

Television Studies - a Dynamic Model for New Humanities?

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During the run of some of our favourite soap operas, the world has gone from mass society and media effects to the 'me generation' and YouTube. A decade of developments in technology, globalisation and consumer activism has challenged the 'broadcasting model' of a nationally-bounded, vertically integrated, monopolistic, expert-paradigm TV industry, dedicated to leisure entertainment. Instead, attention has turned to globally traded formats, social network markets, consumer-created content, multiplatform 'publication,' and a semiotic long tail. However such changes are just as much a challenge to universities as they are to television, since both media and education are dynamic agents in these processes. Thus, the constant changes wrought in and by media technologies and processes require a rethink of 'studies' just as much as of 'television.' 'Television Studies,' only recently established and still a contested field, is already being forced to recast some basic assumptions, metaphors and methods. Going forward, what disciplinary traditions, theories, and purposes should it retain, and what new models should it adopt, in order to provide an adequate explanatory framework for an emergent, dynamic and changing field? Such questions bring into focus a more general 'crisis of the humanities.' The humanities are under attrition historically. Many disciplines, e.g. biology, psychology and geography, have migrated to the sciences. They are also under political pressure. Their version of 'critical' knowledge is not accepted as valid in either scientific or policy circles. But meanwhile the humanities remain a social asset, a publishing success, are popular with students, and remain at the centre of the school curriculum. We need to review the changes faced by TV Studies both earlier in its academic career (changes in the knowledge-paradigm) and more recently (changes in the object of study), in order to proceed to a further question: What can we learn from the career of TV Studies about how to pursue humanities-based research in a changing educational environment? Is it possible that the history of TV Studies holds lessons for the 'old' humanities, in the evolution of knowledge?