

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

Synopsis

Lotz explained that the television industry underwent major changes as it transitioned through three eras: the network era (1950s-1980s), the multi-channel transition (mid 1980s-1990s), and the post-network era (beginning of the present century). She noted that during these eras, the technologies, industrial formations, governmental policies, textual formations, and practices shifted in significant ways. Lotz noted that the network era, when television just started, was marked by limited content choices, only three networks, and a linear, repetitive programming schedule. She noted that during this era, television was a shared, cultural experience for families. She identified a transitional period, the multi-channel transition, in which a series of technological innovations like VCRs, DVRs, and digital devices, altered how people watched television and shifted control away from corporations into viewers' hands. Digitalization led to the post network era, during which time cable channels with loose governmental restrictions changed viewers' access to content. Lotz emphasized that as television changed over time, it moved from a family experience to an individual experience, moving out of the home and into public spaces.

Key Concepts

- **Network Era:** “From the early 1950s to the 1980s” (p. 50); This era was characterized by how television was a domestic, nonportable medium marked by limited content choices, a linear programming schedule, and how it was a family experience (p. 51).
- **Multi-Channel Transitions:** “From the mid-1980s through the nineties” (p. 50); This era was characterized by the changes in how people watched television, the shift in control from corporations into the viewers' hands, and technological innovations (p. 50).
- **Digitalization:** “The adoption of digital production technologies and audience devices...allowed interoperability between television and the other technologies that came to define the contemporary media world” (p. 53).

Key Quotes

- “Network-era practices of looking relied upon the construct of family viewing and the family audience...television viewing in the network era was largely a home-based, shared experience” (p. 51).
- “Television content now represents a broader array of ideas, forms, and peoples than ever before. This should not be taken simply as wholesale advance...It used to be that simply being “on television” conferred importance...This is not the case today, as much of the vast multiplicity of post-network content slips by unnoticed” (p. 58).
- “Television...may evolve into a medium very different from the one we have long thought it to be, but it will indeed continue to exist” (p. 59).

Essential Question

- What technological changes might facilitate a shift in future television content?