

文化研究读解系列

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副主编：[新西兰] 周学麟 李又文



READING  
TV

读  
解  
电  
视

宋云峰 [新西兰] 尼克·佩里 编著



世界知识出版社

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# 读解电视

## Reading TV

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# 总 序

文化研究在西方学术界从20世纪60年代诞生之日起就经常被正统学者批评为华而不实的“学术时髦”。这种批评不仅没有阻止学术界对文化研究与日俱增的兴趣,反而使之成为在西方高校备受关注的显学。究其原因,文化研究的确填补了传统人文学术研究领域的空白,发挥着不可替代的知识创新功能。

文化研究旨在检验文化实践与权力的关系,其研究对象遍及日常生活中社会与政治背景下无限多样的大众文化形式,不仅关注文化如何建构我们,而且关注我们如何建构文化。文化研究试图解释构成人类生活环境的各类文本与意识形态、阶级、种族、性别等的复杂关系,其研究方法具有典型的跨学科性,涉及社会学、政治学、历史学、哲学、传播学、文学批评、女性主义批评、艺术批评、翻译研究,等等。上述意义上的文化研究的确超越了一切传统的人文与社会科学研究范式,提供了观察人类文化和现实生活的独特视角。

西方文化研究的理论与范式正式进入中国大陆学术界大概可以追溯到本世纪初。在短短十多年的时间里,西方文化研究的概念和理论被大量输入国内学术话语体系,不少域外文化研究的著作被翻译出版,文化研究机构不断涌现,相关课程开始进入高校课程设置,越来越多的硕士和博士论文瞄准文化研究选题。文化研究显然已成为中国学术界的显学。

国内学术界文化研究的进一步展开,必须更加系统、深入地把握西方文化研究的理论与方法,同时,高校文化研究相关课程的教学必须建立在对文化研究核心经典文本的阅读之上。为此双重目的,我们组织了一支中西方学者合作团队,联袂推出“文化研究读解系列”。本套丛书包括《读解文化研究》、《读解电视》、《读解流行音乐》、《读解新媒体》和《读解电影》等。每分册的选文由相关领域造诣深厚的西方学者负责精心挑选,均为文化研究领域公认的经典文本;每分册的导读和注释等则由中国学者完成,旨在帮助中国读者准确理解原文。

如此分专题系统呈现和读解西方文化研究领域的经典文本,在中国学术界尚属首次。我相信,无论是文化研究领域的研究者还是授课教师,都能从这套权威性的读本中获取丰富的研究灵感和教学资源。

当然,这套丛书还存在这样和那样的不足,特别是现有的选题远未完整呈现半个多世纪以来西方文化研究的丰硕成果。这一遗憾只有留待来日弥补了。

北京外国语大学英语学院院长  
孙有中

# 前 言

虽然电视广播早在 20 世纪 20、30 年代就已开始,电视在西方发达国家的普及是在第二次世界大战之后的 40、50 年代。那时电视开始与大众媒体电影争夺观众,并促使学者们思考这一新兴媒体的特点和作用。但是直到 20 世纪 70 年代以后,电视研究才开始被当作严肃的学术研究领域进入人们的视野。这与电视本身的跨界特点有着密切的关系,比如电视与大众传播学研究、媒体研究、流行文化研究以及电影研究等领域密不可分,往往被归入其中的某个领域。

电视研究学者夏洛特·布伦斯登(Charlotte Brunsdon)注意到,由于电视研究是个相对较新的跨学科领域,所以“许多电视研究的重要学者都来自高校的社会学、政治学、传播艺术、演讲艺术、媒体研究和电影研究院系。”她还认定电视研究肇始于 20 世纪 70、80 年代;当时对电视的研究也是从三个主要学科领域延伸过来的——新闻学、文学与戏剧批评以及社会科学。

具体来说,新闻学角度的研究主要是对新近电视节目进行专业性评论,文学与戏剧批评角度则以其本身的标准来评判电视剧的编剧质量,而社会科学角度则聚焦电视在当代社会里的制作、传播及作用。电影研究的文本分析、制作流程、传播方式以及受众接受方式(解码与接受理论)等也为电视研究所借鉴。总之,电视研究是个跨学科、多视角的崭新研究领域。

本着电视研究跨学科、多视角的特点,本书的编者选取了 20 篇电视研究学者的重要文章(或章节),从五个主要方面全面剖析电视的本质与特点,供读者和研究者对西方的电视研究领域进行深入、系统的认识或借鉴。这五个主要方面分别是:组织电视广播的产业和企业(industries and enterprises which organizes television);实现电视广播的文本(texts that realize television);接收电视的观众(audience that recognize television);管理电视的机构(agencies that regulate it);影响电视传播的技术手段(technology that shapes television)。

关于读本 20 篇文章的编选理由和简介点评请阅读本书新西兰编者尼克·佩里教授的英文序。

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宋云峰

## **Introduction : Now and Then, Here and There; Time, Place and Television**

Kenneth Tynan was a famous and influential British theatre critic and film reviewer who once suggested that television criticism was impossible because it would require you to “know everything”. Yet far from being impossible, television criticism is not just a commonplace practice but also a thoroughly democratic one. Not only do most of us do it, most of us can do it, thereby contesting and usurping the traditional role and function of the “expert” as a cultural intermediary. The very accessibility and popularity of the medium effectively acts to bring into question the notion of a privileged interpretation and thus by implication it challenges the status claim of the literary intellectual and professional critic.

What Tynan’s observation nevertheless draws attention to is the question of just how television might best be studied. What the essays in this volume suggest and seek to document is that the answers must both identify and respect the specific and distinctive characteristics of the medium. When television was new, the imagery through which it was initially interpreted in the countries of the West derived from, and was shaped by, the study of film, literature and theatre. Thus at first, the dominant tendency was to see the “box in the corner” and its content as a culturally debased form that simply lacked the critical standards and cultural achievements of these older media. With the expansion in the number of academic studies of television, however, what gradually emerged was a recognition and acknowledgement of its defining features when compared with other media. It also led to the development of a more appropriate critical vocabulary in which the central cultural question and key motif is “how does the medium work?”

These processes occurred alongside, and along with, the development of a conceptual framework which proposed that the proper subject matter of television studies is the relation between industry, text and audience. This framework is shared by media of all kinds and thus allows for comparisons between them. The guiding principle is that the analysis of a medium presupposes an understanding of the industry that organizes it, the texts that realize it, the audiences that recognize it and the meanings that circulate between these locations. As applied to television, such a framework provided for an appreciation of the significance of television’s domestic setting. Not only did the location of sets within the home have implications for the distinctiveness of television’s

emergent narrative patterns, it also led to the recognition of the medium's relation to the shape of household organization and the structures of family life. And what was also questioned was the meaning or significance of the very term "audience" when, unlike film and theatre, "it" never assembled in a single, shared physical location, but was instead present only in the statistical categories of ratings agencies.

In a somewhat similar fashion, the puzzle of what might constitute a television "text" was seen to differ from the received, literary understanding of the term and the theories of reading and reception that informed that understanding. Advertising and channel identification, a single programme, an evening's viewing, the nightly and weekly program schedules, a television series, the medium's dense pattern of inter-textual references and literally all of television, all seemed to be more or less plausible candidates as "texts". What could it mean to talk of "reading television" when the very object of such a practice was itself the subject of debate? What also emerged alongside such questioning was the new found appreciation and defence of what until then had been such disdained or critically neglected aspects of television culture as soap operas, with their combination of structural complexity, multiple plotting, absence of narrative closure, ensemble format and layered characterisation.

With respect to the third term in the media studies conceptual framework, namely "industry", the study of television has benefitted from being seen as having structural similarities to radio. For from the outset television was a medium that engaged the interests of governments, whether in terms of regulating its commercial owners, as in the case of the American networks, or in the form of being either actively sponsored or owned by the state, as in the case of the BBC in the UK.

This very condensed and selective sketch of the kind of issues that are characteristic of academic work on television is thus indicative of the development of a body of knowledge and interpretation that set itself against received orthodoxies, and that sought to identify and to do justice to the specific features of the medium. Wider academic recognition of the achievements of such scholarship has been gradual, somewhat grudging and hard won. This volume includes selections from some of the now classic studies that have been most influential in securing that recognition. Nevertheless, because television is presently in a state of flux as a consequence of the digital revolution, both the assumptions and the findings presented here should, in their turn, be understood to be open to interrogation and revision. Thus it can no longer be taken for granted that television viewing is a family activity, undertaken in a domestic setting, in which the television set is an immobile box located in a corner of the living room, watched in accordance with a programme schedule that is centrally determined by the

television channel. For nowadays “watching television” may well refer to the practice of a solitary viewer who downloads fragments of his or her demographically specific programme choices onto a laptop computer or even a mobile phone to be viewed at a time that he or she decides. But what seems sure to endure is what the best of the emergent studies of such developments share with the classic studies featured in this collection, namely, a contribution to the project of taking this most popular medium and its culture seriously.

Thus the first unit in this book has the relation between television and family life as its focus. It opens with an extract from Lynn Siegel’s study of the arrival of American television in the years following World War Two. She foregrounds the significance of the medium’s domestic setting, including the organisation of space within the household. Her methodology is to draw upon US magazines and advertising material from the late 1940s and early 1950s, together with a review of the academic literature of the time, as sources through which to identify both the hopes and the fears and anxieties which accompanied the introduction of this technology into the home. She shows how television was the subject of competing discourses, contrasting those interpretations in which it was presented as a device which would bring families together, with those which considered it to be a source of discord and division. She reveals how debates about the position of the television set in domestic space were also, and necessarily, very significant in shaping understanding of what, at that time, was the new medium’s still indeterminate cultural place.

David Morley’s empirical study complements Siegel’s research on discourse in its focus upon the implications of television for the patterns of social interaction within households, but it does so in a more direct fashion and by way of a different methodology (interviews with family members) in a different country (Britain). It emphasizes the role that television plays in the domestic politics of the household, with a particular emphasis upon how household members actively and selectively use television as a way of ordering and organising their relations with one another. For example, in the detailed findings of the research (not presented in this extract) it documents gender and generational differences in viewing habits and their consequences for gender and generational relations.

It should be noted that both of these classic studies pre-date the emergence of multi-set households and personal computers, developments with significant implications for the shape of social life within such households. What nevertheless endures is the dialectic that they share, in which the role of television(s) in domestic space is interpreted as in a dynamic relation with the inhabitants’ understandings of television’s cultural place (in which the term “place” is understood to consist of a given space



together with the meanings that are ascribed to it).

Unit 2 opens with an extract from John Ellis' account of broadcast television. He also emphasizes the importance of taking account of television's domestic setting in seeking to understand its cultural significance, but shifts attention towards the implications that this has for the textual attributes of the medium and the ways in which it thus differs from other media, notably film. Ellis brings to bear his experience within the television industry in suggesting that, unlike the single unitary film of cinema, what distinguishes television and what should therefore be seen as constituting the objects of textual inquiry and analysis are "a succession of segments organized according to the logic of the series."

Ellis account of the characteristics that distinguish television texts predates the arrival of the internet and other new media developments such as the mobile phone. In their wide ranging comparative study of various media, Bolter and Grusin's more recent analysis employs the notion of remediation as a means of exploring the consequences of what has become an altogether denser and more media-saturated cultural environment. Remediation refers to the predisposition and processes through which a given medium appropriates or otherwise borrows from other media forms and they see television as offering a highly developed version of such a strategy which they term "hypermediacy". Their account nevertheless insists upon the distinctiveness of the television medium, specifically through its emphasis upon immediacy, its stress upon the "here and now" and the "liveness" which that implies and which they contrast with the "there and then" of cinema.

Raymond Williams' much cited account of television's "flow" was a decisive contribution to freeing the interpretation of television texts from any assumption that the terms of such interpretations were already given by, or could be directly derived from, the study of film or literature. Thus Williams notes that a typical experience is that, even when the television set may have been switched on for the purpose of viewing a particular programme, there is nevertheless a predisposition to keep watching beyond the point at which the programme in question has ended. It is as if particular programme units are overridden by the fact of "flow", a process through which purportedly discrete and distinct programme items are effectively both constructed and experienced as part of a unified and continuous sequence. Despite being a highly accomplished critic, Williams nonetheless observes that, "It is indeed very difficult to say anything about this. It would be like trying to describe having read two plays, three newspapers, three or four magazines, on the same day that one has been to a variety show and a lecture and a football match. And yet in another way it is not like that at all, for though the

television channel. For nowadays “watching television” may well refer to the practice of a solitary viewer who downloads fragments of his or her demographically specific programme choices onto a laptop computer or even a mobile phone to be viewed at a time that he or she decides. But what seems sure to endure is what the best of the emergent studies of such developments share with the classic studies featured in this collection, namely, a contribution to the project of taking this most popular medium and its culture seriously.

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items may be various the television experience has in some important ways unified them.” This is both an acknowledgement and a rebuttal of Kenneth Tynan’s assertion that television criticism is impossible, in favour of a recognition that if it is to be successful then such criticism will assuredly – and necessarily – be different.

Rick Altman questions whether the formal properties of television culture as expressed in this concept of flow are to be understood as springing from, or at least closely aligned with, the technological characteristics of the medium. Instead he suggests that the attribute of flow varies according to, and is explicable by reference to, the effects of the context and national characteristics in which a television system operates. He also seeks to demonstrate the significance of sound to television as a medium by highlighting how, in a domestic setting, a somewhat casual and selective “glance” is a typical feature of the viewing experience, rather than the focused and concentrated model of “the gaze” that has been proposed as a defining feature of cinema in the literature on film studies. In such a context the sound track functions to call to the distracted attention of the viewer just what is happening on the screen.

In Unit 4 Nick Browne also argues for the significance of national context in explaining what gets shown on television, but his analysis directs our attention away from the circumstances of reception and towards the conditions of production in general and the characteristics of American capitalism in particular. In so doing, he provides what is perhaps the most far-reaching interrogation of conventional, literary-derived forms of textual inquiry. For Browne, the text of American television is all of American television, embracing programme types, advertising, nightly, weekly and seasonal scheduling as they are organized and integrated in and through what he refers to as television’s textual economy.

Browne’s paper was written at a time when American television was dominated by three free-to-air commercial networks, namely ABC, CBS and NBC. Since then, their pre-eminence has been the subject of challenges, as for example, with the emergence and proliferation of cable or satellite-based pay channels such as MTV, CNN and HBO. In an extract from the second edition of his study of the internal workings of network television, Todd Gitlin considers whether this has led to changes in the governing principles and structural characteristics of the medium in the USA – and thereby served to bring the premises of Browne’s analysis into question. In his sometimes impassioned polemic, Gitlin argues that there is an underlying continuity to the system. Thus although some of the names and the details may have changed, nevertheless the commercial logic, together with the cultural limitations that he sees it as imposing, are all still not just firmly in place, but have increasingly become global in their reach.

In Unit 5, Jane Feuer indicates how the concept of television genre can be employed to provide a bridge between different approaches to the medium because it succeeds in gathering up and binding together the notions of industry, text and audience. Examples of genre include situation comedies, soap operas and documentaries. Genre can be understood as suggesting a formula for the production of programmes, a general formula that, however, can only be realised, refined or perhaps interrogated in and through the singular features of a particular text. From the standpoint of the television audience, one source of pleasure is their culturally derived familiarity with the conventions that are characteristic of a given genre and their expectation that these will be realised in and through the text in question. This is made evident in Ota Taru's account of the making of Japanese "trendy dramas", which illustrates the emergence and development of one such genre, as seen from the standpoint of an industry insider.

Some commentators are, however, sceptical about whether the term genre is really applicable to a medium as fluid as television. They cite as evidence the emergence of such hybrid developments as "mockumentaries" (ie mock documentaries) docu-soaps, info-tainment and various forms of reality television. Within the industry itself, the notion of format, understood as a set of programme conventions that can be copyrighted and thus bought and sold, seems to be the preferred term – American Idol is a recent well known example.

One way to interpret Fiske and Hartley's notion of "bardic television" is as not just acknowledging, but as also insisting upon going beyond, the idea that television programmes do display some genre-like characteristics. They see television and its culture as an agent of both continuity and change, as both formulaic and fluid, but above all as driven to identify and to construct a notion of cultural centrality. The medium is also concerned to affirm its own centrality by effectively and continuously naturalising the rightfulness of its claim to speak for the culture of the society in which it circulates.

For Newcomb and Hirsch television does not so much claim to speak for the culture as to provide the location in which the culture can speak to itself. For them, it is precisely television's aspiration to a position of cultural centrality that leads them to emphasize the complexity and plurality of television culture rather than its simplifying and unifying function. Their emphasis is upon the process of television rather than its products and they see that process as having affinities with ritual (as do Fiske and Hartley), but it is a ritual whose limits are bounded only by the culture in which it operates rather than by any specific category of interests within the culture. Thus

although they share with Nick Browne the notion that all of television is the appropriate object of inquiry, for them it has an altogether more expansive cultural role. Television is the vehicle through which the culture may be said, albeit imperfectly and indirectly, to continuously develop and debate an understanding of itself, rather than being restricted to the role of serving dominant interests by legitimating and reproducing the existing social order.

In emphasizing the importance of national origins as consequential for the shape of television industries, accounts of the history and development of the medium typically contrast two influential models; the American commercial network system, funded by advertising revenue, and the British public service model (the BBC), funded by a licence fee. This contrast maps onto the distinction between market and state power, but what is identified as of particular significance with regard to the BBC-style model, is that it does not directly represent the state which sponsors it, but instead asserts and enjoys a measure of autonomy and critical distance from direct control. The two systems are thus understood to be distinguished not only by their sources of their revenue and the implications this has for their organizational structures, but also by the manner in which they address the viewer. That contrast is stylized as that between, respectively, the “consumer” and the “citizen” and arguments in support of a BBC style model are typically concerned to emphasize the merits of the latter mode. In recent years, however, both the economic viability and the cultural significance of this public service model has increasingly been the subject of questioning, not only in Britain, but in those other countries that have adopted some variant of such a system. In Unit 7, the essays by Nicholas Garnham as a public service defender and Elizabeth Jacka as a sceptical critic point to what, in cultural terms, is at stake in the debate over the future of such a model, when variants of the American style commercial model are increasingly and globally ascendant.

What the papers by Straubhaar and Duarte and John Sinclair argue, however, is that notwithstanding the historical priority, the economic resources and the cultural messages of American television, this does not mean that it has come to assume a position of pre-eminence beyond its national borders in the way that the notion of cultural imperialism suggests. It is particularly significant that both of these studies focus upon Latin America. For it is a region that is not just in geographical proximity to the USA but also a location in which arguments in support of the theses of dependencia and cultural imperialism have circulated widely. Yet as television goes global, both of these papers draw attention to the forms through which it is not cultural uniformity, but rather hybridity and indigeneity that are very much in evidence, both within and across

national boundaries.

Stuart Hall's account of encoding and decoding provides a methodology which recognizes and develops the distinction between the circumstances and intentions of those responsible for producing a television text and how it is received and interpreted. It is a difficult but influential work that does not just draw a contrast between the differential positioning of broadcasters and audiences as categories of social actors; it also refers to the structural differences between the entry and exit points of a discursive formation. Such an approach to the analysis of television thus seeks to recognize and to combine the importance of both social relations and semiotics as the latter is made evident in the visual and oral codes through and by which the medium operates. Hall suggests that the processes of reception and response to the preferred or encoded message are distributed into three categories; the dominant – hegemonic, in which the decoded meaning is consistent with the encoded one; the negotiated, a selective and adaptive reading which contains oppositional elements; and the oppositional, in which an alternative framework of interpretation is in evidence. Katz and Liebe's empirical study of cross cultural differences in the way that the American television series *Dallas* is read illustrates and dramatizes this encoded / decoded contrast. Their analysis of the responses of different groups of viewers based in Israel and the USA, consisting of Arabs, Russian Jews, Moroccan Jews, kibbutzim members and Americans, shows how viewers' interpretations of the series systematically varies in accordance with their cultural background and assumptions.

Ien Ang's analysis of the audience's reception to the changing pattern of Dutch television succeeds in gathering together several of the strands of inquiry explored in this book. She foregrounds the public service / commercial contrast and debate (see Unit 7), acknowledges the significance of both Hall's (see Unit 9) and Ellis's (see Unit 2) work and illustrates how the global and the local are articulated in just one country (see Unit 8). The notion that a relevant starting point and category for understanding television should be the place that it occupies in the everyday life of viewers is implicit in Ang's approach. It is made explicit in this book's closing essay, an extract from Ron Lembo's investigation of the practices of an American sample of viewers. He distinguishes between three different patterns or routines of viewing, which he identifies as "undirected", "discrete" and "continuous" use, and probes into just how these are integrated into, and consequential for, the ways in which his respondents organize their day-to-day existence.

As a technological achievement and an indicator of modernity, television takes up a place alongside contemporary transportation systems, high rise buildings and such other

media as radio, computers and mobile phones. In their various responses to the question of “How does the television medium work?” these studies do not, however, address it from the perspective of a television engineer or technologist. Rather, in their different ways they each exemplify the notion that, in the culture of the West, modernity is to be understood as not just the material manifestations of scientific and technological inventiveness in the shape of such artefacts as television sets. Modernity is also a form of critical consciousness, one which routinely challenges the authority of tradition, including its own, by incorporating a preparedness to interrogate existing assumptions and premises. As such, the main objects of inquiry in these studies are the cultures of television in all their complexity, and what they are, and have been, made to mean at various times and in different parts of the world. More generally then, they are unified by a concern to put the medium of television in its place.

Nick Perry

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