

## Imagining Television Studies 2.0

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The final session at Unboxing Television, “Evolving Television Studies,” was assembled to allow us to look forward from the specific panels here at MIT and to allow time to ponder “what next?” How can we move the small-scale discussions among a closed group of television scholars into a broader forum and help transform our discipline alongside the redefinition of our chosen medium of study? In imagining the future of the field, what elements from our disciplinary past are best abandoned or retained? And how can we spread the word to broaden the conversations started (or continued) at MIT to become more inclusive without simply replicating the standard systems of knowledge dissemination?

Inspired by Heather Hendershot’s skepticism of our panel’s evolutionary metaphor, let me embrace some intelligent design to reframe our discussions away from the survival of the fittest. To move onto another fraught and potentially exhausted metaphor of transformation, perhaps we might consider our work under the rubric of Versioning Television Studies, thinking about how we might upgrade our disciplinary software. I’ll admit that I do have some skepticism about what TV Studies 2.0 might look like, given that I’m not sure there’s a clear sense of what TV Studies 1.0 might be. We work in a field that is unusually anti-foundational, in a process of eternal revisionism—even as our panel features scholars who have written work that most of us would consider essential and canonical in the field, such core scholarship always operates to invert and correct previous assumptions and received bits of conventional wisdom, not set firm foundations for others to follow. Maybe this is what the evolution of television studies looks like—constant change and revisionism rather than the punctuated equilibriums and radical shifts of biology.

So even if our field is not ripe for a radical overhaul and transformative purge, it seems important for us to recognize that television and academia seem to both be in a moment of clear transformation, whether they are best understood as evolutionary, versioning, or perhaps more cynically, planned obsolescence. We obviously must respond to these transformations or face extinction or incompatibility, depending on your metaphor. Most of this conference has focused on television’s many transformations that future television studies must address. But we also need to think about the formal transformations in academia, imagining how television studies can adjust, adapt, and take advantage of new models of scholarly community and communication.

I’ll take advantage of my moderator power to do a little agenda setting. I’d like to pose a list of questions that I hope to provoke us as a panel, as a conference, and as a field to think about what the next version of television studies will look like:

- How can television studies best work with and/or define itself against other media studies structures, from film studies to internet studies?
- How might television studies work to build institutional independence, in the form of distinct societies, journals, or conferences, if at all?

- What are the uncharted terrains of television studies, the aspects of the field that have not appeared on the scholarly agenda?
- How can television studies, as a non-traditional field without well-ensconced ways of doing things, help lead the digital dissemination of scholarship and develop innovative ways to generate and maintain scholarly communities?
- How can television studies better connect with broader audiences, sharing our expertise to match the public appetite for information about our most popular medium?

Hopefully these questions, and others emerging from the conference, will force us to think about how television studies might build on its strengths, and respond to television's unboxing with greater relevance and a stronger sense of community and shared purpose.