots which will not cut are those where conventions are not being followed, and for the viewer there will appear to be a leap from one represented space to another, from one camera point of view to another, in a way which does not respect the coherence of the narrative or the coherence of the space which has been shot. In drama, for example, the conventions of a shot-reverse-shot will allow alternations of point of view between speakers so long as the camera does not break the **180-degree rule**. In fiction genres the position of the camera in individual shots and the use of camera movement must be planned in advance so that one shot will cut with another. In documentary and other factual genres, relationships between shots also have to respect audience expectations of how figures and spaces are represented. **Noddy shots** and **cutaways** are used to provide bridges between shots, and voice-over, music or other sound are also used to produce the impression of coherence and continuity.

180-degree rule the convention that cameras are positioned only on one side of an imaginary line drawn to connect two performers in a scene. This produces a coherent sense of space for the viewer.

noddy shot in television interviews, shots of the interviewer reacting silently (often by nodding) to the interviewee's responses to questions.

cutaway in fictional dialogue or interviews, shots that do not include people speaking. Cutaways often consist of details of the setting or of interviewees (such as their hands).

dolly a wheeled camera platform. A 'dolly shot' is a camera shot where the camera is moved forward or back using this platform.

A hand-held camera will be affected by movements of the operator's hands and body whenever the operator takes a step or moves around. The Steadicam allows smoother and more complex shots than can be achieved hand-held. Shots where the camera is moving have conventionally been created by placing the camera on a **dolly** equipped with wheels, sometimes running on miniature railway tracks laid in studio or on location to facilitate smooth movement. Whereas the Steadicam consists of a camera equipped with a complex system of counterweights that stabilise it when attached to an arm linking the camera mounting to a vest worn by the operator. The operator can alter the camera's position on the mounting almost without touching it and can walk around and turn while the camera remains stable, without shaking or jerking. Although Steadicam operators must be specially trained to use this cumbersome equipment, it is usually cheaper to employ a Steadicam operator when productions require a number of moving shots, so Steadicam has become common across all genres of television production. Soap opera *EastEnders* uses many exterior scenes shot in its standing Albert Square backlot set and frequently uses a Steadicam to film scenes on this exterior set. This reduces the amount of camera set-ups and need to lay tracks for dollies as actors move around the Square. Steadicam was developed as a more effective way of creating moving shots in cinema than technology had hitherto allowed, with the aim of keeping the operation of the camera unobtrusive to the viewer and not disrupting the flow of shots within a sequence. This use of Steadicam follows the long-established convention in film and television that the means for creating the visual image should not be apparent to the viewer, and that the technique of shooting should be as ‘natural’ as possible.

But in some programmes, the sheer versatility and smoothness of Steadicam shots has become a badge of prestige and style in itself, drawing attention to the moving camera. In the 1990s and 2000s US dramas *ER* and *The West Wing* used Steadicams to shoot scenes where information about complex issues of medical procedure or the workings of American government were being conveyed by dialogue. By shooting such sequences with the Steadicam, the characters could continue their conversation while walking together along a corridor or between a series of offices. The moving camera shots provide an ever-changing background of settings to the conversation, adding visual interest and urgency to lengthy scenes of dialogue. This device also communicated the busy lives of overworked medical professionals and White House staff, who did not have time to stop and talk.

The moving-camera Steadicam shot can be a way of following characters smoothly from one space to another, maintaining the audience’s attachment to the character while moving from place to place. More information can therefore be given to the audience about the character and their activities, placing them against a shifting background of different locations. These sustained Steadicam shots present an extended experience of time and space that suggests privileged observation of a real world as it is lived, since the viewer’s experience of space and time is that they are seamlessly connecting one moment to another and one space to another. But viewers are accustomed to the segmentation produced by editing, and the jumping from one moment to another and one space to another that editing produces. So the Steadicam shot can also be experienced as relatively unusual, and thus not a means of observing a world that is much like the one we experience ourselves, but instead a special televisual experience of moving smoothly across an extended time and space that stands out as an exception within the ‘language’ of television.

spectacle a fascinating image which draws attention to its immediate surface meanings and offers visual pleasure for its own sake.

period drama television fiction set in the past, most often the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

Since the mid 2010s long takes as **spectacle** have become something of a trend in US prestige television. Rather than be as ‘invisible’ and natural as possible these sequences draw attention to themselves, making spectacle of performance skill or complex stunts. Comic **period drama** *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* uses frequently elaborate Steadicam long takes to showcase the delivery of its screwball dialogue and lengthy fast-paced comic monologues (Figure 8.4). (See Chapter 12 case study for further discussion.) The long take is not only limited to prestige television, as the British hospital soap *Casualty* broadcast the episode ‘One’ in 2017. Influenced by the 2015 film *Victoria* which was shot in one uninterrupted take, the episode used a 48-minute single take filmed using a shoulder-mounted Steadicam, with only a house explosion featured in its opening sequence filmed separately. However, the technical spectacle of the long take is not a recent televisual invention, as the 1998 *X-Files* episode ‘Triangle’ was shot in a series of long takes, punctuated by advert breaks.

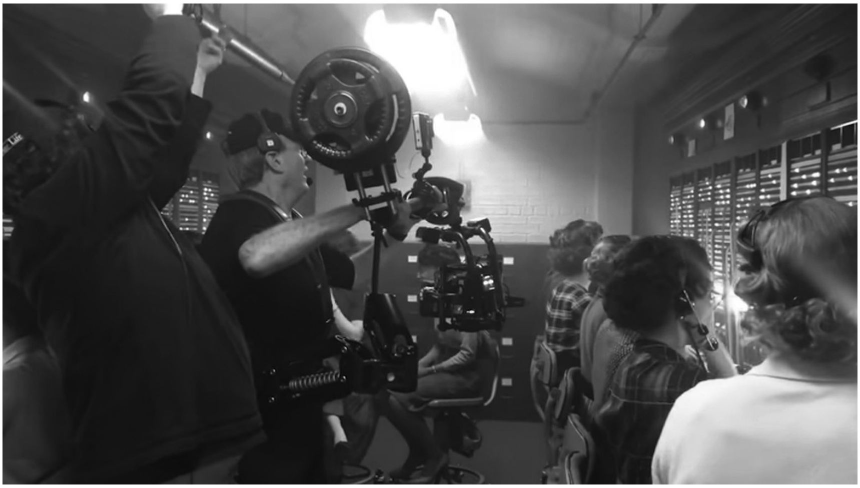


Figure 8.4 Steadicam operator Larry McConkey filming a long take in *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel*

long shot a camera shot taking in the whole body of a performer, or more generally a shot with a wide field of vision.

close-up a camera shot where the frame is filled by the face of a person or a detail of a face. Close-ups may also show details of an object or place.

The conventional forms of television shooting seem to centre on sets of three. The three most used shot sizes are **long shot**, **close-up** and a range of medium-long and medium close-ups in between. To create a coherent sense of space, sequences often begin with a long shot to establish the environment, followed by alternations between mid-shot and close-up to follow the action. In studio production for both factual and fiction genres, three camera positions are the standard minimum for covering the studio space and offering the director choices of long shot, mid-shot and close-up from each camera. In location shooting for drama, scenes shot with one camera will normally be played three times, with the camera positioned in three different places: a general view for establishing shots and cutaways, with the remaining two positions used for shot-reverse-shot cutting between two points of view on the action. A similar three-position format is used for documentary subjects and interviews, so that mid-shots or close-ups of contributors and presenters can be alternated either with close-ups or with wide shots to be used as cutaways. The reasons for this apparent rule of three are that:

- A single point of view is conventionally regarded as boring
- Alternations between two points of view can appear unrelated if there is not a third shot to bridge them
- More than three shot sizes for cameras can appear confusing to audiences

Published guides to television production focus almost exclusively on the standard conventions for shooting and develop these conventions in much more detail. But as the discussion of Steadicam shows, interesting ways of adapting these rules of three, or even breaking the rules radically, can produce creative and involving programmes.

Shot composition allows the relationships between people, and between people and things, to be expressed in spatial terms. There are basic conventions of shot composition that enable shots to cut together in the editing process. For example, when one character is looking at or speaking to another, the speaker is usually positioned to one side of the frame with a blank space in front of them across which they can look towards the other person. Similarly, a person walking normally has space left in front of them in the shot, into which the person can walk. These conventions are easy to see and understand when watching broadcast television and have become conventional norms used unthinkingly by television programme-makers. Tone and meaning depend on all the elements that contribute to **mise-en-scène**: the lighting, music, sound, shot composition, props and objects in frame, costume, and camera movement. These elements are discussed in Chapter 2. The effective direction of television requires the ability to understand and work creatively with all of the elements of mise-en-scène.

mise-en-scène literally meaning 'putting on stage', all the elements of a shot or sequence that contribute to its meanings, such as lighting, camera position and setting.

During a shoot the details of day-to-day and hour-to-hour activities are the responsibility of a production manager. The production manager is responsible to the producer and works closely with the director. They are responsible for the smooth running of travel, accommodation, catering and the hiring of technicians, equipment and facilities, and may assist the producer by doing reconnaissance (recces) for locations and keeping an eye on the production budget. The production manager will also produce a daily progress report on the shoot. The report lists the starting (call) and finishing (wrap) times of the day's work, the locations used and the time in minutes of screen time shot during the day. Similar calculations will show the number of scenes scheduled to be shot, those completed and the number of pages of script completed. From these numbers an average screen time per day can be calculated, and the **shooting ratio** worked out. The purpose of all this detail is to record the hours worked, facilities used, and supplies consumed during the day, so that progress in keeping to the budget can be monitored. One of the roles of a production assistant (PA) is to log and update changes to the script, to monitor continuity and to ensure that shots match and will cut. The PA logs each take and matches it with the script.

shooting ratio the number of minutes of film used to film a scene or complete programme as compared to the screen time of the finished scene or programme.

The technical crew is headed by the director of photography (or lighting director in multi-camera studio productions), who works with the director to achieve their desired aesthetic effect through different cameras, lenses and lighting technologies, liaising with the camera operators and lighting electricians. The camera operator works the camera and on lower-budget productions, including documentary, may be the same person as the director of photography. The sound recordist operates sound equipment, sometimes assisted by a sound assistant who will operate microphones and check equipment. Electricians position and adjust lights and are known as 'sparks'. If there is more than one electrician, the chief is called the 'gaffer' and their assistant is the 'best boy'. A grip is a cover-all term for someone who carries cameras and positions them and lays the track along which cameras can be moved on location. Multi-camera studio productions or outside broadcasts (OB) will also involve a vision mixer, who produces a live edit by selecting shots from the outputs of the different cameras, and a vision controller, who is responsible for the picture quality of cameras. The studio sound supervisor operates a sound mixing desk, the floor manager controls activity on the floor of the studio and is the key link person between the director, performers and contributors, and technical staff. Runners are low-paid staff who support the work of others by running errands, making coffee and performing low-level production tasks. Being a runner is often the recent graduate's first job in television.

Post-production

The processes of editing, sound dubbing and adding music are the final and crucial steps of television production and are known by the collective term 'post-production'. Post-production can be a long, complex and expensive business as digital editing technology allows for an extraordinary range of interventions that can be made during post-production. The addition of digital effects for everything from creating whole new worlds to cleaning up footage in realist dramas, manipulating colour through the grading process, and importing complex graphics are all completed after the production shoot at the editing stage. While, on one hand, the availability of inexpensive high-quality desktop computer editing systems can enable independent producers with tiny budgets or amateurs on YouTube to make effective television programmes, on the other hand the expectations of audiences and commissioning broadcasters have increased as the capability of the post-production technology has expanded.

Editing is crucial to television programme-making. Again, the producer will be heavily involved in the editing process, working alongside a professional editor who is expert in the use of digital editing software and hardware. The fact that the director is normally employed by the producer for a specific episode, rather than having responsibility for the overall look of any serial or series, means that the director is likely to work alongside or defer to the producer's authority in the editing suite. In the simplest terms editing involves choosing takes from the recorded footage and assembling them into the final programme, but the process is a complex and creative act of storytelling. Editing used to be done in analogue ('linear') form but is now digital ('non-linear'). Linear editing of programmes shot on video tape and film stock was time-consuming. Editing on video tape produced a degradation in picture quality and it was difficult to change the editing decisions made during the process. Digital tape formats became commonly available in the 1990s and involved the storage of sound and image information as numerical code stored on the tape. With the introduction of HD cameras this information is now stored as data on hard drives. Digital editing involves no loss of picture or sound quality when data is moved from the drive to the editing system and makes it much easier to revise and rework the programme. The detailed work this enables allows for the creation of complex editing patterns such as *Sharp Objects*'s fragmenting of its alcoholic protagonist's past and present through the increasingly oppressive flashbacks to teenage traumas that haunt her when she returns to her hometown. The production team will have ensured their familiarity with all the footage prior to editing, logged it and noted ideas to be used in the edit. The factors in the minds of the director, producer and editor will be:

- Possibilities for creating progression through the programme
- The revelation of dramatic or interesting turning-points
- Possibilities for intriguing and holding the audience

The rhythm and flow of the programme will be dependent on the careful structuring of these elements, referring back to the script and storyboard (in drama) to check that the aims of the programme idea are being effectively achieved. In documentary it is in editing where the story is constructed, working through and piecing together the large amount of footage accumulated during production into a coherent narrative. Similar processes are used to record and process sound in digital equipment such as the Avid editing system, so that sound can also be manipulated and transformed.

The editing process begins with viewing rushes from the shoot. Particular shots or sequences are chosen for editing, and this process also enables the director to remind themself of the various takes and their possible usefulness. It is likely that chosen shots or sequences will be part of a somewhat longer shot or sequence, so the beginning and ending points desired for the next stage are identified by selecting 'In' and 'Out' points to specify which parts of the chosen shot will be used. The editing software will then be used to produce a rough cut, where the shots are trimmed and ordered more precisely so that the sequences become close to the planned length of the finished programme. The rough cut enables the director to determine the pace and rhythm of the programme, often by cutting on action (where the sequence begins just at the important action rather than including the lead-up to it) and generating interest and suspense by cross-cutting between one scene and another. In documentary, voice-over commentary is written at the rough-cut stage, when the interaction between image and voice can be tried out.

Sound as well as music will contribute to the world evoked on screen, either emphasising what is already present in the image or contradicting it. Sound adds dramatic perspective to images by providing a 'sound point of view' on the action: action in long shot can be accompanied by sound appearing to bring the action much closer to the audience by its volume and clarity; or on the other hand, close-up action can be distanced from the audience by muting or blurring sound. Background sound from various locations (seaside, city street, in rooms with different kinds of acoustic tone) or sound effects can be drawn from those recorded in production or from professional sound libraries. In documentary, background sound will be captured by the sound recordist, as well as speech or other sync sound, for use to cover edits and provide a background soundscape for the programme. Broadcast television soundtracks are complex layers of sound edited onto the images in the online edit.

Digital editing systems such as Avid, Final Cut and Adobe Premier are based on the difference between the digital rushes from the shoot that are stored on the hard drive (known as the 'media') and the control information that the computer uses to determine the order of shots (timeline, timecode and editing instructions, known collectively as the 'project'). While the media require large amounts of hard drive storage space, the project is a small document that can be downloaded onto a drive or cloud storage and used in another computer. As the edit procedure is carried out, the amount of media stored digitally reduces as selections are made from the whole, based on the instructions contained in the project. Eventually the edit will produce a finished file containing all the right shots and sequences in the right order. The online edit is where this material is fine-tuned, minor repairs can be carried out to unsatisfactory frames. The colour grade is achieved by manipulating the colour palette and balancing the colour to standardise the aesthetic across different shots, or accentuating different tones for a stylised aesthetic. Visual effects are added, from relatively minor green screen replacement and beauty work on actors to extensive construction of worlds in telefantasy genres, with effects houses frequently required to work to a more intensive time frame compared to that of cinema. Sound and music tracks are attached to images, unless complex sound is being added, where it would be added separately in a dubbing theatre. All of these online effects can be viewed as soon as they are created, but the computer system needs to render them (process and record them) before the programme can be played back as a complete project. The resulting programme after online editing is called 'the fine cut', and at this point the director and producer will review the programme to make minor final changes before the master copy is at last produced.

Making television programmes is extremely gruelling, and it is often hard to tell whether the programme has 'worked' until after it has been completed. The success of a television production can be impacted by a range of aspects beyond a programme-makers control, from where it is placed in the linear schedule or streaming platform's **interface**, to how much promotion a channel or streamer gives it and the way in which it is marketed. Success can be gauged by how a programme is received by professional critics as well as through social media commentary. However, the key indicator of success within the television industry is the number of viewers. This response is determined in terms not only of the total size of the audience but also of the **audience share**. The raw numbers denoting audience size and percentage share are crude, however, and it is therefore also significant to programme-makers to discover more detailed information, such as the distribution of age groups in the audience of their programme, and its social class distribution.

interface the visual frame through which a streaming platform organises and promotes its programming.

audience share the percentage of viewers estimated to have watched one channel as opposed to another channel broadcasting at the same time.

BARB (Broadcasters Audience Research Bureau) the independent body that gathers and reports viewing statistics on behalf of UK television institutions.

The audience data for broadcast television is collected and processed by independent companies (Nielsen in the US, **BARB** in the UK), with top tens and overnight ratings circulated to the press. One of the problems of the streaming era for programme-makers and industry press alike is that global streaming platforms like Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime Video are secretive about their viewing figures and lack transparency when they are released (Netflix has recently begun to share some viewing data but this is not independently verified). This makes it difficult for programme-makers and creatives to know if their programmes are a success, with the lack of hard data also hampering their contract negotiations for further seasons and future projects. This leaves them to rely on social media commentary and how they are treated by executives. This audience data is of most concern to the hierarchy within television institutions such as commissioning executives, those in control of the employment of programme-makers. Programmes will be cancelled or recommissioned based on this data. Professional reputation among fellow workers within a programme-maker's own specialism, along with recognition from more powerful television executives, or awards success are frequently just as important as recognition by the press and public, since these are the fellow professionals and television executives with whom programme-makers compete and from whom they may gain further prospects of employment.

YouTube, user-generated content and the amateur-professional creator

This chapter has talked through the production processes for television; however, advances in technology allow a single creator or a small team to develop, shoot, edit and upload programming content to YouTube. The open-access streaming platform allows creators to upload their own content for anyone to watch. This user-generated content can be anything from scrappy camera-phone footage to professionally produced video content released in a regular schedule that is nearly indistinguishable from programmes produced by television institutions. However, we must remember that it's very hard to make a living from YouTube, as only the most successful creators are able to fund their video content through advertising revenue alone.

Launched in 2005 as a platform for the uploading and sharing of personal video content, YouTube's core business is participatory culture (Burgess and Green 2018) with the social function of the platform allowing viewers to interact with creators through comments. The growth of YouTube and user-generated content, where the public can produce as well as consume media, was enabled by a collection of technological advances in the 2000s:

- *Web 2.0* – the internet transitioned from a read-only form to a participatory form, which allowed interaction through comments and social media. Users could easily publish their own content through blogs and video sharing platforms, and this content could be easily shared and embedded in other websites.
- *Broadband internet and video compression technology* – their widespread availability allowed both professional and amateur video to be uploaded and streamed online
- *Digital production technologies and software* – price reductions and smaller equipment reduced barriers to access. Consumer-level cameras (even high-level smartphones) and desktop editing software enable amateur creatives to produce video to a high technical standard.

What began as the grassroots sharing of mundane and formally private behaviours and creativity, from emotional confessions to make-up and cooking demonstrations – what Jean Burgess and Joshua Green call 'vernacular creativity' (2018) – has become increasingly corporatised over the last two decades. YouTube blends both amateur and professional production and Burgess and Green note that there have always been two YouTubes operating at once. One is focused on professional production with commercial goals, using aesthetics that map onto established institutions of film and television. The other is focused on 'everyday expression, vernacular creativity, and community formation' (2018: 12), serving niche audiences. YouTube is constantly adjusting the algorithm that controls the discoverability of video content through search and recommendation. In 2012 the platform began strategically reshaping itself from a grassroots creative space into a professional space, seeking to appeal to the kinds of companies who usually spent their advertising budget on television. This process encouraged the professionalisation of content, with major algorithmic changes favouring videos with longer running times (which provided space for more advertising spots) and higher production quality in search results and recommendations, as well as dissuading sexual topics and profanity which enabled videos to be easily matched with advertisers. This aligned YouTube more closely with television.

YouTube draws on established televisual genres such as cooking, lifestyle and travel shows, and has a number of homegrown genres such as video-game play-throughs, make-up tutorials, shopping 'hauls' and most notably the vlog format. Vlogging, particularly in beauty and lifestyle themes, involves creating a feeling that the audience is being welcomed into the creator's everyday life. This feeling is accentuated by the use of hand-held cameras that enable front-facing filming. In vlogs creators frame themselves with the domestic space of a bedroom or living room visible behind them, giving viewers access into the (often highly curated) non-public space of their homes (Figure 8.5). Vloggers also take viewers along as they carry out their 'daily life' in domestic and public spaces. This creates an illusion of access accentuated by vlogging's direct address to camera, which constructs a peer-to-peer relationship with the viewer. However, as Jessica Johnston points out,

> The person in the video may look and talk like the viewer, but the production values of the video suggest that a class divide still exists between producer and viewer, emphasising the higher role the producer plays in the relationship
>
> (2017: 12)

Success on YouTube entails a practice of self-branding that is in part built on a display of 'authenticity' (Arthurs et al. 2018: 8). The direct address of the vlog format, together with the platform's participatory elements and the responsiveness of creators to their audiences creates a sense of intimacy and immediacy. For their fans this brings connotations of authenticity absent from a large-scale professional television production. Community-building, loyalty and satisfaction are essential for the financial success of creators, as subscribers and video view-rates increase advertising revenue. Where traditional television production requires creatives to develop specialised skills and a defined role within a production team, YouTube creators self-produce video content, requiring them to be multi-skilled across a suite of technologies. Although larger creators have management and creative teams or are part of 'multi-channel networks' (MCNs) who provide a range of support services. Creators must also be responsive to

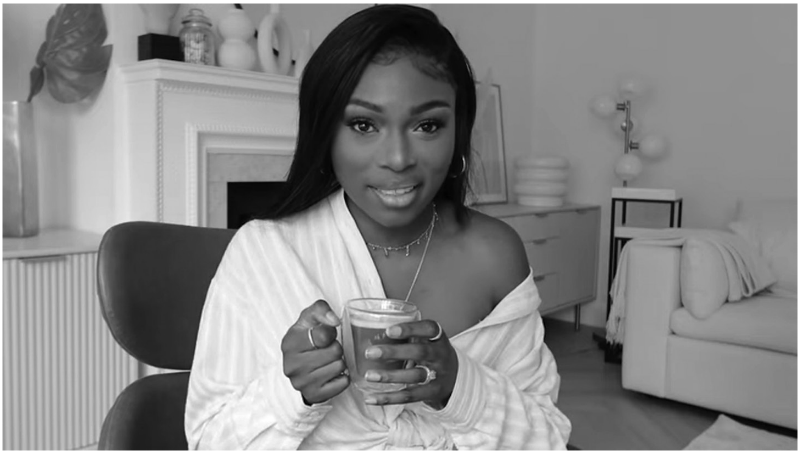


Figure 8.5 Vlogger Patricia Bright framed against her living room

trends in devising new content to increase the possibility of being picked up by searches and recommended by the algorithm, whilst still targeting the needs of their precise niche of audience. They must maintain connections across different social media platforms, curating a range of audience bases. Creators are vulnerable to burnout due to the combination of this intense production process, the unpredictability of advertising revue and the complex and time-consuming tracking of the YouTube algorithm's constantly shifting nature and its impact on content's discoverability. This means that creating for YouTube is an inherently unstable livelihood.

Case study: 'fixed rig' observational documentary

'Fixed rig' observational documentary series use technological innovations and workflows developed for reality TV programme *Big Brother* and apply them to the observational documentary mode. Programmes filmed using a system of small remote-controlled cameras became some of Channel 4's most successful documentary series of the 2010s. This included two long-running programmes *One Born Every Minute* and *24 Hours in A&E*, filmed in hospital maternity wards and Accident & Emergency departments respectively. Much like docusoap and reality TV, these documentary series draw in viewers with strong characters and dramatic arcs, but their production process connotes a stronger documentary 'truth claim' than these forms. As Helen Littleboy points out, it is these documentaries' 'claim on the authentic, television's holy grail, that has become key to broadcasters' and producers' enthusiasm' (2013: 134).

The fixed rig documentary format and production process was developed in Channel 4's 2008 series *The Family*. This ran for three seasons and was positioned as the contemporary version of two ground-breaking and controversial 1970s observational documentary series. 1973 PBS documentary *An American Family* followed the affluent white Californian family The Louds and Paul Watson's 1974 BBC1 series *The Family* followed the white working-class Reading family The Wilkins. Their titles positioned their subjects as representative of contemporary society. Both programmes used observational documentary form and were celebrated for the intimate access into family life their makers achieved. Camera crews and directors filmed in observational format within the homes of these families (in very tight spaces in the case of The Wilkins household), seeking to capture the everyday issues of family life. The resulting serialised narratives featured varying degrees of reflexivity about the filming process.

Leaping forward to 2000, the reality show *Big Brother* presented itself as a social experiment that observed a cast of strangers living together in a studio-as-house, observed around the clock. Their every action was filmed by cameras positioned behind one-way mirrors and CCTV-style remote-controlled cameras rigged onto walls. In 2008 *The Family* took elements of the *Big Brother* production process out into the real world to produce an observational documentary that removed the physical presence of the camera crew. Each season of *The Family* saw small remote-controlled cameras rigged throughout a family's home. These cameras were controlled by the production team in a gallery stationed nearby, with a director choosing who to follow and how action would be covered as it unfolded. The constructed nature of the *Big Brother* format foregrounded artificiality and performativity, yet *The Family*'s use of this production process for observational documentary made 'truth claims' of a new authenticity. Hamish Mykura, then Channel 4 documentary commissioner, claimed this fixed-rig observational documentary produced 'such a distinctive type of programme … If people are being followed by a camera all the time they behave in a certain way. With fixed cameras they are more unguarded and more interesting' (Dowell 2011).

The Family documented months of everyday life for the white British Hughes family, and in two further seasons the British-Asian Grewal family and the British-Nigerian Adesina family. Presenting conflicts, comedy and mundane activities common to family life, it draws entertainment from its intimate access and action that seems unmediated and 'authentic', which viewers could recognise themselves in. The first season was entirely observational, its stories shaped by editing and the narration by actor John Simms. From the Grewal family onwards fixed rig documentaries have used interviews with participants to shape their observational footage, drawing out the emotional and professional context for their actions and more strongly shaping narrative arcs. The fixed rig production process was formalised across the 2010s and benefited from the further miniaturisation of camera technology, with filming technologies becoming more unobtrusive. Documentaries explored the daily life of British public institutions, including hospitals, schools, police stations and prisons, as well as looking at family life beyond the UK in 2015's *The Tribe*, which focused on a Hamar tribe in Ethiopia.

Across its 11 seasons *One Born Every Minute* filmed in the maternity wards of hospitals in Leeds, Bristol, Birmingham and Southampton. The documentary series chronicles the working routines of midwives and provides some insight into the process of giving birth. Most of the screen time is occupied with the interactions of expectant mothers with staff and relatives, with each episode following two or three families through their labour. While births function as the dramatic climax of each episode, the audience is invited to get to know the mothers, staff and relatives in the time preceding the birth, and to sympathise with or criticise the ways that people behave with each other. In *One Born Every Minute* the details of human interaction, and how different people respond to the hopes and fears associated with parenthood, are much more prominent than questions of medical policy, institutional politics or public health information.

Similar storytelling patterns shape *24 Hours in A&E*, although the range of medical situations experienced in Accident & Emergency departments sees a wider focus on public health, with each episode blending adrenaline-fuelled emergencies with more mundane ailments. Episodes are shaped around the narrative arcs of patients' treatment, which intersect with the professional lives of staff and feature intense emotions and moments of comedy in the high stress environment of care at the frontline of the NHS (Figure 8.6). Here the dedication and skill of medical workers in overstretched working conditions is used as an underlying argument for the value of the NHS. These are personal interest documentaries that produce soft politics rather than the campaigning or investigation seen in hard-hitting documentaries and current affairs programmes equipped to explain the complex political underpinnings of the institution's ongoing challenges.

In fixed-rig documentaries remotely controlled miniature cameras are installed in unobtrusive housings on walls and ceiling, with their lenses covered by apertures that conceal where the lens is pointing. Hospital settings, in which medical equipment and security systems are also mounted on the walls of corridors and delivery rooms, help to make the camera rig relatively unnoticeable (Figure 8.7). A fixed rig documentary series requires the installation of a large infrastructure of equipment, using up to 100 remote-controlled cameras and 20 kilometres of cable, with sound recorded through a combination of stationary microphones and radio mics worn by participants. This installation can take weeks as it must work around the busy ongoing life of a hospital or police station. Once this is installed the action

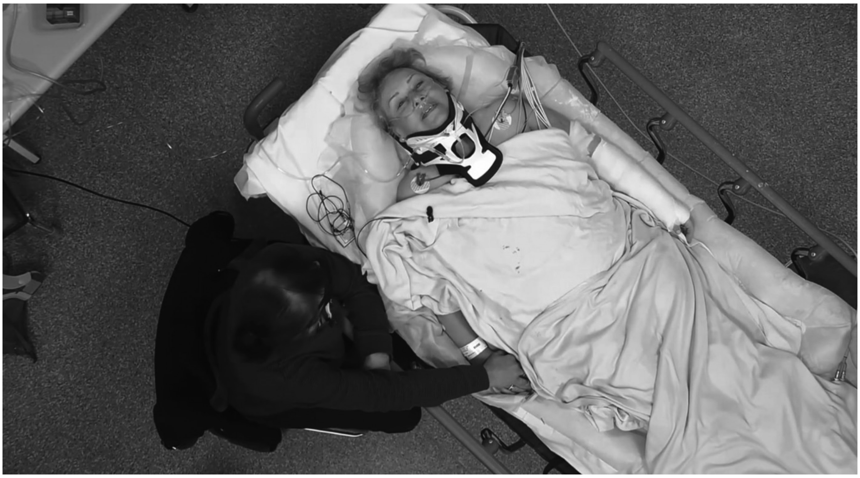


Figure 8.6 A patient shot from an overhead camera in *24 Hours in A&E*

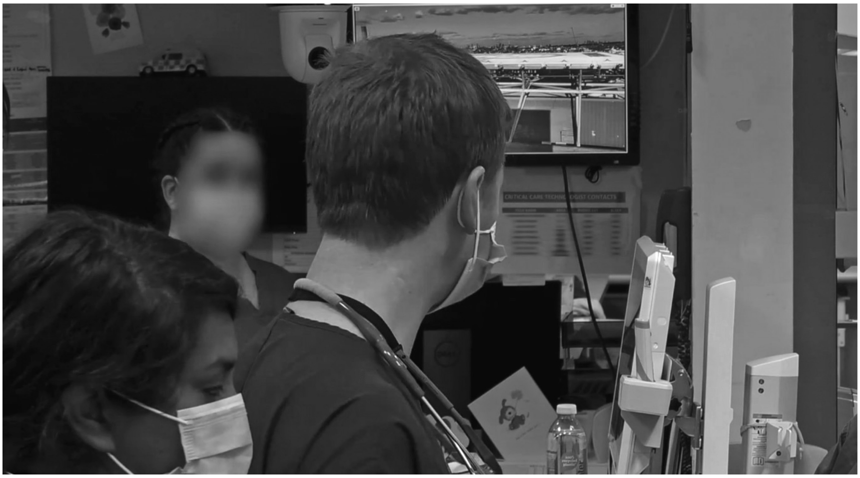


Figure 8.7 A camera is relatively unobtrusive amongst the medical equipment

is captured by a small production crew in a gallery stationed nearby, comprised of a camera operator, sound mixer, vision engineer and a technical assistant, overseen by the gallery director. A conventional observational documentary is constructed through the relationship built between the director and participants, and the close access granted to camera and sound operator. In contrast, Littleboy notes the feeling of distance felt by the gallery team 'The fixed rig transforms the accepted terms of engagement between documentary-makers and their subjects. No longer active participants, the director and crew become voyeurs, cut off from contact with those in the camera's sights' (2013: 133). *24 Hours in A&E*'s 24-hour filming process requires alternating shifts of gallery teams, supported by an on-the-ground production team working to gain filming consent and affix radio mics onto the chosen participants.

Consent is a key part of documentary production, with these series' pre-production seeing producers getting to know the staff, schoolchildren or expectant parents who could provide interesting storylines, building the relationships and trust needed for participants to consent to be filmed. Working in public institutions like schools and hospitals means producers must build confidence in managers worried about representations and reputation damage, and professionals like doctors and teachers wary of storylines and footage capturing actions that may undermine their authority and endanger their employment. Consent is particularly a concern when minors are involved, with *Educating Yorkshire* using an 'opt-out' consent process where parents could request their child not appear on screen, followed by another opt-out stage when schoolchildren, staff and parents viewed the final episode (Ball 2015).

The entire camera rig can be called upon at any time, but the gallery director must scan its outputs for stories and interesting moments, making a choice over which action to follow. The rig is narrowed down to three cameras recording video at any one time (Ball 2015). This requires quick thinking and acute story sense in a director, particularly in a busy and chaotic location like an A&E department or police station. In A&E cases arrive or escalate without warning and a researcher must be mobilised to gain consent and mic-up a potential subject. The production team must fulfil their 'duty of care' for participants as required by UK broadcasting regulations. Researchers require strong interpersonal skills as consent must be gained in what can be a traumatic and vulnerable situation for patients and family members.

The fixed rig production process requires skilled camera operators able to remotely control adjustments from close-ups to long shots in the moment of shooting in order to capture reaction shots, key storytelling beats and emotional moments. They must provide sufficient camera positions to facilitate coherent storytelling and cutting between points of view at the editing stage. Like all documentaries, the editing process of fixed rig documentaries involves substantial labour to construct the final result. Even when recording from only three cameras at a time, a month-long shoot for *24 Hours in A&E* produces 7000 hours of footage, ten times that produced on a typical single-camera documentary shoot (Littleboy 2013: 131). This needs to be shaped into a ten-episode season. Loggers and transcribers document each piece of visual and audio footage, allowing the editors to search using key words to find the right shot. But the complexity of the editing process is still likened to 'completing a jigsaw puzzle from hundreds of thousands of pieces' (Ball 2015).

The production process of fixed rig documentary produces footage that feels unmediated, leading programme-makers and executives to claim a new authenticity in observational form. Fixed rig documentaries set in public institutions require a 'factory-style operation of unprecedented scale' (Littleboy 2013: 136) necessitating large budgets. These are flagship programmes targeting prime-time scheduling slots and must attract high audience numbers to justify their budgets. To appeal to a broad audience their storytelling blends fixed-rig's access and connotations of authenticity with the entertainment values of strong characters and emotive dramatic arcs. As a result they construct a somewhat sanitised and comforting vision of these public institutions.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Studying the professional processes of making television gives a deeper understanding of television institutions, programmes and how meanings are made

- Development is the stage when programme ideas are worked out, researched and planned
- Pre-production is when locations, contributors or performers are selected, scripts are written, storyboards and production schedules are drawn up and the design, props, costumes and music are selected
- Production is the shooting stage, when the creative and technical personnel produce the audio-visual raw material for programmes
- Post-production includes the editing of the material that has been shot, and the inclusion of effects and a sound mix
- The hierarchy of roles in television production, and the ways that technology is designed to be used, reveal assumptions about the relative status of television professional staff, and how images and sound should be put together

Bibliography

Allen, S. (2010) *News Culture*, third edition. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Arthurs, J., Drakopoulou, S. and Gandini, A. (2018) 'Researching YouTube', *Convergence*, 24(1), pp. 3–15.

Ball, M. (2015) 'How fixed-rig has transformed factual', *Royal Television Society Magazine*, February. Available at https://rts.org.uk/article/how-fixed-rig-has-transformed-factual

BBC (2021) 'UHD Production: What do I need to know?', *BBC Academy Guides*. Available at www.bbc.com/academy-guides/uhd-production-what-do-i-need-to-know

Brown, L. and Duthie, L. (2019) *The TV Studio Production Handbook*. London, Bloomsbury.

Burgess, J. and Green, J. (2018) *Youtube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Curran Bernard, S. (2016) *Documentary Storytelling*. Abingdon: Focal Press.

Dowell, B. (2011) 'Channel 4 corners market for fixed-camera observational documentaries', *Guardian*, 10 January. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/jan/10/channel-4-observational-documentaries

Johnston, J. (2017) 'Subscribing to sex edutainment: Sex education, online video, and the YouTube star', *Television and New Media*, 18(1), pp. 76–92.

Hibberd, J. (2021) 'Amazon's "The Lord of the Rings" to cost $465M for just one season', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 16 April. Available at www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/amazons-lord-of-the-rings-cost-465-million-one-season-4167791/

Keller, T. (2019) *Television News: The Heart and How-To of Video Storytelling*. London: Routledge.

Littleboy, H. (2013) 'Rigged: Ethics, authenticity and documentary's new Big Brother', *Journal of Media Practice*, 14(2), pp. 129–46.

Lury, K. (2005) *Interpreting Television*. London: Hodder Arnold.

Mayer, V., Banks, M.J. and Caldwell J.T. (eds) (2009) *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*. New York: Routledge.

Messenger Davies, M. (2006) 'Production studies', *Critical Studies in Television*, 1(1), pp. 21–30.

Owens, J. (2020) *Television Production*, seventeenth edition. Abingdon: Routledge.

Screenskills (2022) 'Job profiles', *ScreenSkills*. Available at www.screenskills.com/starting-your-career/job-profiles/

Tunstall, J. (2001) *Media Occupations and Professions: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Television Audiences

9

- Introduction 208
- The economics of watching television 209
- Ratings: measuring audiences 211
- Targeting audiences 213
- ‘Protecting’ audiences 213
- Active audiences 214
- Attention and involvement 215
- Qualitative audience research 217
- Fan audiences 220
- Case study: data, algorithms and interfaces – shaping streaming audiences 224
- Summary of key points 228
- Bibliography 229

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-10

Television Audiences

Introduction

This chapter discusses how broadcasters gain information about audience sizes, and why this information is significant to them. An important matter to bear in mind when reading this chapter is that numerical, quantitative information does not reveal answers to the questions about why and how people watch television. This is called qualitative analysis and makes up much of the kind of audience analysis done in Television Studies. Studying why audiences watch television programmes, whether they enjoy them and what role television programmes play in their lives requires information about the value people attribute to television, rather than statistical 'quantitative' information. But since the measurement of audiences in terms of numbers of viewers is crucial to the economics and organisation of television, this chapter discusses ways of studying this. The Dutch television theorist Ien Ang (1991, 1996) has analysed the practices of audience measurement, and shown that broadcasters have an insistent desire to find ways of measuring audiences. But audience measurement techniques limit the kind of conclusions that can be drawn from them. Audience measurement:

- Is statistical
- Is based on samples of viewers (although streaming platforms can extract more comprehensive viewing data)
- Results in generalisations about what viewers find pleasurable

Television Studies theorists regard the television audience not as a relatively uniform mass but instead as a complex set of overlapping groups with different allegiances, backgrounds and interests. This shifts the object of study from the television programme, as a text, to the television audience responding to this text. The key concept in the discourse of Television Studies – the plurality of meanings – is still in use, but is now applied not only to the many meanings of programme texts, but to the many different ways in which audiences might interpret programmes. It could be argued that earlier critical methodologies focusing on the text privileged the role of the critic themself in determining the correct meaning of television programmes, assuming that the meanings discovered through analysis were those that the audience was taking from programmes. By focusing on the audience, often by setting up situations in which the researcher listens to the talk of actual viewers – whether in person, from recordings they have made or through analysing online **discourse** – Television Studies has granted more power and authority to ordinary viewers and undercut, to some extent, the mastery of academic discourse over the subject that it aimed to discuss. In undertaking these newer methods of research, Television Studies has also paid much more attention

discourse a particular use of language for a certain purpose in a certain context (such as academic discourse or poetic discourse), and similarly in television, a particular usage of television's audio-visual 'language' (news programme discourse or nature documentary discourse, for instance).

than it had done previously to underanalysed groups of people. In particular, television viewers belonging to ethnic subcultures, women viewers, children and the elderly began to be the subject of research, and their responses to television were taken seriously. Because the researchers working in Television Studies are generally critical of the power relationships operating in contemporary society, audience studies also provided an opportunity to find new sources of potential **resistance** to the ways that the television business is organised, and to the conventional and **ideological** meanings that are discovered in most programmes by close **textual analysis**. Rather than looking for instances of television programmes that could be held up as examples of resistant texts, researchers looked for groups among the television audience that could be characterised as resistant viewers.

The competition for audiences has been intensified as national television broadcasters and their **streaming platforms** come up against powerful global streaming giants. The total television audience has become increasingly fragmented, as have the technologies through which this audience views television, although the number of hours per week that the average viewer watches has remained relatively stable. Broadcasters and streamers aim to capture a significant share of the available audience for their own programmes, especially if their source of funding is advertising. Clearly, commercially funded broadcasters can charge advertisers substantial amounts of money to put advertisements on their channel only if a large or valuable audience group is watching that channel when the advertisement is shown. Similarly, YouTube can charge significant sums to place advertising on videos with large amounts of viewers and accounts with high numbers of subscribers. The same concerns are also important to broadcasters that are not funded by advertising. The BBC gains its income not through advertising but through the payment of the **licence fee**. But the government is unlikely to allow the licence fee to increase and might even abolish the licence fee altogether if the BBC is not gaining audiences comparable to those of the commercial channels. Broadcasters compete against each other to achieve large audience sizes for their programmes (**ratings**) and to encourage viewing of their own programmes rather than those of their competitors that are shown at the same time (**audience share**).

National broadcasters and their streaming platforms must also compete with international streamers funded by **subscription**. These platforms are secretive about their viewing data, with most releasing only select, headline-generating claims of huge viewership for their most popular programmes. These are not verified through an independent ratings body like **BARB** (UK) and Nielsen (US), as the ratings for national broadcasters are. For streamers funded by subscription, audience data informs decisions over whether to renew a programme for further seasons as successful programmes can reduce subscription cancellations, or 'churn' and help maintain and grow subscriber numbers. This chapter's case study looks at streaming platforms, audiences and data in more detail.

The economics of watching television

Television programme-making has to be paid for. While cinema audiences pay for films by buying tickets to see them (and buying products associated with films), television viewers pay indirectly through the television licence, paying for

resistance the ways in which audiences make meaning from television programmes that is counter to the meanings that are thought to be intended, or that are discovered by close analysis.

ideology the set of beliefs, attitudes and assumptions arising from the economic and class divisions in a culture, underlying the ways of life accepted as normal in that culture.

textual analysis a critical approach which seeks to understand a television text's meanings by undertaking detailed analysis of its image and sound components, and the relationships between those components.

streaming platform company that provides video on-demand via the internet, can be subscription-based or supported by advertising or a licence fee e.g. Disney+, BBC iPlayer.

licence fee an annual payment by all owners of television sets, which is the main source of income for the BBC.

ratings the number of viewers estimated to have watched certain programmes, as compared to the numbers watching other programmes.

audience share the percentage of viewers estimated to have watched one channel as opposed to another channel broadcasting at the same time.

subscription payment to a television broadcaster or streaming platform in exchange for the opportunity to view programmes on certain channels that are otherwise blocked.

BARB (Broadcasters Audience Research Bureau) the independent body that gathers and reports viewing statistics on behalf of UK television institutions.

cable television originally called Community Antenna Television (CATV). Transmission of television signals along cables in the ground.

satellite television television signals beamed from a ground transmitter to a stationary satellite that broadcasts the signal to a specific area (called the 'footprint') below it.

slot the position in a television schedule where a programme is shown.

schedule the arrangement of programmes, advertisements and other material into a sequential order on linear television, within a certain period of time, such as an evening, day or week.

reality TV programmes where the unscripted behaviour of 'ordinary people' is the focus of interest.

demography the study of population, and the groupings of people (demographic groups) within the whole population.

niche audiences particular groups of viewers defined by age group, gender or economic status, for example, who may be the target audience for a programme.

merchandising the sale of products associated with a television programme, such as toys, books or clothing.

subscriptions to **satellite**, **cable** or streaming platforms, or by buying products that are advertised in television advertisements. Commercial broadcasters and streaming platforms that integrate advertising (such as ITVX, All4, YouTube and the lower-priced tiers of many US streamers) sell audiences to advertisers. They do so by estimating the size of audience expected to view a particular programme and estimating the composition of that audience (in terms of its age, gender and economic power). According to the size and composition of the audience, the broadcaster or streamer charges advertisers a particular sum of money per thousand viewers that it expects to view a programme or scheduling **slot**. The assumption behind this is that viewers are economically active in making purchases during the time that they are not watching television. So although it may seem that watching television is a respite from the activities of earning money and spending it, the viewer's economic activity is the precondition that enables television programmes on commercial channels and services to be made.

On commercial channels different parts of the linear **schedule** cost different advertising rates, due to the levels of audience they draw in. These were the rates per 30-second slot on ITV in 2021:

- 11am – £8,838
- 6.45pm – £29,498
- 7.30pm – £41,650
- 9.30pm – £37,686
- 11.05pm – £9,763

Advertising during ITV's evening soap opera *Coronation Street* cost £41,650 per 30-second spot in 2021, the channel's highest advertising rate. A 30-minute episode can include up to six minutes of adverts so one episode of *Coronation Street* can draw £249,900 in revenue. Once the episode budget and ITV's operating costs have been deducted from this figure, the rest is profit. The price of advertising varies according to whether the programme in which they are placed is a free-to-air broadcast programme like ITV or on ITVX, the company's streaming platform. In 2020 advertising on broadcaster streaming platforms made up 13% of television advertising sales in the UK (Ofcom 2021). ITV can charge more to advertise on ITVX as younger viewers in the 16–34-year-old age group are more likely to watch programmes on streaming platforms, and it is these viewers who comprise the most attractive market for advertisers because they spend most freely on the products and services advertised on television. ITV gains additional revenue from subscriptions to the advertising-free version of ITVX, as does Channel 4 with All4. Alongside advertising, broadcasters can gain revenue from sponsorship through the bumpers that frame each ad break. **Reality show** *Love Island* is one of ITV's most commercialised programmes. The reality dating show draws around five million viewers on ITV2, the broadcaster's youth channel. Because its **niche audience** is mostly in the 16–34-year-old **demographic**, ITV charged £100,000 per advertising slot in 2021. In addition, ITV brought in revenue of £12 million from its official brand partnerships, including £5 million from the headline sponsor (Sweney 2021) (Figure 9.1). ITV also gains significant revenue from **merchandise** and digital games tied to *Love Island*.

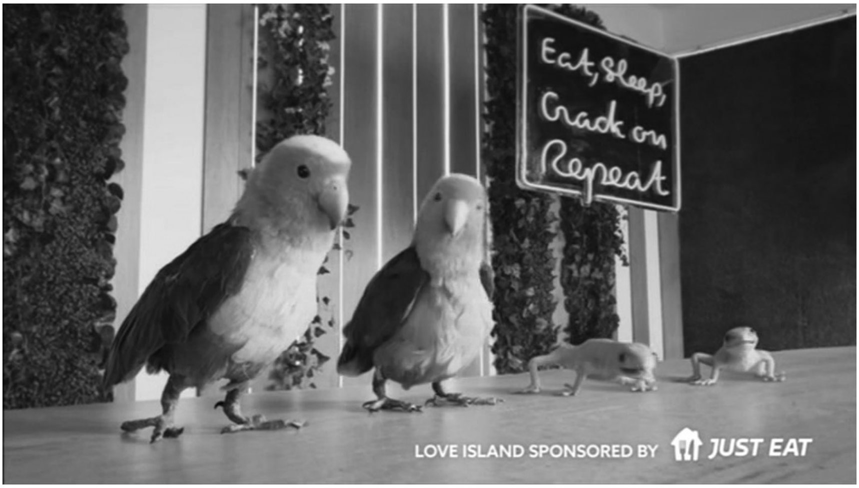

Eat, Sleep, Crack on Repeat
LOVE ISLAND SPONSORED BY JUST EAT

Figure 9.1 Sponsorship bumper from an episode of *Love Island*

Ratings: measuring audiences

Since advertisers pay for audiences' viewing time, they need to know that audiences are watching the commercials. In the UK BARB is an independent body funded by broadcasters and advertisers that collects audience data. It does this by monitoring the viewing habits of an audience panel and processing data provided by broadcasters' streaming platforms of views on smartphones, tablets and computers. The BARB panel of around 5300 households (over 12000 people) is selected to be representative of the nation's demographics, providing detailed information to broadcasters and advertisers about what type of people are watching their programmes (BARB.co.uk). BARB chooses households from various regions of the country, comprising different combinations of household types, some with children, some without, across a range of ages and economic backgrounds. Complex statistical methods are used to ensure that the whole sample is representative, and that the results of the audience research information can be reliably multiplied to give national figures.

The '**people meter**' is a mechanism for monitoring this. The hardware version of this is connected to the household's TVs, with a button for each member of the household to press when they enter or leave a room, it registers what is being watched through matching audio samples to a broadcast. The software version is an app installed on computers and tablets. This is very similar to punching in to work in a factory and punching out at the end of the day. While it might seem strange to equate watching television with doing paid work, the analogy is actually very close. It is just that we are accustomed to thinking of television viewing as leisure (the opposite of work) and separating it from the harsh calculations of profit and loss that govern life in highly developed societies such as Britain. But television is a business and an industry in which television viewers are increasingly regarded as a market, and could also be understood as participants.

people meter a device resembling a television remote control, used in sample households to monitor what viewers watch.

commissioning the UK process through which programmes are pitched, developed and selected for funding and broadcast. The US television industry's structure will see a similar process of a programme being 'picked up' or 'greenlit' by a network or streaming service.

genre a kind or type of programme. Programmes of the same genre have shared characteristics.

BARB's data is crucially important to broadcasters and advertisers, who make high-risk decisions based on live overnight viewing figures, combined with further sets of 'consolidated' ratings incorporating time-shifted and on-demand views. Decisions over whether to **commission**, continue or cancel a television programme are significantly determined by BARB research, because these figures tell British television companies what 'works'. Although international streaming services do not provide similar data, audience data gathering companies like BARB and Nielsen can use their audience panels, along with social media tracking and other technologies to estimate popular programmes on these platforms. In the UK, according to BARB ratings fiction and entertainment programmes have always attracted the largest audiences, particularly programmes in the long-established **genres** of soap opera and police drama, talent shows and competitive reality like *The Great British Bake Off*, *Strictly Come Dancing* and *I'm a Celebrity…Get Me Out of Here*, as well as high profile sporting events. In 2021 the sixth season of BBC1 police drama *Line of Duty* aired weekly on BBC1 and on iPlayer. In a departure from the BBC's usual practice, it was not available as a full season box set on iPlayer until the end of the season. This return to a classic episodic release strategy paid off, drawing an average consolidated audience of over 16 million, only topped in that year's ratings by two football matches, each gaining 18 million. Whilst sports, flagship reality shows and dramas target broad audiences, many programmes and channels target smaller niche audiences made up of particular demographics.

BARB and the broadcasters themselves use a standard breakdown of the population into groups according to their economic and social position. Highly paid professionals make up the 'A' group, lower-management and clerical workers form the 'B' group, while the 'C1' group consists of skilled manual workers. Less attractive groups to advertisers, such as people in temporary employment, people living on pensions and the unemployed, are represented by the codes 'C2', 'D' and 'E'. It is evidently very important for broadcasters that their audience contains a high proportion of the most economically and socially powerful people in the national audience. This is also why in the ITV advertising rates listed above, daytime television commanded the lowest advertising rates as it is more likely to be watched by those in the D and E categories as they are not at work.

preferred reading an interpretation of a text that seems to be the one most encouraged by the text, the 'correct' interpretation.

active audience television audiences regarded not as passive consumers of meanings, but as negotiating meanings for themselves that are often resistant to those meanings that are intended or that are discovered by close analysis.

Looking beyond ratings, a viewer's demographics, background and life experiences shape their reception of television, as this chapter will explore. Audiences can be regarded as passive objects positioned by television texts to accept a single '**preferred reading**', or they can be considered as **active** agents. Television Studies considers audiences as active, taking account of the complex social and cultural contexts in which television viewing takes place, and in which television programmes are made. As Bob Mullan (1997: 18) has argued,

> Viewers often, but not always, engage in meaning-making: they do not always sit there empty-minded awaiting edification. When a viewer watches television they do not leave their histories at the living-room door: neither do they abandon their cultural, class, racial, economic or sexual identities, nor do they forget either their media knowledge of comparable programmes, information in newspapers, and other aspects of the infrastructure of television viewing.

From this 'active audience' perspective, audiences are not regarded as masses, crowds or mobs but individuals with autonomy and a perspective on the world.

Targeting audiences

Television programme-makers devise new programmes not simply on the basis of ideas that they are interested in, but in order to target and attract particular audiences. The information provided to them by BARB about existing programmes gives them some basis for understanding which kinds of **format** are attractive to certain audiences. For example, structured reality programmes *Laguna Beach*, *The Only Way Is Essex* and *Made in Chelsea* were developed with the knowledge that significant numbers of young adult viewers who enjoy reality TV also enjoy soap opera and teen drama. The format blended the real-life storytelling and observational style of **docusoap** with **prime-time** drama's high production values, continuity editing and carefully composed **mise-en-scène**. Information deriving from past ratings is not always reliable, so single pilot episodes of new programmes are routinely made and shown to **focus groups** comprising carefully selected individuals of a certain age, gender and social background. Moderators are employed to lead the discussions in the focus group, in a similar way to how teachers ask questions and lead the discussion in a class. Online focus groups using clips and simpler sets of questions can provide further data. Focus group responses also help guide scheduling and marketing.

Clearly, focus groups represent very small samples of the total viewing audience, and the results derived from such studies can be unreliable. A further difficulty with using this methodology is that viewers tend to make judgements based on what they already know. It is very difficult for people to give an opinion on something that is innovative, without comparing and contrasting it with programmes they already like. It is for this reason that television broadcasters are criticised for producing a diet of television that always seems the same. Once a particular genre or format has been successful (such as talent shows, police or hospital drama) there is a tendency for broadcasters and streamers to keep delivering more of the same, to minimise risk.

'Protecting' audiences

Concerns over audiences shaped the development of regulations governing television content. These were influenced by underlying ideologies that viewed vulnerable audience populations, including children, as in need of 'protection'. Historically, television programmes have been made by well-educated and socially powerful elite groups, with those who commentate on and regulate television sharing similar backgrounds. This influenced early conceptions of television's mass audience, who were viewed as less socially powerful and well-educated, and by extension vulnerable and prone to bad influences in similar ways that children might be. There has been a long tradition among commentators on television to consider mass audiences as 'them' in contrast to the more sophisticated 'us' represented by those commentators. Theodor Adorno and the **Frankfurt School**

format the blueprint for a programme, including its setting, main characters, genre, form and main themes.

prime time the part of a day's television schedule when the greatest number of viewers may be watching, normally the mid-evening period.

docusoap a television form combining documentary's depiction of non-actors in ordinary situations with soap opera's continuing narratives about selected characters.

mise-en-scène literally meaning 'putting on stage', all the elements of a shot or sequence that contribute to its meanings, such as lighting, camera position and setting.

focus groups small groups of selected people, representing larger social groupings such as people of a certain age group, gender or economic status, who take part in discussions about a topic chosen for investigation.

Frankfurt School a group of theorists in the mid-twentieth century who worked on theories of contemporary culture from a Marxist perspective. Key members, notably Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, left Nazi Germany in the 1930s to work abroad.

argued that the mass media perpetrated what we now call ‘dumbing down’ and encouraged the mass audience’s fascination with trivia, immorality and indiscriminate consumption. Concerns over ‘dumbing down’ of television content linger on in cultural attitudes towards the medium. One of the ideological assumptions that long-shaped television regulation saw certain groups of viewers (who were considered less sophisticated than the people who made programmes or framed television regulations) as unable to discriminate for themselves between programmes that have socially positive meanings and programmes that could encourage anti-social or dangerous behaviour. In this way broadcasting regulations referring to children or to vulnerable adults justified the ability of a small group in society to legislate for what the majority were able to understand. Television regulations over language, sexual content and violence shaped the content and representations of television programming.

The gradual liberalisation of regulations on television programme content in the latter half of the twentieth century has partly been the result of granting television viewers greater agency and discrimination. The television viewer had been conceived of as a passive object that television programmes could directly affect and influence through the depiction of anti-social behaviour such as violent, sexually excessive or illegal behaviour. This was also the focus of audience research studying ‘media effects’. However, regulators now consider people’s relationships with television to be much more complex. Viewers are now understood as being aware of how television operates as a medium, and how the images and sounds on television are not the same as real life but are representations of it. The audience is considered as a subject rather than an object, and Television Studies work on audiences considers how viewers understand what they see in diverse and complex ways.

code in semiotics, a system or set of rules that shapes how signs can be used, and therefore how meanings can be made and understood.

discourse a particular use of language for a certain purpose in a certain context (such as academic discourse or poetic discourse), and similarly in television, a particular usage of television’s audiovisual ‘language’ (news programme discourse, or nature documentary discourse, for instance).

polysemia the quality of having multiple meanings at the same time. Texts like this are called ‘polysemic’.

Active audiences

In the 1980s, new ways of understanding how audiences understand the **codes** of television programmes were explored, and the most prominent of these is called the ‘encoding–decoding’ model. This work by the media academic Stuart Hall (1980) argued that programmes contain dominant ideological **discourses**. These are encoded in programmes through the production practices of programme-makers that result in conventional forms of narrative structure, invitations to the audience to identify with particular characters and the telling of stories that reflect taken-for-granted social meanings. Hall was interested in the factors that might affect the encoding of these meanings and also how audiences might decode them. Since the images and sounds of television are **polysemic**, it can never be guaranteed that audiences will make sense of the programme in a way that is consistent with the meanings encoded in it. Hall argued that television programmes contain a ‘dominant’ or ‘**preferred**’ reading, which limits the range of ways in which audiences can interpret the programme. But he suggested there was also space for audiences to interpret a programme through ‘**negotiated**’ and ‘resistant’ readings. Hall’s encoding–decoding model is subject to three important criticisms. First, it is easier to determine preferred meanings in programmes that are primarily intended to convey information, such as news programmes. Drama and other kinds of fiction tend to offer more alternative understandings of the action

preferred reading an interpretation of a text that seems to be the one most encouraged by the text, the ‘correct’ interpretation.

negotiated reading a viewer interpretation of a television text where the viewer understands meaning in relation to his or her own knowledge and experience, rather than simply accepting the meaning proposed by the text.

represented in them, and therefore a greater range of possible interpretations. Secondly, the encoding–decoding model does not make it clear whether preferred meanings are part of the television programme itself, whether they are something that can be identified after analysis by a media theorist, or whether they are actually in the minds of audiences. The third criticism is that the ideological values encoded in television programmes seem to be so powerful according to this model that it is difficult to challenge them. It is clear that some programme-makers produce radical and alternative programmes, so the conventions of communicating meaning in television leave a space for change.

In a study of how different audience groups made sense of *Nationwide*, a current affairs magazine programme shown in the 1970s, David Morley (1980) selected groups according to their social and economic background. He asked the different groups to watch selections from *Nationwide*, and tested Stuart Hall's encoding–decoding model against their responses. He found that many of their comments did not seem to justify the model. These actual viewers did not understand *Nationwide* primarily in the categories of 'dominant', 'negotiated' and 'resistant' readings. There were two main reasons for this:

- Characteristics of the groups that were not directly related to their social and economic position were affecting his results. The gender and ethnic background of people seemed to be just as important as their economic status.
- Many of the viewers in Morley's groups found *Nationwide* irrelevant to them, or were not able to make much sense of the programmes they had seen

The conclusion that Morley drew from this was that audience research should pay much more attention to the knowledge and experience those viewers brought with them to watching television. This knowledge and experience are termed the viewer's 'cultural competence' or 'cultural capital'. What viewers already know and understand, shapes their reactions to television. These are as much to do with pleasure and frustration as they are to do with the issues of social and political position that Morley had focused on. Channel 4's long-running reality show *Gogglebox* is designed to show how audiences can respond to the same programme in similar or different ways. The cast features a range of family and friendship groups who are chosen to reflect different regional, ethnic and class backgrounds, as well as age groups, inferring that these elements can shape a viewer's interpretation of a programme. Each group are filmed in their own homes using a small 'fixed-rig' system (as discussed in Chapter 8) watching a selection of programmes that aired that week on British television (Figure 9.2). Their responses and connected conversations are intercut with clips from the programme, with these editing choices producing comic or emotional contrasts and connections across the different viewing groups.

Attention and involvement

Aiming to provide a way of distinguishing between the different levels of attention that television viewers give to the programmes they watch, Jeremy Tunstall (1983) distinguished between primary, secondary and tertiary involvement with

Figure 9.2 *Gogglebox* cast members react to a programme

media. The most concentrated kind of attention he refers to as 'primary involvement'. This is where the viewer concentrates closely on what they see and hear on television, to the exclusion of any other activity. This is the focus of *Gogglebox*. Of course, many television viewers are also doing something else while they are watching television. The kind of attention where viewers are sometimes distracted is categorised as 'secondary involvement'. In a situation like this, the viewer is paying attention to the television screen some of the time, and listening to most of the sound, but might also be doing something else like engaging with social media or playing a game on a smartphone, shopping online using a tablet, or keeping an eye on the children. The lowest level of attention is called 'tertiary involvement'. Here the television viewer is paying only momentary attention to television while being engaged in another activity that demands concentration. For instance, the viewer might be cooking a meal while a screen in the kitchen is on, so that they scarcely see any of the images and are only occasionally listening to the sound. Some people use media technology in ways that had not been envisaged by its creators, such as leaving a television set on all day as a deterrent to burglars or keep an animal company when all the occupants of the house are out. Clearly the level of involvement in television makes a lot of difference to the meanings that viewers can make of what they see and hear. Television in contemporary culture is so deeply embedded in the routines of everyday life that a viewer's involvement with it can vary enormously. When studying television it is important to remember that there will be a whole spectrum of ways in which actual viewers engage with programmes.

Some television programmes are constructed to require viewers to engage at the level of primary involvement. This is often the case with prestige dramas whose complex narratives require devoted attention. In the UK main evening news bulletins appear at fixed points in the linear schedule such as 6pm or 10pm. Their scheduling already carries the connotation that news programmes are important, and that viewers could and should make an appointment to view them. This was particularly the case during the early months of the coronavirus pandemic when news programmes were some of the highest rated programmes in the UK each week. The 23 March BBC News Special where the Prime Minster announced the national lockdown was the second highest rated programme of 2021 (BARB The Viewing Report 2021). News programmes begin with loud and dramatic opening music, calling the viewer's attention to the television set and announcing that something important is about to be broadcast. The implication is that viewers should stop what they are doing and pay attention, granting primary involvement to the programme. Once the programme begins, the opening shot is normally a head-on address to the viewer by the presenter, who welcomes the viewer by saying 'good evening'. A situation of dialogue is constructed by this address to the viewer, and the viewer is invited to take up the position of someone being spoken to directly, someone who is paying attention to what is being said. News is a very rich **semiotic** text that is constructed to demand attention from the viewer. That attention is rewarded by allowing the viewer to gain information from a variety of viewpoints and by means of a variety of semiotic codes that convey meanings in different ways.

Some of the time, it is likely that the complex television texts of news programmes succeed in attracting and rewarding primary involvement from their viewers. But it is also likely that the density of news programmes often passes the viewer by. A few hours after watching the news, or even a few minutes after watching it, many viewers will find it very difficult to remember each of the news stories presented, let alone the nuances of the different points of view and fragments of information that the programme has offered. Instead viewers will construct for themselves a sense of what is important in the news, often based as much on their pre-existing knowledge of ongoing news stories, and on other information sources such as the internet and gossip, as on a particular news programme itself.

There are many factors that tend to dissolve the detail of what is seen on television into the diffuse fabric of everyday life. The embedding of programmes in the **flow** of linear broadcast television viewed over an afternoon or evening, or the '**binge watching**' of episodes autoplayed on a streaming service, as well as the general distractions present during viewing. A whole complex of other factors predisposes viewers to be interested in some moments in a programme and not others. This could be seen as a failing, in that television has to struggle so hard against the other aspects of people's lives that it can have a relatively weak power to shape and inform. Yet, on the other hand, this criticism assumes that television should indeed shape and affect its audiences in this dramatic way. Audience researchers have been more sceptical about the role of television in society. They have argued instead that television should be regarded as only one of the very many ways in which people make sense of their reality. Although television is important, it needs to be understood as part of everyday life.

semiotics the study of signs and their meanings, initially developed for the study of spoken language, and now used also to study the visual and aural 'languages' of other media such as television.

flow the ways that programmes, advertisements, etc. follow one another in an unbroken sequence across the day or part of the day, and the experience of watching the sequence of programmes, advertisements, trailers, etc.

binge-watching the viewing of multiple episodes of a programme sequentially, popularised by DVD box sets and streaming platforms.

Qualitative audience research

Audience studies explore the relationship that viewers have with television. This work looks at particular demographics (gender, class and race) of viewers, audiences (frequently fans) of particular programmes or of particular genres such as soap opera, reality TV or science-fiction. As the field developed, this work often sought to assert the value of genres and audiences that were at that time devalued in both academia and society as a whole. This is seen in work on science-fiction fandom, and particularly in feminist media studies work on soap opera and female audiences. The latter explored the complex relationship women have with television, tracing how soap opera formed a part of their identities and communities (Ang 1989, Brown 1994).

ethnography the detailed study of how people live, conducted by observing behaviour and talking to selected individuals about their attitudes and activities.

anthropology the study of humankind, including the evolution of humans and the different kinds of human society existing in different times and places.

This **ethnographic** study of television audiences takes its methodology from the academic discipline of **anthropology**, which focuses on the study of humankind. Anthropologists observe human behaviours in a bid to understand how different cultures function, and whether there are consistent structures that underlie human culture, family relationships and ways of organising work, leisure and identity. Research on television audiences asks some of the same questions, by seeking to understand how television functions in relationships between people, and affects the ways in which people's daily lives and understandings of themselves are formed. Yet one of the legacies that remains from the history of the discipline of anthropology is that the researcher is frequently in a more socially powerful position than the respondents that they interview and study – even when they are reflexive about their own place in the subculture that they are studying.

Television audience researchers aim for what the anthropologist Clifford Greeted called a 'thick description' of audience behaviour. This involves discovering 'a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which [social behaviours] are produced, perceived and interpreted, and without which they would not…in fact exist' (Geertz 1967: 7). The observation must be interpreted in relation to the cultural frameworks that make it meaningful, so that the ethnographer can analyse what they observe. The television ethnographer's results are therefore interpretations of the subjects' interpretations of their own actions and thoughts, and often those of other people too. Ethnography is a form of textual analysis, and interpreting audiences reveals the intricate, singular and different ways in which people make interpretations of their world and think about their own cultural behaviours. Layer on layer of interpretation is produced, and the best kinds of audience research explore not only the results obtained from the research, but also the constructed quality of the ethnographer's text. Ethnographic researchers are writers, and the observing, transcribing and interpreting functions involved in their work are not as separate as the 'scientific' history of the discipline might imply. Doing audience research requires the ethnographer to adopt several identities at different times, or at once:

- Participant
- Observer
- Recorder
- Author
- Interpreter
- Theorist

Researchers need to reflect on their agendas, with those who present themselves as belonging to the subcultures they study taking care to retain a degree of distance from the subjects of their analysis and reflexivity over their own role and beliefs. Audience research must take care to acknowledge that, like observational documentary discussed in Chapter 7, the act of observing a cultural practice will itself inevitably alter and affect the behaviour they observe. As audience research has developed within Television Studies, training in the ethnographic methodologies derived from anthropology or sociology has made researchers more conscious of the potential ethical issues embedded in their methods of research. Books and articles using audience research always contain explanations of ethnographic methodology and draw attention to the limitations of their results.

Academic studies of television audiences using ethnographic methods are most often carried out by talking to respondents who have voluntarily put themselves forward as research subjects, and who are therefore likely to have something they want to say about television. The different methods researchers use to find respondents shape the design of their projects. Some researchers use 'snowballing', in which one person takes on the responsibility to find another who will participate in the study, then that person finds another volunteer, and so on. While this methodology is less artificial than trying to select a panel of respondents who are representative in some way, it inevitably produces a self-selected group. Other researchers have placed advertisements in magazines or on websites, for example, and reviewed the responses they receive. This produces a self-selecting group of viewers, who have something that they wish to communicate. The formalities of writing letters or emails include the need to organise material, to be polite and to choose a language that may distort information by formalising it. When writing down their reactions, viewers may consciously or unconsciously modify their responses by putting them into the disciplined forms that are conventional when writing to people whom we do not know personally.

Recording viewers as they watch television or talk in interviews and focus groups can offer less formalised responses than written communication. Although the researcher must consider how respondents may tailor what they say to give responses that they think may be most interesting, or that present them in the most interesting light, for example. Studying internet discussion boards and social media platforms can allow researchers to observe 'unmediated' audience responses to programmes. However, there are ethical hurdles in collecting and getting consent to use this material, and researchers must consider the 'performative' nature of much of online communication (Busse 2018). Interviews are commonly used by television-makers (production companies, channels or advertising agencies, for example) in the form of focus groups, to understand what viewers think of programme ideas or completed programmes. Interviewing is also a common practice in academic Television Studies, where researchers interview producers, writers, actors and executives to understand the decisions that shaped a programme's creation and production. Viewers are interviewed in order to understand why they watch television, what they watch and what appeals to them or turns them away from some kinds of programme. In each of these contexts, qualitative interviews are used; in other words, the interviewer gathers information and then interprets its significance, rather than asking straightforward yes or no questions. Qualitative interviews provide primary data, the raw material for drawing conclusions based on evidence. But they can also be used to explore an area of research to see whether there are more questions that need to be asked.

The different ways of conducting interviews have been a topic of research for decades, as experts in the social sciences have refined their techniques in order to do effective commercial research on consumers (to improve products and services, or to create new ones) and also to study social phenomena such as television viewing habits or opinions about violence in media. There are four types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, unstructured and focus group interviews (Arksey and Knight 1999, Lunt and Livingstone 1996, May 2001). They vary across a spectrum from using a preordained set of questions, asked in a particular order (structured interviews) to a group discussion where the interviewer and the participants have a conversation that can veer off in unexpected directions (focus group discussion). The less structure there is in the choice of questions to ask, the more an interview is likely to yield useful qualitative information, but the more the interviewer will need to interpret the results and consider what the significance of the answers may be. In focus group interviews, the aim is to make the interview as much like a conversation as possible, so that questions and answers lead on from each other. When a range of different interviewees are involved, their responses can be compared with each other, and individual responses can reveal the ways in which one person's views are different from another person's. Once an interview has been completed, the researcher will need to interpret it and extract information that helps to answer the initial research question, or modify it in new directions. Interviews provide many kinds of evidence, and not all of it concerns the actual content of the answers to questions. Hesitations, misunderstandings of a question and apparently irrelevant digressions can be revealing about the interviewees' attitudes to the topic they are being asked about.

Fan audiences

Viewers who regard themselves as fans of particular programmes are a subgroup of television audiences. As with the other research discussed in this chapter, the main emphasis in fan studies has been on how fans gain pleasure from their close relationship with television programmes, as well as how their relationships with television provide fans with kinds of social identity, a community (whether online or in person) and in some cases a creative outlet. The way that fans actively appropriate television culture can be regarded as an intense but revealing instance of how all television viewers take possession of the programmes they watch and assimilate the meanings of programmes into their own lives.

Fans have moved from the margins of subculture to the mainstream of popular culture. Many behaviours that were once considered 'fannish' have become part of everyday television consumption. Viewers have intensive engagements with programmes and use them to build connections with other people. Mainstream culture websites produce detailed and extended analysis of individual episodes (commonly called recaps), with comment sections and social media sites like Twitter providing communal spaces for the dissection of programmes. The official Twitter accounts of television companies like Netflix (which has multiple demographically and genre-focused accounts) cultivate a faux-personalised and fannish tone of excitement and devotion in their promotion of the company's programming (Beer 2019).

The sharing capabilities of the internet mean that fan communities are more accessible for everyday viewers, as social media spaces like tumblr, YouTube and databases like Archive of Our Own support the circulation of fan creative projects such as fan art, fanfic and vidding (fan-made montage videos). Unpaid fan labour can support the global spread of foreign-language television, as is seen in the collectively fan-produced **subtitles** for programmes not yet available via official outlets, including Japanese anime, Korean drama and the cult Norwegian teen drama *Skam*. With this 'fannish' mainstreaming in mind, what defines the fan audience?

subtitle written text appearing on the television screen, normally to translate speech in a foreign language.

Fan communities are self-selected groups of people who identify closely with programmes, and with fellow television viewers who also devote special attention to the same programme, they accumulate detailed knowledge about a programme that has value (cultural capital) within their fan community. Prominent programmes whose **fan cultures** have been investigated by television researchers include *Doctor Who*, *The X-Files*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Sherlock*, along with the original *Star Trek* and its many subsequent spin-offs. Television fan culture includes a huge range of programmes and genres, but is notable that most of these well-documented fan cultures surround 'cult' programmes that fall into the category of science fiction or fantasy television. One of the arguments of audience research on these fan communities is that being a fan is itself crucially tied up with the pleasures and fantasies that enable fans to reimagine themselves differently and to experiment with the possibilities and limits of their identity and desires. The long history of *Doctor Who* and the process of the Doctor's 'regeneration' enables a recasting of the protagonist, so different generations of fans can have particular attachments to different versions of the Doctor. When the Doctor is recast, or a popular enemy reappears in a new episode, the programme's fan community extensively debates the good and bad points of storylines and performances. Figure 9.3 shows Jodie Whittaker as the thirteenth Doctor, confronted by their old enemy the Daleks. This sequence restages a familiar confrontation that has happened repeatedly in *Doctor Who* since 1963. Here the spectacle of a mid-sky face-off and a swirling crowd of Daleks illustrates the big-budget nature of the post-2005 version of *Doctor Who*, which has shifted from a 'cult' object to become one of the BBC's most valuable programme brands.

fan culture the activities of groups of fans, as distinct from 'ordinary' viewers.

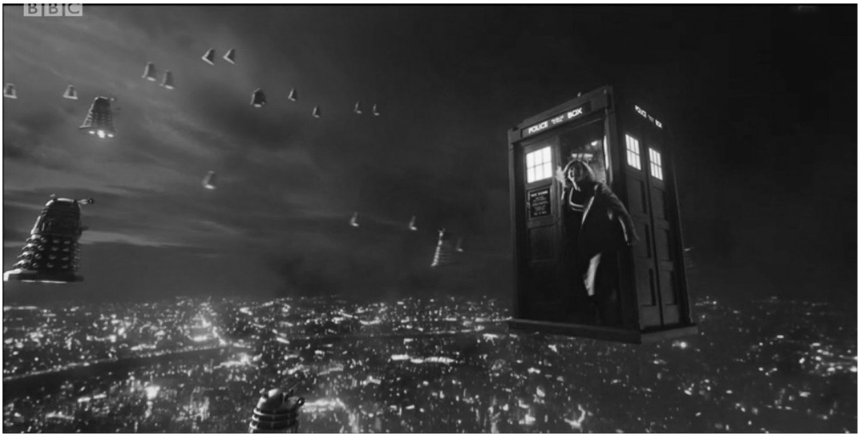


Figure 9.3 The Doctor confronts a mass of Daleks in *Doctor Who*

John Tulloch (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995: 145) describes the central fan activity as ‘the power to gloss’, meaning the power of television fans to interpret and reinterpret programmes for themselves and to engage in dialogue and debate with each other around questions of interpretation. Henry Jenkins (2013: 86) argues that

> Organised fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semi-structured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it.

By engaging in such debates, fans are able to display their cultural capital of knowledge about a programme, and the debates and discussions themselves constitute a fan community. The possibility of potentially endless debate about interpretation enables the fan community and its activities to continue indefinitely, even when a programme is cancelled and there are no new episodes to discuss. The long-running programmes that have tended to be the focus of fan interest, are normally written by a wide range of writers, may feature different actors who join and leave the series over the period of its run, and the narrative structure, thematic concerns and settings (the components of the programme format) may change. These discontinuities allow broad scope for fan interpretation, and for making value judgements about the success or failure of particular episodes or groups of episodes.

The range of ways in which fans take possession of a television programme for themselves, and redirect its components and meanings for themselves, has been described by the media theorist Henry Jenkins (1992) as ‘textual poaching’. Drawing the analogy with poachers who illegally capture animals or fish to eat from land or rivers that are owned by someone else, Jenkins argues that fans take up, reread and rework television programmes that are created, controlled and owned by the ‘official’ television culture of professional programme-makers, transforming them into a rich and complex participatory culture. Rather than viewing programmes according to the preferred readings encoded by their creators, fans have the potential to choose the parts that interest them and make them function in new ways. For some audience researchers fans are considered a resistant audience that refuses to adopt the conventional position laid out for it by a television programme, and instead reappropriates programmes in ways that contradict the aims of their creators and owners. Jenkins suggests that fan responses can range from fascination and adoration to frustration and antagonism, producing an active engagement with their chosen programme (2013: 23). Fans can operate in similar ways to the creators of television programmes, producing alternative products that supplement or take the place of industrially produced television programmes.

Digital technologies and the internet have enabled participatory cultures of fandom to proliferate. For example, fans:

- Create online spaces dedicated to their favourite programme
- Produce their own subtitles to aid in the international circulation of programmes

- Organise and attend collective cultural events such as conventions
- Use their favourite programme as the basis for their own creative production, from gif sets to fan fiction to vidding

Many researchers have framed these activities as resistant, in that they frequently promote ways of viewing, talking about and restaging programmes that take possession of the original and transform it in interesting ways, at times using this process to critique the original programme. But on the other hand, fan culture reproduces many of the ways in which 'official' television production culture works. Fans discriminate between insiders (who belong to the world of fan culture) and outsiders (who do not belong), just as television professionals seek to preserve their elite position within the industry and normally deny access to members of the audience. The cultural competence that fans seek to possess (such as detailed knowledge about their favourite programme) is a form of capital that gives them status within their community. In a similar way, television programme-makers accumulate insider knowledge about their business and also accumulate financial capital and profit for themselves and the organisations for which they work.

Studies of fan communities have highlighted their ability to offer space for resistance and explorations of identity, with much formative research on fan communities exploring women's and queer fan cultures. Concerns about representation and identity remain a key part of academic work on fandom. However, Rebecca Wanzo points out that Black fans and popular culture have long been absent in fan studies, just as they are absent from popular cultural representations of fans. She notes that 'an investment in whiteness may be foundational to some groups of fans' (2015: para 1.4). Fan cultures can reproduce traditional ideological discourses that shape contemporary society, particularly around race and gender. This has been illustrated by 'toxic' online campaigns against steps to diversify representation in popular culture, particularly when connected to cultural objects with long-standing, active fanbases such as *Doctor Who* and *Star Wars*. In part this relates to questions of ownership and power that have always shaped fan cultures, with fans wrestling with media companies and wider audiences over who a programme 'belongs' to. Fan research has also explored 'anti-fans' whose identities and community are drawn from their dislike of a programme or character, and communal practices of 'hate-watching' (Gray 2003). While fan cultures can create a sense of community this unity is sustained in distinction to the national and global media cultures (the 'media economy') that maintain power over the objects of their fandom.

Fans can be valuable consumer groups that are courted and heavily marketed to by media companies and whose social media campaigns can wield a degree of influence in the commissioning, casting and writing of programmes. As global media conglomerates seek to monetise the potential value of the intellectual property they own, some entities that were 'cult' objects sustained by fan audiences have become flagship brands, as television institutions exploit their **brand recognition**. This is particularly seen in the case of characters created for Marvel comics playing a key role in prestige original programming for streaming platform Disney+.

brand recognition the ability of audiences to recognise the distinctive identity of a product, service or institution and the values and meanings associated with it.

Although the internet provides a virtual community for television fans, a relatively small proportion of fan activity has to do with media production

merchandising the sale of products associated with a television programme, such as toys, books or clothing.

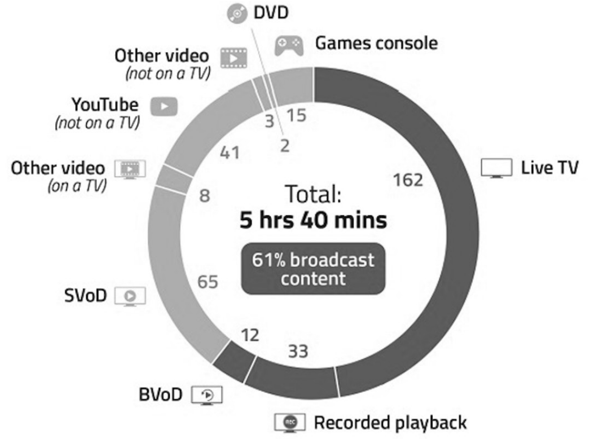
itself, and instead it is concerned with interpretation, analysis and consumption – of objects produced by other fans and official **merchandise**. Being a fan is a means not only of resisting the dominant interpretations shaped by programme-makers and taking possession of the meanings of television programmes for oneself, but also of positioning oneself as a consumer of the commodities that programme producers now increasingly use as valuable streams of income to fund further programme-making. In the DVD era, knowing that fans were likely already to have amassed off-air videotaped copies of programmes, it became common for the owners of franchises such as *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* to rerelease programmes on DVD box sets with tempting extras such as interviews with cast members or producers, so that fans would buy the original programmes all over again. The desire for a complete collection of programmes with the best possible image and sound quality stimulates the desire to amass commercial objects among the fan community, with remastered versions reissued on Blu-ray and digital download enabling further rounds of monetisation.

Although television fans are valued in Television Studies audience research, since they are the viewers who most actively respond to television programmes and engage most consciously in alternative and resistant practices prompted by television programmes, they are also complicit with the television industry and the structures and assumptions that underlie it. Indeed, fan culture is a response to a cultural disempowerment that derives from being a member of the audience rather than a producer of programmes. Fan social media campaigns may be able to push the television industry into making small adjustments, but the power dynamics remain significantly unbalanced.

Case study: data, algorithms and interfaces – shaping streaming audiences

watershed the time in the day (conventionally 9.00pm) after which programmes with content that may disturb children can be shown.

This case study looks at streaming platforms and the audience experience of on-demand, non-linear television. Linear television that is delivered by broadcast, cable and satellite channels uses a flow model where a continuous stream of programming is segmented into a schedule. This schedule is a fixed grid of programmes that shapes the viewer's experience of television, with the positioning of genres and programmes organised around viewers' everyday lives. The early evening contains shorter and more diverse programmes for viewers who may be distracted with other tasks, while the post-9pm '**watershed**' offers adult viewers longer and more complex forms and formats requiring more devoted attention and content that may be unsuitable for children. Programmes air at set times and the broadcaster's goal is to retain the viewer and prevent them switching over or off. Linear television is characterised by immediacy, it is 'always on'. In the UK, when a television set is turned on it produces a collective experience of television with all of the audience able to watch the same programme at the same time (whereas the US is split into different time zones). For example, the season 11 finale of *The Great British Bake Off* attracted 9.2 million viewers and a 39.7% share of the audience in November 2020, meaning over a third of the country watched the programme at the same time (Ramachandran 2020).



Source: Ofcom estimates of total audio-video viewing. Modelled from BARB, Comscore and TouchPoints data.

Figure 9.4 Ofcom chart of average minutes of viewing per day per device in 2020. Courtesy of Ofcom Media Nations Report 2021

Non-linear television gives viewers a more individualised television experience with the ability to self-schedule an evening's viewing. Since the 1980s domestic recording technologies have enabled viewers to shape their own television schedules using **VCRs** and more recently **DVRs**. These programmable technologies allowed viewers to extract programme's from television's linear flow and watch on-demand at their convenience. Cable and satellite **set-top boxes** combined access to linear television with on-demand content in the form of programme 'box sets', and more recently incorporated select streaming platforms. Similarly, a smart television combines linear channels with streaming apps. The move towards on-demand viewing has been accelerated by the wide availability of streaming platforms, along with their portability via smartphones, tablets and laptops. However, it's important to remember that linear television still makes up part of many people's viewing experience and how age and income factor into this. Figure 9.4 is a chart from Ofcom's *Media Nations* (2021) report showing the breakdown of average viewing minutes per day for all viewers in 2020, across all devices. We can see live television still made up a significant portion of viewing, despite the Ofcom report's record of a large increase in streaming viewing.

VCR programmable machine connected to a television that played and recorded onto video cassettes.

DVR programmable machine connected to a television that records and plays back television from a hard drive.

set-top box the electronic decoding equipment connected to home television sets that allows access to digital television signals and the internet.

Table 9.1 identifies differences between linear and non-linear television delivery. Yet, as this case study shows, there are many continuities between these forms. Where flow is thought of as a feature of linear television, there is also flow in the viewer's experience of streaming platforms. Many streaming platforms include live streams of linear channels or sporting events. In the UK broadcaster-owned streaming platforms contain live streams of all their channels – the BBC iPlayer includes 11 channel live streams – and Amazon Prime Video is at present distinctive amongst the global subscription platforms in streaming live sporting events, including football and tennis. So linear flow and liveness can still be features of on-demand streaming platforms. On-demand television is frequently characterised as giving viewers agency and promoting viewer choice. Yet autoplay delivers a constant flow of programming – sequential episodes and recommendations – that encourages a passive state of binge-watching, with the goal to keep viewers on the platform.

Table 9.1 Comparison of characteristics of linear and non-linear television

Characteristics of linear television	*Characteristics of non-linear television*
Broadcast/cable/digital/satellite	DVR/streaming platform
Programmes within flow	Programmes as files
Experienced through schedule	Experienced via interface/menu = database
Ongoing	Fragmented
Immediacy and time-specific	Extended availability
Structured viewing through range of channels	Interaction and seemingly endless choice
Ratings	Data
Curation according to day parts/audience demo (e.g. Prime time, post-school children's programmes)	Curation via themes and personalisation
BBC1	BBC iPlayer
CBS	Paramount+
HGTV	Discovery+

(Table adapted from Johnson 2019)

interface the visual frame through which a streaming platform organises and promotes its programming.

Streaming platforms present television in a non-linear format, with a homepage or **interface** providing viewers with a menu of individual programmes to choose from on-demand. Programmes and their episodes exist as individual files organised into a database, experienced through the frame of the interface. Viewers choose what to watch and when, with programmes available for an extended period of time. If we use the metaphor of water to describe linear television's flow, the metaphor of the library could be used to describe non-linear television, as the experience sees the viewer choose a programme from themed categories. Yet this choice is something of an illusion, as the interface shapes the viewer's experience of the platform's huge database, presenting only a limited selection of programmes. As Catherine Johnson points out 'interfaces function to create an *illusion of content abundance and user agency* that belies the highly structured nature of online TV services' (2019: 109).

Both the linear schedule and the on-demand interface use practices of curation, with programmes selected for particular audiences and positioned within the schedule or interface. Linear channels will schedule new and high-profile programmes in prime time on certain days of the week to gain the most viewers possible. Similarly, streaming platforms will place new and high-profile programmes at the top of their interface, the first things seen when a viewer enters the platform (Figure 9.5). Both practices draw viewers' attention and aim to get programmes in front of as many people as possible. Streamers' splash pages and category titles like 'new' and 'trending' take up prime real estate and guide viewers' attention. Netflix encourages immediate viewing by auto-playing trailers and at times whole programmes as soon as viewers open the platform and as they scroll down its interface. We see here how linear channels and streaming platforms both encourage viewers to follow particular pathways of viewing.

Just as the linear schedule is shaped around the daily lives of audiences, Netflix tends to release prominent new content on Fridays or national holidays, positioned for leisure time binge-viewing. Chuck Tryon suggests that the platform's release of entire seasons at once

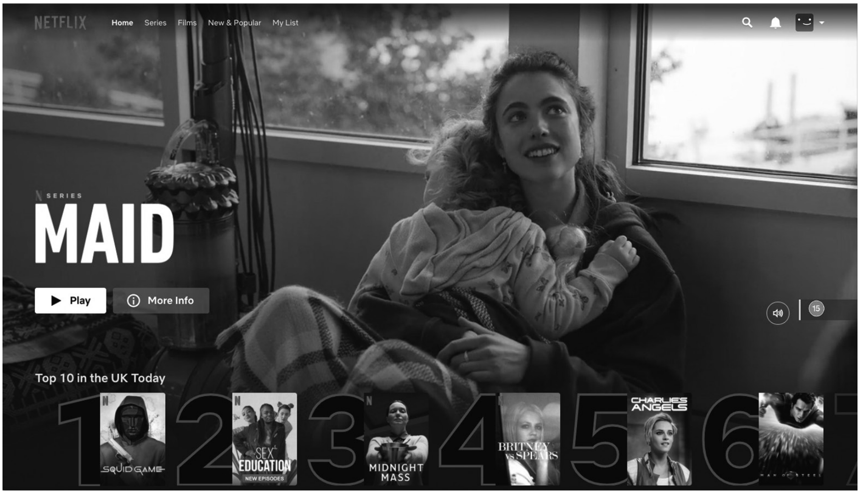


Figure 9.5 New and popular programmes are given a prominent position on the Netflix interface

emulates linear television's liveness and immediacy 'by promoting the idea that viewers will be left out if they don't watch new seasons as soon as they are available' (2015: 107). Both Disney+ and Apple TV+ have chosen to release their high-profile new programmes weekly, imitating the scheduling practices of linear television. This helps build anticipation and maintain cultural buzz for streamers with smaller new programming slates than Netflix. In June 2021 Disney+ chose to move all its programme releases to mid-week after it saw significant success releasing the highly anticipated Marvel series *Loki* on a Wednesday, away from the competition of other platforms' Friday releases (Goldberg 2021). Here we see how a streaming platform's release practices imitate the need for linear television's schedulers to navigate competitors' hit programmes.

Schedules and interfaces are both shaped by data. Audience data provided by BARB and Nielsen as well as that from broadcasters' own research help channels build their schedules. Decisions over where to place a programme are also shaped by broadcasters' knowledge of their competitors' schedules, avoiding or directly challenging hit shows, or offering counterprogramming through different genres or programmes targeting a different audience demographic. Interfaces are shaped by computer **algorithms** that process the huge amount of data streamers collected on user behaviours. These shape the personalised themed categories and programmes offered to individual viewers. A channel's weekly schedule is set in advance and remains relatively static, only interrupted by major news events, and the same schedule is offered to all viewers. A streamer's interface is a dynamic object that can change according to the user, location and technology used to view it (Johnson 2019: 109). Each streamer's interface offers different levels of personalisation. For example, Sky's Now TV offers a limited amount of personalisation through a watchlist and some tailored recommendations of content, whereas YouTube offers a high degree of personalisation and recommendation. Netflix promotes itself in part on its knowledge of its customers and ability to recommend new content. Figure 9.5 shows how the platform's interface deprioritises the search function (a small icon in the top right) and by extension viewer agency, in favour of the carousels that promote a 'personalised' selection from its database.

algorithms calculations made by computer programmes using data collected by channels and streaming services. Used to analyse viewer behaviour and tastes based on their viewing practices.

Streaming platforms derive detailed data from a viewer's interaction with their interface, combining this with the basic information provided in a viewer's profile on sign up. Netflix tracks how a viewer searches or browses the interface, how long they take to make a selection, their choice of what to watch, when they pause and stop, and how fast they watch an episode or season. Like the television ratings and demographic information provided by BARB and Nielsen, streaming platforms use this data to shape their commissioning and promotional choices. Programme metadata includes descriptive data that helps shape the interface. The internally produced tags affixed to programmes include information about structure, narrative, genre and theme to help algorithms sort them into categories for the viewer e.g. 'sci-fi & fantasy programmes', 'international fight-the-system TV programmes'.

These data-driven algorithms also shape what is *not* visible to a viewer, limiting discovery and diversity of content. If a viewer uses Netflix to watch mostly romances, sitcoms and family melodramas they are unlikely to be offered a gritty crime drama or hard-hitting documentary. Where the evening schedule of Channel 4 or NBC offers a mixed schedule of genres, giving the viewer a chance to discover something unexpected, Netflix will offer more of the same. In April 2021 the platform introduced the 'play something' viewing mode in response to data provided on viewing behaviour. The length of time viewers spent scrolling through the interface indicated 'choice fatigue'. Selecting the 'play something' button autoplayed an algorithmically chosen programme, further restricting viewer agency (although viewers could skip to the next selection if it didn't fit) (Adalian 2021). Netflix, which marketed itself as a 'disruptor' of linear television, had created a viewing practice that imitated the experience of channel-hopping through linear television.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- The measurement of audiences and prediction of how they respond to television are important to television institutions' economic success and the planning of programmes
- The increasing number of television channels and systems of delivery (including Freeview, cable and satellite and streaming platforms) has fractured television audiences into smaller niche groups, and some audience groups are more sought-after than others, usually because of their economic or social status
- The television audience is considered not as a uniform mass, but instead as a collection of diverse groups whose personal and social experiences shape their responses to television
- Television Studies has developed ways of understanding how audiences make meanings from television and debated the significance of television in everyday life. Television Studies researchers have sought to reduce the distance between them and the ordinary viewers they study, to understand and value everyday television viewing.
- Television Studies has taken a particular interest in audiences from groups with relatively little social power (such as children, fans of cult programmes and

women at home), and their use of television to express their identities and form social networks

- There are many differences between linear television and streaming platforms' shaping of audiences' experience, yet there are also many continuities

Bibliography

Abercrombie, N. and Longhurst, B. (1998) *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. London: Sage.

Adalian, J. (2021) 'Inside Netflix's quest to end scrolling', *Vulture*, 28 April. Available at www.vulture.com/article/netflix-play-something-decision-fatigue.html

Allen, R. (1992) 'Audience-oriented criticism and television', in Allen, R. (ed.), *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*. London: Routledge, pp. 101–37.

Ang, I. (1989) *Watching Dallas: Soap Operas and the Melodramatic Imagination*, trans. Couling, D., revised edition. London: Routledge.

Ang, I. (1991) *Desperately Seeking the Audience*. London: Routledge.

Ang, I. (1996) *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World*. London: Routledge.

Arksey, H. and Knight, P. (1999) *Interviewing for Social Scientists*. London: Sage.

BARB (2021) *The Viewing Report*, June. Available at www.barb.co.uk/viewing-report/

BARB (2022) 'How we measure broadcasters' audiences'. Available at www.barb.co.uk/about-us/how-we-do-what-we-do/

Beer (2019) 'Inside the secretly effective – and underrated – way Netflix keeps its shows and movies at the forefront of pop culture', *Fast Company*. Available at: www.fastcompany.com/90309308/by-any-memes-necessary-inside-netflixs-winning-social-media-strategy

Brown, M.E. (1994) *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasure of Resistance*. London: Sage.

Bruhn Jensen, K. (ed.) (1998) *News of the World: World Cultures Look at Television News*. London: Routledge.

Busse, K. (2018) 'The ethics of studying online fandom', in M.A. Click and Scott, S. (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 9–17.

Dickinson, R., Harindranath, R. and Linné, O. (eds) (1998) *Approaches to Audiences: A Reader*. London: Arnold.

Drummond, P. and Patterson, R. (eds) (1988) *Television and Its Audience: International Research Perspectives*. London: British Film Institute.

Geertz, C. (1967) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. London: Fontana.

Geraghty, C. (1998) 'Audiences and "ethnography": questions of practice', in Geraghty, C. and Lusted, D. (eds), *The Television Studies Book*. London: Arnold, pp. 141–57.

Goldberg, L. (2021) 'Disney+ shifts original series to Wednesday release date schedule', *The Hollywood Reporter*, Available at www.hollywoodreporter.com

/tv/tv-news/disney-plus-shifts-original-series-to-wednesday-release-date-schedule-1234968809/

Gray J. (2003) ‘New audiences, new textualities: Anti-fans and non-fans’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(1), pp. 64–81.

Hall, S. (1980) ‘Encoding/decoding’, in S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*. London: Hutchinson, pp. 128–38.

Holmes, S. and Redmond, S. (2006) *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture*. London: Routledge.

Jenkins, H. (1992) *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London: Routledge.

Jenkins, H. (2013) *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture: Updated Twentieth Anniversary Edition*. London: Routledge.

Jhally, S. and Livant, B. (1986) ‘Watching as working: the valorization of audience consciousness’, *Journal of Communication*, 36(2), pp. 124–43.

Johnson, C. (2019) *Online TV*. Abingdon, Oxon.

Lewis, L. (ed.) (1991) *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. London: Routledge.

Lunt, P. and Livingstone, S. (1996) ‘Rethinking the focus group in media and communication research’, *Journal of Communication*, 46(2), pp. 76–98.

May, T. (2001) *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*, third edition. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Morley, D. (1980) *The ‘Nationwide’ Audience*. London: British Film Institute.

Morley, D. (1992) *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.

Mullan, B. (1997) *Consuming Television*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Ofcom (2021) *Media Nations: UK 2021*, 5 August. Available at www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand/media-nations-reports/media-nations-2021

Ramachandran, N. (2020) ‘“Great British Bake Off” season 11 finale becomes highest rated show for U.K.’s Channel 4’, *Variety*, 25 November. Available at https://variety.com/2020/tv/global/the-great-british-bake-final-highest-rated-show-channel-4-1234839964/

Ruddock, A. (2001) *Understanding Audiences: Theory and Method*. London: Sage.

Seale, C. (1999) *The Quality of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Storey, J. (1999) *Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life*. London: Arnold.

Sweney, M. (2021) ‘Love Island earns ITV £12m before new series as advertisers jostle to take part’, *The Guardian*, 25 June. Available at www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/jun/25/love-island-earns-itv-12m-before-new-series-as-advertisers-jostle-to-take-part

Tryon, C. (2015) ‘TV got better: Netflix’s original programming strategies and binge viewing’, *Media Industries Journal*, 2(2), pp. 104–16. Available at https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mij/15031809.0002.206/--tv-got-better-netflixs-original-programming-strategies?rgn=main;view=fulltext

Tulloch, J. and Jenkins, H. (1995) *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek*. London: Routledge.

Tunstall, J. (1983) *The Media in Britain*. London: Constable.

Television Representation and Identity

10

- Introduction 232
- Intersectionality and othering 233
- Representation and stereotype 235
- Meaningful diversity and plastic representation 237
- Ideology 239
- Television as cultural forum 241
- Reality television and identity 242
- Who makes TV? 244
- Diversity as brand management 246
- Case study: *Chewing Gum* 249
- Summary of key points 251
- Bibliography 252

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-11

Television Representation and Identity

Introduction

Television has the power to shape how audiences understand the world and their own identities. It does this through the stories and images it chooses to present, choices that are shaped by society and by the industrial systems that produce programmes. It is important to study television's representations because they have power, they can influence how we as a culture understand our collective reality and the people in it. It is important not to think about television as a *reflection* of reality like a mirror. Instead, this process is television re-presenting the world to us. However, this is only ever a partial image, as it cannot show the whole. So, we need to think about what choices shape what we do see. As we have discussed throughout this book, there are many systems that shape what television shows us and how meaning is created, from **aesthetics** to **narrative** to **genre** to the structures of the television industry.

genre a kind or type of programme. Programmes of the same genre have shared characteristics.

aesthetic a specific artistic form. Aesthetics means the study of art and beauty.

narrative an ordered sequence of images and sound that tells a fictional or factual story.

This chapter discusses some of the ways Television Studies has thought about representation and identity. It considers how television's representations can contribute to cultural 'othering', the importance of considering representation through an intersectional perspective, along with how stereotypes and archetypes function in characterisation. The chapter looks at how television has been analysed through ideological perspectives, and the concept of the cultural forum. It explores the concept of plastic representation and what meaningful diversity could look like. It then asks who gets to make programmes, considering how power dynamics and access to production roles shape television, and how diversity is mobilised in the television industry to shape brand identities. The chapter draws these ideas together in a case study of the British sitcom *Chewing Gum*.

Television is a major cultural site of representing, managing and debating difference. It represents people we may never meet and places we may never visit, so it can shape cultural understandings and social norms surrounding **gender**, sexual orientation, **class**, nationality, disability or race and **ethnicity**. It can create connections and familiarity, although absences can contribute to cultural erasure. Television writer Jack Thorne has advocated for meaningful representations of disability both on British television screens and in production roles, arguing that invisible prejudice in the industry leads to absences and limitations in representation and creative opportunities (Lopez 2020). His dramas *Cast-Offs* and *Don't Take My Baby*, along with biographical drama *Then Barbara Met Alan* which chronicled the work of British disability rights activists and was co-written with Deaf writer and performer Genevieve Barr, tell stories of disabled characters played by disabled actors. However, these remain rarities in British television.

gender the social and cultural division of people into masculine, feminine, or non-binary individuals. This is different from sex, which refers to the biological difference between male and female bodies.

ethnicity membership of a group with a specific identity based on a sense of belonging, such as British Asian or Italian-American, for example.

class a section of society defined by their relationship to economic activity, whether as workers (the working class) or possessors of economic power (the bourgeoisie), for example.

Incorporating Deaf and disabled characters and performers into long-running prime-time **soap operas** can increase visibility and awareness. Since 2020 *EastEnders* has had two Deaf characters. The long-running character Ben has experienced partial hearing loss since infancy, but has been played by hearing actors. The newer character Frankie is played by Deaf actress Rose Ayling-Ellis who uses British sign language. Ben's hearing aids have always been visible, but his Deaf identity is foregrounded infrequently and as an adult his storylines have largely focused on his queer identity and family's criminal links. A 2020 storyline about Ben's further hearing loss and potential cochlear implant introduced the character of Frankie to briefly connect Ben to the Deaf community as part of his decision-making. Frankie then went on to be incorporated into one of the soap's major families as a regular character. Deaf writer Charlie Swinbourne pitched Ben's storyline as part of the BBC's Writers' Access Group and advised on the storyline, which climaxed in a 'silent' episode whose modified audio track placed viewers within Ben's perspective (Swinbourne 2020). This illustrates the soap's lack of Deaf and disabled writers in its existing freelance writer's pool, but also showed the impact of industry initiatives to provide access and development for creatives from under-represented groups.

soap opera a continuing drama serial involving a large number of characters in a specific location, focusing on relationships, emotions and reversals of fortune.

Intersectionality and othering

Academic work on racial and ethnic representation has highlighted the need for nuanced representations that recognise the complexity of and diversity within a group's identity. We must remember that identity is always intersectional, people are never defined solely by a single facet of their identity. Instead, the complexities of nation, gender, race and class inform and shape our experience of the world. The concept of intersectionality was developed by law academic Kimberle Crenshaw as a way to think about identity and its relationship to power, which she illustrated through the doubled burden of discrimination experienced by Black women (Crenshaw 2017). Intersectional representation in television programmes understands characters and communities through the multiple parts of their identity, rather than defining them through a single aspect. For example, US drama *Vida* tells the story of two estranged Mexican-American sisters and their connections and conflicts with their local community when they return to their family home in East Los Angeles after their mother's death (Figure 10.1). The programme's characterisations and storylines intersect generational and class differences within the queer and Latinx communities, including the neighbourhood's fight against gentrification.

Alongside its exploration of the complexity of contemporary relationships and the impact of sexual assault on three Black British friends, *I May Destroy You* highlights the joy and nuances of Black British identity in London. Kwame asks a Grindr date 'where you from?', with his response signalling the potentially loaded nature of the question and its relationship to intersectional and national identity. 'If it's a Black person, I'm gonna tell them I'm from Nigeria. If they're English asking me where I'm from, they're getting Barking and Dagenham'. The programme examines how Kwame's identity as a queer Black man shapes his struggle

Figure 10.1 Sisters Lyn and Emma gaze at their mother's bar in *Vida*

to process his rape, his feelings of invisibility and his treatment by a straight Black policeman when he finally reports it. Through Kwame's experiences *I May Destroy You* pushes its audience to reconsider cultural 'norms' around relationships and sexual assault.

Television contributes to the shaping of social and cultural 'norms', which it can also challenge and critique. Norms are shared beliefs and ways of viewing the world that are entirely socially constructed; we might think of the role of 'normative femininity' in shaping gender norms in different countries. Cultural norms are culturally specific, for example Western European and North American cultural norms can be different to those of South Asian or Middle Eastern cultures. Jonathan Gray points out that the US television industry has long prioritised the white audience's economic and cultural capital and it is assumed that 'the cultural traditions and identities of blacks, Latinos and Asians must be transformed and thus made to appeal to whites' (2005: 95). Here we see how whiteness is shaped as a 'norm' of US advertising-funded television production. Cultural norms play into the processes of 'othering', which defines a group against and excludes them from dominant mainstream norms. 'Othering' simplifies difference and shapes it as undesirable, dangerous or alluring.

In the twenty-first century, outside of soap opera, British television's limited representations of British Muslim communities has tended to filter their stories through a wider cultural othering that connects the Muslim faith to extremism. With few programmes centring British Muslim characters, those that do such as Peter Kosminsky's political dramas *Britz* and *The State*, and 2018 ITV thriller *Next of Kin*, bear a cultural burden that ends up limiting British Muslim identity to conversations about national identity and extremism. In contrast, 2021's Channel 4 sitcom *We Are Lady Parts* offers a multiplicity of British Muslim characters that counter othering through comic specificity (Figure 10.2). Created and written by Nida Manzoor, it follows the misadventures of an all-female Muslim punk band, using the comic everyday, **satire** and rounded characterisation to normalise aspects of Muslim culture, from headscarves to prayer to arranged marriage.

satire a mode of critical commentary about society or an aspect of it, using humour to attack people or ideas.

Figure 10.2 *We Are Lady Parts* in their rehearsal room

Representation and stereotype

A single programme's limited representations may not feel like a big deal. However, there is considerable power built from the repetition of certain images and representations, or their wholesale absence. As Jonathan Gray points out, 'when multiple shows start to exhibit the same blind spots, this causes a major problem for the depiction of reality' (2008: 124). Particularly if this is based on faulty assumptions or reductive representations that function as stereotypes. A stereotype is a socially constructed shorthand used to decode or describe an identity group, erasing any diversity within it by applying a reductive, simplified set of traits to the group as a whole. Stuart Hall points out that stereotypes involve othering, used as 'part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the "normal" and the "deviant", the "accepted" and the "unacceptable", what "belongs" and what is "other", between "insiders" and "outsiders"' (Hall 2013: 248).

We might consider *The Big Bang Theory*'s scientist Rajesh Koothrappali and *Silicon Valley*'s software engineer Dinesh Chugtai in relation to Western stereotypes of South Asian masculinity. Both are skilled in science and technology, but are frequently emasculated, struggle with romance and have a low status in their friendship groups. The male ensembles of both sitcoms share many of these qualities, with both programmes drawing comedy from this characterisation of 'nerdy' masculinity. However, these are qualities repeatedly assigned to South Asian men in American media, resulting in a stereotype that positions them outside of the 'norms' of American masculinity. As the only South Asian characters in their ensembles, Raj and Dinesh carry the weight of representation that their white male counterparts do not. Increasing the breadth of representations of a group in a programme's cast can allow characters to share this weight, countering a risk of falling into stereotyping.

When analysing the complex processes of representation, it can often feel simpler to focus on stereotypes. However, this is limiting for analysis, and it is more productive to explore the how and why; what power dynamics are operating narratively and culturally to produce this representation? As both programmes are

textual analysis a critical approach which seeks to understand a television text's meanings by undertaking detailed analysis of its image and sound components, and the relationships between those components.

sitcoms, we could use **textual analysis** to examine where the humour is directed. Who are we guided to laugh at in a scene and what is the programme's attitude towards these characters? For example, Raj is frequently the target of Howard's comic cruelty in *The Big Bang Theory*, and Dinesh of Gilfoyle's torment in *Silicon Valley*. What is the programme's point of view on these actions, how does each guide us to view their tormentor's behaviours? Where do our sympathies lie? Jonathan Gray points out that 'humour draws us back from the logic of the world, creating room to contemplate and reflect upon – even if only fleetingly – the social rites that form the basis of the comedy' (2008: 118). Whilst Raj and Dinesh can be the subject of these comic beats, they are often as much about Howard and Gilfoyle's hidden insecurities over their own masculinity and status within the group.

When considering characterisation it is important to separate a stereotype from an archetype. Stereotypes are about power and are fixed, reductive portrayals linked to an entire identity group. Archetypes are about character motivation and psychology, an easily recognisable character type on which a writer can build. For example, the buffoon is a standard comic character type, a self-important idiot who lacks self-awareness. They are frequently male and often an authority figure – a father or boss – whose pose of importance is undermined by their actions, like Homer in *The Simpsons* or David Brent in *The Office*. The *People Just Do Nothing* character Chabuddy G does not draw comedy from stereotypes of British South Asian identity, instead, the inept wannabe entrepreneur is presented as a buffoon, a contemporary version of Del Boy from *Only Fools and Horses*. The wheeler-dealer constantly spins fantasies of success for the mockumentary's camera, but he is undermined by the mise-en-scène that frames him against evidence of his failing ventures (Figure 10.3).

Content analysis is another method used to monitor television's representations. Researchers using this quantitative methodology survey a large number of programmes that aired during a set period of time, counting bodies in front

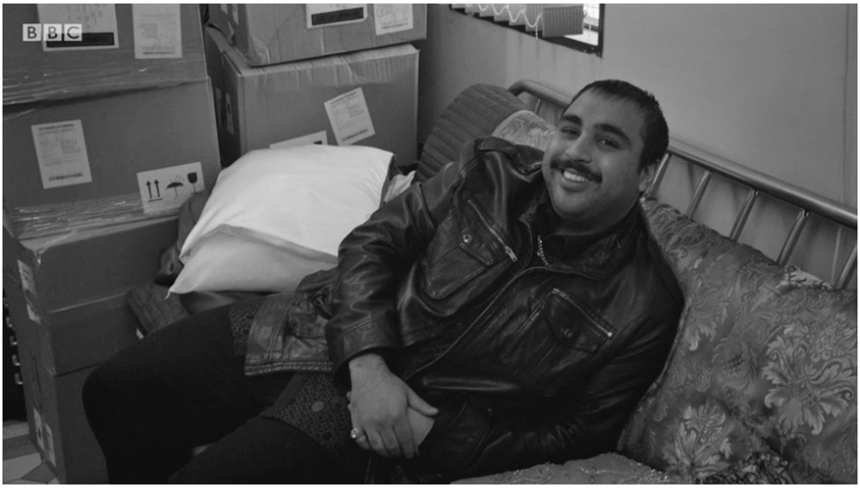


Figure 10.3 Chabuddy G shows the camera around his office/living space in *People Just Do Nothing*

of or behind the camera. This data-based approach uses a set of parameters such as the presence, prominence or characterisation of a gender, race or age group. This type of research provides statistics that are easily understood, supporting press coverage and activist campaigns. However, this method lacks the depth and nuance that qualitative, textual analysis-based research can provide. It risks slipping into simplistic categories of 'positive' (has value) and 'negative' (harmful) representation, particularly around race and ethnicity. These distinctions create unhelpful binaries, particularly as a 'positive' racial representation itself is often connected to white, middle-class norms. Instead of defaulting to discussion of stereotypes, positive and negative representation, it is more productive to analyse representation through storytelling and aesthetics, as well as industrial and cultural contexts.

Meaningful diversity and plastic representation

Increasing diversity in television has been a long-term concern of both Television Studies and industry campaigners. Across television's history there have been recurring campaigns to improve representations of race and ethnicity, sexual identity and disability both on-screen and behind-the-camera. These are largely cyclic but reached a renewed climax in the 2010s when campaigners pushed to counter the UK and US television industries' default to whiteness as an economic and cultural norm (Gray 2005) eventually resulting in some gains in representational diversity on-screen and in production roles. But how do we categorise 'diversity', or meaningful progress towards television adequately reflecting its audience? What does meaningful diversity look like on screen?

Mary Beltran (2010) notes that television uses diverse ensembles to appeal to young and upscale audiences. This can visually signal the supposedly progressive mindset of a programme and its target audience. However, these programmes frequently lack meaningful diversity, defaulting to storytelling that centres white experience. Beltran suggests meaningful, rather than surface level diversity requires

- Characters of colour who are fully realised individuals with storytelling and interiority equal to white characters. Do we get to know their families, home life, or inner worlds?
- Writers and producers with knowledge of and interest in the worlds and perspectives of the non-white characters
- 'Natural' diversity that exploits a story's setting or subject matter. Settings such as schools and hospitals and particular geographic regions can offer a range of story possibilities and **demographic** make-ups

In the UK, setting a programme in a large city with a sizeable multicultural population such as London or Birmingham can provide more opportunity for 'natural' diversity than rural and coastal locations in Cornwall, the Welsh border, or the Lake District. These rural and coastal regions are selected as settings due to the visual appeal of their landscapes, yet they also fulfil **public service** remits to represent the nation's regions, so a balance needs to be struck.

demography the study of population, and the groupings of people (demographic groups) within the whole population.

public service in television, the provision of a mix of programmes that inform, educate and entertain in ways that encourage the betterment of audiences and society in general.

Kristen Warner warns against measuring representational progress solely through the presence of different-looking bodies on screen. Here, diversity becomes linked to quantity – the number of visible bodies – rather than the depth and dimensionality of characterisation, performance and narrative (2017: 33). Without a dimensional racial and cultural specificity, increased on-screen diversity risks producing what Warner terms ‘plastic representation’, valuing quantity more than dimension. This results in thinly written characters of colour that are nonetheless marketed and received as ‘progress’.

The practice of ‘colourblind casting’ is frequently used as a quick fix for the diversity issues of British and US television, increasing employment opportunities for actors of colour by opening up the casting of a role to all races. Yet Warner points out this can end up producing ‘normatively white characters who happen to be of colour’ (36). This smoothing out of racial difference may help white mainstream audience accept visual difference, but results in a stripped down universal sameness. A ‘blind cast’ character that is not adjusted to ‘connect with the histories and experiences of the culture that the character’s body inhabits’ will lack depth and emotional resonance (37). Warner argues that meaningful progress on diversity beyond visible bodies needs to occur at the level of production, looking beyond tokenism in writing teams and freelance episode directors to the **showrunners** and executive ranks who have the power to develop and **commission** programmes.

showrunner the writer-producer in charge of the day-to-day running of a television programme, who is also tasked with the shaping and maintaining of that programme’s ‘voice’.

commissioning the UK process through which programmes are pitched, developed and selected for funding and broadcast. The US television industry’s structure will see a similar process of a programme being ‘picked up’ or ‘greenlit’ by a network or streaming service.

Rather than writing a character who ‘happens to be Black’, which recentres whiteness as a norm, writing ‘Black on purpose’ creates cultural specificity. For Warner this involves

> writing characters as complex racialized individuals that exceed the boundaries of positive and negative, so that their familiarity, relatability, and humanity can draw audiences seeking out that kind of visibility. Cultural specificity speaks to a more genuine and meaningful diversity because it allows for audiences to see a fully dimensional view of themselves on screen, since the character is created and performed as a person based on real identities, experiences, and culture.
>
> (112)

Medical drama *Grey’s Anatomy* used colourblind casting to build its main ensemble and continues to do so with episodic cast members. For much of the programme’s run these blindcast Black, East Asian and Latinx characters rarely addressed their race, or how it had impacted their experience as medical practitioners. The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests and the coronavirus pandemic’s unequal impact on communities of colour pushed the seventeenth season to incorporate storylines that addressed racial inequalities in US medical provision. Where *Grey’s Anatomy*’s major US **network** ABC targets a wide audience base, US basic **cable** channels BET and OWN **niche target** Black audiences. They produce Black-cast programmes such as *Being Mary Jane* and *Queen Sugar* that feature a breadth of dimensional Black characters who reflect these channels’ brand identity of cultural specificity (Smith-Shomade 2007).

cable television originally called Community Antenna Television (CATV). Transmission of television signals along cables in the ground.

network a television institution that transmits programmes through local or regional broadcasting stations that are owned by or affiliated to that institution.

niche audiences particular groups of viewers defined by age group, gender or economic status, for example, who may be the target audience for a programme.

In September 2021 Channel 4 featured the Black to Front project, a day-long event featuring Black-led programming across the schedule, including some advertising breaks. The event was in part a stunt whose difference aimed to draw attention to the whiteness of British television, with Channel 4 pitching the day as a showcase for the wealth of Black talent available to the industry. The event was announced in August 2020 in response to the Black Lives Matter protests of that summer, which had brought further attention to British television's ongoing struggles with on-screen representation and employment of Black production talent, a long-term focus of campaigners.

Black to Front featured a small amount of newly commissioned prime-time programming in late-night topical discussion show *Unapologetic*, reality show *Highlife* and comedy pilot *Big Age*. Across the rest of the day Black presenters replaced the regular white hosts in special editions of key Channel 4 programme brands, including *Countdown* and *Love It or List It*, as well as a revival of the channel's 1990s breakfast entertainment show *The Big Breakfast*. An episode of soap opera *Hollyoaks* focused on its Black family and was written and directed by Black creatives, with additional Black crew members brought into the existing production teams of all programmes. Black to Front risked operating as plastic representation. It was marketed as a progressive, disruptive event, yet as Black performers were slotted into existing roles and programmes for a single day, there was little space for Black British creatives to reflect the dimensionality of their culture outside the few Black-led pilots.

Channel 4 pledged to continue the aims of the day long-term, in line with its public service remit to champion unheard voices and represent the UK's diversity. This included setting quotas for developing and commissioning programmes from production companies with ethnically diverse leadership and investing in a training and mentorship scheme for Black talent (Ramachandran 2021). The Black to Front project shows that making significant change in television's representation remains a long-term undertaking.

Ideology

When considering how representation and identity function in television it is important to understand the role of **ideology**. This is a shared set of beliefs that shape how a society functions and inform what is accepted as common sense and 'normal'. These can be large political and economic organisational systems, such as **capitalism** or socialism. Ideologies also include aspects of identity such as gender, religion, sexual identity, race and ethnicity or age, considering how they shape and are shaped by a society. The concept of **hegemony** shows how a culture or individual groups can be persuaded to accept a dominant set of ideologies that benefit those in power, even if this does not benefit their own interests. Ideologies work to create a **status quo**, which means we often don't recognise an ideology at work because it's presented as 'common sense'. For example, the role of consumption and capitalism in American culture, **neoliberalism** in contemporary Western culture, or the belief in universal access to public healthcare in the UK. Other societies may not share these beliefs so their role as ideologies would be more visible – think of how US political discourse uses the phrase 'socialised medicine' to discuss universal public healthcare, and the **connotations** that phrase implies.

Ideology-based analysis of television considers how programmes intentionally or unconsciously communicate different ideologies, ways of seeing the world. As

ideology the set of beliefs, attitudes and assumptions arising from the economic and class divisions in a culture, underlying the ways of life accepted as normal in that culture.

capitalism the organisation of an economy around the private ownership of accumulated wealth, involving the exploitation of labour to produce profit that creates such wealth.

hegemony a term deriving from Marxist theories of society, meaning a situation where different social classes or groups are persuaded to consent to a political order that may be contrary to their benefit.

status quo a Latin term meaning the ways that culture and society are currently organised.

neoliberalism ideology that positions personal responsibility over collective support, redefining citizens as consumers. Privatisation and the competition of the marketplace are privileged as a response to economic, political and social issues, rather than state support and regulation.

connotations the term used in semiotic analysis for the meanings that are associated with a particular sign or combination of signs.

television creatives live within a society, they consciously or unconsciously reproduce its 'common sense' norms. So analysing television helps us understand how different ideologies function in a society. Ideologies can change and adjust across time, so analysis of television history shows how representations of gender, race and sexual identity in genres such as soap opera and sitcom illustrate changing cultural norms.

identification a term deriving from psychoanalytic theories of cinema, which describes the viewer's conscious or unconscious wish to take the place of someone or something in a television text.

Television uses processes of **identification** to connect viewers with a programme, which encourages the acceptance of its point of view and underlying ideologies. Shows like *Grey's Anatomy*, *Glow* and *Sex Education* increase the chance of viewer identification through their use of ensemble casts. Characters from a blend of gender, class, race and ethnic backgrounds offer multiple points of access for viewers. However, to return to Mary Beltran's points, each programme is initially or predominately focalised around a white central character.

Police procedurals are an example of television identification shaping ideologies and social norms. Procedurals shape the viewer's experience of crime through the perspectives of law enforcement rather than the victims, those committing a crime or accused of it. These narratives see law enforcement comfortingly solve the crime by episode's end and shape wider cultural norms that position the police as protectors and heroes. However, the Black Lives Matter protests of the 2010s and 2020s demonstrated that this experience of policing is not shared by all sections of society. The gendered ideology of patriarchy privileges and assigns cultural power to male and masculine identity over female and feminine norms. The expectations and structures of patriarchal culture can negatively shape men's lives and experiences as much as it does women. The patriarchal structure of US society shapes the gender norms of US competitive dating shows *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* (Kavka 2012), whose storytelling and representations are built around conservative social attitudes and values surrounding romance and marriage.

Television is a key contributor to the ideology of national identity, how a country pictures and understands itself, along with the drawing of boundaries over who 'belongs'. Stuart Hall notes that identity is 'an on-going project, under constant reconstruction' (2005: 23), particularly national identity, and that this can be shaped by cultural images. Both the BBC and Channel 4's public service remits require programming to represent the nation. Competitive reality show *The Great British Bake Off* casts its amateur bakers to reflect an inclusive idea of Britishness and offer multiple points of identification for viewers (Figure 10.4). Jorie Lagerway points out that the programme's casting presents a comforting, idealised image of nation that counters the divisive, conflict-driven political climate of the Brexit and Trump era. It offers 'an imagined nation that is inclusive, diverse, and offers equal opportunity for Britons across regions, ages, sexualities, classes, races and ethnicities' (2018: 443).

The 1980s-set US spy thriller *The Americans* is focused on the ideological divides between Russia and the US during the height of the Cold War. The programme follows a pair of Russian spies who have lived deep undercover for decades as married American parents Elizabeth and Phillip Jennings, whilst carrying out undercover missions in service of Russia's political goals. The programme structures the viewer to identify with these protagonists, despite their Communist belief systems conflicting with the capitalism that shapes US culture. However, the viewer is also offered American points of identification through

Figure 10.4 The cast of season twelve of *The Great British Bake Off*

their FBI Agent neighbour Stan, and as the seasons progress, their daughter Paige. Elizabeth remains committed to their mission and her belief in Mother Russia, yet Philip is increasingly ambivalent about his job and national identity. The audience is naturally sympathetic to his temptation by capitalist society and individualistic American identity. In this way the programme presents ambivalence about American patriotism under President Reagan, whilst also giving space to identify with its allure.

Television as cultural forum

Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch's concept of television as a 'cultural forum' (1983) considers how ideology is negotiated in programmes that appeal to a wide audience base, such as the US classic network era of the 1950s to 1970s. Where today viewers can choose from a wide range of programmes and outlets to find something that aligns with their individual worldview, the classic network era needed to appeal to a broad audience as there were only three networks. Newcomb and Hirsch argue network television could function as a 'cultural forum', where debate and conflict between a programme's characters created a space to express and work-through cultural concerns. This allowed different beliefs and viewpoints to exist in one programme, enabling identification with the broadest audience possible. Although dominant ideology was likely reasserted by the close of the episode the conflict had provided productive space for airing dissenting views (Mittell 2010: 288).

NBC sitcom *Parks and Recreation* illustrates how the cultural forum remains a useful concept for analysing ideology in contemporary television (Hendershot 2020). Set in the local government of Pawnee, a fictional Indiana city, its protagonist is Leslie Knope, an over-enthusiastic administrator in the Parks and Recreation department. She embodies the ideology that engagement with your community and local politics is a positive thing. The opposing perspective is embodied by her

Figure 10.5 *Parks and Recreation* derives comedy from Ron and Leslie's opposing perspectives

privatisation the policy of placing industries or institutions in the hands of privately owned businesses, rather than state ownership.

boss Ron Swanson, an anti-government libertarian who believes in the rights of the individual and **privatisation**. Leslie and Ron thus provide identification for both conservative and liberal viewers, although *Parks and Recreation* largely lampoons Ron's libertarian perspective. Whilst drawing comedy from their conflicting worldviews the sitcom ultimately presents Leslie and Ron as allies rather than enemies (Figure 10.5), despite Ron's resistance to Leslie's beliefs, showing 'how opposing factions can communicate and collaborate' (234). Ultimately, the programme's ideological position leans liberal as it shares Leslie's beliefs in conversation and community as cornerstones of democracy, despite its frequent puncturing of her optimism through the comic absurdity of Pawnee's citizens.

The cultural forum is an example of how television's representations can help viewers 'work through' uncertainties or anxieties, both personal and social. John Ellis explains that 'television offers an important social forum in which the complexities and anxieties of difference…can be explored. It now plays its part as one of the social institutions which try to reconcile the divisions that come with differences' (2000, 72). By spending time with a character who is different to them a viewer can come to gain an understanding of those they represent. Television's representations can prompt cultural discussions, and Television Studies analyses these discourses to understand how these representations function. Another aspect of 'working through' is the viewer's ability to learn coping mechanisms by sharing a character's challenging experience or emotion. Norwegian teen drama *Skam* was created by a public service broadcaster NRK as such a space for Norwegian teens to work through challenging personal and social issues. Here we can see how the structure and funding of a television industry can shape its representations and ideologies.

Reality television and identity

Identity and ideology are central frames for Television Studies' analysis of reality TV, as the genre has come to play a prominent role in shaping cultural perspectives on identity, particularly class, gender and race and ethnicity. This is in part due to reality TV's interest in 'ordinary people' (a term that often stands in for 'working-class') and everyday lives, as well as the processes of judgement and shame that are frequently structured into the genre's narratives and audience address. Lifestyle and makeover programmes are a subset of reality TV that focuses on bodies, homes, gardens and finances, offering templates for living based on middle-class taste codes and gender norms. In these programmes an untidy house or disordered body are treated as symptoms of emotional and psychological issues. 'Experts' scrutinise houses and bodies, with their judgement aiding the subject in their transformation into the programme's vision of a socially acceptable selfhood, in part through the use of 'correct' consumer products. The underlying promise of makeover programmes is that this exterior transformation through consumption and alignment with accepted ideological norms will also resolve participants' psychological and emotional issues.

Class and gender politics shape the 'maternal TV' sub-genre of reality TV, particularly the working-class teenage mother who is repeatedly positioned as a figure of judgement. Imogen Tyler (2011) argues programmes like BBC3's *Underage and Pregnant* are shaped by neoliberal ideologies that present the poverty and struggles of their working-class participants as individual failings rather than a social problem created by structural inequalities. The programme's imagery uses representational shorthand familiar to British audiences from social realist storytelling – housing estates, domestic space, clothing and hairstyles – to efficiently code its participants as working-class mothers. This imagery echoes negative media coverage and political discourse that positioned the working-class teen mum as a drain on the welfare state. The programme's storytelling mobilises negative value judgements that position the teen mother as a figure of shame and inadequate motherhood.

BBC Three and MTV share a youth demographic, and MTV programmes *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom* show the similarities in British and US reality TV's class and gender ideologies. Amanda Ann Klein (2021) points out that these programmes are positioned as cautionary tales for MTV's white, middle-class, suburban youth demographic. She highlights their preference for casting white middle-class girls whose pregnancy can be positioned as a single mistake. This threatens their secure future, but can be overcome with hard work. This generates empathy for the programme's participants whilst also indicting them for their predicament, 'they should have known better' (108). The programmes do feature some working-class subjects such as Amber Portwood, whose financially unstable background is more reflective of the wider experience of teen motherhood in the US than her middle-class castmates. *Teen Mom* constantly places Amber's parenting under scrutiny, repeatedly presenting her as unable to effectively care for her child. Yet Klein notes that despite class judgement being clearly present in the programme's visual storytelling, *Teen Mom*'s discourse of teen motherhood does not recognise class as a factor in its cast's experience (109). Rather than present a class-conscious understanding of how Amber's experience of motherhood is shaped by her background of poverty, an unstable upbringing and a lack of access to education, she is instead perpetually framed as *choosing* not to do 'enough', with her struggles to parent presented as personal failings. *Teen Mom* illustrates MTV's overall denial of class as a shaping factor in the experiences and opportunities of its reality TV casts, including the privileged lives of the stars of *The Hills*, who are instead presented as aspirational, all-American girls.

Privilege shapes the lives depicted in Bravo's *The Real Housewives* franchise, which takes pleasure in its casts' affluent lifestyles, conspicuous consumption and body modifications. With programmes set in cities across America the franchise draws on soap-opera storytelling style to explore the complex dynamics of female friendships, with their casts' competition and conflicts providing combustible narrative material. These programmes target Bravo's favoured demographic of affluent, predominantly white, women and gay men. The franchise forms part of a larger cultural shift in the 2000s where 'housewife' no longer solely refers to a woman who performs domestic labour for her family. Bravo's model of 'housewife' is a woman of 'pampered leisure, engaging in aesthetic rituals and regimes of self-care including shopping, dining out, and hiring others to assist them with their clothing, hair, makeup and jewellery' (Leonard 2020: 278). The franchise's aspirational yet cautionary storytelling offers viewers access to these women's upscale lives yet also highlights their ordinariness through their personal, familial and friendship struggles, 'contrasting pleasant surface and ugly reality' (285). Here we see how reality TV's shaping of class and gender can provide dual pleasures for its audience.

Racquel Gates points out that reality TV's low cultural status, its distance from 'respectability', allows it to explore topics and issues that other genres may shy away from, particularly around race, gender, class and sexual identity (2018: 147). The popularity of Black-cast reality TV like *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, *Love and Hip-Hop* and *Basketball Wives* highlight the value of Black female audiences for US cable channels Bravo and VH1. Gates counters wider cultural criticism of these programmes over their 'negative' representations of bad behaviours and 'excessive' Black femininity. Instead she argues for their liberatory possibilities, their provision of respite from the politics of respectability that shape Black women's media representations and everyday lives. For Gates the programmes' messy, over-the-top worlds provide emotional release from societal pressures and allow viewers to 'work through' the contradictions and frustrations of Black womanhood (178–80). Here we see the complex pleasures that reality television's representations can offer audiences, and the importance of looking beyond positive/negative divisions when discussing racial representations.

Who makes TV?

When analysing television representations and identity it's important to consider who gets to make television and who has the power to commission programmes. Television Studies work on industry and television production has highlighted how the power structures of television industries have been shaped by gender, race and class since the medium's beginnings. Consider who becomes head of channels and entertainment companies, whose tastes and experiences shape which programmes are developed and greenlit. Just as importantly this also impacts the bottom rungs of power, the interns and assistants. Who afford to can work unpaid or at a low wage in expensive cities to develop the skills and relationships needed for career advancement? Similarly, lower-level production roles are frequently low-wage and underpaid, requiring long unsocial working hours during production. In this way class and its intersection with race shape access to television from entry-level all the way up to high-level positions. If the people who get to commission and make television come from privileged, largely white backgrounds, this shapes the kind of stories that are told, how they are told and who gets to have complex emotional lives at the centre of them.

For example, the success of HBO's family crime drama *The Sopranos* ushered in US cable drama's 'second golden age' in the 2000s. These **prestige** dramas predominately featured white male anti-heroes and were shaped by a set of white male 'auteur' showrunners venerated by both critics and Television Studies work on 'quality TV'. Critical and academic discussion of prestige TV privileged dramas that interrogated the complexity of primarily white, frequently violent, masculinity, such as *Deadwood*, *Mad Men*, *The Wire* and *Breaking Bad*. Despite *Sex and the City* and *Six Feet Under* playing a key part in this second golden age they saw less long-term critical and industrial influence, with female ensemble comedy and family drama taking much longer to gain a significant hold in US prestige TV.

prestige TV critical and industry term to describe high-budget flagship drama and comedy. Term aims to remove hierarchical/judgemental connotations of the term 'quality television'.

To focus in on HBO, who makes its television and benefits from its considerable industrial power as a '**gatekeeper**' for prestige TV? In 2014 journalist Maureen Ryan produced a quantitive analysis of the creators and showrunners of the channel's hour-long dramas produced since 1974. She found that:

gatekeepers the critical term used for the people and institutions (such as television commissioning producers, or regulatory bodies) who control access to television broadcasting.

- Only one woman created an original one-hour drama series during those four decades
- With one exception HBO had not aired an original hour-long drama or dramatic miniseries created by a person of colour
- No woman or person of colour had been a creator or showrunner on an hour-long HBO drama or miniseries since 2008

Ryan also surveyed the hour-long dramas of FX, HBO, AMC, Showtime and Netflix from 2002 to 2014, finding out of 97 dramas only 12 creators or showrunners were women, only two of those women of colour, and finding no men of colour (Ryan 2014). She connected this dominance of white male creative voices to US prestige drama's limited investment in stories outside of white male experience during the 2000s and early 2010s.

The late 2010s saw the US TV industry come under renewed pressure from activists, press and social media campaigns to expand the diversity of those creating and starring in television. Prestige cable channels HBO and FX responded with initiatives to increase the diversity of their television and film directors. HBO's rose from 23% women and men of colour and white women in the 2014–15 season to 57% in the 2017–18 season. On FX (including its sister channel FXX) episodic directors increased from 12% in 2014–15 to 51% in August 2016 (Ryan 2016, 2018). HBO and FX's chief executives' choice to pursue these initiatives and the speed of their implementation illustrates the power held by industry gatekeepers. Yet Kristen Warner points out that these inclusive approaches focusing on episodic directors – rather than writers or showrunners – offers a quick fix for channels under pressure over diversity and camouflages their largely white male showrunner line-up. As freelance directors are employed for single episodes and work to maintain the shape of the showrunner's storytelling and the aesthetic established by the pilot director, they lack significant power. Warner argues that ‘flattening directors of colour into markers of quantifiable gains may ensure their employment, but it also renders diversity as an artificial additive and not substantive contribution’ (2017).

Comedy’s shorter run-times and lower budgets sees channels and streamers more willing to take on ‘risk’ in looking beyond established white male perspectives. Jennifer Fuller (2010) points out that channels use their support of creatives from diverse backgrounds who offer perspectives beyond a white middle-class norm to signal their embrace of ‘risk’, a key part of their prestige brand. This was seen in the large 2010s cycle of British and US single-camera comedies starring and created by white women that followed the success of Lena Dunham’s HBO comedy *Girls.* The ‘precarious girl’ comedy makes ‘the endless alienation of its millennial female subject a source of humour’ (Wanzo 2016, 29). Its key features are a perpetual girlhood caused by economic and social precarity, with protagonists experiencing alienation, failure, discomfort and comic debasement. These programmes positioned prestige comedy as a space where television could push against normative femininity and intimately explore messy, confrontational women’s lives (Figure 10.6). The cycle included *Broad City*, *Difficult People*, *Love*, *Lady Dynamite* and *I Love Dick* in the US, along with *Fleabag* and *Catastrophe* in the UK. The cycle predominantly focused on white protagonists but did include Issa Rae’s *Insecure* and Michaela Coel’s *Chewing Gum*.

Diversity as brand management

A commitment to diversity is increasingly presented as part of channel and streamers’ brand identities, promoted through programming choices and advertising campaigns. Melanie Kohnen discusses ABC Family’s use of branded diversity, the ‘inclusion of cultural diversity in television programming that is motivated by and

COMEDY CENTRAL

Figure 10.6 *Broad City*’s ‘precarious girl’ comedy gives us intimate access to its protagonists

contributes to a channel's branding strategies' (2015: 1). During the 2010s the US cable channel courted its niche target demographic of young millennials invested in cultural diversity and family through a branding campaign centred on family melodrama *The Fosters*. This positioned the programme's lesbian couple and their white and Latinx adopted and foster family as a counterpoint to conservative political constructions of the 'American family' as a white heterosexual ideology. Kohnen suggests that ABC Family's strategic use of diversity opened up space for critical interrogations of queer and interracial identity, illustrating how television can offer a 'working through' of cultural tensions.

Netflix has frequently employed branded diversity in its publicity campaigns, including its 'Strong Black Lead' Twitter account and podcast. The streamer is a mainstream outlet targeting a broad audience base through a huge mix of programming, yet these promotional measures highlight its small amount of Black-led 'Originals' in order to position it as a risk-taking innovator. Netflix's 2017 US campaign #TheFirstTimeISawMe was promotion positioned as advocacy campaign. It featured actors, directors and writers linked to Netflix films and programming discussing how screen representations helped form their identities. By association it sought to present its own programming as offering greater diversity than broadcast and cable television. Kristen Warner is sceptical of attempts to frame streamers as 'disrupting' industry norms through branded diversity, noting that 'emerging media are often saddled with social expectations of meaningful change because of the possibilities these platforms seem to offer to democratise content and serve audiences with stories and characters similar to themselves' (2021). She questions whether streamers represent material change or merely replicate strategies and patterns familiar from legacy television, where short-term commitments to diversity were used by broadcast and cable channels to signal innovation and industrial 'risk' and thus prestige, but rarely lasted.

Cultural diversity has been built into the brand identity of the UK's Channel 4 since its 1982 launch, as part of its public service remit. Sarita Malik and Darrell M. Newton point out that 'lobbying and debates about training and access for Britain's Black cultural workers helped to prepare the ground' for the channel's formation (2017, 8), established as an alternative to the BBC and ITV duopoly. The channel's first remit centred risk-taking and a diversity of viewpoints, requiring it to provide programming for underserved and minority audiences, to commission its programmes from **independent production companies**, to innovate and experiment, and to commit to educational and culture programmes.

independent production companies businesses making television programmes which can be sold to television networks that transmit and distribute them.

However, maintaining this remit became a trickier task following the 1992 Broadcasting Act, which made Channel 4 an independent corporation responsible for selling its own adverts (this had previously been the responsibility of ITV, with Channel 4 funded by a tax on ITV's overall profits). The channel now needed to balance its public service remit with the necessity to produce audience-drawing genres attractive to advertisers. The resulting changes to its programming saw the channel 'accused of turning away from its public service values in favour of profit' (Johnson 2012: 86). These tensions shape the current branding of Channel 4 where its initial radical and minority address has shifted to a niche focus on upscale audiences and the 16–34 youth audience, two profitable mainstream demographics that are attractive to advertisers.

Channel 4's brand identity hails this audience by positioning itself as a risk-taking yet populist outsider devoted to diversity and offering an alternative to the mainstream. Catherine Johnson points out that Channel 4's brand identity involves distilling its public service remit into a set of brand values (90). We can see this in the Channel 4 website's presentation of its expansive remit as four concise components:

- To champion unheard voices
- To innovate and take bold creative risks
- To inspire change in the way we lead our lives
- To stand up for diversity across the UK

In late 2021 the channel faced threats of privatisation from the Conservative government, with ministers challenging the channel's cultural and industrial value in an era of intensified global media competition. In response Channel 4 launched the Altogether Different campaign, which used branded diversity to promote its channel identity and assert its value to the nation. The advert featured a diverse selection of presenters, performers and Paralympic athletes featured in Channel 4 programming, including most of its Black, British Asian and disabled presenters (Figure 10.7).

The advert hails the channel's viewers as 'big, beautiful weirdos', using a surreal comic tone to position both itself and the UK as communities that champion and are defined by difference. This connects Channel 4's brand identity with a progressive, cheeky version of British national identity that is proud of being 'weird' and welcoming. In doing so it appealed to the self-image of its youth and upscale audiences by countering the restrictive ideologies of nation and belonging circulating in contemporary politics and the press. In the face of political challenges to its public value and threat of competition from global streaming giants, Channel 4's Altogether Different campaign asserts the broadcaster's importance using national specificity, its role a communal forum, and its offer of a 'diverse and distinctive' alternative in the British broadcasting landscape.

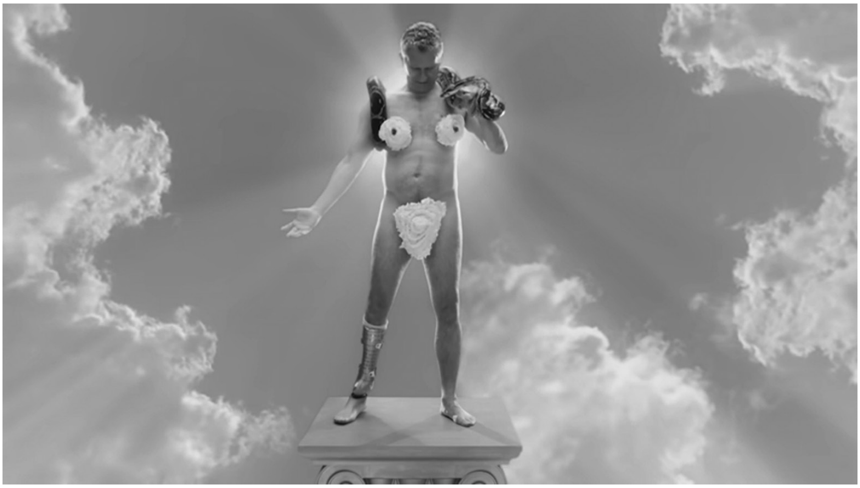


Figure 10.7 Comedian Adam Hills features in Channel 4's Altogether Different branding campaign

Case study: *Chewing Gum*

This case study looks at *Chewing Gum*, a British comedy that debuted on Channel 4's **digital** youth channel E4 in 2015. It considers the programme's representations, storytelling and authorship, drawing out some of the ideas discussed in this chapter with a particular focus on gender, class and race in comedy. Created, written by, and starring Michaela Coel the programme was developed from her theatre monologue *Chewing Gum Dreams*. It follows Black working-class Londoner Tracey, a naive and awkward twentysomething who is emerging from a sheltered religious upbringing and experiencing a delayed adolescence. *Chewing Gum* is part of the 2010s precarious girl comedy cycle, whose programmes drew at times uncomfortable comedy from their intimate access to young women's lives, bodies and emotional states. They used comedy to break 'social and emotional taboos surrounding femininity, bodies and sexual experience' (Woods 2019: 205). In *Chewing Gum* Tracey's awkward physicality and oversharing produces a comedy of discomfort. The programme derives its comedy from her intense desire for yet lack of knowledge about sexual and romantic experience that sees her act more like a hormonal teenager than a twentysomething woman.

digital television television pictures and sound encoded into the ones and zeros of electronic data. Digital signals can also be sent back down cables by viewers, making possible interaction with television programmes.

Tracey shares these intense desires and fears with the audience through direct address, where her chattering oversharing illustrates her lack of emotional and physical control (Figure 10.8). This use of direct address to produce uncomfortable comedy and complicated audience connections also featured in 2016 BBC Three comedy *Fleabag* (Woods 2019). The upper-middle-class white London of *Fleabag* (co-funded by Amazon Prime Video) saw it fit smoothly into the US-based precarious girl cycle, which featured middle-class white femininity as its representational norm (aside from *Insecure*'s Black middle-class world). Yet *Chewing Gum*'s Black working-class protagonist resulted in the programme receiving much less attention than *Fleabag* in press and academic discussions of the cycle.

The US precarious girl cycle was positioned as prestige TV due to its departure from and challenge to US norms of gender representation and comedy. However, national television differences mean *Chewing Gum* sits within the established comic trends and representations of British youth television (Woods 2016). On BBC3 and E4 British youth sitcoms

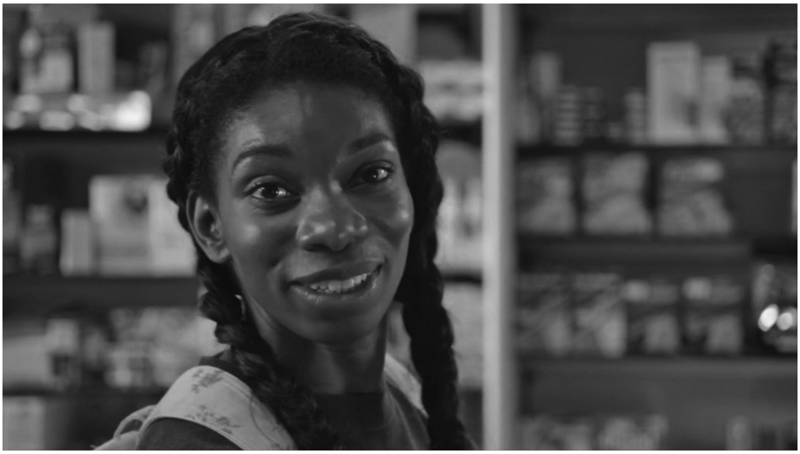


Figure 10.8 Direct address in *Chewing Gum*

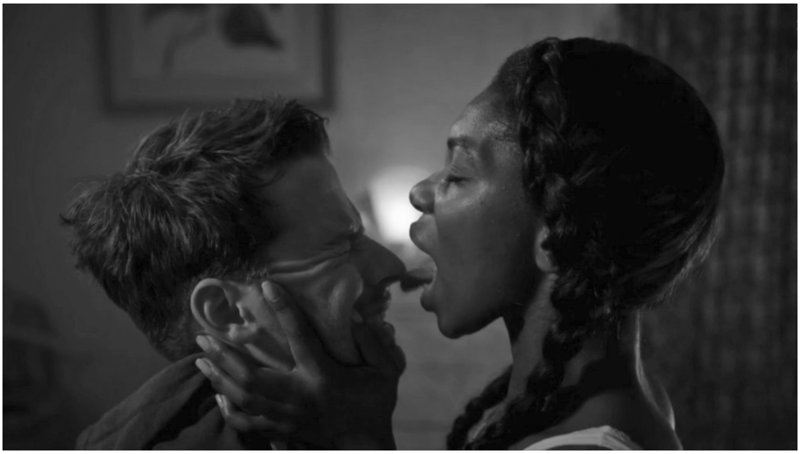


Figure 10.9 Tracey's naïve approach to sex is played for slapstick comedy

such as *The Inbetweeners*, *Drifting* and *Him & Her* regularly feature comic elements that US precarious girl comedies frame as risk-taking and pleasurably transgressive, such as mundanity, casual cruelty, crude humour, 'unlikeable' protagonists and comedies of embarrassment. What is presented as a divergence and challenge in the US could be considered a comic norm in the UK. For example, Sharon Horgan's 2006 BBC Three comedy *Pulling* is arguably a precursor to the precarious girl cycle, with its anti-glamour aesthetic and trio of cruel and selfish female protagonists. However, just as *Chewing Gum* diverges from the middle-class norms of the US cycle, at the time of its broadcast it was also distinct amongst the otherwise white worlds of British youth sitcoms. Yet its influence can be seen in successors *Man Like Mobeem*, *Timewasters*, and *We Are Lady Parts*, which feature Black and British Muslim casts and creators.

Rebecca Wanzo suggests that the precarious girl's abjection and perpetual girlhood can be the result of economic shock or a rebellious choice for middle-class white women (2016, 28-9). In *Chewing Gum* Tracey's perpetual girlhood is due to her arrested development, which results in her social and sexual naiveté. She displays a childlike lack of physical control that borders on slapstick, with the programme drawing comedy from her struggles with the emotional awareness required to manage everyday social activities and her cluelessness in sexual situations (Figure 10.9). Where Tracey throws herself into sexual experience her sister Cynthia remains religious and sheltered, with her fear of yet fascination with the sexual and social transgressions that most people her age have already encountered in their teenage years presented as its own source of comic discomfort.

Chewing Gum uses direct address to intensify the audience discomfort produced by Tracey's comic misadventures, intense desire and excessive physicality. Switching between a pose of confidence and bewildered panic she shares her desires and frustrations with the audience. This intimate sharing of her interiority draws the viewer close, yet at the same time Tracey's lack of boundaries produces comic discomfort. She overshares with the viewer whilst sat on the toilet and during awkward attempts at sex with her boyfriend. This push and pull between intimacy and discomfort is also a feature of Coel's next project, BBC1's *I May Destroy You*, where she uses more stark tonal shifts to keep her audience unbalanced. The programme blends comedy and raw emotionality through its intense focus on protagonist Arabella as she attempts to gain control and make sense of her world after a sexual assault.

In programmes like *Girls*, *Broad City* and *Fleabag*, white precarious girls embrace comic debasement and grossness as freedoms from normative femininity. Yet Wanzo points out this becomes complicated by race, because Black bodies are haunted by racist stereotypes built on othering and the grotesque, the result of centuries of white supremacy (45–6). She suggests Issa Rae's *Awkward Black Girl* sidestepped this risk attached to comic precarity by using the more mainstream comic tradition of awkwardness, a technique Rae continues in *Insecure.* In *Chewing Gum* Michaela Coel's writing and performance takes pleasure in a chaotic physicality and comic excess. However, any risk of linking this comic debasement with racial stereotypes is defused by the programme's connections to British comedy traditions of debasement and excess. In sitcoms such as *The Inbetweeners*, *Pulling* and *Father Ted* along with Channel 4's comic drama *Shameless* this ranges from cringe comedy to moments of the surreal. *Chewing Gum* also lessens Tracey's bearing of the 'historical weight of black abjection' (30) by expanding its comic abjection out to supporting female characters, from fellow Black precarious girls in Cynthia and Tracey's best friend Candice, to a range of white female comic grotesques in featured roles (Woods 2019: 201).

Chewing Gum shares with *Shameless* a vision of council estate life shaped by chaotic comedy and communal bonds. Coel grew up on a council estate in the London borough of Tower Hamlets and is a rare Black working-class creative working in British television. She intentionally countered the images of deprivation, entrapment and violence that tend to shape British film and television's representations of city council estates, particularly Black working-class life (as seen in *Kidulthood* and *Top Boy*). Where council estates and tower blocks frequently feature as a 'striking visual symbol' for alienation, social and economic inequality (Burke 2007: 178), *Chewing Gum* was intentionally filmed in summer and its aesthetic is shaped by eye-popping bright colours. The estate is shaded with dappled sunlight and its balconies feature window boxes full of plants. Shots of the estate's communal space feature the voices of children playing. Together this shapes the estate as a warm welcoming community, a teasing yet supportive safe space for Tracey's naïve comic misadventures. Overall, we can see how *Chewing Gum* straddles the investments of the precarious girl cycle and British television's comic traditions to build its representation of Tracey's chaotic desires.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- The study of television representation includes the question of how television institutions represent certain groups, in what ways and for what reasons
- The methodology of content analysis is a statistically based method for finding out about representation in samples of television, whereas textual analysis interprets and evaluates television representations

- Studying representations involves considering how audiences understand and respond to the representations of people they see, and how television can provide a forum for 'working through' difference
- Academic work on representation has pushed for greater depth in television's representations and explorations of identity. Industry analysis has highlighted how change is driven from the top down
- Analysing television institutions shows how diversity has been positioned as 'risk', which sees it incorporated into brand identities for short-term gain, along with the role of public service remits in shaping representation

Bibliography

BBC (2022) 'About us: Mission, values and public purposes'. Availabke at www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/governance/mission

Beltran, M. (2010) 'Meaningful diversity: Exploring questions of equitable representation on diverse ensemble cast shows', *Flow*, 12(7), 27 August. Available at www.flowjournal.org/2010/08/meaningful-diversity/

Burke, A. (2007) 'Concrete universality: Tower blocks, architectural modernism, and realism in contemporary British cinema', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 5(3), pp. 177–88.

Channel 4 (2021) 'What we do: Channel 4's remit'. Available at www.channel4.com/corporate/about-4/what-we-do/channel-4s-remit

Channel 4 Television Corporation Ltd (2019) *Channel Four Television Corporation Report and Financial Statements 2019*. Available at www.channel4.com/corporate/performance/reporting/reporting-library

Coel, M. (2018) 'Michaela Coel: MacTaggart lecture in full', *Broadcast*, 23 August. Available at www.broadcastnow.co.uk/broadcasters/michaela-coel-mactaggart-lecture-in-full/5131910.article

Crenshaw, K.W. (2017) *On Intersectionality*. New York: The New Press.

Dyer, R. (1997) *White*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ellis, J. (2000) *Seeing Things. Television in the Age of Uncertainty*. London: I.B Tauris.

Fuller, J. (2010) 'Branding blackness on US cable television – Jennifer Fuller', *Media Culture & Society*, 32(10), pp. 285–305.

Gates, R. (2018) *Double Negative: The Black Image & Popular Culture*. London: Duke University Press.

Gray, H. (2005) *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation*. London: University of California Press.

Gray, J. (2008) *Television Entertainment*. London: Routledge.

Hall, S. (2005) 'Whose heritage? Un-settling "the Heritage", re-imagining the post-nation', in Littler, J. and Naidoo, R. (eds), *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of 'Race'*. London: Routledge, pp. 21–31.

Hall, S. (2013) 'The spectacle of the "other"', in Hall, S., Evans, J. and Nixon, S. (eds), *Representation*, second edition. London: Sage.

Hendershot, H. (2020) ‘Parks and Recreation: The cultural forum’, in Thompson, E. and Mittell, J. (eds), *How to Watch Television*, second edition. New York: New York University Press, pp. 230–8.

Johnson, C. (2012) *Branding Television*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Kavka, M. (2012) *Reality TV*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Klein, A. A. (2021) *Millennials Killed the Video Star: MTV’s Transition to Reality Programming*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Kohnen, M. (2015) ‘Cultural diversity as brand management in cable television’, *Media Industries*, 2(2). Available at https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mij/15031809.0002.205/--cultural-diversity-as-brand-management-in-cable-television?rgn=main;view=fulltext

Lagerwey, J. (2018) ‘The Great British Bake Off, joy, and the affective potential of Nadiya Hussain’s amateur celebrity’, *Celebrity Studies*, 9(4), pp. 442–54.

Leonard, S. (2020) ‘The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills: Franchising femininity’, in Thompson, E. and Mittell, J. (eds), *How to Watch Television*, second edition. New York: New York University Press, pp. 278–86.

Lopez, K. (2020) ‘“His Dark Materials” screenwriter Jack Thorne fights to give disabled talent opportunities’, *Indiewire*, 12 November. Available at www.indiewire.com/2020/11/his-dark-materials-jack-thorne-disability-1234596607/

Malik, S. and Newton, D. (eds) (2017) *Adjusting the Contrast: British Television and Constructs of Race*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Martin, B. (2013) *Difficult Men: From the Sopranos and The Wire to Mad Men and Breaking Bad*. London: Faber & Faber.

Mittell, J. (2010) *Television and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Newcomb, H. and Hirsch, P.M. (1983) ‘Television as a cultural forum: implications for research’, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 8(3), pp. 45–55.

Newton, D. (2011) *Paving the Empire Road: BBC Television and Black Britons*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Palmer, G. (ed.) (2008) *Exposing Lifestyle Television: The Great Reveal*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Ramachandran, N. (2021) ‘Channel 4 reveals next steps to increase Black representation in U.K. industry’, *Variety*, 19 November. Available at https://variety.com/2021/tv/global/channel-4-black-representation-uk-1235115865/

Rowe, K. (1995) *The Unruly Woman: Gender and Genres of Laughter*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Ryan, M. (2014) ‘Who creates drama at HBO? Very few women or People of Color’, *Huffington Post*, 3 June. Available at www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/hbo-diversity_n_4899679

Ryan, M. (2016) ‘FX CEO John Landgraf on the “racially biased” system and taking major steps to change his network’s director rosters’, *Variety*, 9 August. Available at https://variety.com/2016/tv/features/fx-diversity-directors-hiring-ceo-john-landgraf-interview-1201831409/

Ryan, M. (2018) ‘HBO hits important milestone in push for behind-the-scenes inclusion’, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 10 August. Available at www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/hbo-hits-important-milestone-push-behind-scenes-inclusion-1133786/

Smith-Shomade, B.E. (2007) *Pimpin' Ain't East: Selling Black Entertainment Television*. New York: Routledge.

Swinbourne, C. (2020) 'From the Writers' Access Group to working as Story Consultant on Ben Mitchell's deafness storyline on *EastEnders*', *BBC Writers Room*, 5 June. Available at www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/writersroom/entries/cd3e2b97-494b-4e78-ac94-df88441f13d5

Tyler, I. (2011) 'Pramface Girls: The class politics of "maternal TV"', in Skeggs, B. and Wood, H. (eds), *Reality Television and Class*. London: BFI Palgrave, pp. 210–24.

Wanzo, R. (2016) 'Precarious-girl comedy: Issa Rae, Lena Dunham, and abjection aesthetics', *Camera Obscura*, 31(2), pp. 27–59.

Warner, K. (2017) 'In the time of plastic representation', *Film Quarterly*, 71(2), pp. 32–7.

Warner, K. (2020) 'Being Mary Jane: Cultural specificity', in Thompson, E. and Mittell, J. (eds), *How to Watch Television*, second edition. New York: New York University Press, pp. 108–16.

Warner, K. (2021) 'Blue skies again: Streamers and the impossible promise of diversity', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, June 24. Available at https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/blue-skies-again-streamers-and-the-impossible-promise-of-diversity/

Wood, H. (2014) 'Benefits Britain the live debate: Hiding in the light', *CST Online*, 21 February. Available at https://cstonline.net/benefits-britain-the-live-debate-hiding-in-the-light-by-helen-wood/

Wood, H. and Skeggs, B. (2010) 'Reacting to reality TV: The affective economy of an extended social/public realm', in Kraidy, M. and Sender, K. (eds), *The Politics of Reality Television: Global Perspectives*. London: Routledge, pp. 93–106.

Woods, F. (2016) *British Youth Television*. London: Routledge.

Woods, F. (2019) 'Too close for comfort: Direct address and the affective pull of the confessional comic woman in Chewing Gum and Fleabag', *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 12(2), pp. 194–212.

Television Cultures and Globalisation

11

- Introduction 256
- Global television 257
- National television in global contexts 260
- International unscripted format sales 262
- The scripted format trade and localisation 265
- Global power and streaming platforms 267
- The global and local interrelationship 269
- Case study: Hallyu and Korean drama 272
- Summary of key points 276
- Bibliography 276

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-12

Television Cultures and Globalisation

Introduction

This chapter deals with theories that analyse how international television markets work and the global distribution of programmes. The US and UK have long had considerable power in the global flow of television content, but the increasing significance of international flows originating from regions such as South America and East Asia has been hotly debated. Any discussion of television today needs to take account of the social and political significance of how national and transnational television cultures work in relation to each other. This is particularly important in an era when the global spread of US-based streaming platforms shapes television viewing in hundreds of countries. As Chris Barker (1997: 27) notes, the term 'global television' 'implies all the various configurations of **public** and **commercial television** which are regulated, funded and viewed within the boundaries of nation-states and/or language communities'. The global movement of television is enormously complex. What is at issue is the degree to which the meanings of television are dependent on the institutions and cultures in which they originate. What conclusions can be drawn from studying non-English language television content, as well as television's circulation in international television markets? In different national television contexts there are inequalities in power and funding, as well as the balance of imported and national programmes. This chapter explains how theorists of television have understood these inequalities.

public service in television, the provision of a mix of programmes that inform, educate and entertain in ways that encourage the betterment of audiences and society in general.

commercial television television funded by the sale of advertising time or sponsorship of programmes.

globalisation the process whereby ownership of television institutions in different nations and regions is concentrated in the hands of international corporations, and whereby programmes and formats are traded between institutions around the world.

One of the most significant theories for explaining how television is organised today is that of **globalisation**. This can refer to the phenomenon whereby some programmes or **genres** of television have spread across different nations and cultures, so that television in different countries can seem surprisingly familiar. One way of explaining this is to use the concept of **media imperialism**, which considers power imbalances in the global spread of media. It is argued that 'world patterns of communication flow, both in density and in direction, mirror the system of domination in the economic and political order' (Sinclair et al. 1999: 173). A second meaning of globalisation is to refer to the power of media and technology conglomerates that are relatively independent of nation-states (although frequently originating from the US). These can broadcast by satellite or stream via the internet into many countries and regions. Large media conglomerates diversify into global channels and streaming platforms and acquire independent production companies in local markets. This helps to consolidate their position in the international television marketplace. Theorists of television have debated whether globally distributed programmes and global television institutions have brought new opportunities and freedoms, or whether they have imposed a deadening sameness on the diverse cultures of the world. An important question that

genre a kind or type of programme. Programmes of the same genre have shared characteristics.

media imperialism the critical argument that powerful nations and cultures (especially the USA) exert control over other nations and cultures through the media products they export.

underlies this debate is whether television institutions both embody and transmit **ideological** 'messages' that are the result of their ownership, their relationship to national broadcasting **regulations** and their adoption of particular cultural values. Another is whether audiences passively consume television's messages – as Chapter 9 discusses, audiences can process and understand programmes differently – and how national contexts and tastes can shape the reception of international programming. Global television flows are uneven, complex sets of media exchanges. This chapter provides an account of the critical models that can be employed to evaluate these issues, and the divergent conclusions that can be drawn from them.

regulation the control of television institutions by laws, codes of practice or guidelines.

ideology the set of beliefs, attitudes and assumptions arising from the economic and class divisions in a culture, underlying the ways of life accepted as normal in that culture.

Global television

The term 'globalisation' has several possible meanings. It can be used to refer to:

- Products of global corporations, whether these are concrete products like shoes or textual products like television programmes
- The distribution system which circulates these products, like the global network of transmission satellites used by television broadcasters, or the global spread of US-based streaming platforms distributed via the internet
- The consumers of products distributed in this way, the global audiences

Theorists of television have emphasised that at the levels of production, distribution and consumption it is possible for the significance of global television to change and argue that globalisation is not a natural and unstoppable process. In production, global television corporations can be restrained by national or local laws and regulations which make them operate differently in different places. Global distribution networks may carry the same television programme over a very wide area, but the ways in which the programme is received (by whom, how and the significance of receiving global television in a particular society) will be different in different contexts. John Sinclair and his fellow authors (Sinclair et al. 1999: 176) explain that:

> Although US programmes might lead the world in their transportability across cultural boundaries, and even manage to dominate schedules on some channels in particular countries, they are rarely the most popular programmes where viewers have a reasonable menu of locally produced programmes to choose from.

For example, in November 2021 the UK ratings service BARB launched an update to its audience measurement process that enabled it to estimate UK audiences of global streaming platforms viewed on television sets (this does not as yet include mobile devices). Disney+, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video do not report viewing data, or only reveal limited amounts, so this development enabled their audience to be estimated alongside those of UK broadcasters and their streaming platforms. BARB reported a top 10 made nearly entirely of UK programmes, led by *Strictly Come Dancing*, *The Great British Bake Off* and *The Larkins*, with the first international title Netflix's South Korean hit *Squid Game* at number 10 (which we discuss in this chapter's case study). The next Netflix programme, *You*, sat at the much lower ranking of 58. This illustrates the British audience's preference for homegrown programming, despite the prominence of US programmes in press coverage.

Television Studies uses theories of globalisation to address the processes that homogenise television and reduce difference, as well as processes of differentiation. Furthermore, globalisation theory brings together approaches to television that concern economic, institutional, textual and reception practices. One of the ways of approaching television globalisation is to consider it as part of **postmodernism**. The American theorist Fredric Jameson (1991) uses the term 'postmodernism' to refer to the ways in which cultural products (such as television programmes) as well as physical products (such as bananas) have become part of the global **capitalist** economy. Jameson's political background is in **Marxism**, and therefore he emphasises how the economic basis of capitalism affects television and media culture, and how the production and reception of television carry on the same principles of inequality and consumerism that are found in other aspects of contemporary commerce. From this perspective, television programmes can carry the political ideologies of contemporary capitalist culture.

postmodernism the most recent phase of capitalist culture, the aesthetic forms and styles associated with it, and the theoretical approaches developed to understand it.

capitalism the organisation of an economy around the private ownership of accumulated wealth, involving the exploitation of labour to produce profit that creates such wealth.

Marxism the political and economic theories associated with the German nineteenth-century theorist Karl Marx, who described and critiqued capitalist societies and proposed Communism as a revolutionary alternative.

cultural imperialism the critical argument that powerful nations and regions (especially those of the Western world) dominate less developed nations and regions by exporting values and ideologies.

One way in which these power dynamics have been discussed is through theories of **cultural imperialism**. Developed in the 1950s and 1960s, versions of this theory were used to discuss the global export of Western, and especially American, television and how global audiences interpreted their meanings and ideologies. Imperialism refers to the building of empires by European nations, especially during the nineteenth century in Africa and Asia. The purpose of empire was to secure natural resources and trade routes in order to feed the industrialising European nations and to provide markets for the goods produced in their factories, but by the end of the Second World War in 1945 these empires had been largely dismantled. Cultural imperialism refers to the similar process by which Western nations exercise cultural power over less wealthy countries, rather than exercising the military, legal and trading power which empire involved. According to this argument, the export of cut-price television programmes (as well as cinema, pop music and other cultural goods) undercuts less well-funded local media industries and promotes the commercial interests of Western corporations, especially American ones, and thus supports the political and military interests of the West. By means of the images of affluent Western lifestyles portrayed in television programmes, consumer culture is spread across regions and populations that increasingly aspire to the Western products and expectations that their meagre resources make difficult for them to acquire. The crudest forms of this cultural imperialism thesis, which simply proclaim that the world is being Americanised, pay too little attention to the specifics of the local and national organisation of television consumption.

In the 1980s, when these questions were taken up by a number of theorists of television, it was particularly striking that American programmes were the ones most exported beyond their own borders, and seen by the largest worldwide audiences. In a famous study, television research by Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1990) countered theories of cultural imperialism, finding that viewers in different national cultures understood the 1980s prime-time American soap opera *Dallas* in very different ways. They chose to study viewers of *Dallas* because it had been exported to a large number of nations, and had been seen as an indication that the future of television would be an increasing global homogeneity of programmes dominated by glossy American dramas. But, perhaps surprisingly, *Dallas*'s representation of the 'American dream' of financial success and personal happiness was understood by Jewish members of a kibbutz in Israel as proof that money does not bring happiness. By contrast, members of a North African cooperative thought that *Dallas* proved how money rescues people from everyday problems. Russian Jews who had recently arrived in Israel from the Soviet system believed that *Dallas* was a subtle critique of capitalism that unconsciously exposed its contradictions. So Liebes and Katz's study showed that, contrary to many people's expectations at the time, the meanings of television programmes are understood in relation to the cultural environment and expectations of viewers, and are not injected like a pernicious drug into the cultures where they are watched.

Sinclair and his fellow authors (Sinclair et al. 1999: 183) noted that 'there tends to be a more distanced realm of "pure entertainment" within which US programmes are processed – as markers of modish modernity, as a "spectacular" world – compared to more culturally specific responses made to domestic and other sources'. Theories of cultural imperialism also ignore the flows of television within regions, based for instance on the legacy of the languages of the former empires. This makes possible the exchange of programmes in Spanish among the countries of Latin America, with the region a significant producer of **telenovela**. **Dubbing** and **subtitling** have enabled telenovelas to be exported to non-Spanish language markets, with audiences in a range of countries. Regional television flows sometimes allow for reversals of the more common North to South and West to East trade in television. This chapter's case study considers the regional flow of South Korean drama within East Asia and its further global spread.

telenovela a fictional continuing melodrama on television that lasts for a specific number of episodes. Telenovelas are particularly associated with South American television.

subtitle written text appearing on the television screen, normally to translate speech in a foreign language.

dubbing replacing the original speech in a programme, advertisement, etc. with speech added later, often to translate speech in a foreign language.

The group of countries with the highest proportion of domestically produced television includes the United States, Britain, Brazil, Japan, India, Canada and Australia, along with the recent growth of South Korea. These wealthy countries are able to use imports to top up their domestic production base. But many smaller nations within South America, Africa and Asia have small television industries and insufficient revenue to make many programmes and depend on imports to fill 50 per cent or more of their schedules. The television industries of Brazil and Mexico, for example, have the funding and facilities to make many of their own programmes, making them powerhouses in Latin American television trade. But television broadcasters in the Global South and other less wealthy regions find it much less expensive to buy American or British television than to make their own, with episodes of American television series from several years ago acquired as part of a package of programmes at a low cost. The production costs of these programmes have already been mostly covered by showing them in the domestic American market and sales to larger global markets. So the money made from the export of older series is nearly all pure profit for the media conglomerates and distribution companies that sell them. This makes companies that own extensive libraries of television and film content valuable acquisitions for media conglomerates.

The much higher production values and the aura of sophistication that often surrounds imported television in non-Western countries means that sectors of the television audience that are attractive to advertisers (such as employed young people with surplus income to spend on consumer goods) may be more likely to watch them. This not only has the effect of marginalising the products of the domestic television industry, reducing its chances of expansion, but also historically has filled the most valuable broadcasting slots with Western programmes in which commercials advertising Western consumer products may often appear. As this chapter goes on to discuss, the global expansion of US-based global streaming platforms is based on their exclusive offerings of high-profile, mostly Western, programming that is dubbed and subtitled into a range of languages. Here the competition from these global platforms' powerful brand identities introduces unequal power dynamics into local television markets, challenging less well-funded linear channels and national streaming platforms. Even if crude Americanisation is not the effect of this, consumerisation and the reinforcement of Western values may be. Ramon Lobato (2019: 142) points out that

> export power does not translate directly into cultural power. At the same time, at least some aspects of the cultural imperialism thesis remain important for understanding how global audiences feel about digital media services like Netflix. The dominance of US media is still an empirical fact that must be reckoned with.

Exploring the complexity of globalisation and television involves thinking about the structure of television industries, media regulation, funding practices, distribution and reception, and how particular programme types move around the world.

National television in global contexts

Britain is relatively unusual in global terms because its major broadcasting organisations mainly show programmes made in Britain. Although satellite broadcaster Sky and streaming platforms bring a lot of US programming to viewers, the nation's highest rated programmes are always British. The country has a powerful position in the global television trade, with programmes sold to many overseas countries, where they are frequently subtitled or dubbed into a local language. For higher-budget programmes global sales are an essential part of financing. Sales of new and older (which the industry calls 'library') programmes and linked merchandise contribute to broadcasters funding models. Some of the biggest recent British sales to international territories include:

- Crime drama *Sherlock* – 230 territories
- Natural history series *Planet Earth II* –154 territories
- Motoring programme *Top Gear* – 214 territories
- Period drama *Downton Abbey* – 250 territories

British programmes are relatively successful as exports, partly because of the prominence of English as a shared language around the world. In the period 2019 to 2020, revenue from UK television exports reached nearly £1.48 billion, with the US, France and Australia the biggest markets. Drama was the most popular genre with 48 per cent of sales, then factual at 28 per cent and entertainment at 16 per cent. Nevertheless, American television far exceeds television from Britain and any other European country in export revenue and coverage.

Whilst much of British television is made primarily for a domestic UK audience, high-budget prestige drama has a national and international outlook as British broadcasters require the aid of an international co-production partner, often a US cable channel or streaming platform. The partner contributes to the programme budget in exchange for local or global broadcasting or streaming rights. In the **Peak TV** era, the 'TV arms race' (Ryan and Littleton 2017) has seen intense competition from deep pocketed streaming platforms push programme budgets to new heights across international television markets. Co-production partners means British broadcasters can attract the top creative talent and production values expected by audiences accustomed to high-budget international television. For example, in 2019 high-end BBC1 **period drama** *Gentleman Jack* and telefantasy *His Dark Materials* were co-produced with US subscription cable channel HBO (Figure 11.1). When Netflix co-produces with a British broadcaster it will take the exclusive rights to air the programme outside of the UK. It frequently markets these co-productions as 'Netflix Originals' internationally, as seen with BBC1 crime drama *The Serpent* and Channel 4 teen drama *End of the F***ing World*.

'Peak TV' industry term coined by US television executive John Landgraf to refer to the huge amount of scripted series produced by network, cable and streaming in the US in the second half of the 2010s.

period drama television fiction set in the past, most often the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

British prestige drama's need for co-production can result in programmes greenlit with an eye on both a local and global audience, with this dual address impacting which stories reach the screen. International co-production leans towards glossy crime dramas, period dramas about the privileged classes, middle-class family melodramas and thrillers. This means fewer dramas about working-class people or British social conditions are made, particularly programming with social realist themes. The need for co-production partners has had a particular impact on period drama's representations of the national past. International export has been a long-time contributor to the genre's funding model, with British

Figure 11.1 The blockbuster *His Dark Materials* adaptation is a BBC/HBO co-production

period drama's export value shaped by the tastes of a segment of the US audience via the long-running PBS anthology drama strand *Masterpiece Theatre* (renamed *Masterpiece* in 2008). The strand built its brand around a curated selection of imported British prestige drama, mostly period drama and crime thrillers. In the 2000s *Masterpiece* moved into co-producing British period dramas, including BBC dramas *Emma*, *Cranford* and *Call the Midwife* and ITV dramas *Grantchester*, *Victoria* and *Downton Abbey*, its biggest hit. *Masterpiece* tends to favour 'safe' relatively conservative British period dramas, with comforting stories of white, privileged lives proving extremely popular. As a result, this impacts British television's ability to fund more contentious or challenging stories of the national past.

A few flagship British period dramas have been produced without international partners, including BBC1's *North & South* and Channel 4's *The Mill*. Notably these both depict the struggle of working-class lives in Northern mill towns, a less exportable vision of the national past. However, the expansion of outlets looking to co-produce prestige drama in the peak TV era has enabled British broadcasters to look beyond *Masterpiece*, pairing with US cable channels like AMC, FX and HBO, whose brand identities are built on more challenging prestige drama, as well as global SVODs. These co-production partners can support period dramas that offer challenging or less well-represented stories of the national past.

European broadcasters have similarly shaped their national pasts through a dual address with an eye to export. This can raise concerns over homogenisation or the selective interpretations of distinct national identities. These national pasts can be less familiar to international audiences than the British past, which is heavily circulated through tourism and historic colonial connections. But these unfamiliar stories can also offer novelty and exoticism for international audiences, with the familiar genre elements of period drama helping lessen **cultural discount** (Hoskins and Mirus 1988). The France-Canada co-production *Versailles*, which aired on cable channel Canal+ in France, was built on strategic choices targeting global export. It is a heavily fictionalised biographical drama about the internationally recognisable seventeenth-century French King Louis XIV, who is depicted as a Machiavellian twentysomething. The drama cost £25 million for its first season, making it the most expensive drama made in France at that time. *Versailles* blends royal romp and political thriller in a hyperstylised imagining of an extravagant royal court immersed in sex, violence and political intrigue. It was filmed in France but was created by British writers and starred a British actor, supported by European actors. The programme was filmed in English as English-language productions could be sold for twice as much as French-language programmes on the international market (Sweney 2017). The strategy paid off as the programme was eventually sold to over 130 territories (Snoddy 2016).

cultural discount theory that argues that a cultural product from one country can struggle to connect with audiences in other countries, as they have less familiarity with its styles, values, institutions, ideologies and cultural representations.

International unscripted format sales

The sale of programmes to other national broadcasters and streaming platforms are useful ways for media companies to gain revenue from exploiting their library content. But it is also possible to sell the idea of a programme, rather than the programme itself. A successful television programme in one region can be sold globally as a format, where the original structure or storylines are retained but adjusted to the local language and setting. Format sales are similar to the business of selling complete programmes to other national broadcasters. The buyer licences a programme idea and its narrative structure, character relationships and setting, with the deal often including the scripts for batches of episodes. So, rather than buying copies of the original programme itself, overseas broadcasters acquire the template or set of instructions – 'the bible' – which enables them to remake the programme using their own facilities, performers, local language and locations. This reduces risk along with development costs as a television company can rely on a formula that has proven successful in other markets.

Unscripted formats are dominant in the global trade in television formats, particularly light entertainment, game shows and reality TV formats. Reality show *Big Brother* and singing competition *The Voice* both originated in the Netherlands, created by television producer John de Mol Jr., with their formats licenced to over 60 international territories. The format of BBC1 celebrity ballroom dance competition *Strictly Come Dancing* is sold internationally by BBC Studios as the *Dancing with the Stars* franchise and has been licensed to over 60 territories. Each version uses the same competition format made with local presenters and celebrities, although judges and professional dancers can move between different national versions. Bruno Antonioni has been a judge on *Strictly Come Dancing* and the US *Dancing with the Stars*, whilst six of the 2021 professional dancer cast of *Strictly Come Dancing* had previously appeared in international versions.

The US, UK and the Netherlands are established leaders in international format trade, but South Korea is a rising power. This is due to formats like *The Masked Singer* franchise, a 'mystery talent' spin on the competitive reality singing format using elaborate costumes to disguise anonymous celebrity contestants. More than 40 international version of the format have been produced, which began life as *King of Mask Singer*. This aired on MBC TV in South Korea using a two-night live tournament format, with disguises using elaborate masks and gloves. The format is co-distributed by MBC and the international media company Freemantle and was sold around East Asia before it was adapted for US TV. *The Masked Singer US* airs on the FOX network, with the format localised and the cultural discount lessened by aligning it with local cultural tastes and televisual practices. This US version was structured in the conventional competitive reality format with weekly episodes eliminating contestants and a winner crowned at the end of the season. Production values were heightened to align with those expected of US prime time talent shows, featuring outlandish and ornate head-to-toe character costumes (Figure 11.2). As there is little cultural discount between US and UK television the US reworking of the format was adapted very closely for an ITV prime-time weekend light entertainment slot.

Format sales usually see an international distributor sell to local television companies who produce their local-language version. However, global streaming giants have begun to produce multiple local-language versions of hit formats in-house. Netflix has produced three international versions of the reality show *The Circle*, which was first made in Britain by independent production company Studio Lambert for Channel 4. The programme uses a 'social game' familiar from *Big Brother*, with contestants isolated in individual apartments in the same building and only able to communicate with each other via a voice-activated social media 'app' (Figure 11.3). Where Studio Lambert's parent company All3Media would

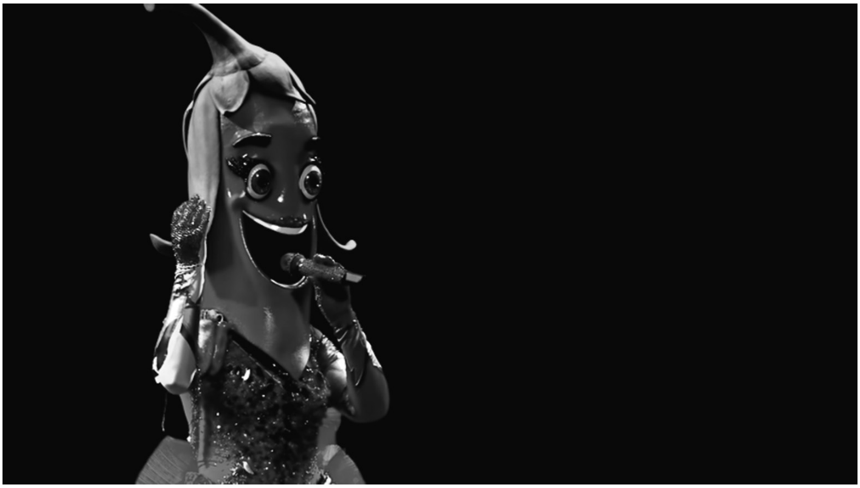


Figure 11.2 An outlandish character disguise in the US version of *The Masked Singer*

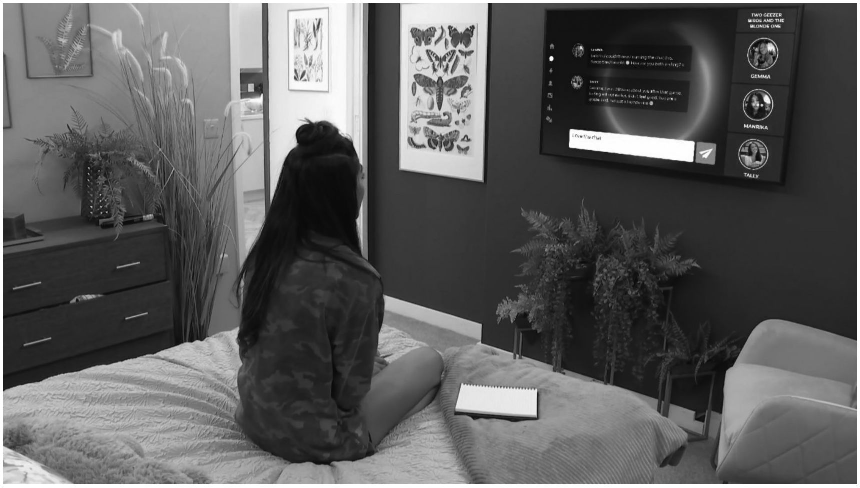

TWO GEEZER BIRDS AND THE BLONDE ONE
GEMMA
MANRIKA
TALLY

Figure 11.3 The UK version of *The Circle*

traditionally have sold the format to multiple local television companies, Netflix bought up global rights to the format. The streamer has co-produced three local-language versions with All3Media, set in France, Brazil and the US, targeted to different geographic regions and global languages. Each local-language version of *The Circle* is filmed in the same Salford block of flats that served as the production studio for the UK original, with international casts brought to the UK. This creates production efficiencies as the programmes maintain the same crew and production process. Each version is localised with different interior design to reflect cultural tastes, local foods and insert shots of cities from that country. Netflix has produced local-language versions of its own US romance reality show *Love is Blind* for Brazil and Japan, enabling it to target the valuable South American and East Asian markets.

The scripted format trade and localisation

The global trade in scripted formats has grown since the mid-2000s. Scripted formats may be more commonly described as remakes or adaptations and include soaps, telenovelas, dramas and comedies. The deal can include a production bible and existing script libraries, which can create production efficiencies and save on development. Format trade minimises risk by drawing on a proven success, but scripted formats are a riskier prospect than unscripted as comedy and drama are culturally sensitive forms. Drama requires emotional resonance to connect with audiences, and comedy must be adjusted to national tastes and peculiarities of humour. Where unscripted formats stick close to the original and follow a detailed 'bible', scripted genres see a variety of adaptation strategies as a concept is reworked for the tastes and cultural sensibilities of local audiences. NBC's US version of British sitcom *The Office* saw a significant recalibration in tone and characterisation across its first season as writers reshaped the show for the tastes of US network viewers. Cable channel MTV looked to British youth television as it explored genres beyond reality TV, producing adaptations of British hits *Skins* and *The Inbetweeners*. Israel has become something of a hotbed in the scripted format trade, with successful dramas reworked into prestige US dramas *Homeland*, *In Treatment* and *Euphoria*.

Norwegian teen drama *Skam* was a cultural phenomenon in Scandinavia and built an international cult fandom online thanks to fan-created subtitles. It then spread across Europe and the US as a scripted format. *Skam* was made by Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK following an intensive research period into the needs of teenage audiences. The resulting programme targeted teenage girls, using its storytelling to reflect their struggles with academic and social pressures and help them 'work through' their own social and emotional troubles (Sundet 2020: 83). *Skam* was distributed online as short video clips via a special website, producing a feeling of 'real-time' distribution by irregularly dropping clips set at the time and day they were released. Transmedia storytelling expanded the narrative into the audience's online world, through screengrabs of chat messages posted to the website and the social media accounts of main characters. The programme attracted intense engagement and popularity amongst its target Norwegian youth audience. Its regional and global growth into a cult phenomenon happened outside of conventional industry export patterns. Its website was not geo-blocked until season 4 so viewers from outside Norway could watch the programme. They were aided by local fans who provided English translations via website comment sections and social media, a practice that forms part of fandom's 'gift economy' (Hellekson 2009). Episodes with fan-made subtitles were later shared in peer-to-peer distribution networks including Google Drives.

The programme's export through conventional industry channels was impaired by its unconventional format, potentially controversial subject matter, its cultural specificity to Norwegian youth as well as its regionally restricted music rights. However, *Skam* saw success across Europe as a scripted format, becoming one of NRK's most exported drama formats. This included a US version produced by Facebook and set in Austin, Texas. Where the Norwegian *Skam* was developed in response to NRK's non-profit public service remit, *Skam Austin* was part of the commercial social media giant's attempt to court young audiences who had left for other platforms. *Skam Austin* used authorship to signpost its authenticity, bringing the creator of the Norwegian original on as its showrunner, where European adaptations used local production teams. The European local-language versions include:

- *Skam Italia* (Italy, 2018–)
- *wtFOCK* (Belgium, 2018–2020)
- *Skam France* (France, 2018–)
- *Skam España* (Spain, 2018–2020)
- *Skam NL* (Netherlands, 2018–2019)
- *Druck* (Germany, 2018–)
- *Skam Austin* (US, 2018–2019)

A central element of *Skam*'s success is its intensity of audience engagement produced by its commitment to realism and connotations of 'authenticity'. Producing local-language versions of the scripted format enables television companies to target local youth audiences using a proven programme brand and storytelling model. Local production teams can research and adjusting their storytelling to incorporate national difference and cultural concerns, managing any cultural discount and maintaining the authenticity claims central to the programme brand. Each version maintains a strong connection with the original form. They are distributed online via streaming platforms owned by broadcasters or global platform YouTube, use social media to expand the narrative through transmedia storytelling and employ the bright yellow title font of the original, even when the title is changed (Figure 11.4). Each follows a group of high-school students with a focus on the experiences of teenage girls, building each season around the perspective of a different character. The majority illustrate the production efficiencies of scripted formats, loosely following the storylines and characters of the Norwegian original's first four seasons whilst also introducing new characters

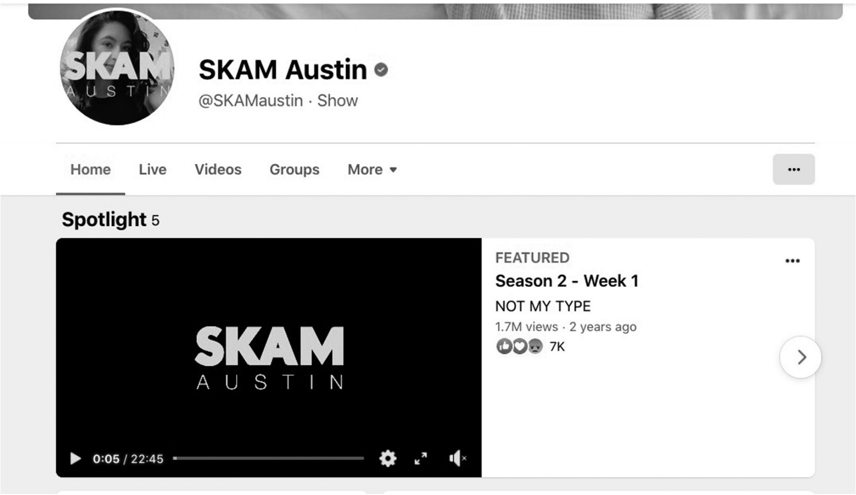


Figure 11.4 *Skam Austin* is produced for Facebook and uses the brand identity of the Norwegian original

and storylines based on extensive research identifying the desires and needs of their national youth audiences (Hopewell 2017).

For example, German version *Druck* is a made for public service content network funk, co-owned by public service broadcasters ARD and ZDF. Funk's programming is distributed on global social media platforms to reach youth audiences in their favoured online space, with *Druck* released via funk's Youtube channel. *Druck* is set in a Berlin high school and its first four seasons draw on the Norwegian original, with the fifth and sixth seasons following a new cast. A trans male character was introduced in season three in response to fan requests and to reflect the current social climate (Stollfuß 2021). Stollfuß notes that the German production team encouraged fans' interaction via digital media, with this extra layer of audience research influencing storytelling, helping align the scripted format with local audience tastes and desires.

Global power and streaming platforms

As Chapter 5 outlined, a small number of giant international corporations have a powerful hold on the production, distribution and exhibition of television. Each of the US major networks is owned by a media conglomerate that owns a range of cable channels and local television stations. These companies also own Hollywood studios and production companies that make television as well as other media and entertainment companies like publishing houses and theme parks. Further mergers have connected media corporations with cable and telecommunication companies, who own the means of distributing television via cable and broadband internet. These companies have international reach, for example the telecom company Comcast owns the NBC network and Universal film studio in the US and in 2018 purchased Europe's largest media and pay-TV group, the British-based media and telecom conglomerate Sky. This **vertical integration** represents not cultural imperialism by a nation but a form of corporate imperialism. The rise of streaming has seen US media conglomerates develop their own streaming platforms as a further distribution outlet. Platforms like Disney+ and HBO Max launched in the US and are now rolling out worldwide. These streamers are marketed on the exclusive access provided to their parent company's valuable film and television holdings as well as new programming. This moves away from the standard distribution model of gaining revenue from libraries and new programmes through a complicated patchwork of distribution deals in local markets.

vertical integration the control by media institutions of all levels of a business, from the production of products to their distribution and means of reception.

Alongside these media conglomerates, a set of giant US-based technology companies have come to wield international power. Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google (referred to by the acronym FAANG) shape global communication, media, retail and politics. The borderless spread of the internet allows these companies to enter new international markets without the need to build extensive in-country infrastructure (Lobato 2019: 144). For example, the US-based streaming platform Netflix's ambitions have turned increasingly global. More than half of Netflix subscribers are outside the US and expanding globally enables the streamer to spread the cost of high-budget programming across millions of global subscribers. Netflix began life as a DVD rental company in 1997 and in 2007 added on-demand video streaming to its subscription, then began to expand internationally as a subscription streaming platform. It first expanded to Canada in 2010, then Latin America in 2011 where it took advantage of a single regional language and a large middle-class audience base accustomed to pay TV. From 2013 to 2015 it spread across Western Europe, arriving in Japan and Australasia in 2015. Its international spread culminated in a 'global switch-on' in 2016 where it added 130 more countries, those in lower value or more difficult to establish markets. The internet as delivery device facilitates this spread as it 'changes the fundamental logics through which television travels, introducing new mobility and immobilities into the system, adding another layer to the existing palimpsest of broadcast, cable, and satellite distribution' (2019: 5).

Programming is key to this expansion, both 'Originals' and acquisitions of exclusive licensed content such as AMC's *Breaking Bad*, which helped Netflix gain a hold in the UK. The streamer pursues a mass audience demographic similar to ITV or NBC and now produces and acquires a huge amount of content to appeal to a range of national audiences. Netflix's aggressive pursuit of global rights to programmes enables it to offer a degree of exclusivity and continuity of experience to global users in England, Brazil or India. However, each market requires a degree of localisation through programme acquisitions that reflect the tastes of local markets and provide local-language content. As a result, Lobato argues that Netflix is not a static cultural object, but constantly evolving from market to market, 'becoming more geographically differentiated and localised' as languages and library categories are customised for different global markets (2019: 14).

Localising itself enables Netflix to expand its power in a global marketplace. Where the streamer initially relied on US Originals and local acquisitions, it has expanded into producing local-language Originals in key markets such as Brazil, Mexico, Britain, Europe, India and South Korea. As the streamer can spread its costs on high-budget programming globally, it competes with and can outspend local broadcasters who have significantly less resources to produce programming, threatening local broadcasting cultures. Netflix is building production bases in a range of countries beyond the US, including Mexico, Spain, Britain and South Korea. Studio holdings enable it to practice vertical integration by controlling the production, distribution and exhibition of a programme. For example, its first European production centre was a Madrid studio opened in 2019, building on successful Spanish-language Originals *Cable Girls* and *Élite*. *Élite* is a teen drama created by Carlos Montero and Dario Madrona, who had an established reputation for the genre in Spanish television. *Élite* uses a degree of Spanish specificity; however, it employs glossy aesthetics and narratives familiar from US teen TV to manage any cultural discount in Netflix's global markets. Like US shows *Gossip Girls* and *Veronica Mars*, *Élite* is built around a high school class conflict concept that enables it to luxuriate in glamorous lifestyles whilst offering a degree of social critique. Netflix's large-scale dubbing and subtitling process enabled the Spanish teens to feel even more familiar to English-language audiences, with episodes auto-playing with dubbed American voices.

Dubbing and subtitling have always been central to global flows of television, allowing the domestication of the foreign. They add an extra step and related labour costs to export flows but lessen cultural discount and help assimilate foreign programmes into local television flows. Christine Amadou and Simone Knox suggest the practice enables 'each (source and target) language [to] bring its own characteristics, aesthetics and texture to the text' with each version 'created for a particular target market and specific (television) culture' (2011: 1). Netflix's in-house dubbing and subtitling of its original programming and high-profile licensed content into select major languages involves a significant amount of labour. But it supports the platform's global spread by providing continuity in its catalogues worldwide. Dubbing and subtitling at scale allows the streamer to expand its library at a low-cost, compared to producing new content.

Due to the historic international domination of English-language media, English-speaking audiences lack familiarity with dubbing and 'have come to expect that the "norm" will be that voices will always be in synch with the visual performance' (Lury 2005: 69). Foreign language programming has traditionally been subtitled when imported into US and British markets. Whilst European dramas have gained cult success amongst upscale audiences in both nations, mainstream US and UK audiences are understood to be resistant to subtitled programming. Netflix is attempting to normalise dubbing in English-language markets by auto-playing English-language dubbed versions of international programming rather than subtitled versions. A Netflix executive's statement that audiences might prefer dubs because "[t]hey might be folding laundry, or their kids come into the room, and they don't want to miss a plot point" (quoted in Shaw 2021) positions all its programming in the same 'background noise' context. Understanding the global spread of streaming platforms through theories of media imperialism illustrates the global/local challenges of the streaming age. The cost efficiencies of a giant global producer pose a significant threat to local broadcasters and streamers, who find it difficult to compete with a globally powerful brand that can spread its costs across 190 countries.

The global and local interrelationship

The global dominance of Western television can seem to cover over local and regional differences. Western television theorists are sometimes beguiled by the presence of television familiar to them that is found outside its original cultural contexts. But the fact that Western television seems to be, or seems about to be, everywhere, and appears culturally powerful everywhere, might just reinforce the prejudice that only Western television is worth discussing in arguments about globalisation, whereas it is the interrelations of Western with local and regional cultures which need to be understood. The relationship between place and television culture is complex, and global television and global television corporations make local and regional differences more, not less, important. Local television cultures can find their identities alongside or by resisting the globalisation of television, so that the dominance of global television becomes important to the production of local television. Local, in this connection, can also importantly mean regional. Here geographic connections (cultural proximity) and shared or similar cultures (cultural affinity) help television cultures cross national boundaries. Television cultures can be made up of speakers of the same language (like Spanish in much of Latin America, and in US states with large Spanish-speaking populations) or audiences which share similar cultural assumptions and ideologies (like the audiences in many nations of the Middle East who share the Muslim faith).

Cultural affinities can also connect globally disparate cultures through class and wealth, as privileged demographics share culture and consumption patterns worldwide. As US-based streaming platforms move into less wealthy nations of the Global South their subscription charges can be more expensive than those of local television industries. So rather than targeting a broad swath of the population as they do in wealthier Western countries, they target the upper-income brackets who can afford subscription costs. Japanese and South Korean 'trendy dramas' illustrate cultural affinities between East-Asian and Western television targeting such demographics, as they depict familiar upscale metropolitan lifestyles. They feature female protagonists, cosmopolitan, sophisticated lifestyles and representations of consumption. They share many qualities and storytelling elements with the glossy post-feminist US film and television that focus on the aspirational lifestyles, romantic and working struggles of privileged white women.

free market a television marketplace where factors such as quotas and regulations do not restrict the free operation of economic 'laws' of supply and demand.

quota a proportion of television programming, such as a proportion of programmes made in a particular nation.

deregulation the removal of legal restrictions or guidelines that regulate the economics of the television industry or the standards which programmes must adhere to.

Rather than being an autonomous and unstoppable process, the processes of globalisation are open to regulation by regions and individual nations. The apparently free and uncontrollable television market is not a natural fact and depends on political decisions about deregulation and competition in television by nation-states and groupings of states. But the world organisations which oversee international television agreements generally support the lowering of national restrictions and **quotas**,because they seek to create a global **free market** economy in communications.

Countries and regional groupings of countries tend both to **deregulate** and to encourage globalisation but can introduce further regulation to protect their societies. The European Union's 2010 Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) is a media law designed to develop and protect European media and digital culture. It enabled programmes to flow easily across national borders within Europe as well as protecting national film and television content. At least 50 per cent of broadcast television was required to be European, although member states could adjust that quota. The AVMSD's goals include:

- Providing rules to shape technological developments
- Creating a level playing field for emerging audiovisual media
- Preserving cultural diversity
- Protecting children and consumers
- Safeguarding media pluralism
- Combating racial and religious hatred
- Guaranteeing the independence of national media regulators

As part of the AVMSD's goals to create a more even playing field between global streaming giants and national industries, a quota of 30 per cent of European content has been applied to streaming platforms. Different European countries set out their own media laws around the presentation and promotion of European content in the catalogues of global streaming platforms. Ramon Lobato (2019: 145–6) points out that Central and Eastern European countries tend to have lower or no quotas, compared to Western European countries with stronger production bases and have higher quotas. France requires 60 per cent of available content on linear television and streaming platforms to be European, and in 2021 a new law required global streamers to invest 20–25 per cent of their French revenues in French content (Keslassy 2021), such as Netflix's *Lupin* (Figure 11.5).

However, in the global television landscape, concepts of society and nation could be seen to be diminishing in usefulness, particularly as the internet reshapes digital media flows. As the philosopher Anthony Giddens (1990) has argued, the concept of society as a unit bounded in time and space loses its force when, for example, live television news or sporting events confuse the sense of time and space by broadcasting across time zones. Television also brings new ways of understanding space – like the notion of a global 'war on terrorism' or a New World Order, for example, which change people's sense of their place in the world. Cultures are of course located specifically in time and space, and reactions to television can differ in different local contexts. Because television broadcasts such a range of images of culture – like versions of what youth and age, domesticity, work and gender might mean – global television provides the possibility of reflecting on local cultures. Global television provides resources for people to think about themselves and their social environment, in the same ways that local or national television does. Sinclair and his fellow authors (Sinclair et al. 1999: 187) give this example:

> An Egyptian immigrant in [Scotland], for example, might think of herself as a Glaswegian when she watches her local Scottish channel, a British resident when she switches over to the BBC, an Islamic Arab expatriate in Europe when she tunes in to the satellite service from the Middle East, and a world citizen when she channel surfs on to CNN.

People around the world negotiate their sense of place, time and community in relation to local, regional and global television cultures, and they do this by borrowing from or resisting ways of thinking and living shown on the screen. Global flows of television are complex, fluid processes and involve a degree of cultural blending, which is intensified by the internet. The somewhat idealist concept of 'pop cosmopolitanism' is an example of cultural blending, suggesting that flows

Figure 11.5 The crime caper *Lupin* is a French Netflix Original

of pop culture between countries inspire new forms of 'global consciousness and cultural competency' (Jenkins 2006: 156). Global forms of media exchange are an uneven, complex and multi-faceted process. Digital media platforms can be seen to increase Western power at the expense of local cultures and broadcasting industries. But they, along with unofficial peer-to-peer networks enabled by web 2.0, also support the flow of non-Western programmes in the opposite direction.

Case study: Hallyu and Korean drama

This case study focuses on Korean television, which is one of the most powerful non-Western television industries due to the global success of Korean drama (K-drama) and recent exports of Korean entertainment formats. Television is a key part of Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, the growth in Korean cultural exports throughout East Asia and beyond. This began with the export of TV drama in the late 1990s, later joined by K-pop, film, animation, online games, smartphones, skincare, fashion, food and lifestyles. Youna Kim suggests that the Korean Wave can't be thought of solely as a planned flow supported by government and corporate policy, but 'more by accident it is a multi-directional flow and a highly interactive collaborative process that is created, and possibly sustained, by digitally empowered fan communities' (2021: 3).

K-drama offers audiences technically sophisticated, glossily aspirational programming, operating as a more culturally acceptable alternative to US and Japanese imports within East Asia. Its success in the region is due to television flows based on cultural proximity due to geographic connections, as well as cultural affinities through shared Confucian beliefs around respect and family. But these connections are not simple, as the region is shaped by diverse ethnicities, cultural histories and tensions between countries. The flow of programmes around East Asia is uneven and unequal, shaped by language, a country's wealth and its production base. As wealthier countries with strong media industries, Japan and particularly South Korea are the dominant countries in the East Asian television trade. Their programmes flow out to Chinese-language populations in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, as well as China itself (although the nation's twenty-first-century political context has made media flows much more complicated). But there is less flow in the opposite direction due to Japan and South Korea's media strength.

These regional television flows are aided by dubbing and subtitling, which domesticates the foreign. Official subtitles have long been produced by distributors as part of export flows, typically through Hong Kong or Taiwan for Chinese-language translations. Unofficial subtitles are also produced through fan labour. 'Fansubs' – most notably for Japanese anime and K-drama – are produced by fans as soon as programmes air and are circulated online within regional and global fan communities. This organically formed collaborative culture has helped the regional and global spread of East Asian culture through peer-to-peer sharing, as well as official streaming platforms such as DramaFever (now closed) and Rakuten Viki.

The Korean Wave was catalysed by the post-1997 Asian Financial Crisis, which had a big impact on the Korean economy and the East Asian region. Countries in need of cheaper television imports than Japanese drama looked to South Korea. Responding to this export potential, the South Korean government supported the industry's growth through tax incentives, deregulation and subsidies. Korean conglomerates also moved into the TV industry, helping to develop its business side. Government support shows how the popularity of South Korean culture can be seen as a form of 'soft power', where culture intersects with ideology, politics and the economy to create a dynamic, commercialised form of pop nationalism (Kim 2021: 13). In the Korean Wave we see the ability of a 'cool' national brand to attract and influence international audiences without coercion, similar to Swinging London in the 1960s and attempts to market the UK as 'Cool Britannia' in the 1990s through pop music and art.

The South Korean TV industry is highly competitive, with broadcast, cable and streaming providers producing a huge amount of new programming. Across the twenty-first century this competition has driven up quality and production values, enabling Korean drama to compete with Western exports. Romantic comedy and melodrama are the most popular in export markets, but K-drama encompasses crime, legal thrillers, historical, sci-fi and fantasy, with programmes frequently hybridising genres. For example, 2013's *My Love from the Star* is a romance with a sci-fi twist, featuring an immortal alien being who was stranded on earth in 1609 and lived through Korean history. Working as a university professor in contemporary Korea he falls in love with his neighbour, an aloof yet chaotic actress (Figure 11.6).

K-dramas are usually created by one writer and one director, unlike the writing teams and episodic directors of the US model. They are serialised forms telling one story over around sixteen episodes of 60–75 minutes, with two episodes airing each weekend. Their storytelling is marked by intensive seriality which is often focused on a central romance, with soundtracks using pop songs as themes to chart a romance's development and emphasise climactic moments. K-drama's audience appeal is built through glossy high production values, aspirational lifestyles and fashions, with sophisticated cosmopolitan settings that rival US and Japanese dramas, which all aid programmes' global spread. The industry is built around a robust star system, one that exhibits a particular image of beauty that is in part produced through the plastic surgery normalised in South Korean culture. Lisa Y.M. Leung argues that through its blend of Western and Asian features, the 'Korean face becomes the epitome of the hegemonic ideal that homogenises ethnic differences within and beyond Asia' (2021: 189). Here beauty produces cultural affinity. Alongside stardom, risk is managed through adaptations of successful web comics, novels and regional remakes. For example, workplace romantic comedy *What's Wrong with Secretary Kim?* began life as a novel, was adapted into a popular web comic and then in 2018 a K-drama, whose composition and costuming at times referenced panels from its source text.

Figure 11.6 An intense focus on romantic tension in *My Love from the Star*

The regional and global fan appeal of romantic K-drama can be connected to the intensity of its seriality and emotional expression, focused through a central romantic couple. Kim suggests these dramas offer an intimate connection and an at times intense emotionality that is different from most Western drama. This produces ‘a pleasure of recognisable human experience with powerful emotional responses’ (2021: 4) that aids viewers in working-through their own emotions and lives. K-dramas pair their frequently aspirational lifestyles with a valuing of family and relationships shaped by Confucian ideologies of loyalty and respect. This can aid both their regional spread and their export to or fan-circulation within regions like the Middle East and the US. Romance narratives frequently showcase a slow-burn, idealised romance focused on emotion and love. K-drama’s limited representation of sex is shaped in part by the content restrictions of the television ratings board. Its romantic intensity is combined with a form of ‘soft masculinity’ that is also seen across the boy bands of K-pop. These are sensitive, emotionally expressive heroes, but are often only able to confess themselves to the heroine in private (2021: 25).

The transition of Korean pop culture and lifestyle products from a regional to a global phenomenon has been termed Hallyu 2.0, reflecting to the role of digital media in the spread to Western countries. Streaming video has been central to this success, aided by fan culture’s interconnected social media and unofficial peer-to-peer distribution channels – particularly through practices of fansubbing. Amanda Halprin points out that ‘fansubbing began as a way for fans to navigate around hurdles put in place by the corporate sphere that prevented them from sharing and accessing content’. But ‘members of the corporate sphere are now incorporating fansubbing practices into their distribution models’ (2018). Pitching itself as a fan community, streaming platform Rakuten Viki focuses on East Asian drama and offers a range of library content and currently airing programmes. Its status as a central site for the global K-drama audience relies on fan labour through its subtitling community. Volunteer ‘translation teams’ rapidly translate an episode’s original language into English and many other global languages by parcelling this work out into individual scenes. This process frequently offers higher quality subtitling than the global streaming giants; however, Rakuten Viki commodifies fandom’s gift economy.

The late 2010s saw US-based streaming platforms latch onto the success of Hallyu 2.0, with Hulu and Netflix acquiring popular K-dramas as low-cost library content. Netflix’s algorithms promoted female-led romantic K-drama as niche content for Western audiences, filling a genre gap in its catalogue, whilst K-drama library content supported the streamer’s growth in East Asia. Following similar moves in the UK, Europe and South America Netflix made an aggressive entry into the South Korean production sector, where it planned to spend $500 million in 2021, half of its entire budget for the Asia Pacific region. This included leasing film and television production facilities and making deals with South Korean production companies to co-fund or acquire new programming. The streamer’s ‘strategic partnership’ with production company Studio Dragon gave them global streaming rights to hot new series such as 2020’s romance *It’s Okay to Not be Okay.* Broadcast on pay-cable channel tvN in South Korea, the programme was marketed globally as a ‘Netflix Original’.

Netflix also produced exclusive South Korean Netflix Originals, including supernatural period action *Kingdom* and 2021’s global phenomenon, the violent dystopian thriller *Squid Game*. Both exhibit higher levels of violence than programming produced for South Korean linear television outlets, as Netflix did not have to work within the content restrictions of Korean Media Ratings Board. As a result, Netflix presents these K-drama Originals as prestige dramas, with aesthetics and storytelling that align with the genres of Korean cinema that have circulated internationally as part of Hallyu 2.0. This asserts the Originals' difference from the romantic K-dramas that have dominated the form's global flows, but also practices the kind of cultural hierarchies that circulate in US prestige TV, which tends to elevate 'masculine' genres and devalue 'feminine' genres.

Squid Game debuted at a time when new television releases had slowed due to 2020's production suspensions during the coronavirus lockdown. Netflix claimed the period saw more audiences sampling local-language programming, as the company further accelerated its programming of dubbing and subtitling in order to make content available to fill the programming gap. *Squid Game*'s cultural permeation was aided by recent Hallyu 2.0 inroads into the Western cultural mainstream, with *Parasite* winning the Best Picture Oscar in 2020 and pop phenomenon BTS releasing their first English language single that year. *Squid Game*'s cultural discount was further lessened through its viscerally violent spin on the 'survival game' plot, familiar from narratives like *The Hunger Games* franchise, along with the resonance of its dystopian capitalist allegory in a pandemic-struck world. Its stylised gameworlds (Figure 11.7) featured in viral social media memes on Tik Tok and Twitter, with this word-of-mouth marketing success seeming to take Netflix by surprise.

The programme's global spread was also supported by Netflix's ability to prominently feature it on its home page, along with its choice to autoplay a local-language dialogue track (with an American dub for English-language nations) rather than the subtitles conventionally used for K-drama. However, k-drama fans' ongoing critique of the quality of Netflix's K-drama subtitling was brought to a head by *Squid Game*'s success. An online backlash from bilingual viewers highlighted the poor quality of the programme's subtitles and particularly its English-language dub, which simplified and misrepresented characterisation, as well as essential South Korean social context. Here we see how Netflix's translation sought to reduce 'cultural discount' by removing much of the programme's politicised critique of capitalism and income inequality. Without this, critics argued, 'the series is simply violence porn with scenes upon scenes of brutalized Asian bodies' consumed by white Western audiences (Kwon 2021). This issue highlighted the cost-saving measures of global streamers that devalued the labour of accurate translation, as well a choice to reduce cultural specificity and soften cultural critique in order to ease *Squid Game*'s global flow as merely a stylish nihilistically violent thriller.

Figure 11.7 Players compete to the death in *Squid Game*'s violent survival game

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Studying television today involves understanding how national and international television cultures work in relation to each other, in the context of globalisation
- New technologies, from satellite transmissions to internet-enabled streaming video, have made possible greater exchange of television across the world, mainly from developed countries to less developed ones
- Television flows are not only West to East, North to South, and can be shaped by shared languages and cultures
- The effects of television globalisation can be both progressive and regressive
- Unequal cultural and industrial power dynamics have been exacerbated by the rise of global streaming platforms
- The media imperialism thesis has argued that political values are communicated when television programmes and television institutions spread around the world
- Local audiences' understanding of global television can be different, so that the meanings of programmes change according to where they are seen

Bibliography

Adamou, C. and Knox, S. (2011) 'Transforming television drama through dubbing and subtitling: Sex and the cities', *Critical Studies in Television*, 6(1), pp. 1–21.

Barker, C. (1997) *Global Television: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bignell, J. and Fickers, A. (2008) 'Introduction: Comparative European perspectives on television history', in Bignell, J. and Fickers, A. (eds), *A European Television History*. New York: Blackwell, pp. 1–54.

Chua, B. H. and Iwabuchi, K. (2008) *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Dowmunt, T. (ed.) (1993) *Channels of Resistance: Global Television and Local Empowerment*. London: British Film Institute.

Giddens, A. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Halprin, A. (ed.) (2018) 'The Voices of Viki: Considering fansubbers as linguistic gatekeepers', *Flow Journal*, 24(9). Available at www.flowjournal.org/2018/07/the-voices-of-viki/

Havens, T. (2008) *Global Television Marketplace*. London: British Film Institute.

Hellekson, K. (2009) 'A fannish field of value: Online fan gift culture', *Cinema Journal*, 48(4), pp. 113–18.

Herman, E. and McChesney, R. (1997) *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Global Capitalism*. London: Cassell.

Hopewell J. (2017) 'Mipcom: Shame gets European remake roll-out from NRK, Beta Film', *Variety*, 14 October. Available at https://variety.com/2017/tv/global/mipcom-shame-gets-european-remake-roll-out-from-nrk-beta-film-1202590274/

Hoskins, C. and Mirus, R. (1988) 'Reasons for the US dominance of the international trade in television programmes', *Media, Culture & Society*, 10(4), pp. 499–515.

Jameson, F. (1991) *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso.

Jenkins, H. (2006) *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Keslassy, E. (2021) 'Netflix, Amazon must invest 20–25% of French revenues in local content, France government decrees', *Variety*, 30 June. Available at https://variety.com/2021/streaming/global/avms-france-netflix-new-rules-streamers-1235008364/

Kim, Y. (ed.) (2021) *The Soft Power of the Korean Wave: Parasite, BTS and Drama*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Krüger, S. and Rustad, G.C. (2019) 'Coping with shame in a media-saturated society: Norwegian web-series Skam as transitional object', *Television & New Media*, 20(1), pp. 72–95.

Kwon, S. (2021) 'Netflix's botched translation misses a key part of Squid Game', *Slate*, 8 October. Available at https://slate.com/culture/2021/10/squid-game-netflix-subtitles-translation-capitalism.html

Leung, L.Y.M. (2021) 'Mediating Asian modernities: The lessons of Korean dramas', in Kim, Y. (ed.), *The Soft Power of the Korean Wave: Parasite, BTS and Dram*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 184–95.

Liebes, T. and Katz, E. (1990) *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of 'Dallas'*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lobato, R. (2019) *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution*. New York: New York University Press.

Lull, J. (ed.) (1988) *World Families Watch Television*. London: Sage.

Lury, K. (2005) *Interpreting Television*. London: Hodder Arnold.

Parks, L. and Kumar, S. (eds) (2019) *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*. New York: New York University Press.

Rixon, P. (2006) *American Television on British Screens: A Story of Cultural Interaction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ryan, M. and Littleton, C. (2017) 'TV series budgets hit the breaking point as costs skyrocket in Peak TV era', *Variety*, 26 September. Available at https://variety.com/2017/tv/news/tv-series-budgets-costs-rising-peak-tv-1202570158/.

Shaw, L. (2021) 'Netflix's dubbed shows turn voice artists into new global stars', *Bloomberg*, 31 March. Available at www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-31/netflix-s-lupin-highlights-how-dubbed-shows-are-taking-off-globally

Sinclair, J. (2005) 'Latin American commercial television: "primitive capitalism"', in Wasko, J. (ed.), *A Companion to Television*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 503–20.

Sinclair, J., Jacka, E. and Cunningham, S. (1999) 'New patterns in global television', in Marris, P. and Thornham, S. (eds), *The Media Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 170–90.

Snoddy, R. (2016) 'Versailles: The price of success for French TV drama', *Royal Television Society*, 25 July. Available at https://rts.org.uk/article/versailles-price-success-french-tv-drama

Stollfuß, S. (2021) 'The platformisation of public service broadcasting in Germany: The network "funk" and the case of Druck/Skam Germany', *Critical Studies in Television*, 16(2), pp. 126–44.

Straubhaar, J. D. (1991) *World Television: From Global to Local*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Sundet, V. S. (2020) 'From "secret" online teen drama to international cult phenomenon: The global expansion of SKAM and its public service mission', *Critical Studies in Television*, 15(1), pp. 69–90.

Sweney, M. (2017) 'French TV company behind Versailles to invest in UK drama', *The Guardian*, 15 May. Available at www.theguardian.com/media/2017/may/15/french-tv-company-behind-versailles-to-invest-in-uk-drama

Thussu, K. D. (ed.) (1998), *Electronic Empires: Global Media and Local Resistance*. London: Arnold.

Zhou, Y. and Guo, Z. (2005) 'Television in China: history, political economy, and ideology', in Wasko, J. (ed.), *A Companion to Television*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 521–39.

Television and Quality

12

- Introduction 280
- Identifying ‘quality’ 282
- Channels and brands in American television drama 285
- Television and authorship 288
- The ‘cinematic’, legitimating television and complex serial drama 291
- Visual style and the *Doctor Who* brand 293
- Period drama as prestige genre 296
- Case study: *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* 298
- Summary of key points 300
- Bibliography 301

DOI: 10.4324/9781315619675-13

Television and Quality

Introduction

This chapter addresses the question of **quality** in television, primarily in relation to drama programmes, since this has been the focal point of academic debates about the meaning of ‘quality TV’. It also incorporates discussion of authorship, complexity and legitimation, which are important components of these debates. Although academic work has largely avoided making distinctions that value one programme or **genre** over another, informal talk about television very often consists of identifying a ‘good’ programme (or channel or viewing experience). It is important to remember that when Television Studies talks about ‘quality TV’ it not saying a programme innately *is* quality, instead ‘quality’ is being examined as a cultural construct, something attached to a programme or genre through cultural discussion, be that industry, press or academic **discourse**. This chapter uses the term ‘quality TV’ to refer to the critical concept that explored how and why certain programmes are given cultural value that elevates them above television’s ‘mass’. As Charlotte Brunsdon highlights, ‘there are always issues of power at stake in notions of quality and judgement – Quality by whom? Judgement by whom? On whose behalf’ (1990: 73).

Rather than using ‘quality TV’ to describe the programmes themselves this chapter uses the terms ‘**prestige TV**’ and ‘prestige drama’. These are descriptors used in the industry and press coverage, and usefully avoid processes of judgement and evaluations linked to the term ‘quality’. Prestige TV is predominantly programmes with higher **budgets** that use ‘complex’ **narrative** structures and characterisation, carefully considered and detailed **aesthetics**, and target affluent, educated viewers. These are given prominent placement by broadcasters and streamers and frequently gain awards nominations along with significant press attention and analysis. Here ‘prestige’ refers to the high cultural status given to these programmes, or to which they aspire.

The study of television derives some of its methodologies from literary and film studies, including a focus on the construction of meaning through the analysis of narrative, image and sound as outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. Contemporary viewers are accustomed to programmes filmed on digital cameras that can be broadcast or streamed in HD or 4K and viewed on large television sets, possibly with surround sound systems. Even a smartphone can present a high-quality streaming video with pin-sharp detail and a relatively rich soundtrack (when using headphones). However, television has not always been thought of as a medium of aesthetic value. This is partly due to the technologies that recorded, broadcast and received television programmes (see Chapter 8). For decades much of television was recorded on video tape, with only certain types of high-status programming using film stock. Most television sets had small screens, particularly compared to

quality in television, kinds of programmes that are perceived as more expensively produced and more culturally worthwhile than other programmes. The term can create cultural and gendered hierarchies that suggest television is otherwise ‘low culture’.

genre a kind or type of programme. Programmes of the same genre have shared characteristics.

discourse a particular use of language for a certain purpose in a certain context (such as academic discourse or poetic discourse), and similarly in television, a particular usage of television’s audio-visual ‘language’ (news programme discourse or nature documentary discourse, for instance).

narrative an ordered sequence of images and sound that tells a fictional or factual story.

prestige TV critical and industry term to describe high-budget flagship drama and comedy. Term aims to remove hierarchical/judgemental connotations of the term ‘quality television’.

aesthetic a specific artistic form. Aesthetics means the study of art and beauty.

budget the money allocated to the making of a particular programme or series of programmes, which is controlled by the producer.

the vastness of a cinema screen. These technical aspects, along with television's connection to the domestic meant theorists considered viewers' engagement with television to be more casual than the devotion required of the cinema experience (see Chapter 9).

It was this experience of television that shaped US television theorist Horace Newcomb's (1974) conception of the primary attributes of broadcast television:

- Intimacy: television engages viewers with characters and narratives
- Continuity: television is available whenever we wish to view it
- Immediacy: television is closely connected with events occurring around us

Newcomb suggested that the medium was most suited to working on contemporary social anxieties through narrative forms characterised by **realism** and involvement with character and story. He associated visual stylishness, on the other hand, with cinema rather than television. Theories of television viewership were shaped by conceptions of medium specificity like Newcomb's. The viewer was positioned as someone 'casting a lazy eye over the proceedings, keeping an eye on events, or, as the slightly archaic designation had it, "looking in"' (Ellis 1982: 137). Television scholarship defined the medium as one in which a distracted domestic viewer glances at relatively simple image compositions with low density of visual information, where images are emphasised and anchored by dialogue, sound and music. If audiences watched sporadically and inattentively then complexity, ambiguity and other highly valued aesthetic qualities would be wasted. These assumptions, made initially in the era of live, studio-based, multi-camera television with monochrome pictures, influenced the lack of sustained academic attention to television's audio-visual style in Television Studies until the 2000s.

realism the aim for representations to reproduce reality faithfully, and the ways this is done.

The distracted gaze is still part of much of our experience of television, with our attention divided between the television screen, phones, tablets or domestic tasks. When viewed on a computer the viewer's attention is frequently split with other apps and websites. Yet today many television programmes (not only prestige TV) exhibit a complexity, ambiguity and high degree of visual stylishness, whilst still exhibiting the features of broadcast television identified by Newcomb. Since the late 1980s, contemporary British and US drama series have increasingly adopted self-conscious stylishness as a key component of their form and appeal to audiences (McCabe and Akass 2007). Robin Nelson (1997) demonstrated how critical emphases on authorship, television plays (which we would now call single dramas) and a lament for a lost 'golden age' of television drama missed out on the increasing predominance of popular series of this type during the late 1980s and 1990s, whilst also failing to account for audience response or the importance of genre.

British academic work on forms of television realism has focused attention on the cultivation of a style that effaces itself in order to witness character and environment rather than to draw attention to audio-visual style. These conceptions of television as a visually impoverished medium were shaped by comparisons with cinema, as contemporary Hollywood cinema invested high budgets in films that based their appeal on spectacle, effects and distinctive directorial intervention in ***mise-en-scène*** (McLoone 1997). This influenced the relative neglect of television style in Television Studies, especially popular and generic programmes. The 'aesthetic turn' of the discipline, in part influenced by 'quality TV' scholarship,

mise-en-scène literally meaning 'putting on stage', all the elements of a shot or sequence that contribute to its meanings, such as lighting, camera position and setting.

textual analysis a critical approach which seeks to understand a television text's meanings by undertaking detailed analysis of its image and sound components, and the relationships between those components.

has seen greater attention paid to detailed **textual analysis** across a breadth of television genres.

Identifying 'quality'

The confusing term 'quality', which gained increasing prominence in academic work about television in the 2000s and 2010s, has different meanings in different contexts. Both Simon Frith (2000) and Jane Feuer (2003), discussing quality in UK and US television respectively, argue that quality is defined through programmes' aesthetics, technical achievement and target audiences. Both identify 'quality TV' as:

- Aesthetically ambitious programmes displaying creative imagination, authenticity and relevance, separated from what are seen as generic, conventional television productions
- Production processes that prioritise strong writing and innovative *mise-en-scène*
- Economically valuable television, which valuable viewers (relatively wealthy and educated social groups) enjoy and are willing to pay for

Programmes that fit these definitions of 'quality' can be found in prestige drama and factual series, as well as popular genres such as police and hospital drama or comedy series. BBC nature programmes produced by Alistair Fothergill and presented by David Attenborough, including *The Blue Planet* and *Planet Earth*, invest very large amounts of money to capture visually spectacular scenes of animal behaviour. The efforts of a camera operator to capture footage on an ice floe (Figure 12.1) make clear the human and technical effort required. The image comes from a documentary, *Making Waves*, which both explained and advertised how the nature series *The Blue Planet* was made. However, an important question that arises from this mixing of 'elite' and 'popular' culture, is how to ascribe

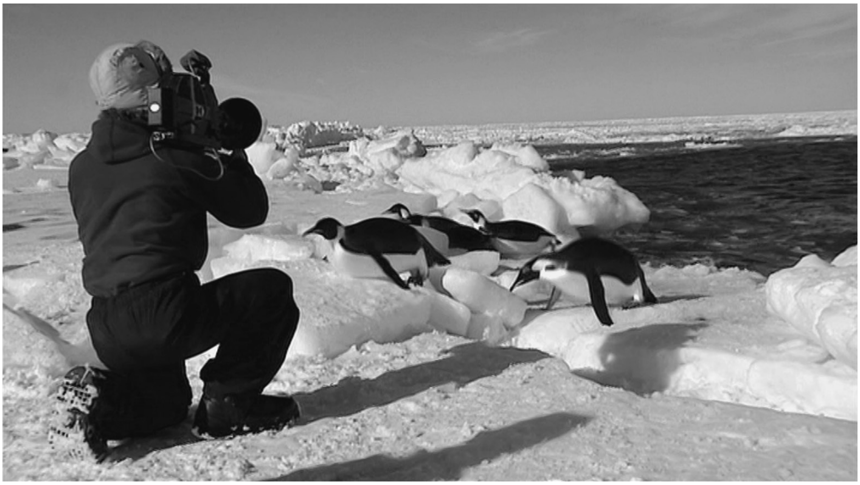


Figure 12.1 Making *The Blue Planet* natural history series

significance and value to television that exhibits these features. For example, it seems quite legitimate to claim that *The Simpsons* is a very important piece of cultural work, at least as important as any contemporary novel, play or painting, because of

- Its intertextual complexity
- Its self-awareness
- Its relevance to today's fragmented media landscapes and audiences

As the case study in Chapter 6 argued, much of the comedy in *The Simpsons* comes from the **reflexive** parody of the **conventions** of other genres including other animated series, television sitcom, television news, children's television. At the same time as using parodic reworkings to critique these other genres, *The Simpsons* celebrates and enjoys mixing up the conventions of the source texts. The values of complexity, self-consciousness, and engagement with cultural issues in *The Simpsons* make it fit the criteria for 'art', yet it is obviously part of **popular culture**, not least because it is a programme produced by a US **network**, and is widely distributed and **merchandised**. This highlights how tricky it can be to confidently define 'quality TV'.

Academic debates around 'quality TV' were shaped by Robert Thompson's 1996 book *Television's Second Golden Age*. This defined 'quality TV' through a select group of US network dramas of the late 1980s and early 1990s, including *Hill Street Blues*, *Thirtysomething*, *Twin Peaks* and *ER*. Thompson suggested such series positioned themselves as 'quality' by:

- Encouraging sustained viewing by loyal audiences
- Creating distinctive visual styles and characters
- Developing complex storylines across several episodes
- Blending genres together

This set of dramas targeted urban, educated, high-earning demographic niches valuable to advertisers, defined as separate to the 'mass audience'. This network television strategy was in part a response to the rising competition of cable channels siphoning off valuable audiences with niche-targeted programming. Long-running 'popular quality TV' series *The West Wing* and particularly *ER* were extremely popular with audiences, with *ER* drawing some of network television's highest ratings at its peak. This industrial strategy of popular high-end programming highlights shifts towards narrowcasting within US network television's otherwise broad target audience. This model became central to the economic model of **cable** channels like HBO, Showtime, AMC and FX, who produced many of the dramas central to subsequent academic debates about 'quality TV'.

We can consider 'quality' as something attached to a programme through its marketing, scheduling and press coverage. 'Quality' is frequently a component of British public service broadcaster's remits, with the BBC's public purposes stating that 'The BBC should provide high-quality output in many different genres and across a range of services and platforms which sets the standard in the United Kingdom and internationally'. Here we see how 'quality' is in part constructed through how a programme or genre are discussed in culture. Certain genres

conventions the frameworks and procedures used to make or interpret texts.

reflexivity a text's reflection on its own status as a text, for example drawing attention to generic conventions, or revealing the technologies used to make a programme.

popular culture the texts created by ordinary people (as opposed to an elite group) or created for them, and the ways these are used.

merchandising the sale of products associated with a television programme, such as toys, books or clothing.

network a television institution that transmits programmes through local or regional broadcasting stations that are owned by or affiliated to that institution.

cable television originally called Community Antenna Television (CATV). Transmission of television signals along cables in the ground.

period drama television fiction set in the past, most often the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

adaptation transferring a novel, theatre play, poem, etc. from its original medium into another medium such as television.

have historically had strong links to quality, such as **period drama** and literary **adaptation**. Charlotte Brunsdon (1990) studied 1980s British press and political discussion about the 'value' of public service broadcasting and found two popular ITV period dramas, *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Jewel in the Crown*, were repeated positioned as examples of television 'quality'. Her analysis of this discourse (85–6) found it linked television 'quality' to four components:

- Money
- Literary pedigree
- 'The best of British acting'
- Heritage export

Brunsdon was not suggesting these components *were* markers of 'quality', instead she emphasised how this discourse *positioned* them as '*uncontroversial* indicators of quality' (86). She pointed out that this understanding of television 'quality' was shaped by programmes that offered 'a combination of restraint and uncommon spectacle' linked to upper-middle-class taste codes (85). Here we can see how understandings of 'quality' are culturally constructed, can be linked to class, and can shift over time. Current cultural and academic conceptions of 'quality TV' have been shaped by the serialised dramas that aired on US **subscription** cable channel HBO in the 2000s.

subscription payment to a television broadcaster or streaming platform in exchange for the opportunity to view programmes on certain channels that are otherwise blocked.

Academic and press 'quality' discourse has often foreground social value, as seen in early Television Studies work analysing how television addressed its audience and engaged with society. For John Fiske and John Hartley, writing in 1978, the discourse of television was made up of a mixture of what they called 'literate' and 'oral' codes. By this they meant that television programmes are 'narrative, sequential, abstract, univocal, "consistent"', sharing 'literate' components with written texts and relatively high-status forms of written communication. Yet the 'dramatic, episodic, concrete, social, dialectical' features of television texts make them similar to the informal communication of spoken language in anecdotes, folktales or popular songs (1978: 125). Television's 'literate' **codes** inform programmes' novelistic narrative structures and linear explanatory forms. This reflects the unifying and official language of social power, which imposes an ordered view of the world and a system of values and regulations on society. On the other hand, Fiske and Hartley saw television's 'oral' features as derived from the organic culture of people's own communities and everyday lives, representative of popular culture. The 'oral' mode of television was regarded as a vital and **progressive** element, supporting Television Studies' critique of the forces of social control, together with its valuation of ordinary people and their worldviews. Television's oral mode was seen to possess radical potential for connecting with a sense of community, validating the ordinary viewer and popular culture. The textual analysis of television programmes still carries a legacy of assigning 'quality' to progressive and socially challenging content, versus programmes which perpetuate formerly dominant social conventions and support the **status quo**.

code in semiotics, a system or set of rules that shapes how signs can be used, and therefore how meanings can be made and understood.

progressive encouraging positive change or progress, usually implying progress towards fairer and more equal ways of organising society.

status quo a Latin term meaning the ways that culture and society are currently organised.

'Quality' is frequently connected with innovation and ambition in style and form. This has a relationship with genre, since one way of creating innovative programmes is by blending genres together. For example, the long-running hospital drama series *ER* was positioned as popular 'quality TV' through its innovative mix of genres and production techniques. Debuting in 1994, the influential NBC drama used an aesthetically ambitious visual style that was designed to capture the short attention span of viewers and emulate medical workers' experience of a busy hospital emergency room. The narrative of *ER* was patterned to include periodic bursts of rapid action interspersed with more leisurely character development, and the programme as a whole was segmented into a large number of relatively short scenes. The longer and slower scenes of character interaction drew on the conventions of **soap opera**, with a focus on emotion and interpersonal connection between colleagues as well as in the doctor/patient relationship. Here frequent close-ups, emotional cues provided by music and an emphasis on the viewer's memory of past events in the characters' lives enrich what is happening in the narrative present.

By contrast, the shorter scenes of rapid activity, usually scenes in which the doctors respond to the arrival of a seriously injured person, used fast-paced hand-held camera movement, **whip-pans** and rapid editing. The Steadicam was a central feature of ER's emergency sequences, interweaving with the movement of actors and circulating the operating table to create the feeling of a race against time as well as the fluidity of professional competency. In these scenes character dialogue overlaps, and the noises made by medical equipment blend with rapid percussion music to add to the sense of urgency and confusion. These medical action sequences used conventions deriving from **observational documentary** or news footage of action caught on the run by the camera, with the use of dramatic music and complex sound found in action-filled genres like and police drama.

Although *ER*'s **showrunner** was John Wells, NBC marketed the programme on the names of its executive producers; Hollywood film **director** Stephen Spielberg's production company Amblin developed the series; and popular novelist Michael Crichton's 1974 screenplay was the basis for its pilot. Spielberg and Crichton had recently worked together on the blockbuster film *Jurassic Park*, so this marketing drew on their **brand** names to connect the programme to cinema and distinguish it from other network television, as well as to signal its action credentials.

soap opera a continuing drama serial involving a large number of characters in a specific location, focusing on relationships, emotions and reversals of fortune.

whip-pan a very rapid panning shot from one point to another.

observational documentary a documentary form in which the programme-maker aims to observe neutrally what would have happened even if they had not been present.

showrunner the writer-producer in charge of the day-to-day running of a television programme, who is also tasked with the shaping and maintaining of that programme's 'voice'.

director the person responsible for the creative process of turning a script or idea into a finished programme, by working with a technical crew, performers and an editor.

brand recognition the ability of audiences to recognise the distinctive identity of a product, service or institution and the values and meanings associated with it.

Channels and brands in American television drama

Changes in institutional and technological contexts provided the conditions for the changing attitudes in Television Studies that produced the 'quality TV' debate and renewed attention towards television aesthetics. In Britain's 'era of scarcity' (Ellis 2000: 39–60) or in the USA's classic network system, a small amount of channels and networks provided a restricted diet of television that was aimed at mass audiences. Developing a distinctive aesthetic was not very significant when there was a restricted diet of programming for mass audiences, the kinds of programmes that are definitively 'popular'. After this period of what the US network NBC's executive Paul Klein (1975) called 'least objectionable programming', both British and US network television changed significantly during the 1980s and 1990s. From the 1980s onwards the emergence of US cable channels (especially HBO) challenged network dominance, and a culture of programmes for niche audiences came about, supported by programme-related **merchandise** (especially retail videotape and DVD season boxsets) (Curtin 2003).

In the US prestige TV became a way for subscription (and some basic) cable channels to define themselves in a crowded television market. By creating 'must-see' programmes targeted at affluent audience demographics, they created strong channel and programme brands. The American cable network AMC gained a high public profile due to the critical success of *Mad Men*, about advertising executives in the 1960s. The programme's attention to elaborately recreating the settings and costumes of the era can be seen in Figure 12.2, in which lighting, composition and performance combine to make a dialogue scene visually very satisfying. The programme was also extensively covered in the press during the heyday of online episode recaps, with each episode pored over and written about in detail on multiple websites. This supported the engaged viewing practices required by the programme's complex narrative construction and characterisation.

The programmes produced by these cable channels challenged the continued value of the concept of the glance for describing television viewership, since prestige TV invites and rewards attentiveness. Jason Mittell describes this kind of programming as 'complex TV', a term suggesting their meaning 'grows richer through sustained engagement and consideration. It suggests that the consumer of complexity needs to engage fully and attentively, and such engagement will yield an experience distinct from more causal or partial attention' (2013: 46). Prestige TV also questions the usefulness of the concept of **flow** in describing television's temporality, since flow refers both to the continuous broadcast of programmes one after another (often interrupted by commercials and trailers) and also to the viewing experience as a flowing sequence. Programmes that foreground visual style and narrative complexity implicitly attempt to stand outside of flow and are marketed with such designations as 'appointment television' or 'must-see TV'.

flow the ways in which programmes, advertisements, etc. follow one another in an unbroken sequence across the day or part of the day, and the experience of watching the sequence of programmes, advertisements, trailers, etc.

This separation was central to HBO's channel brand as it needed to create an aura of exclusivity around its programming to encourage viewers to pay

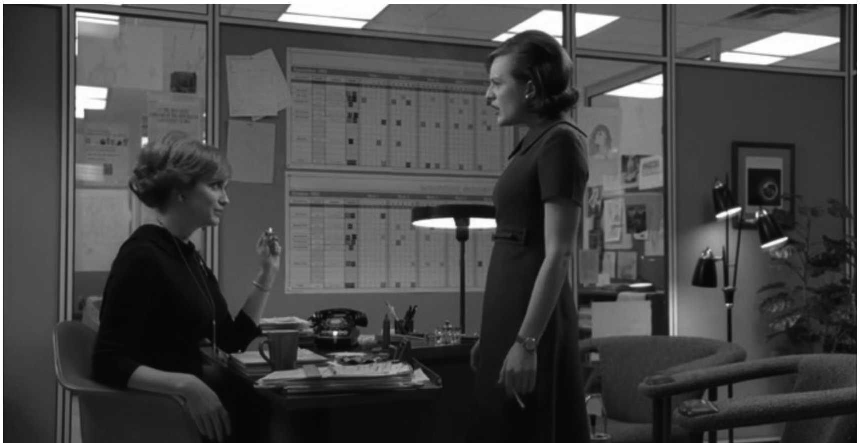


Figure 12.2 Visual style in *Mad Men*

for a subscription. The channel marketed itself with the slogan 'it's not TV, it's HBO'. Among other meanings, this tag line sought to position HBO programming as distinct from and elevated above that of network television. In the late 1990s and 2000s the channel screened a range of critically acclaimed television dramas including *Oz*, *Sex and the City*, *The Sopranos*, *Deadwood* and *The Wire*, establishing it as the home of a new 'golden age' of television. These programmes contained a level of sex, violence and profanity that could not be present in network television due to the restrictions of television regulator the **FCC** and advertiser involvement. For HBO these elements contributed to its brand identity of 'risk', which also included complex storytelling, morally ambiguous protagonists and the creative freedoms given to its showrunners, making 'authorship' a key component of this brand. It deliberately addresses its subscribers (and potential subscribers) as a select group, a **niche audience** who demand a superior quality of programme compared to the **free-to-air** television networks (Leverette *et al.* 2008).

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) the government body in the USA which regulates the operations and output of television companies and other broadcasters.

free-to-air television programming for which viewers make no direct payment.

When HBO began making original drama it also produced less programming than the major US networks, airing two or three new programmes a week compared to the seven nights of three-hour blocks aired on the networks. This meant the channel could spend more time and attention than the networks on developing programmes. The smaller number of programmes on-air and short average season lengths of ten episodes (compared to the network average of 22) meant HBO could focus its programming budget on fewer episodes of television. The resulting high per-episode budgets supported the development of distinctive visual styles as a channel norm. When basic cable channel AMC rebranded itself as a prestige channel in the 2000s it followed the HBO model. The success of *Mad Men* and later *Breaking Bad* positioning the channel as a high-end drama destination and potential HBO competitor.

niche audiences particular groups of viewers defined by age group, gender or economic status, for example, who may be the target audience for a programme.

During the 2000s and 2010s prestige TV also had a strong DVD market. As an HBO subscription was an expensive addition to a cable package in the US, DVD box sets enabled non-subscribers to purchase a part of the channel brand. DVD boxsets produced an intensive engagement through 'binge-viewing' of several episodes in succession and separated television from broadcast flow (Kompare 2006). This was a primary way for viewers outside the US to access HBO programming, which aired erratically on UK terrestrial channels until satellite company Sky gained exclusive broadcast rights to all the channel's content and launched Sky Atlantic. For example, crime drama *The Wire* struggled to find audiences in the UK on FX satellite channel and BBC2, eventually gaining a cult following through DVD box-set viewing. This pattern was repeated later in the streaming era with AMC crime drama *Breaking Bad*, which had failed to find a UK audience on FX and Five USA, but became a hit on Netflix.

binge-watching the viewing of multiple episodes of a programme sequentially, popularised by DVD box sets and streaming platforms.

Many of the programmes central to the 'quality TV' debate such as *ER*, *The West Wing* and *The Sopranos* were shot on film stock rather than videotape. Film enabled prestige TV's emphasis on distinctive visual style, producing a greater depth of colour, contrast of lighting and more elaborate camera movement than shooting on video. For film cameras, each shot has to be individually lit and the camera repositioned. This made prestige TV stand out against other television forms such as the multi-camera sitcom or soap opera that were shot with limited camera setups and less investment in the look of the finished programme.

melodrama a form of drama characterised by heightened performance styles, a focus on reversals of fortune and intense emotional reactions to events.

Although film stock has now largely been replaced by ultra-high-definition digital video, some series assert their prestige by shooting on film stock, including HBO's comic family **melodrama** *Succession*. Stereo sound, CGI and post-production effects have offered further opportunities for making visually distinctive programmes, with the production attention required for all these technical aspects contributing to the escalating budgets of the 'TV arms race'. The climactic episodes of worldwide phenomenon *Game of Thrones*, HBO's defining programme of the 2010s, employed levels of CGI and battle sequences otherwise only seen in blockbuster films.

Television and authorship

realism the aim for representations to reproduce reality faithfully, and the ways this is done.

Television has been considered a writer's medium, particularly in a British context. This is in part due to historic oppositions that positioned television as an aesthetically conservative medium of dialogue and character, and cinema as more adventurous in style and narrative form. Academic work on television drama in Britain placed value on a social **realist** aesthetic, as well as:

- Complexity of textual form
- Reflexivity, in which programmes took account of their own conventions
- The importance of authorship
- Engagement with contemporary social and political issues

sociology the academic study of society, aiming to describe and explain aspects of life in that society.

anthropology the study of humankind, including the evolution of humans and the different kinds of human society existing in different times and places.

Early work in Television Studies (e.g. Brandt 1981) engaged with television drama through authorship, because methodologies for discriminating 'quality' could be exemplified in the single television play (single drama) and the prime-time, high-profile television serial. These were forms that already privileged authorship as both a differentiating brand and a guarantor of quality for broadcasters and reviewers. Academic studies legitimated their criteria for selection by drawing on criteria already dominant in the study of literature and theatre drama, such as complexity, social engagement, originality and ambiguity. Unsurprisingly, the resulting 'canon' of programmes consisted of dramas by established male writers of 'serious' television plays or serials. However, subsequent research has questioned the separation of drama into the 'serious' and 'popular' and signalled an interest in reception that came from **sociology** and **anthropology** (Chapter 9) as much as from literary traditions. An implicit and sometimes explicit discrimination of 'quality' in programmes was replaced by critical discourses that explored the cultural meanings of programmes through the competing claims of authorship, genre, institution and reception.

Prestige TV is frequently positioned in both marketing and press coverage as the result of a distinctive creative vision, an 'auteur' given a significant artistic freedom. Press coverage will signal a broadcaster or streamer's provision of creative control to a high-profile writer as a sign of a programme's 'quality'. However, television production is a collaborative process involving many skilled professionals. As Trisha Dunleavy points out, television production's industrial process requires four main collaborative stages: concept design, scriptwriting, production, and post-production. This creative work can

> involve dozens (and potentially hundreds) of contributors. Additionally, with each of these processes requiring specialist expertise…the vortex of artistic control (regardless of the size of a drama project) is more often a 'key creative' duo, trio or small, team, than it is a single person.
>
> (2009: 35)

Yet authorship is still used to promote prestige TV, such as Sally Wainwright's *Happy Valley* (Figure 12.3), Jack Thorne's *National Treasure* anthology series, Donald Glover's *Atlanta*, or Michaela Coel's *I May Destroy You.* The positioning of the writer as the sole 'voice' of a programme is largely seen in serials, as well as British sitcom's short seasons, where one writer is able to write all of the episodes.

Attaining the position of writer-director is a signal of authorial control and prestige, as seen in the work of Stephen Poliakoff (*Perfect Strangers*, *The Lost Prince*) and Peter Kosminsky (*The Government Inspector*, *The Promise*). This position has historically been less accessible for female creatives, so Sally Wainwright's move to writer-director in season two of *Happy Valley*, as well as her subsequent dramas *To Walk Invisible* and *Gentleman Jack* was a marker of her industry power, as well as indicating industry moves towards gender equality. After struggling with the television industry's complicated power dynamics during the production of her first television show *Chewing Gum*, Michaela Coel chose to work with the BBC in co-production with HBO for her follow-up *I May Destroy You* in part due to the creative freedom she was given to write, executive produce and co-direct the serial.

In programmes where visual style is offered as one of the principal attractions, the director's contribution is significant since they, working with a cinematographer, are responsible for creating it. The director of a programme's pilot episode establishes its world view and visual style. Many prestige dramas' pilot episodes are directed by creatives with prominent cinematic reputations, with their auteur status assigning prestige. For example, Martin Scorsese directed the pilot of HBO period gangster drama *Boardwalk Empire*, at the time the most expensive in television history at $18 million. The majority of television programmes are directed

Figure 12.3 Sally Wainwright's crime drama *Happy Valley*

by television veterans who are relatively anonymous within popular culture, even those who are star names within the television industry like Michelle MacLaren, who regularly helms prestige television. However, as budgets for prestige drama have risen due to the heightened competition of Peak TV's 'TV arms race' (Ryan and Littleton 2017), and mid-budget films have become much harder to fund, directors that established their careers in cinema have moved into TV. These directors can work in collaboration with a writer-creator, as with season one of HBO's *True Detective*, written by Nic Pizzolatto with Cary Fukunaga directing. Or it can be a writer-director, such as Jane Campion with *Top of the Lake*, who co-created and co-wrote each episode with Gerard Lee and shared directing duties with Garth Davis. The short runs of 'limited series' can enable a single director like Fukunaga to helm an entire season, rather than the standard production process of directors rotating in for individual episodes. The programme is then in part marketed on their creative input.

'Peak TV' industry term coined by US television executive John Landgraf to refer to the huge amount of scripted series produced by network, cable and streaming in the US in the second half of the 2010s.

Writers and directors are important creative figures, but so are producers, who also often write episodes. Since the 1980s US television has given writer-producers or 'showrunners' greater creative control over programmes than episode directors or screenwriters (Pearson 2005). The same phenomenon has taken hold in Britain, particularly for long-running series and genre shows with relatively lengthy seasons, such as *Doctor Who*. The showrunner works in some combination of series creator, writer and producer. They devise and develop a programme, defining its 'look' in collaboration with the directors and establishing the main characters, settings and genre components. Sometimes the programme's creator continues as showrunner, at other times an experienced showrunner is brought on to lead production when a successful pilot is written by a less-experienced writer. Once a series format is devised, a robust production system can be established where the showrunner serves as manager, shepherding and cohering the work of numerous writers – working as freelancers for individual episodes or employed for the season as part of a writers' room – and episodic directors can contribute to the format, overseen by the showrunner as manager.

format the blueprint for a programme, including its setting, main characters, genre, form and main themes.

For example, *The Wire* was created by David Simon, who made great claims for its innovations in the police genre, but also for its importance more widely in television fiction. Simon argued that *The Wire* took television's possibilities for storytelling more seriously than its predecessors and required the kinds of concentrated attention and commitment from the viewer that might more usually be expected in the literary novel. While these comments implied that television viewers are usually rather passive and needed to be taught how to view a series like *The Wire*, it also used cultural hierarchies to position the programme as prestige TV. Press and academic discourse frequently aligned *The Wire*'s serialised storytelling, sprawling cast and social conscience with the Dickensian novel. This legitimated the programme by connecting it with the 'serious' art form of classical literature, which had a higher cultural status than television.

A showrunner with a proven track record like David Simon can become a brand in themselves. Simon has established a long-standing creative partnership with HBO, making eight critically acclaimed programmes for the channel. His brand is built on a stark commitment to realism and sprawling ensemble storytelling that uses a street-level view to chart the workings of American cities and institutions, with *The Wire*, *Treme* and *The Deuce* all exhibiting an interest in the relationship between city space, economic systems and labour. The showrunner-as-brand has particular value in the 'TV arms race', when deep-pocketed streamers (particularly Netflix) spend heavily on exclusive deals with creatives who have established reputations for hit programmes. Shonda Rhimes spent over a decade creating a string of female-centred melodramas for ABC and Ryan Murphy the *American Horror Story* and *American Crime Story* anthologies for FX, before they were courted by Netflix in big-money deals that promised creative freedom. These deals bet on their value as audience-draws and this paid off in 2020 when Shonda Rhimes executive-produced the hit bodice-ripping period fantasy *Bridgerton*.

The 'cinematic', legitimating television and complex serial drama

Prestige TV is also characterised through the work of highly skilled and star actors, who create moments of character revelation by means of performance. Prestige TV is frequently marketed around star performers who are attracted by complexly written characters. Television has always had a star system; however, the last decade has seen increasing amounts of actors who built their reputation in cinema move over to television. This brings the prestige of cinematic stardom to television, but contributes to the rising budgets of high-end drama. For example, season one of HBO melodrama *Big Little Lies* starred Reese Witherspoon and Nicole Kidman, with both actors serving as executive producers and its first season was directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, who had worked with Witherspoon on the film *Wild*. Meryl Streep joined for season two, creating considerable star wattage. Both Witherspoon and Kidman have starred in and produced further television projects, illustrating how prestige television has stepped into the gap created by the decline of the mid-budget film targeting adult audiences.

There is a cultural tendency to use 'cinematic' as shorthand to describe the aesthetic of high-end drama and comedy that has high **production values** and a distinct visual style. Or indeed, the glossy aesthetic of reality programmes such as *The Hills* and *Made in Chelsea*, which use balanced frames, continuity editing and post-production colour-grading to ape the style of US prime-time drama (Woods 2016) (Figure 12.4). The term 'cinematic' employs a cultural hierarchy that suggests television itself is not capable of visual sophistication. However, a distinct visual style and sophisticated, beautiful, carefully considered compositions that draw attention to themselves are now so prevalent across US and UK prestige TV (and frequently popular drama) that this visual style should be called 'televisual'. Deborah Jarmillo points out that '"Cinematic" connotes artistry mixed with a sense of grandeur' (2013, 67) and suggests the term impairs serious discussions of a televisual aesthetic. 'Cinematic' functions in the same way as claims that a programme functions as a 'ten-hour movie' (frequently used by creatives moving over from film). This phrase positions a project as separate from television, elite. Yet it neglects to recognise that serialisation – telling the arc of a story across multiple episodes – is a central feature of television storytelling, particularly closed-ended serials that tell a cohesive story across a defined set of episodes.

production values the level of investment in a television production, such as the amount spent on costumes, props, effects and sets.

Labelling television as 'cinematic' and a 'ten-hour movie' are processes of legitimation that work in a similar way to academic debates around 'quality TV'.

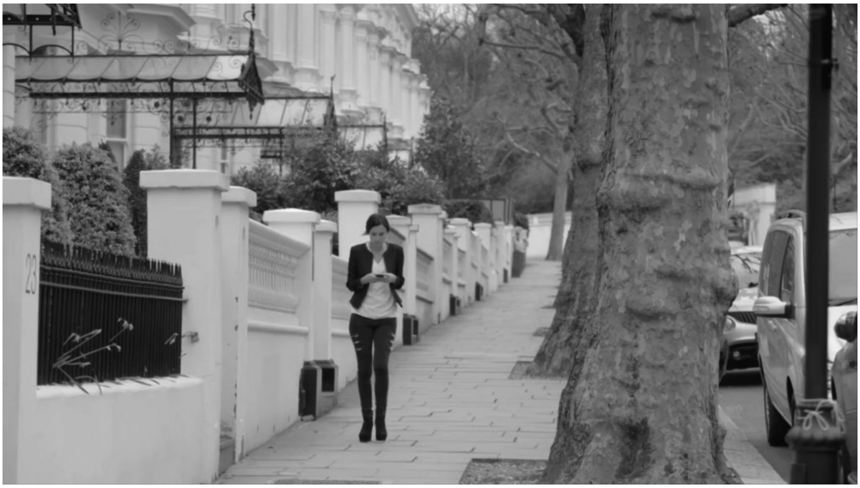


Figure 12.4 *Made in Chelsea*'s careful composition and soft champagne colour grade

Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine (2012) study how television legitimation functions from industrial, cultural and technological standpoints. They highlight the underlying classed and gendered positions involved in elevating certain types of programmes as 'quality' and thus separate to 'ordinary' TV. Newman and Levine (2012: 5) point out that this discourse perpetuates existing status structures and cultural hierarchies by

> distancing more respectable genres of TV and more technologically advanced modes of watching from those forms and viewing practices rooted in the medium's past, and associated with less valued audiences who had previously been seen as central to television's cultural identity – women, children, the elderly, those of a lesser class status, people who spend their days at home

Popular and academic analysis of male-orientated prestige TV and its 'narrative complexity' have at times positioned these programmes against the 'bad object' of soap opera and network dramas informed by melodrama storytelling, both forms that have historic connections with female audiences. Yet the heavily serialised storytelling and deep narrative history of prestige TV owes much to the narrative techniques of soap opera.

The template of 'complex serial drama' set out by Trisha Dunleavy (2018) provides a way to discuss prestige TV whilst avoiding the taste and judgment embedded in terms like 'quality'. She distinguishes high-end drama from 'ordinary' television through the industrial strategy of a very high cost per episode. This enables a differentiation through high production values and aesthetic ambition that is designed to attract well-educated, higher-income viewers who appeal to advertisers and can afford the costs of multiple cable and streaming subscriptions (4). However, the budgets of high-end dramas are not always in service of spectacle. Instead HBO dramas such as *The Wire* and *Mare of Easttown* assert their prestige through a commitment to realism that contrasts to the glossy glamour of much of network television drama.

Dunleavy identifies four characteristics of ‘complex serial drama’ produced by US cable and streaming outlets. These distinguish it from the longstanding conventions and traditions of US TV drama produced by broadcast networks (5–6).

- A serial format requiring dedicated viewing, in contrast to the episodic form that historically dominated network television aimed at drawing in casual viewers
- Idiosyncratic and innovative concepts and settings, which also contribute to a distinctive ‘look’, supported by high per-episode budgets. These are contrasted with the reliable institutions of medicine and law and order found in network dramas
- Conflict-riven and transgressive protagonists, whose personal struggles shape the programme’s story arcs. Ensembles featuring morally ambiguous and psychologically complex characters
- Explicit content – nudity, sex, violence and profane language – compared to that allowed on broadcast television by FCC content rules and the need to be advertiser friendly

All these elements position complex serial drama as a ‘risk’, used as a branding strategy by cable channels and later streaming platforms. These are the flagship programmes used to retain subscribers and tempt new ones. However, the intense competition of the Peak TV era means that high-end budgets are not only the preserve of complex serial drama. Multiple extremely expensive programmes have been designed for mass audiences, with streaming platforms producing blockbusting fantasy dramas to tempt new subscribers, including the string of Disney+ programmes linked to the Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise and Amazon Prime Video’s *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*.

Visual style and the *Doctor Who* brand

The BBC science fiction series *Doctor Who* is an example of a programme whose meaning shifted over time, from children’s television and cult text to a popular drama and valuable flagship BBC programme brand. This shift came with its revival in 2005, with the ‘New Who’ employing a higher degree of serialisation, as well as accessing a higher budget and technological innovations than its previous iteration (Bignell 2013). The programme’s investment in a distinct visual style connects with the discussion of the mainly American context discussed so far, as did the prominent role of authorship. Established TV writer Russell T. Davis served as showrunner and assembled a writing team familiar from creating their own hit and cult programmes. *Doctor Who* was revived to target both a national and global audience, with its visual style and storytelling influenced by the US network television that dominated the export market. Like other British prime-time drama contemporary with its 2005 revival such as *Spooks* and *Hustle*, *Doctor Who* accommodates itself to American norms of production and genre expectation. In the commercial context of overseas sales, the revival’s

50-minute form was built to accommodate four 'acts' per episode that could be separated by commercial breaks, so each segment develops to a moment of tension or suspense.

Davies reshaped the format by planning lengthy story arcs that include set-piece action sequences and moments of high-budget spectacle. This can be seen as an attempt to transcend the perceived limitations of visual style in the *Doctor Who* format. In an interview (Sleight 2011: 15), Davies said that 'the thing that enticed me to do *Doctor Who* [was] – big pictures. Television doesn't do that enough; most television is people sitting there talking'. *Doctor Who* was first made in the 1960s era of live, studio-based, multi-camera television with monochrome pictures. However, technical innovations have given the revival's showrunners new ways of making visually distinctive narratives. Because of the convergence of television's digital production systems with the technologies used by specialist visual effects companies who work in several media, television is made in very much the same ways as cinema and animation. All BBC dramas are shot in HD and edited and post-produced digitally, with this all-digital production workflow integrating inputs from a range of sources at different stages of production. For example, visual spectacle using **green-screen** and CGI can function as a set-piece at the opening or climax of an episode. CGI can also aid the creation of the alien beings the Doctor encounters. The production values of television drama are perpetually increasing, with digital technologies increasing the sharpness and complexity of both images and sound. Shooting on location using HD cameras provides a rich and detailed image texture.

green-screen shooting action against a green background so that images from another source can be pasted in to replace the green background.

Doctor Who needs to provide a satisfying experience for this wide range of viewers and viewing contexts, whether on a TV set, laptop, tablet or mobile phone. The programme remains a key vehicle for bringing the BBC as a brand into the consciousness of the children and young people who frequently consume their television via mobile devices. These factors affect what *Doctor Who* episodes look like, and how episodes and seasons are structured. The revived programme was a leader of the BBC's extension of its programmes beyond conventional broadcasting, both to reinforce the programme's powerful brand and to demonstrate the broadcaster's commitment to **convergence** technologies. *Doctor Who* used multi-platform content and transmedia storytelling to expand its story world beyond the programme, with the BBC using the programme to pioneer **spin-offs** such as short-form online 'mobisodes' and online games.

convergence the process whereby previously separate media technologies merge together. For example, a mobile phone can now be used to take calls, send messages, take photos, browse the internet, store and stream video content and music.

spin-off a product, television programme, book, etc. that is created to exploit the reputation, meaning or commercial success of a previous one, often in a different medium from the original.

When Steven Moffat took over the showrunner role for *Doctor Who* in 2009, the tone and visual style of the series was deliberately altered to emphasise a fantasy or fairytale quality, not only in the writing but also in the visual look of the episodes. Moffat's reign as showrunner declared an interest in the visual set-piece from the very start of season five in 2010. In 'The Eleventh Hour', the TARDIS hurtles over London at the height of several hundred feet, with its doors hanging open and the Doctor dangling out, and then crashes into Amy Pond's garden (Figure 12.5). The pace and changing point of view in the sequence encourage an appreciation of visual excitement. The sequence contributes little to the plot or to the exploration of character, but it encourages a sense of awe and admiration for its creative and technical expertise, and in this respect it is comparable to the opening 'hook' sequences of blockbuster action movies, where the cinema viewer is quickly rewarded with an exciting opening. In the opening TARDIS flight of

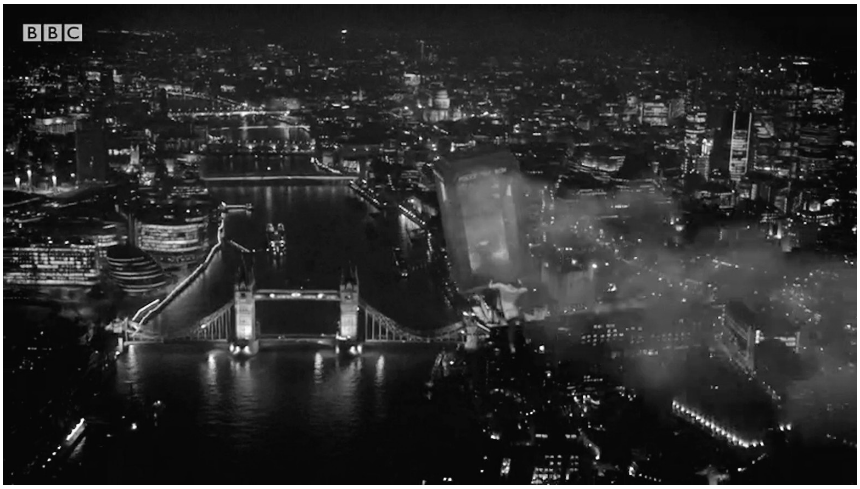


Figure 12.5 The doctor dangles from the TARDIS in 'The Eleventh Hour'

'The Eleventh Hour', the rapid movement is a visual *tour-de-force* in itself. It is a helicopter shot that has been digitally overlaid with studio-shot green-screen sequences of the Doctor dangling from the TARDIS, along with a digitally rendered TARDIS and doctor in long-shot. The roller-coaster pace of the editing of the sequence is responsible for its impact as much as the visual content of any particular shot.

As well as overseeing the making of a specified number of hours of drama, Moffat was the manager of a very valuable commercial asset (soon to be two, as he was co-creator of BBC1 prestige drama *Sherlock*, which debuted in 2010). Part of the *Doctor Who* showrunner's job is to protect and enhance the programme brand. Catherine Johnson argues that 'Programme brands organize the public's engagement with branded products through extending and multiplying the experiences surrounding television programmes' (2012: 157). These branded products, including spin-offs and merchandise, complicate 'previously held distinctions between content and promotion, forcing us to explore the ways in which all texts might take on multiple functions depending on how they are positioned by producers and used by viewers' (157). The *Doctor Who* franchise is a key brand for the BBC, deriving significant income from overseas sales and merchandising. It is not just the look of the screened episodes that counts, but also how they function as products in themselves and exist in a relationship with further non-televisual products that express that visual look in another medium.

Texts in the wider *Doctor Who* franchise have included behind-the-scenes footage, including commentary on how special effects work is achieved, for example in the BBC Three companion *Confidentials* series, as well as box set DVD extras and clips on the official website. When 'The Eleventh Hour' was advertised in late March 2010 before its first screening, Moffat's opening sequence of the TARDIS over London was made available on the BBC website and the interactive 'red button' digital television service. It is significant that this high-speed effects sequence was chosen as the **teaser** for the series, as it showcased the programme's

teaser a very short television sequence advertising a forthcoming programme, often puzzling or teasing to viewers because it contains little information and encourages curiosity and interest.

visual appeal. Moreover, a series of short videos about the making of the effects sequence was added to the website and red button feed. The pre-visualisation artist Dan May explained how he constructed the CGI animation from a **storyboard**, and James Swanson, director of photography for the helicopter sequence, described the experience of making it. The forces that impact on *Doctor Who* are dynamic and often contradictory. Across the life of the 'New Who', emergent technologies of production and reception, like shooting in HD, watching on Blu-Ray, and 4K HD broadcast have made it possible for a long-running series programme to achieve Moffat's aim of an expansive, large-scale, visually sumptuous look. This has needed to be realised inventively within restricted budgets because *Doctor Who* is produced without international co-producing partners, with a budget well below HBO's science-fiction and fantasy programming such as *Westworld* or *Game of Thrones*. This has often brought benefits in adapting storylines to available resources and strengthening the attention to character that has always been central to the format.

storyboard a sequence of drawn images showing the shots to be used in a programme.

Period drama as prestige genre

Period drama has inbuilt connotations of television 'quality', through its links with literary traditions and national histories, along with the high budgets required for its detailed reconstructions of the past. The genre's connections with British tourism's selling of the national past (Caughie 2000) gives it strong value on the export market, which aids its appeal to international co-production partners (Chapter 11). Period drama has historically been associated with British public service broadcasters, but the genre has now become an international 'mass-market property', moving away from cultural assumptions that it is 'the preserve of a "discerning", culturally conservative niche audience' (Monk 2015: 27). In the Peak TV era new television outlets, as well as those looking to rebrand, have often used period drama to signal their commitment to high-end drama, driving a 2010s boom in the genre. Outlets can assert their brand identity by producing period dramas that offer a distinctive interpretation of the past, particularly programmes that self-consciously play with or contradict public perceptions of an era or historical figure.

US cable channel FX has cultivated a reputation for creative risk-taking in prestige drama and comedy that rivals that of HBO. In the 2010s this brand identity has been fed by a cycle of period dramas offering new perspectives on late twentieth-century US history. This was catalysed by FX's critically acclaimed cold war spy drama *The Americans* that followed Russian sleeper agents masquerading as an American family during the 1980s. *Pose* explored the queer ballroom scene in 1980s New York, foregrounding the struggles and creative triumphs of the city's queer and trans communities of colour. Crime thriller *Snowfall* presented the 1980s drug trade and the impact of the crack epidemic through the perspective of the Black communities of Los Angeles. *Mrs America* looked back to the second-wave feminism of the 1970s through the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment, profiling key figures of the movement alongside the rise of the religious right through Conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly. These dramas exhibit serial storytelling, complex ambiguous protagonists and innovative settings with distinctive visual style, all features Trisha Dunleavy (2018) identifies in the complex serial drama. These returns to recent history complicate stories America has told about itself, countering perceptions of period drama as a safe, conservative genre and feeding FX's brand reputation for risk-taking creativity (Woods 2022: 161–3).

Streaming platforms Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+ and Netflix have looked to high-end, distinctive interpretations of the past to position themselves as innovative competitors to established television outlets. Amazon Prime's *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* is the focus of this chapter's case study. *Dickinson* was included in the 2019 launch slate of Apple TV+ and is part of a cultural trend for historical remix that includes the stage musical *Hamilton*, film *The Favourite* and TV comedies *Drunk History* and *Another Period*. The comic teen drama created an alternate perspective on the teenage and early twenties life of nineteenth-century American poet Emily Dickinson. Building connections between the poet and contemporary teens, the programme presented Emily as a queer goth teen and expressed her strange creative voice through tonal shifts and a soundtrack of contemporary electronica and hip-hop. Emily, and at times her siblings and her friends, slips into twentieth-first-century speech and mannerisms to express frustrations at the social restrictions of their small, privileged world.

Netflix chose *The Crown* as its first original drama **commission** from a UK production company, aggressively outbidding the BBC and ITV, the traditional homes for British period drama (Dowell 2017). A period drama exploring the life of Queen Elizabeth II and her royal family could seem an oddly conservative choice of flagship programme for a streamer that had consistently positioned itself as a 'disrupter' of linear television. When *The Crown* debuted in 2016 Netflix was a relatively young streaming platform whose brand identity was still being built, with no reputation for prestige drama. *The Crown* mobilised the '*uncontroversial* indicators of quality' that Charlotte Brunsdon argues are culturally attached to period drama (1990: 85–6). The streamer used the programme to build prestige into its brand identity and to target global audiences with a genre that had established global appeal ('heritage export'). It was created by white male filmmakers Peter Morgan and Stephen Daldry, drawing on their 2013 theatre play and Morgan's reputation for film and television docudramas chronicling late twentieth-century British politics (a version of 'literary source'). The programme cast a slew of prominent and emergent British actors ('the best of British acting'). By widely promoting the budget of £100 million allocated for the programme's first two seasons, Netflix showcased its financial heft and ability to compete for and escalate the budgets of high-end drama ('money'). This budget signalled the programme's investment in production design and locations, asserting its 'authenticity' through the creation of a historically accurate mise-en-scène. By commissioning *The Crown* Netflix made clear that for all its talk of disruption, it did not choose a period drama that countered established perspectives on British history. Instead it relied on established markers of 'quality' to support its global expansion, a programme from established white male 'auteurs', with a focus on the white British aristocracy that has long been a feature of the genre.

commissioning the UK process through which programmes are pitched, developed and selected for funding and broadcast. The US television industry's structure will see a similar process of a programme being 'picked up' or 'greenlit' by a network or streaming service.

Case study: *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel*

Debuting in 2017, *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* (*Mrs Maisel* hereafter) is an hour-long comedy-drama series set in 1950s New York. It centres on Midge Maisel, a fast-talking, highly confident and competent upper-middle-class Jewish housewife who starts a secret life as an aspiring stand-up comedian after her husband leaves their family. This case study discusses *Mrs Maisel* as prestige comedy drama, looking at how it employs many of the features discussed in this chapter. The programme is an example of new television outlets using period drama with distinctive interpretations of the past to stand out in the crowded marketplace of Peak TV. A breakout critical hit that achieved widespread success at the Emmy awards, *Mrs Maisel* provided Amazon Prime Video with a level of cultural status that its previous programming had been unable to achieve. It helped solidify the relatively young streaming platform as a destination for original programming.

Mrs Maisel is part of a late 2010s shift in US prestige TV to include women's perspectives as protagonists and creators. This was in line with pushes towards gender equality in the television industry, alongside the wider cultural rise of what Sarah Benet-Weiser (2018) calls popular feminism. Until this point, US prestige drama was dominated by male-centred storytelling, as seen in journalist Brett Martin's (2013) veneration of its 'creative revolution' as the result of 'difficult men'. These were the protagonists and 'auteur' creators of programmes like *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Deadwood*, *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad*. Midge can be viewed as the conflict-riven transgressive protagonist Trisha Dunleavy (2018: 5–6) identifies as a key component of complex serial drama. A frequently foul-mouthed comedian in a male dominated business, she is a woman pursuing a new thirst for independence in a society shaped by patriarchal **ideologies** (whilst displaying little interest in her two children). However, her conflict is largely of the screwball kind, as her effortless ability to manage challenging situations finds her rarely significantly troubled. Midge's upper-middle-class privilege allows her to move effortlessly through New York, between her parent's home on the Upper West Side, the hipster bohemia of the Village where she shapes her act and the downtown clubs where she seeks success.

ideology the set of beliefs, attitudes and assumptions arising from the economic and class divisions in a culture, underlying the ways of life accepted as normal in that culture.

Although her comedy sets in season one feature sharp and provocative social and gender critique, Midge rarely displays the morally complex, duplicitous behaviour of the anti-heroes explored by Dunleavy. However, she displays a single-minded pursuit of career success that frequently harms her personal relationships. *Mrs Maisel* can be considered a career romance, with Midge falling in love with comedy. Where she previously focused her attention on maintaining the feminine perfection required of an upper-middle-class wife and mother, this focus shifts to a determined pursuit of comic success. Midge is patterned after pioneering female comedians Joan Rivers and Jean Carroll, who worked in the male dominated stand-up comedy world of the 1950s and 60s. This aligns the programme with contemporary period drama's tendency to shape stories around proto-feminist heroines; women out of time who can be cast as female pioneers pushing against the misogyny and gendered constraint of their eras (Woods 2022).

Mrs Maisel exhibits the distinctive look and milieu Dunleavy identifies in the complex serial drama (5), as the programme counters the popular cultural image of America's 1950s as an era of suburban family life and conservative social values. Midge's spacious New York apartments and glamorous wardrobe offer an alternative vision of 1950s family life as one of urban sophistication, and she retains her glamour even when venturing into the bohemia of the Village. The programme's production design and visual style build a heightened vision of mid-century New York, illustrating the complex serial drama's 'unusual attention to mise-en-scene, verisimilitude, cinematography and musical scores to evoke a particular mood' (2018: 5). *Mrs Maisel*'s New York evokes classical Hollywood cinema's representations of the city, which had been built on studio backlots. Here real city locations are reshaped through production design, costuming and performance to evoke the stylised technicolour city found in 1950s musicals and romantic comedies (Woods 2022: 90).

The programme's mid-century US period drama predecessor *Mad Men* was also set in New York, but was filmed in Los Angeles, so its highly detailed vision of the city is largely confined to interior space. In contrast, the high budget provided by Amazon Prime Video enables *Mrs Maisel* to blend extensive interior sets with location shooting on the streets of New York (Figure 12.6). Filming in a city as dense and crowded as New York is expensive, so *Mrs Maisel* showcases the streamer's financial investment in prestige TV, supporting the creation of a heightened 1950s image of the city on location, across multiple seasons. Press coverage and marketing foregrounded the scale of the programme's reconstructions as well the research and attention to detail of its production team. This signalled the programme's period reconstruction as 'authentic', despite its heightened, colour coded nature (Woods 2022: 89).

Authorship is prominent in the press coverage of *Mrs Maisel*, which was created by husband-and-wife team Amy Sherman-Palladino and Daniel Palladino, who also direct many of its episodes. Sherman-Palladino has the more prominent position in this pairing, with press coverage focusing on her distinctive televisual 'voice' and outsized personality, akin to the 'difficult men' celebrated by Martin (2013). Her reputation as a televisual auteur was built on network dramadies targeting teen and family audiences. *Gilmore Girls* and *Bunheads* feature confident, witty, heroines whose distinctive verbal style was patterned after Sherman-Palladino's own. Their fast-paced, comic speech is delivered in extended monologues and dialogue scenes often dense with popular culture references. This distinctive 'voice' is also central to *Mrs Maisel*, as Midge, her mother and friends share a rapid-fire screwball comedy speech pattern, which carries over into Midge's stand-up act. Both the creative challenge

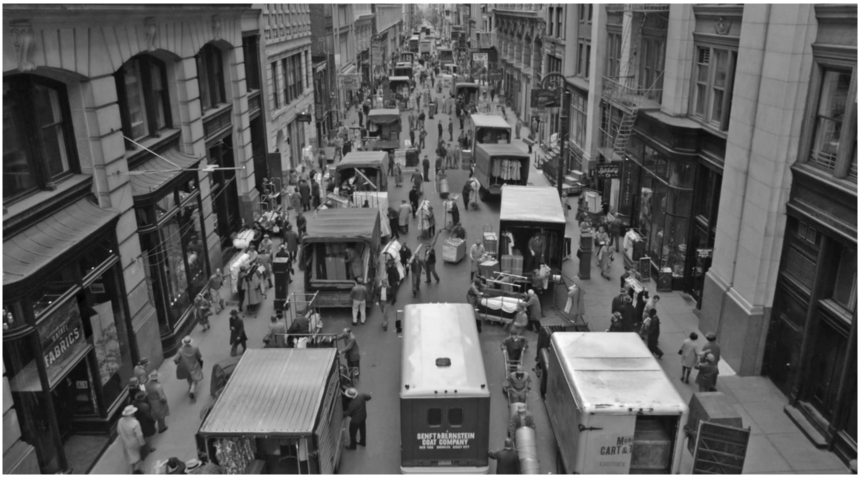


Figure 12.6 *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* recreates 1950s New York on location

of this style of writing and the performance skill required to deliver it forms part of the programme's prestige.

Mrs Maisel's shooting style favours wide and medium shots to display these performances, capturing Midge, her family and manager Suzie's fast-paced sharp dialogue and constant movement. The programme's distinctive visual style mimics the dynamism of its dialogue through lengthy, propulsive, often complexly staged Steadicam takes. This visual style is an escalation of the Steadicam-driven 'walk and talks' seen in NBC hospital drama *ER* and political drama *The West Wing*. *Mrs Maisel* uses Steadicam's ability to invigorate 'the field of vision, imbuing it with an astonishing dramatic vigor and spatial depth' (McCabe 2013: 63). This dynamic visual style signifies the upper-middle-class privilege of Midge and her parents as they move assuredly and unencumbered through life, as well as the forceful nature and aspirational drive of her working-class manager Suzie. The programme uses dancers as extras for their sense of movement and energy (Zoller Seitz 2018), with stylised choreography of movement key to its complex **long takes**. Here the movement of bodies and camera bring a level of rhythmic musicality and theatricality to everyday activities that evokes the classical Hollywood musical (Woods 2022: 89). The programme's Steadicam shots have grown increasingly spectacular across its run, using long takes, wide framing and choregraphed movement to drawing viewers' attention to their complex construction. Here technological mastery is presented as a signal of prestige.

long take an imprecise term denoting a longer than usual uninterrupted camera shot.

Mrs Maisel is positioned as a comic iteration of the complex serial drama. It features a transgressive female protagonist whose career progression is tracked through a strongly serialised narrative. The programme's at times spectacular visual style displays its detailed construction of a distinctive milieu in its fantasy-tinged mid-century New York. Amazon Prime Video used *Mrs Maisel*'s distinctive iteration of period drama to stand out in a highly competitive television landscape, display its financial investment in original drama and establish itself as an outlet for prestige TV.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- 'Quality' in television is a cultural construct, rather than something possessed by individual programmes
- Cultural prestige has been conferred on certain programmes by comparing them with texts in other media, such as cinema, theatre and literature.
- Television Studies has focused on authorship, narrative and visual style to analyse how programmes labelled as 'quality' make creative use of television's distinctive features.
- The concept of 'quality' in television has changed its meaning over time, and been critiqued for creating cultural hierarchies through processes of legitimation that devalue certain genres and audiences
- Channels and streaming platforms use prestige TV to attract audiences of high commercial value, as well as build brand identities in a highly competitive television landscape

Bibliography

Abbiss, W.S. (2019) ‘Proposing a post-heritage critical framework: The Crown, ambiguity, and media self-consciousness’, *Television & New Media*, 21(8), pp. 825–41.

Banet-Weiser, S. (2018) *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bignell, J. (2007) ‘Citing the classics: Constructing British television drama history in publishing and pedagogy’, in Wheatley, H. (ed.), *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*. London: I.B. Tauris, pp. 27–39.

Bignell, J. (2013) ‘The look: style, technology and televisuality in the new *Who*’, in O’Day, A. (ed.), *Doctor Who: The Eleventh Hour*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Brandt, G. (ed.) (1981) *British Television Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brunsdon, C. (1990) ‘Problems with quality’, *Screen*, 31(1), pp. 67–90.

Caughie, J. (2000) *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Curtin, M. (2003) ‘From network to neo-network audiences’, in Hilmes, M. (ed.), *The Television History Book*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 122–5.

Dowell, B. (2017) ‘The Crown Netflix: Series would not have worked on BBC says producer’, *Radio Times*, 14 September. Available at www.radiotimes.com/news/tv/2017-09-14/bbc-would-have-struggled-to-make-the-crown/.

Dunleavy, T. (2009) *Television Drama*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Dunleavy, T. (2018) *Complex Serial Drama and Multiplatform Television*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ellis, J. (1982) *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Ellis, J. (2000) *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Feuer, J. (2003) ‘Quality drama in the US: The new “Golden Age”?’, in Hilmes, M. (ed.), *The Television History Book*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 98–102.

Fiske, J. and Hartley, J. (1978) *Reading Television*. London: Methuen.

Frith, S. (2000) ‘The black box: The value of television and the future of television research’, *Screen*, 41(1), pp. 33–50.

Jaramillo, D. L. (2013) ‘Rescuing television from “the cinematic”: The perils of dismissing television style’, in Peacock, S. and Jacobs, J. (eds), *Television Aesthetics and Style*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 67–75.

Johnson, C. (2012) *Branding Television*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Klein, P. (1975) ‘The television audience and program mediocrity’, in Wells, A. (ed.), *Mass Media and Society*. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield, pp. 74–7.

Kompare D. (2006) ‘Publishing flow: DVD box sets and the reconception of television’, *Television & New Media*, 7(4), pp. 335–60.

Leverette, M., Ott, B. L. and Buckley, C. L. (eds) (2008) *It’s Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lury, K. (2005) *Interpreting Television*. London: Hodder Arnold.

Martin, B. (2013) *Difficult Men: From the Sopranos and The Wire to Mad Men and Breaking Bad*. London: Faber & Faber.

McCabe J. (2013) *The West Wing*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State Press.

McCabe J. and Akass, K. (eds) (2007) *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*. London: I.B. Tauris.

McLoone, M. (1997) 'Boxed in? The aesthetics of film and television', in Hill, J. and McLoone, M. (eds), *Big Picture, Small Screen: The Relations between Film and Television*. Luton: University of Luton Press, pp. 76–106.

Mittell, J. (2013) 'The qualities of complexity: Vast versus dense seriality in contemporary television', in Peacock, S. and Jacobs, J. (eds), *Television Aesthetics and Style*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 45–56.

Mittell, J. (2015) *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York: New York University Press.

Monk, C. (2015) 'Approaches to the costume drama. Pageantry and populism, democratization and dissent: The forgotten 1970s', in Leggott, J. and Taddeo, J.A. (eds), *Upstairs and Downstairs: British Costume Drama Television from the Forsyte Saga to Downton Abbey*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 27–44.

Nelson, R. (1997) *TV Drama in Transition: Forms, Values and Cultural Change*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Newcomb, H. (1974) *Television: The Most Popular Art*. New York: Anchor.

Newman, M. and Levine, E. (2012) *Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status*. Abingdon: Routledge.

O'Falt, C. (2017) 'Why Netflix spent millions so "The Crown" could shoot in very, very big rooms', *IndieWire*, 16 August. Available at www.indiewire.com/2017/08/netflix-the-crown-production-design-emmy-stephen-daldry-martin-childs-1201867229/.

Pearson, R. (2005) 'The writer/producer in American television', in Hammond, M. and Mazdon, L. (eds), *The Contemporary Television Series*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 11–26.

Ryan, M. and Littleton, C. (2017) 'TV series budgets hit the breaking point as costs skyrocket in Peak TV era', *Variety*, 26 September. Available at https://variety.com/2017/tv/news/tv-series-budgets-costs-rising-peak-tv-1202570158/.

Shimpach, S. (2010) *Television in Transition: The Life and Afterlife of the Narrative Action Hero*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Sleight, G. (2011) 'The big picture show: Russell T. Davies' writing for *Doctor Who*', in Bradshaw, S., Keen, A. and Sleight, G. (eds), *The Unsilent Library: Essays on the Russell T. Davies Era of the New Doctor Who*. London: Science Fiction Foundation, pp. 15–28.

Thompson, R. (1997) *Television's Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Williams, R. (1977) 'A lecture on realism', *Screen*, 18(1), pp. 61–74.

Woods, F. (2016) *British Youth Television: Transnational Teens, Industry, Genre*. London: Palgrave.

Woods, F. (2022) *Period Drama*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Zoller Seitz, M. (2018) 'The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel Isn't Just a "Feel-Good Show"', *Vulture*, 26 December. Available at www.vulture.com/2018/12/mrs-maisel-season-2-palladino-interview.html.

Glossary of key terms

180-degree rule the convention that cameras are positioned only on one side of an imaginary line drawn to connect two performers in a scene. This produces a coherent sense of space for the viewer.

active audience television audiences regarded not as passive consumers of meanings, but as negotiating meanings for themselves that are often resistant to those meanings that are intended or that are discovered by close analysis.

actuality footage television pictures representing an event that was filmed live. The term usually refers to pictures of news events.

adaptation transferring a novel, theatre play, poem, etc. from its original medium into another medium such as television.

aesthetic a specific artistic form. Aesthetics means the study of art and beauty.

affiliates local television stations (normally in the USA) that have made agreements (affiliations) with a network to broadcast programmes offered by that network rather than another.

algorithms calculations made by computer programmes using data collected by channels and streaming services. Used to analyse viewer behaviour and tastes based on their viewing practices.

analogue broadcasting signals in waves of varying frequency. Analogue signals require greater space or 'bandwidth' than digital signals, and do not allow interactive response from viewers.

Annan Committee a committee reporting in 1977 to government on the future of broadcasting. It supported public service broadcasting, the funding of the BBC by licence fee, and the planned introduction of a fourth television channel.

anthropology the study of humankind, including the evolution of humans and the different kinds of human society existing in different times and places.

audience share the percentage of viewers estimated to have watched one channel as opposed to another channel broadcasting at the same time.

authorship the question of who an author is, the role of the author as creator and the significance of the author's input into the material being studied.

avant-garde work aiming to challenge the norms and conventions of its medium, and the group of people making such work.

axis of action or 180-degree line, the imaginary line connecting two main actors in a scene.

back lighting lighting the subject of a shot from behind to provide depth by separating the subject from the background.

balance the requirement in television news and current affairs to present both sides of an argument or issue.

BARB (Broadcasters Audience Research Bureau) the independent body that gathers and reports viewing statistics on behalf of UK television institutions.

binge-watching the viewing of multiple episodes of a programme sequentially, popularised by DVD box sets and streaming platforms.

brand recognition the ability of audiences to recognise the distinctive identity of a product, service or institution and the values and meanings associated with it.

broadcasting the transmission of signals from a central source which can be received by dispersed receivers over a large geographical area.

budget the money allocated to the making of a particular programme or series of programmes, which is controlled by the producer.

cable television originally called Community Antenna Television (CATV). Transmission of television signals along cables in the ground.

capitalism the organisation of an economy around the private ownership of accumulated wealth, involving the exploitation of labour to produce profit that creates such wealth.

catch-up services streaming services and websites that allow viewers to view programmes on-demand after their broadcast on linear television, for a certain period of time.

censorship the omission of sensitive, prohibited or disturbing material at any stage in the production process from the initial idea to its transmission.

class a section of society defined by their relationship to economic activity, whether as workers (the working class) or possessors of economic power (the bourgeoisie), for example.

close-up a camera shot where the frame is filled by the face of a person or a detail of a face. Close-ups may also show details of an object or place.

code in semiotics, a system or set of rules that shapes how signs can be used, and therefore how meanings can be made and understood.

commercial television television funded by the sale of advertising time or sponsorship of programmes.

commissioning the UK process through which programmes are pitched, developed and selected for funding and broadcast. The US television industry's structure will see a similar process of a programme being ‘picked up’ or ‘greenlit’ by a network or streaming service.

commodity a raw material or product whose economic value is established by market price rather than the intrinsic qualities or usefulness of the material or product itself.

connotations the term used in semiotic analysis for the meanings that are associated with a particular sign or combination of signs.

conventions the frameworks and procedures used to make or interpret texts.

convergence the process whereby previously separate media technologies merge together. For example, a mobile phone can now be used to take calls, send messages, take photos, browse the internet, store and stream video content and music.

copyright the legal right of ownership over written, visual or aural material, including the prohibition on copying this material without permission from its owner.

cultural discount theory that argues that a cultural product from one country can struggle to connect with audiences in other countries, as they have less familiarity with its styles, values, institutions, ideologies and cultural representations.

cultural imperialism the critical argument that powerful nations and regions (especially those of the Western world) dominate less developed nations and regions by exporting values and ideologies.

Cultural Studies the academic discipline devoted to studying culture, involving work on texts, institutions, audiences and economic contexts.

culture the shared attitudes, ways of life and assumptions of a group of people.

cut the moment at which one camera shot ceases and another begins, where no transitional visual effect (such as a fade or a dissolve) is used.

cutaway in fictional dialogue or interviews, shots that do not include people speaking. Cutaways often consist of details of the setting or of interviewees (such as hands).

demography the study of population, and the groupings of people (demographic groups) within the whole population.

denotation in semiotics, the function of signs to portray or refer to something in the real world.

deregulation the removal of legal restrictions or guidelines that regulate the economics of the television industry or the standards which programmes must adhere to.

diegesis the telling of events as narrative. Diegetic sound is sound emanating from the represented environment, and extra-diegetic sound comes from outside that environment.

digital media player (or streaming device) small internet-connected device attached to a television that accesses a range of streaming platforms in app form.

digital television television pictures and sound encoded into the ones and zeros of electronic data. Digital signals can also be sent back down cables by viewers, making possible interaction with television programmes.

director the person responsible for the creative process of turning a script or idea into a finished programme, by working with a technical crew, performers and an editor.

discourse a particular use of language for a certain purpose in a certain context (such as academic discourse or poetic discourse), and similarly in television, a particular usage of television's audio-visual 'language' (news programme discourse or nature documentary discourse, for instance).

documentary a form aiming to record actual events, often with an explanatory purpose or to analyse and debate an issue.

docusoap a television form combining documentary's depiction of non-actors in ordinary situations with soap opera's continuing narratives about selected characters.

dolly a wheeled camera platform. A 'dolly shot' is a camera shot where the camera is moved forward or back using this platform.

drama-documentary a television form combining dramatised storytelling with the 'objective' informational techniques of documentary. Abbreviated as 'dramadoc' or 'docudrama'.

dubbing replacing the original speech in a programme, advertisement, etc. with speech added later, often to translate speech in a foreign language.

DVR programmable machine connected to a television that records and plays back television from a hard drive.

effects measurable outcomes produced by watching television, such as becoming more violent or adopting a certain opinion.

ethnicity membership of a group with a specific identity based on a sense of belonging, such as British Asian or Italian-American, for example.

ethnography the detailed study of how people live, conducted by observing behaviour and talking to selected individuals about their attitudes and activities.

fan culture the activities of groups of fans, as distinct from 'ordinary' viewers.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) the government body in the USA which regulates the operations and output of television companies and other broadcasters.

feminism the political and theoretical investment in and exploration of women's place in society and culture, focused on a goal of equality.

flashback a television sequence marked as representing events that happened in a time previous to the programme's present.

flow the ways in which programmes, advertisements, etc. follow one another in an unbroken sequence across the day or part of the day, and the experience of watching the sequence of programmes, advertisements, trailers, etc.

focus groups small groups of selected people representing larger social groupings such as people of a certain age group, gender or economic status, who take part in discussions about a topic chosen for investigation.

format the blueprint for a programme, including its setting, main characters, genre, form and main themes.

franchise the right to broadcast on the terrestrial ITV channel for a set number of years, secured by paying a fee to government.

Frankfurt School a group of theorists in the mid-twentieth century who worked on theories of contemporary culture from a Marxist perspective.

Key members, notably Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, left Nazi Germany in the 1930s to work abroad.

free market a television marketplace where factors such as quotas and regulations do not restrict the free operation of economic 'laws' of supply and demand.

free-to-air television programming for which viewers make no direct payment.

gatekeepers the critical term used for the people and institutions (such as television commissioning producers, or regulatory bodies) who control access to television broadcasting.

gender the social and cultural division of people into masculine, feminine or non-binary individuals. This is different from sex, which refers to the biological difference between male and female bodies.

genre a kind or type of programme. Programmes of the same genre have shared characteristics.

globalisation the process whereby ownership of television institutions in different nations and regions is concentrated in the hands of international corporations, and whereby programmes and formats are traded between institutions around the world.

glocalisation when a globally distributed product, company or programme is adjusted to fit a local market.

green-screen shooting action against a green background so that images from another source can be pasted in to replace the green background.

hegemony a term deriving from Marxist theories of society, meaning a situation where different social classes or groups are persuaded to consent to a political order that may be contrary to their benefit.

horizontal integration the control by a media corporation of companies from different media forms, such as television, film, digital and music.

iconic sign in semiotics, a sign which resembles its referent. Photographs, for example, contain iconic signs resembling the objects they represent.

ident a short sequence containing a channel or streaming platform's logo (or that of a programming strand) which appears before a programme, reminding the viewer where they are watching it. A key part of communicating brand identity.

identification a term deriving from psychoanalytic theories of cinema, which describes the viewer's conscious or unconscious wish to take the place of someone or something in a television text.

ideology the set of beliefs, attitudes and assumptions arising from the economic and class divisions in a culture, underlying the ways of life accepted as normal in that culture.

independent production company businesses making television programmes which can be sold to television networks that transmit and distribute them.

Independent Television Authority (ITA) the first official body set up to regulate commercial television in Britain.

interface the visual frame through which a streaming platform organises and promotes its programming.

intertextuality how one text draws on the meanings of another by referring to it, by allusion, quotation or parody, for example.

licence fee an annual payment required to watch or record programmes on a TV, computer or other device as they are broadcast, as well as download or watch BBC programmes on iPlayer. The main source of income for the BBC.

linear television broadcast on a channel in a continuous flow, according to a prescribed schedule.

location any place in which television images are shot, except inside a television studio.

long shot a camera shot taking in the whole body of a performer, or more generally a shot with a wide field of vision.

long take an imprecise term denoting a longer than usual uninterrupted camera shot.

Marxism the political and economic theories associated with the German nineteenth-century theorist Karl Marx, who described and critiqued capitalist societies and proposed Communism as a revolutionary alternative.

media conglomerate a large media company that owns businesses in different media. It increases its size through mergers with and acquisition of other companies.

media imperialism the critical argument that powerful nations and cultures (especially the USA) exert control over other nations and cultures through the media products they export.

media literacy the skills and competence that viewers learn in order to understand easily the audio-visual ‘languages’ of media texts.

melodrama a form of drama characterised by heightened performance styles, a focus on reversals of fortune and intense emotional reactions to events.

merchandising the sale of products associated with a television programme, such as toys, books or clothing.

metonymy the substitution of one thing for another, either because one is part of the other or because one is connected with the other. For example, ‘the Crown’ can be a metonym for the British state.

mise-en-scène literally meaning ‘putting on stage’, all the elements of a shot or sequence that contribute to its meanings, such as lighting, camera position and setting.

monopoly control over the provision of a service or product by one institution or business.

multi-camera set up arranges action and studio space in a proscenium arch style towards multiple cameras. These cameras are recording at the same time.

narration the process of telling a story through image and sound. Narration can also refer to the spoken text accompanying television images.

narrative an ordered sequence of images and sound that tells a fictional or factual story.

naturalism originally having a very specific meaning in literature and drama, this term is now used more loosely to denote television fiction that adopts realistic conventions of character portrayal, linear cause and effect narrative, and a consistent and recognisable fictional world.

negotiated reading a viewer interpretation of a television text where the viewer understands meaning in relation to his or her own knowledge and experience, rather than simply accepting the meaning proposed by the text.

neoliberalism ideology that positions personal responsibility over collective support, redefining citizens as consumers. Privatisation and the competition of the marketplace are privileged as a response to economic, political and social issues, rather than state support and regulation.

network a television institution that transmits programmes through local or regional broadcasting stations that are owned by or affiliated to that institution.

news value the degree of significance attributed to a news story, where items with high news value are deemed most significant to the audience.

niche audiences particular groups of viewers defined by age group, gender or economic status, for example, who may be the target audience for a programme.

non-linear television television consumed outside of its scheduled broadcasts, either via DVRs or on-demand platforms.

observational documentary a documentary form in which the programme-maker aims to observe neutrally what would have happened even if they had not been present.

Ofcom the Office of Communications, a government body responsible for regulating television and other communications media in Britain.

off-line editing the first stage of editing a completed programme, where the sequence of shots, sounds and music is established.

online editing the final stage of editing a completed programme, where effects are added, colour grading and sound mixing takes place, and a high-quality version of the programme is produced.

outside broadcast the television transmission of outdoor events such as sport or ceremonial occasions, using equipment set up in advance for the purpose. Abbreviated as OB.

outsourcing obtaining services from an independent business rather than from within a television institution, usually as a means of cutting costs.

pan a shot where the camera is turned to the left or turned to the right. The term derives from the word 'panorama', suggesting the wide visual field that a pan can reveal.

pan-and-scan capturing a section of an image and enlarging it to fill the television.

'Peak TV' industry term coined by US television executive John Landgraf to refer to the huge amount of scripted series produced by network, cable and streaming in the US in the second half of the 2010s.

people meter a device resembling a television remote control, used in sample households to monitor what viewers watch. Viewers record which channels they watch and for how long.

period drama television fiction set in the past, most often the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

personalities people appearing on television who are recognised by audiences as celebrities with a media image and public status beyond the role they play in a particular programme.

pitch a very short written or spoken outline for a programme, perhaps only a few sentences, often used to persuade a commissioning executive to commission the programme.

point of view shot a camera shot where the camera is placed in, or close to, the position from where a previously seen character might look.

polysemia the quality of having multiple meanings at the same time. Texts like this are called 'polysemic'.

popular culture the texts created by ordinary people (as opposed to an elite group) or created for them, and the ways these are used.

postmodernism the most recent phase of capitalist culture, the aesthetic forms and styles associated with it, and the theoretical approaches developed to understand it.

preferred reading an interpretation of a text that seems to be the one most encouraged by the text, the 'correct' interpretation.

prestige TV critical and industry term to describe high-budget flagship drama and comedy. Term aims to remove hierarchical/judgemental connotations of the term 'quality television'.

prime time the part of a day's television schedule when the greatest number of viewers may be watching, normally the mid-evening period.

private sphere the domestic world of the home, family and personal life.

privatisation the policy of placing industries or institutions in the hands of privately owned businesses, rather than state ownership.

producer the person working for a television institution who is responsible for the budget, planning and making of a television programme or series of programmes.

production values the level of investment in a television production, such as the amount spent on costumes, props, effects and sets.

progressive encouraging positive change or progress, usually implying progress towards fairer and more equal ways of organising society.

psychoanalysis the study of human mental life, including not only conscious thoughts, wishes and fears but also unconscious ones. Psychoanalysis is an analytical and theoretical set of ideas as well as a therapeutic treatment.

public service in television, the provision of a mix of programmes that inform, educate and entertain in ways that encourage the betterment of audiences and society in general.

public sphere the world of politics, economic affairs and national and international events, as opposed to the 'private sphere' of domestic life.

public television television funded by government or by private supporters, rather than solely by advertising.

quality in television, kinds of programmes that are perceived as more expensively produced and more culturally worthwhile than other programmes. The term can create cultural and gendered hierarchies that suggest television is otherwise 'low culture'.

quota a proportion of television programming, such as a proportion of programmes made in a particular nation.

ratings the number of viewers estimated to have watched certain programmes, as compared to the numbers watching other programmes.

realism the aim for representations to reproduce reality faithfully, and the ways this is done.

reality TV programmes where the unscripted behaviour of 'ordinary people' is the focus of interest.

reflexivity a text's reflection on its own status as a text, for example drawing attention to generic conventions, or revealing the technologies used to make a programme.

register a term in the study of language for the kinds of speech or writing used to represent a particular kind of idea or to address a certain audience.

regulation the control of television institutions by laws, codes of practice or guidelines.

resistance the ways in which audiences make meaning from television programmes that is counter to the meanings that are thought to be intended, or that are discovered by close analysis.

Royal Charter sets out the BBC's Object, Mission and Public Purposes. Renewed every 10 years after a process of negotiation with the current government.

rule of thirds guideline that divides image into thirds and ninths, allowing compositions to be well-balanced, often the subject is placed to the left or right

satellite television television signals beamed from a ground transmitter to a stationary satellite that broadcasts the signal to a specific area (called the 'footprint') below it.

satire a mode of critical commentary about society or an aspect of it, using humour to attack people or ideas.

schedule the arrangement of programmes, advertisements and other material into a sequential order on linear television, within a certain period of time, such as an evening, day or week.

semiotics the study of signs and their meanings, initially developed for the study of spoken language, and now used also to study the visual and aural 'languages' of other media such as television.

serial a television form where a developing narrative unfolds across a sequence of separate episodes.

series a television form where each programme in the series has a different story or topic, though settings, main characters or performers remain the same.

set-top box the electronic decoding equipment connected to home television sets that allows access to digital television signals and the internet.

shooting ratio the number of minutes of film used to film a scene or complete programme as compared to the screen-time of the finished scene or programme.

shot-reverse-shot the convention of alternating a shot of one character and a shot of another character in a scene, producing a back-and-forth movement which represents their interaction visually.

sign in semiotics, something which communicates meaning, such as a word, an image or a sound.

showrunner the writer-producer in charge of the day-to-day running of a television programme, who is also tasked with the shaping and maintaining of that programme's 'voice'.

slot the position in a television schedule where a programme is shown.

soap opera a continuing drama serial involving a large number of characters in a specific location, focusing on relationships, emotions and reversals of fortune.

sociology the academic study of society, aiming to describe and explain aspects of life in that society.

spectacle a fascinating image which draws attention to its immediate surface meanings and offers visual pleasure for its own sake.

spin-off a product, television programme, book, etc. that is created to exploit the reputation, meaning or commercial success of a previous one, often in a different medium from the original.

sponsorship the funding of programmes or channels by businesses, whose name is usually prominently displayed in the programme or channel as a means of advertising.

status quo a Latin term meaning the ways that culture and society are currently organised.

storyboard a sequence of drawn images showing the shots to be used in a programme.

strand a linked series of programmes, sharing a common title.

streaming platform company that provides video on-demand via the internet, can be subscription-based or supported by advertising or a licence fee e.g. Disney+, BBC iPlayer.

structure of feeling the assumptions, attitudes and ideas prevalent in a society, arising from the ideologies underpinning that society.

subject in psychoanalysis, the term for the individual self whose identity has both conscious and unconscious components.

subscription payment to a television broadcaster or streaming platform in exchange for the opportunity to view programmes on certain channels that are otherwise blocked.

subtitle written text appearing on the television screen, normally to translate speech in a foreign language.

symbolic sign in semiotics, a sign which is connected arbitrarily to its referent rather than because the sign resembles its referent. For example a photograph of a cat resembles it, whereas the word 'cat' does not: the word is a symbolic sign.

syndication the sale of programmes to US cable television and to regional television broadcasters to transmit within their territory.

syntagm in semiotics, a linked sequence of signs existing at a certain point in time. Written or spoken sentences, or television sequences, are examples of syntagms.

taste and decency conformity to the standards of good taste and acceptable language and behaviour represented on television, as required by regulations.

teaser a very short television sequence advertising a forthcoming programme, often puzzling or teasing to viewers because it contains little information and encourages curiosity and interest.

telenovela a fictional continuing melodrama on television that lasts for a specific number of episodes. Telenovelas are particularly associated with South American television.

terrestrial broadcasting from a ground-based transmission system, as opposed to broadcasting via satellite.

text an object such as a television programme, film or poem, considered as a network of meaningful signs that can be analysed and interpreted.

textual analysis a critical approach which seeks to understand a television text's meanings by undertaking detailed analysis of its image and sound components, and the relationships between those components.

title sequence the sequence at the opening of a television programme in which the programme title and performers' names may appear along with other information, accompanied by images, sound and music introducing the programme.

tracking shot a camera shot where the camera is moved along (often on a miniature railway track) parallel to a moving subject of the shot while photographing it.

trailer a short television sequence advertising a forthcoming programme, usually containing selected 'highlights' from the programme.

treatment a short, written outline for a programme, usually written for a commissioning executive to read, specifying how the programme will tell its story or address its subject.

uses and gratifications a theoretical approach that assumes people engage in an activity because it provides them with a benefit of some kind.

variety programmes entertainment programmes containing a mix of material such as songs and comedy sketches.

VCR programmable machine connected to a television that played and recorded onto video cassettes.

vertical integration the control by media institutions of all levels of a business, from the production of products to their distribution and means of reception.

voice-over speech accompanying visual images but not presumed to derive from the same place or time as the images.

watershed the time in the day (conventionally 9pm) after which programmes with content that may disturb children can be shown.

whip-pan a very rapid panning shot from one point to another.

Index

180-degree rule 57–8, 192
24 Hours in A&E 201–4

ABC 93, 95, 115, 120, 124, 128–30, 132, 238, 291
ABC Family 246–7
actuality footage 138, 166–8, 177
Adorno, Theodor 213
advertising 75, 95, 114–17, 120, 122–3, 125, 136, 154, 209–10, 212, 239, 246; -funded streaming 15, 124, 199–201; -funded television 26, 99–100, 128, 130, 234; junk-food 118–19
aesthetics 54, 62, 132, 159, 170, 177, 199, 232, 237, 268–9, 274, 280, 282, 285
African-American *see* Black
algorithm 4, 27, 199, 201, 224, 227–8, 274
All4 18, 29, 32, 124, 127, 210
Allen, Robert 164
Althusser, Louis 165
amateur 14–15, 64–5, 124, 158, 182, 191, 198–9, 240
Amazon Prime Video 9, 19, 29, 33, 75, 115, 124, 126, 131, 188, 198, 225, 249, 257, 293, 297–30
AMC 77, 126, 245, 262, 268, 283, 286–7
The Americans 77, 240–1, 296
analogue television 13, 196
Ang, Ien 154, 208
animated series 76, 118, 150–4, 283
Annan Committee 100
anthology drama 72, 262
app 127, 149, 211, 263
Apple TV+ 124–5, 227, 297
archive 50, 60, 89–92, 159–60, 172–3, 186–7, 221
Asia 132, 258; East Asia 124, 256, 259, 263, 272–4
Attenborough, David 282
audience 26–9, 297–229; active 27–9, 212–15, 222; fragmented 116, 209, 283; global 257–8, 260–1, 293, 297; history 30–2, 213–14; mass 3, 30, 115, 213, 268, 283; measuring 209, 211–13; niche 13, 25, 94, 108, 122, 199, 210, 212, 287, 296; quality 283–7, 291, 293; research 4–5, 13, 217–20; streaming 224–8; targeting 13, 27, 33, 76, 78, 93, 107–10, 115, 122–4, 130, 132, 149, 150, 179, 177, 187, 212–13, 227, 237–8, 244, 247, 265–6, 270, 280, 282–3, 286, 291, 299
aural signs 38, 168
authorship 19–20, 55, 80, 184, 186, 249, 266, 281, 297–9, 293, 299

back lighting 48
Baird, John Logie 93–5
Barker, Chris 256
Barthes, Roland 72
BBC (British Broadcasting Company); archive 90, 92, 103, 117, 126–8, 197; commissioners 103, 117; funding 91, 115–17 209; history 93, 95, 99–108; public service remit 32, 95, 117, 240, 283; Royal Charter 19, 117; Studios 116, 263
BBC1 107, 114, 117, 119, 127, 187, 212
BBC2 93, 100, 108, 117, 119
BBC iPlayer 26, 29, 32–3, 70, 114–15, 117, 124, 126–8, 212, 225
BBC Three 33, 108, 122, 174, 243
Beltran, Mary 237
Benjamin, Walter 161
best boy 195
The Big Bang Theory 120–1, 126, 146–7, 235–6
Big Brother 14, 148–9, 159, 201, 263
Big Mouth 150–4
binge watching 3, 78, 127, 217, 225, 287
Bleak House 191
Black 48, 79–83, 130, 223, 233–4, 238–9, 244, 247, 249–51, 296; Black British 100, 233, 238–9, 248; *see also* people of colour
black-ish 130, 146

Born, Georgina 116
brand identity 18, 107–8, 119–20, 122–123, 238, 247–8, 287, 296–7
Brazil 259, 264, 268
Breaking Bad 72, 77, 126, 245, 268, 287, 298
Brideshead Revisited 284
British Asian 100, 202, 248
Britishness 41, 240
British youth television 107–10, 249, 265
broadband 13, 93–4, 114–15, 119, 121, 124, 191, 199, 267
Broadcasters Audience Research Bureau (BARB) 198, 209, 211–13, 217, 227–8, 257
Broadcasting Act 100, 247
Brooklyn Nine-Nine 42–3, 126, 147
Brookside 100–1, 108
Brown, Ivor 31–2
Brunsdon, Charlotte 163, 280, 284, 297
budget 33, 109, 117, 125, 182–3, 185, 187–8, 190–1, 195–6, 199, 204, 210, 221, 245–6, 274, 290–1, 293, 296; high-budget 19, 42, 62, 76, 123, 126, 189, 260–1, 268, 280, 282, 287–8, 292, 294, 297, 299
Buffy the Vampire Slayer 137, 141, 221
Butler, Jeremy 41

cable and satellite broadcasting 16, 26, 91, 93, 114–15, 124, 224–5, 268
Call the Midwife 77, 143, 262
camera: HD 191, 196, 280, 294, 296; movement 49, 52–3, 192, 195, 285, 288; operators 47, 52–3, 182, 184, 192, 194–5, 203–4, 282; UHD 191
Canada 259, 262, 268
Canal+ 189, 262
capitalism 239–40, 258–9, 275
Casualty 143, 193
catch-up services 33, 127
Caughie, John 91, 174
CBS 93, 95, 115, 120–1, 125–6
Censorship 13, 118
Channel 4 16, 29, 33, 103, 108, 117, 119, 121, 228, 238; brand identity 56, 247–8; diversity 238–9, 247; funding 26, 114, 116, 210; history 100–1; public service remit 126, 240, 247
Channel 5 26, 33, 114, 116
channel ident *see* idents
Chernobyl 175–7
Chewing Gum 54, 147, 186, 246, 249–51, 289
children's television 54, 107, 116–19, 150, 154, 283, 293
China 96, 272
The Circle 149, 263–4
citizenship 98, 116
CITV 119
class 28, 102, 149, 162, 198, 215, 217, 232–3, 237, 240, 243–5, 270, 291–2; middle-class 98, 106, 237, 243, 246, 249–50, 268, 284, 298, 300; working-class 42, 55, 108, 143, 163, 201, 243, 249–51, 262
classic network system 96, 115, 128, 132, 241, 285
close-up 21, 40, 50–3, 63–7, 194, 197, 204, 285
CNN 94, 96, 271
codes 39–43, 45, 71, 147, 158–60, 162, 168, 243, 284
Coel, Michaela 186, 249–51, 289
colour 44, 46, 48–9, 100, 191, 288, 299; colour-grading 49, 182, 196–7, 291–2
colourblind casting 238
Comcast 13, 120, 267
comedy 45, 54, 55, 64, 79, 84, 108–9, 144–7, 150–4, 202, 235–6, 242, 249–51, 265, 273, 283, 298–9; gender 147, 246; race 250–1
commercial television 4, 18, 24, 26, 75, 106, 114, 116, 118–19, 199, 209–11, 256; history 96, 99–101
commissioning 29, 100–1, 103, 116–17, 119, 126, 132, 182–7, 198, 212, 228, 238–9, 244–5, 247, 297
Communications Act 117
computer generated imaging (CGI) 39–40, 288, 294, 296
conglomerate 124, 272; conglomeration 121, 129; media conglomerate 94, 114, 120–1, 125, 128–30, 224, 256, 259, 267
content analysis 236
convergence 23, 161, 294
co-production 17, 117, 126–7, 189–90, 261–2
copyright 15, 184
Corner, John 171
Coronation Street 33, 92, 101, 104–7, 141, 163–4, 210
coronavirus 5, 29, 55, 130, 216, 238, 275
corporations 12, 88, 94–5, 96, 97, 129, 257–8, 267, 269
costume 43–4, 182, 195, 263, 286
crime drama 16, 76, 92, 245, 261
cultural affinity 269, 273
cultural capital 215, 221, 222, 234
cultural discount 262–3, 266, 268, 275
cultural forum 241–2
cultural imperialism 258–60, 267
cultural proximity 269, 272
cultural studies 2, 25

Dallas 105, 164, 258
Damilola: Our Loved Boy 175–7
Dancing with the Stars 129, 263
data 4, 27, 127, 139, 161, 191, 196, 198, 208–9, 211–13, 224–8, 237, 257
Davies, Russell T. 293–4
de Saussure, Ferdinand 38
Deaf 232–3
decency *see* taste/decency
DEF II 108
democracy 98, 242
demographics 107, 122–4, 129, 210, 227–8, 237, 243–4, 247, 268, 283
Derry Girls 145–6, 151
Desperate Housewives 129–30
Desus & Mero 45–6
Development 183–5
digital television 5, 13, 26, 32, 91, 94, 108, 110, 115, 124, 191, 249, 295
direct address 54, 72, 200, 249–50
director 19, 50, 60, 101–3, 169–70, 174, 182–6, 188, 190, 194, 196–8, 201, 203–4, 238, 245–7, 273, 289–90
disability 232, 237
Discovery 91, 120, 189; Discovery+ 124–5, 226
Disney 12, 120, 128–32, 150; Disney+ 29, 121, 124–5, 128, 130–2, 150, 191, 198, 223, 227, 257, 267, 293
distribution 15, 88, 93, 95–6, 114, 119, 123–4, 128–9, 190, 198, 256–7, 259, 265, 267–8, 274
diversity 48, 116, 146, 235, 237–9, 245–6; branded diversity 246–8
Doctor Who 29, 39, 140, 185, 221, 223–4, 290, 293–6
docudramas 158, 174–7, 297
documentaries 14, 33, 50, 53, 55, 102, 108, 138, 148, 159–60, 162, 169–75, 192, 228; fixed-rig 201–4; interview 54, 172, 194; nature 190, 282; observational 148, 169, 285; production 184–7, 196–7
docusoap 148–9, 158, 201, 213
drama-documentaries *see* docudramas
dubbing 16, 54, 198, 259, 268–9, 272, 275
Dunleavy, Trisha 72, 77, 287, 292–3, 297–8
DVD 3, 77, 89, 121, 224, 267, 286–7, 295
DVR (digital video recorder) 3–4, 13, 18, 94, 139, 225

E4 108, 122, 126, 249
EastEnders 33, 42, 76, 141, 163–5, 192, 233
Ebbrecht, Tobias 175
editing 14, 41, 56–62, 64, 161, 169, 171–2, 184, 187, 192–4, 196–9, 204, 215, 285, 295; continuity editing 57–8, 62, 213, 291
Élite 42, 268
Ellis, John 25, 75, 93, 166, 242
emotional realism 154, 163–4
encoding–decoding model 214–15
ER 53, 142–3, 283–5, 287, 300
ethnicity 232, 237, 239, 243
ethnography 28, 148, 218
Europe 12, 97, 106, 132, 189, 265, 268, 270
exhibition 114, 123, 129, 267, 268
export 4, 16–17, 19, 24, 54, 89, 91, 101, 258–62, 265, 268, 272–4, 284, 293, 296

Facebook 33, 78, 265–7
factual television 108, 138, 147–8, 158–60, 162, 169, 172, 174–5, 184–7, 192, 261
The Family 201–2
Famous, Rich and Homeless 21–2
fans 78, 220–4, 265, 272, 274
Federal Communications Commission (FCC) 95, 123, 287
femininity 234, 244, 246, 249, 251
feminism 27–8, 218, 270, 296, 298
Feuer, Jane 282
Film Studies 2, 20, 38, 41, 280
Fiske, John 28, 70, 284
flashback 60, 61–62, 73, 147, 196
Fleabag 54, 72, 246, 249, 251
flow 3–4, 18–19, 25, 70, 78, 89, 108, 139, 217, 224–6, 286–7; global 256, 259, 270, 272, 275
focus groups 27, 90, 213, 219–20
formats 4, 15, 17, 138, 140, 148–9, 213, 222, 290; scripted trade 265–7; un-scripted trade 262–4, 272
The Fosters 247
Fothergill, Alistair 282
France 17, 189, 261–2, 264, 266, 270–1
Frankfurt School 213
free-to-air television 91, 94, 108, 124, 210, 287
Friday Night Dinner 77, 146
Friends 14, 42, 49, 76, 120, 121, 126, 146
Frith, Simon 282
Fuller, Jennifer 246
FX 77, 245, 262, 283, 287, 291, 296–7

gaffers 195
Game of Thrones 24, 39, 62, 73, 77, 188, 288, 296
game shows 76, 104–5
gatekeepers 245
Gates, Raquel 244

gender 28, 54, 71, 101, 141, 146–7, 162, 213, 215, 223, 232–3, 234, 239–40, 243–4, 249, 289, 292, 298
genre 135–55; boundaries 89, 137–40; conventions 47, 136–7, 150, 154; hybridity 137–8, 147; repetition and innovation 136, 142, 151
Germany 17, 93, 97, 266–7
Giddens, Anthony 271
Gilmore Girls 229
Girls 246, 251
Global South 169, 259, 270
globalisation 17, 256–8, 260, 269–70, 270
glocalisation 17
Going Out 108
'golden age' 101–2, 123, 245, 281, 287
Google 15, 124, 265–6
Gourmet Makes 62–8
graphics 41, 64, 138, 196
Gray, Jonathan 234–6
The Great British Bake Off 46–7, 77, 149, 212, 224, 240, 257
Grenfell 159–60, 169–73
Grey's Anatomy 56, 73–4, 77, 129–30, 142–4, 238, 240
Grips 195
Groening, Matt 150
Grossberg, Lawrence 25
The Grove Family 106

Hall, Stuart 102, 214–15, 235, 240
Hallyu *see* Korean wave
handheld camera 53, 63, 65, 67, 161
The Handmaid's Tale 44, 49, 72
Happy Valley 49, 186, 289
HBO 56, 77, 79–80, 115, 123, 245, 261–2, 283–292, 296
HBO Max 29, 121, 124–6, 267
High on the Hog 160, 170–3
Hill, Annette 149
The Hills 122, 149, 244, 291
Hollyoaks 108, 141, 239
horizontal integration 119, 121, 129, 132

iconic sign 39
identification 71, 144, 174, 240–2
identity 18, 27, 71, 102, 122–3, 164, 218, 220–1, 223, 232–7, 239–4, 247
idents 18, 56, 108, 122, 139
ideology 140, 160, 165, 209, 239–42, 247, 257
I May Destroy You 48, 51, 127–8, 186, 233–4, 250–1, 289
immediacy 3, 21, 43, 53, 79, 138, 158, 161, 166, 177, 200, 224, 227, 281
The Inbetweeners 109, 145, 151, 250–1, 265
independent production companies 100–1, 103, 116–17, 119, 121, 189, 247, 256, 263
Insecure 48, 51, 79–84, 246, 249, 251
Instagram 33, 78
interface 4, 119, 124, 136, 139, 198, 224–8
Internet *see* broadband
intertextuality 138
iPlayer 26, 29, 32–3, 70, 114–15, 117, 124, 126–8, 212, 225–6
It's Okay to Not Be Okay 42, 274
iTunes 94, 124–5
ITV 22, 24, 92, 104, 107, 114, 116, 119, 212, 247, 263; funding 26, 210; history 99–100, 106
ITV2 108, 119, 210
ITVX 116, 119, 124, 127, 210

Jameson, Fredric 258
Japan 153, 221, 259, 264, 268, 270, 272–3
Jenkins, Henry 222
Johnson, Catherine 5, 124, 226, 248, 295

Katz, Elihu 258
Killing Eve 44, 127–8
Kim, Youna 272–4
Klein, Amanda Ann 122, 243
Knox, Simone 54, 155, 268
Korean drama 76, 221, 259, 272–5
Korean wave 272–3

Lacan, Jacques 165
Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County 122, 149, 213
Late Night with Seth Myers 45
Latin America 76, 256, 259, 268–9, 274
Law & Order: Special Victims Unit 43, 77
legitimation 9, 280, 291–2
licence fee 99, 114–17, 124, 127, 209
Liebes, Tamar 258–9
lifestyle television 20, 124, 148–9, 187, 199–200, 243
light entertainment 14–15, 33, 50, 53, 55–6, 90, 106, 119, 145, 148, 263
lighting 14, 40, 42, 46–8, 63, 147, 169, 176, 184, 191, 195, 286–7
limited series 76, 290
linear television 4–5, 18, 29, 33, 115, 131, 139, 224–8, 271, 275, 297
Line of Duty 73, 212
listing magazines 90
liveness 3, 30, 33, 43, 63, 93, 144, 146, 166, 225, 227
live television 5, 21, 26, 33, 56, 114–15, 159, 166, 225, 271
Lobato, Ramon 260, 268, 270

location filming 41, 43, 46, 49, 63, 101, 141, 149, 167, 182, 190, 192, 194–5, 204, 237, 263, 294, 297, 299
London 30, 93, 99, 102, 143, 160, 164–5, 175, 233, 237, 249, 251, 295
long shot 22, 49, 58, 64, 67, 194, 197, 295
long take 62, 193–4, 300
Lost 56, 78, 124, 129–30, 132
Love Island 65, 73, 119, 120, 149, 210–11
Lury, Karen 42, 46

Made in Chelsea 149, 213, 291
Mad Men 77, 141, 245, 286–7, 298–9
The Mandalorian 72–3, 131
Marconi EMI 93
The Marvelous Mrs Maisel 53, 193, 298–300
Marxism 102, 258
masculinity 55, 235–6, 245, 274
Master of None 50
Masterpiece 19, 262
media imperialism *see* cultural imperialism
medical drama 53, 142–4
medium shot 50, 53, 64–5, 67, 300
melodrama 164, 273, 292
merchandising 50, 190, 210, 224, 260, 283, 286, 295
metonymy 173
Mexico 259, 268
Middle East 169, 234, 269, 274
minority audiences 100, 247
mise-en-scène 41, 46, 48–9, 63, 149, 195, 213, 236, 281–2, 297, 299
Mittell, Jason 137, 154, 286
mobile phones 13–14, 32, 39, 161, 167, 294
Moffat, Steven 294–6
monopoly 24, 95, 99
Morgan, Peter 297
Morley, David 215
Moseley, Rachel 108
MTV 94, 96, 108, 122–3, 148–9, 243, 265
Mullan, Bob 212
multi-camera set up 15, 42, 46, 55, 58, 144, 146–7, 195, 281, 287, 294
multi-channel television 77, 91, 116
Murdoch, Graham 19
Murdoch, Rupert 93
music 38–40, 53, 56, 73, 82, 102, 138, 182, 190, 192, 195–8, 217, 266, 273, 281, 285
music programme 107–9
Muslim 234, 250, 269
My Brilliant Friend 42
My Love from the Star 273

narration 53, 55, 60, 73, 88, 171–22, 202
narrative 69–85; narrative arc 74, 77, 80–2, 142, 202; narrative structure 3, 70, 75, 81, 136, 142, 148, 154, 164, 174, 185, 214, 222, 263, 280, 284
Nationwide 215
Nazis 97
NBC 93, 95, 115, 120–1, 124, 126, 228, 267–8, 285; NBC Universal 125
Neale, Steve 137–8
negotiated readings 214–15, 222
Nelson, Robin 75, 281
neoliberalism 239
Netflix 19, 29, 33, 56, 115, 119, 121, 124–7, 130–1, 188–9, 198, 220, 226–8, 245, 247, 257–8, 261, 263–4, 267–9, 274–5, 287, 291, 297
Netherlands 263, 266
network television 56, 73–5, 77, 130, 142, 241, 283, 285, 287, 293
Never Have I Ever 55
news 117, 139, 148, 159, 161, 166–9, 175, 186, 285; liveness 166–9, 271; news value 136, 167; programme 90, 101, 116, 128, 138, 166–9, 215–17
New York 43, 55, 63, 76, 95, 129–30, 132, 148, 158, 296, 298–300
newspapers 14, 17, 26, 93, 129, 136, 163, 166, 187
non-linear television 3, 114, 127, 196, 224–6
Normal People 33, 51, 127–8
Norway 78, 221, 242, 265–7
NRK 78, 242, 265

Ofcom 32, 116–19, 255
The Office 124, 126, 145–6, 236, 265
Olympic Games 70, 97, 159
on-demand 18, 29–30, 78, 94, 114–15, 117, 120, 124, 127, 139, 224–7
One Born Every Minute 201–2
The Only Way is Essex 149, 213
othering 232–5, 251
outside broadcasts 30, 103, 195

Paget, Derek 174
pan 49, 53
Parks and Recreation 73, 146, 241–2
PBS 19, 26, 190, 262
Peak TV 19, 29, 125, 187, 189, 261–2, 293, 296
Peep Show 52, 77
People Just Do Nothing 236
people meter 211
people of colour 46, 130, 237–239, 246, 296
pilot 56, 129, 184, 190, 213, 246, 285, 289–90

pitch 183, 185, 233
Planet Earth 191, 260, 282
plastic representation 237–9
plot 42, 71, 73–83
point of view 23, 54, 71, 137, 152, 162, 169–71, 192, 194, 197, 236, 240, 294
politics 22, 27, 100, 139, 167, 202, 241, 244, 248, 267, 273, 297
popular culture 12, 91, 137, 147, 155, 163, 220, 223, 282–4, 290, 299
post-production 49, 55–7, 116, 147, 161, 182, 184, 191, 196–8, 288, 291
preferred readings 169, 212, 214–15, 222
pre-production 182, 185–90
prestige TV 123, 183, 189, 245, 249, 275, 280–1, 286–92, 298–300
prime-time 77, 149, 204, 213, 233, 239, 258, 263, 288, 291, 293
private sphere 15, 27, 175
producers 19, 25, 38, 73, 90, 101–3, 118, 121, 137–8, 161, 165, 167, 182–7, 190, 195–6, 200–1, 204, 219, 224, 237, 259, 263, 269, 290, 295
production 191–6
propaganda 97
psychoanalytic theory 71, 165
public service broadcasting 4, 19, 23, 24, 29–30, 32, 43, 78, 95, 97, 99–100, 103, 108, 114–19, 126–7, 163–4, 166, 169, 232, 239–40, 242, 247–8, 265, 267, 283–4, 296
public sphere 21, 175

qualitative research 208, 217, 219–20
quality TV 245, 280–5, 287, 291
quantitative methods 208, 236
queer 223, 233, 247, 297

race 101, 223, 232–3, 237–46, 251
Radio 24, 30, 93, 95, 99, 117, 128–9, 136
Rae, Issa 79, 251
ratings 27, 89, 130, 198, 209, 211–13, 257
realism 39, 102, 149, 158, 169, 173, 266; codes 42–3, 53, 159; ideology 165–6; quality 82, 290; soap operas 162–5; and technology 160–2
The Real Housewives 244
reality TV 55, 58, 122, 147–9, 213, 242–4
The Real World 122–3, 148
reception 95, 97, 120, 171, 258
reflexivity 66, 155, 166, 201, 218
regional television 16, 99, 149, 163–4
regulation 97, 107, 117–18, 270
representation 232–52
resistant audiences 209, 214–15, 222–4
The Road to Coronation Street 92
royal wedding 21, 104, 159
runners 196
Ru Paul's Drag Race 58
Russian Doll 56
Ryan, Maureen 245

S4C 100
satellite broadcasting *see* cable and satellite broadcasting
satire 102, 234
Scandal 60, 130
Scheduling 107–8, 131, 210, 216, 227
science fiction 137, 152, 221, 293
script editors 185–6
scriptwriters 184–6, 232–3, 288–91
Second World War 20, 31, 95, 97, 175, 258
semiotics 38–9, 41, 160, 217
September 11th attacks 158
serial 72, 75–7, 107, 163, 288–9; complex serial 77–8, 84, 291, 293, 298–30; episodic serial 77–9, 130; prestige serial 184, 186, 189
seriality 42, 70, 74, 80–1, 123, 141–2, 148, 201, 273–4, 291–2, 297
series 76–77
set-top box 124, 225
Sex Education 74
sexual assault 233–4, 251
Sharp Objects 60
shooting ratios 195
shot-reverse-shot 50, 57–8, 60, 192, 194
showrunner 80, 130, 184, 186, 238, 245, 285, 290, 293–4
signs *see* semiotics
Simon, David 290
The Simpsons 76, 150–5, 236, 283
Sinclair, John 257, 259, 271
single drama 20, 72, 106–7
sitcom 50, 74, 77 109, 132, 144–7, 150–4, 185–6, 241–2, 250–1, 289; multi-camera 46, 55, 146, 288; single-camera 146–7; social norms 235–6, 240
Skam 78–9, 221, 242, 265–7
Sky 16, 93, 121, 227, 260, 267, 287
snowballing 219
soap opera 28, 33, 42, 51, 70, 72, 149, 213, 233, 285, 292; audiences 218; culture/history 90, 92, 106, 136, 163; genre 140–2, 148; melodrama 164; narrative 74–7, 244; production 46, 101, 185, 190, 192, 287; realism 162–5
social media 4, 14, 23, 33, 78–80, 95, 130, 161, 166–8, 198, 201, 212, 219–20, 223–4, 265–7, 274
social sciences 27, 219
sociology 2, 17, 27, 219, 288

The Sopranos 123, 143, 245, 287
sound 38–9, 53–6, 65, 143, 169, 196–8, 203; dialogue 16, 53–5, 142, 187, 193, 275, 285, 288, 299–300; recordists 195
South America *see* Latin America
sponsorship 95, 210
sports 55, 70, 73
Starstruck 57–8, 74
Star Trek 137, 221, 224
status quo 102, 239, 284
Steadicam 53, 143, 192–3, 285, 300
stereotype 235–6
story 70–7, 79, 84, 185, 196, 204, 291, 293–4
storyboard 187, 296
strand 33, 107–8, 262
Stranger Things 47, 126, 137, 141
streaming platform 5, 13, 19, 29, 32–3, 115, 120–1, 123–7, 130–2, 139, 185, 187, 191, 198, 224–8, 260, 267–9, 272, 274, 297–8; advertising-funded 210–11; open-access 199; subscription 116, 209, 270
Strictly Come Dancing 15, 53, 140, 263
studio audience 54–5, 71, 144, 146–7
subscription: cable and satellite 26, 93, 115, 120, 123, 286–7, 292; streaming platforms 116, 124, 209, 270
subtitles 16, 272, 275; fansubs 221–2, 265
Succession 56, 288
Survivor 148
symbolic sign 39–40
syndication 77, 91, 121, 150
syntagms 41

T4 108
talent shows 14–15, 138, 263
talk show 45, 54–5
taste/decency 99–100
teaser 63, 75, 139, 150, 295
Teen Mom 123, 243
teen TV 108, 140, 268
telenovela 76, 259, 265
textual analysis 38, 41, 62, 218, 236, 284
textual poaching 222
Thorne, Jack 232, 289
Time Warner *see* Warner Bros. Discovery
title sequences 40–1, 56, 138
toddlers' Truce 107
trailers 18, 139, 226
transnationalism 17, 256
transmedia narrative 78, 131, 265–6, 294
treatment 187
TV play *see* single drama
Twitter 220, 247, 275

uses and gratifications research 27

variety shows 15, 30, 99, 106, 136
Versailles 262
vertical integration 119, 129, 267–8
VH1 244
Vida 233
violence 26, 118, 123, 145, 150, 169, 175, 214, 220, 251, 262, 275, 287, 293
virality 14, 78, 131, 275
vision mixer 195
visual sign 38, 168
The Voice 15, 263
Voice-over 55, 138, 168–9, 171–2, 185, 192, 197

Wainwright, Sally 186
The Walt Disney Company *see* Disney
Wanzo, Rebecca 223, 250–1
Warner, Kristen 130, 238, 245–7
Warner Bros. Discovery 13, 29, 120–1, 126
Warner Media *see* Warner Bros. Discovery
watershed 118, 224
We Are Lady Parts 234, 250
Wells, Paul 154
Western society/culture 39–40, 97, 169, 234, 239, 258, 260, 269–70, 272–5
The West Wing 193, 283, 286, 300
whip-pan 285
Williams, Raymond 12, 25, 102
Wimbledon 43, 103
The Word 108
World Wide Web *see* Internet
writers' room 184–5, 290

The X-Files 193

Youth drama 108–10
YouTube 14–15, 18, 33, 62, 65, 78, 95, 116, 124, 190, 196, 198–201, 209–10, 220, 227, 266–7