

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

Synopsis

The author discusses the timeline of the history of TV. She notes there are five categories we can use to examine TV: technologies, industrial formations, governmental policies, practices of looking, and textual formations. She identifies three different eras in this timeline, the Network era (1950s-1980s), the Multi-Channel Transition (Mid 80s-Mid 90s), and the Post-Network era (Mid 90s-Present). She identifies several elements of the Network era including television being run by only three big networks, viewers having little viewing choice due to linear scheduling, few government regulations, and television being a family experience. Lotz also notes the important technological advancements in the Multi-Channel Transition period like the remote control and VCR. She also highlights the Post-Network era advancements including more options of channels, new technologies that provided viewers with more viewing choice, the merging of TV and computers, digitization, and HD. Many people believe that all these changes might lead to the end of television; however, Lotz argues that does and will continue to exist.

Key Concepts

- **Network Era:** a period when people “primarily experienced television as a domestic, nonportable medium used to bring the outside world into the home...with minimal choice and control characterized to our viewing experience” (p. 51).
- **Multi-Channel Transition:** “from the mid-1980s through the nineties.” A period in which, “norms of operation lead to changes in the textual production of the medium and its role in culture” (p. 50).
- **Post-Network Era:** an era in which “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. The nature of the relationship between supply and demand was changing” (p. 53).

Key Quotes

- “By the late twentieth century...Those working in television and its adjacent industries worried about their future employment and devised plans to adjust their businesses to emerging developments.” (p. 49).
- After the Post-Network Era began “the decade of transition wore on, broadcasters instead focused on ways to “monetize” the spectrum through ventures such as home shopping networks or leasing the spectrum to others instead of engaging in endeavors that might offer greater public service” (p. 56).
- During the Multi-Channel Transition “expansion in viewer choice led to a massive dispersal of the viewing audience across the increasing range of channels, while control devices diminished the mandated immediacy of viewing characteristic of the network era” (p. 57).

Essential Question

- How might TV change in the future in terms of technology?