

The stated goals of the workshop are to interrogate “the object of the field” (“How is transmediation changing the rules of television, or how is it preserving established patterns? How are old forms being re-energized and re-invented?”), and, as the workshop is conceived as “a forum for discussion, brainstorming, and interrogation of contemporary trends in television and the evolution of television studies, in light of the increasing expansion of television . . . how TV studies can move forward as television transitions into the next phase of its life?” In this light, I thought it might be productive, initially, to consider what our panel’s apparent, shared concerns, objects, methodologies, and broader goals in “television studies” are.

Our roundtable is focused on three potentially contentious or at least widely divergent “keywords”: “Citizens,” “Politics,” and “Television.” While the entire weekend’s conversation could be dedicated to considering how we might “define” any one of these words and its relation to the stated goals, above, in considering each of our work, I find potential connections that could help to focus these concepts.

It appears to me that, methodologically, each of us considers “television” as a social institution that can only be understood at the intersection of:

-Industry

as a structural and technological phenomenon

(e.g., the “bones” and “hardware”; “networks” characterized by unevenness in distribution and access)

as a site of Labor

and as a cultural, social, and textual phenomenon (per below)

-Policy and Regulatory discourses

e.g., particularly, how post-Telecommunications Act of 1996 and subsequent policy shifts as they

have redefined “Television”

-Marketing and promotional discourses

as sites of economic but also social capital formation/reinforcement

-“Textuality”

programming, advertising, streamed content; genre distinctions

[e.g., postfeminist primetime genres, “educational” media, dramatic narrative, reality TV,

local news, “quality TV,” event-TV]

modes of address

[e.g., satire v. “sincerity”]

-Audience

conceived as a market or market segments (per above)

as taste-cultures

as “interactive,” engaged viewers;

as site-specific participants; as media activists and producers

In other words, none of the panelists considers any one of these elements of “television” in isolation. This is, to my mind, one of the characteristics that distinguishes much work in Television Studies out of humanist traditions from work on TV in other contexts and, arguably, is what distinguishes it within the broader context of “media studies,” going forward. And yet, this is also, to my mind, one of the things that makes the work we do, often, relatively difficult to

“explain.” E.g., it does not lend itself to grant underwriting for its legibility in terms of effects analysis or statistical outcomes. It does not enable or encourage patents, etc. However, what this methodology certainly *does* do, is consider Television as a site of significant social power within our culture—as a network that is *innately* “political” from the most “micro,” everyday, quotidian engagement to its most “macro,” institutional imperative.

Given this, arguably, shared methodology, it seems that a common thread of concern that focuses each of our work is the historic, theoretically invested interrogation of the concept of “public interest,” “community” and sites of intersection or conflict between “official” or “expert” discourses and “everyday,” “popular” “talking back” to the television set.

A related connection across each of our work is a shared concern with the tenacity of “old” media or its logics in a “new” media era, particularly as evidenced in institutional appeals to “public service” and audience practices involving “talking back” to the television set (e.g., among other concerns, John’s work on YouTube’s democratic appeals and its structuring absences; Jeffrey’s work on “the monitorial citizen,” media activism and localism; Laurie’s work on liberal governance, “self-shaping” and media discourses; Anna’s critique of official and “expert” discourses in the contemporary political landscape [governmental and media institutions]; and my own interrogation of geographic/political/market constructs that adhere to broadcast-era myths of identity in a “post”-broadcast era. John has written about this, explicitly, as “a broadcast ethic of TV citizenship.”

One of the lingering questions (at least for me) from the 2006 Flow Conference in Austin was the avoidance of confrontation of this question: the very real continued *appeal* of the “broadcast ethic” *in spite of* or in the face of rapid industrial change. My perception at Flow was that this conversation was reduced to a debate over “nostalgia” and national-specificity in the face of “new” global realities. I would suggest that there is much more going on here and think that this panel, in particular, might productively investigate this and related issues. Though, I also maintain, “nostalgia” for a “cultural forum” and consideration of the real specificity national media systems *do* fundamentally matter in such a debate—and not just as a way to quickly dismiss “old,” “territorial” ways of thinking. I am reminded here, particularly, of David Morley’s wise acknowledgement that (and, apologies, as I’m not quoting here) media are, generally, not experienced as “global” for most.

Jeffrey’s and Anna’s work, particularly, on site-specific and “watchdog” critiques of journalistic discourse engage this paradox that—particularly in times of war, it seems, when casualties are tangibly “real” in home-towns/local news coverage across the country but effaced from “national” media—as “media culture” is, increasingly “global,” TV is “restored” to its most local service functions (at least outside of DMAs 26-and-above . . .). And, as Laurie’s and, I hope, my own work would suggest (and as John’s work on the YouTube community has argued), there remains a felt need for and attraction to “mass”-appeal, “shared,” multi-generational, multi-market, multi-raced and gendered programming. These are genres of programming and audiences that TV Studies has often ignored or disdained (post its notable inception, forged by attending to “low” genres such as the soap-opera) in favor of “quality” TV discourses and “high” capital venues such as HBO (TV that’s “not TV”—and, again, Jeffrey’s work explicitly speaks to this as well). At Flow, I attempted to raise this issue in terms of the “field’s” frequent attention to “cult” TV and “boutique” genres over programs such as *Dancing With the Stars*, *American Idol*, or, yes, *JAG* or *NCIS*. Mary Desjardins also recently raised this issue in Flow online in terms of generational gaps in TV studies (e.g., her study of assisted living facilities and TV watching). I guess my insistence here stems from one of the issues that has been haunting me since the non-election of President Bush: the way in which academic discourse (and, I would argue, the Left—

or “left”—in US politics) has rather willingly (if not entirely consciously?) embraced rhetoric from the Right that argues that academia has lost touch with political realities in the “real” world. Arguably, *not* attending to the TV people *do* still watch (or to the remaining, intractable, hugely popular sites of “broadcast” culture such as televised sport) for “failed” culture such as *Studio 60 On the Sunset Strip* plays into this very notion of an academic realm unable to communicate (or, worse, actively unwilling to communicate) outside of a circle of conversation about TV that is, actually, “not TV.”