

Lotz, A. D. (2009). What is U.S. television now?. *The Annals of the American Academy*, 625, 49-59.

Synopsis

Lotz outlines the history of television in the United States, focusing on the changes in this industry since its inception. In doing this, Lotz breaks TV history up into three major periods of time; the network era, multichannel transition, and post-network era. Lotz noted that in examining TV over these periods of time, we can look at five specific aspects of TV as a medium in order to identify changes in television and why those changes matter. She identifies those aspects as technologies, industrial formations, governmental policies, practices of looking, and textual formations. With these categories as a framework, Lotz describes the network era of TV, which was between the 1950's and 1980's. In short, Lotz defines it as the period when television was a non-portable, domestic medium with only 3 channels that aired shows in a linear, static schedule. Moving on, Lotz defines the multichannel transition era, which was between the 1980's and 1990's, as a period in which new technologies such as the VCR and DVR were revolutionizing the medium, giving viewers more freedom. These changes led into the present era, the post-network era (2000s to present), which Lotz defines as the result of all of the changes that occurred during the multi-channel transition. In this period, there was a tremendous increase in the number of channels and viewers had much more control over how they experienced TV. Lotz finishes by saying that TV affects almost every aspect of our lives, and that it will not only continue to exist, but change constantly as well.

Key Concepts

- **Network era:** The initial era of television that Lotz describes as; “the formative period in which the industrial norms of the then-new medium were put in place” (p. 50).
- **Linear Schedule:** The format that TV channels during the network era followed, which Lotz defines by saying “shows were available only at appointed times in a routinized daily sequence of programming” (pg. 51).
- **Digitalization:** “the digital transmission of television signals, but also the adoption of digital production technologies and audience devices” (p. 53).

Key Quotes

- Referring to the three eras of TV she defines Lotz says, “Such a periodization of the industrial history of television is necessary because shifts in norms of operation lead to changes in the textual production of the medium and its role in culture” (p. 50).
- Referring to the RCD, VCR, & DVR Lotz says, “The new control devices transformed television from a ‘flow’ of content that was available only at a particular moment to individual programs that could be reordered, saved, and re-viewed at will” (p. 53).
- Referring to every aspect of these mediums and how they affect people Lotz says, “Older media such as radio and magazines have experienced sizable adjustments ... And television is now undergoing just such adjustment” (p. 58-59).

Essential Question

- How might COVID and its lingering effects on society affect how TV is produced and consumed?