

## Unboxing Television — Complicating Authorship and Cultural Labor

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The terms “authorship” and “cultural labor” and their place within the context of television studies seem to, in my mind, immediately invoke broader questions of power. Authorship implies the capacity to create and contain textual meanings and also suggests that fixed meanings carry an intentionality that can be traced back to an identifiable source. Cultural labor, conversely, indicates a form of toil whether in support of a production process or in the work necessary to consume/interpret the final ‘product.’ These cursory impressions could easily echo some of the more heated debates within media studies and the tendency to treat production and reception as discrete categories.

I would argue, however, that television as both an industry and a symbol-generating forum problematizes what are already complex and contested terms. Authorship within the institutional formation of television might be best described as a series of negotiations and compromises within the structural constraints of competing ideological and economic interests. Following Bourdieu we might conceptualize it as a field in which the players — writers, producers, executives, advertisers, policymakers, to name but a few — seek to exploit the rules of the game to their advantage. Preferred audiences, both in the form of commodities to be sold to sponsors and as embodied cultural communities are already constructed in the strategies of industry actors who seek to mitigate against the uncertainties of the reception process. Needless to say, power is unequally distributed in both the institutional process of labor and in the range of representations and discursive resources of audience ‘laborers.’

These are hardly revolutionary insights within television industry studies. However, as television (as we’ve known it) moves into new physical and virtual spaces of production and reception it is increasingly difficult to grasp the authority/authorship of the discourses it generates. In regard to the industrial dimensions of production, the global circulation of format television, the rise of international co-productions, and the out-sourcing of Hollywood production to other countries challenge analyses of authorship and labor that have predominantly emphasized the nation-state as the primary site of television studies. Similarly, the exponential growth of cyber-fan communities and user-generated content on YouTube and Web 2.0 further destabilize the boundaries between production-reception and authorship-labor. In “complicating” these terms during our session I am particularly interested in generating debate about how we might actually begin to re-conceptualize our research in directions that address the moving target of the new televisual environment. I see an opportunity here to explore the nuances of newly emergent shifts in power beyond the dominance-resistance binary that often marks debates about cultural production as both an interpretive and institutional activity. For example, new technologies allow fans to participate in textual construction and authorship while simultaneously making these communities more visible to surveillance and incorporation by the media industries. How might this recognition of the mutually

constitutive relationship between control and agency allow us to recuperate and refine the explorations of symbolic, discursive, and material power that marked earlier debates in critical television studies? To this end, I am proposing that a consideration of what D'Acci refers to as an "integrated approach to media studies" might allow us to both complicate our understanding of authorship and cultural labor as well as provide us with a potential map from which to navigate the contemporary moment of television. Her revision of both Johnson's "circuit of production and consumption" model as well as Hall's "circuit of culture" encourages a move toward multi-directional exploration of the inter-related sites of production, reception, socio-historical context and the cultural artifacts themselves.