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**FAMILIES IN FRONT OF THE SCREEN:  
EVERYDAY CONTEXTS OF TELEVISION USE**

A dissertation presented in  
partial fulfilment of the requirements  
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in Sociology at Massey University

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## ABSTRACT

Although the experience of watching television has assumed a position of prime importance, not only in the lives of families, but also as a central component of the advertising industry, we know very little about what people actually do when they are in front of the screen. Using innovative technology which allowed the researcher to record eight selected families watching television, this thesis argues that our conceptions of families closely scrutinising the texts of television programmes are misplaced. Following the work of Lull and Morley, who emphasise the importance of the social context over the predominance of the text, the evidence presented in this qualitative study suggests that instead of a 'spectorial' medium in which audiences sit captured by programmes, television acts rather as a kind of 'moving wallpaper' against which the everyday events of family life are played out. This means that our understandings of television watching must therefore be based on the social relations of the family as they use television in their spatio-temporal domestic contexts. Significant shifts are therefore necessary in media research agendas.

## Errata

1. p. 23, first line of the fourth paragraph:  
'discreet' *should read* 'discrete'.
2. p. 110, tenth line of the fourth paragraph:  
'come' *should read* 'comes' and 'start' *should read* 'starts'.
3. p. 131, sixth line of the second paragraph:  
'Jennifer (15)' *should read* 'Jennifer (5)'.
4. p. 141, *delete* the first line of the final paragraph.

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## INTRODUCTION

'We eat, drink and sleep in front of the television', joked one of the fathers participating in this study, when responding to a question which asked how he would characterise the use of television in his family. The significance of his somewhat ambiguous answer initially escaped my attention. After all, the father's response seemed quite 'matter-of-fact', but his laughter which accompanied the statement as well as the hilarity of other family members that followed it, reflected a degree of 'collective self-knowledge' about the use of television in this family. This self-knowledge appeared to be based on a shared understanding that television ought not to be taken too seriously. Of course, television is 'there' but its daily presence in family life should not be made too much of; for most family members it is definitely *not* a problem. In other words, because television is so much a part of the everyday, taken-for-granted reality of family members, the actual experience of its *integration* into daily family routines has transcended the 'worrying' discourse in which television is *isolated* as a 'problem' to be confronted by family members, parents in particular.

The significance of this family exchange about television only occurred to me later. A considerable amount of dissatisfaction with existing paradigms in media studies generally, but in television audience research especially, provided the earliest motivation to conduct this study. The overriding concern for *content* (as the outcome of the production practices of media professionals) over that of the *context* of media consumption by audiences was the predominant dissatisfaction. Secondly, the lack, or even complete absence, of theoretically informed audience research in New Zealand also became a compelling rationale to conduct a *qualitative* investigation so as to generate new insights about audiences so desperately needed in the 'Land of Know-Nothing' (Lealand, 1988b). Finally, and returning to the previous family anecdote, the ideas behind this study were shaped by a more 'positive' outlook on the ways in which families go about using television in the context of their everyday lives. By contrast, public discussion in New Zealand about the perceived role of television in *the family* has been ridden with sinister scenarios about the alleged effects of television content which, I may add, were usually borrowed from the inconclusive findings of suspect experimental laboratory research. Psychologists, social workers, educationalists and librarians - to list but a few conspicuous professions claiming expertise - seemed to have staked out the field of 'television malignancy'. I suspected that this 'negative' view, which was overly pessimistic about the capacity of family members to be *self-reflexive* about their household use of television, was unwarranted.



As these deliberations were formalised into a research proposal, an initial literature search revealed that overseas researchers had come to similar conclusions regarding the limitations of current theoretical perspectives in audience research, as well as the shortcomings of commonsense explanations about the effects of television. In particular, two studies were of crucial importance in guiding the formulation of the research problem. First, Lull's (1980a) study on the social uses of television took the *family as the unit of analysis for television consumption*. His participant observation methodology took him to the 'natural', domestic settings of television audiences where he focused on the *structural* and *relational* uses of television central to daily family contexts. Lull also emphasised the routine, taken-for-granted nature of television use in domestic contexts. The second study was Morley's (1986) *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*. In many ways Morley built on the new research agenda initiated by Lull and, from his interviews conducted *en famille*, he distilled a fascinating argument which brought out the gendered infrastructure of the everyday use of television by families. In doing so, he uncovered the hidden realities behind that almost meaningless phrase 'watching television'. Morley, furthermore, had brought together two important traditions in media and communications research, namely 'critical' cultural studies and 'empirical' family/communication research, traditions previously regarded as almost mutually exclusive. Lull and Morley thus assisted with the formulation of research questions which attempted to address: (1) how families, and individual members of families, *use* television in the context of their everyday life; and (2) how families, or the individuals within families, *make sense* of television programmes.

Lull's and Morley's work also suggested the broader methodological parameters of this study and the use of qualitative methods in particular. Lull and Morley convincingly showed that the qualitative methods of participant observation and in-depth interviewing successfully capture the intricacies of the family television viewing context. When Collett and Lamb's (1986) study *Watching People Watching Television* came to my attention, I decided to employ this innovative method to observe the use of television by families in their own domestic settings. Collett and Lamb's method involved the placement of an in-home observation cabinet which videotaped activities in the living/television room as soon as the television set was turned on. A similar cabinet was designed and constructed for this study and this was used to furnish observational data on eight families. These videotaped observations were augmented by in-depth family interviews and were used to arrive at a qualitative argument which focused on the everyday family contexts of television use. A brief synopsis of the chapters which develop this qualitative argument follows below.

Chapter One outlines the broad contours of post-war media theory paying particular attention to the question of how television audiences were researched and conceptualised. In order to locally situate some aspects of the broader discussion, this chapter starts with a brief overview of past and present practices of audience research in New Zealand, thus showing the dominance of the market research or ratings paradigm in this country. The chapter continues with a scrutiny of three communication models in terms of their conceptualisation of (television) audiences: the effects paradigm, the uses and gratifications paradigm and the encoding/decoding paradigm. The final section of the chapter introduces an emerging paradigm which facilitates an understanding of audiences in terms of their use of the media in the context of their everyday lives. Since television is normally consumed *domestically*, a theoretical concern for family contexts of television use emerges, as well as a realisation that television ought to be researched within the family/household unit.

The concern for family contexts of television is the focus of Chapter Two. This chapter reviews the family and television literature dating back to the late 1940s. The first generation of television and family research (roughly covering the period 1950-1980) was characterised by attempts to isolate television's effects on a growing list of quantifiable family life variables. The second generation coincides with Lull's (1980a) ground-breaking study on the social uses of television by family members. Unlike work published thus far, Lull researched families in their 'natural', domestic context using qualitative methodology. This enabled him to arrive at an appreciation of how families use television to create and sustain social relations, and how television may contribute to the structuring of family activity, both environmentally and behaviourally. This second generation also includes Morley (1986). Morley's qualitative study of family television viewing practices focused upon the politics of the living/television room, bringing out gender as a crucial factor in the everyday routines of families in front of the screen. Three themes warranting further investigation emerged from this new generation of family and television research: (1) the *temporal*; (2) the *spatial*; and (3) the *political* dimensions of television use. These contextual features of family television viewing practices became the organising principles for the analysis of fieldwork data.

Chapter Three discusses the research methodology and related ethical issues. The fieldwork involved the videotaping of eight families for one week each with a custom-built, in-home observation cabinet which recorded the activities in the living/television room as soon as the television set was turned on. This procedure was followed up by a debriefing interview with each of the participating families after the observation cabinet had been removed from their houses. The chapter starts with a discussion of the research tradition of electronic

observation equipment in the home, either through photography or video technology. In particular, it pays tribute to Collett and Lamb's (1986) study as their in-home observation cabinet became the model for the design and construction of the observation unit employed in this study. The chapter continues with an outline of the fieldwork procedures, including those for the recruitment of families, data collection and data analysis. Finally, the ethics of the research are discussed and attention is given to the process by which the ethical issues were identified, negotiated and resolved.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present the analysis of observational data obtained during March-September 1990. Chapter Four introduces the eight participating families via a description of their typical viewing day. This chapter includes a socio-demographic profile of each family as well as a discussion of the spatial lay-out of their houses, especially the living/television room. The aim of this chapter is not only to get acquainted with the individuals within these families, but also to describe the family's everyday interaction with television. In fact, it will be argued that understanding the daily involvement of families with television facilitates an understanding of the organisation of family life in general. However, the overall objective of the chapter is to provide an introductory descriptive framework from which substantial themes are drawn for further analysis.

Chapter Five provides the in-depth analysis of the core contextual themes in the everyday consumption of television within the eight families. The ecology of the domestic use of television is analysed in terms of the temporal and spatial dimensions of the eight family contexts. The extent to which television time and television space is part of the spatio-temporal organisation of family life is demonstrated. The interpersonal dimension of family television viewing practices is another important contextual theme. The politics of the everyday use of television by families includes discussions of parental strategies of supervision and control and marked differences in the use of television by men and women respectively. It is shown that the everyday politics of the living room are embedded in the temporal and spatial organisation of family contexts.

Having accounted for the everyday family contexts of television use, Chapter Six investigates the interaction between television texts and television contexts. This examination combines the textual analysis of television programmes with the analysis of the family context in which the programme is 'watched'. The chapter demonstrates that without accounting for the actual *context* in which television programmes are consumed, not too

much can be said about the television *text* as a repository of meaning for family members. In other words, family members make sense of television through the everyday contexts of which they are part.

The importance of everyday family contexts for the understanding of the ways in which family members use and make sense of television will be reiterated in the Conclusion. Not only will the Conclusion pull the major findings of this study together, it will also deal with their significant implications for media theory. In particular, I will emphasise the importance of bringing more qualitative sociology into media studies so as to more fully understand the everyday, complex routines in which people consume media products.

## CHAPTER ONE

### FROM CONTROL TO AGENCY, FROM CONTENT TO CONTEXT

#### Shifting Paradigms in Conceptualising Television Audiences

##### Introduction

Almost two decades years ago, Philip Elliott (1974:249) wrote:

As a general rule mass communication researchers seem to be dissatisfied with the history of their subject. The literature is full of attempts to repudiate old approaches, to start new ones and to direct attention to aspects of the subject hitherto untouched.

Today, one cannot but still concur with this statement. During that same period, there has been an outpouring of research and theoretical discussion within which more attention was directed to the study of audiences, previously a somewhat neglected category in the formulation of mass communication theory. Similarly, as television sets started to find a domicile in living rooms at an unprecedented rate, the interdisciplinary study of television was also expedited to become a legitimate subject for scholarly analysis. However, the combined effect has been a state of conceptual confusion as a fairly recent stock-taking exercise of communication studies revealed.<sup>1</sup>

The last twenty years have seen a coming and going of an array of perspectives, paradigms, research methodologies - and even 'epistemological interventions' (see Allor, 1988:252) - in the quest for a better understanding of television audiences. The general tone of many of these contributions echoes Elliott's observation, with the result that the apparently uneven and chequered career of mass communication research extends itself into the more recent generation of television audience studies. The latest trend in television audience research is one of 'deconstruction'. This approach has produced a cemetery of rejected theoretical traditions which have found a premature death, and it has also given birth to what could be seen as an overambitious - and, therefore, somewhat debilitating - agenda for ('self-reflexive') empirical research, where the emphasis is on ethnography.

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1. See the special issue 'Ferment in the Field', *Journal of Communication* (1983)

A published compilation of papers presented at a symposium<sup>2</sup> illustrates the trend mentioned above. The editors of this collection let us know that communication research, or rather television research, is at a crossroads (Seiter et al., 1989:14):

The academic pendulum swings along the fine line between re-seeing and revisionism: valorization of consumption replaces insistence on production; recognition of escapism replaces the search for engagement; the centrality of contradiction makes way for the importance of identity; work makes way for relaxation and politics makes way for pleasure. (emphasis added)

They immediately add, by way of a conclusion, that 'the difficulty is in slowing the process which turns a radical shift into a new orthodoxy' (Seiter et al., 1989:14).

In this chapter I intend to 'slow down' this process in more than one way. My aim is to expose some post-war models, or paradigms, of television audiences research and theory to critical scrutiny by asking how these studies break with commonsense explanations about television audiences. The latter, according to Gray (1987:24), needs to signify a shift from conceptualising the audience as:

...an undifferentiated homogeneous mass whose only significance is that it is watching television at any particular time to socially constituted audiences whose relationship with television involves the complex process of the production of meaning.

Secondly, I want to evaluate, where appropriate, how the studies under review were conducted so as to come to a methodological appreciation of the findings. The important question here is whether the methodology employed has enabled researchers to tap the complexity of television consumption as referred to by Gray. Both lines of inquiry are important in an attempt to conceptualise and empirically investigate the text/context problematic particularly in light of an analysis of the viewing context which is the focus of this thesis. For this very reason this chapter will also include a discussion of Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model which: (a) marks a decisive theoretical landmark in that it attempted to steer cultural studies - here referred to in a generic sense only - away from textual determinism; and (b) has also generated an important piece of empirical research (Morley, 1980). Both Hall's and Morley's contributions will provide a backdrop for a discussion of the television viewing context, which in turn may assist in the mapping of contours of the 'new orthodoxy' as anticipated by Seiter et al. (1989). However, in order to locally situate at least some of the debate on audiences, I begin with a brief overview of television audience research in New Zealand.

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2     'Rethinking the Audience: New Tendencies in Television Research, held in Tübingen, Germany, February 1987 (see Seiter *et al.*, 1989).

## Television audience research in New Zealand

It would not be an exaggeration to argue that the study of television audiences has a poor, weak tradition in New Zealand. The past and present situation in 'audience research' could be characterised as following the so-called 'head-counting approach'. Mainly used for programme-rating purposes, this research has gathered mostly quantitative data for commercial reasons. Within the political economy of television in this country, the ratings deliver, as it were, audiences to advertisers who in this capacity have become the main source of financial revenue for broadcasting. This research has taken on the role of providing the 'official statistics' on audience viewing patterns through a data collection process which uses the formula of who is watching which programme at what particular time. These findings, whether obtained through viewers' diaries (until April 1990) or the PeopleMeter<sup>3</sup>, are the currency of the television business. They provide both a price tag for commercial slots and the basis on which programming decisions can be made by the network executives.

In their report *Broadcasting and Related Telecommunications in New Zealand*, the Royal Commission of Inquiry (1986:430) acknowledged the general commercial importance for advertisers of the 'head-count' generated by the Audience Research Unit of the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand (BCNZ) and the research group McNair. However, the Commission (1986:430) also noted that 'there would seem to be an area not fully addressed by the [Audience Research] Unit, the in-depth understanding of people's likes and dislikes in programming' with the underlying question being 'how one gets around the problem of discovering what people may like once they have seen or heard it'. The Commission (1986:430-431) recommended that:

More in-depth socially based research could aid considerably the process of defining New Zealand audiences' tastes. On the basis of such information more use could well be made of pilot programmes to test the reactions of audiences as well as of executives to previously unexplored avenues of programming.

Yet the Commission (1986:430-431) understood the 'reluctance by the BCNZ to invest scarce resources on in-depth socially based research' and 'some of the caution with which the BCNZ has so far proceeded'. With the Royal Commission of Inquiry being generally sympathetic to an increase in research endeavours, it is somewhat ironic that the BCNZ

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<sup>3</sup> PeopleMeters were developed by Nielsen in the United States and by AGB in the United Kingdom. PeopleMeters require active viewer participation in that viewers have to register - by pushing buttons on a remote control device - their presence in the room where the main television set screens (see Poltrack, 1989:429).

disbanded its Audience Research Unit during 1987 and passed on this responsibility to AGB:McNair. Audience research in New Zealand thus became merely an extension of market research.

This particular practice of audience research in New Zealand reflects, in Jensen's (1987:21) words, the social climate in which quantitative audience research is located, as well as the ways in which the role and influence of broadcasting in contemporary society is perceived:

The outpouring of commercial marketing research and political communication studies points out that data about the behavioral consequences of communication are commercially and politically useful information.

It is the assumption of this state of affairs being the case, rather than the evidence provided by quantitative audience ratings research, which makes this type of research such an attractive option for the television networks and advertisers alike. As Morley (1990:6) mentions:

Ratings solve a fundamental problem: the need to measure and 'know' a dispersed and varied audience. Ratings thus convert an elusive occurrence (people watching television) into calculable units on which economic transactions can be based, for audience measurement provides the economic foundations of the broadcasting industry.

It follows that, as Morley has rightly stated, to challenge the ratings is to attack the economic and political heart of the television industry. For its part, the television industry has restricted its response to criticisms of audience measurement with an 'increasingly frantic search for a "technical fix"' (Morley, 1990:5). The recent introduction of the PeopleMeter in New Zealand is an excellent example of this response. Its introduction into the local 'mediascape' was hailed by the industry as an answer to the 'growing complexity of the television medium and the audience viewing environment' (AGB:McNair, not dated:2). The PeopleMeter is supposedly better equipped to deal with this 'complexity' than the viewers' diaries which were previously employed to gather rating statistics (for a short polemic on the business launch of the PeopleMeter in New Zealand, see Lealand, 1990). Furthermore, the complexity of the viewing environment may well prove too enigmatic for the ratings industry to successfully capture in its viewing statistics as 'zipping', 'zapping' and 'grazing' become entrenched practices among audiences (see Ainslie, 1988; Ang, 1991).

Writing about the introduction of the PeopleMeter in New Zealand, Macdonald (1990:86) referred to this practice of audience research with its strong marketing orientation as 'the pseudo-science of demographics and ratings'. Aside from this potentially critical judgement,



Macdonald's article lapses into an almost curious fascination with this new research technology, a brief infatuation which was also characteristic of public discussion in the New Zealand media. Overseas, the PeopleMeter has been received with considerably more scepticism - even among market researchers whose reservations are not too far removed from those voiced by other critics: 'The figures received from tv-meters are taken as a pretext for viewing behaviour' (Montén, 1989:182). But in the final analysis, ratings research is methodologically flawed in that, according to Morley (1990:6), it 'reduces television viewing to the observable behaviour of having the set on [which] is further assumed to be a simple act, having, in principle, the same meaning and salience for everybody'.

The amount of resources being expended by commercial (and public service) television institutions to forever 'desperately seek the audience'; to deliver the audience, as it were, in nicely packaged demographic and psychographic segments to advertisers, is also the focus of Ang's (1991) comprehensive critique of the ratings discourse. Ang (1991:ix-x) extends Morley's observation by pointing out that 'the audience so desperately sought does not exist, at least not in the unified and controllable mode in which it is generally envisioned.'

Moreover, the everyday realities of television audiencehood are silenced in the official or professional discourses about the television audience, which from a position of distance does not want to know the subjective, complex and dynamic forms of audiencehood. From this analytic perspective, Ang (1991:2) sets herself the task to:

...disentangle the process of this symbolic silencing by examining the pragmatic logic of the institutional point of view [which] leads us to treat 'television audience' as a definite category whose conceptual status need not be problematized. The television audience is taken-for-grantedly defined as an unknown but knowable set of people, not more, not less.

The television audience as conjured up by the broadcasting institutions appears to be nothing more than a discursive construct which, represented as a taxonomic collective, stands in stark contrast with what Ang (1991:153-170) calls the social world of actual audiences. The latter's world is too polysemic and too polymorphic to be captured in the discursive construct of the television audience; in other words, or epistemologically speaking, the social world of actual audiences always remains an unfinished definition.

According to Lealand (1988b:2), the ratings discourse in New Zealand has a persistent influence. Audience research output tends to be solely characterised by a verification of numbers, a practice by which 'quantitative or descriptive statistics measure and classify the

availability and users/subscribers of different services'. Elsewhere, Lealand (1988a:43) has pointed to the paradox that exists regarding knowledge about television and its audiences:

...television in New Zealand has usually been regarded as too important (ratings signify all known behaviours) and too trivial (not worthy of the attention other social behaviour attracts) to be researched in any meaningful way.

The combined result has been that the market research 'paradigm' has become the dominant framework for the interpretation of information about audiences.

In the absence of other knowledge about New Zealand audiences what remains is speculation about the future with new technologies creating new markets, if the 1988 Steering Committee's report *Restructuring of the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand on State Owned Enterprise Principles* is anything to go by. Listing recent trends in the United States and Europe, this report reflects on the (financial) consequences of a deregulated broadcasting market. The key words in this report are 'audience share' and 'cost economies', which specifically pertain to the deficit to be experienced by the 'terrestrial networks' in light of the new media such as satellite television, cable television and subscriber television (Steering Committee, 1988:15-16). From reading this report, one cannot but conclude that audiences are solely perceived in terms of advertising revenue. The theorisation of the audience as commodity (ie. audiences creating surplus value for the television industry) put forward by Marxist media scholars (Smythe, 1977; Jhally and Livant, 1986) takes on a new exigency when provided with the evidence of the argument expressed by the Steering Committee. Moreover, the report, like the audience measurement techniques discussed above, merely posits the television audience as a discursive term which, according to Morley (1990:6), 'lumps people together only in so far as they have an observable category, "watching television", in common'.

With such limited knowledge about television audiences in New Zealand available, it should come as no surprise that by now largely discredited models of audience behaviour underpin a lot of the commonsense thinking about the alleged influences of the media, television in particular, in New Zealand society. The weekly column 'Letters to the Editor' in the *Listener & TV Times* is a case in point. While perhaps being one of the few publicly accessible opportunities for 'audience feedback', its correspondents all too often portray a rather sinister view of the media combined with images of audiences that defy a realistic appreciation of the actual television viewing process. This is not to say that this situation does not match that of other societies with a similar kind of media saturation and where the media equally make easy scapegoats for all manner of social ills experienced. Nevertheless, it is important to start an agenda for research in New Zealand that entails a shift away from

perceiving audiences as commercial targets of the television and advertising industries or, alternatively, as passive recipients of media content.

The next section reviews images of audiences which occupy various positions on the active-passive continuum and conceptualisations of audiences in terms of agency and control. This is an appropriate corollary to the discussion of audience measurement practices in New Zealand which contains implicit notions of audience passivity or activity. To this end, two models - the 'effects' and 'uses and gratifications' paradigms - which have dominated the study of audiences in the post-war period, will receive closer attention. The former could be characterised as conceptualising audiences as predominantly passive whereas the latter allows for a more active image. It will be shown that in an unaccustomed and possibly contradictory way, both paradigms are subsumed within the market research model of audiences.

### **Effects, uses and the television audience**

While the effects tradition has over the last twenty years come under severe criticism and has been dismissed outright as almost an oddity of the past, it still acquires considerable mileage for debate in the public discourse about television. Whereas it may also be the case that any 'self-respecting' media researcher would have long since abandoned this particular model, various versions of the effects paradigm keep on capturing the imagination of commonsense thinkers about the role of the media in modern societies.

The origins of the effects paradigm can be found in the earliest attempts to explain the mass media, which during the inter-war period were accredited with a powerful and persuasive role. The intellectual environment in which it emerged as a broad consensus has been well documented and the constituting ingredients of the effects paradigm according to Curran et al. (1982:11-12) were:

...(1) the creation of mass audiences on a scale that was unprecedented through the application of new technology - the rotary press, film and radio - to the mass production of communications; (2) a fashionable though not unchallenged view, that urbanization and industrialization had created a society that was volatile, unstable, rootless, alienated and inherently susceptible to manipulation; (3) linked to the view of urbanized man as being relatively defenceless, an easy prey to mass communication...(4) anecdotal but seemingly persuasive evidence that the mass media had brainwashed people during World War 1, and engineered the rise of fascism in Europe between the wars.

It was in this context that the 'magic bullet' theory or 'hypodermic' model emerged to explain the effects of the media in modern society. The hypodermic model's analogy has been a powerful one as it appeals to popular sentiments. The media are seen here to 'inject'

particular messages - rather like a drug - into the brains of members of the audience thus causing them to behave in a certain way. In the 1930s, these ideas were held by critics of the left as well as of the right. The Frankfurt School promoted the view that 'the American mass media were turning individuals into "masses", destroying culture, and acting as a powerful drug which produced a mindless conformity', while cultural conservatives of the Leavisite mould argued that 'high standards could only be kept up if culture was confined to an exclusive élite' (Barrat, 1986:16).

While seemingly dominant in the interwar period, there is some debate as to whether the hypodermic model actually existed. Wartella and Reeves (1985) argue that Katz and Lazarsfeld mobilised the notion of the all-powerful media as a bogus argument to justify their own work. Katz and Lazarsfeld's classic contribution *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (1955) set out to challenge simplistic stimulus-response models by introducing the notion of intervening variables or 'factors that come between...the media and the masses to modify the anticipated effects of communications' (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955:20). This study rendered a broader sociological analysis of media effects as almost obsolete and it was aimed to dethrone the hypodermic theory with an insistence on the complexity of the mediation process (Gitlin, 1978). Yet, as Chaffee and Hochheimer (1985:289) have asserted, Katz and Lazarsfeld had misrepresented the history of communications research in that the hypodermic model was created as an antithesis 'against which the limited effects model could be contrasted'.

However, this dethroning of the direct effect model was a highly symbolic act: 'Certainly no bullet theorists had time to fire their shots before the dominant orthodoxy, the effects paradigm, claimed the field' (Hodge and Tripp, 1986:192-193). The scientific framework of limited effects, referred to by Hodge and Tripp as the 'dominant orthodoxy', would direct attention to 'the search for specific, measurable, short-term, individual, attitudinal and behavioral "effects" of media' (Gitlin, 1978:207). Hence, as the 1950s and 1960s saw the introduction and rapid spread of television, research began to shift its main interests to '[television's] effects on viewers and the functions served by television viewing for various subaudiences. Of particular concern was the effect...on the attitudes and behavior of children' (Allen, 1987:9). Here the emphasis was on the 'discrete' effects the media may have on certain individuals rather than society as a whole.

'The effects paradigm in the 1950s and 1960s', according to Hodge and Tripp (1986:193):

..settled down as a successful 'normal science'. The success was measured not by actual achievements, but by the feeling of confidence that research was on the right track: the effects of television, on children and others, would in time be exhaustively understood.

Behaviourism, as well as the discipline of psychology in general, made the greatest claim to detached judgment. Researchers in this field, supported by an increasing constituency concerned about television violence, mobilised the scientific method 'convinced that they [were] producing "hard evidence" about the effects of television' (Lodziak, 1986:6).

The particular contention of 'the helpless duped audience [which] can, because of its subjugation, be legitimately spoken for, explained, and theorized by academics who are themselves immune from the forces they find acting upon others' (Fiske, 1988:246) has been an important alibi for the effects model. The laboratory experiment has proven to be the specific terrain in which most studies were conducted. Lodziak (1986:20) argues that this application of psychological behaviourism to measuring television's effects, on the one hand, 'belie[s] the complexity of human experience', and on the other treats television 'in isolation and in terms of stimulus properties, which again distorts its complexity'. Murdoch (1984:65), in similar vein, has pointed to the problem of generalisation associated with laboratory research often cited in the screen violence debate:

In the first place, the majority of experiments have been carried out with nursery-school children and college students. Though easy for academic researchers to get hold of, these groups are hardly representative of the population at large. Second, by decontextualising screen violence, these experiments change its meaning... Third, the kinds of violent behaviour studied are very unlike real-life incidents - rape, sexual assault and 'mugging' - that commentators are most concerned about.

The fact that no consensus has been arrived at in the findings put forward has amplified the problems associated with the effects project, even though the call for more research of this kind remains. However, a more fundamental complication with the effects model has been its underlying contradiction which has been correctly unmasked by Morley (1989:160):

On the one hand, television is accused of reducing its audience to the status of 'zombies' or 'glassy-eyed dupes' who consume a constant diet of predigested junk food, churned out by the media 'sausage factory' and who suffer the anaesthetic effects of this addictive and narcotic substance. However, at the same time...television has also been accused of making us do all manner of things, most notably in the debates around television and violence - where it has been argued that the viewing of violent television content will cause viewers to go out and commit violent acts.

It is clear that the effects model with its fragmentary and contradictory information appears to be grounded in commonsense assumptions about what television does to its audience. Therefore, its research endeavour has not really been able to further qualify such assumptions to a satisfactory direction on which gradual progress could be made.

Dissatisfaction with the effects paradigm led some media researchers in the late 1960s to formulate an alternative perspective which came to be known as the uses and gratifications approach. Against the merely reactive and passive attitudes of the audience toward media

content which was generally the position taken by the effects researchers, the uses and gratifications model emphasised the active role of audiences. In his call for a new research agenda, Halloran (quoted in Barrat, 1986:28) succinctly formulated this new impetus: 'We must get away from the habit of thinking in terms of what the media do to people and substitute for it the idea of what people do with the media'. McQuail et al. (1972) followed this up by accentuating the interactive process between the media and their audiences, attempting to place it in a broader social system. For these authors (McQuail et al, 1972:144), media use is characterised as an interactive process; media content has, therefore, to be related to the 'individual needs, perceptions, roles and values and the social context within which a person is situated'. In particular, the uses and gratifications perspective places the priority on active audiences which filter media content according to their own individual needs. Thus, the classic statement of the uses and gratifications perspective has listed the following sequence of concerns, namely (Katz et al., 1974:20):

(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.

While Katz et al. (1974:21) acknowledge that the uses and gratifications contributions are varied in their individual points of departure, 'all strive towards an assessment of media consumption in audience-related terms, rather than in technological, aesthetic, ideological, or other more or less "elitist" terms'.

The uses and gratifications perspective has mostly employed the questionnaire method to elicit responses from audiences. The main interest is to find out the reasons behind, for instance, choosing a particular television programme. These responses are then organised into clusters which reflect the most popular statements about why one is watching a particular programme (Barrat, 1986). However, since the level of generality of such questionnaires tend to obscure the complexity of media consumption, there are problems in attempting to go beyond the demonstration of truisms (Elliott, 1974:257). McQuail et al. (1972), for example, distinguished four categories within their descriptive typology of media usage: diversion; personal relationships; personal identity; and surveillance. In other words, television could be respectively used for escaping routines and problems, for companionship, for point of reference as a means of identification and, finally, satisfying a need to know what is going on in the world. Such typologies have revealed a sensitivity to the variability of audience response and interpretation which was previously wanting in the effects paradigm. The underlying assumption here, however, is that audiences are in

control, rationally using the media for their own ends and this implies that we are free to interpret the media product as we choose - 'that there are no interpretations built in to media texts so they can mean what we want them to mean' (Barret, 1986:125). This particular line of critique is one with which I shall continue.

Elliott (1974:252) had earlier pointed to the psychologism - explanation in terms of solely psychological criteria - implicit in the uses and gratification approach, in that it:

...is basically mentalistic, relying as it does on intervening mental states and processes... The approach is individualistic in the sense that it deals with intra-individual processes. These can be generalized to aggregates of individuals, but they cannot be converted in any meaningful way into social structure and process.

Furthermore, Elliott (1974:253) has argued that uses and gratifications cannot escape the charge of being functionalist, be it of a individualist type whereby 'no attempt is made to differentiate between media or people on the basis of the interests they represent or the power they possess'. The uses and gratifications model, in other words, leaves little or no room for the analysis of power groups and their ideologies. Similar problems arise with the uses and gratifications approach's optimistic claim for allowing a conceptualisation of the active audience (Elliott, 1974:254):

People are credited with more control over their own activities. But if the audience can take control of itself, there is less reason to be concerned about the ownership and control of the media, or with the quality of the output or with any problem of long-term or short-term effect.

It appears that positioning the audience as active consumers of television content has been conceived of in mainly psychological terms at the expense of a sociological appreciation of audiences as being part of complex relationships. Hence, Inglis (1990:147) has characterised 'the unhappily named' uses and gratifications studies as not offering anything startling new:

'Gratification' has an infantile ring to it, and 'needs' an over-urgent one. The line from gratify to need is as crudely straight as the line from stimulus to response. Behind these terms we can see the discredited models of psychological behaviourism, the view that all actions are built out of conditioned reflexes, reinforced by success and reward.

Both the effects and uses and gratifications perspectives, while apparently paradigmatically opposed, have strong affinities with the market research practice referred to earlier in this chapter. The effects paradigm, promoting the stimulus-response mechanism, would of course be any advertisers' conjecture which, in its most basic sense, would uphold that a product's level of exposure on television influences buyer behaviour. The discussion

surrounding children's exposure to commercials is, *mutatis mutandis*, feeding on similar assumptions of unmediated access. Since advertisers are the main source of income for the television networks, both have economic interests in believing that advertising works and the effects model has provided a credible 'scientific' rationale. It is to this purpose that the ratings discourse will probably direct itself, sustaining this economic relationship of mutual benefit.

The uses and gratifications approach also has some rapport - even though perhaps unintended - with television market research. On the superficial level, uses and gratifications comes fairly close to what marketers equate with 'psychographic segmentation'. The latter argument involves delineating target or consumer groups on the basis of lifestyle characteristics, usually arrived at by the same vague and bland psychological generalisations that have also been identified in the uses and gratifications approach. On a somewhat more substantial level, the uses and gratifications approach has been placed in the framework of *laissez-faire* capitalism. As such it has been criticised for maintaining the status quo in that it, according to Bonney and Wilson (1983:19):

...represents audiences, like consumers in *laissez faire* economics, as unproblematically exercising free and rational choices in a free market, choosing the texts they like, want or need. Thus, it implies that audiences are getting what they want, that the way things are is the way they should be because the way they are is the outcome of free and rational choice.

Needless to say, the television ratings industry works very much on the same principles and is in the business to statistically confirm them. This audience research routine not only fails to recognise audiences as being part of wider social networks, but it is also flawed in not providing an adequate picture of television viewing practices. The next section will introduce a model which allows for a more dynamic relationship between audiences and television texts, while also being more alert to the social and political contexts of television production and consumption.

### **Television audiences as decoders**

As an exponent of critical communications theory, Hall's (1980) work on encoding/decoding - a precursor to the present rubric of the 'text/context problematic' - has emphasised that (Ang, 1985:251):

...an analysis of a text must be combined with an analysis of its social conditions of existence [attempting] to undermine the implicit assumptions of many sophisticated, semiologically based analyses, according to which the subject/viewer of a text coincides with the subject position constructed in the text.



Compared with the effects model and the uses and gratification approach, Hall's encoding/decoding model offered the potential to provide a map of differential readings of television content which in turn was problematised as (re-)producer of meanings. In doing so, the encoding/decoding model furnished the starting point of conceptualising television audiences more dynamically in terms of their structural position in society as well as having the ability to ideologically unmask television texts. A more sociological recognition of audience reception was thus achieved (Crook, 1989:361).

However, Hall's model has been primarily understood as a semiological conception as illustrated in Wren-Lewis's (1983:179) diagram below, showing the two sets of signifying practices:

signifier (event/object) -> encoding -> signifier (television programme) -> decoding

Couched in what appears to be the predominant semiological jargon of its time, Hall's contribution, while seminal, does not excel in accessibility. It is for this reason that Hall's model will be initially introduced using his own phraseology, before attempting to place it in a broader perspective.

Television, Hall argues (1980:134), as an area of 'social life appear[s] to be mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organized into dominant or preferred meanings'. Television engages in a signifying practice because it encodes these preferred meanings into programmes to create a meaningful discourse. This is a 'relatively autonomous' process since the 'professional code' of television broadcasters is not determined by but 'operates within the "hegemony" of the dominant code' (Hall, 1980:136). Decoding refers to the processes by which audiences make sense of televisual discourse, with the contention being that 'there is no necessary correspondence between encoding and decoding, the former can attempt to "pre-fer" but cannot prescribe or guarantee the latter, which has its own conditions of existence' (Hall, 1980:135). However, this is not to say that encoding cannot delimit the parameters of decoding processes as Hall (1980:135) observes: 'If there were no limits, audiences could simply read whatever they liked into any message'. In other words, there is a degree of reciprocity between encoding and decoding moments (Hall, 1980:136).

With the caveat that they should be seen hypothetically and subject to further empirical testing and refinement, Hall (1980:136-138) distinguishes three possible decoding positions in which one finds a parallel argument to the Gramscian theory of ideology. The first

position is labelled the dominant-hegemonic, which occurs when a member of the audience 'takes the connoted meaning from, say, a television newscast or current affairs programme full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded'. The second position is identified as the negotiated code which contains 'a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules - it operates with exceptions to the rule'. Finally, the oppositional code refers to the viewer who decodes 'the message in a globally contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference'. It is in the latter category that Hall locates the 'politics of signification', the struggle in discourse.

Inglis (1990:148) has made the point that Hall has mainly in mind the encounters between programmes and audiences of a political kind. His eloquent 'translation' of Hall's triple mode of decoding comes close to recording what may be any 'anecdotal' account of the experience of viewers (Inglis, 1990:148):

...first, the 'dominant-hegemonic', which is to say the conventional wisdom of the day; the 'negotiated', which is to say much the same as the first but with a few local qualifications thrown in; and the 'oppositional', which means what it says but at least allows for such vivid gratifications as shouting at the set.

Indeed, audiences may accept programming as it comes over the box; or say 'yes, but...'; in addition, they may throw things at the set; and, as yet another in what could be in an exhaustive list, they may flatly ignore it.

To say that such varied responses necessarily imply a kind of political constitution of the subject, as Hall seems to be suggesting, would be an overstatement. In this vein, watching television thus precipitates the 'political', whether or not this is tapping the lived experiences of audiences, something which is reinforced by the model's supposed preoccupation with television news and current affairs programming. The latter, that is the analysis of television as a 'hegemonic project', has been a treasured theme for the cultural Marxists of the Birmingham Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies. It enables television to be analysed as a 'site of struggle' thus serving as an antidote for those who had written television off as an instrument of the dominant class. The role and functions of ideology, however, still capture the foreground because the encoding/decoding model which framed audience research within cultural studies 'placed the question of the audience firmly within the ambit of the sociological pull of the problematic of hegemony' (Allor, 1988:225).

In his defence, Hall (1980:130) mentions that:

The typical processes identified in positivistic research on isolated elements - effects, uses, 'gratifications' - are themselves framed by structures of understanding, as well as being produced by social and economic relations, which shape their 'realization' at the reception end of the chain and which permit the meanings signified in the discourse to be transposed into practice or consciousness.

However, at the risk of setting up a 'man of straw', this argument could be returned to Hall whose theoretical contribution does not really transcend this conundrum, on a somewhat different though related level. Wren-Lewis (1983:181) has pointed out that at the encoding-end of the equation: 'Television is seen as reproducing meanings (or not), rather than producing them'. According to Wren-Lewis, this is to concede television the same status as those communication models that see the television content as a simple representation/misrepresentation of social reality. To analyse television as an agency involved in constructing reality would avoid discussing the merits of whether or not television is 'real'.

On another, and perhaps more fundamental, level the encoding/decoding model promotes a narrow role for the audience - a feature already referred to above. Particularly where the decoding practices are concerned, the model's effectivity is, according to Ang (1986:251-252):

...limited to negotiations open to viewers within the given range of significations made possible by a text or genre of texts...For this research model, the sole problem is the way in which texts are received/decoded in specific socio-cultural contexts, failing to take into account that decodings are embedded in a general practice of television viewing. It then becomes possible to question the relevance of the concept of decoding, with its connotations of analytical reasoning, for describing the viewer's activity of making sense of a text, as watching television is usually experienced as a 'natural' practice, firmly set within the routines of everyday life.

With its emphasis on the rational viewer making sense of television programming in a fairly structured way, the encoding/decoding model - while for different reasons - thus falls into a trap similar to the case of the uses and gratifications model. Not embedding television viewing practices within the routines of everyday life emerges as a crucial oversight in what was otherwise a good starting point for conceptualising television consumption in a more dynamic way.

These criticisms can be extended to Morley's (1980) *The 'Nationwide' Audience: Structure and Decoding*, his attempt was to empirically operationalise Hall's encoding/decoding model, supplementing it with Parkin's (1973) conceptual framework of class structures and meaning systems. Morley (1980:15) conceives the audience as:

...composed of clusters of socially situated individual readers, whose individual readings will be framed by shared cultural formations and practices pre-existent to the individual: shared 'orientations' which will in turn be determined by factors derived from the objective position of the individual reader in the class structure.

Morley (1980:18) thus allows for a dialectic understanding of the reception of the television text on account of which the latter's meaning will be 'constructed differently according to the discourses (knowledges, prejudices, resistances, etc.) brought to bear on the text by the reader'. The crucial factor, according to Morley (1980:18), resides in 'the range of discourses at the disposal of the audience'. In other words, the interpretation of the television text depends on the scope of meaning systems available to audiences.

To uncover the empirical reality of the above theoretical propositions - which on the surface are rather ambitious, requiring as they do that we not only to count but also enter into heads - Morley (1980:36) showed two Nationwide programmes (a regular current affairs feature) to groups with different social and cultural backgrounds. These groups consisted of 5-10 people and were drawn from a variety of educational institutions as well as from management and trade union training centres, the aim being to gain entry where the group already had some existence as a social entity. After having been shown a video recording of the television programme, the ensuing group discussions about the programme were audio-taped and transcribed.

The 'patterns of group readings' (Morley, 1980:134) shows the centrality of the decoding/encoding model organised around social clusters of reading. More specifically, they demonstrate that the apprentice groups, school boys and managers tended to adopt the dominant code of the programme while the training college students settled with 'the "dominant" end of the spectrum of the "negotiated" readings'. Alternatively, the photography and university students rendered oppositional readings which, as Morley (1980:134) suggests, are respectively informed by an ideology of media professionalism on the part of the photography students and a cultural critique of a 'Leavisite' kind on behalf of the university students. The trade union groups produced both negotiated and oppositional decodings, the differences depending on their social and educational background as well as their political outlook. Finally, black students tended to refuse to read the programme: 'The concerns of Nationwide are not the concerns of their world' (Morley, 1980:134). The latter showed that decoding practices do not necessarily confine themselves to the three types suggested by Hall.

These findings revealed that the ways in which this magazine-type current affairs programme was decoded by respondents did not always correspond to their class position. Furthermore, Hall had underestimated the variety of readings that could be made (Fiske, 1987:268-269). As Morley (1980:162) puts it in his conclusion:

We cannot consider the single, hypostatised text-subject in isolation from other discourses. Neither should we 'read in' sociological/demographic factors as directly affecting the communication process.

Despite these qualifications, the encoding/decoding model may be no less than a sophisticated version of the stimulus-response model in which (televisual) language can be understood as the 'intentional transmission of atomized meanings from one person's head to another' (Streeter, 1984:90). Apart from the theoretical credentials of the encoding/decoding model, its empirical operationalisation by Morley was not without problems. Moreover, Tulloch (1990:200) refers to difficulties associated with the role of the interviewer in 'situating audience interpretation' as well as with group dynamics during the interview setting which may veer the group towards a 'unified interpretive position' (see also Wren-Lewis, 1983).

It needs to be said that Morley (1981), in a critical postscript to *The Nationwide Audience*, has himself constructively contributed to the ongoing discussion that this study generated. The next section of this chapter will briefly summarise his 'self-reflexive' critique in order to introduce the broad theoretical perspective adopted in this thesis, a perspective which will facilitate the study of television audiences in the context of everyday routines and practices.

### **Television content, television audiences and the viewing context**

Morley's influential study *The Nationwide Audience* was concerned with the determinations of meaning through the signifying practices of television and the television decoding processes by audiences located in various positions within the social structure. In his postscript to that study, he acknowledged the difficulties associated with the encoding/decoding model, in particular that it was dealing with a broadly political form of communication. Using Dyer (1975), Morley (1981:10) argues that decoding models need to recognise, in the first instance:

...the question of the viewers' positive or negative response to the text as a particular cultural form - do they enjoy it, feel bored by it, recognise it as [being] at all relevant to their concerns? These questions...need to be asked before exploring whether or not they 'agree, or disagree, or partly agree' with the ideological propositions of the text.

He is suggesting that this would involve a shift to genre theory which allows for a more

flexible model for text-audience relationships. Genre theory would treat television programmes as cultural artifacts and the understanding of genre as sets of rules governing the production of meaning which 'regulate the production of texts by authors and the reading of texts by audiences' (Morley, 1981:10). In particular, Morley makes a case for genre theory to be related, following Bourdieu (1984), to the distribution of cultural competences among audiences according to the latter's social structural position. However, Morley's new proposal has the peril of leading to a new kind of textual/social determinism which posits a class-, age- and gender-differentiated audience against possible television programme genres (e.g. 'working class women watch *Coronation Street* for this and that reason') which can only connote a stereotypical appreciation of television audiences. Such a conceptual framework 'risks collapsing back into a mechanistic model simply qualified by a limited notion of polysemy' (Streeter, 1984:90-91).

While perhaps a useful vehicle to categorise television content or television programme types, however, there are some problems with indiscriminately applying genre theory to television. As Feuer (1987:131) has mentioned:

Television has employed standard programs types, but arguably this has not been the main principle of coherence for the medium. Television programs do not operate as discrete texts to the same extent as did movies; the property of 'flow' blends one program into another, and programs are regularly 'interrupted' by ads and promos.

In addition, television's unit of coherence tends to be larger than discrete programmes and thus rather different from the genre which, for instance, in film is a vehicle for the acknowledgement of difference using relatively standardised procedures. As Feuer (1987:131) points out, an evening's television viewing may include different networks with all possible programme combinations. In other words, and at the risk of overgeneralising, the audience 'watches' television and not television genres which after all tend to be but arbitrary categories devised by (mostly) literary critics. Genre, in other words, may be too narrow a concept to analyse the audience reception processes. (For a fuller exposition of this contention and the compelling evidence that supports it, refer to Chapter Six.)

Feuer's reservations with respect to indiscriminately applying genre theory to television, therefore, also has implications for conceptualising audiences in the ways in which they may watch television. This inevitably leads to having to incorporate an appreciation of the television viewing context. In the remainder of this section, a starting point will be offered for such an understanding by focusing on the integration of television viewing practices in the everyday routines of audiences. First, and building on from Feuer (1987), attention

needs to be paid to the question of how television programming itself may anticipate the conditions or contexts in which it is consumed. The latter may be addressed by briefly discussing television's associational properties of segmentation and flow (see Fiske, 1987:99-105).

Williams (1974) coined the phrase of 'television flow' on the basis of his experience as an English visitor being exposed to American television. Unlike British programming of that time, American television programming was continually interrupted with commercials, newsbreaks and promos. Williams (1974:95) likened his encounter with American television as:

...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 it is not like that at all, for though the items may be various, the television experience has in some important ways unified them.

Ellis (1982) has taken issue with Williams' concept of flow, preferring the notion of segmentation instead. While subscribing to Williams' insight in the way flow may assemble disparate items, he disagrees with Williams where 'items' are taken to be 'separate texts' (Ellis, 1982, 117-118). In doing so, Williams' model is mistaken in that it is based on 'cinema-style texts which appear in a context that reduces their separation one from another' (Ellis, 1982:118). In other words, Williams conflates cinema with television, but the latter does not operate by the single text. Ellis (1982:112) makes the point that it is typical of television to broadcast the text as 'small sequential unities of images of sound whose maximum duration seems to be about five minutes', which are then organised into groups either in a cumulative way (like the news item and the advertisement) or in a repetitive and sequential way (such as the serial or series).

According to Ellis (1982:162), through such operations of broadcasting texts, television draws the interests of audiences in a way unique and certainly different from that of the cinema:

The viewer is cast as someone who has the TV switched on, but is giving it very little attention: a casual viewer relaxing at home in the midst of the family group. Attention has to be solicited and grasped segment by segment. Hence both the amount of self-promotion that each broadcast TV channel does for itself, the amount of direct address that occurs, and the centrality given to sound in TV broadcasting. Sound draws the attention of the look when it has wandered away.

Television viewing is thus assumed to take place in the everyday domestic setting which in turn does not appear a favourable context for a 'concentrated spectatorial activity' in a way the cinema is (Ang, 1985:254). With television having adopted its overall mode of address

to accommodate the relatively erratic nature of the domestic viewing context, it would make sense that audience researchers devised analogous strategies that aimed to understand the consumption of television in the everyday settings of audiences. The final section of this chapter, then, will deal with the more recent initiatives in this burgeoning field which have attempted to conceptualise audiences in their everyday life worlds.

### Television audiences and everyday life

Ang (1991) has recently argued that even though we presently live in a television-saturated world, with television becoming an integral part of our everyday practices and experiences, our knowledge about the 'social world of actual audiences' leaves much to be desired. Instead, she (Ang, 1991:1) claims, 'we are stuck with a poor vocabulary of unhelpful stereotypes'. These stereotypes - like 'telly addicts', 'glued to the box' and 'amusing ourselves to death' - may in fact be a protracted 'Luddite' response to the everyday integration of a new technology and may thus signify a resistance to a realisation that television has indeed become part of everyday life. Charting the responses to new technologies in the nineteenth century during the process of which such technologies as the railway gradually became part of a taken-for-granted reality, Bausinger's (1984:346) depiction of how the 'technical [was expressed] as an incomprehensible demonic threat' could be readily applied to accounts bemoaning the introduction/consolidation of television as a popular consumer item.

In formulating a point of departure from research that 'reifies' media communication, Bausinger (1984:347) notes that the essence of everyday intercourse with (media) technology lies in its naturalisation. According to Bausinger (1984:347), media research has basically ignored this avenue of inquiry, particularly where it concerns questions regarding the meaning and manifestations of 'the media as agencies of the everyday encounters'. Employing qualitative empirical research strategies - 'it is more important to understand something than to measure it' (Bausinger, 1984:347) - Bausinger (1984:349-350) postulates the following general points which firmly establish the media in the realm of the everyday.

Firstly, the media are never consumed in isolation of each other - hence, in the study of the use of the media, it is necessary to take the whole 'media ensemble' into consideration. Secondly, the media are never used completely nor with full concentration - it is, therefore, more appropriate to speak of 'parergic' media consumption. Thirdly, 'the media are an integral part of the way the everyday is conducted' (Bausinger, 1984:349). In other words, media behaviour cannot be divorced from 'non-media-related' forms of behaviour. Fourth,



media consumption is a collective process; the seemingly individual act of reading a newspaper (or watching television) still takes place in a context of family and friends. Fifth, media communication cannot be separated from interpersonal communication - media contents form a significant part of daily conversation patterns. Finally, apart from the fact that media contents convey several meanings, the 'open field' in which communication takes place contributes to a considerable amount of ambiguity in the reception process thus undermining the notion of the 'synthetic average viewer'. Bausinger (1984:350) concludes with a broad statement which denotes the emergence of a new research interest; a shift away from content to context, where the latter specifically refers to media consumption in the context of everyday routines:

...our media world does not merely consist of the content of the media, but includes all the bewildering interplay of intentional and unintentional acts of deliberate and incidental actions related to the media, to people, to the environment - the whole opaque panoply of the everyday.

Not only has Bausinger's pioneering contribution been taken further conceptually (see, for instance, Silverstone, 1989; 1990; Morley and Silverstone, 1990), but the latter half of the 1980s also saw a host of empirical studies placing television viewing in the context of everyday life. Most of these studies centred on the family context which, at the start of the 1980s, was increasingly conceived as the 'natural site' in which television audiences ought to be studied (Lull, 1980a; Morley, 1986). The literature tracing this development will be the immediate focus of Chapter Two. However, while both strands of studies are intimately linked, this chapter concludes with a more general perspective on television and everyday life.

Silverstone (1989:80), taking de Certeau's (1984) perspectives on the 'creativity' of everyday consumption practices to television, reiterates the points made by Bausinger:

We consume television not just in our relationship to the content, but also in our relationship to it as technology, as an object to be placed in our domestic environment and articulated into our private and public culture.

Elsewhere, Silverstone (1990) argues for an anthropology of television audiences in order to arrive at a social ecology/morphology of television viewing. In particular, he (Silverstone, 1990:187-188) calls for a research agenda which includes descriptive, or ethnographic, studies that monitor different patterns of consumption within different domestic settings across multiple aspects of television's use in time and space. Secondly, the dynamics of television viewing in terms of the active-passive continuum need to be more fully understood. Finally, research needs to focus on the consequences of the involvement with

television for individual family members and for families as a whole.

The research agenda proposed by Silverstone (also see Morley and Silverstone, 1990) entails a definite shift towards a greater sensitivity for understanding the context in which television is consumed. This is not to say that the concern for television content has altogether withered. However, questions relating to the ways in which audiences use and make sense of television content need to be framed and understood in terms of the daily contexts in which audiences consume television. In other words, so-called patterns of television viewing behaviour can, according to Ang (1991:161), only be satisfactorily accounted for:

...when it is grounded in the concrete situation in which it takes place. 'Watching television' is always behaviour-in-context, a generic term for heterogeneous kinds of activities whose multifarious and shifting meanings can only be understood in conjunction with their contexts.

## Conclusion

This chapter began with Elliott's (1974) somewhat disparaging assessment of the then current state of the art in mass communication research. In his polemic against the uses and gratifications approach, at that point in time hailed as a major paradigmatic shift in media studies, Elliott expressed his scepticism towards the discipline's 'haunted past', of a practice that repudiates old perspectives while at the same time attempting to initiate (a) new research agenda(s). However, Elliott's remarks could, of course, be applied to any academic discipline and, as perhaps more 'mainstream' epistemologies (see, for instance, Kuhn, 1970) would argue, such shifts constitute the nature of scientific change.

While this is not necessarily the place to enter into a broader debate of how academic knowledge in media studies is constructed, the last three decades have seen numerous contributions attempting to understand and explain the workings of the mass media in contemporary (Western) societies (for a comprehensive overview, see McQuail, 1987). Such contributions have enhanced our understanding of how the media operate or, perhaps more to the point, how the media do not operate in society (Winston, 1986). The recent upsurge in attempts to understand the complex social worlds of audiences (Ang, 1991) is an outstanding example of this trend, particularly when one considers that the latter field was ridden by notions of malignancy (Lodziak, 1986).

The major aim of this chapter was to outline the broad contours of post-war media theory by focusing on how television audiences were researched and conceptualised. More

specifically, three communication models were scrutinised on their conceptualisation of television audiences: the effects paradigm, the uses and gratifications paradigm and the encoding/decoding paradigm. In addition, the market research model was mentioned which, especially in the absence of other approaches, presently reigns supreme in New Zealand. This overview revealed that Loziak's (1986:Chapter 4) assessment was not too far off target: media- and/or ideology-centred approaches contributed to conceptions of the maligned audience.

The television/audiences nexus, as variously represented in the four models above, also tends to be open to the charge of anecdotalism because empirical evidence was either highly controversial or altogether absent. The four models merely rendered stereotypic depictions of audiences which perhaps could be equally stereotypically summarised as follows. The market research model perceives the audience as a 'taxonomic collective' (Ang, 1991) which, as gullible consumers, can be sold in demographic and psychographic segments to the advertisers. The effects model posits the audience as atomised - and therefore - vulnerable recipients of television content, violent programming in particular. The uses and gratifications paradigm operates on the basis of the rational viewer exercising free television programme choice so as to satisfy 'universal' psychological needs. Finally, the encoding/decoding model is concerned with politically constituted subjects which somehow are inscribed in the television text, often a current affairs programme or some other 'political' television programme.

Another picture emerging from this discussion was that the ways in which audiences were conceptualised was intimately linked to the methodological strategies employed by researchers. A concern for the context in which television is consumed was altogether absent, even though Morley's (1980) adoption of Hall's [1973] (1980) encoding/decoding model proved to be an insightful starting point from which a new sensitivity for the context was to be further developed. The final section of the chapter introduced an emerging paradigm which attempts to understand television consumption in the everyday contexts of audiences. After all, television audiences are people too (Svennevig, 1987) - and, as hinted at in this section, people tend to be family members as well. In other words, in attempting to capture the everyday contexts of television audiences, it would make sense to select the family environment as the site for researching everyday television viewing practices.

Morley's subsequent work has been very instructive. His *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (Morley, 1986) entails an important methodological departure from his previous work. The family as the unit of consumption for television is identified

as the appropriate way for conceptualising audiences. Methodology should make allowances for studying audiences in the natural context in which most viewing takes place. The next chapter will look at the family as the immediate viewing context of television, thereby building on Morley's (1986:16) insistent warning that:

...audience research which ignores the social/familial position of the viewer cannot comprehend a number of key determinations relating to both viewing 'choices' and responses. These involve questions of differential power, responsibility and control within the family, at different times of the day or evening.

Chapter Two will address these issues by thematically reviewing the generation of television and family life studies which, as will be shown, started as early as the late 1940s - thus coinciding with the arrival of the television medium into the domestic setting.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FAMILIES AS AUDIENCES

#### Understanding the Everyday Consumption of Television by Families

##### Introduction

Ever since the post-war period, when television left its experimental phase to become commercially adopted on an increasingly wider scale as a new form of mass communication, researchers in the burgeoning academic discipline of communications studies have looked, with a varying degree of conceptual precision, at the nexus of television and family life. There has been the more or less obvious implication that television should be primarily considered as a *domestic* medium, even though it has only been recently acknowledged that the family/household ought to constitute the main unit of analysis for television (Lull, 1980; Morley, 1986).

The first chapter concluded by outlining Morley's intellectual journey, a journey entailing a shift from a predominant concern with television as text to an attempt to conceptualise the context in which television is consumed. Morley's *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (1986), however, is not an isolated attempt. During the 1970s and early 1980s in Germany and the United States, respectively, a new generation of television family research emerged. This generation not only started from the premise that the family constitutes television's primary audience but also, and for this very reason, from the argument that television audiences need to be studied in the 'natural' environment of the household. Research methodology, therefore, needed to be transformed to enable the change in theoretical priorities to bear fruit. Consequently, there has been a significant adjustment which has brought qualitative methodologies to the foreground. The latter were seen to provide a more appropriate means for grappling with a list of new research questions.

Whilst within the United States this new impetus emanated from the established academic discipline of family (communication) studies, in Germany its origins lie in what is known as *Rezeptionsforschung* [reception research], which has only recently started to make an impact, however modest, among Anglo-Saxon scholars. Reception research's 'common denominators' are twofold (Mueller and Meyer, 1985:6):

...it is primarily recipient-orientated (as opposed to content- or effect-orientated) and it emphasizes the predominantly active role the recipient plays in whatever form of interaction with the media.

The interaction between members of the audience and with their social environment during the 'reception process' is another focus of research interest.

This chapter will review this new generation of television and family life studies. In doing so, the chapter will be organised around themes or issues that have emerged with a certain degree of consistency throughout the last two decades, and which have withstood the test of empirical research. Gunter and Svennevig's *Behind and in Front of the Screen: Television's Involvement with Family Life* (1986), the first comprehensive review of research on television and family life, deals with a range of such related themes or issues, some of which will receive further attention in this chapter. Their list of themes is quite exhaustive and includes such topics as (Gunter and Svennevig, 1986:2):

...the use of television by families, the decision-making processes which determine that use, the way family life is shown on television, the influence of television's portrayals on viewers' beliefs about family life, and the impact of television or of particular kinds of programming on the interaction between family members.

It needs to be pointed out that television and family life as an intrinsic area of interest has received relatively little attention. Research has tended to concentrate on children and adolescents who, of course, usually happen to live in family contexts, even though only sparse reference is made to this fact (a notable exception is Palmer, 1986). The result has been that children, who are after all considered to be the most vulnerable victims of television, have been studied in isolation from their 'normal' viewing environment.

However, under the so-called bibliographic rubric of 'Television and the Family', there is a sizeable body of literature which predates what was labelled above as the new generation of television and family life studies. It is to this earlier generation of studies that attention will first be paid. This will roughly cover the period 1950-1980; accordingly, some of the paradigms mentioned in the previous chapter will be revisited.

### **Families and television**

A review of the literature on television and family life may profitably start by paying a tribute to a nineteenth century technological visionary, Albert Robida, whose pictorial 'science fiction' of 1882 placed the family as the unit of consumption for his envisaged technological marvel (Barnouw, 1982:4):

Families of the future would, as he saw it, watch a distant war from the comfort of the living room. In his imagination, the screen on the wall would also allow people to take courses taught by a faraway teacher. And it would enable the housewife to survey goods for sale, and her husband to watch a girlie show - all from the comfort of home.

Less than a century later, Robida's technological vision has materialised and the different types of audience activity anticipated in his *Visions: Homescreen Delights* (1882) have become part of the daily routines of family members.

The first generation of research on television and family life is characterised by a uniform undertaking to measure the effects of television on domestic life, or in the words of what must be one of the very first studies of this kind, 'to determine how a technological innovation may modify certain family activities and practices' (McDonagh, 1950:113). Since McDonagh's study is fairly typical of what was to come in research answers to this investigative 'problem', I will deal with it in some depth. The article compared television and non-television households on several variables. It was found, for instance, that while both groups were similar in terms of age distribution and educational status, television families tended to have more children and belonged to a higher occupational category than non-television families. Furthermore, television families noticed an increase in visitors, but were going out less (for pleasure driving, sport activities, cinema). In addition, television households were found to be reading less, listening to the radio less and 'home conversation' appeared to have suffered also under the influence of television, leading McDonagh (1950:122) to state that (while in some families television offers the subject of much conversation):

The television family during evening hours is changing from a social group characterized by conversation to an audience sitting in the semidarkness and silently gazing at their commercially sponsored entertainment via television.

This rather somber observation is also reflected in McDonagh's (1950:120) evaluation of television monopolising viewers' attention 'to the point where "auxiliary" activities (i.e. homework [domestic chores]) cannot be completed'.

A second study to address television and the family was that of Hamilton and Lawless (1956). Using a predominantly Parsonian framework, they suggested that 'television viewing will become an integral part of the social milieu within which the personality grows and develops' (Hamilton and Lawless, 1956:393). Like McDonagh, they also compared television and non-television families and found differences in eating habits, social activities and forms of social interaction. Hamilton and Lawless found that television

families participated more in family activities of which television viewing formed a significant part. However, this was qualified by the observation that 'television becomes a *substitute* for social activity both within and outside the family circle' (Hamilton and Lawless, 1956:398, my emphasis). Television as a 'substitute' form of entertainment was also found to enrich family status in the community and in this capacity television viewing would become an expected pattern of social intercourse. Furthermore, in their discussion of changing family roles, Hamilton and Lawless (1956:399) make the interesting point that in television families the child has become more dominant because of its part in selecting what programme to watch. Not only had the selection of programmes become a source of frustration and conflict, but they also found that the husband and the child were making the final decisions regarding programme choice leading to a 'trend for the mother and wife to lose her dominant role in the family constellation', thus prefiguring what has become a salient theme in the analysis of television families. The latter, according to these authors, is an example of the way in which television is 'finding its place in the social interactional value system of our culture' (Hamilton and Lawless, 1956:403).

Both studies acquired their data through standardised interview procedures, in which hidden assumptions of an effects model were operationalised. In this vein, McDonagh's study attempted to measure the effects of television on a host of family recreational activities, whereas Hamilton and Lawless tried to show how television may be considered as a social factor responsible for a changing personality. Interestingly, the effects that were discerned may in fact have been time-period specific. In her analysis of women's home magazines of the 1950s, Spigel (1990) found that public discourse about television and the family assumed a middle-class ownership. In other words, the families that obtained television sets tended to be high-status families which, consequently, became the centre of attention for the research community until the pattern of ownership became democratised. Nevertheless, research questions with the underlying notions of the possible effects of television on family life remained on the agenda throughout the period immediately following the above mentioned studies. The call for more research increased as well as a demand for the refinement of methodologies, especially that of sampling techniques. It is to these studies that I will now turn.

The widespread penetration of television into households during the late 1950s and 1960s saw an increasing demand for research but not in the least for reasons of a growing concern for the perceived impact of television on family life. One of these studies, commissioned by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), confidently concluded that (Belson, 1959:127):



The outstanding result of the enquiry has been the fact that it has uncovered hardly any evidence to support the large and sweeping generalisations often made as to the effects of television upon family life and social habits.

If there were any 'effects' discernible, these varied according to locale, season and family background factors, but the overall finding was that television would bring the family together during evening transmission hours (Belson, 1959:128). Such findings, it could be argued, must have been comforting to the BBC which sponsored the research and which could have been politically compromised as the only broadcasting establishment in the United Kingdom. However, in another early and much cited example of British research, *Television and the Child: An Empirical Study of the Effect of Television on the Young*, Himmelweit *et al.* (1958:383) put forward the view that 'television, although centred on the home, does not greatly strengthen family ties, even though it may offer a spurious sense of unity'. While the family's defence of television as a benefactor - which may have informed the 'positive' results in the Belson study - should be treated with suspicion, the authors are nevertheless careful in not wanting to cast television in the role of scapegoat in such matters as the causation of family conflict.

Across the Atlantic, the 1960s saw a steady rise of publications dealing with television and the family from various angles. Reviewing this literature is not as informative as might be expected since it is rather like presiding over an academic court, hearing evidence versus counter evidence without getting a significant or new light on the matter under investigation. Most research conducted in this period rested on an epistemology which conflates cumulative knowledge with perspective knowledge as the following discussion of three examples readily shows.

First, Niven (1960) looked at responsibility for television programme selection in the family, a function which was found to vary according to different time slots during the day. For example, during the evening viewing hours 'the majority of the program selection is the result of family decision' (Niven, 1960:111). Second, Smith (1961) contrasted the former results with his finding that housewives tended to select television programmes in the evening and that general agreement about programme choice was considerably less. The latter was particularly the case in families where the parents had a lower level of educational achievement. In such families 'housewives who are relatively unsophisticated are more often the selectors of television programs because television is more important to them' (Smith, 1961:43). Finally, Blood's (1961) results, which suggested that in lower class families the father/husband controls the television when conflict arises over which programme to watch, seemed to contradict Smith's findings. The lower class families also

reported that they did not perceive television interfering with other activities, something which set them apart from their uppermiddle class counterparts who tended to censor television programming for their children more so than lower class families.

These three studies, while attempting to cover a similar problematic, were surprisingly contradictory in their findings. These inconclusive results cannot but give the impression that television and family life research was in a state of limbo - as was indeed the effects paradigm which dominated much of the research during the 1950s and 1960s. Operating within a theoretical vacuum, this type of research isolated findings from its object and method of study; hence the rather uncritical presentation of the data as matter of fact instead of interpreting the results within a framework of media and/or family theory.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, this particular trend continued. Researchers, confidently armed with improved questionnaires, sampling techniques and statistical analysis, probed the family audience on an almost infinite number of variables. For example, Steiner (1963:227) was mainly concerned with 'the attitudes and feelings generated by the television set' and found 'no direct evidence on how the audience actually behaves in regard to television, or as a result of watching it'. While he designated the home environment as the natural setting for television, we do not learn a lot other than that television watching is not a 'solitary affair' (Steiner, 1963:79-80), a finding which he confirms with evidence from ratings statistics. Bower (1973:143-175) also devoted a chapter to the family. He found that 'joint viewing' was the prevalent mode of television viewing in both single- and multiset families where 'the *main* set acts pretty much as the *only* set in the composition of the family members it brings together' (Bower, 1973:147). Within this context, Bower (1973:183) discovered that children were almost equal partners with their parents in the viewing decision process. Again these findings appeared to be rather unreliable since another study (Wand, 1968:93) suggested that the notion of television as a 'family medium' may be a misleading one. Wand qualified this by arguing that group viewing only occurred when both parents and children shared an interest in the television programmes watched.

The research agenda of the 1970s - at least in the United States, where most studies of this kind were conducted - reproduced in not too novel a fashion the research questions of the previous two decades. One reason may have been that a majority of researchers had not caught up with the changed quality of viewing practices. According to Lyle's (1972:23) impressionist account, the change had been quite profound:

One recalls that in the early days of television, when people were first acquiring sets, they watched for great periods of time, then gradually reduced their viewing time. Today it appears that the set is largely just left on and that the viewer 'drops in and out' of programs. This raises the possibility that while television has become ever more interwoven with our lives, its hold upon our attention has perhaps been reduced. Indeed, one might ask if the public's general affect for television has perhaps fallen despite apparent increases in 'viewing time'.

These issues, germane to an understanding of the family viewing context, do not find any resonance in: Walters and Stone's (1971) article on television and family communication; Rosenblatt and Cunningham's (1976) study on television viewing and family tensions; and, finally (even though this list is not exhaustive), Abel's (1976) survey on children's television viewing patterns within families. While these studies perhaps allow for a more dynamic and complex appreciation of the family as mediating television content than earlier studies did, the conceptualisation of the television viewing process is static and stereotypical.

Back in Western Europe, Brown and Linné (1976:186) more or less adapted Halloran's dictum (see Chapter One) concerning the area of television and family life. Instead of asking 'How does television affect families?' they posed the alternative question of 'How do families use television?', thus mobilising a social action perspective on families as audiences, which included faint traces of the uses and gratification paradigm. Brown and Linné (1976:186) argued that such a shift rendered a genuinely new research agenda:

In terms of research this reorientation leads to many specific questions. How are decisions about television taken within the family? What satisfactions are gained from family viewing and how do they differ from those gained from individual viewing? At a more sophisticated level of conceptualisation we can begin to consider the functional relationship which exists between family and television, in particular the manifest and latent functions of family viewing from the perspective of socialization.

It must be emphasised that these questions are not that particularly new but the reference to what appears to be Merton's functional analysis is not really a progressive venture. If Brown and Linné's suggestion is taken at face value, television and family life research had returned to the intellectual backwaters of 1950s' sociology and social psychology. This assessment is reinforced by their adoption of 'a very simple model which has a long history of use in the behavioural sciences' (Brown and Linné, 1976:187), in other words the S-IV-R (stimulus - intervening variable - response) model, where the family conveniently stands in for the intervening variable in a linear model of television consumption.

Meanwhile in Germany, the role of television in everyday family life received more systematic attention. Hunziker, Lüscher and Fauser (1975) interviewed *both* parents and children, concerned as they were about incorporating the role of television in theories of

socialisation, in particular how television content was being 'processed' [*verarbeitet*] by families in their social construction of reality (following Berger and Luckmann, 1963). They argued that television is consumed domestically and its resultant ecology makes it a family medium in which both parents and children participate with similar viewing practices (Hunziker *et al.*, 1975:304):

Because television consumption is tied to the home in such a way, one can expect the high correlations between the television (viewing) behaviours of parents and those of their children, which is indeed the case. The ecology of domestic television makes this plausible: Once the set is turned on, it directs its appeal to everybody.<sup>1</sup>

Hunziker *et al.* (1975:305-306) offer the interesting insight - which hitherto had remained relatively unexplored - that the qualitative use of television in the family almost indiscriminately occurs in addition to other activities so that 'television only on the surface regulates collective action within families'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the authors are careful to point out that there are no grounds to believe that television substantively influences the patterns of family interaction, which are more likely to be affected by the styles of upbringing employed by parents (Hunziker *et al.*, 1975:307-308).

Television viewing is conceptualised by these German scholars (for a methodological elaboration see Hunziker, 1976) as being integrated to a high degree in the everyday life of families as part of their negotiation of reality. This theoretically informed overture to television and family life serves as an appropriate antidote to those - academic researchers and free-lance activists alike - who perceived 'television and the family' as a social problem to be addressed. The latter preoccupation, of course, found its culmination in Winn's *The Plug-In Drug* (1977) that, according to one commentator (Root, 1986:10), is ridden with 'practically every phrase available in the zombie lexicon'. The sinister title of Winn's book was reflected in its content which unconvincingly attempted to provide the hypodermic model with a new lease of life, concerned as it was with showing how television undermined the family - literally making it a disease for its youngest members. However, enter the 1980s and new initiatives, particularly of innovations in methodology, appeared in what had been a barren landscape of the effects formulas. This new generation of studies started to follow Hunziker *et al.*'s (1976:310) recommendation to analyse television in the context of

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1 The German original reads: 'Da solchermassen der Fernsehkonsum an das Haus gebunden ist, sind die hohe Korrelationen zwischen dem Fernsehverhalten der Eltern und ihren Kindern zu erwarten, was in der Tat zutrifft. Die Ökologie des häuslichen Fernsehen macht dies plausibel: Ist das Gerät einmal eingeschaltet, so richtet es seinen Appel an jedermann'.

2 The German version reads: 'Das Fernsehen stellt nur an der Oberfläche ein gemeinsames Handeln der Familie dar'.

everyday family life, combining it with qualitative methodologies of which participant observation and in-depth interviewing were the most commonly employed. It is to the discussion of these more recent investigations that the next section is directed.

### **Families and the social uses of television**

In aiming to understand how families *use* television in the context of their everyday life, Lull's (1980a) study offers an excellent starting point. This section commences with this pivotal study by outlining, in some considerable detail, Lull's typology of the social uses of television thus providing the intellectual yardsticks against which subsequent research can be evaluated. The overall aim of this section is to show how Lull conceptualised families as audiences by providing a theoretical anchoring with the aim of harbouring qualitative audience research within a broader sociological discourse. In the introduction to his ground-breaking study, Lull (1980a:197) suggested that:

... audience members create specific and sometimes elaborate actions involving the mass media in order to gratify particular needs in the social context of television viewing.

His objective was to arrive at a typology of the social uses of television based on an ethnography of television audiences - involving participant observation and in-depth interviewing - which in turn he wanted to evaluate against the theoretical backdrop of the uses and gratifications literature. Because the immediate questions of methodology will be taken up in the next chapter, this section will more closely focus on how Lull combined ethnomethodology with the uses and gratifications perspective.

By placing the uses and gratifications paradigm in the tradition of social constructivism, Lull (1980a:198) believed that the uses of the media by audiences are 'observable evidences of the audience's control over the receptive instruments of mass communications'. In doing so, Lull escaped to a considerable extent the charges of psychologism and functionalism that have been levelled against the uses and gratifications model in the past (Elliott, 1974; see also Chapter One). Furthermore, in emphasising the mundane, taken-for-granted countenance of family television viewing - made manifest by ethnomethodology - Lull paid attention to the important insight that much of the media are consumed routinely rather than constitute an active, conscious effort by individuals, something which the uses and gratifications perspective had overstated in its case against various expressions of the hypodermic model.

It was within this novel framework that Lull (1980a:198) could propose that:

Television and other mass media, rarely mentioned as vital forces in the construction or maintenance of interpersonal relations, can now be seen to play central roles in the methods which families and other social units employ to interact normatively. The interpersonal uses one makes of the mass media constitute the construction of a particular subset of actions which find many practical applications in the home environment.

Having pointed out that the family is television's primary audience and, therefore, its 'natural' unit for analysis (Lull, 1980a:198), his typology marked a significant breakthrough since earlier typologies of audience uses of the media, such as McQuail *et al.* (1972:144), focussed on 'relating media content, *individual* needs, perceptions, roles and values and the social context within which a *person* is situated' (emphasis added). In other words, Lull's typology of the uses of television centres on the interpersonal and social traits of the family viewing context. Television within this context is, according to Lull (1980a:202), an environmental resource:

It contributes to the overall social environment by rendering a constant and predictable assortment of sounds and pictures which instantly creates an apparently busy atmosphere. The activated television set guarantees its users a nonstop backdrop of verbal communication against which they can construct their interpersonal exchanges.

The fixation on the individual, as in the uses and gratifications paradigm, had earlier also been anticipated by Hunziker (1976:181) who made the point that in such models the concept of the use of television 'is taken out of the total context of relevant meaning structures and is interpreted without further reference to such structures' (see also Morley, 1986:15).<sup>3</sup>

Lull's social uses typology differentiates the *structural* from the *relational* uses, with the latter given a greater priority and attention. The structural uses of television encompass environmental and behaviourally regulative dimensions. With respect to the environmental dimension, television is employed as a resource 'in order to create a flow of background noise which moves to the foreground when individuals or groups desire' (Lull, 1980a:201-202). It can provide companionship while performing domestic tasks as well as its 'timeless environmental function' which serves as a continuous source of entertainment (Lull, 1980a:202). The second characteristic, that of a behavioural regulator, is such that television plays its part in structuring the day (Lull, 1980a:202):

Television punctuates time and family activity such as mealtime, bedtime, choretime, homework period and a host of related activities and duties.

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3 The German version reads: 'wird aus dem Gesamtkontext der relevanten Sinnstrukturen herausgelöst und ohne weitere Bezugsname auf diesen interpretiert'.

In addition, talk and conversation patterns are influenced by television viewing patterns which, according to Lull, extend themselves beyond the immediate household and can spill over into external family relations, such as outside recreational activities.

It was mentioned before that Lull paid considerably more attention to his typology of the relational uses of television. Whereas the structural uses of television dealt with the ways in which television is a structural feature of the living room (or kitchen, bedroom etc.) and thus by its presence regulates and complements household activities, the relational uses of television refer more directly to interpersonal relationships and the richness of family interactions. The relational dimension was divided into four major categories: (1) communication facilitation; (2) affiliation/avoidance; (3) social learning; and (4) competence/dominance.

The first category was portrayed by Lull (1980a:202) as follows: 'Television's characters, stories and themes are employed by viewers as abundant illustrators which facilitate conversations'. He found that, for instance, children may use television in order to enter an adult conversation. Television programmes may provide an agenda for talk and thereby facilitate communication with shared points of reference which enable family members to verbalise those kinds of personal experiences that would otherwise be difficult to express. In other words, television can provide examples to illustrate what one wants to say (see also Morley, 1986:32). Conversation facilitation may be part of the viewing experience itself (Lull, 1980a:203):

Conversational discomfort is sometimes reduced when the television is turned on and in view of the interactants. The uneasiness of prolonged eye contact is lessened since the television set ably attracts attention during lulls in conversation.

The second aspect of the relational dimension refers to the 'social use of television [in] its potential as a resource for the construction of desired opportunities for interpersonal contact or avoidance' (Lull, 1980a:203). Lull believed this process to include a variety of interpersonal exchanges ranging from physical, verbal contact/neglect, family solidarity, family relaxation to conflict reduction and relationship maintenance. 'Television viewing is a convenient family behavior which is accomplished *together*' (Lull, 1980a:203). By the same token, television viewing may lessen the demand for interpersonal contact - whether or not intentionally sought. It is in this use of television that Lull came close to an appreciation of television in terms of its 'positive features', such as the integration of television by family members into their daily lives, which results in the reduction of family conflict and the maintaining of satisfactory marital relationships.

Lull's third category designated television as a resource of social learning. The latter expressed itself in a multitude of criteria all of which indicated that television provides much information for daily living and can be drawn upon by its consumers. Among other things, it provides an agenda for decision-making whereby both the fictional and nonfictional genres of television play an important role. In this capacity, television provides role models and as such can play its part in value transmission which, particularly when mediated through 'opinion leaders', can substitute schooling but can also give individuals the opportunity to assert themselves as a valued member of society (Lull, 1980a:205).

The final category of the relational dimension pertains to the 'variety of ways in which television provides unique opportunities for the demonstration of competence by means of family role fulfillment' (Lull, 1980a:205). The regulation of children's viewing hours would be an obvious example, especially when it is undertaken as a gatekeeping function. Television viewing may also be identified as a means for role enactment, or even role re-enforcement. In addition, television could be used to demonstrate competence in order to dominate other family members. Conflict over which programme to watch, and the decision-making process in which this often occurs, is another avenue for dominating one's peers (fathers were usually named by other family members as those who control the set, see Lull, 1978). But it can also involve other interpersonal dominance strategies (Lull, 1980a:206):

Television viewing in many homes is authoritatively granted or taken away as a reward or punishment. Adults and children argue to decide who will watch what programs, thereby creating an opportunity for the airing of personal differences. For family members who are angered by each other, television viewing (the program decision-making process or the viewing experience) provides incessant opportunities for argument, provoking possible dominance struggles among family members.

The latter, then, shows that while television can enhance family solidarity, it can also contribute to or exacerbate family conflict. However, this is not to accord television either positive or negative attributes since Lull (1980a:207) placed the priority on the family context of which television is part:

...the methods which individuals construct, using television and other media, constitute important subsets of unique and useful communicative behaviors which are central to family life.

Lull (1980a:207) concludes on the suggestion that - based on the categories of the relational uses of television - it may be possible to construct indices to develop viewer or user types in conjunction with family types.



This chapter will continue to review further extensions to Lull's social uses of television theme. In addition, it will discuss the whole new ambit of television and family life studies which, it would be fair to argue, is theoretically indebted to and facilitated by Lull's break with the earlier problematic of 'television and the family' dealt with in the first section of this chapter. This discussion will specifically concentrate on the ecological - temporal and spatial - aspects of family television viewing as well as on the political (or interpersonal) dynamics of the domestic contexts of television families. In doing so, the centrality of Lull's social uses of television approach will become evident in that it provides the 'conceptual fertiliser' for eliciting the themes in which everyday family television viewing practices can be theorised.

### **Television families: the ecology and politics of the living room**

The consideration of ecological and 'political' factors of television viewing in family contexts has come together in Lull's subsequent work on television families which spans the 1980-1990 period (Lull, 1980b; 1982; 1988; 1990). Lull's work has, during the same period, been elaborated and refined in a special theme edition of the *Journal of Family Issues* (1983) as well as by Morley (1986) who has operationalised many of Lull's insights in a British context. This section will discuss these seminal contributions with the aim being to demonstrate the interdependence of ecological and political factors of family television viewing.

Lull (1978), in an earlier publication, had made an initial attempt to investigate the nature of verbal interaction and interpersonal influence in the selection of television programmes. In this study, which could roughly be subsumed under the title of 'the politics of the living room', he found that when the selection of television programmes is accomplished by family voting, the privilege of family position proved to be the crucial factor. While the middle class sample of parents made attempts to 'democratize the voting process, they fared well themselves when the decisions were made' (Lull, 1978:57). However, the issue of parental control, whether or not negotiated democratically, is not as straightforward as may first appear, particularly when the household ecology of television viewing is taken into account rather than focusing on television content only.

Medrich has referred to the problematical nature of parental control and television programme decision-making processes in families with his notion of 'constant television', which he defines as follows (Medrich, 1979:171):

Constant television households are those in which the TV is turned on for most of the day - whether or not anyone is watching. In other words, television in these homes is a background to almost all family activities throughout the day.

Medrich found that such households were mainly confined to lower socio-economic groups, where high rates of television viewing accompanied the constant television environment. While parentally-controlled television viewing seemed to occur in higher socio-economic families, Medrich (1979:176) also suggested that, on a more general level, future research should 'encompass a notion of television as a pervasive environment in many American homes', a suggestion which placed television viewing in the everyday context of family life. In this sense, 'constant television' may also be an index of 'being at home', without having the intention of watching it (see Morley, 1990). Medrich's results were obtained via a survey methodology which placed severe restrictions on trying to map the actual television viewing environment. Nevertheless, his insistence on the importance of the ecological factors sustaining the decision-making processes within television households is complementary to what Lull (1980a) identified as the structural dimension of television in families. Yet, Lull's 'audience ethnography' allows for the actual viewing environment being recorded and analysed more successfully.

The fact that the social uses of television across a variety of families is not a uniform process is, furthermore, attested to by Lull's (1980b; 1982) follow-up studies. In these articles, Lull mobilised a typology of family communication patterns in which he distinguished 'socio-oriented' families from 'concept-oriented' families, a distinction which has affinities with Bernstein's typology of different socialisation patterns in working-class and middle-class families, respectively (Morley, 1986:34). Lull argues that the differences in patterns of family communication are reflected in the way socio-oriented and concept-oriented families use television. The former type emphasises harmonious social relations whereas the latter family type is characterised by the independent expression of ideas by family members (Lull, 1980b:329). This is, moreover, reflected in the way the families use television socially (Lull, 1980b:329-330):

Members of socio-oriented families admit that television is useful to them for interpersonal objectives which range from structuring their activities and talk patterns (the *environmental* and *regulative* functions) to uses of the medium for more complex relational purposes (*communication facilitation, affiliation/avoidance, social learning, and competence/dominance*). Family members from concept-oriented homes, on the other hand, reported that, with few exceptions, television is not useful to them as a social resource.

These exceptions pertained to the social uses of television such as the transmission of values, gatekeeping, and the exercising of parental authority - the majority of which were found to be useful by concept-oriented families but not by socio-oriented families. The overall conclusion was that not only were the concept-oriented families watching less television, but that they also claimed more interpersonal independence from television.

The above study was conducted with the participant observation method whereby an observer-interviewer spent a three-day period with a family and during the final day of which a post-observational fixed-item questionnaire was administered (Lull, 1980b:323-324). Using the same typology, Lull (1982) proceeded to carry out what he called a 'mass-observational study' on how families select television programmes. The study was guided by, among other things, the notion that television viewing is often non-selective (Lull, 1982:802):

Many audience members watch programs that simply happen to appear on the same channel to which the television is already tuned. Viewers often watch programs that are selected by somebody else in the family.

This study, then, was meant to document the family activities that involved the control of the main television set (Lull, 1982:803). Again Lull found marked differences between socio-oriented and concept-oriented families - similar to those reported in his earlier article (Lull, 1980b) - with the interesting exception that socio-oriented families, supposedly more harmonious than the concept-oriented families, were less considerate to their peers and more argumentative in the selection of television programmes (Lull, 1982:810). However, family position more adequately explained the level of control exercised over television programme selection (Lull, 1982:810):

Fathers had more perceived and actual control of the selection of television programs than any other individual in the family. Mothers were the least influential family member in this regard. About three-fourths of all program selections were made by one person and took place with little or no discussion or negotiation. Routines for viewing, even those operating during the first few weeks of the television season, occurred in a rule-governed, routinized fashion that apparently required little conversation in most homes.

This offers the interesting conceptualisation of the family viewing process in terms of the relative distribution of domestic power, which in a later study became more fully elaborated (Morley, 1986; 1988). The related notion of television viewing in families as a 'gendered' process will receive more attention later in this chapter. First, I wish to discuss how television was increasingly made central in various expressions of family theory as it was realised that television viewing plays a fundamental role in the family's ecology and interactional processes.

In his editorial to a special issue of the *Journal of Family Issues* devoted to television and the family, Ellis (1983:275-276) points to the gap in knowledge that existed in a variety of theoretical perspectives, amounting to virtual ignorance of a family orientation within television studies:

Even when researchers claim to have a 'family orientation,' they often mean that the children they are studying happen to live in family units. With a few notable exceptions...literature on television and the family has been limited to speculation and advice to parents. The dearth of literature in this area may be partly due to a history of researching television from a limited psychological and individualistic perspective.

According to Ellis (1983:277), television as a 'member of the family' will emerge as an area which will receive incremental attention.

It could be argued that contributions made by both Messaris (1983), examining parent-child conversations which had the television programmes they were watching as their main topic, and Palmer *et al.* (1983), looking at television and children's fright reactions as mediated by the family context, do not quite live up to what Ellis had promised in his editorial. Messaris (1983:304-305), who concentrates on 'information-oriented conversation' and 'conversations involving behavioral prescription', does not build on the theoretical vantage points that Lull (1980a) had offered, namely to place television viewing (and related talk) within the context of everyday family life. Palmer *et al.*'s (1983:279) contention, for instance, that 'television has a way with families - generally its own way', combined with the set of recommendations for parents regarding the supervision of their children's viewing habits (Palmer *et al.*, 1983:288-290), would be exactly the sort of studies of which Ellis (1983) was critical. In addition, Davis and Abelman (1983) represents a curious attempt, to say the least, which tries to 'frame' Goffman (with the assistance of Winn, 1977) on the subject of families and television where the (misplaced) concern is with socialisation.

The above reservations, however, do not apply either to the ethnographic study of family mediation of television through the organisation of time and space by Bryce and Leichter (1983) or to Goodman's (1983) review of family systems and television. Bryce and Leichter (1983:321) note the role of television in the ecology of the household and how this affects the uses of the medium within families:

How a family is organized in time and space will affect who watches, with whom, what is watched, and when. The organization of the physical environment and the placement of the television set within that environment mediate what is viewed and therefore what is learned from the medium. The relationship between the physical location of the television and the social uses of space can reveal much about how viewing takes place.

Bryce and Leichter (1983:323-324) introduce the typology of 'monochronic' families and 'polychronic' families which refers to the management of time and space on the cultural level (see also Bryce, 1987). Monochronic families are those families in which parents expect their children to do *one* thing at a time, whereas in polychronic families several things can be done at once. With respect to styles of television viewing, monochronic families tended to watch television in a more focused and constant fashion than polychronic families where television served as a continuing background (see Medrich, 1979) in which 'viewing was engaged in concurrently with a number of other activities, and the children's visual attention to television was sporadic' (Bryce and Leichter, 1983:323). In other words, the *temporal* and *spatial* dimensions within families mediate the interpersonal, social uses of television which, although implicit in nature, impinge on the more explicit forms of family intervention in such processes as the selection of television programmes.

Goodman (1983) brings a family systems perspective to the role of television in family life. She argues that this does not merely involve studying television's effects on family members, but that it comprises 'looking at TV as a phenomenon that serves a whole range of social purposes' (Goodman, 1983:405). She believes it is important to distinguish between: a 'family's use of television', which posits the family as active consumers with television relegated into a more 'passive' role; and 'television's role in the family', which accords an active role to television as constructing its own meaning and import (Goodman, 1983:407):

TV is part of 'culture' and brings with it a whole set of meanings, rules, values, and the like when it enters the room. Each family, however, interprets what 'comes with' the set in its own terms, viewing television through its own screen of family rules.

This dual concern is also the focus of another article in the special issue of the *Journal of Family Issues* that looks at how family interactions vary through the factor of programme salience. Employing a contextualist framework, Brody and Stoneman (1983:329-330) argue that 'a reciprocal relationship exists between family members as well as between family members and television programming'. As family members select television programmes for watching, these programmes arrange the degree of family interaction. The contextualist approach holds that (Brody and Stoneman, 1983:332):

...each family member is viewed as an active participant in devising strategies to adapt to family contexts as well as a contributor to the development of contexts that serve to structure family transactions.

Translated to the television viewing context, it is proposed that the latter serves as an organising function influencing sequential exchanges between family members. Furthermore, it is argued that within the television viewing context family members assume roles determining their behaviour and, finally, the family is conceived of as constituting different (sub-)systems, such as the spouse subsystem, the sibling subsystem, and the parent-child subsystem (Brody and Stoneman, 1983:333-336).

Relating this to their notion of 'program salience', which is speculated to have an impact on the way individual family members interact within the television viewing context, Brody and Stoneman (1983:336-337) allow for a combination of person and contextual factors determining the salience of a programme for family members. Person parameters refer to the 'aspects of a person that are a product of his or her development, which in part determine how a particular context will be experienced by him or her' (Brody and Stoneman, 1983:336) and include information-processing skills, role expectations, state and emotional factors, and interest in the content of the programme. The contextual parameters refer, according to Brody and Stoneman (1983:337), to the characteristics of the television viewing setting:

They include the presence of competing activities, the arrangement of the physical milieu, the persons present, and the perceptual and content features of the program.

Some of the above aspects have already received attention in this chapter, however, Brody and Stoneman make some additional, and interesting, observations. With respect to family roles, they suggest that the active involvement of mothers with their children while watching television sets them apart from fathers who tend to become engrossed in the television programme and thus rely on mothers to enact the parenting role (Brody and Stoneman, 1983:339-340). Furthermore, family members may undertake other, often competing, activities while watching television. These activities, common to the domestic environment, include reading newspapers, (parents) doing housework, and (children) doing homework, etc. Brody and Stoneman (1983:342) propose that it is possible to predict that:

The greater the family members' interest in the television program being viewed, the less they will attend to competing activities, and, conversely, the greater their interest in the competing activity, the less they will visually attend to television. The resulting impact of family interaction depends on the nature of the competing task. If the task involves, or allows for, social exchange, the amount of family interaction may be greater than when all family members are viewing television. If, however, the task precludes social exchanges, there may be less family interaction than during television viewing.

Brody and Stoneman also make the point that television programming does not require equal levels of attention and processing. The variation in the 'active versus passive demands of television programs has definite implications for family interactions' (Brody and Stoneman, 1983:345). For example, commercial breaks may provide an avenue for conversation and interaction, whereas during other programme segments, particularly those which demand sustained attention, conversational interruptions may lead to irritations. The latter came to the fore in their in-home observational investigation which compared family interaction during three television programmes; namely the evening national news, a Pink Panther cartoon show, and the *Muppet Show*. During these programmes, family interaction was found to vary so that, for instance, (Stoneman and Brody, 1983:363):

Fathers were less responsive to their children's questions during the news than during cartoons. Children, on the other hand, were less contingently responsive during their viewing of cartoons than during either the Muppets or the evening news. Interestingly, mothers did not vary in their responsiveness to their children across programs.

In an alternate study (Hopkins and Mullis, 1985) these parental (gender) roles are somewhat qualified. While fathers may engage less in verbal interaction during their favourite programmes, nonverbal exchanges (such as touching, cuddling up, etc.) were found to be more prevalent, particularly among males since television viewing offered the context in which to feel relatively comfortable about allowing certain degrees of intimacy.

Another relevant study is that of Leichter *et al.* (1985). These researchers offer the analogy of television as a 'current' running through families' lives (Leichter *et al.*, 1985:29):

Television, almost like electricity, is a presence in the family that exerts its influence whether or not it is being viewed at a particular moment. Decisions, for example, about when to watch, whether to watch, and what kinds of contents to let children see are interwoven with other activities on a continuing basis.

Their article is further devoted to the spatial and temporal organisation of families and how television fits in that nexus. The placement of the television set within a home, for instance, may be deliberate so as to influence viewing patterns as well as the exercise of control, or as a focal point for family gathering (television as the 'family hearth'). However, the choices with respect to the placement of television may involve a sequence of adjustments and readjustments, the latter made possible in part by the various shapes and sizes of television sets presently available (Leichter *et al.*, 1985:33). Furthermore, within the television viewing space, a variety of viewing postures were observed, including (Leichter *et al.*, 1985:33):

...sitting in front of the set on a chair or couch or on the floor; lying down on a couch or on the floor, sometimes with a blanket or sleeping bag; standing; leaning on a piece of furniture; walking through the room; standing or sitting while engaged in another activity, such as doing the dishes or sewing.

These spatial dimensions also involve seating arrangements within which priorities tend to reflect family position, the archetypal example being the father's chair in front of the television. However, Leichter *et al.* (1985:35) make the insightful observation that 'physical structures and television equipment combine with spatial dimensions in establishing and maintaining personal boundaries'.

The temporal dimension with regard to television brings to bear such notions as 'wasting time', which are often 'emotionally charged', especially because television viewing (like talking on the telephone) is conceived as an activity which does not result in a 'product' (Leichter *et al.*, 1985:36). The temporal dimension of television, however, also expresses itself in other, more subtle ways (Leichter *et al.*, 1985:36):

In a sense, television is one of the external institutions that influence the scheduling of family activities. Yet, since television viewing takes place within the home, two kinds of schedules meet directly, and families fit them together in a variety of ways.

Related to this issue is the notion of temporal demarcation, in other words the initiation and termination of television viewing time (Leichter *et al.*, 1985:37). The initiation of a television viewing episode may involve an extensive ritual, conveyed by the image of 'getting ready', or merely adjusting one's seating position. By the same token, the termination of the viewing time may 'be major moments, sometimes fraught with conflict and even tantrums, or they may entail a click of the switch' (Leichter *et al.*, 1985:38).

While this chapter is not intended as a proper chronology, arduously charting the field of television and family life, it has, at this point, arrived at the culmination of the studies discussed so far. This landmark is represented by Morley's already classic study *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (1986). The next section of this chapter will deal with Morley's contribution, specifically concentrating on the gendered circumstance of the family television context.



### Television families: gender and domestic power

It is perhaps not without significance that Hall (1986) bestowed praise on the project undertaken by Morley (1986). After all, Hall (1986:9) now seems to concur with Morley's insistence upon the need to shift the focus of attention away from television content towards the viewing context:

Morley is able to demonstrate how various are the activities which accompany television viewing and how varied are the social uses to which it is put. Viewing can be used to provide the occasion for family interaction, or to 'create space', even when the living-room is crammed with other people. It can forge solidarities, establish alliances between family members or just provide a much-needed excuse for cuddling up. The medium thus has become integrated into the everyday processes and codes of family interaction. Around it a complex web of customary procedures and rituals, rules and principles develop.

*Family Television*, as Hall further notes, should be considered as part of an unfolding project with which Morley had been involved for over a decade (a project Hall himself more or less instigated with his discussion of encoding/decoding practices.) This unfolding project saw a shift from a predominant concern with television as text to the structural dimensions of televisual interpretation (Morley, 1980) and to a concern (represented in *Family Television*) with the naturalistic settings of television viewing processes. Furthermore, Morley draws on 'mainstream' family and audience research, perspectives he combines with cultural studies and feminist theory (see Ang, 1989). It is Morley's employment of feminist theory in particular which gives his work a novel and fresh approach, cashing in as it does on the gendered aspects of domestic television. It is within this framework that Morley (1986:15-16) is especially keen to investigate:

...the differences hidden behind the catch-all description 'watching television'; both the differences between the choices made by different viewing options, and the differences (of attention and comprehension) between different viewers' responses to the same viewing materials - differences which are masked by the finding that they all 'watched' a given programme.

In order to fulfil the above objectives, Morley (1986:50-55) conducted interviews with eighteen lower-middle class and working class families from an area of South London. These interviews, of one to two hours, unstructured discussion, were initially with parents only but somewhat later in each case the children were invited to take part. The interviews, conducted *en famille*, have the advantage of providing safeguards for 'misrepresentations' of actual behaviour (for which self-reports of television viewing habits have gained a kind of notoriety), since family members were checking out and commenting on what their peers

were conveying in the interview. Once the interview was completed, the audio record was transcribed in full for analysis, resulting in rich verbatims of the family interview, which is itself of intrinsic interest (see Morley, 1986:56-145).

Morley's analysis shows the centrality of gender as 'the one structural principle working across all the families interviewed' (Morley, 1986:146). More significantly, Morley argues that the gender differences with respect to viewing habits can be explained in terms of the relative domestic distribution of power between men and women. Careful to avoid hanging himself on the halter of biological essentialism, Morley (1986:146; see also Ang, 1989:108) points out that these differences 'are the effects of the particular social roles that these men and women occupy within the home'. The quintessence of the feminist argument, which conceptualises gender relations in television families, is, of course, that it is not confined to the domestic sphere (Morley, 1986:147):

...the dominant model of gender relations within this society...is one in which the home is primarily defined for men as a site of leisure - in distinction to the 'industrial time' of their employment outside the home - while the home is primarily defined for women as a sphere of work (whether or not they also work outside the home). This simply means that in investigating television viewing in the home one is by definition investigating something which men are better placed to do wholeheartedly, and which women seem only to be able to do distractedly and guiltily, because of their continuing sense of their domestic responsibilities. Moreover, this differential positioning is given greater significance as the home becomes increasingly defined as the 'proper' sphere of leisure, with the decline of public forms of entertainment and the growth of home-based leisure technologies such as video, etc.

This theoretical positioning enables Morley to reinterpret as well as redefine a host of issues uncovered by his empirical work - most of which have already been discussed in this chapter - but the conceptual reasoning that Morley mobilises through the feminist approach is of a kind that genuinely breaks new ground, perhaps of epistemological proportions to paraphrase Althusser. Be that as it may, I will proceed by listing some examples of Morley's (1986:146-172) analysis in which he covers such issues as: power and control over programme choice; viewing styles; planned and unplanned viewing; amounts of viewing; television-related talk; use of video; 'solo' viewing and guilty pleasures; and programme preferences.

The ability to call up a powerful analogy to assist with the explanation of relatively complex social relationships has been one of the major strengths of the sociological discipline. In attempting to depict the impact of the remote control device on television programme selection strategies enacted by family members and the power and control it involves, Morley (1986:148) offers a marvelous imagery. He likens the remote control device to a medieval mace resting on 'the arm of Daddy's chair' and as such it represents a 'highly

visible symbol of condensed power relations'. Furthermore, the physical possession of the remote control device serves as a material referent for men whose sense of domestic power may otherwise be ultimately fragile and insecure (see also Morley, 1988). Men treat the remote channel control device as a cherished possession and go to fairly extreme lengths to consolidate their power position by determining what is being watched. For instance, they commonly carry the remote control with them when they leave the room or initiate 'wrestling matches' to prevent others controlling the device. Another recent technological introduction into the living rooms of families is the video cassette recorder (VCR). Morley (1986:158-159) argues that VCRs also predominantly belong to the male (fathers and sons) domain, with women (apart from teenage daughters), who operate other sophisticated technological domestic gadgetry, being excluded or excluding themselves from using video machines.

Also characteristic of the domestic roles that men and women assume are their respective viewing styles and the ways they go about planning 'an evening's viewing' (Morley, 1986:150-154). Consistent with other research findings presented in this chapter, Morley found that men tend to watch television attentively whereas women do so in conjunction with other domestic activities or as part of an ongoing conversation. In other words, it appears that the distinction between monochronic and polychronic time uses (Bryce, 1987) is a gendered division. This is also reflected in the planning of television viewing hours in which men continually check what is on and map out their evening's viewing, while women display a 'much more take-it-or-leave-it attitude, not caring much if they miss things (except for their favourite serials)' (Morley, 1986:153).

There has been little research that differentiates 'qualitative' from 'quantitative' viewing. Survey reports, such as those poured out by marketing research firms, make the leap of equating presence in the living room with actual television watching (see Chapter One). Because of their perceived greater availability to view television, women have been judged to be heavier consumers of television than men. Morley (1986:154-155) decisively dismisses such questionable research findings:

My point is that while women are there, in front of (or rather, to the side, or in earshot of) the set, their dominant viewing practice is much more 'bitty' and much less attentive than that of men.

It is, therefore, necessary to be aware of the contradiction that confuses 'viewing' with 'viewing attentively and with enjoyment' (Morley, 1986:166).

The list of differential viewing behaviours of men and women is quite exhaustive, with the different aspects all inextricably linked. One other dominant theme that emerges concerns the guilty pleasure associated with television watching which is evident in women's willingness to talk about television with friends and workmates, while men show a certain reluctance to talk about television with their peers, apart from the occasions when it concerns sport. Men tend to boast about watching only 'factual' television. However, such 'presentation of self' has more to do with the way men belittle 'fictional' television ('soap opera is silly women's stuff') which after all tends to be the viewing preference of women. The latter is one of the reasons, thinks Morley, why women feel guilty about television viewing, particularly when they do it on their own. Furthermore, since the home is not a sphere of leisure for women, their viewing practices are constrained by guilt and obligations (Morley, 1986:161). What Morley leaves more or less implicit are the ways that family members use television genre (or television portrayals) to construct their *own* gender identities rather than those of their peers (see Traudt and Lont, 1987).

Morley's *Family Television*, in the words of Lull (1987:127), marks a significant break with previous work within the cultural studies problematic:

Most critical/cultural theorists pay only lip service (if that) to audiences; Morley takes audiences seriously, carefully describing their roles as family members who, in the course of their daily routines, construct time spent with television and video.

Combine this with Morley's ingenuous inflexion of a feminist perspective and one truly has the *locus classicus* of an ethnography of everyday family practices featuring television viewing flowing as a current through a host of social activities.

The Atlantic Ocean - depicted as both a barrier and a highway for various sorts of travel, intellectual and otherwise - has proven to be more than a minor barrier in terms of the time taken for Morley's study to make an impact. This can be partly explained by the arbitrary division of 'academic' labour which characterises North American research as 'mainstream' and methodologically driven, and its European counterpart as 'critical' and theoretically oriented. However, Lull and Morley have been important emissaries bringing two academic traditions of 'critical' cultural studies in Britain and North American 'empirical' audience research together. The combination of these traditions has facilitated a greater understanding of the everyday dynamics within families as they use television. The latter has found its culmination in Lull's *World Families Watch Television* (1988), which has brought a number of international studies together that rehearse a lot of the themes and issues discussed so far in this chapter. Not only does this study reveal that the geo-cultural contexts of television

consumption display a high degree of variability, but this variability is largely explained in terms of the diverse cultural experiences of family life and family relations (Lull, 1988:253-254). Indeed, everyday television viewing practices are first and foremost everyday *family* practices (Lull, 1990:149):

Audience members are family members, too, and their identities, interests, and roles are articulated, acted upon, and played out in the routine activity at home. We can interpret much television viewing as extensions of audience members' most basic and common mental and behavioral orientations, nested and constructed within culturally diverse circumstances.

## Conclusion

Chapter One concluded by talking about the emerging paradigm of conceptualising television audiences in terms of their everyday life-worlds. This chapter has translated these concerns with everyday television consumption practices to family life into the concrete site in which daily television viewing routines normally take place. In doing so, a substantial body of literature has been reviewed, a body which can be roughly divided into two strands of thought. The first generation of television and family research (1950-1980) predominantly attempted to discern television's effects on a growing check-list of variables. Mainly quantitative in nature, this research did not quite come to grips with operationalising the family as the unit of analysis for television, in that it tended to focus on *individual* family members rather than perceiving the family as a dynamic *collectivity*.

The television and family research of the 1980s generation on the other hand, in part originating from family studies, has posited television as part of the overall family environment and as such has significantly moved away from earlier conceptions which saw television as an invasion into family life. This second generation of work emphasised the use of television in everyday family contexts and was initiated by Lull's (1980a) ground-breaking article on the social uses of television. Lull demonstrated how television may structure family activities environmentally as well as being a behavioural regulator. In addition, he suggested a typology of relational uses which described the ways in which family members use television to create and sustain domestic social relations. Lull also made a strong case for the employment of qualitative methodology (participant observation and in-depth interviewing), enabling him to study television consumption in the 'natural' context of everyday family practices.

The subsequent generation of researchers, following in Lull's footsteps, have insightfully contributed to an understanding of television in everyday family practices. In particular, Morley (1986) added a richness to this account by his analysis of the interpersonal dynamics of family television viewing practices. His employment of feminist theory in the interpretation of the data obtained by in-depth family interviews uncovered the gendered circumstance of everyday family contexts. Moreover, he convincingly showed the different meanings that family members derive from their use of television, the explanation of which rests in the ways in which family members experience the domestic sphere. For women, the family home is a site of work, whereas men tend to predominantly experience it as a site of leisure. This inequality extends itself into the use of television, thus showing once again the importance of the family context.

Three themes can be detected which generally warrant further investigation (also see Morley and Silverstone, 1990), if not empirical application to a New Zealand context. First, the *temporal* dimension of television usage within families begs further definition. The temporal dimension of television viewing not only expresses itself through television programming schedules but also by the extent to which 'television time' is constructed as part of 'family time' (see Bryce, 1987; Leichter *et al.*, 1985). Second, the *spatial* dimension of television usage needs further elaboration (see Bryce and Leichter, 1983; Leichter *et al.*, 1985). The spatial organisation of family dwellings necessarily follows an appreciation of the temporal dimension because the use of time inevitably means the use of time in space (see Giddens, 1981). The combined analysis of temporal and spatial dimensions thus contributes to an understanding of the domestic ecology of family television viewing practices. Finally, and building on Morley's (1986) work, everyday television consumption practices also have an interpersonal dimension. This *political* dimension, in turn, is intimately linked to the temporal and spatial organisation of family contexts. Thus a joint analysis of all three dimensions must contribute to a fully-fledged understanding of the everyday complex routines of television families (see Rogge, 1989). Operationalising these arguments to empirical research may seem an ambitious task, but then all theoretically informed research ought to be ambitious in intent so as to allow what often appear to be disjointed thoughts and 'hunches' to find an empirical anchoring.

## CHAPTER THREE

### WATCHING FAMILIES WATCHING TELEVISION

#### An Outline of Methodological and Ethical Issues

##### Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodological issues regarding the naturalistic study of television consumption in the home which, according to Lull (1990:Chapter 8), has been an under-researched topic. Mainly for reasons to do with the increasingly privatised complexion of family life in Western societies, 'the idea of invading the home to do social research does not appeal to most researchers' (Lull, 1990:174). However, there has been a recent upsurge in qualitative research which, as Chapter Two has suggested, saw a steady and persistent realisation that the family/household must constitute the dynamic unit of consumption for television (*cf.* Lull, 1980a; Morley, 1986) and that research methodologies need to be accommodated to capture this new-found appreciation.

This chapter, then, will review the methodological innovations that have enabled researchers, by means of photography or videotaping, to qualitatively record the family viewing context. Following this review, the research strategy employed in this study will be introduced. It involved the videotaping of eight families for one week each via a custom-built, in-home observation cabinet, to monitor the activities of family members present in the living room while the television set was switched on. In addition, the empirical data gained through this process were complemented with debriefing interviews with each of the eight families after the in-home observation cabinet had been removed.

One other reason why 'invading the home' (Lull, 1990:174) may not appeal to social researchers, is because it raises important ethical concerns. In this case, the videotaping of families in their own homes may be open to the charge of voyeurism (see Walkerdine, 1986), whereas the observation equipment itself may connote the Orwellian phrase of 'Big Brother Is Watching You' (see *Evening Standard*, July 5, 1989:1). On a more practical level, the ethical issues of immediate concern were recognised as being: (1) informed consent/voluntary participation; (2) anonymity and confidentiality; (3) harm to the family and

individual family members; (4) the listing of the shortcomings of the research; and (5) the identity of the researcher. This chapter will also confront these issues and outline how they were resolved in consultation with the Human Ethics Committee of Massey University.

Chapter Two, and to a lesser extent Chapter One, argued the case that television consumption can be most profitably understood when engaging the family/household as its main unit of analysis. This notion has been most successfully operationalised by employing qualitative methodology - mainly (participant) observation and in-depth interviewing.<sup>1</sup> There has been some discussion about the relative merits of participant observation *vis à vis* 'electronic' observation (see Lull, 1980a; 1990). The position adopted here is to argue that both participant and electronic observation are more or less the same in principle, with of course the difference being that in the latter instance the researcher is not physically present, but is present 'behind the camera'. In this study the rationale for opting for electronic observation has been to diminish the researcher's presence. Up-to-date video technology has not only enabled us to reduce researcher obtrusiveness, but also has the advantage of minutely recording the context in question in a form which facilitates repeated analysis (see Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979:84). The next section of this chapter, then, will continue with an assessment of studies that have used videotaped observations as a means of recording family television viewing processes.

### Videotaping television viewing practices of families

In a climate dominated by audience measurement through such techniques as the viewing diary and mechanical meters of television set tuning, Allen (1965) set the precedent of photographing television audiences. He devised a piece of equipment, the DynaScope, with which he sought to address and correct shortcomings experienced in audience measurement techniques (Allen, 1965:2-3):

We must attempt to prove audience facts. We must be certain that we have a minute-by-minute record of the set-in-use time, the station to which the set is tuned, the duration of program viewing, as well as data on program loyalty, cumulative audience, and the actual patterns of viewing for various members of the family. Finally, we must have an exact record of the time each member of the family is present, whether or not he is looking at the TV set, and the amount of time that *no one is in the room with the set*.

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1 The combination of both methodologies has recently been referred to as the ethnography of television audiences (see, for instance, Lull, 1990). However, ethnography has been defined in relatively broad terms, to the point where it has been defined to mean qualitative research in general (Nightingale, 1989). In this study, the term qualitative research has been preferred (see also Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).



Allen's research questions appear to have been largely informed by the advertisers' quest for knowledge about whether audiences attend to their commercials (Allen, 1965:3). Nevertheless, his time sequence photography method was an important methodological innovation, capturing as it did naturalistic aspects of the home viewing environment. It thus represents the first generation of techniques that involved the employment of an in-home observation unit.

Allen's DynaScope was 'unobtrusively' housed in a steel cabinet and took four pictures a minute. The equipment was placed in the television room where the lens could cover the family viewing area and the DynaScope, by means of a 'high-fidelity mirror system', also recorded the image on the screen. An electric clock monitored the exact time a picture was taken. The DynaScope recorded families' viewing habits for a period of two weeks and during this time participating families were asked to keep a *TV Guide* diary in which family members had to mark the television programmes they had selected.

However, the DynaScope method encountered a number of difficulties (Allen, 1965:7-8). First, many television sets were found to be in less than perfect working order, with about 10 percent giving a bad picture. This fault could be remedied by consulting viewing diaries to check which television programme was being watched at the time, but not all families were found to be diligent or punctual in filling in the diary. Furthermore, small children sitting in close proximity to the set were not photographed by the DynaScope, and in some families the lighting of the room proved inadequate and necessitated supplementary lighting. Finally, because of the fifteen-second time interval for photographs, behaviour during commercials was not always monitored. It could also be argued that, for all its ingenuity, the DynaScope's *still* photographs may have created the impression that the family viewing situation was somewhat static.

The second generation in the development of the in-home observation unit stressed the methodological advantages of 'continuous surveillance' facilitated by video technology as against time sequence photography. Bechtel *et al.*'s (1972:274) study was based on the premise that the daily viewing habits of subjects must be observed '*in situ*, not in the laboratory'. The purpose of their study was to 'explore the use of photographing the television audience as a technique for validating questionnaires about television viewing' (Bechtel *et al.*, 1972:275). In total, Bechtel *et al.* monitored twenty families for five days each. The television monitoring equipment employed was controlled from a truck parked in the driveway behind or beside the house. Inside the truck, an operator supervised a videotape recorder, a microphone mixer and three nine-inch television monitors. Two of

these monitors were linked up with the two cameras in the house, whereas one monitor was used to combine the camera images with sound. One of the operator's additional tasks was to change the videotapes on an hourly basis after having carefully documented the family's name, as well as the date and time of the recording.

Inside the family home, the equipment consisted of two cameras with wide angle lenses and three microphones, all of which were placed in the television viewing room. One camera was mounted over the television set to get the widest possible view of the room. The other camera was pointed at the television set to record the programme being watched at the time. Pictures from both cameras were merged by means of a special effects generator, providing a simultaneous view of the television programme being watched (as a small insert in the lower left corner) and the activities of persons present in the room. The cameras and microphones were connected by cables to the equipment in the truck. Furthermore, the individual elements of the equipment were connected in such a way so that once the television set was switched on the videotaping machine in the truck started the recording process.

The authors (Bechtel *et al.*, 1972:278) listed a series of problems with the equipment, mainly technical in nature. The hourly change of videotapes meant that about seven minutes of viewing were lost per hour. In addition, considerable amounts of recording time were lost through equipment failure such as unpredictable breakdowns of the recording heads, the special effects generator and the monitors as well as the failure of one of the cables. Also, the build-up of iron oxide on the videotapes prevented the recording of a clear picture. Like Allen, Bechtel *et al.* also experienced problems with lighting with the result that in some cases the room was too dark for adequate observation. The alleged unobtrusiveness of the equipment should also be qualified, since about half of the sample believed that the presence of the cameras - and one may add the various cabled contraptions leading to the truck outside - influenced their behaviour (Bechtel *et al.*, 1972:288-289). Indeed, Lull (1980a:199) has singled out this study as being highly contaminated by what could be called an electronic version of the Hawthorne effect, namely the presence of the camera in the living room. However, even though Bechtel *et al.* limited themselves in the analysis of the videotaped recordings to comparing observed behaviour with the self-report of television viewing practices, the findings are not insignificant and provide support for the use of in-home observation equipment. As the authors themselves conclude (Bechtel *et al.*, 1972:298):

In general, the subjects' consistent overreporting indicates a lack of awareness of the complexity of behavior during the time the television set is on.

The third and present generation of in-home observation units has profited from technological innovations in video systems which have overcome many of the cumbersome and invasive procedures which hampered the research of Bechtel *et al.*. State of the art video technology has made it possible for researchers to place relatively compact and, therefore, less obtrusive equipment into the homes of families. The primary value of this latest generation is the lack of invasiveness (see Anderson *et al.*, 1985; Anderson *et al.*, 1986; Collett and Lamb, 1986; Collett, 1987; Svennevig and Wynberg, 1986; and Svennevig, 1987).

Anderson *et al.* (1985:1347-1348), for instance, used a cart housing a black-and-white time-lapse video cassette deck, control circuitry, a time/date generator, a screen splitter and battery backup equipment. In addition, and like Bechtel *et al.* (1972), two cameras were used; one to record the television programmes while the second filmed the television room. Both cameras were either mounted on the cart or on a tripod. The time-lapse video cassette recorder taped only while the television set was on, providing one video frame every 1.2 seconds. Parents were asked to change the videotape, usually after 26 hours of video recording, and participating families (106 in total) were monitored for ten days. In their articles, Anderson *et al.* do not mention any problems they may have encountered with the above methodology during the data collection process; however, another source (Anderson, 1988) has revealed that changing living room temperatures played havoc with some parts of the equipment. More fundamentally, it is not clear why they opted for the time-lapse recording method. It would seem that real time recording of the viewing habits of family members offers distinct advantages, since this procedure leads to a fuller appreciation and understanding of television viewing as an interactive process between the television programme, the family viewing context and individual family members.

An attempt to account for television viewing as an interactive process was more successfully accomplished by the research of Collett and Lamb (1986). These researchers constructed a cabinet containing a television set as well as several other pieces of equipment which allowed them to record the activities of people in front of the television set. They described their equipment as follows (Collett and Lamb, 1986:1) :

The cabinet, which looks much like the wooden television cabinets that one finds in people's homes, contained a VCR, a split screen device, various timers and a low-light camera which was positioned above the television set, behind a small glass screen, pointing at the viewing area in the room. The system was wired so that the camera and the VCR only recorded what was happening in the room when the television set was switched on, and a clock was used to select when recording would take place, provided the TV was switched on.

This cabinet was installed in the homes of twenty families for seven days in each case. In addition, participants were asked to complete a viewing diary and provide a rating of television programmes they had been watching. These booklets were collected daily by a technician who would also change the videotape. Participants were asked not to alter their daily routines and, aside from a few instances of apparent self-conscious behaviour, the video recordings showed that most of the families were 'totally oblivious to the fact that they were being recorded' (Collett and Lamb, 1986:2).

It can be concluded that the cabinet successfully blended in with a variety of family interiors, diminishing the obtrusive character of earlier monitoring devices. Hence Collett and Lamb's observation cabinet became the methodological model for this study - supplemented with the family interview as used by Morley (1986).

### **Methodological procedures: an inventory**

So far this chapter has discussed the precursors in the development of in-home observation units, culminating in the custom-made observation cabinet designed by Collett and Lamb. We turn now to the methodological procedures carried out in the present qualitative inquiry which set out to understand: (1) how families, and individual members of families, use television in the context of their everyday life; and (2) how families, or the individuals within families, make sense of television programmes. Each of the following aspects will be discussed in turn: formulation of the research questions; design and construction of the in-home observation cabinet; recruitment of families; the fieldwork protocol - viewing and interviewing families; and qualitative analysis of the observation and interview records.

#### ***Formulation of the research questions***

The lack of research on television audiences in New Zealand provided the overall rationale for this study, and questions relating to how audiences *consume* television furnished the focus for the research problem. Such questions, it could be argued, are a necessary corollary to questions conceptualising the possible effects of television, which in New Zealand have been mainly addressed in terms of the television violence debate (see, for instance, Barwick, 1990). In other words, research on television consumption by audiences needs to lie on the same continuum as research on, for example, the institutional production practices of television and research on its resultant content. It was this theoretical realisation that crystallised the broad contours of the present study.

These concerns were initially operationalised in a paper that attempted to provide a model for understanding the consumption of overseas programming on New Zealand television (Zwaga, 1987). Drawing on Morley (1986), it was argued that the highly contested and often emotionally charged debate on national cultural sovereignty (see Lealand, 1988; Mattelart *et al.*, 1984) could be most profitably studied by translating this problematic to the New Zealand family viewing context, the site in which most television viewing would take place. Furthermore, the paper reported on the research conducted by Collett and Lamb (1986) concluding with the suggestion that a novel and interesting research project could be generated which would qualitatively investigate the consumption of overseas programming on New Zealand television, using Morley (1986) and Collett and Lamb (1986), respectively, as theoretical and methodological foundations.

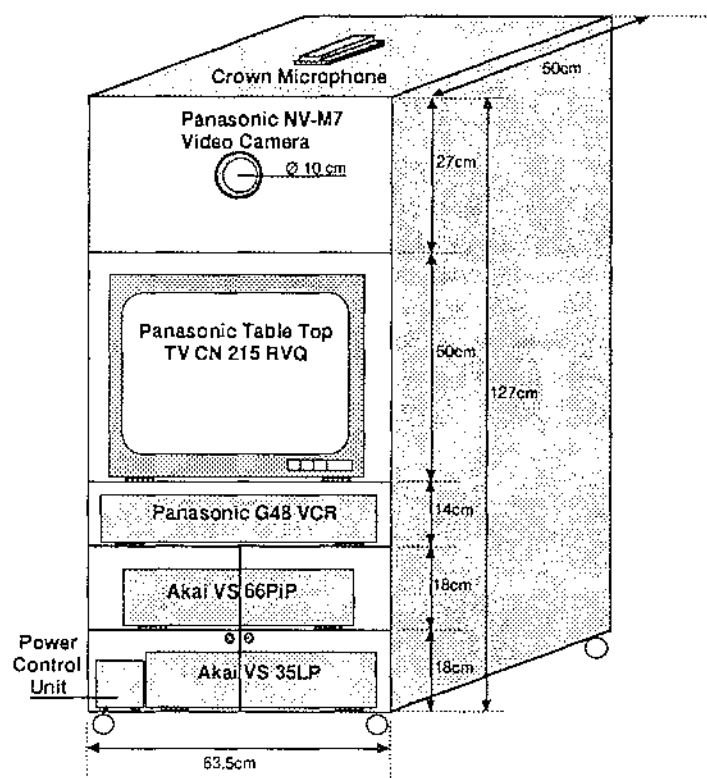
In light of the issues raised in the above studies, it was decided to broaden the scope of the research to include not only all aspects of television programming, but also to strive to account for the role television plays in everyday family life. It was to this effect that a proposal for funding was formulated and, during the period October-December 1988, submitted to various funding agencies. In March 1989, funding was obtained from the New Zealand University Grants Committee (N.Z.U.G.C.) which underwrote the research with a grant of \$13,000. Having obtained the necessary funding, the design and construction of the in-home observation unit took place in late March 1989. During 1990, another grant of \$2,200 was procured from the Massey University Research Fund to assist with technical modifications to the in-home observation unit, the costs of equipment transportation and the transcription of the family interviews.

### *Design and construction of the in-home observation cabinet*

Prior to obtaining the N.Z.U.G.C. grant, advice regarding technical specifications was sought from overseas researchers who had themselves designed and worked with an in-home observation unit. These researchers were Dr. Peter Collett of Oxford University, and Professor Daniel R. Anderson of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Peter Collett advised that while he could not part with some of the technical details of the equipment - the design then being in the process of acquiring a patent - he did not foresee any problems with design and construction of a cabinet which would perform the same function as the original specimen. Daniel Anderson's reply was similar in nature. He also kindly offered, provided we would pay the costs for postage, the use of his control circuitry. Since his equipment involved a time-lapse recording device, no further negotiations regarding this suggestion were entered into and it was decided to look for local expertise.

This expertise came in the form of audio-visual technicians based at Massey University who directed us to a manager of Manawatu TV & Sound Service Limited, a local electronics retailing and consulting firm. This person was given the following design brief. He was to construct a cabinet, not dissimilar to contemporary television furniture (so as to diminish obtrusiveness), housing a 21" television set, an optional video cassette recorder (to be included for families which normally use a VCR), a low-light camera, a long-play video cassette recorder, a microphone and various other electronic items which would enable the videotaping of activities in the television room as soon as the television set was activated. Furthermore, the videotaped recordings of the television room should be complemented with an insert which showed the television programme actually watched at the time. Another requirement stated that the cabinet should have the capacity to be easily assembled and transported.

Figure 3.1 Diagram of the in-home observation cabinet



The electronics consultants constructed a mock-up which was displayed in one of their consulting rooms. Apart from the control unit, which was specially designed to perform the above-mentioned functions, this mock-up had the apparent advantage of including off-the-shelf consumer electronics products which significantly reduced the costs as well as the time factor in putting the equipment together. After a period of extensive testing of the mock-up in their consulting rooms, the electronics consultants contracted a manufacturing joiner to build a cabinet which would house the various electronics items. Once the cabinet was finished it incorporated a Panasonic NV-M7 video camera, a 21" Panasonic CN215 RVQ table top television with remote control, a Panasonic G48 video cassette recorder - operating with the same remote control facility as the television set, an Akai VS 66 Picture in Picture video cassette recorder, an Akai VS 35 Long Play video cassette recorder, a Crown Boundary Layer microphone, and a power control unit (see Figure 3.1). For the playback of the videotapes, a 9" National Quintrix TC 1100 AZ with a headphones output and a Panasonic VCR NV-L25 HQ were used by the researcher.

During May, 1989, the in-home observation cabinet was experimented with for a further two weeks at the researcher's residence to achieve simulated pilot testing of the equipment in a normal domestic setting. The videotaped recordings thus obtained were viewed for analysis, with the aim to carefully document the working of the equipment under various conditions. Such conditions included the rapid turning off and on of the television set and the testing of the optional VCR, particularly the off-air recording of television programmes. Some crucial problems were identified with the equipment which were to come more urgently to the fore during pilot research with one of the families. First, there were problems with the recording devices going out of sequence so that the camera was recording activities in the television room while the set was turned off! Second, the angle of the camera lens of the Panasonic NV-M7 was judged too narrow, leaving sizeable sections of the television room unmonitored. A particular example of this problem concerned young children who sat right in front of the television cabinet. Third, the insert in the lower right hand corner, showing the programme screened, obscured members of the household (usually not more than one) from the view of the camera. Fourth, the video camera was unable to operate equally effectively under different levels of illumination. In particular, where windows were located opposite the observation cabinet, a 'back lighting' problem occurred. Under these conditions, the level of contrast between the subject(s) and the background was greatly reduced on the video image. Finally, there were also some problems with the audibility of family conversations; these were often masked by the sound of the television set.

The audibility of family conversations, while posing an initial problem, was remedied relatively easily by carefully listening with the help of a set of headphones plugged into the monitor used for the playback of the videotapes. However, even with the help of this aid there remained some conversation which was unintelligible to the analyst's ear. The insert in the lower right hand corner obscuring possible participant(s) from the view of the camera continued to be a minor obstacle. The equipment used, particularly the Akai VS 66 picture-in-picture video cassette recorder which acted as the screen splitting device, could not be modified to have the insert appearing, say, in the top left corner where it would interfere less with the recording of family activity. With respect to the overall view of the television room, a wide-angle lens was purchased and placed over the existing lens, significantly improving room coverage by the camera. However, children sitting very close to the television set, as young children in some instances were observed to do, remained out of range of the camera.

In those households where it posed an obstacle, the 'back lighting' problem could only be remedied by altering the position of the observation cabinet. This would, however, involve a change from the usual position of the television set which in turn meant a significant alteration of the room layout. It was decided to trade-off data quality in favour of unobtrusiveness by maintaining the original layout of the room. While other camera equipment (including infra-red sensors to better accommodate changing lighting conditions) became available to more or less solve this problem, it proved too expensive to purchase and include in the cabinet.

Throughout the pilot study, problems with the control circuitry (to obtain the appropriate sequencing of the individual electronic components) posed a major obstacle. The observation cabinet had to be taken out several times for repairs. It appeared that the operation of other electronic appliances, such as washing machines, triggered the power control device thus causing the observation cabinet to record incorrectly. By December 1989, it was decided to redesign the control unit, drawing on the professional expertise of the technical workshop of the Psychology Department at Massey University. The engineers of this department employed micro-chip technology with a soft-ware programme especially written to continually check whether the control circuitry was in the correct operating mode. This new design was extensively tested in the workshop during January and February 1990 and by March of that year was considered operational for fieldwork. The ensuing data collection on the television viewing habits of eight families took place during the period March to October 1990.



### *Recruitment of families*

Because of the invasive nature of the research strategy employed to record the ways in which families watch television, it was decided to use the so-called 'snow-ball' recruitment technique. Initially, this involved contacting families personally known to the researcher, followed by families whose names were supplied by contact persons 'in the field'. In addition, some families sought contact with the researcher after they had heard of the research either through newspaper reports or by 'word of mouth'.

Perhaps because of the invasive character of the research, considerable problems were encountered in finding enough families to fulfil what was originally intended as a study of between fifteen to twenty families. Some families, having declared an initial interest to participate in a study about television and family, declined once they were told in an introductory interview that the research would involve the placement of an in-home observation unit which would videotape their activities for a period of seven days. This reluctance also meant that the sought after variability in the background of participating families became severely compromised, with the result that the eight families that finally took part in the study have a bias towards middle-class status. It is possible to argue that with qualitative research of this kind, which almost by necessity uses a small sample, that representativeness of the sample is difficult to achieve. However, as this qualitative study is largely concerned with analytical generalisation, representativeness is hardly the major issue at stake. As such, this study contrasts with survey research where statistical inference is a primary objective (Yin, 1989:39).

By the same token, this qualitative research project did not set out to measure how this or that family (taking account of all feasible sociological variables) watches television. Instead, this study was designed with the aim to understand the role of television, or more specifically the use of television by families, in the context of everyday life. While it may have been an improvement to have had more participating families (thus achieving a higher degree of variability), the absence of such variability does not detract from either the intended objectives of the project or its potential contribution. Furthermore, the time factor played an important role here as well: it acted as a constraint in so far as this research project, like any other, had a deadline. After having videotaped eight families and obtained approximately 275 hours of recordings, it was decided that the database for intensive qualitative analysis was large enough to support a sound, complex theoretical argument.

*The fieldwork protocol - viewing and interviewing families*

Once contact had been established with a family which showed an initial interest in the research project, an appointment was made for an introductory family interview. When making this appointment, it was emphasised that it would be desirable, if not mandatory, for all persons living in the household to be present during the interview. This first briefing, which lasted for approximately 30 minutes to one hour, served to fully acquaint each member of the family with the research procedures. Ample opportunity was provided for questions to be asked and these were answered by the researcher as clearly as possible. Central to this meeting was the family consent form (see Appendix 1) which not only outlined the general purpose of the research and the data collection procedures, but also presented the family with their rights as research subjects. The consent form was left with the family for further consideration as well as the researcher's telephone number in case the need arose to answer any other query regarding the family's participation. The researcher usually left the meeting with a clearly stated intention to telephone the family after a few days to hear whether or not they had decided to participate in the research.

Following confirmation of a family's decision to participate - with all members of the family having signed the family consent form - a time mutually convenient to the family and the researcher was negotiated to install the in-home observation cabinet. The researcher and a technician usually placed the equipment in the family's residence on a Thursday, a process which took about one hour and involved the testing of appropriate lighting conditions as well as of the most profitable camera angle. The in-home observation cabinet occupied the spot where previously the family's main television set had been standing, in most cases in the living room. The family was informed that the videotaping would not start for a few days, so as to allow the family to get accustomed to having the cabinet in place. For families which normally used a video cassette recorder, the optional Panasonic G48 was included in the cabinet or, if a family was not familiar with the operating instructions of this particular brand item, the family's own video cassette recorder was linked up with the equipment. The actual data collection took place for seven successive days, where possible from Monday to Sunday. The researcher would arrive every morning at around 8:00-8:30 am (on Saturday and Sunday this was extended to 9:00-9:30 am) to insert a new video cassette tape in the Akai VS 35 Long Play video cassette recorder. In the long play mode each 3 hour tape could record up to 6 hours. There were instances, however, particularly on week-end days, when the television set was turned on for more than six hours and, consequently, these viewing episodes (chiefly late evening or early the following morning) were not recorded.

As soon as the seven days of in-home observation was completed, an appointment was made to collect the cabinet. The equipment was normally collected on the Thursday following the last recording day, which effectively meant that the cabinet had been in the family's residence for two weeks, even though there were occasions, mainly through intervening circumstances, that this period was prolonged by one or two weeks. At this stage, the co-operation of the family was gratefully acknowledged. In addition, the researcher mentioned that he would be in touch to arrange a debriefing interview at a time when all members of the household would be present. As outlined in the consent form, the family was reminded of the fact that the debriefing interview should ideally take place within a period of two to three weeks after the observation cabinet had been removed.

This two or three week period was employed by the researcher to carry out an initial, preliminary analysis of the family's recorded television viewing habits. The aim of this early analysis was to arrive at a global picture of the family's viewing habits, attempting to depict, relatively succinctly, the episodes of television viewing that were captured on videotape. In other words, the initial transcription of the videotaped recordings concentrated on the following items: (1) the time of the day the television set was turned on, which was achieved by consulting the *Listener/TV Radio Times* for the appropriate days; (2) the persons present in the television room; (3) the television programme screening; and (4) a brief description of the activities that the persons present were engaged in. These transcripts were entered into a coding form listing the above four categories, which would also enable later, rapid retrieval of information for further reference.

The debriefing interview with the family usually lasted one to one and a half hours and was audio-taped for subsequent transcription. This post-observational family interview sought to explore whether the 'episodes of family viewing' or 'observed idiosyncrasies' corresponded with the generally perceived patterns of television viewing within each family. More specifically, the family interview also sought to establish whether or not the observation cabinet had modified the behaviour of family members in a significant way. From the interviews, it is clear that families generally judged that this was not the case and that they went about their viewing practices in their usual habitual way. There were, however, some incidents mentioned in the interviews that could either be defined or construed as episodes of modified behaviour by certain individuals. For example, one mother mentioned that she had refrained from physically participating in the televised sessions of *Aerobics Oz Style* while the cabinet monitored her family. Another mother said that her adolescent son abstained from watching the afternoon's cartoon shows because in her opinion he did not want to be seen watching such television programmes. Related to this issue, the videotaped

recordings found, like Collett and Lamb's (1986) study, evidence of self-conscious behaviour, particularly during the first day in the recording week, when children were observed engaging not only with the television but with the camera as well.

To conclude this section, it needs to be pointed out that in some households the family interview worked more successfully than in others. In some families, young children especially were rather shy and needed to be prodded by their parents to open their mouths. If this encouragement failed, the parents usually ended up speaking for their children. (The latter, of course, is an interesting fact in itself because we are dealing here with the parents' interpretations of their children's viewing hours.) In other cases, the interview *en famille* worked very well indeed. Television, it seems, offers much common ground for conversation within families - resulting in wide-ranging discussions in which most participants freely expressed their opinions. In this respect, moreover, the relatively unstructured nature of the debriefing interview served the research objectives well.

### *Qualitative analysis of observation and interview records*

Miles (1983:117) has argued that the central dilemma in the use of qualitative data is that the methods of analysis are not very well formulated. It would not be an exaggeration to state that this is particularly the case when it concerns the analysis of data obtained through video- and audio-recording techniques. Within a broader methodological context, however, there has been some discussion with respect to the character and status of such data in qualitative research. For instance, Schwartz and Jacobs (1979:84) have pointed to the fact that while research employing video- and audio-recording devices differs from research which uses more 'conventional' observational techniques, the 'raw' findings still need to be contextualised:

Eyes are not cameras; they cannot zoom, nor can they pan. Ears are not microphones...But even if an individual had microphones for ears and cameras for eyes, he is always 'situated' within a social environment at some space-time point. Depending on physical barriers, spacing patterns among those present, and his own patterns of locomotion, the same room can look and sound amazingly different to him than it does to others.

Similarly, Anderson (1987:333) has referred to some of the dangers when audio- and video-recordings are used as the 'primary analytical resource'. It may lead to the objectification of behaviour where the emphasis is on actors and their performances in isolation from the overall context in which these occur. Ultimately, the recorded family viewing behaviours need to be interpreted - not only contextually, but also from the point of view of the family members' meanings of their television viewing habits.

This qualitative analysis of the video-recordings of family television viewing episodes and the transcripts of the family interviews proceeded through the following stages. A preliminary analysis of the videotapes (containing the observations of television viewing within each family for a period of seven days) was conducted before the family interview, which was usually scheduled two or three weeks after the observation cabinet had been removed from the family home. The videotape transcriptions were entered onto a coding form (see above section on fieldwork protocol) to obtain summaries of daily television viewing patterns which could be readily used for future data retrieval. This important component of the 'research text' (Anderson, 1987:Chapter 12) briefly described the broader contexts of the ways in which family members 'watched' television programmes as well as paying attention to the 'significant details' (Anderson, 1987:336) as these were observed. These preliminary analyses, furthermore, served the crucial purpose of acquainting the researcher with the general viewing patterns within each family before the debriefing interview could take place.

Following the debriefing interview, the next stages of the analysis focused on the integration of the family interview transcripts with the videotaped observations. To this effect, the latter were now thematically reviewed in conjunction with a corresponding thematic reading of the interview transcripts. These themes have their origin in the recent family and television literature (see Chapter Two) and subsequently served as 'sensitising concepts'. According to Patton (1990:391), the procedure of employing the sensitising concept aims to inductively 'examine how the concept is manifest in a particular setting or among a particular group of people' and as such is helpful in making sense of the data. The results of these analytic procedures are reported in the following chapters, but first it is necessary to pay attention to the ethical implications of the research.

### **Ethical issues**

In their evaluation of ethical considerations in qualitative family research, Larossa *et al.* (1981:307-308) state that the double role of the field worker, that is the field worker being simultaneously treated as guest and researcher, is of ethical significance since 'home interviews or observations may lull some families into disclosing more about themselves than they had originally planned'. Furthermore, what these authors call the 'serendipitous quality of the setting and interaction' (Larossa *et al.*, 1981:308) may well constitute an invasion of privacy because the family may have given more information than originally

consented to. Set in relation to such ethical considerations as informed consent and the risk-benefit equation, qualitative family researchers need to be extra diligent in safeguarding the rights of the research subjects.

During the proposal stage of the research, careful consideration was given to the ethical implications of video recording the television viewing habits of families in their own homes. Partly for reasons to do with the relatively unprecedented nature of the proposed research, counsel was sought from the Human Ethics Committee of Massey University. After a preliminary meeting with the Committee, the following ethical topics were identified as demanding explicit attention, if the research was to proceed: (1) informed consent/voluntary participation; (2) confidentiality; (3) harm to family and individual family members; (4) listing of the shortcomings of the research; and (5) the identity of the researcher. In addition, the Committee requested the preparation of a consent form (see Appendix 1) and a contract form for any workers involved in the project (see Appendix 2). The resolution of these ethical issues was perceived to contribute to a relationship of trust between the researcher and the participating families whereby the privacy of the latter was protected at all possible costs.

Informed consent was obtained after carefully explaining the levels of involvement (the in-house seven day observation period, as well as the debriefing interview) that the research required for a family intending to participate. This explanation was provided during the introductory meeting, where all members of the family were present. All participants were told the objectives of the study and the mechanics of the in-home observation cabinet were carefully described. In some cases, a video recording of the British television series *Open the Box*, reporting the Collett and Lamb (1986) study, was offered to a family but not all families took it up. Furthermore, the participants were informed of the procedures to maintain strict confidentiality, as well as of the measures protecting their rights during their involvement in the research project. The final confirmation of the family's participation in the research project took place only after they had signed the family consent form, which all family members aged sixteen years and older were encouraged to do.

Measures to safeguard the confidentiality of the research participants were as follows. The videotaped observations were coded (for example, Family A; Family B; Family C; etc.) to ensure that the family's name was not identified in the study. While the names of the families were known to the researcher, his supervisors, and technicians involved in cabinet installation, they were not released to anybody else. The technicians were required to sign a contract form in which they promised not to release or reveal the identity of participating

families. Furthermore, as an additional safeguard, the videotapes, while remaining with the researcher for a period of five years, are to be destroyed at the termination of the research or, if requested, returned to the participating families. During the same period the tapes are to be securely stored. Finally, the above mentioned measures were also adopted to safeguard confidentiality with respect to the audio-taped interviews. Transcripts of the interviews have been coded and any other specific identifying characteristics have been removed. In this thesis, moreover, the families' surnames have been changed (for example, Family A are *The Allens*; Family B are *The Browns*; Family C are *The Cooks*; etc.) as well as the first names of each participating family member and casual visitors within the household concerned.

On the issue of harm to the family, and individual family members, the participants were recognised as having the following rights. In addition to protection of their identity, participants were free to withdraw from the research at any time without threat of reprisal or recrimination from the researcher. As we are dealing here with groups consisting of more than one person, the right to withdraw was extended to any member of the participating household. In practice, this meant that if one member wanted to withdraw from the research, the family as a whole discontinued its participation. A withdrawal from the research by a family did, however, not occur. Furthermore, it was also communicated to the participants that they had the right to have any recorded material erased, if they were of the opinion that nobody, including the researcher, should have access to what had been recorded on a particular videotape. The latter provision was included to make clear to the participants that they had the final say about what became part of the researcher's data base, but there were no objections to the videotapes in any case. The participants were also informed that the in-home observation cabinet would be insured by Massey University while it was in their residence and that they were not liable for any breakdown or accidental damage that could eventuate.

The ethical concern relating to the shortcomings of the research has been adequately covered in the methodological sections of this chapter. These shortcomings included the restraints imposed upon the nature and scope of data collection by the technical limitations of the observation cabinet, recruitment of participants, etc. However, in its subsequent narrative exposition, the research endeavours, in the words of Silverman (1989:57-77), to tell 'convincing stories'.

Finally, even though some of the families were personally known to the researcher, his identity was always made known to all participants as somebody who was employed by Massey University as a tutor in Sociology and who was fulfilling the research requirements for completion of a Ph.D. The participants were informed of the researcher's identity during initial telephone conversations as well as during the first family meeting. Formal documents (e.g. the consent form) carried the Massey University letterhead which was also used in any correspondence with either potential or actual participating families.

## Conclusion

This chapter started with a discussion that charted the technological progression of in-home observation units monitoring families watching television. Whereas the obtrusiveness of the in-home observation equipment proved to be a major obstacle for the earliest generation of researchers, subsequent refinements in video technology enabled the design and construction of less obtrusive equipment. The chapter continued by describing how these innovations informed the design of the in-home observation cabinet used in this study. However, while it is relatively easy to conceive and build an unobtrusive in-home observation cabinet, to make it empirically operational is quite a different exercise altogether. A number of technical difficulties were encountered, and though the most serious of these were eventually resolved, there is nevertheless room for further improvement in the equipment that should be considered by future researchers. This chapter also introduced a range of other methodological issues which had an immediate bearing on the fieldwork procedures adopted in this study. These procedures included those for the recruitment of families, data collection and data analysis. The ethical issues were also outlined and attention was paid to the processes by which these were negotiated.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### MEET THE SIMPSONS

#### Introducing Eight Families and Their Everyday Involvement with Television

##### Introduction

In an attempt to firmly establish media use within the context of everyday family routines, Rogge (1989:169) has argued that:

The media are interpreted against the background of everyday life as it is lived and experienced...The media are unquestioningly accepted as normal, they are something completely *familiar*. Their general ubiquity causes them to be allocated certain functions in people's everyday lives. The media form a part of the family system, a part many can no longer imagine living without. [emphasis added]

Television viewing - the outstanding example of contemporary media consumption - is an everyday activity. Within this context, 'watching television' is part and parcel of everyday routines and as such it belongs to the realm of the mundane. This taken-for-granted nature of television viewing, however, makes it a challenging object for research. What is a seemingly straight-forward research exercise (as in, for instance, the ratings paradigm which tells us of who is watching what programme at which particular time) is, in fact, complicated by the need to take into account the familial organisation of the living room, as well as the interpersonal dynamics of television viewing. The latter issues take the analysis of television viewing practices to a higher level of complexity, in an attempt to grapple with everyday realities that go beyond the apparently innocent relationship of *the* viewer to their favourite television programme.

Similarly, by placing television viewing practices within the context of everyday reality, it follows that it is almost impossible to accord television a single, discrete influence, as various expressions of the effects paradigm have suggested (see Chapter One). However, it would be mistaken to argue that television has no 'effect' whatsoever, or that it merely constitutes an epiphenomenal ingredient of everyday life. To hypothesise whether or not television imparts identifiable effects has proven to be largely a misguided (empirical)

research project. Instead, it is more fruitful to think of television viewing as being part of a particular set of social relations and as such it may inform, no more and no less, how these social relations are constituted on an ongoing basis in everyday familial routines.

This reciprocity becomes especially acute when the analysis of television viewing establishes the family/household as the dynamic unit of consumption of television (Morley, 1986). Furthermore, as Lull (1988:258) suggests:

...television is not only a technological medium that transmits bits of information from impersonal institutions to anonymous audiences, it is a social medium, too - a means by which audience members communicate and construct strategies to achieve a wide range of personal and social objectives.

In this sense, the television viewing practices of audiences are *extensions* of the personal and social positions, and the roles of family members - all which cannot be seen in isolation from what is loosely labelled 'watching the box' (Lull, 1990).

In order to make these notions operational, it is necessary to learn more about the families that have participated in this study. This chapter, then, will introduce the eight families who took part in the study's fieldwork during March-October 1990. In doing so, the chapter begins by providing a profile of each family in terms of their general socio-demographic characteristics. In addition, the physical layout of the families' dwellings will be discussed - in other words, the topography of each family home - concentrating on the location of the television room *vis à vis* other rooms in the house. More specifically, this will also involve a description of the interior arrangement of the television room.

Through an analysis of the television viewing practices of the families observed, it is not only possible to learn more about the families' everyday interaction with the medium but also about family life itself. The everyday enactment of family roles, for instance, will find its expression in the ways families, or individuals within families, use television. Accordingly, a description of a typical viewing day will be presented for each of the families which participated in the study. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the different uses of television exhibited by the eight families and how these are influenced by the interpersonal factors in their make-up, factors such as authority relations. Overall, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an introductory descriptive framework from which substantial themes can be drawn for in-depth analysis in the chapters which follow.

## Family television viewing profiles

**Table 4.1 - Summary of Characteristics of Participant Families**

Family	Family Status and Adult Occupations	Type of House	Location of TV	TV Use by Hours*
The Allens John Alice Andrew (12) Eric (6) Carol	Father, Student Mother, Part-time Student Child Child Boarder, Student	Single storey; 3 bedrooms	'Open-plan' living room	33.15
The Browns Margaret Ann (14) Sylvia (11)	Mother, Student Child Child	Single storey; 2 bedrooms	'Separate' living room	40.30
The Cooks Martin Janet Robert (17) Paula (13)	Father, Lecturer Mother, Teacher Child Child	Double storey; 4 bedrooms	'Open-plan' living room	18.15
The Dawsons Philip Joanne Brenda (13) Judith (11)	Father, Lecturer Mother, Part-time Teacher Child Child	Double storey; 4 bedrooms	'Separate' living room	38.00
The Elliots Oscar Ellen	Husband, Public Relations Officer Wife, Physiotherapist	Double storey; 3 bedrooms	'Open-plan' living room	22.00
The Fields Trevor Jane Barbara (15) Sally (13) Karen (9) Jennifer (5)	Father, Real Estate Manager Mother, Part-time Teacher Child Child Child Child	Double storey; 4 bedrooms, study and rumpus room	'Separate' living room	39.30
The Grays Cynthia [Doug] Mary (16) Emily (15) Stuart (12)	Mother, Part-time Counsellor  Child Child Child	Double storey; 4 bedrooms, TV room and study	'Television room'	35.00
The Howards Paul Jill Michelle (10) Lucy (8) Peter (6)	Father, Sickness Beneficiary Mother, Housewife Child Child Child	Single storey; 3 bedrooms	One in 'Separate' living room and one in bedroom	42.00

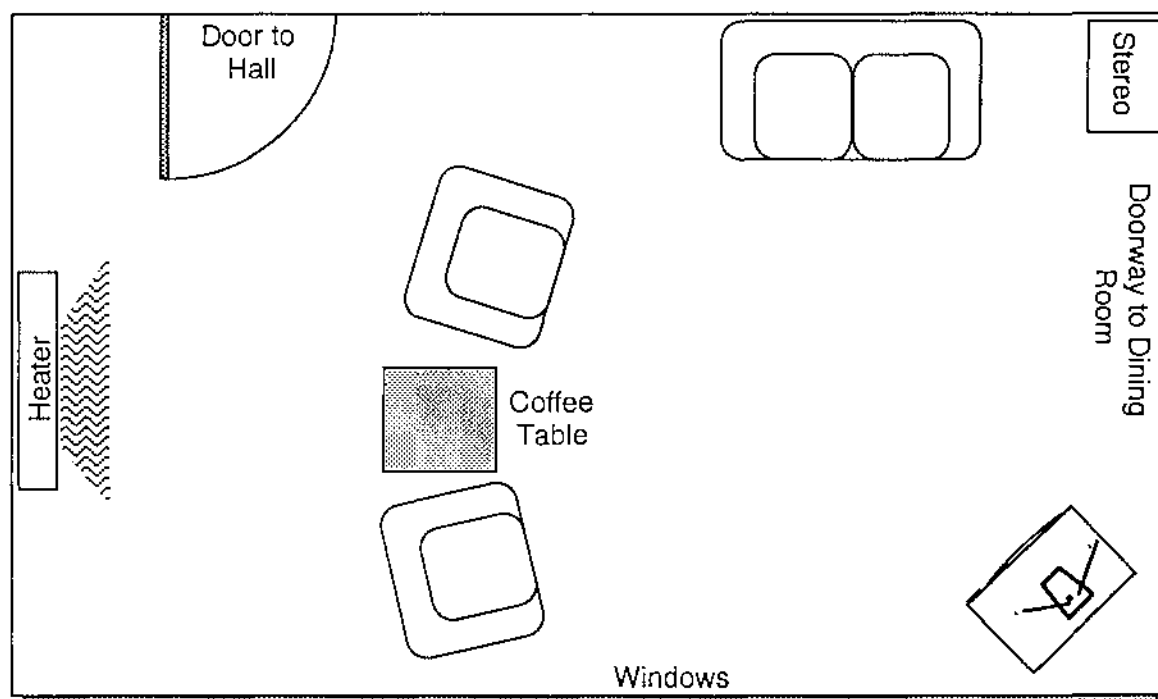
\* Amounts have been rounded off to the nearest quarter hour.

### *Family A: The Allens*

The Allen household consists of two parents, John and Alice, and their two sons, Andrew and Eric, aged twelve and six years. The family also provides board to a female tertiary student, Carol, who attends Teacher's College. The father is a former secondary school teacher, but is now studying towards a doctorate at the local university, where the mother also undertakes part-time study for an undergraduate degree. The oldest son attends secondary school, and his younger brother is at primary school. The family rents a three-bedroomed suburban home, with a sleepout which is occupied by the boarder.

The living or television room joins the dining room, but the latter is not used for dining. Instead, the dining room is used as another family room for such activities as doing school work and playing musical instruments. The dining room is in turn linked up with the kitchen, so that it is possible to monitor from the kitchen what is going on in the living room. As one enters the living room, the television set is situated in the lefthand corner with a two-seater and two matching chairs placed adjacent to it. Between the television set and the seating furniture, there is ample space to lie on the floor.

**Figure 4.1 The Allens' living room**



During the week in which this household was monitored just over 33 hours of videotaped recordings were collected, amounting to a daily average of about 4:45 hours. On Saturday, the television set screened for over 6 hours, whereas on Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday the set was turned on for around 3:30 hours. On each of the other days, Monday, Thursday and Friday, the television set was on for more than 5 hours. This quantitative breakdown, however, should be treated with some caution, since it merely represents the actual time during which the television set was turned on. During this time, family members may or may not have been present, and alternatively, they may or may not have directed their attention solely to the screen. Notwithstanding this *caveat*, the actual time the television set is turned on - and the observed differences between families with respect to this particular practice - does reveal important aspects regarding the viewing styles and the use of television within families.

As with most families with young children examined in the course of this study, the television set occupies a fairly dominant presence in the Allen's living room. In many ways, the simple act of turning the television set on, particularly by the children, Andrew and Eric, can be seen as a signifier of wakefulness and having come out of bed or, alternatively, as an indicator of having come home from school. For the parents (John and Alice), as well as the boarder (Carol), television viewing denotes more than just merely watching certain programmes. Leisure time is mostly spent at home, and accordingly television, particularly for the father, serves as an important leisure resource in the evening, which usually starts with the family meal being consumed in front of the television set. Viewing practices within this household vary greatly, and the extent of this variation will be illustrated below.

In the early morning while others are still in bed, Eric (6), the youngest child, will routinely turn on the set somewhere between 6:30-7:00am and sit right in front of it. He attentively watches the breakfast cartoon show screening on Channel 2<sup>1</sup>, without being distracted by competing activities or the presence of others in the room. The early morning television viewing behaviour of this child approximates a state of being 'glued to the box', because at other times he is typically restless and has difficulty in concentrating upon one thing at a time. When 'glued to the box' his eyes, with an animated gaze, follow the programme on the screen closely, including the commercial breaks.

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1 There are three national television networks in New Zealand - TV ONE, Channel 2 and TV3. The eight families participating in this study normally received all three channels.

What is on the surface a somewhat stereotypical depiction of a young child absorbed in watching television cartoons takes on an entirely different meaning when it is translated to the actual family context, in which this boy lives and consumes television. He is the youngest and, by implication, the least powerful person when it comes to having a say in the decision-making process about what programme to watch. Early morning television, however, with nobody else present competing for the remote control, in effect means that he watches what he wants on his own terms, and this situation manifests itself in sustained viewing attention. This particular viewing style has not gone unnoticed. For example, Andrew (12), his older brother, tends to ridicule Eric's 'zombie-like' viewing behaviour.

Without having any significant allies in the television room - his father often sides with his older brother in terms of viewing preferences, and his mother tends to show little interest in television - there may be some symbolic significance in the fact that, on several occasions, Eric arranged several Teddy bears to be seated next to him in front of the television set. Without wanting to stretch the analogy too far, television viewing is a social activity and companionship in the form of toys (and as an alternative to censuring peers) may thus contribute to a meaningful relationship between television viewing and play. Moreover, the attentive viewing style of this child, interspersed with play, is disrupted when others enter the room later in the morning. The overall picture which emerges thereafter is one wherein those present, including Eric, casually watch television while getting ready for school or work. On the intervention of one of the parents, the television set is soon turned off.

While sometimes joining his younger brother to watch the breakfast cartoons in the morning (in an albeit less attentive viewing style), Andrew normally turns on the set in the afternoon, having arrived home from school. He is usually by himself, his mother and younger brother being out of the house, both doing some shopping after Alice has collected Eric from school. He occupies one of the seats and watches a cartoon on either Channel 2 or TV3. Unlike his younger brother, his viewing style is far more erratic. Flicking through a book or magazine, he sporadically watches the afternoon's programming, switching between the two channels. This is especially the case when the commercials appear, during which time he may also leave the room. When others, such as Carol (the boarder) or Eric, come into the room, this viewing behaviour is maintained while he occasionally chats to those present. His younger brother is quite restless, moving in and out of the room, sometimes stating his particular cartoon preference but not necessarily following this up by actually attending to the programme. Eric's behaviour sometimes irritates his older brother who tells him to settle down, not unlike his father would do on other occasions. Their mother, Alice, comes in

briefly, to bring in a drink or to resolve a conflict that has arisen about clashing programme interests. When Carol arbitrates, she does so reluctantly. All these activities contribute to a seemingly busy atmosphere, with television serving as a complementary background, those present tuning in and out of the programme screening, and (usually) avoiding the commercials.

Dinner, taken in front of the television, brings the whole household together. It is customary for this family to switch to TV ONE's *One Network News* starting at 6pm, followed by *Holmes* and *Sale of the Century*. During these programmes there is a lively interaction between the members present and the programme being watched. Television in this setting initiates discussion, which is directly programme-related, but there is also talk about things that have occurred during the day. Seating arrangements are relatively fixed, with John, the father, sitting in what could be considered the most prominent viewing position, Andrew, his oldest son sitting on the couch together with the boarder, and the youngest child invariably sitting on the floor. Alice, the mother, does not appear to have an 'assigned' seat. She may sit on the chair next to her husband, on the couch or on the floor. Verbal interaction during the meal is mainly between the father and his oldest son who appear to be 'intellectual allies', sharing a similar kind of humour. The comments of Eric are either ignored or dismissed by them, but they occasionally find a sympathetic ear from his mother who may move to sit next to him on the floor. Carol sometimes joins in the discussion/comments initiated by the father and his oldest son. These interactions tend to be paced by what is screening on the set, with commercial breaks being used as a time in which to carry away dinner plates, and to enable the dessert to be brought in by either John, Alice or Carol. On week nights, the set is turned off at around 7:30pm, usually by John, ending this family viewing episode. On week-end nights, however, the set continues to stay on with the children watching such programmes as TV ONE's *Our World*, a nature programme.

Apart from dinner-time, Alice is hardly in the room when the television is on. Preferring to listen to music instead, she does not like most television programming. This preference, however, is severely compromised by the fact that the family's stereo is also in the living room. During the evening she is usually absent from about 8:30pm, while her husband watches television for relatively long periods, sometimes joined by Carol. He follows a régime of relatively planned viewing, such as movies, news and current affairs and documentaries, showing a strong loyalty towards TV ONE. His viewing style is that of the solitary viewer: attentive yet discerning, virtually ignoring, for instance, all commercials by turning off the volume with the remote control. On most viewing occasions he has a book handy which he consults during the advertisements, but he also interrupts viewing to attend

to domestic chores, such as folding away the washing. His spouse, if she has not gone to bed, usually sits in the adjoining room and during the evening both communicate at a distance. Alternatively, when she has gone to bed, she may call out to her husband to join her, an invitation which is generally not taken up. Typically, at around 11-11:30pm, John turns off the set.

Television viewing in this family is perceived to be a dominant activity by the family members themselves, particularly the parents. 'We eat, sleep and work in front of the television!', said John jokingly during the interview, perhaps displaying an awareness of his own viewing behaviour. His spouse, Alice, expressed a more serious concern, thinking that she always has to give in to the viewing practices of other members in the family - especially those of her children - thus preventing her doing the things she likes. As has been shown above, these divergent attitudes to television are fully expressed in the viewing practices of both parents.

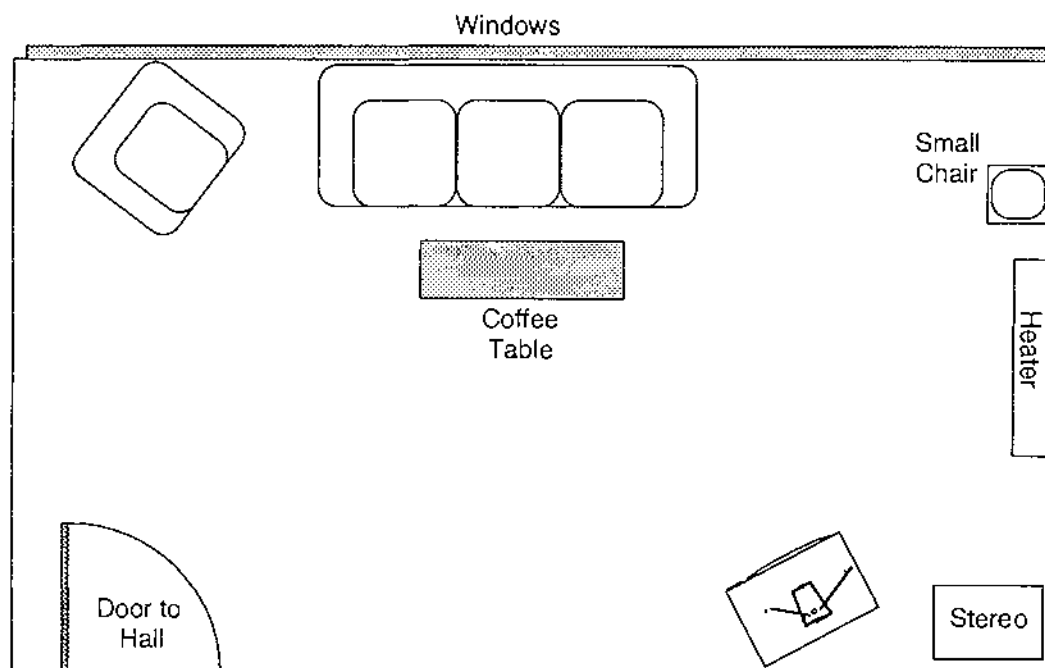
### *Family B: The Browns*

The Browns are a single-parent family which consists of the mother, Margaret, a mature student working towards a post-graduate university degree while receiving the Domestic Purposes Benefit, and her two daughters, Ann and Sylvia, aged fourteen and eleven. The youngest girl goes to intermediate school and her older sister attends secondary school. The family owns a two bedroom house on a subdivided suburban section.

The living room, where the television set is placed in the left corner facing the windows, is a separate room with a door leading to the hall. The kitchen, which includes a small dining area, is directly off the hall next to the living room. The living room has a large three-seated couch with on its immediate right a comfortable chair. Both are facing the television set. On the left of the couch a smaller chair is situated, but a person using this seat does not have a direct view of the television unless one turns oneself towards the set. In front of the couch there is a small coffee table, but between the coffee table and the television set, there is enough room to sit or lie on the floor.



Figure 4.2 The Browns' living room



About 40 hours of videotaped recordings were collected from this household during the week the cabinet was installed in their living room. Except for Sunday, when the television set was turned on for 4:30 hours, during all other days of the week the set screened for in excess of 6 hours. This is, however, not to say that all members of this household are either attending to the television set or are present in the room. Yet, the outstanding feature of this family's viewing practice lies in the finding that, particularly on week days, the television set almost uninterruptedly screens from the late afternoon to the late evening, that is from about 4pm to approximately 10:30pm. During the week-end, this pattern contrasts with one of several, relatively unconnected viewing sessions.

A typical viewing day in this family starts with Sylvia (11) turning on the television at around 7:15am. Usually sitting on the couch in her pyjamas, she watches Channel 2's *Ox Tales*, a daily breakfast cartoon show. During the programme, she leaves the room on several occasions either to have breakfast or to get dressed. However, she returns to the room, resumes her position on the couch and watches the breakfast cartoons while grooming

her hair. Her older sister, Ann (14), briefly enters and has a quick glance at the set and collects her school bag before leaving again. Margaret, their mother, has not got out of bed yet. For both girls, and for Sylvia in particular, early morning television provides a background for such activities as getting ready for school, the timing of which is monitored by both of them through the clock showing on the screen. Independent of parental intervention, the set is turned off by one of the girls at around 8am. In this instance, television rather than a parent - as is prevalent in most of the other families - communicates that it is time to leave for school.

On several occasions during the week Margaret switches on the set at lunch time albeit for very short periods. On this particular occasion she has something to eat while casually watching *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on TV3. She comments on the commercials and leaves the room in dismay. For about ten minutes, the television screens with nobody in the room. Margaret returns and almost immediately turns off the set. This viewing episode lasts about fourteen minutes and it is not an uncommon one for her. A vocal protest at commercials, stating that she has better things to do, often accompanies her actions. Being a post-graduate student working mostly at home, daytime television may offer a diversion which nevertheless has to be kept in check, particularly when its programming has little to offer. Watching television may, apart from causing the voiced irritation, also trigger guilty feelings about such a pastime during the (working) day, with the result that the set is turned off.

The arrival home from school of Ann and Sylvia from school initiates a prolonged viewing period in which the television set screens without interruption. As in the early morning, television acts as a backdrop for many activities which are far removed from a sustained viewing effort. An afternoon snack is taken in front of the set with both Sylvia and Ann frequently moving in and out of the room. This is followed by a period of relaxation in front of the set, watching the cartoons screening on TV3. Sylvia, the youngest of the two sisters, watches the programmes closely, switching channels when the commercials appear but regularly returning to TV3's cartoon shows. She normally sits on the couch, but sometimes moves to the floor right in front of the television set. Ann lounges in her favourite position with her legs stretched over the arm of a comfortable chair and her feet resting on the couch. She reads a magazine but occasionally glances towards the television.

There is hardly any verbal interaction between the two sisters during the afternoon viewing period. Sylvia, however, quite often attempts to initiate a discussion by, for instance, asking Ann a question relating to a television programme but Ann more often than not does not respond. If there is any interaction between the two, it tends to be disagreement about what

channel to watch, Sylvia preferring the cartoon shows on TV3 and Ann wanting to see Channel 2's *3:45 Live!*, a teenage magazine-type programme. Their mother, who is otherwise in the kitchen working on her studies, occasionally comes into the room but she tends not to involve herself in the dispute regarding the different viewing preferences of her daughters. Ann, by merely asserting herself, usually gets her way with the younger Sylvia giving only the faintest of opposition. Perhaps not having a convincing counter-argument, she also possibly realises that Ann will only watch the programme momentarily. When her sister later leaves the room, Sylvia takes the opportunity to switch back to the cartoon shows.

Both Ann and Sylvia do their school work in front of the television. Ann is usually the first to get her school bag. She sits down on the floor, with her paperwork and books placed around her. Seeing that her sister has taken the lead, Sylvia somewhat reluctantly collects her homework but it takes her considerably more time and effort than her sister to settle into a work routine. Lying or sitting on the floor right in front of the television set, Sylvia is continually distracted by the cartoon shows screening on TV3. She appears to turn her attention to her school work mainly during the commercial breaks. Ann, on the other hand, is engrossed in her work and only occasionally glances at the set. It is as if she is 'watching' television by listening alone, following the programme by ear - rather like listening to the radio. Moreover, she uses the commercial breaks as an opportunity to leave the room to fetch a book or to have a chat with Margaret in the kitchen. Sylvia tends to follow Ann by leaving the room as well, with the result that the television sometimes screens with nobody in the room - for a period of anything up to fifteen minutes. The overall pattern which emerges is that Ann appears to be reasonably well equipped to continue her homework while using the television in quite a selective way. Sylvia, however, has more difficulty in blending other activities such as doing homework with watching television. Furthermore, she tends to emulate much of what Ann is doing even if it is with what appears to be a somewhat ambivalent enthusiasm.

Like the case of the previous family, dinner is taken in front of the television, although its timing is different. In this family, dinner usually coincides with the screening of *Blind Date* on Channel 2 at 5:30pm. Shortly before dinner, Margaret comes into the living room with a newspaper which she reads on the couch while having a cigarette. Mentioning that tea will be ready soon, Margaret checks with her younger daughter, Sylvia, to see how she is progressing with her homework by briefly moving to the floor. Sylvia takes the opportunity to ask her mother some questions regarding her homework to which the latter duly responds. During such exchanges, Ann sits reclined in the comfortable chair watching Channel 2's *Batman*, attentively yet somewhat impassively.

Dinner is collected from the kitchen as *Blind Date* is about to start. This programme is analysed by Margaret regularly interjecting comments regarding the nature of the programme, or the participants involved in this dating game. Ann and Sylvia, however, do not respond to any of the comments made by their mother. While occasionally making some isolated remarks themselves, the exchanges tend to be very much one-way. The latter is, in fact, typical of occasions when the family as a whole watches television; Margaret reacts verbally to aspects of the programming and usually directs her comments to her daughters who remain silent. As they both stated in the interview: 'We just want to be quiet and watch.' For her part, Margaret wants to correct many of the views expressed on the programme, arguing that there is 'a great deal of rubbish on television' which must be challenged.

After dinner and the conclusion of *Blind Date*, Margaret leaves the room to do the dishes, while Ann and Sylvia watch *Happy Days*. Sylvia has returned to her homework but her eyes tend to be more on the screen. The period following dinner, however, is relatively unsettled, with both girls often moving in and out of the room. When at 6:30pm *Neighbours* screens on Channel 2, Ann and Sylvia return to watch the programme attentively and quietly. Their mother has gone out for her daily run, first making sure, however, that the children have closed the curtains and turned on the lights. She also announces that she intends to watch the mini-series *Shaka Zulu* which is a daily feature this week on TV3.

*Shaka Zulu* is subsequently watched by the whole family and the viewing episode follows a pattern similar to that for the *Blind Date* programme, with Margaret doing a lot of explaining and commenting. Having lived in Africa - where the story of this mini-series is situated - she turns the programme into an educational exercise and her daughters display more interest in what her mother has to say, even though the discussion is again one-way. During the programme, Margaret regularly leaves the room, particularly when the commercials come on. In these instances both daughters call her when *Shaka Zulu* returns on screen. As it gets later, Sylvia cuddles up to her mother who sits on the couch. Margaret suggests that Sylvia ought to go to bed, but is not insistent. Ann watches the programme attentively while Sylvia has difficulty staying awake. The programme concludes at 10:30pm and the set is turned off.

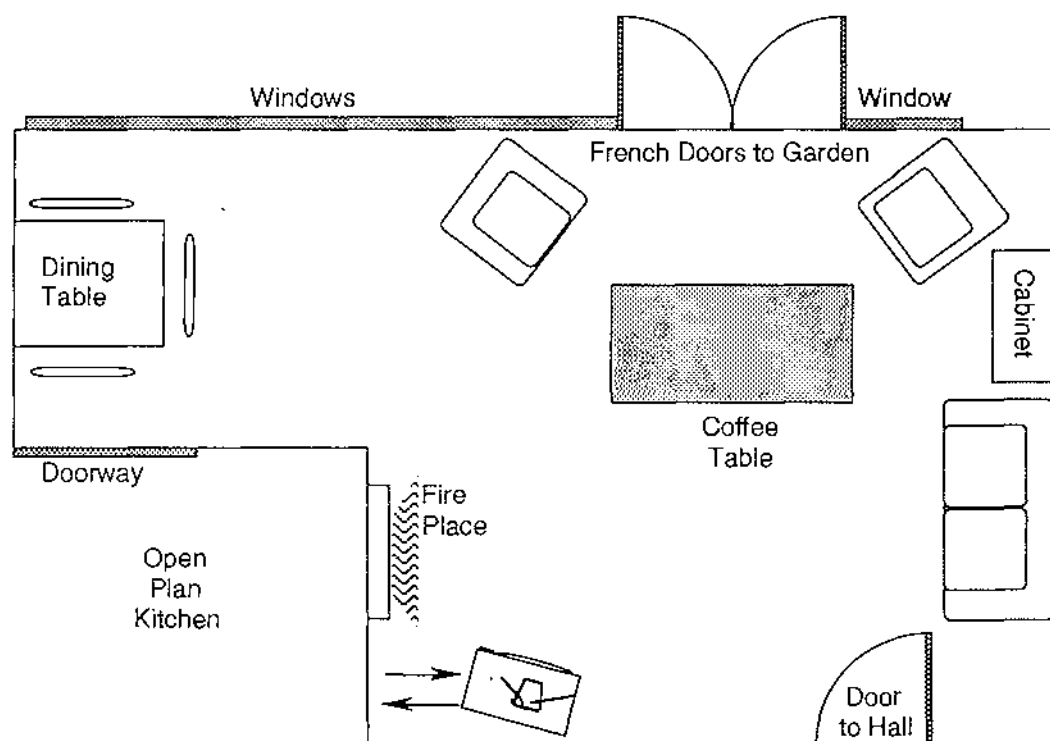
Television viewing during the week in this household contrasts with the patterns observed in the weekend. On Saturday and Sunday, the television not only screens less but the viewing is also more fragmented, in terms of the television actually being turned off. All three members of the household play sports on Saturday, and Sunday may be used for

outings, such as visiting friends. Nevertheless, television can be considered to play a fairly dominant role in this family, although its main role manifests itself in being an important background resource. A paradox also finds its expression in the actual behavior as opposed to rules devised for television viewing in this family. The mother, Margaret, rules out most violent television but her daughters show no sign of feeling deprived of such television content. In other words, there is no real enforcement of the rule to the point that Ann and Sylvia are not even aware that such a rule exists. A clear example of this situation is provided by the *Shaka Zulu* programme which included warfare, impalings and other acts of violence.

### *Family C: The Cooks*

The Cooks own their renovated farm cottage on a largish property situated in a rural setting just outside the city. Among other things, the property features a lawn tennis court. Both parents hold full-time employment positions; Janet is a secondary school teacher and Martin works as a university lecturer. Their eldest son, Robert, is aged seventeen years and attends secondary school, as does Paula, his thirteen year old sister.

**Figure 4.3 The Cooks' living room**



The living room is part of an open-plan, L-shaped area which also comprises the dining room and the kitchen. The lounge has two comfortable chairs located in both the far right and far left corners, facing the television set. The latter, together with a VCR, is placed on a cart with castors and, when in use, can be pulled from the wall against which the small 14" television set usually stands. On the left, and only partially facing the television set, a two-seater is situated between the latter and the far left chair stands a set of drawers. A large coffee table accentuates the centre of this room, with only enough space left to sit or lie relatively close to the television set.

The Cooks have a busy social calendar, which involves them in many activities away from their home. This is reflected in the relatively small amount of time the television set screened in this household. At only 18:15 hours for the week, this is the lowest figure for all of the families. Since no use was made of the television on Sunday, the set was only turned on for an average three hours per day for the remaining six days, with the viewing episodes mainly confined to the evening. Even at this time of the day, however, the television is usually turned on and watched with the intention of viewing what are to be considered worthwhile programmes. Generally speaking, television viewing is a planned pursuit with the result that the television is turned on and off to watch particular programmes. Hence, television generally serves less as a background device than in the other families, notwithstanding the fact that during the evening it is employed in this fashion, particularly by Martin, the father.

The use of the VCR is another feature of the discretionary utilisation of television in this family. Both Robert and Paula have established a 'video library' to which they resort when nothing of interest screens on television. An active sportsman, Robert quite often plays his favourite soccer tapes which, on Saturday mornings, for instance, are part of his routine of preparing for the game he will be playing in the afternoon. Robert's appetite for videotaped sports programmes, however, is the cause of some friction with Paula who, while playing hockey herself, does not see the point of viewing such videotapes over and over again.

While it is customary for either Robert (17) or Paula (13) to turn on the set when they come home from school, it screens on average no longer than half an hour at this time. For both, television viewing at this time of the day is part of their relaxation from school while having a snack at the same time. Robert and Paula invariably watch Channel 2's *3:45 Live* with Robert scanning the newspaper, and occasionally peering at the screen. Paula is quite talkative during the programme to which Robert only indifferently responds. Robert leaves the living room carrying his plate and cup and Paula, by herself for a few minutes while the

same programme is still screening, turns off the set with the remote control as she is about to leave the living room as well. With their parents being absent, these short viewing sessions in the afternoon reveal, apart from the somewhat taunting teenage brother-sister relationship - both deride each other's (viewing) interests - a reflective and a very 'disciplined' use of the television. Such use has been cultivated by their parents, Martin and Janet, who believe that their children should not watch television merely for the sake of watching it. Whenever the television set is turned on, Martin will every so often monitor what Paula is watching. This is often accompanied by him asking what she is watching, questions which take on the meaning of 'has Paula got something better to do'. It is not uncommon for Paula to reply by turning off the set. As a brief aside, it is also interesting that Robert is exempted from such supervision; apparently he is deemed to be sufficiently self-disciplined.

Around 5:30 pm, having done their school work and in anticipation of dinner, Paula and Robert come back into the living room to quite attentively watch *M\*A\*S\*H\** on TV ONE. Robert sits on the two-seater couch facing the set and Paula sits on the floor right in front of the television. During a commercial break, Robert leaves the room to have a chat with his mother, Janet, who - within hearing of the living room - prepares dinner. Meanwhile, Paula has switched to Channel 2's *Blind Date*, a programme which she watches with considerable enjoyment, lying on the floor and resting her head in the palm of her hand. She switches to *M\*A\*S\*H\** again when the ads appear, but when a commercial break interrupts this programme also she goes back to Channel 2, and ends up humming along with the tune of a commercial. However, soon after she turns off the set, having briefly scanned the programmes on the other channels. Robert turns on the set almost immediately afterwards to watch the news on TV ONE which, not unusually in New Zealand, heads off the day's events with a sports item. Martin briefly enters the room and has a quick chat with Robert regarding a news item. Janet calls out that tea is ready. Somewhat belatedly, saying something like 'Hold on!', Robert turns off the set.

The Cooks explicitly make a point of *not* having dinner in front of the television set. Dinner time is family time, and to have television screening in the background is considered an intrusion. The television normally does not screen between approximately 6:30pm and 8:00pm. This, furthermore, also communicates the fact that television has a relatively low priority in this family, as was rather self-consciously attested by the parents during the interview. Notwithstanding the intention of formally having dinner together, the meal at the table can be readily adapted to take on a more casual character, particularly when not

all four are present - a regular feature in this busy household. Unlike the two previous families, television's prime time, in other words, does not coincide with what in this household is defined as family time.

Television viewing in the evening takes on a somewhat different character. While on the surface it has the appearance of a relatively planned event, the actual experience of television viewing approximates what was observed in the previous families during day time. The overall picture which emerges is one of Janet not often being present, and Martin, Robert and Paula being the main actors in the living room between 8:00pm and 9:30pm. The family usually tunes into their favourite programmes which, apart from the sport programmes screening on TV ONE or TV3, tend to be British dramas and comedies, as well as current affairs and documentary programmes almost exclusively appearing on TV ONE. Furthermore, if the set is turned off, this is only for periods of five minutes or so, making the evening sessions the more prolonged ones. Subsequently, television during the evening takes on the role of 'moving wallpaper' in which family members (Martin in particular) tune in and tune out. By contrast, Robert and Paula (if they are not watching a favourite programme) switch channels a lot, watching ten minute segments of this or that programme, displaying the kind of viewing behaviour of which Martin disapproves and challenges. It is at such moments that the set is temporarily turned off. Instead, Robert might play a video like *Blackadder* which in turn will also be watched by Martin.

There is a generally busy atmosphere with family members walking in and out of the room, talking to each other but also watching television together. Programmes such as *'Allo, 'Allo* more or less get undivided attention as the family shares in the humour of the programme. Even though Martin combines reading/working and watching television throughout the evening, a programme like *'Allo, 'Allo* gains his complete attention, as the laughter of others in the room regularly turns his attention to the screen. He sits in the right corner chair, sufficiently far away not to be 'caught by the spell' of television. This chair is very much his; a mere nod or a wink enables him to free it from trespassers who have encroached on his working/viewing area.

Commercial breaks usually contribute to the temporary suspension of television viewing during which Martin and Janet - if present - leave the room to make coffee, or alternatively talk to each other, while Robert instructs Paula to switch to another channel. Magazine-type programmes like TV ONE's *Foreign Correspondent*, Channel 2's *Beyond 2000* or TV3's *Mobil Sport*, feature strongly on the list of viewing preferences and habits of this family. These programmes tend to be watched item by item rather than as a whole which, it could



be argued, suits the viewing styles of household members. With Janet and Martin reading during these programmes and occasionally following a particular item, and Robert together with Paula (who tends to go to bed in the course of such programmes) watching certain segments, it is the kind of 'non-intrusive' television viewing which this family prefers.

The period between 10:00pm and 11:00pm is characterised by Martin watching by himself. This is usually initiated by the arrival on screen of the *One Network News*. Janet and Robert have gone to bed and Martin, having put his work aside, flicks through the newspaper but checks each news item as it is introduced. He moves to the spot right in front of the screen, sitting in a squatting position. Being by himself, and with the television providing some form of backdrop companionship, Martin relaxes with the newspaper. This viewing style is continued when the news is followed by *One World of Sport*, and just after 11:00pm he turns off the set.

#### *Family D: The Dawsons*

The Dawsons live in a small town in close proximity to the city. They own their two-storied house which is surrounded by a large garden. The father, Philip, is a university lecturer and Joanne, the mother, is a part-time primary school teacher. The couple have two daughters, Brenda and Judith, aged thirteen and eleven years respectively. Both attend school in the city.

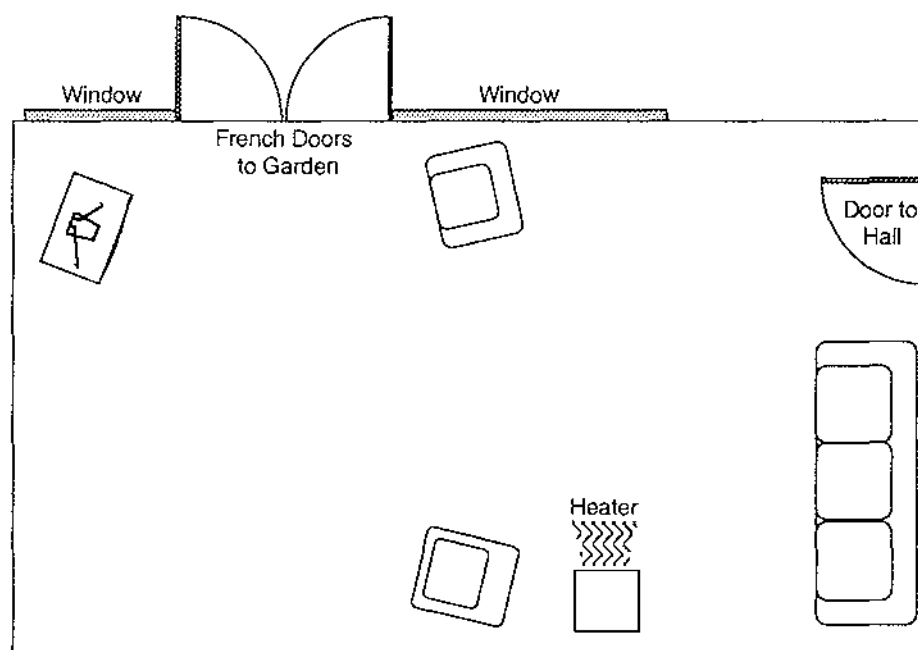
In this household, the television set with a VCR is placed in a large multi-purpose family room. Apart from being the television room, it acts as a children's play-room and an area where domestic chores, such as ironing, are performed. This room is separated from the hallway by a door and has French doors leading into the garden. As one enters from the hall, the television set is situated in the far right corner of the room and opposite, next to the door, stands a three seater couch. Immediately to the left of the couch is a pot-belly heater with a rug placed in front of it. Approximately halfway across the room, two lounge chairs are located, more or less to the left and right of the screen - with the left chair positioned close to the heater. Beyond these two chairs, there is a considerable amount of space to sit, lie or play on the floor in front of the television (see Figure 4.4 below).

The week in which this family was monitored included ANZAC day, a public holiday, a factor which may have contributed to the relatively high number of hours during which the television set was turned on. A total of 38 hours of videotaped observations were collected from this household, amounting to a daily average of just over 5:30 hours. On several days

the television screened in excess of 6 hours - thus surpassing the daily long play recording capacity of the observation unit using a 3 hour tape. Compared with the other days, on Friday the set screened for 2:30 hours because the television was turned off at 7:30pm when the family went out thus cutting off normal evening viewing.

Interestingly, while the total amount of viewing hours would place this household in a high television usage category, the television does not screen at breakfast time on week days, as is the case with other families with a similar high viewing level. Even on Saturday and Sunday, only sparse use is made of television in the early morning with Brenda (13) and Judith (11) preferring to sleep in and then to lie in bed reading a book. It is usually at midday during the week when the television is turned on for the first time by the mother, Joanne, who tunes into TV3's *Oprah Winfrey Show* while having her lunch. Seated in the right corner chair, she attentively but quietly watches this programme, occasionally sipping from her cup of coffee. Throughout this programme she leaves the room when the commercials appear. In such instances she is out of the room for up to three or four minutes, and upon returning will read a magazine if necessary while waiting for the *Oprah Winfrey Show* to recommence. She resumes watching the programme although her eyes wander to the magazine which she has on her lap. During another commercial break, the reading of the magazine gains prominence and is carried on for several minutes even though the programme has appeared on screen once more. When the *Oprah Winfrey Show* concludes, Joanne stands up and walks to the set to turn it off.

Figure 4.4 The Dawsons' living room



Having arrived home from school and taken afternoon tea in the kitchen, Brenda and Judith come into the living room and immediately turn on the television. The afternoon's viewing starts with a recorded episode of *Days of Our Lives* which is quite attentively watched by Brenda who zaps through the ads. Judith at this stage is in and out of the room a lot, not showing any particular interest in the recorded programme. Between 3:30pm and 6:00pm, however, they almost exclusively stay with TV3, which screens in succession such programmes as *The Mickey Mouse Club*, *Real Ghostbusters*, *Voltron*, *Police Academy* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

This afternoon viewing session is associated with other activities, such as doing homework (Brenda) or playing (Judith) to the point that it is at times difficult to ascertain which activity takes precedence over the other. In other words, the living room becomes a well-blended hub of activity, in which both girls combine a routine of 'distracted', even uninterested, viewing with homework and play. However, Brenda seems to fit this depiction more so than does her younger sister, Judith. Whereas the latter can momentarily get absorbed in a cartoon programme, thereby displaying an episodic viewing style which lasts for between five and ten minutes, Brenda only tends to gaze at the screen (doing her homework from the left corner chair) as a kind of thinking pause. Similarly, Judith's more intensive viewing periods are interspersed with a similar gaze, which is soon followed by her leaving the room or by an attempt to entice Brenda into a game. This week it concerns a game of 'elastic twist' whereby the two chairs are connected with a long elastic cord over which both girls jump. Once Brenda is invited by Judith to join in this game, both girls watch the set only while the other is jumping. Alternatively, they leave the room, even though Brenda does this more consistently than Judith, who is more likely to stay in the room and watch the cartoons. This goes on for quite some time and well into the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* programme which screens at 5:30pm. Half-way through this programme the television is turned off by Brenda after her mother has called out that tea is ready.

Philip usually arrives home just before dinner. On most occasions he greets his daughters briefly, standing in the doorway before going to the kitchen. Alternatively, he collects some wood from the garden and places it together with some old newspapers in the wood burner though he does not light it. Having done this, he leaves the room to go to the kitchen, where Joanne is either preparing or about to serve the meal.

While the parents always have dinner in the kitchen, this cannot be said of their daughters, Judith in particular. Joanne and Philip prefer to have dinner *en famille*, but Judith and Brenda do not consider it to be family time. Their explanation is that because their father

listens to *Checkpoint*, a daily radio news programme, and repeatedly tells them to be quiet, they believe that they might as well leave the kitchen and watch television. This is especially the case when dessert is being served, which is generally taken by Brenda and Judith in front of the television during Channel 2's *Happy Days*. Around 6:30pm, when *Neighbours* starts on the same channel, they are joined by Philip and Joanne.

It would seem that *Neighbours*, a daily drama series on Channel 2, brings the family together in front of television for the first time of the day. A favourite programme for Joanne, Brenda and Judith, it complements after-dinner relaxation with Joanne simultaneously reading the newspaper, seated in the left corner chair, while Brenda and Judith work or play on the floor, occasionally glancing at the set. Philip comes into the room a little later and lights the fire, before sitting down on the couch with something to read. By his own account, Philip does not care much for television programmes of this type, but enjoys the company of his family rather than being by himself somewhere else in the house. He pays hardly any attention to the screen and instead attempts to initiate what ends up as being brief exchanges of conversation (such as Philip asking Brenda how her school work is going). Commercial breaks on screen influence the extent of verbal interaction between family members, who may also use these programme interruptions to leave the room. Brenda, for instance, may briefly leave the room for some paperwork, which she then shows to Philip as she sits next to him on the couch. Joanne carefully reads the newspaper, only periodically checking with the *Neighbours* programme on the television which now has the undivided attention of the youngest daughter, Judith. Having finished with the newspaper, Joanne turns her attention to household chores, folding away some washing prior to starting with the ironing. While she is doing this, she watches the programme quite attentively, sometimes interrupting her ironing.

When *Neighbours* finishes at 7:30pm, this family normally stays with the programming offered on Channel 2 during the next hour. At 7:30pm, however, programmes like *Cheers*, *The Flying Doctors* or *The Comedy Company* are watched more attentively by all members of this household. Brenda and Judith have put away their school work, and Joanne has finished with the ironing. This period of family viewing is characterised by programme-related talk, with the girls asking questions to which Philip usually responds. Discussions gain a certain prominence during the commercial breaks, which are also marked by family members moving in and out of the room. While Philip has still a book on his lap, he watches television more frequently, only returning to his reading when the ads come on and when he is not talking with Joanne or with one of his daughters. It is also around this time that

he uses a commercial break to leave the room to make a cup of coffee for himself and Joanne. At the conclusion of the programmes mentioned above, the set is turned off - though often for a very short period.

It is between 8:30pm and 10:00pm that Philip takes a greater interest as well as a more active role in deciding what programme to watch on television, customarily after having consulted the newspaper for the programme schedule. He moves closer to the television set sitting in the right corner chair. Sport, Documentaries (*Tuesday Documentary* in particular) and the news - all predominantly on TV ONE - have his special interest. When these programmes screen at night, he decides, not without cries of protest coming from Brenda and Judith, to view them. When Judith and Brenda pick up their elastic twist game, using one of the chairs on which their father sits, Philip reprimands them several times and urges them to be quiet so that he can follow the programme. The latter event is reminiscent of Philip listening to the radio during dinner time. Meanwhile Joanne has left the room, and is soon followed by her two daughters who may think that the living room is not the place for them to be at this stage.

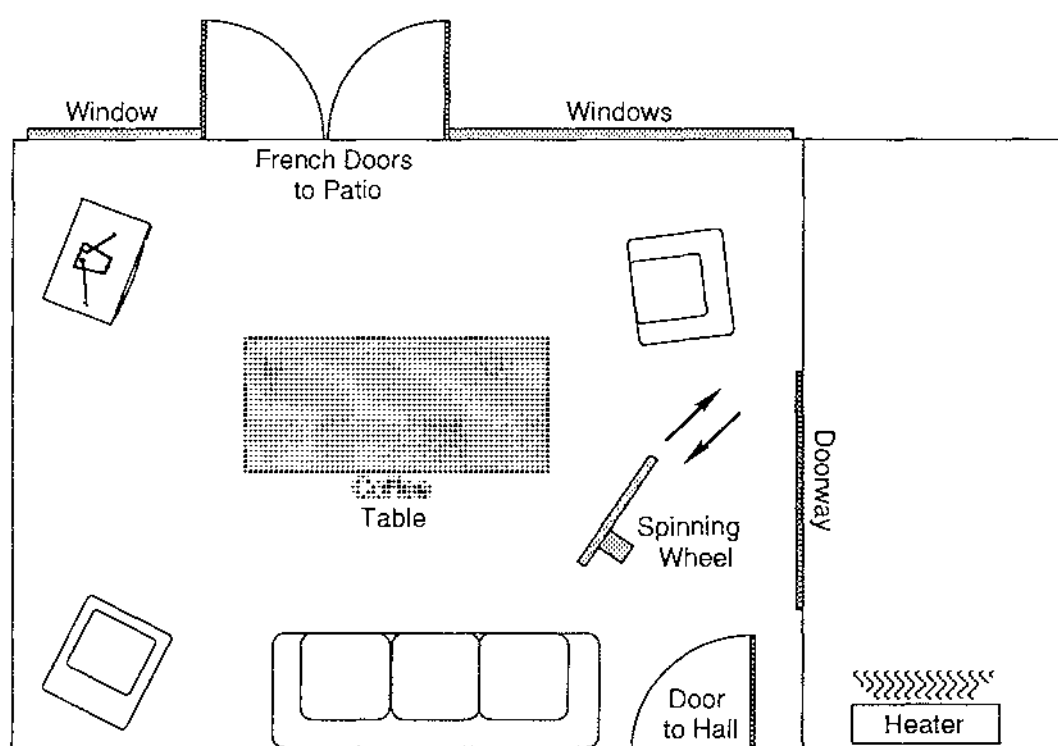
Somewhat later, Judith and Brenda return to the room in their pyjamas and linger about, which leads Philip to enquire as to why they have not yet gone to bed. Joanne enters the room to collect her daughters, or attempts to do so, but ends up chatting to Brenda. Judith has left the room to go to bed. Meanwhile Philip watches the programme attentively, scanning through the newspaper when the ads come on. This viewing style is extended through the *One Network News*, with Philip not following all items. After Brenda has gone to bed, Philip chats with Joanne who is about to take a shower. As was the case with some of the other families, it is the father who remains watching television beyond 10:00pm. The father of this family, however, nods off to sleep while seated in the chair and it is Joanne, in her dressing gown, who enters the room to wake him up. As Joanne leaves the room, Philip stands to tidy some things away, but then returns to his chair to watch the completion of the news. *One World of Sport* continues the evening's programming schedule but Philip turns off the set after the programme's fare is introduced. This family's viewing day concludes at around 10:45pm.

### *Family E: The Elliots*

The Elliots are so-called 'Empty-Nesters', their three children having left the parental home for tertiary studies. The Elliots live on their 30 acre 'life-style' farm where they keep horses and sheep. During week days, Oscar is a public relations officer and Ellen is a physiotherapist.

The Elliots have two adjoining family living areas which are separated by a large doorway. The living area joining the kitchen has a large wood burner, which also provides the heating for the other lounge containing the television set with a VCR placed on top of it. This television cabinet is placed in the right hand corner of the room, with a three-seater arranged alongside the left wall. Next to the couch is a door leading to the hall. A comfortable chair is located in the right corner straight across from the television set. Between the chair and the television set, and beside the couch, stands a coffee table. Immediately to the right of the television set, French-doors open onto the patio area in the garden.

Figure 4.5 The Elliots' living room



The Elliots watched just over 22 hours of television, averaging about 3 hours per day. Except for Monday when the television screened 4:45 hours, on other week days the television was generally turned on for about two hours. In addition, on Saturday and Sunday the television screened for 3 hours and close to 6 hours, respectively. The relatively low amount of television viewing hours during the working week can be explained not only by Oscar's and Ellen's full-time jobs commitments, but also by the fact that there are no young children living in this household. By their own admission, they have experienced a considerable drop in the use of television since their children left home.

Often on weekday nights, the television set may not be turned on until 6:00pm or 6:30pm and on some nights the set is turned on even later. During the weekend, the television is normally turned on in the mid- to late afternoon by Oscar who, initially by himself, then later with Ellen, watches his favourite sports programmes such as *Nissan Rugby Special* and *Countrywide Bank Grandstand*. If the weather on the weekend is fine, however, Oscar and Ellen may continue to work through the afternoon on their farm. While they mainly farm sheep, they also keep horses, which is an important form of leisure for Ellen.

In the evenings, Ellen will rarely turn on the television when she is by herself. This is a relatively frequent occurrence because Oscar's work commitments regularly take him out of town for the night. However, when arriving home from work, Oscar almost immediately turns on the television set just before 6:00pm. While Ellen is preparing the evening meal in the kitchen, Oscar momentarily stands in the doorway to watch *M\*A\*S\*H\** screening on TV ONE. Then, as part of a daily ritual to make the room comfortable for the evening, he collects some firewood from the outside patio and lights the wood burner in the adjoining room. Once he has got the fire going, he closes the curtains. Meanwhile, *One Network News* has commenced. Oscar briefly turns towards the set to watch the introductory run-down of the news events but leaves the room almost immediately afterwards.

While Ellen and Oscar are having their dinner in the kitchen, the news programme continues, with nobody in the room for about twenty minutes to half an hour. Whereas it is customary for both of them to have their dinner in the kitchen, this habit may be changed if they want to watch a particular programme, or, alternatively, as Oscar puts it 'if we're getting lazy...' This deviation, however, tends to occur mainly on Friday nights or in the weekend.

Around 6:30pm Oscar returns to the television room and, after having cleared away some papers from the coffee table, he sits on the couch attentively watching an item on *Holmes* which immediately follows the *One Network News*. When the *Holmes* item has finished he leaves and helps Ellen with the dishes while the television screens to an empty room. When Oscar returns he stands in front of the couch and somewhat indifferently stares at the set. He is joined by Ellen, who asks what the *Holmes* programme is about. Ellen has a hearing impairment and is to a considerable degree dependent on Oscar to convey what is being said on the set. As his attention is focused on the programme, her question is not answered. When the commercials appear, both leave the room. Ten minutes later, as *Holmes* is about to conclude, Oscar comes into the room and turns off the set with the remote control.

Between 7:30pm and 8:00pm, Oscar turns the set back on. During the remainder of the evening, this household generally tunes into TV ONE which offers the kind of programming that Oscar in particular enjoys the most. With television being predominantly used for the purpose of relaxation, the next two hours are characterised by a relatively concentrated viewing mode on Oscar's part, even though this may at times be combined with such activities as spinning and knitting. The latter activities, however, gain more significance during the commercial breaks which Oscar purposely avoids. Oscar's viewing diet consists of programmes that could be described as 'social realist' drama. British situation comedy programmes also feature high on his viewing preference list. With the *Listener* guiding his evening's viewing schedule, Oscar typically watches such programmes as *Coronation Street* (which tends to be somewhat of a transitory programme before Oscar settles into a more intense viewing style), *The Bill*, *Casualty*, *Minder* and *Mobil Masterpiece Theatre*. Favourite comedy programmes which also receive his undivided attention include *The Good Life*, *Ever Decreasing Circles*, *Open All Hours*, *'Allo, 'Allo* and *Yes, Prime Minister*. Oscar responds to the latter programmes with a considerable amount of hilarity and every so often his laughter invites Ellen to look up from behind her newspaper at either Oscar or the screen. Both maintain relatively fixed seating arrangements. Ellen sits in the right corner chair directly opposite the television set, and Oscar has his own place on the couch, from which he may move to the spinning wheel situated between the couch and the chair.

Because of her hearing impairment, Ellen finds it difficult to enjoy television in the way Oscar does. Apart from 'police series', she has similar programme tastes to her husband, but finds it difficult to sustain television viewing for a long period as it takes too much concentration and effort. Oscar plays an important role in communicating bits of programming she might have missed. One specific example relates to TV ONE's *Country Calender*, during which Oscar quickly summarises and comments upon the topics featured



on this farmers' magazine programme. However, there are occasions that he himself is so engrossed in his viewing that he fails to notice Ellen's questions. Similarly, when Ellen attempts to initiate a discussion, Oscar takes quite a bit of prodding, something which leads to frustration on Ellen's part. In such instances she returns to reading the newspaper and regularly leaves the room. The interaction changes when the ads come on. Using the remote control Oscar will normally turn the sound down and resume his knitting or spinning. During this time he will also tend to seek eye contact with Ellen and initiate conversation by asking 'What did you say...?', thus referring to an earlier question asked by Ellen. This particular situation demonstrates very clearly that conversational patterns for the Elliots are determined largely by the sequencing of programme segments and commercial breaks.

Oscar will normally turn the set off around 10:00pm before *One Network News* commences. Usually, he does not find it necessary to watch this programme, as by this time he would already be familiar with the main news events of the day through the radio or the newspaper. When he does stay up to watch *One Network News* he will invariably do so on his own, as Ellen will have gone to bed. During this programme, Oscar maintains his typical viewing style of paying attention only to the news items. He uses the commercial breaks to clear things away, such as the spinning wheel, or to read a book. At the conclusion of the programme, the set is turned off.

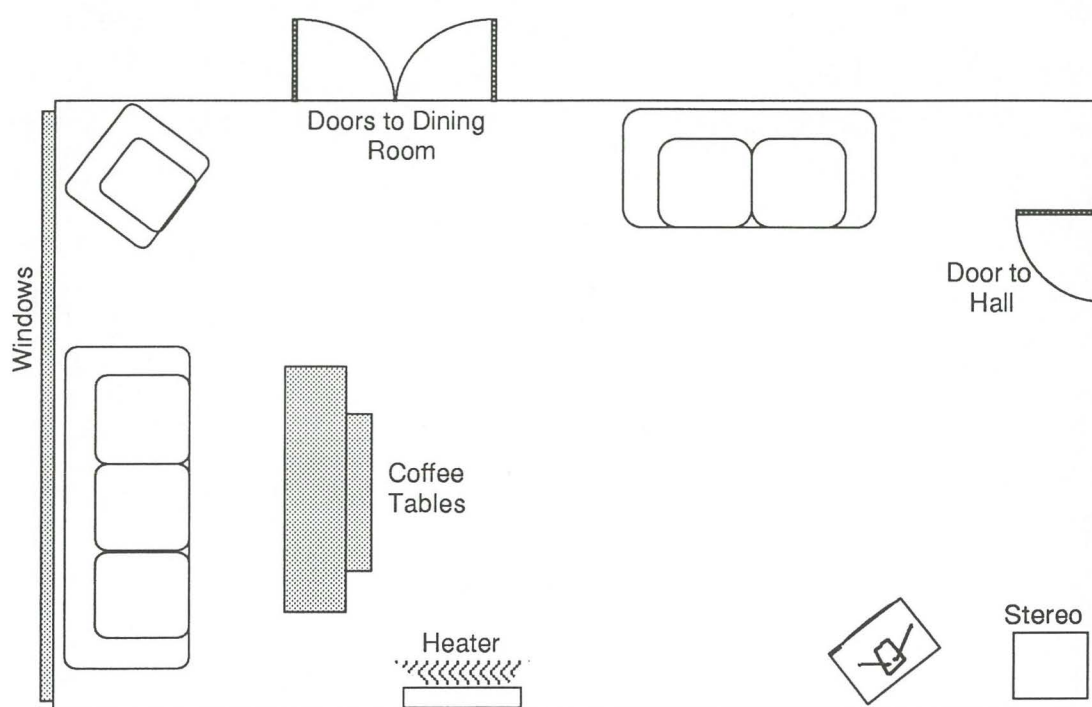
### *Family F: The Fields*

The Field household consists of six members. They own and live in a large family home in the suburbs of the city. Trevor, the father, is a manager for a real estate company and Jane, the mother, is a part-time primary school teacher. The couple's four daughters, Barbara, Sally, Karen and Jennifer are aged between five and fifteen years old. The two eldest daughters, Barbara and Sally, aged fifteen and thirteen respectively, attend secondary school. The third in the line, Karen, goes to primary school and is nine years old. The youngest, Jennifer, is aged five and goes to kindergarten.

The television set in this household is placed in the family's large lounge. This room is joined by two wide-opening doors with the dining area, which is generally used as such. The television set occupies a fairly focal place in the living room. A two seater couch is situated directly opposite the set. In the far right corner (at a considerable distance from the television set) stands a comfortable chair, placed next to the doors leading to the dining room. Alongside the windows at the right-hand side of the room, a larger couch is located but not all three of the seats have a good view of the television. In front of the couch stands

a coffee table. There is plenty of space to sit or lie on the floor in front of the television set, but this area also acts as a thoroughfare from the dining area to other parts of the house, such as the hallway situated on the left of the family room.

**Figure 4.6 The Fields' living room**



In the week during which the television viewing habits in this household were recorded, the television set screened for 39:30 hours - averaging approximately 5:40 hours per day. On Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday the television was turned on for six hours, whereas on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday the set screened between four and a half and five and a half hours. These figures, which to some extent indicate the level of family viewing, place this family in a category of high daily television usage.

The comparatively high use of television can be explained by the family size (the greatest of this study). However, the uses of television by individuals in this household are highly diverse. This diversity can be attributed to the age distribution of family members which in turn is reflected in the observation that the viewing habits of individual members vary according to the time of the day. In other words, the two youngest girls tend to watch television for the most part in the afternoon thus representing, as it were, the 'first shift'. This period is quite distinct compared with the 'second shift' of television viewing during the evening when the room tends to be occupied by the parents and their two eldest daughters. Moreover, dinner time, during which the television set is normally turned off, reinforces the notion that one is dealing with two relatively distinct viewing periods.

Apart from Saturday and Sunday, breakfast television does not ordinarily screen in this household during the remainder of the week. Instead, the early morning period during the working week is entirely consumed by family members getting ready for either school or work. During the week-end, however, the youngest daughters in this family, Jennifer (5) and Karen (9), get up just before 7:45am and watch such cartoon shows as *Denver, the Last Dinosaur*, screening on Channel 2. They watch this programme fairly inattentively with Jennifer lying on the two seater still wearing her pyjamas and Karen, also wearing her pyjamas, sitting on the floor with her back partially turned to the television while she plays with a cardboard carton. This viewing situation is extended during the screening of Channel 2's *What Now* until the set is turned off at around 8:30am by Jane, their mother, who tells her daughters to get dressed and join the family at the breakfast table. This early morning viewing episode indicates a reluctance on the part of the parents, Jane in particular, to have the television screening at this time in the morning, even though it is the week-end.

During week days, the 'first shift' of television viewing usually starts at approximately 3:00pm when the two youngest daughters arrive home from school. Jane turns on the set while Jennifer lies on the two seater. As Jennifer watches Channel 2's *Play School*, her mother comes in, sits next to her and a brief discussion ensues about the programme. However, Jennifer does not show much interest in the discussion and Jane leaves the room. Concurrently, Karen moves in and out of the room several times before settling down on the floor right in front of the television. During the cartoon shows following *Play School*, Jennifer and Karen briefly talk, and when their popular cartoon programme *Wowser* appears on screen, both sing along with the soundtrack. Jennifer is now sitting up on the couch watching the programme attentively but soon after lies down again and seems to fall asleep.

Karen's initial enthusiasm for *Wowser* has also subsided, as she works on the floor doing some homework, only occasionally glancing at the set. Now and then she attempts to talk with her sister but there is no response from the couch - Jennifer has definitely gone to sleep.

When *Wowser* finishes and Channel 2's *3:45 Live* is about to start, Karen immediately changes to TV3's *Mickey Mouse Club*. Although this programme initially captures her attention, she soon returns to her homework on the floor. Her mother enters the room with a snack which she passes around, with the effect of waking up Jennifer, who sits up straight, has a bite to eat and also starts to watch the *Mickey Mouse Club*. Karen, while eating her snack, also watches the set more attentively. Her older sister, Sally (13), has arrived home from school and briefly comes into the room; she looks at the set while standing in the doorway before leaving again.

As the *Mickey Mouse Club* concludes, and is respectively followed by *Duck Tales*, *Saber Rider*, *Police Academy* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, the room returns to the kind of scenes described earlier. Karen and Jennifer are in the room but do not pay much attention to the screen. Karen works or plays on the floor and Jennifer lies on the couch. Both follow the programme by watching the screen in relatively infrequent viewing 'blocks', which generally last no longer than several minutes. Interestingly, Karen only decides to leave the living room when the commercial breaks appear, whereas Jennifer tends to give more attention to the same commercials which mostly feature advertisements for toys. Sally enters the room, and briefly sits on the two seater next to Jennifer but after collecting a drink from the kitchen she leaves the room again. Throughout the afternoon Karen operates the remote control, and she regularly switches to Channel 2 but always returns to the cartoon shows screening on TV3.

When *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* - a cartoon programme which is watched more attentively by both girls - finishes, Karen switches to *One Network News*, while Jennifer leaves for the dining room/kitchen, where their mother, Jane, is preparing the evening's meal. During the news, Karen moves in and out of the room frequently, but, for most of the time, nobody is in the room. With Jennifer and Karen being in the room for the greater part of the afternoon, occasional disagreements occur. These disagreements, which generally tend to be unrelated to television viewing, sometimes end in physical struggles. When this happens, Jennifer typically starts crying and this is soon followed by her elder sister hastily making peace offers before Jennifer has a chance to complain to their mother.

The period between 6:00 and 7:30pm represents a transitional phase in a day's viewing within this family. While the afternoon session is characterised by the presence of Karen and Jennifer in a relatively diffident ambience, the period following 6:00pm stands out in that the living room becomes a hub of activity with the television screening as background. Having arrived home from work, the father, Trevor, enters the living room, either checking with Karen on how her day has been or giving Jennifer a cuddle. He sits on the couch attentively watching a news item before leaving the room temporarily to get changed into more comfortable clothes. Meanwhile Sally and this family's oldest daughter, Barbara (15), have come into the room as well and, together with their father, they watch the news. During the commercial break, Karen switches to Channel 2's *Happy Days* but is soon reminded by Trevor to switch back to the news. Having done so, Karen leaves the room. As *One Network News* concludes there is some general discussion between the three present in the room which lasts until the *Holmes* show's jingle sounds in the background. During *Holmes*, everybody, apart from Trevor, moves around and out of the room. Trevor is the only one present who attentively watches the programme while in the commercial break he picks up the newspaper, casually flicking through it. All children of the family move towards the dining room from where a lot of banter emanates and to which their father, Trevor, occasionally, mostly laughingly, responds. Just before 7:00pm, on some days a little later, Trevor turns off the set as he walks towards the dining room to join his family for tea.

Dinner time at around 7:00pm normally initiates a substantial break from television viewing at the start of the evening. This break may last anything from one to one and a half hours. This time is used for doing the dishes, a task which Trevor and his eldest daughters generally perform whereas Jane is getting her two youngest daughters, Jennifer in particular, ready for bed. It needs to be pointed out that there are nights when the television set is turned on immediately after dinner. This occurs, for instance, when *The Flying Doctors*, a popular programme for all the Field family members, screens on Monday at 7:30pm on Channel 2. However, during these popular programmes, Trevor attempts to do the dishes during the commercial breaks, at the same time enlisting the help of one of his elder daughters. Furthermore, Jennifer, who by this time in the evening will normally be getting ready for bed under Jane's supervision, will be allowed to return to the living room to watch the programme, or part of it, in her pyjamas. Episodes like these are in fact among the rare occurrences when the entire family watches television together.

While the 'first shift' of television viewing during the afternoon is characterised by the family's youngest members, Jennifer and Karen, occupying centre stage in the living room, the 'second shift' sees them make way for Trevor, Jane, Barbara and Sally. Compared with

the afternoon session, the evening shift of family viewing tends to involve a clashing of programme preferences which is resolved in quite a practical way. One fairly typical example concerns Jane and Trevor wanting to view TV ONE's *Tuesday Documentary* (but it could also concern programmes like TV ONE's *Foreign Correspondent*) while at the same time Barbara and Sally claim a preference for Channel 2's *China Beach*. As Jane sits on the couch with Barbara, Sally lies on the floor and Trevor occupies the far corner chair with a newspaper on his lap. All end up more or less watching bits of both programmes, with Barbara switching between channels as the ads appear on either programme. Thus commercial breaks are avoided and everyone present in the room watches both programmes quite attentively. Jane, while at times quite engrossed in her knitting, remains aware of what is screening and has to remind Barbara on several occasions to switch back from *China Beach* to *Tuesday Documentary*. Hence, the parents' and their teenage children's different programme tastes are quite easily accommodated within this family. Furthermore, it is not unusual to find that, in contrast with the afternoon session, the television is turned off at the conclusion of such programmes mentioned above. However, after fifteen minutes or so the set is commonly turned on again.

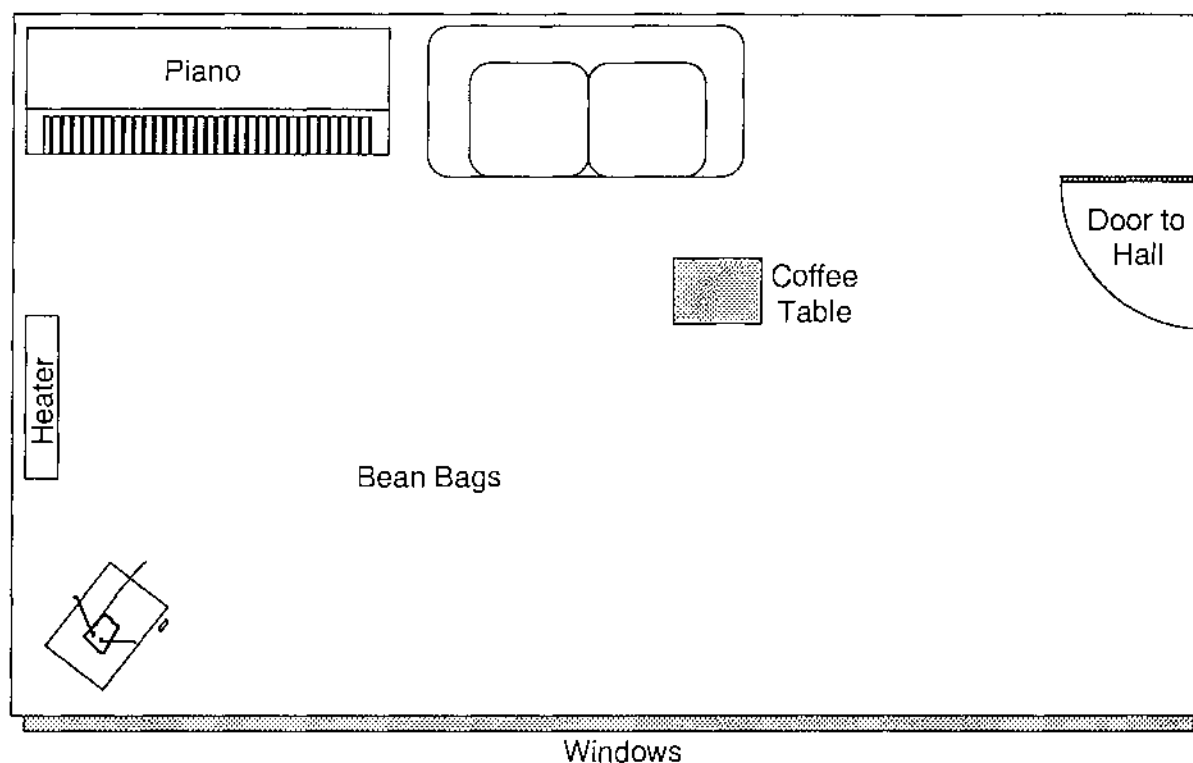
The viewing day concludes with Jane and Trevor sitting down together on the two-seater couch to watch *One Network News*. During the first five minutes of this news programme, which starts at 10:00pm, Sally and Barbara leave the room together, but soon return to say 'Good night'. Barbara sits for a while on the far corner couch, talks briefly to her father and then leaves. During the ad break Jane starts knitting and chats with Trevor. Midway through the news, however, she gathers up her knitting gear and walks out of the room leaving Trevor by himself. Trevor watches the remainder of *One Network News* and when the programme finishes at 10:30pm, he first tidies some things away from the living room and then turns the set off.

### *Family G: The Grays*

The Gray household consists of the mother, Cynthia, who is a part-time counsellor, her partner, Doug (who was virtually 'invisible' when this family was monitored and also did not participate in the interview), and her two daughters and son. Her two daughters, Mary aged sixteen and Emily aged fifteen, attend secondary school. Cynthia's son, Stuart, is aged twelve and goes to intermediate. They live in a large villa which is situated in one of the top residential areas of the city.

The Gray family have what could be called a separate television room, which is mainly used by the children for this purpose. In this room, the television set together with a VCR is placed on a movable trolley. When in use in the television room - only on certain occasions will the television set be transferred to the main lounge - this trolley stands in the left corner of the room. Immediately opposite the television set, and in the right hand corner of the room stands a piano. Next to the piano is a two-seater couch with a small coffee table in front of it which often tends to be shifted. A couple of bean bags lie on the floor occupying the more prominent television viewing spots in the room. The television room, furthermore, is separated from the main lounge by a large vestibule.

**Figure 4.7 The Grays' television room**



In total, the television screened just under 34:00 hours during the week in which this household participated in the study. This translates into a daily average of close to five hours. However, on two consecutive days, Monday and Tuesday, the set was turned on for in excess of six hours. These two viewing days contributed to the relatively high daily average and can largely be explained by the fact that Stuart, being ill, spent those days at home, occupying the room for the greater part of the day while the television screened in the background. On both Wednesday and Sunday, however, the television was turned on

for only about two and a half hours; on these days the children visited their father who lives elsewhere in town. On the remaining three days the set screened for between four and a half, and five and a half hours. The viewing week in this household, then, shows a rather uneven spread of viewing hours over the seven days, and no particular pattern could be discerned.

Nonetheless, in describing a typical viewing day of this family, a certain pattern emerges which sees Stuart (12), the youngest in the household, being a more ardent consumer of television than other family members. During the daytime, that is before and after school, he spends most of the time in the television room by himself but is sometimes accompanied by a friend. For Stuart the viewing day usually starts at around 7:30am when he tunes into Channel 2's breakfast cartoon programme *Fantastic Max*. Wearing his school uniform, Stuart sits on a bean bag immediately facing the television set. He sips from a drink while attentively following the cartoon show but when the programme is about to finish he leaves the room. He returns to the room and while sitting on the bean bag he puts on his shoes, occasionally watching Channel 2's *Breakfast News*. During this programme, he leaves the room for about five minutes only to return to collect his school bag before switching off the television.

At 3:15pm, having returned home from school with a friend, Stuart turns on the set which screens TV3's *Another World*. Both boys leave the room almost immediately and are out of the room for some time. When they return to the room with a drink and a sandwich, they sit down on the couch to watch *Thomas the Tank Engine* which has already started. At the suggestion of his friend, Stuart switches to Channel 2's *Wowser*. They only stay with this programme for a couple of minutes and then Stuart switches back to TV3 just before *Duck Tales* starts. During a programme trailer, featuring *The Greatest American Hero*, the two briefly discuss the merits of the programme concerned before they leave the room again. While *Duck Tales* screens, the room remains vacant for about ten minutes until Stuart and his friend return with more food. As they eat, Stuart puts on a video featuring skate boarding, and then explains to his friend the finer details of the spectacular action, occasionally rewinding the tape and showing the action in slow motion. As both watch the video and talk about skate boarding, Cynthia (Stuart's mother) enters the room, saying she is going out. When the video finishes, Stuart briefly switches back to *Duck Tales*, but when his friend walks out of the room he turns the set off.



About half an hour later, Stuart returns to the room and turns on the set which screens TV3's *Police Academy* cartoon show. He initially watches this programme attentively from one of the bean bags, but during the remainder of the programme he is in and out of the room. Stuart leaves the room when the commercial breaks come on, but usually stays away longer than the break and thus misses considerable segments of *Police Academy*.

While Stuart is away, his older sister, Emily (15), makes a brief appearance, but she returns a few minutes later for a longer viewing spell. Through the VCR she watches an earlier recorded episode of TV3's *Home and Away* while she sits on the couch. She attentively watches her favourite soap opera, using the remote control to 'fast-forward' during the commercial breaks. Meanwhile, Stuart returns to the room and sits down on a bean bag and plays with the kitten that the family recently obtained. He pays little attention to either Emily or the recorded programme. As the tape finishes, Emily rewinds it and proceeds to use the remote control to pre-set the recording of this day's episode of *Home and Away* which will screen at 5:30pm. She quickly checks with Stuart asking him whether she went about it the right way and, after getting a somewhat indifferent confirmation, she leaves the room.

*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* has now started on TV3 and this is watched attentively by Stuart. Cynthia, having arrived home again, comes into the room and while she plays with the kitten, she briefly chats to Stuart. At this time, Mary (16) makes her first appearance of the day in the television room, but almost immediately leaves again together with her mother, Cynthia. During the next commercial break, Stuart switches to Channel 2's 3:45 *Live* but returns to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, which he watches until its conclusion. Stuart switches to Channel 2's *Happy Days* which starts at 5:00pm. But after having watched about five minutes of this programme, during which time he frequently hops to the other two channels to see what else is screening, he turns off the set.

About half an hour later, Emily turns on the set and sits on the couch, while Stuart lies on the floor doing some homework. *The Oprah Winfrey Show*<sup>2</sup> on TV3 is initially watched quite attentively by Emily. However, when the first ad break comes on, Emily leaves the room for the kitchen where she assists her mother. She is soon followed by Stuart, who returns right away with the vacuum cleaner and proceeds to Hoover the room. Having completed this task, he leaves the room again and the television continues to screen with nobody present for a considerable period of time.

While there are no specific arrangements regarding dinner time in this household, it is not uncommon for the children to have their tea in front of the television. By contrast, Cynthia and her partner (Doug) normally have their dinner in the kitchen/dining area which, in terms of their overall individual viewing habits, is not surprising since both are either hardly (in the case of Cynthia) or never (in the case of Doug) to be seen in the television room. Thus, after twenty minutes or so, Mary, Emily and Stuart return to the room with their dinner plates. While eating, all three rather casually watch *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, mainly focusing their attention on their meal which they consume in silence. Once they have finished their meal all three vacate the room for some time.

During this period, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* concludes and when Mary returns, she switches to Channel 2's *Neighbours*, which she watches from the couch. A few minutes later she is joined by Emily. Both sisters become absorbed in the programme, although Emily uses the commercial breaks to check what is screening on the other channels. Halfway through the programme, their younger brother, Stuart, enters with dessert and he too watches the programme, though he tends to interrupt his concentrated viewing spells to play with the kitten. When *Neighbours* finishes, both Emily and Mary leave for their respective bedrooms to do their school work. Stuart, however, takes the opportunity to switch to TV3's *The Wonder Years* which he combines with the viewing of Channel 2's *Comedy Company*, mainly by switching between the two channels when the programmes are interrupted by commercial breaks. He turns off the set about 30 minutes later, when *The Wonder Years* programme has finished.

The remainder of the evening, from about 8:00-8:30pm onwards, the evening is characterised by solo viewing, with family members only watching what they rate as being their favourite programmes or, in Cynthia's case, watching a programme which she had videotaped earlier. Interestingly, Emily tends to be absent during this time of the night, as she either does her homework or prefers to listen to music in her room instead. Stuart, on the other hand, might return to the room to watch Channel 2's *Tour of Duty* which he will generally watch very attentively, making repeated use of the commercial breaks to view some skate boarding action on the VCR. Having more or less worked out the time it takes for a commercial break to finish, Stuart always tunes back to *Tour of Duty* on time. His older sister, Mary, displays a preference for American situation comedies, such as TV3's *Roseanne* and Channel 2's *Who's The Boss* or *Married With Children*. Even though she might be joined by her brother

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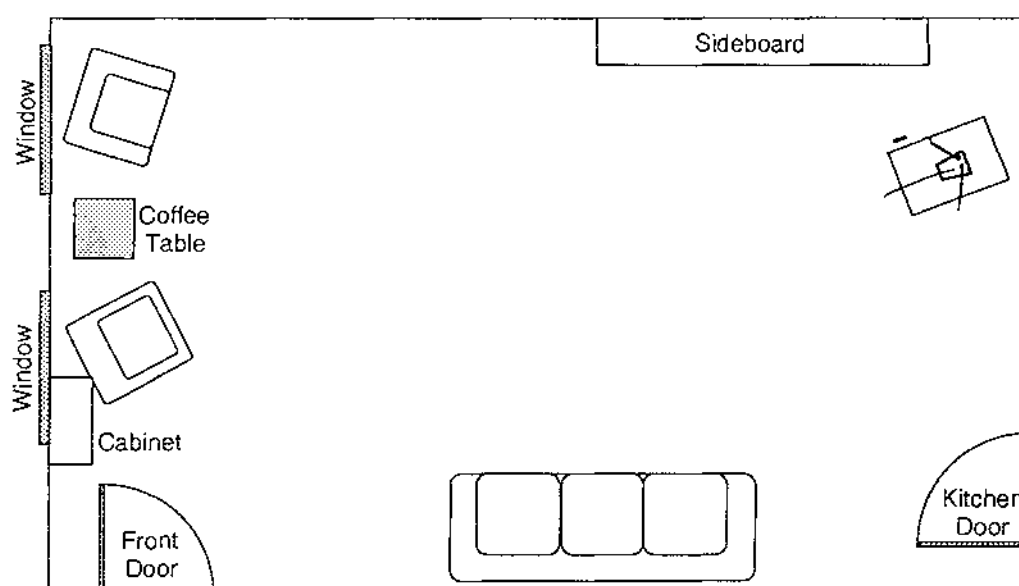
2 During the course of the fieldwork, TV3 rescheduled *The Oprah Winfrey Show* from midday to the late afternoon/early evening.

- particularly during the first two of these programmes - Stuart is only sporadically in the room. Even if he is present, he does not pay much attention to the screen, apart from pestering Mary to change over to another channel. Mary does not give in, however, and alternately watches the programme and does her homework or writes letters. Finally, Cynthia enters the room at about 10:00pm (when her children have gone to bed) to watch a videotaped version of TV ONE's *10AM*, an art programme normally screening on Sunday mornings. This is one of the few occasions that she is in the television room for a prolonged time, and she attentively watches this arts programme, which contains no commercial breaks, until about 11:15pm. Following the pattern exhibited by Stuart and Mary immediately after watching their favourite programmes, she then turns off the set. It is for this reason that, unlike the other families discussed so far, television viewing in this household closes down at a relatively unfixed hour, something which can be attributed to the varying individual viewing habits within this family.

#### *Family H: The Howards*

The Howards live in a state housing area of the city where they rent a modest home. Paul, the father, is a sickness beneficiary and the mother, Jill, is a full-time homemaker. Their three young children all attend primary school. The eldest daughter, Michelle, is ten years old, her younger sister, Lucy, is aged eight. Peter, the youngest child, is six years old.

**Figure 4.8 The Howards' living room**



This family normally uses two television sets, one of which is in the parents' bedroom, while the main set, which is connected to two VCRs (one VCR is predominantly used for the copying of video tapes), is situated in the living room. The living room is separated by a door from the kitchen and the other areas of the house. Entering the living room from the kitchen, the television set stands in the corner immediately on the right. Across the room, and next to the door opening to the front porch in the left-hand corner, two lounge chairs are separated by a porcelain cabinet. A three-seater is located alongside the left-hand wall. All the seats provide adequate viewing positions. There is a sideboard at the right-hand side of the television set, but the centre of the room is clear of any furniture, thus providing the opportunity for the young children to sit, lie, play or watch on the floor in front of the television set.

Of all eight families participating in this study, the main television set in the Howard household was turned on for the greatest number of hours. On each single viewing day the television screened in excess of six hours. The viewing hours within this family tend to be spread over the whole day but they are not evenly spread. This extensive usage can be partly explained by the fact that, with both parents at home, the television tends to screen relatively more than in the other households during the late morning and early afternoon. Despite this, the viewing hours in this family appear to be mainly concentrated in the period between the mid- to late afternoon and the mid-evening. Thus from about 3:00pm, when the children ordinarily arrive home from school, the television screens almost uninterruptedly until about 9:30-10:00pm. In this respect, this household's television viewing habits are not too dissimilar from the observed viewing habits of the other families with young children.

The viewing day in this family usually starts between 8:00 and 8:30am, after the family has had breakfast. Lucy (8) turns on the television set which screens Channel 2's *ITN News*. She sits on the floor right in front of the television but soon afterwards she leaves the room in answer to a call from her mother. Almost immediately, however, Lucy returns to the room but switches off the television. Fifteen minutes later, the television is turned on again and all three children are present in the room attentively watching Channel 2's cartoon show *Smurfs*. Lucy and her younger brother, Peter (6), sit on the floor while Michelle (10) sits on the couch. Jill, their mother, enters the room and tells them somewhat angrily that they should turn off the television and get ready for school. While Michelle and Lucy leave the room, Peter ignores his mother's second request which can be heard from the kitchen. Jill makes a third attempt (this time she is vocally supported by Paul, her husband) to tell Peter

to turn off the television and get ready for school. Peter leaves the room when Jill comes in to turn off the set. Such exchanges are but one example of how television in this family becomes a source of conflict, particularly between Peter and his parents.

Just before midday, Jill turns on the television. She pulls one of the corner chairs closer to the set before sitting down with a hot drink to watch Channel 2's *Santa Barbara*. When this programme finishes approximately ten minutes later, she moves the chair back to its original place and leaves the room. Meanwhile, *The Young and the Restless* has started on Channel 2 but the programme initially screens to an empty room. Jill returns and starts to iron a shirt on the floor, occasionally looking up to watch the programme. This viewing episode lasts for about fifteen minutes and when she has finished ironing the shirt, Jill turns off the set.

About one hour later, at 1:30pm, Paul enters the room and turns on the television. He sits on the couch and quite attentively watches the final twenty minutes of TV ONE's *Film on One*. Once in a while he turns his eyes away from the television and gazes about the room. Alternatively, he initiates discussions with Jill who is in the kitchen. From these brief exchanges, it emerges that he is about to leave the house to do some shopping and collect his children from school. When the afternoon movie concludes just before 2:00pm, Paul stands up and switches off the television with the remote control. In what is a quite typical pattern for this household, the television has, by this particular time of the day, already screened for about one and a half hours, an aggregate which is made up of roughly three separate half hour sessions.

The children normally arrive home from school at around 3:00pm and this marks the beginning of a protracted viewing period, during which the television is turned off for only very short spells. After having turned on the set, Michelle tunes into TV3's *Dennis the Menace*, a cartoon programme which she attentively watches from the couch. Ten minutes into this programme, she switches to Channel 2's *Seabert* but soon leaves the room to collect a paper notebook and some pencils. Returning to the couch she starts to play with these items, paying virtually no attention to the set. As *Seabert* finishes and 3:45 *Live* is about to start, Peter enters the room. He switches to TV3's *Duck Tales* and sits on the floor right in front of the set. For about five minutes or so, he rather passively stares at the set. However when Lucy, together with a friend, come into the room and start playing on the floor behind the area where Peter sits, he divides his attention between the programme and the game the two girls play. This week the girls are playing 'knucklebones', a game which involves throwing small metal 'bones' in the air while retrieving others from the ground. After a while, Michelle puts aside her paper and pencils, and joins her sister and friend in the game.

When Peter pushes one of his sisters out of the way, there is some commotion and Jill, shouting from the kitchen, intervenes. This causes Peter to momentarily leave the room, while the girls continue to play.

As the soundtrack of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* starts, Peter returns to the room and occupies his previous spot on the floor. The three girls have temporarily suspended their game and are attentively watching this cartoon programme. However, after a couple of minutes they resume playing, while Peter still has his eyes fixed on the screen. During the first commercial break of the programme, Peter leaves the room, while Lucy and her friend turn their attention from their game to some of the commercials which predominantly feature advertisements for toys. A 'Barbie doll' ad, for instance, receives their particular attention and is followed by a brief discussion in which Michelle mentions that she has seen one in the shop. She also informs her sister and friend of the doll's special features. Peter comes back and continues to watch *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, occasionally following the knucklebones game that the girls have resumed playing. When the programme is about to conclude, Michelle, Lucy and her friend concentrate more fully on the cartoon, to ascertain, as it were, how the turtles rescue the world from yet another impending disaster. As the programme finishes, Peter leaves and the girls continue playing the game for another ten minutes – paying no attention whatsoever to TV3's *Home and Away*. Then they also leave the room.

The television may be turned off around 5:00pm, when the family has an evening meal in the kitchen. If turned off at all, this tends to be only a relatively short intermission from television viewing as Paul, after a quarter of an hour, turns on the set again. He pulls out the right-hand corner chair, moving it quite close and directly in front of the television. *Home and Away* still screens on TV3 but Paul switches to Channel 2's *Happy Days*. He somewhat indifferently watches this programme until its conclusion after which he switches back to TV3 where *The Oprah Winfrey Show* has just begun. He watches this programme with considerable amusement and his laughter invites his wife, Jill, to enter the room. She then stands next to Paul's chair and watches while Paul quickly explains what the fun was all about. A brief conversation ensues between the two as Peter, Lucy and Michelle come into the room as well. Paul and Jill's conversation is interrupted by the ringing of the phone which is answered by Paul. Michelle takes the opportunity to switch to Channel 2's *Blind Date* which she watches from the floor. Meanwhile, Jill has waited for Paul to complete his telephone conversation and both leave the room followed by their three children. As *Blind Date* concludes, Paul returns to his chair and switches to TV ONE's *One Network News* which he attentively watches by himself.

The start of *One Network News* highlights a pattern that characterises the remainder of the evening. By this time, the children have more or less given up any sustained interest in watching television in the living room. Furthermore, Jill's absence during most of the evening can be explained by the clashing viewing preferences of herself and Paul. Paul likes to watch news and current affairs programmes, documentaries and situation comedy whereas Jill can not stand such programming. She prefers soap operas and other drama programmes, a viewing preference which tends to be derided or belittled by Paul. The outcome of such differences is that Jill will watch programmes like Channel 2's *Neighbours*, TV ONE's *Coronation Street*, Channel 2's *The Flying Doctors* or Channel 2's *Richmond Hill* on the television set in her bedroom where she may be joined by the children. Paul, on the other hand, watches his favourite programmes in the living room. The children move between both rooms, but when they are in the living room they do not pay too much attention to the screen.

Throughout *One Network News* and *Holmes*, Paul watches each news or current affairs item with interest, sometimes commenting loudly, particularly when it concerns items featuring politicians. During the commercial breaks he switches to TV3 which either screens *The Oprah Winfrey Show* or *3 National News* but generally returns to TV ONE. When *Holmes* finishes and *Sale of the Century* is about to start, Paul moves to the telephone to make a quick call before he leaves the room. Nobody is in the room during the greater part of the quiz programme.

When TV ONE's *Coronation Street* starts, Michelle, the family's oldest child, enters the room and almost immediately switches to Channel 2's *Comedy Company*. She combines the viewing of this programme with doing some homework on the floor. She is, however, more involved with the latter. Paul returns and, while sitting on the couch, begins a conversation with his daughter, Michelle, who shows him what she is drawing. During this exchange, both initially ignore the programme although Paul's eyes occasionally wander towards the screen, until finally his attention is more fully captured by the comedy programme.

When *Foreign Correspondent* starts, Paul moves back to the chair which stands right in front of the set. He watches this overseas current affairs programme very attentively, and during the ad break he turns down the volume while Michelle shows him some homework. Jill comes into the room to close the curtains and mentions something to Paul, who ignores her. She leaves the room again but in the background her shouting is audible as she tries to get

the children to go to bed. Lucy and Peter briefly enter the living room and, together with Michelle, clear away some of their toys. Michelle kisses her father goodnight and all three children go off to bed. Paul continues to watch television and during the *One Network News* programme he is joined by Jill. She watches only briefly and, as she leaves the room, Paul turns off the set.

## Conclusion

This chapter introduced the basic characteristics of the eight families that participated in the fieldwork. The initial acquaintance with the families took the form of descriptions of a typical family viewing day, outlining its chronology, the family members present in the living/television room, the television programmes screening on the set, and typical or significant events that occur as family members use television. On reading what is presented here as a typical viewing day for each of the eight families, one may come to the somewhat superficial conclusion that family members as members of a television audience have a lot in common. Taken on face value, families 'watch' a considerable amount of television since the set is on for a number of hours each day - in some cases longer than the in-home observation unit's possible recording time of six hours. However, a quantitative breakdown of television viewing habits does not capture the qualitative experience of the family television viewing process.

The socio-demographic summaries of the eight households and their participants reveal a diversity in family composition. While five of the households (the Cooks, Dawsons, Elliots, Fields and Grays) could be described as belonging to the middle-class, the remaining three families (the Allens, Browns and Howards), prove more difficult to classify. Despite the obvious different social backgrounds - which are perhaps most fully expressed in the apparent real estate value of the properties the families live in - the differences with respect to the interior arrangements facilitating the use of television are more subtle.

The eight families exhibit different television viewing habits, as measured by the amount of time families choose to have the television set on. The phenomenon of television as background, or the depiction of television as 'moving wallpaper', is prevalent in each family but its occurrence is acted upon in various ways. Furthermore, the physical layout of the television room varies between families, but not necessarily for reasons that have to do with the actual structural features of the house.



The fact that the narrative of a family's typical viewing day was presented by following its chronology is not without significance because 'temporal organization' (Giddens, 1984:120) within family settings is an important consideration when analysing domestic television viewing routines. Television may in fact act as a timekeeper, signalling that it is time to do something else, particularly when the screen itself shows a clock, as was the case in the early morning viewing episodes. The scheduling of television programmes may indicate when it is time to have dinner, or alternatively, when it is time to go to bed. Viewing television programmes as a planned event is another aspect of the temporal organisation within families as is the activity of watching television itself, which may often compete with other family activities. The latter is particularly demonstrated by the fact that for many adults in this study the use of television brings out a sense of guilt, something to be done as a last resort. It seems that for them television viewing is often associated with 'wasting time'.

Still, the most obvious example of temporal organisation in families is expressed in the amount of time families use television. In comparing television time-use between the eight families, one can observe a wide range from 18:15 hours to 42:00(+) hours for the lowest and highest users, respectively. Within families, however, a marked differentiation in television time-use can also be observed. Such differences may in part be attributed to the time available to watch television, which leads, for instance, to recognition of the diverse viewing patterns of adults on the one hand, and children on the other. Furthermore, these differences also extend to children of varying age-groups within and across families, so that it is possible to speak of two (or more) 'time shifts' of television usage. In addition, there are marked disparities in television time-use between adult men and women, with the latter in general noted for their absence from the area where the television screens.

The presence and absence of particular individuals from the area where the television screens introduces another set of themes which specifically pertain to the spatial organisation of the family dwelling. Temporal organisation and spatial organisation are two concepts which are, of course, intimately linked; the use of time almost without exception involves the use of time-in-space (Giddens, 1981:38). One important aspect of spatial organisation refers to the overall physical structure of the house where a family lives. While the physical structure of the dwelling is relatively fixed, families can enact changes in the use of space to suit their social and interpersonal priorities. The number of family members in households *vis à vis* the available space, for instance, is a crucial concern because it may place certain constraints on the social uses of space. Although the positioning of the

television set in the living/television room is of immediate relevance, the location of this space in the architectural layout of the house also needs further consideration, as we shall see in Chapter Five.

Similarly, seating arrangements within the living/television room are not without significance; the fact that small children often sit or lie on the floor right in front of the television set leads to them being (undeservedly) perceived as 'glued to the box'. By the same token, adults literally reserve more 'distance' from the television set and this behaviour has been classified as a more 'mature' viewing style. Regardless of the seating arrangements, television often screens as background, as a 'spatial complement' to a host of domestic activities. The domestic use of television sees the latter being combined with, for instance, children doing homework, families having their evening meal and parents (mothers in particular) doing domestic chores. In the experiences of most family members, television is a relatively non-intrusive medium that viewers may tune in and tune out of. On the other hand, television can also impose itself on family members and thus becomes a source of 'environmental contention', even extending beyond the room where the television set is located. In the final analysis, the social uses of family space must inevitably qualify the broad quantitative parameters of family television viewing time. The television set may be turned on, but to characterise 'watching television' as a prolonged, sustained activity requiring full attention is to deny the everyday fluidity of the family television viewing ecology.

Lastly, the biographical summaries display an interpersonal dynamic very much akin to everyday family relations. Television in the family context contributes to that richness in family relations rather than obstructing or preventing its occurrence. Alternatively, family television viewing practices may reinforce family hierarchy and inequality. An analysis of the 'politics of the living room', therefore, is a necessary corollary to the examination of the spatio-temporal dimension of family television viewing practices. For example, while there are notable differences in where, how, and what families members watch, such differences only make sense when these are explained in terms of the roles and positions that family members bring to the television set. Fathers may take an active role in monitoring and controlling their children's television viewing diet, but this often goes hand in hand with men asserting their own viewing preferences. Likewise, the absence of mothers from the living/television room can be explained in part because women withdraw from the politics of family for the sake of family harmony. In fact, gender differentiation is an important analytical tool which contributes to the understanding of the interpersonal struggles as these are fought out in front of the set. There is, however, a more subtle aspect

to this process, and which relates to the viewing styles family members adopt. The latter is expressed as a 'dual reality' in the family home, a site of leisure and work. In other words, the family home, either as a site of work or a site of leisure, is an important factor in analysing the everyday politics of television viewing.

The family television viewing episodes presented in this chapter demonstrate similarities and differences between the families observed. Combine this with the human geography of the living/television room and it is possible to come to an *ecological* appreciation of family television viewing experience. Observed differences in the viewing practices of families, but also of individual family members within and across households, can in part be attributed to the *spatio-temporal* organisation enacted by families. In addition, *family politics* (that is, the *social positioning* of family members according to their roles) also explains the diversity of television viewing experiences. Both themes will be taken up in Chapter Five which combines an ecological analysis of the family television room with an analysis of interpersonal relations as these evolve in front of the television set, thus firmly locating television consumption within everyday family contexts.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TELEVISION AUDIENCES IN FAMILY TIME-SPACE

#### The Ecology and Politics of Family Television Viewing

##### Introduction

Chapter Four introduced the eight families that participated in the fieldwork during the period between March and October, 1990. A socio-demographic profile of each of the families was provided together with a discussion of the physical layout of their family home, specifically concentrating on the interior arrangement of the family/television room. In addition, and for the greater part of Chapter Four, descriptions of typical family viewing days were presented to indicate the families' involvement with television.

Having outlined each family's typical viewing day in terms of its 'key events', the persons present, the television programme watched and the description of the setting, the next step will be to interpret family viewing habits, employing the 'sensitising concepts' of *family ecology* and *family politics*. Used inductively, sensitising concepts 'examine how the concept[s are] manifest in a particular setting or among a particular group of people' (Patton, 1990:391; see also Chapter Three). As these concepts have their origins in the recent literature of (family) audience studies, the argument expressed in the latter part of Chapter Two will be briefly revisited.

The emerging concern for family ecology and family politics as areas of intrinsic interest for audience studies has arisen from what could be called a paradigm shift within the latter discipline (see Chapter One). This shift may be typified as having led to a change of emphasis, with more attention now being placed on context instead of content. While earlier strands of audience research concentrated on the message and, in particular, the effects of media content on *the* audience, the more recent phase shows a concern for the context within which media content is consumed. The preoccupation with media content has not withered altogether, but its analysis has become juxtaposed with the analysis of the context in which television is being watched. Among other things, this shift has also meant a change in methodologies for studying audiences, taking the analysis back to the 'natural', or domestic, context of television viewing.

A dual concern for family ecology and family politics was first articulated by Lull (1980a), whose typology of the social uses of television is organised around the structural (relabelled here as the ecological) dimension and the relational (renamed here as the political) dimension. In Lull's discussion of the social uses of television, the structural, or *ecological*, dimension referred to both the environmental use (provision of background noise, companionship and entertainment) and the regulative use (punctuation of time and activity, talk patterns). The relational, or *political*, dimension expresses itself in the following four social uses: communication facilitation (provision of common ground agenda for talk); affiliation/avoidance (aspects of family solidarity through [non-] verbal contact); social learning (where television is used for the provision of role models, value transmission, dissemination of information); and, finally, demonstration of competence or dominance (role enactment, role re-enforcement, gate-keeping). While perceiving both dimensions - the structural and the relational - as interdependent (Lull, 1980a:209), he proceeds to analyse them quite independently of each other. Furthermore, Lull's employment of the term 'uses' is perhaps too strong in that it denotes a kind of *intentionality* on behalf of the actors which may or may not be present in the everyday, mundane reality of television consumption (see Giddens, 1984:8-12).

Morley's *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* acknowledges a conceptual indebtedness to Lull's 1980 article (Morley, 1986:31-37). Morley's (1986:13) central premise is that 'television is predominantly a *domestic* medium' and therefore needs to be studied within the everyday network of social relations of the family/household. In his study, Morley translates these social relations into a broader concern for gender which he sees as underpinning the dynamic consumption of television, and which operates as the 'one structural principle working across the families interviewed' (Morley, 1986:146).

More specifically, Morley places television viewing within the domestic arena of the politics of the living room. Family television viewing for Morley (1986:147) is, therefore, mainly seen in terms of the broader social relations in the home which for men tends to be a site of leisure, whereas for women it is predominantly a sphere of work. Within such a framework, the ecological analysis features only implicitly, something which may be explained by the nature of Morley's interview data. In other words, Morley's data may not fully capture the ecological or structural dimension of family viewing practices in the way that Lull's participant observation study did.

The narratives of a 'typical' day's viewing by a family presented in Chapter Four echo Morley's (1986:15) insistence that "“watching television” cannot be assumed to be a one-dimensional activity which has equivalent meaning or significance at all times for all who perform it'. In a subsequent attempt to chart the dynamic complexity of 'watching television', Lull (1988) and Morley (1988; 1989) respectively refer to what they label 'modes of viewing' and 'viewing styles'. This can be combined with what Hartley (quoted in Fiske, 1987) has defined as 'régimes of viewing' which, elaborated by Fiske (1987:73-74) under the heading 'modes of reception', refers to the following:

Viewers may watch television as a primary activity when they are 'glued to the screen'; they may...reluctantly give it second place in their attention while they do something else; or they may have it on while they read the paper, converse, or do homework; it gains full attention only when an item makes a strong and successful bid for their interest...some may listen to it rather than watch.

This depiction of television viewing, as oscillating between a primary or secondary (perhaps even tertiary) activity, was also arrived at by Tunstall (1983:135) who connected these 'modes of viewing' to the actual amount of time that audiences attend to the screen.

The above observations are an appropriate introduction to the ecological aspects of family television viewing. The chapter analyses the temporal and spatial dimensions of viewing, outlines the interpersonal, or political, factors of family viewing and concludes with an analysis of the relationship between the ecological and political ingredients. The concluding argument will make a case for the inseparability of the structural and relational dimensions of television.

The question which will undoubtedly arise is whether or not there is such a thing as 'family viewing styles' as hinted at by Lull (1980a:209) or, alternatively, whether the television viewing process is a rather more individual experience, albeit mediated by the family environment. Ultimately, this is a question of defining the constitutive ingredients (i.e. the *ecological* and *political* dimensions) of the family viewing context. This matter will also be revisited in the final section of this chapter, thus paving the way for a new perspective on the 'text-context problematic' which is the subject of Chapter Six.

### **The ecology of family television viewing - temporal and spatial dimensions**

The ecology of television viewing has often been a factor overlooked in research on television audiences. This can be partly attributed to the fact that the dominant research methodologies (such as the survey technique) are not attuned to capturing the ecological

dimension. Furthermore, the taken-for-granted reality of everyday life in which television consumption is located, may have engendered a 'scientific' reluctance on the part of some researchers - since who wants to research the 'painfully obvious'. Be that as it may, it has only recently been realised that the family/household constitutes the site in which television viewing naturally takes place. Concomitant with this new-found appreciation has been an insistence upon the study of television consumption within the domestic context. These theoretical and methodological realisations have facilitated the study of family television viewing contexts employing an ecological perspective.

For the purposes of this chapter, the family ecology of television viewing has been defined in the following way. First, a distinction has been made between the temporal and spatial dimensions. Second, within each of these two dimensions, another two categories are identified which I have respectively labelled as the *internal context* and the *external context*. The internal context pertains to those aspects of the temporal and spatial dimensions which are within the immediate control of the family and can thus be daily acted upon. The external context refers to the 'constraints' coming from outside of the family (such as the scheduling of television programmes) but also the actual physical environment as represented in the layout of the family home. In other words, the external context is more or less given, even though the temporal boundaries of television programme scheduling can be 'modified' through the use of video cassette recorders, and the internal context of the family is amenable to change via physical and social adaptations. Figure 5.1 presents this ecological matrix.

**Figure 5.1 - The Ecology of Television Viewing**

	<b>Temporal</b>	<b>Spatial</b>
<b>Internal Context</b>	Organisation of family time	Organisation of family space
<b>External Context</b>	Organisation (or scheduling) of television time	Physical characteristics of the family home

The ecological analysis will start by outlining the temporal dimension of family television viewing. This is followed by an analysis which maps the spatial organisation of the family/television room. Both the temporal and spatial dimensions are, of course, intricately linked

since, as Giddens (1981:38) has pointed out, the use of time necessarily connotes the use of time in space. Having said that, it is anticipated that the two facets of the ecology of family television viewing will provide us with a better understanding of 'the extent to which television does capture [family] time, and thus also [family] space in the private-domestic sphere' (Lodziak, 1986:128).

### **Family time and television time**

Family time, which on the surface is a somewhat elusive category, lies at the heart of how the everyday world of family members is experienced, and as such contributes to the mundane, daily rhythms which are very much taken for granted. For the purposes of this chapter, it is necessary to point out that the weekly cycles of television programming in part shape the temporal regularity of the everyday life world which, according to Zerubavel (1981:21):

...is definitely among the major background experiences which are at the basis of the 'normalcy' of our social environment. The fairly regular temporal structure of our social life is responsible for the establishment of some solid temporal ground against which the occurrence of certain events and the presence of persons and objects pass as 'normal' and unnoticeable.

Furthermore, television scheduling with its emphasis on the series and the serial represents the recourse, as Ellis (1982:116) has pointed out, 'by which a day's broadcasting is arranged so that particular programmes coincide with supposed events in the life of the family.'

The amount of time the television set is turned on in households, then, is one measure - even though a crude one - of the temporal organisation of family activity. The videotaped observations of the eight families that participated in this study reveal a diverse use of television when measured by the amount of time the television screened in their respective family homes. Table 5.1 highlights differences in the recorded viewing hours with the *caveat* that these figures ought not to be taken as absolutes but, instead, as indicative of the characteristic viewing practices of the individual families.

As a prelude to the analysis of the results presented in Table 5.1, it is possible to distinguish between three broad groups of families as measured by the amount of time the television set screened in their homes, employing the - albeit arbitrary - categories of 'light', 'moderate' and 'heavy' users of television. The first category (light users) comprises the families whose total recorded hours of television screening was less than 25 hours for the seven day observation period. The moderate users are those whose recorded screening



hours were between 26 and 35 hours and the heavy users category comprises those families where the television screened for in excess of 35 hours. Table 5.2 presents the families by television time-use categories.

**Table 5.1 - Weekly Amounts of Recorded Viewing Hours\* by Family**

Observation Days (Monday - Sunday)								
Family	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	Total
Allen	4:30	3:30	4:00	4:45	5:15	6+	3:30	33:15
Brown	6+	6+	6+	6+	6+	6+	4:30	40:30
Cook	4:00	4:00	2:15	1:45	1:30	4:30	0:15	18:15
Dawson	5:45	5:45	6+	5:15	2:30	6+	6+	38:00
Elliot	4:45	1:45	1:45	2:15	2:45	3:00	5:45	22:00
Field	5:45	5:15	6+	4:15	6+	6+	6:00	39:30
Gray	6+	6+	2:30	6:00	6+	4:30	2:30	35:00
Howard	6+	6+	6+	6+	6+	6+	6+	42:00
* Amounts have been rounded off to the nearest quarter hour; and 6+ means that the television screened in excess of the six hour recording capacity of the observation cabinet.								

**Table 5.2 - Families by Television Time-Use Category**

Light (16-25 hrs)	Moderate (26-35 hrs)	Heavy (36 hrs or more)
The Cooks (18:15)	The Allens (33:15)	The Dawsons (38:00)
The Elliots (22:00)	The Grays (35:00)	The Fields (39:30)
		The Browns (40:30)
		The Howards (42:00)

At the extreme ends of the light user and heavy user categories, that is the Cook family and the Howard family respectively, there is a vast time difference in the use of television. Some 23:45 hours (of having the television set turned on) separate the two families, amounting to more than half of the conventional working week. Indeed, being in paid employment is an important factor in terms of the demands it places on the availability and management of family time. Considering the time difference in television usage between the two families, it is, therefore, not surprising that in the Cook family both parents hold full-time jobs, whereas in the Howard family both parents are not in paid employment. This may, of course, be only one reason; in an effort to present a more complete picture of 'time-investment' in television *vis-à-vis* other family activities, each family will be discussed in turn starting with the light user category.

### *The light users*

The Cooks (Martin, Janet, Robert and Paula) and the Elliots (Oscar and Ellen) are in the category of light users. The television set in these households screened for 18:15 and 22:00 hours, respectively. While these families differ significantly in demographic composition - the Cooks sharing their home with their two school-aged children whereas the Elliot children have left the parental home - both households have otherwise quite similar lifestyle characteristics. Both spouses in each of the two families hold full-time paid positions. Furthermore, both families live outside the city where they maintain relatively large properties - in the case of the Elliots one may even speak of a small farm. The time expended on looking after the property was given as one reason by both Martin Cook and Oscar Elliot for the relatively low amount of time that the television screened in their respective households.

The professional commitments of both couples are, however, of more immediate importance in terms of explaining their daily time spent in front of the television. During the working week, for example, the television in the Elliot household is turned on between 6:00 and 6:30pm, that is after Oscar and Ellen have come home from work. In the case of the Cooks, the television is switched on in the late afternoon for half an hour or so by either Robert or Paula as part of their after-school relaxation but is not attended to by either of their parents (Martin and Janet) until about 8:00pm. In addition, Janet's extra-curricula activities during the first term at the secondary school where she teaches meant that she was out of the house on several nights. Comparing both families in this category of light users, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that the Cooks - a family with two children - used television less than

the Elliots - a couple whose children have left the parental home. In fact, the television viewing levels of the Cooks, as measured in time-use, are also exceptional when compared with other families with children.

The latter can be largely explained by the observation that Martin and Janet Cook - but especially Martin - take an active role in monitoring the time their children watch television, the supervision of which is often accompanied by suggestions to do something else:

...more often than not we would say 'Go and read a book, or go and practice tennis or something'. And I guess we spend a fair bit of time kicking the ball around or playing tennis or whatever but [there] wouldn't always be an option offered. (Martin - The Cooks)

The above statement also reflects the ongoing commentary by Martin (at home on most nights) concerning the suitability of programmes screening at the time. Implicit in those comments was the question as to whether or not his children, Paula in particular, had something 'better' to do. It seems that Robert and Paula have internalised the concerns of their parents. During the period immediately following their arrival home after school, for instance, both children make only relatively sparse use of television. Instead, they soon move to their individual rooms where they commence their homework. In addition, as playing sports features high on Robert and Paula's activity lists, they complement their parent's busy social calendar, thus contributing to this family's overall 'bustling' time schedule within which television watching is given a low priority.

Since television viewing in this household is, in effect, acted upon as something of a 'last resort', the planning of it by consulting programme listings is a relatively rare occurrence. This is not to say that these family members are not aware of the weekly television schedules, and do not make viewing decisions accordingly, but these decisions tend to occur while the television is actually being watched. Moreover, when considered overall, as Martin points out, television programming schedules do not encroach on other activities:

...I can't ever imagine we would ever forsake doing something else in order to stay in and watch the television programme - even before we had a video. (Martin - The Cooks)

The contrast between the Cooks and the Elliots (the other light user family) suggests that differences in planning television viewing may help explain the time-use of television. The Elliots set out to plan an evening's viewing by routinely checking the *Listener*. This role is mainly assumed by Oscar, who mentions that:

We buy the *Listener* and we try [to] see what's on ahead so that we try and plan our viewing rather than just have it on and wait until something crops up... (Oscar - The Elliots)

During the working week, this planned nature of television viewing sees the Elliots mainly watching in the evening. They generally only watch those programmes which Oscar has selected from the programme guide, and having done so the set is turned off. The dominant role of Oscar in this selection process stands out. During the week-end, television viewing is dependent on the weather, an important factor as to whether or not work can be done on the farm. As Ellen Elliot points out, 'we usually watch...afternoon sport if it's a wet day and we have got nothing better to do...'

Even though Ellen is usually present in the living room with Oscar while the set is switched on, she hardly devotes any time to actually watching television even when Oscar is out of town (which, because of his occupation, occurs quite regularly). She attributes this particular practice to her hearing impairment, a condition which means that watching television would largely be wasted on her. Finally, ever since their children left home, the Elliots have noticed a marked drop in the amount of time the television is turned on. While this may be an expected characteristic, it again highlights the exceptionally low amount of recorded viewing hours for the Cook family.

### *The moderate users*

The moderate television time-use category comprises the Allens and the Grays; their respective recorded viewing hours during the observation period were 33:15 and 35:00 hours. The Allens (John, Alice, Andrew, Eric, and the student-boarder, Carol) show a reasonable consistency in their daily use of television. During six of the seven observation days, the television set screened between 3:30 and 5:15 hours while on Saturday the television was switched on for more than six hours.

The Grays (Cynthia, Doug, Mary, Emily and Stuart) recorded 35:00 hours but are somewhat more difficult to pin down. The three days (Monday, Tuesday and Friday) on which the television screened for in excess of six hours are off-set by the two days (Wednesday and Sunday) during which they recorded a comparatively low figure of two and a half hours. The fact that for three days this household tuned into television for more than six hours demonstrates the somewhat arbitrary nature of their inclusion in the moderate time-use category of 26-35 hours and also points to the arbitrary nature of the time-use categories. However, on two of these three days the television screened almost continually from 8:00am onwards while Stuart (12) was ill at home; in other words, the Monday and the Tuesday could be considered untypical.

In the Allen household, neither of the parents were in full-time paid employment. John was a full-time PhD student who during the day worked on his doctorate at his office at the local university. His spouse, Alice, studied part-time towards an undergraduate degree. She was usually home when the children arrived from school; indeed one of her daily routines was to drive Andrew (12) and Eric (6) to and from school. Carol, the Teacher's College student who boarded with the Allen family, attended classes during the day and normally arrived home around 4:00-4:30pm.

During daytime hours, the television set was exclusively used by Andrew and Eric who, for brief spells in the late afternoon, were occasionally joined by Carol. Eric begins the (television) day in the early morning; the fact that television programming has started may provide him with a major cue that the day has begun. This particular perception of time provided through television programming is also characteristic of his recollection of the duration of his viewing periods in the morning. When asked, for instance, how long he would be watching, Eric replied:

It really depends how long the programme is...When it finishes, I probably want to watch another one [laughs] and another one, another [one] and another one. (Eric - The Allens)

His morning viewing episodes were often terminated by his mother (Alice) who had to inform him - and his brother Andrew - that it was time to have breakfast or to get ready for school.

The television set is not turned on again until approximately 3:30-4:00pm when Andrew and Eric arrive home from school. From this time onwards, the television set screens until 7:00-7:30pm, with brief interruptions lasting for 15-30 minutes. Andrew, more consistently present in the room than Eric, divides the time watching television with reading magazines or doing homework. This particular television time-use feature - in which television screens, so to speak, as a backdrop to other activities - is especially characteristic of families in the moderate and heavy user categories.

The Allens are one of the two families in this study who always have dinner in front of the television set. However, television is not considered the main focus of family interaction; watching the news between 6:00 and 7:00 just happens, according to John Allen, to blend in quite smoothly with having the evening meal.

It is the dinner rather than the television that brings everyone together. It's that time of the day...We have developed this pattern for a considerable time now... (John - The Allens)

However, this statement does not go unqualified by his wife Alice who believes it to be 'a disgusting habit'. Like most mothers/women in this study, Alice is often absent from the living room when the television screens. Dinner time represents the only prolonged period that she is present in the living room while the television set is switched on. Her absence otherwise is explained by her as follows:

I don't really enjoy watching it a lot unless it is a programme I really want to see...I have a few other things that I want to do. (Alice - The Allens)

Between 7:00 and 7:30pm, the television set is turned off. This time is normally used to attend to chores such as doing the dishes and getting young Eric ready for bed. In addition, John mentions that television programming at this time of night has nothing to offer anyway.

Very often, at about half past seven, something obnoxious is on television like *Coronation Street* or something like that, and so we turn it off...because we can't bear to have it on. (John - The Allens)

With the children in bed, it is usually John and the boarder Carol who will be watching television for the remainder of the evening starting at 8:30pm. Like the children in the afternoon, John and Carol combine television viewing with other things like reading a book or doing some knitting. The time invested in so-called television watching in the evening is, therefore, not synonymous with the time actually spent attending to the screen. As Carol puts it:

I am quite happy to sit there and watch something...and just sit there for hours and read [a book] at the same time...I can knit and watch TV without thinking what I'm knitting or do crochet - embroidery is a bit harder [laughs] especially when I'm following a pattern. (Carol - The Allens)

Television commercial breaks are especially avoided and tend to act as a trigger to concentrate more fully on an alternate activity.

In the Gray household, television tends to be mainly used by Stuart (12) during the daytime. He routinely turns on the set in the morning and, while having his breakfast, watches until about 8:00am when it is time to leave for school. In the afternoon at about 3:30pm, Stuart typically turns on the television set which he watches for the next two hours or so, sometimes joined for brief periods by his sisters Mary (16) or Emily (15). During this period, however, he is frequently moving in and out of the room while the television keeps screening. According to Stuart, the weather is an important factor in what he may do after school:

[When I] come home [it] depends what I'm doing; if it's raining I usually sit down and watch TV but if it's not I usually get up and do something like skat[ing] or something like that... (Stuart - The Grays)

Emily, the younger of the two sisters, watches comparatively little television during the day. Apart from her favourite soap opera, *Home and Away*, which screens on week-days at 5:30pm, she is not often present in the television room. The frequency with which she records this programme off-air to view at a later stage is an interesting time management aspect, showing her discretionary use of television. After dinner, Emily may return to watch some television but never after 8:30pm, returning to her room instead to do her homework. As she points out:

I don't usually watch TV after about 8:30...I make sure I don't watch things like mini-series and things like that because they take up too much time, you know... (Emily - The Grays)

Depending on the programme screening at the time, television in the evening screens to Mary and Stuart until 9:30-10:00pm. On two nights of the week, however, all three children visit their father (Cynthia and the children's father are divorced) with the result that television usage on Sunday and Wednesday is relatively low at two and a half hours. Cynthia Gray rarely watches television: she prefers to listen to music instead, to work on her part-time studies or to be with Doug, her partner, when the latter is home. In the event that Doug is out of town for business, Cynthia may adjust her usual routine and habit:

I'll often spend more time doing things with the kids and so I sit in [the television room] even though I don't go especially to watch a programme. (Cynthia - The Grays)

Compared with the Cook family, it can be argued that the presence of young children in both the Allen and the Gray households, produces different television time-use patterns. This not only expresses itself in an overall higher television time-use but also in the different times of the day when the television is turned on. In both families, for instance, the television screens in the morning prior to the children going to school. Furthermore, it is turned on for considerable periods during the afternoon, almost immediately after the children have arrived home again from school. However, this observation does not apply to all children of the two households in the moderate time-use category. In fact, the point can be made that the extent of television time-use is dependent on the age of the child, both absolutely and relatively. For example, while there is a significant age difference between Stuart (12) and Eric (6), as the youngest in their respective families, they display fairly similar television time-use habits during the day, using television in the morning as well as the in the afternoon. In this respect, they exhibit viewing practices similar to those observed among children of the families in the heavy-user category to which we now turn.

### *The heavy users*

Half of the families participating in this study fall in the heavy user category which pertains to those households where the television screened for in excess of 35:00 hours. The Dawsons (Philip, Joanne, Brenda, and Judith) used the television set for 38:00 hours whereas in the Field (Trevor, Jane, Barbara, Sally, Karen and Jennifer) household the television screened for 39:30 hours. For three days in both households the television set was turned on for more than six hours (see Table 5.1). The Browns' (Margaret, Ann and Sylvia) recorded viewing total of 40:30 hours was made up of six days on which the television screened for more than six hours. Finally, the Howards (Paul, Jill, Michelle, Lucy and Peter) turned on the television set for more than six hours on each day of the week, resulting in the highest amount of recorded screening hours (42:00 hours plus) for this study.

The Dawsons' and the Fields' relatively similar demographic characteristics translate themselves into corresponding television time-use patterns. The husband and wife in both households hold full-time and part-time jobs respectively and, while the Field family is larger in size, the children in both families are all girls. The 38:00 hours of weekly television usage in the Dawson family sees a certain concentration of viewing hours during the week-end as well as on the Wednesday which in this particular week was ANZAC day<sup>1</sup>, a public holiday. On those occasions the television set screened for in excess of six hours each day, starting at around lunch time and screening until 10:00pm, but with relatively long interruptions during the afternoon. While the television screens more on days off from work or school, Philip Dawson did not think that television kept the family at home on those days:

I don't think what's on the television affects very often [uhm] anything else we do. If we decide to go out and do something - go for a drive, or go fishing, or go to the Races - we just do it, we don't look to see what's on the television. (Philip - The Dawsons)

When one considers week-days, the television screens as soon as Brenda (13) and Judith (11) Dawson return home from school, even though this is normally not the first time in the day that the television has been turned on - Joanne, their mother, will briefly switch on the set at around noon while she is having lunch. While Brenda or Judith routinely turn on the television set after they arrive home and have been given something to eat, both combine watching television with playing games or doing homework. Television time is thus shared with other activities which, in the case of homework does not go without a certain degree of amazement on the part of their parents. But as Judith pointed out (with vocal agreement from Brenda):

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1 Every year on April 25, ANZAC day commemorates the ill-fated 1915 landing of the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps on Gallipoli.



It's easier to concentrate doing homework with the TV on - [be]cause at school there are always people talking and stuff...when you are doing it at school. (Judith - The Dawsons)

Between approximately 3:30pm and 5:30pm, the television screens more or less uninterrupted, with Brenda and Judith present in the living room. Judith Dawson definitely spends more time visibly attending to the screen than her older sister, who appears to devote more of her attention to her homework. In addition, television also screens when they have both left the room or are playing the elastic twist game together. In other words, television does not necessarily 'claim' time, but offers a relatively flexible background against which the mundane individual and family routines are lived out.

The above picture of the afternoon viewing period extends into the evening period which is loosely separated by the family dinner, normally taken after Philip Dawson has come home from work at around 5:30pm. For Brenda and Judith, however, dinner time represents a short break from the living room and the television. The whole family comes together when Joanne and Philip have finished clearing away the dishes at around 6:30pm which coincides with the start of *Neighbours*. Television in the evening usually screens until 10:30pm with the children going to bed about 9:30pm. Like her children, who share television viewing with other activities, Joanne Dawson prefers to combine domestic chores with watching television during the evening. Referring to the ironing of clothes in front of the television, she mentioned:

I use to have [the ironing board] in the laundry and I just sort of have a wall to face and I [laughs] get really bored and [have] nobody to talk to...I find that it's quite a good job to do in front of the TV. I like to sort of have...half [iny] attention on one and the other half on whatever else you are doing. (Joanne - The Dawsons)

Similarly, her husband Philip purposefully maps out the evening, combining other activities, such as reading the newspaper or a scientific article related to his work, with watching television. He would prefer that the television did not screen all night because he thinks that he would get more work done: 'If I try and write a letter with the television on, it takes me twice as long as if I'd just hide away somewhere and write it!' (Philip - The Dawsons). Even so, he elects to stay in the living room because on (winter) evenings it is the most comfortable room in the house. While attempting to read with the television screening in the background may not prove productive from Philip's point of view, he also ends up missing out on programme items he would have liked to watch:

...usually I guess I try to judge it so that I'm reading what I want to read in the newspaper when I'm pretty sure I know what's going to happen, say, in the next few minutes on the television. But sometimes I miss things - I get...engrossed in an article I'm reading and [uhm] something I wanted to see on the television I'll miss altogether. (Philip - The Dawsons)

Interestingly, these comments from Joanne and Philip also highlight the use of time in space, which will receive more attention in the next section of this chapter.

The second family in the heavy user category are the Fields. Their 39:30 hours of television usage also sees a concentration of viewing hours during the week-end, Friday night included. Like the Dawsons, this family does not normally use the television during the breakfast period, apart perhaps from Saturday. On school-days, breakfast television is out of bounds in this family, a rule which is generally adhered to, though it is often challenged by the youngest in the family, Jennifer (15). According to her mother, Jennifer (5) tries to watch television in the morning and has to be prevented from doing so.

Television viewing in this family starts in the afternoon. From the mid-afternoon period onwards, individual time-use patterns are, however, quite distinct to the point that it is possible to speak of two 'shifts' of television viewing, occupied by different family members. The 'first shift' roughly stretches from 2:30pm to 5:30pm, with Jennifer and Karen inhabiting the living room after they have arrived home from school. But time spent in front of the television is shared with other activities. Jennifer, for instance, tends to fall asleep on the couch while the television is screening, whereas Karen (9) combines television viewing with play:

I'm usually sort of...colouring in things...I always make up my own invention [this week she fabricated a 'computer' out of a cardboard carton], I just sort of look up whenever I hear the Dumm Doo Dumm on the television or something... (Karen - The Fields)

Her mother, Jane, confirms that this is indeed the case:

Yes, she tends to do that. She tends to have a [uhm] I mean, she would sit here for a couple of hours after school but she is, you know, playing around or drawing or sketching or making something... (Jane - The Fields)

Speaking of the 'first shift', the 'perceived' time that Jennifer and Karen spend in front of the television does not go without comment, particularly where their older sisters are concerned. Sally (13) uses the label of 'television-holics' in describing the amount of time she believes Jennifer and Karen expend watching television. This can be partly explained by felt injustices of the past which sometimes beleaguer the older off-spring of families. For instance, comparing Karen's relative freedom with respect to television time-use with what she was allowed when she was Karen's age, Barbara (15) quite passionately argues about the different treatment she used to receive:

Mum, you are losing your touch...I think you're being too lenient... [Sally and I] used to have the rule of two programmes a day and that was it. And we used to abide by that [laughter from both parents] and if we were good, we were allowed three. (Barbara - The Fields)

However, the two older daughters may not appreciate the circumstances in which Karen or Jennifer 'watch' television programmes in the same way that their mother does. The (school-) age differences of the children in this household also play an obvious role in the time available to watch television. As Barbara put it to Karen 'when you get to High School you just haven't got the time to watch it', to which Karen somewhat sarcastically responded 'See, see when I'm *your age* I won't have time to watch it' (Barbara and Karen - The Fields). These interpersonal exchanges also say a lot about the 'politics' of family television viewing. While this will be taken up more explicitly in the final section of this chapter, this exchange highlights the fact that the temporal dimension of television viewing - as part of the organisation (and control) of family time - certainly has familial-political implications.

The afternoon period, or the 'first shift' of television viewing, normally concludes at around 6:00-6:30pm. The television is usually turned off as the family gets ready to have the evening meal. Dinner time is considered family time, when the Fields gather around the table in the dining room, situated adjacent to the living room. As Jane explains:

During the news...we might keep [the television] on just to listen, but more often than not I actually turn it off for dinner time because it's really the only time we get to sit down as a family and talk about the day's happenings... (Jane - The Fields)

The period immediately following dinner is used to get Jennifer and Karen ready for bed, a task usually accomplished by their mother, Jane. Trevor and one of his older daughters attend to the dishes which, on some occasions, may be done in conjunction with watching television, using the commercial breaks to move back to the kitchen. 'If there's something I want to watch, I'll work around it but not every night', says Trevor to illustrate this particular point. But in general, the time between 8:00-9:00pm is used to get the domestic duties out of the way before watching television again. With Barbara and Sally being in their rooms doing homework or, alternatively, out of the house for their Speech and Drama lessons or babysitting, the television, if switched on, more or less screens to an empty room. Having finished with the day's chores, the rest of the evening is spent watching television:

We sort of sometimes really try and organise ourselves so we can be finished to sit down at 9:30 to watch [television], don't we? I mean sometimes you just feel like relaxing, sitting down and unwinding and sort of just watching something. (Jane - The Fields)

Around this time, Sally and Barbara return to the living room and remain here until approximately 10:00pm - the start of the late evening news - which is watched by Trevor and Jane until its conclusion at 10:30pm. With Jane having gone to bed, the last half hour of the television day involves Trevor alone who will turn off the set at 11:00pm.

The two remaining families in the heavy user category are the Browns and the Howards. Of all eight families that participated in this study, these two households stand out in their television time-use patterns with daily usage of six hours or more. Another related distinguishing feature is that the television screens more or less uninterrupted from 3:00-3:30pm until the late evening when those remaining in the living room go to bed. Furthermore, these two families also use television during breakfast and lunch time, another factor which contributes to the high usage of television. Finally, the parents of both families are not in paid employment, hence most of their daily activities tend to be centred in or around the family home.

The Browns' viewing day typically starts at around 7:15pm with Sylvia (14) watching the early morning cartoons, occasionally joined (briefly) by her older sister Ann. However, 'breakfast television' during week days had only been a relatively new programming decision initiated by Channel 2. The introduction of early morning television affected how both sisters spent their time before going to school. Ann contrasts her activities in the morning before television screened at breakfast time with her present routines as follows:

[I used] to read a book, or just lie in bed, or have my breakfast and get ready for school...I don't usually watch it now but sometimes, sometimes...instead of doing stuff in the bathroom I bring it in here [the living room] and do it in here. (Ann - The Browns)

The time, furthermore, is monitored by Ann and Sylvia through a clock which, showing in the right hand corner of the television screen, tells them when it is time to leave for school and at around 8:00am one of the girls turns off the television set. The girls' mother, Margaret, who has not yet got out of bed at this time, was quite surprised to hear such 'inventiveness' on the part of her daughters, making the comment: 'Oh gee wizz...they account for everything, don't they?' (Margaret - The Browns). Even without the time actually showing on the screen, television programming during the day serves as a clock, as Ann clearly pointed out:

...if you know what television [uhm] programmes are coming on you know what time it is...like in the mornings and that. In the mornings before and after school they have cartoons and kids' stuff but in the daytime and around lunchtime they have soap operas and all that. (Ann - The Browns)

Come lunchtime, Margaret briefly turns on the television while having her lunch. However, by her own admission her behaviour at this time of the day is not typical and might have been researcher-induced:

...it was exceptional, I only turned it on because it was your set and I wanted a bit of quality [referring to the late model television set which was part of the in-home observation cabinet]. I would normally have my lunch and then go out in the sun. 90 percent of the time I make myself lunch, pop outside in the deck chair and have it with the trees outside. Because I love being outside...even if it's windy.  
(Margaret - The Browns)

That Margaret's behaviour is exceptional is perhaps also borne out by the fact that she alone is in the room for very short spells even though the television keeps on screening. She usually turns off the television accompanying the action with the comment that she has better things to do, presumably referring to her studies which she pursues from her home. Whether or not comments of this kind are directed to the researcher/observer is an interesting topic, but one that falls outside the objectives of this chapter. Nevertheless, these remarks say a lot about the management of time in relation to television time-use patterns, and the relatively conscious process it involves in the case of Margaret.

When Ann and Sylvia arrive home from school, the television screens without interruption from about 3:30pm until approximately 10:30pm. As was also observed in other families, however, the television in the afternoon period provides a background while both sisters, Ann in particular, do their homework. During this period the television may screen to an empty room for intervals of 10-15 minutes or so. When asked about this habit of doing homework in front of the television, Ann responded:

...if I have to do projects or stuff like that, then I do it in the kitchen or some place else. But if I just have to copy something or it's not really important then I do it in front of the television. (Ann - The Browns)

It seems that in the week that this family was monitored, Ann had homework to do but little or no project work since she was present in the living room on all afternoons. Both Sylvia and Ann, even though not visually attending to the screen, seem to use the commercial breaks to leave the room. In the words of Sylvia: '...the ads are repeated and you can see them when you want...the ads are just a time when you can go and get stuff' (Sylvia - The Browns). The commercial breaks thus provide an opportune moment to combine watching television with other activities, without either necessarily competing for their attention.

Another example of how television viewing in this family is combined with other domestic routines is provided by dinner time. Like the Allen household, the Brown family always have their evening meal in front of the television. Having dinner in this fashion is perhaps the first time of the day when the family sits together, and it is seen by the mother as something special. In fact, Margaret does not at all agree with statements that depict dinner time as exclusively family time in which television should not intrude:

That's a myth...Most families 'gush out' or fight over dinner, or they sit there quietly and slurp up their dinner and can't wait to get away...when we are sitting down here - [for instance] if it's a windy night and we've got the heater on, telly on - it's a special time for us *too* to sit down here. (Margaret - The Browns)

With Margaret doing the dishes after tea before she goes for her daily run, the living room returns to the 'afternoon scene' with Sylvia and Ann occasionally watching the set while doing their homework. It is at this time that Sylvia appears to concentrate more on her homework, but only until *Neighbours*, a favourite daily programme for both girls. The rest of the evening television is normally watched *en famille* - Margaret having returned from her jogging. Time spent in front of the television during this period is perhaps the most intensive, with commercial breaks being used by all present to leave the room with persistent regularity - Margaret often taking the lead. As far as Margaret is concerned, commercial breaks are not only a waste of time but also downright annoying:

...I hate anything that is interrupted. I always like things to flow - even if I'm watching and still doing something else, I don't want to miss anything...so I tend to shoot out when the ads are on. When I come [back] and because I hate missing things I say to the kids 'What happened there, what's happening?', they both just go 'Oh look Mum, nothing'. And they never tell me, so I can't rely on them to tell me what I missed. (Margaret - The Browns)

In other words, by attempting to combine television watching with other activities, Margaret's viewing pleasures are somewhat compromised, because she misses parts of the programmes she would have liked to watch. While Ann and Sylvia may be reluctant to pass on information about the programme, they were observed on many instances warning Margaret whenever the commercial breaks had finished and the programme, which their mother had set out to watch, had resumed. It is with these television time-use patterns that the evening passes by, and the television is turned off at approximately 10:30pm.

The Howards are the highest level users among the families studied. Like the Browns, the parent(s) of the Howard household are not in full-time employment. Paul, the father, is a sickness beneficiary and his spouse, Jill, considers herself to be a full-time homemaker. Many of the couple's activities tend to be centred on the home, a pattern perhaps

compounded by Paul's disability. Paul and Jill used to be quite involved with their children's school by helping out in the class room, but because Jill was diagnosed as having angina problems, this involvement ceased.

The day normally starts with Michelle (10), Lucy (8) and Peter (6) watching the breakfast cartoons. These viewing episodes are characterised by a relatively hectic atmosphere, with the children moving about the living room. It is clear that television viewing competes with such activities as getting ready for school, and the children, Peter in particular, tests the patience of their parents who constantly have to remind them that it is time to leave. Television viewing, marked by a reluctance by the children to abide by their parents' instructions, readily becomes a source of conflict. Paul is fully aware of the antics that go on in the morning, antics caused by the clash between time spent watching television and the time needed for his children to get ready and leave for school:

It's like when we get up in the morning, they know they've got to go to school...and [uhm] a lot of screaming goes on in here. (Paul - The Howards)

While there are also interpersonal, or political, dynamics at work - which will be taken later in this chapter - the conflict that arises in the morning is mainly one of time-management, and results from divergent attitudes towards such management between the parents and the children. In particular, the children attempt to 'stretch' the time they believe is available for getting ready. Television viewing thus becomes the means to test the temporal boundaries that their parents have laid down. Playing games before going to school could be similarly used by Michelle and Lucy to test such temporal boundaries.

With the children having gone to school, Jill (sometimes accompanied by Paul) will normally turn on the television around 11:00-11:30am for a brief period. She often combines watching a morning soap opera with attending to some domestic chore like ironing a shirt or folding away washing. This domestic scene is quite typical for Jill. Indeed, domestic chores and child care take their share of time to the point that Jill feels she does not watch a great deal of television:

Well, I don't normally watch TV at all...having three kids you've got a lot of work, cleaning up after them, and I don't have the time to sit down most times... Well, if *Coronation Street* is on and I go to sit down and watch it, the kids usually call out for me to do something or they want something - I've got to run and see to them. (Jill - The Howards)

Paul, on the other hand, takes on more of a 'supportive' role in the overall supervision of the children, usually after Jill has called upon him to take his share of the responsibility. His television viewing, therefore, is not as much impeded as Jill's is, as he tends to vocally reprimand his children from the chair or couch he occupies while watching a programme. According to Paul: 'I can't run at all...I've got no show of running after [them]' (Paul - The Howards).

Like the Brown family, once Michelle, Lucy and Peter return home from school around 3:00pm, the television screens almost without interruption until it is turned off in the late evening. During the afternoon, the television often screens to an empty living room or, when the children are present, viewing is combined with doing homework and play. Peter, the youngest, is perhaps the more consistent viewer of the three children, an observation confirmed by his father's exaggerated remark that television had taken over his son's life. Overall television during the afternoon takes on the role of 'moving wallpaper', a kind of background against which family activity takes place. In the words of Paul:

TV in this house is used as a background. Even when they put one of my videos on, for instance, [ah] I don't know why they put it on for 'cause they don't watch, you know...so in that respect I [uhm] don't suppose the old TV would hold them to the screen. (Paul - The Howards)

Furthermore, the weather does not seem to greatly influence the television viewing habits of the children - in fact, according to Jill, her children are quite unpredictable:

...when you want them to stay inside when it's wet they'll play outside. But when it's a nice day, like today, they'll stay inside and play. (Jill - The Howards)

Dinner is never taken in front of the television, but always in the kitchen, even though the television keeps on screening. Dinner time normally falls in the period between 5:00-7:00pm and does not appear to be influenced by television programming. 'When it's ready, it's ready', said Paul. After dinner, Jill attempts to plan her evening's viewing by attending to the dishes first and, subsequently getting the children ready for bed (9:00pm is their usual bedtime). However, her intentions to watch particular programmes are often thwarted by her having to attend to such domestic chores:

Well...if dinner's over and the dishes are all done, I make an effort to sit down and watch a programme before the kids go to bed. Otherwise, if the kids are going to bed then I miss halfway...I miss half of it so I don't bother watching it. (Jill - The Howards)



In the early evening, Jill, together with some of her children, watches television in the bedroom. This is mainly because her and Paul's programme preferences clash to a considerable extent: 'That's why I got her a second TV for [the] bedroom, you see' (Paul - The Howards). However, having to keep an eye on one of the children, who might still be playing on the street, more often than not prevents Jill from enjoying a programme. In the final analysis, Jill does not get to watch television with full attention until late at night in the parents' bedroom where the second set is located: '[Paul is] usually asleep so I just sit up in bed and watch my programmes' (Jill - The Howards). Paul, on the other hand, spends the evening in the living room, sometimes joined by a visitor/friend. After the late evening news, Paul normally makes his way to the bedroom to join Jill.

### **From the temporal to the spatial**

So far the temporal dimension of television viewing has been discussed in terms of the actual television time-use patterns across the eight families that participated in the study. The discussion grouped these families into three categories of television time-use - light, moderate and heavy. From this discussion, it emerges that while there are some obvious time-use differences between the light user category on the one hand and the moderate and heavy time-use categories on the other, there tends to be a greater overlap between the moderate and heavy time-use categories respectively.

However, while the individual experiences of spending time in front of the television set are highly variable, the overall assessment of the television time-use patterns points in the direction in which the 'broadcast TV viewer' is generally addressed by the television medium (Ellis, 1982:162):

The viewer is cast as someone who has the TV switched on, but is giving it very little attention: a casual viewer relaxing at home in the midst of the family group.

The number of actual hours the television is turned on may thus refer to what could be called the 'residual' time-usage of the television within families. It could be argued that in the moderate to heavy time-use families, as compared with the light user category, television tends to be more a part of, even more blended with, everyday family life. A rather unambiguous interpretation would, of course, be that the more hours a television screens to a particular family, the more likely it is to become integrated within that family's everyday routines.

But there is more to the observation than that. Families do develop certain strategies to curtail the hours television screens within their household, as well as using television to establish temporal boundaries within family life. For example, the majority of families established a time for the evening meal which excluded television, whereas for other families (e.g. the Browns and the Allens) having dinner in front of television was a meaningful experience of having everybody together. At a more immediate level, the scheduling of television programmes can be considered as having a timekeeping function which regulates certain family practices, the most obvious being children's bedtime. 'Casting' family viewers through programme scheduling comes also to the fore during breakfast television; the only occasion that television screens a clock simultaneously with the programmes, so as to remind viewers when they 'ought' to go to school or work. In a way this is similar to television constructing a 'national bedtime' as Farnsworth (1990:137-138) has pointed out: 'the nightly arrival of closedown reinforc[ed] implicit notions of domesticity and of appropriate behaviour at about 11pm'. Furthermore, while in most families television is 'allowed' to screen as background, in some families (e.g. the Cooks and the Elliots) television only tends to be turned on for the purposes of watching particular programmes. This difference not only points to general familial strategies regarding time-management, but also to the ways in which watching television is perceived as either a discrete activity or as an activity that readily blends with other family routines.

However, even though family strategies are able to be discerned, there are some real differences between the time-use patterns of individual family members. It is interesting to note that while overall family strategies tend to differ, certain individuals across families appear to have a lot in common and thereby transcend the socio-economic differences that exist between families in this study. The most outstanding example are the women/mothers. Across the board, their involvement with respect to television is very low, be they 'homemakers' and/or students and/or holding full-time jobs. Their male counterparts tend to use television much more, often on their own until late into the evening. Finally, there are differences, which also express themselves across families, between the usages by children as compared with male adults. For children, television tends to serve as a background device; by contrast adult male viewing tends to be more attentive and planned, perhaps only being 'relegated' to the background when commercial breaks appear. Their female counterparts display an episodic viewing style similar to that of children - they often combine watching television with the execution of a domestic chore. However, for both men and women watching television brings out a certain degree of guilt; in this sense, watching television is something to be done as a last resort, even though in practice (and particularly for men) these 'guilty pleasures' do not prevent adults from using the medium.

The following discussion will attempt to tease out more of the above themes by concentrating on the spatial dimensions of family television viewing. Television time-use almost automatically means the use of television within a particular space, and this raises questions about how this 'family' space is organised (refer to the diagrams of living rooms presented in Chapter Four) and occupied by the family members within it. The interpersonal dimensions of family space will be the main focus of the next section, thus providing an appropriate lead-in to the final section of this chapter, which will deal with the politics of family television viewing.

### **Family space and family television use**

In his analysis of the spatial dimensions of social life, Giddens (1984:119) introduces the concept of regionalisation which he defines as 'the zoning of time-space in relation to routinized social practices'. His application of this concept to the private house (drawn from typical European housing arrangements) is particularly relevant to the examination of the spatial dimension of family television viewing. According to Giddens (1984:119):

Houses in contemporary societies are regionalized into floors, halls and rooms. But the various rooms are zoned differently in time as well as space. The rooms downstairs are characteristically used most in daylight hours, while bedrooms are where individuals 'retire to' at night.

Furthermore, the walls between the different rooms of a private house demarcate boundaries of such regionalisation (Giddens, 1984:121). For present purposes, this point can be illustrated by contrasting family homes featuring a separate dining/kitchen area and a separate living room (as in the Brown, Dawson, Field and Howard households) with, for instance, family homes having an open-plan living area which includes no physical separation between the dining and or kitchen areas and the living room where the television is usually located (as in the Allen, Cook and Elliot households). In addition, a particular room may have been allocated for television viewing purposes (as in the Gray household).

The above observations pertain, of course, only to the physical structure of the family home. While the physical layout of a particular domicile may be considered as being relatively fixed, the social uses of family space within a home are less dictated by aspects of domestic corporeity. In other words, the use of domestic space by families often involves an element of choice, even though this may be constrained by the actual physical features of the homes. Aside from the existing conventions ruling the interior arrangements of private houses - a bed normally typifies a bedroom rather than a kitchen, for example - the furnishing of one's

house remains a matter of personal and/or family choice. The television set is often regarded as a piece of furniture (Root, 1986:21-54), and as such could be perceived to be part of the fairly conscious deliberations that accompany the appointment of the family home.

Colloquially speaking, the television set has also been regarded as another member of the family (Gunter and Svernevig, 1987:4). While such a personification begs caution, it does, however, hint at the perceived familiarity that this medium imbues within the domestic setting. The notion of television as part of the furniture, combined with the fact that it is given the attributes of another sibling or peer, is an important ecological trait. Indeed, television as part of family space warrants an examination - if only as a necessary complement to the time-use patterns - in order to obtain the full ecological picture of family television viewing.

After describing the broader spatial dimensions of television viewing within the eight families, this section will focus more closely upon the interpersonal uses of family space in front of the television set. The question of who sits where, an issue related to the extent of assigned or usurped seating arrangements, will be addressed. In attempting to answer this question, reference will be made to the distribution of domestic power, which will suitably establish the argument concerning the politics of family television viewing the remainder of this chapter.

The spatial dimensions of the family home include such characteristics as the size of the section on which the house is placed, the overall size of the family home, the number of rooms as well as the proportional measurement of the areas which have been designated as family space. The latter refers to those quarters in the family home which are predominantly used in daily family traffic and may include such areas as the kitchen, the dining room and the living room. The relative position of the daily family living spaces *vis-à-vis* each other - whether or not such spaces are separated by walls - will provide the initial focus for the analysis of the spatial dimensions of family television viewing. Three groups can be discerned in the spatial dimensions of the eight family homes (see Table 5.3).

\* Figures shown in between brackets denote the television time-use in hours (see Table 5.2). In comparing Table 5.2 with Table 5.3, an association can be discerned between television time-use and the spatial arrangements of the eight family households. The ensuing discussion will establish whether the presence of such a pattern is a matter of quantitative reductionism - the notion of 'ecological fallacy' readily offers itself as a necessary *caveat* - or whether there are aspects that remain concealed by simply comparing Tables 2 and 3.

In other words, Giddens' (1984:110ff) comments regarding the use of time in space may be more subtle than simple quantitative indicators, such as the number of hours of television time-use, in particular when one considers that 'watching television' is a multi-dimensional activity.

**Table 5.3 - Spatial Dimensions of Family Homes**

'Open-plan' family living area	'Separate' family living areas	Room for television use only
<i>The Allens (33:15)*</i>	<i>The Browns (40:30)</i>	<i>The Grays (35:00)</i>
<i>The Cooks (18:15)</i>	<i>The Dawsons (38:00)</i>	
<i>The Elliots (22:00)</i>	<i>The Fields (39:30)</i>	
	<i>The Howards (42:00)</i>	
*Figures shown in between brackets denote the television time-use in hours (see Table 5.2)		

Furthermore, it must be noted that while the family homes in each category may share similarities in their basic spatial layout, the overall characteristics of these homes may vary greatly in such aspects as size and appointment. Be that as it may, the following discussion will describe and analyse the spatial dimensions of television viewing for each family in turn. In addition, the interior arrangement of the (living) room in which the television set is located will also receive attention to determine whether, as some commentators have suggested (see Root, 1986:40), 'television sets have replaced coal fires as the focal points of sitting rooms.'

#### *Television use in an 'open-plan' family living area*

This category comprises the Allens, the Cooks and the Elliots. Apart from the Allens, all the other families own their property, a factor which could be considered as affording relatively more 'freedom' in the arrangement of the spatial layout of the family home than is the case when a family rents a house. However, all three families have what could be called large family living quarters, which incorporate the sitting room and a dining/kitchen area. Yet, while these families may more or less conform in this spatial infrastructure of their respective homes, the social uses of this family space with respect to television viewing are varied. The latter, it will be shown, can be largely attributed to the interpersonal dynamics within the families.

The Allen's family living space consists of three adjoining areas. These include the sitting room where the television is located, a 'dining room' which is scarcely (if ever) used for this purpose (even though a table and chairs are situated here), and the kitchen. This particular set-up makes the television set, when it is turned on, a fairly dominant feature of daily household proceedings; not only does it occupy a focal spot in the corner with the furniture arranged around it in a half circle, but it also makes its presence felt in the room adjacent to the sitting room (see Figure 4.1, p. 77). Indeed, during the daytime, particularly the period following the children's arrival home from school, the television's presence is difficult to escape. According to Alice (Mrs Allen), who rarely watches television herself, this compromises her own preference for alternative activities:

I like reading and listening to music and playing some music, but the children have got the television on, and I wouldn't have a show turning it off. I mean, they'd be so annoyed...both of them. (Alice - The Allens)

In other words, television use, in the context of the open-plan character of the daily living area limits Alice's range of what she feels she can do during the day, and she continually gives in to Andrew's and Eric's wishes of wanting to watch television in the afternoon. She does not anticipate this changing until both sons leave the parental home.

The afternoon period is characterised by Andrew sitting on the two-seater couch, whereas his younger brother, Eric, tends to roam the floor. Eric is the more 'restless' of the two while watching television, and his position on the floor in front of the television set seems to reflect this 'style of viewing' as he would only reluctantly be confined to a particular chair. Andrew, on the other hand, tends to sit quite serenely on the two-seater couch combining television watching with reading a book or magazine. He is occasionally joined by Carol (the boarder), who usually sits in one of the chairs within convenient conversational distance. Both Andrew and Carol often take the opportunity to talk, although the conversations tend to be paced by what is screening on the set.

Even though there is a dining table in the adjacent room, the evening meal is normally taken in the sitting room while the Allens watch television. It is also the only time of the day that everybody is usually present in the sitting room. According to the family's father, John, this pattern has evolved over a considerable period of time:

Even when we did all fit around the table [in the adjoining room], we've never tried. I don't think we have got five chairs [laughter] so the five of us would not fit around that table. We just couldn't afford a decent table so we sit comfortably. (John - The Allens)

The social use of space during dinner time reveals an interesting detail. With everybody in this household present, there is competition for the more prominent viewing and/or comfortable seating positions to an extent not seen at other times of the day. Nevertheless, the main seating positions at this particular time are more or less fixed; invariably John occupies the chair in the centre of the room and Alice tends to be seated next to him in the chair on the left. Andrew and Carol usually share the two-seater couch whereas Eric normally ends up on the floor, where he is sometimes joined by his mother, Alice. When the main course has been finished and the plates are carried out by the parents who subsequently return with the dessert, there is some movement almost akin to 'musical chairs' with Eric, for instance, moving to his father's chair. His father, however, has merely to reappear and his youngest son resumes his earlier position on the floor. In other words, the resolution of potential conflict is relatively straightforward and, as John points out, is guided by the following expectations:

I think children should give way to adults but not to each other...One of the reasons why our kids move around the floor is because we have three adults and only seating for four and there are five people in the room... (John - The Allens)

After dinner and or after *Sale of the Century*, the television set is turned off and is not turned on again until 8:30pm or so. John is usually the only person to watch television with any degree of consistency at this particular point in time. By the mid evening, the children have retired to their bedrooms and Alice might be working on her studies in the dining room. Interestingly, the television does not appear to intrude on her activities as it does in the afternoon when the children are watching it. John and his wife exchange comments as both get on with either watching television or attending to their studies. During the evening, John watches by himself, being seated in the same chair he occupied during dinner time. This chair is 'strategically' placed to combine television watching with reading:

[That chair] is also the best place for the light - it is actually quite hard to read in other parts of the room. So, if you're reading a book between the ads or something like that, that's the chair to sit in because it is much lighter there. (John - The Allens)

The Cooks' open-plan family living space is 'L-shaped' and includes the sitting room and the kitchen/dining area. When in use, the television set in the sitting room is in view of two comfortable chairs and a two-seater couch (see Figure 4.3, p. 86). The television is a small 14" set and is placed on a trolley with castors which is pulled out from the wall, thus enabling those seated in the chairs to watch whatever is screening. However, when these seats are

not occupied, the small set screens to the two-seater only. In other words, when the family as a whole watches television (which in this household tends to be after 8:00pm), the television set is 'pulled out' from the wall.

In terms of television time-use, the Cooks, as compared with the other families, used television the least. This particular finding is reflected in the spatial organisation of their daily living practices as far as television is concerned. For instance, according to the father, Martin, who was concerned about television becoming a dominant feature of the sitting room, the purchase of a small set was a fairly conscious decision:

...we have always only gone to a little, a small portable TV because I...don't like the idea of a big screen taking over the whole room...that's a subtle way of restricting the enthusiasm to watch. Having a little TV that you can move out of the way - so it's mobile and can get put away and is not the focal point of the room. (Martin - The Cooks)

The latter comment refers not only to the sitting room itself, but also to the rumpus room which has a television aerial connection. It is to this location in the house that the television is occasionally moved, especially when the parents entertain guests so that Robert and Paula can watch television if they so wish.

During the daytime, television is only sparsely used by the Cooks. Unlike most of their school contemporaries in the other families, Robert (17) and Paula (13) do their homework in their respective rooms and television in the afternoon is only watched as a brief form of relaxation after they have arrived home from school. Rather than dominating family space at this time of the day, (as was the case in the Allen household), television in the Cook family functions as a background for unwinding from a day at school:

...if I am tired and I haven't got anything else to do I'll go and watch the TV for a while and just sort of flake out but usually...I won't even pay any attention to it. I'll just sort of sit there and [laughs] contemplate, and may not take any notice of what's on the TV - just sort of look at it, you know. (Robert - The Cooks)

Dinner time is normally set aside for the family to be together: '...we rarely watch it while having a meal - if the four of us are here we sit around the table and there is no television on, and it's an important family time' (Martin - The Cooks). Spending time together around the dinner table is a matter of physical and personal proximity. It is mostly for this reason that the television is turned off during dinner time, quite apart from the fact that it would be impossible to see the set from the dining table. However, in this busy household, one



of the parents is quite often out during dinner time. If this is the case, the normal practice of having the evening meal together at the table may be modified, as Janet, the mother, explains:

[Martin and I] are the catalysts for sitting around the table [but] there are occasions when we don't - mostly we would sit around the table if both of us were here and one of the children. If one of us [parents] is missing, therefore, we tend to make it more casual. (Janet - The Cooks)

It is in the evening, from 8:00pm onwards, that the Cooks are most likely to watch television as a family group, even though not all family members may be present. At this time of the day, certain patterns in the interpersonal use of space are evident. First, Robert and Paula show no specific preference for a particular seat; they either sit on the two-seater or on the floor which are the closest positions with respect to the television screen. However, they would not sit together on the couch or on the floor. Instead they would elect to sit somewhere else if either of them was already occupying one of these viewing positions. This form of 'space-distancing' is not as pronounced between the children and their parents; for instance, Robert would join his mother on the two-seater and Paula would cuddle up to her father seated in 'his' comfortable right-hand corner chair. Second, Martin spends the greater part of the evening in this position, where he combines watching television with reading the newspaper or doing some university work: 'I rarely sit down and watch...I sort of have got half a mind, half an ear on [the television] (Martin - The Cooks). 'His chair', in the right-hand corner, is some distance from the television set which allows Martin to watch television in this particular fashion. Furthermore, with his reading and/or work material spread over the coffee table, it is indisputably Martin's corner to the point that he will ask Robert and Paula to vacate the chair saying that he has got some work to do. With his children having gone to bed, the late evening period sees Martin moving right in front of the screen where he, from a squatting position on the floor, watches the late evening news. Martin is on his own and he watches the set until the conclusion of the programme while occasionally flicking through the newspaper.

The Elliots are the final household with an open-plan family living design. Their daily living area is rather spacious and includes a dining/sitting room and a formal sitting room where the television set is located. Both living rooms are separated by a large doorway and are heated, if required, by a wood burner installed in the dining/sitting room. The television set is situated in the right-hand corner of the sitting room with two comfortable chairs and a three-seater couch placed around it at a comfortable viewing distance (see Figure 4.5, p. 95).

On a typical week-day, the arrival home of Oscar and Ellen from work is followed by the preparation of the evening meal. At this particular point in time, Oscar may turn on the television set to watch brief snippets of *One Network News*. On most occasions, however, he does not sit down, but follows the programme while standing in the doorway. He regularly walks out of the room. 'Watching' television in these interrupted sequences is, in other words, accomplished from a distance in anticipation of the evening meal being served. It is almost as if a manifest function of such 'distanciation' is to avoid getting too much involved with the programme because of the impending dinner. It is perhaps characteristic also of being 'in-between' activities.

While dinner is normally taken in the dining/sitting room, this is not exclusively the case. If there is a programme screening that Oscar and Ellen want to watch, dinner is consumed in the formal sitting room. The proposal to have dinner in front of the television is often initiated by Oscar, as Ellen explains: 'He usually decides by saying "Oh, do you want to watch the...?"' - quite often I have even set the table for us' (Ellen - The Elliots). Another reason which makes having dinner in front of the television a more inviting option is the new lounge suite the Elliots had recently obtained:

We had [laughs] terrible uncomfortable furniture in here so, you know, you didn't stay here and watch the TV unless you wanted to...we didn't watch it because [this] room wasn't a particularly interesting room, and we didn't have nice furniture to sit on, so there was nothing inspiring about being here unless you were watching the TV. Now this room is the most pleasant room to sit in, so we have tended to like sitting here [laughs]. (Ellen - The Elliots)

The evening's viewing, which usually spans the period between 8:00 and 10:30pm, is a relatively planned event: '...we don't usually leave the television on so it's sort of there in the background all the time...we'll put it on to watch something and then turn it off' (Oscar - The Elliots). The seating/viewing positions seem equally calculated with Oscar normally sitting on the couch and Ellen being seated in the chair directly facing the television. Immediately next to the couch stands a spinning wheel with a small stool which, during the course of the evening, is used by Oscar, especially during the commercial breaks. As Oscar points out:

[Television's] a relaxation as far as I'm concerned [but] I'm the sort of person who feels guilty just watching television and I like to be doing something, you know, and I do my spinning and that sort of thing...I have a thing about ads - yeah, I hate the adverts, you know, I try and mentally switch off from those and do something completely different. (Oscar - The Elliots)

For Ellen, however, television in general is regarded as an intrusion, exerting a kind of dominance in the sitting room which precludes social intercourse. This may be partially attributed to Ellen's hearing impairment which reduces the enjoyment she gains from watching television. Another reason probably relates to Oscar's attentive viewing style which in turn can be related to his intentional disposition towards television viewing. In other words, when Oscar has decided to watch a particular programme, he really *watches* the programme much to the dismay of Ellen:

I think [television] is the most anti-social thing that was ever invented to be quite honest [laughs]. I get quite aggravated at times. I want to tell him something that I just thought of but there's no way, you know...he's got to watch his thing. (Ellen - The Elliots)

Similar frustrations are also evident when Ellen attempts to watch a programme but, because of her hearing impairment, is unable to follow it in its entirety: 'I miss about 60 or 70 percent of the laughs' (Ellen - The Elliots). She depends on Oscar to communicate to her segments of the programme she fails to hear. However, with Oscar being engrossed in watching the programme himself, a response to Ellen's questions is not always forthcoming. For a person with a hearing impairment, this situation must accentuate how the television in the corner can prevail over social interaction such as conversation.

### *Television use in 'separate' family living areas*

This category of 'spatial regionalisation' refers to those domestic settings in which the television is in the main sitting room, which in turn is separated by walls or doors from other daily family living quarters such as the dining/kitchen area. With respect to family television viewing especially, it thus alludes to the characteristics of the physical structure of a family dwelling which 'may ensure that encounters can be sustained in different parts of the building without intruding upon another' (Giddens, 1984:123). Four of the eight families that participated in this study as fall within this category. Of these, the first three (the Browns, the Dawsons and the Fields) own their property, whereas the Howards rent their house.

The Browns live in a small two-bedroom home with a separate living room. As one enters the living room, the television is positioned in the right-hand corner. Opposite the television set stands a three-seater couch which is in full view of the screen. On either side of the couch stands a chair, one of which is somewhat obscured from direct view of the television. Between the couch and the television set, there is plenty of room to either sit or lie on the floor right in front of the television set, a viewing position which is often taken up by the

youngest in the household, Sylvia (see Figure 4.2, p. 82). With limited space available in the rest of the house, the living room is the focal point of familial interaction while the television screens in the background. What is going on in the living room, does not, however, go unnoticed in the other rooms of the house, particularly when it concerns a noisy television set, as Margaret points out:

[Television] has a dominant effect on our interaction. Not only in the living room but in the whole house. For instance, when I'm trying to do my studies in my bedroom I can hear that blasted thing going with *China Beach* and I'm always saying 'Shut that bloody door, Shut the door, Shut it!'. (Margaret - The Browns)

While the television almost continually screens between approximately 3:30 and 10:30pm, it does so against a background in which the girls are doing their homework and/or play, as well as the family having dinner together. This is particularly evident as soon as Ann and Sylvia return home after a day at school. Ann characterises her activities as follows:

I put my stuff away and eat and talk on the phone, do my homework, go next door [to the neighbours], play outside, read a book, or do something from school that I might have to do like drama club or stuff like that. (Ann - The Browns)

Most of the indoor activities mentioned by Ann are in fact performed while the television screens, and it is significant that Ann does not include watching television as a distinct activity. It is, however, a reflection on how television in the afternoon is used as a background resource that family members tune in and tune out of, without it being registered as a discrete, dominant activity.

Another typical scene of the living room at this time of the day sees Sylvia (11) sitting or lying on the floor, and her older sister, Ann (14), being seated in the left corner chair. While having her homework spread on the floor around her, Sylvia's close proximity to the television screen seems to interfere more with her homework than is the case with Ann, who only occasionally glances at the set. Being together in the same room does not apparently guarantee social interaction, since Ann and Sylvia hardly exchange words. It would be pushing it too far to attribute this to the screening television because the sisters do not always attend to the screen simultaneously. Sylvia appears to be in two minds as to what to do, and the television's offering of afternoon cartoon shows seems too tempting to ignore.

The very possibility of her daughters being able to do homework while the television screens is received with a degree of astonishment by Margaret: 'we are raising children to have three-track minds at the same time!' (Margaret - The Browns). Ann, who is several years older than her sister, can keep her concentration more successfully on her homework while

the television is screening than can Sylvia. Age may well be a factor influencing the extent to which children are able to combine television viewing with several other activities. Observations obtained from the other families also point in this direction.

The afternoon's viewing patterns are extended into the evening mainly because of the fact that dinner is taken in front of the set. In other words, there is neither a temporal nor a spatial break from television. This again defines the living room as the main 'locale', the locale where familial interaction takes place in front of the television. Dinner is taken in the living room, according to Margaret, for reasons of convenience on two counts:

It is probably because this room is much more comfortable than the kitchen. It is a very small kitchen and it is also easier for me to say 'Come on kids', (well, see they are sitting in [the living room] anyway) 'I'm serving up. Hurry up Sylvia, Ann'. They come in and get their plate. Somehow it's much more pleasant. (Margaret - The Browns)

Dinner time is the first time of the day that the family as a whole sits down together for a prolonged period. The seating positions adopted at this time, with Margaret sitting on the couch, Ann sitting on the chair left of it and Sylvia sitting on a mat on the floor, continue to be taken up throughout the evening. 'We are all very habitual...we have very much our own positions in this living room in the evening' (Margaret - The Browns). Throughout the evening, Margaret comments on the television programmes, but her daughters do not respond to her interjections. As the evening progresses, however, Ann and Sylvia seek non-verbal contact with their mother, both of them at different times moving towards the couch where Margaret is sitting: 'There's a fair bit of touching, TLC...we often play tickly toes or they do my hair' (Margaret - The Browns).

Like the Browns, the Dawsons' large two-storied house also has a separate living room which during the afternoon and evening functions as a room where most family interaction takes place. As one enters this room through the door which links the living room with the hallway, the television set is situated in the far right corner with a comfortable chair on either side. At the other end of the living room and immediately next to the door - at a considerable distance from the television set - stands a three-seater couch. Right in front of the television set and between the two chairs, there is enough space to sit on the floor and watch television (see Figure 4.4, p. 91). This space is also used by the two sisters, Brenda (13) and Judith (11) to do their homework or for playing games like 'elastic twist'.

On most weekdays at noon, Joanne has her lunch in the living room after having turned on the television:

...sometimes I put it on at lunchtime; it gives me company while I'm eating my lunch. I'm not really watching, I might half listen to the [uhm] that programme Oprah something... (Joanne - The Dawsons)

She sits in the chair on the right-hand side of the television set, a viewing position she also tends to assume during the evening when the rest of her family is present. This is not the first time in the day that Joanne might have turned on the television. She normally participates in the physical exercise programme *Aerobics Oz Style* (week-days on Channel 2 at 10:40am) using the space right in front of the television set. While the observation cabinet was in her home, however, she modified her usual habit for reasons of privacy: 'I didn't want to do the exercises while your equipment was here' (Joanne - The Dawsons).

When Joanne's daughters, Brenda and Judith, return home from school, the living room activities and use of space are similar to that observed in the previous family. Seated in the chair on the left of the switched-on television, Brenda works on her homework, occasionally moving to the floor right in front of the set where her sister, Judith, tends to watch the afternoon cartoons. While Judith watches the television programmes quite attentively - even though she often is in and out of the room to see her mother in the kitchen/dining room - Brenda seems unperturbed by what is screening as she focuses almost single-mindedly on her homework or the book she is reading, even though she sits close to the television set. At reasonably regular intervals, however, Brenda glances at the set and appears to watch it for a while:

...usually I'm doing my homework. I don't really know - my eyes are sort of moving away...Just something which [uhm] might be like some exciting part on the TV, if there's some adventure film on, or something like that...You can tell by the music, can't you? (Brenda - The Dawsons)

The living room is also used for playing games; this particular week it was 'elastic twist' (as their mother pointed out: 'They have a phase of it - a couple of weeks and then they'll give it a break and then go back to doing it again' [Joanne - The Dawsons]). In order to play this game, Brenda and Judith pulled out the two chairs and attached an elastic rope which they jumped over or used for some other gymnastic activity. Taking turns, either Brenda or Judith would sit on one of the chairs and watch television. Television is thus blended in with play which, it could be argued, is permitted by the relatively large living room.

Philip and Joanne Dawson usually have their evening meal in the kitchen/dining room, but are not always joined by their children who prefer having dinner in front of the television. They do so without the full consent of their father: 'I get annoyed when the kids just grab their food and come in [the living room] and watch television' (Philip - The Dawsons).

Brenda, however, blames her father for not being very sociable during dinner time; he insists on listening to the radio and expects everybody to be quiet. Her mother, Joanne, agrees that Philip undermines his own arguments for having dinner together at the family table:

Philip likes to listen to the radio and read the paper at the same time as eating, and he can't talk to the girls as well...so it's not particularly sociable. I stay with him. I'm faithful [laughs]. (Joanne - The Dawsons)

After Joanne and Philip have attended to the dishes, they join Brenda and Judith in the living room at a time which coincides with the start of *Neighbours*. This is the first time of the day when the family as a whole is together watching television. Brenda usually sits in the chair to the left of the television whereas her mother, Joanne, occupies the right-hand chair. Judith sits on the floor in front of the television set and Philip sits on the couch, well removed from the set and in a position from which he combines watching the programme with reading in a style similar to that of Martin Cook. Philip feels that he does not manage very well in combining these activities. Citing the presence of his family and the comfort of the room as his reasons for spending the evening in the living room, there are nevertheless occasions when he forfeits the room because of the television:

I come in here because it's the only warm room in the [house] and I like to be with the others, but I would rather the television wasn't on...but if it's on [uhun] I try to work but at times I work upstairs. If I [have] something on really important and it need[s] to get finished I have to go somewhere else. I can't concentrate here... (Philip - The Dawsons)

Conversely, Joanne has brought some of her domestic work, like the ironing, into the living room because it is more pleasantly performed in front of the set: '...it's helps me to take my mind off what I'm doing - I hate ironing!' (Joanne - The Dawsons).

With everybody present but engaged in various activities, watching television can hardly be labelled a primary activity for everyone at a single point in time. Brenda, after having watched television for some time, soon turns her attention to her homework which she might also show to Philip for correction. Judith is working on her homework with a greater devotion than in the afternoon, even though she watches the television more than most of those present. If there is a programme screening that Philip wants to see, say a current affairs programme, he will move to the chair nearest to the television set while his daughters are slowly getting ready to retire for the night. Joanne usually follows soon after, preferring to read in bed rather than stay up with Philip to watch the evening news.

The third family home in this category where the television set is located in a 'separate' living room, is that of the Fields. Their living room is connected (by two wide-opening doors) with the dining room, which in turn is part of an open-plan kitchen. As one enters through the door from the hallway, the television is positioned in the left-hand corner of this living room. Almost straight across from and closest to the television set stands a two-seater couch which is complemented by a comfortable chair and a three seater situated alongside the windows at the other end of the room (see Figure 4.6, p. 99). During the daytime, the doors to the dining room are usually opened, but in the evening after the dinner dishes have been cleared away and the youngest children have gone to bed, these doors tend to be closed.

A viewing day in this family normally starts in the afternoon when the mother, Jane, has collected her two youngest daughters, Jennifer (5) and Karen (9), from school. Jennifer almost immediately moves to the two-seater where she either sits or lies, if not falling asleep, for the greater part of the afternoon, usually until dinner is being served. As her father, Trevor, describes Jennifer's viewing patterns: 'She's half asleep with her eyes open' (Trevor - The Fields). Her older sister, Karen, also spends the afternoon in the living room but she tends to sit on the floor in front of the television where she combines watching her favourite programmes with doing homework and play, such as 'colouring in things [and] making my own invention' (Karen - The Fields). During the afternoon, this position in the living room seems to be very much 'Karen's corner', as is confirmed by her mother: '...she's usually got a little pile of stuff down here...she's got some little project going most of the time (Jane - The Fields).

With the living room physically separated from the kitchen/dining room, Jane, who spends most her afternoons attending to domestic chores, feels somewhat powerless in overseeing the amount of television viewing that occurs during the afternoon:

...it's so very difficult to [uhm] actually monitor the whole time because...I tend to get busy in the kitchen getting dinner. And then you'll be interrupted by a couple of phone calls and you're sort of conscious of them in here watching television. But I think partly because, you know, they're quiet, they're occupied, they're not fighting and so you sort of think, "Oh well, yes, I'll let it get to the end of the programme, then we'll turn it off". (Jane - The Fields)

The older two daughters, Barbara and Sally Field, once they have arrived home, are only in the living room for a brief spell. They often go, after an afternoon snack, to their respective rooms where they start on their homework. On some occasions, however, Sally will bring her homework into the living room: '...when it's cold in my room I do, when [my



parents] won't let me have the heater on because of all the wooden [panelling] in my room' (Sally - The Fields). When dinner time approaches, the living room becomes more lively, as it is used as a thoroughfare between the hallway (off which the bedrooms are situated) and the dining room. Barbara and Sally soon settle themselves on the three-seater chair and there is discussion coming from all directions. This is particularly the case when Trevor Field arrives home from work. After having changed clothes, he enters the room to sit on the two-seater couch from which he watches the *One Network News* while flicking through the newspaper: 'Dad sits over there with the news and with the newspaper, sometimes [he] sits down there [three-seater couch] and looks at the news' (Jennifer - The Fields).

Trevor, rather than the television, becomes the focal point of the living room. Karen moves in between Jennifer and her father on the couch to show him something. Barbara and Sally talk about the day's happenings, attempting to draw Trevor into their discussion. The overall result is that Trevor, while following the news, has to choose where to place his attention. It seems that the announcement by Jane that dinner is ready saves him from a potential 'information overload'. As the whole family shifts to the dining room, the television is normally turned off. However, on some days it may be left on - usually for the news hour between 6:00 and 7:00pm - so that it can be heard from the dining room. Says Trevor: 'It's normally only on a week-end night or unless there is something really drastic [that has] happened on the news' (Trevor - The Fields).

But generally speaking, the break from television during dinner time and half an hour beyond coincides with a 'changing of the guard' in terms of those present in the living room during the afternoon and evening, respectively. Jennifer and Karen have made way for their parents, Jane and Trevor and for their older sisters, Barbara and Sally, who now occupy the living room. While she may also move to the floor in front of the television set, Sally usually shares the two-seater couch with her mother (busy with chores such as mending some clothes) while Trevor and Barbara sit on the three-seater couch. This disposition changes when Barbara and Sally go to bed, leaving Jane and her husband, Trevor, sitting together to watch the late evening news. Interestingly, whereas the afternoon shift tends to proceed without any clashes of viewing preferences, the evening sees some conflict in programme interests between Barbara and Sally on the one hand, and their parents on the other, with the parents giving in to their children, as the following light-hearted exchange readily shows:

Trevor: 'Last night we watched *McGyver* but next week we watch *90 Minutes*.'

Barbara, Sally and Karen: '60 not 90!'

Jane: 'But we will watch it for 90 to make up for it [laughs]. Mind you, not that much that we really miss watching, anyway.' (Trevor, Jane, Barbara, Sally and Karen - The Fields)

The evening's viewing concludes following a pattern similar to that of other families; Jane leaves for bed and Trevor, seated on the couch immediately across from the television set, remains for another half hour or so until he turns off the set.

The Howard family is the final household with a separate living room in which the television is located. Their living room is the smallest in size when compared with the other three families in this category. As one enters the living room through the door from the kitchen, the television stands in the right-hand corner where it faces two comfortable chairs at the other end of the room and a three-seater couch which is positioned on the left of the television alongside the wall (see Figure 4.8, p. 108). However, as noted previously, this is not the only television set in the Howard household; another set is located in the parent's bedroom and is predominantly used in the evening. This family is the only household in this study with more than one television set.

In terms of television time-use, the 42:00 hours that were recorded in this household were more or less concentrated between approximately 3:30 and 10:00pm daily. However, the day normally starts with Michelle (10), Lucy (8) and Peter (6) watching the breakfast cartoons. Peter invariably sits on the floor right in front of the television where he may be joined by his sisters Lucy and Michelle, who frequently move in and out of the room, returning to either sit next to Peter or to sit on the couch. As the time for school approaches, their mother (Jill) on several occasions reminds them to turn off the television. It is only after their father, Paul, makes himself heard from the kitchen that all three depart, Peter being characteristically the last to vacate the room, and leaving his mother to turn off the set.

Just before lunchtime the television is turned on again by Jill while she is doing the ironing: 'Yeah, if I'm standing there doing the ironing, I've got...my soap operas to watch' (Jill - The Howards). Jill is usually by herself because her husband dislikes this kind of television programming: '*Days of Our Lives*...I wouldn't give them the time of day' (Paul - The Howards). Instead, Paul will stay in the kitchen where he talks with Jill from a distance asking such questions as whether or not she needs something from the shops. Jill's ironing seems to be prolonged considerably because of her watching the television set.

Between 3:30 and 10:00pm, the television is continually screening to a living room which, after the children have arrived home from school, turns into a hub of activity. The spatial constraints of the relatively small living room give rise to a hectic atmosphere, where surges of conflict between the children, including friends of Michelle and Lucy, are backgrounded by the afternoon's viewing. Conflict is not so much centred on what programmes to watch, but rather on a competition for space. For instance, Peter (who of all the children present tends to concentrate more on the cartoons in the afternoon), has to not only compete with his sisters and their friends for space in front of the television but also for 'quiet space' because of the noise emanating from the girls as they play 'knucklebones'. Such scenes are complemented by Michelle and/or Lucy leaving the room to complain to their parents about Peter's behaviour, who subsequently gets reprimanded or told to go outside.

The afternoon progresses with Michelle and Lucy continuing their game of knucklebones or attending to their homework while only occasionally watching the set. According to their father (Paul), the children's homework does not suffer with the television screening:

...they have had school reports with good [grades]. But, you know, the thing is that the TV doesn't [uhm] bother them. Sec, Michelle will go up into the [living] room and she'll manage to do her homework and everything. (Paul - The Howards)

The Howards make a point of having the evening meal at the table in their kitchen: 'Not in front of the television...I don't even like the kids bringing foodstuffs [into the living room]' (Paul - The Howards). The television, however, is not turned off and during the evening meal it screens to an empty living room which is typical of the background function of television in this household.

Immediately after dinner, Paul comes into the living room and pulls out one of the chairs at the other end of room to sit quite close to the set. He is usually by himself with his children moving in and out of the room: 'You would see me there basically by myself most evenings and that's not because the camera was there. That happens all the time...' (Paul - The Howards). Jill comes into the room occasionally - often to get Paul to take his share in the supervision of the children. In between doing the dishes and getting her children ready for bed, Jill usually watches programmes like *The Flying Doctors*, *Country Practice* and *Coronation Street* from the television in her bedroom. As Jill explains, she literally makes her way to the bedroom because of the clash of television programmes preferences:

Well [Paul] wants to watch his political, [uhm] parliamentary thing, well I won't watch it because I can't stand politicians for a start...or he watches all these [uhm] documentaries about politics and all this stuff that's going on overseas...so I'll go in the other room and watch TV in the other room. (Jill - The Howards)

### *Room for television use only*

The final category of domestic spatial organisation concerns the case where a room in the family dwelling has been more or less allocated for television viewing purposes only. This is not, of course, to say that all activities are confined to television viewing but that the television would probably represent the paramount reason for being present in the room. The assignment of a room for television viewing purposes may be informed by two important considerations to do with the spatial regionalisation of domestic settings. First, a family dwelling must have enough space to accommodate whatever reasons lie behind the choice of assigning a room for television viewing purposes only. Second, on the basis of having such a 'luxury of space', television may be consigned to a perhaps less prominent room of the house because it is deemed to exert an ecological stranglehold on social interaction or activities in the other family living areas. These related aspects are discernible in the Gray household - the only family in this study with a room solely for television viewing.

The large double-storied house in which the Grays live contains large family living areas which are located downstairs. These include a spacious sitting room, a kitchen/dining room and a television room in what was once (presumably) the master bedroom. This television room is quite large, approximately the size of many of the sitting rooms of families previously discussed in this chapter. The room has the television standing on a trolley in the far right-hand corner, that is as seen from the door which connects the television room with the hallway. Diagonally across from the television set is a two-seater couch which in turn has a comfortable chair on its left towards the centre of the room. Between the television set and the couch, a couple of bean bags lie on the floor (see Figure 4.7, p. 104).

It was Mrs Gray's wish that there be a separate room in their home for television viewing purposes. A key reason was her experience in another house that the family had lived in, and where space was a constraining factor:

...at one period, about four years ago, we moved to a smaller house where we didn't have a separate television room [uhm] and...the television was in the lounge. I found that really, really difficult. I felt invaded by it - even the kids didn't watch as much television as they do now, because I didn't like it on all the time. (Cynthia - The Grays)

The youngest son, Stuart (12), is the most frequent user of the television room. Before and after school, it is Stuart who engages most in watching television which he does from one of the bean bags positioned right in front of the television set. Television, however, does not continually get his full attention, something which was clearly demonstrated during the two days Stuart was ill and the television predominantly screened in the background. Under more 'normal' circumstances, Stuart, like most children in this study, combines watching television with play or some other activity, a viewing style of which he was well aware:

[Uhm] I usually just sit in front of the heater and just watch TV and fiddle with something. I usually play with my Lego or something...If it's a really interesting programme - like I usually watch *Tour of Duty* or something like that - I really sit down and watch that pretty good, but if it's just cartoons or *Neighbours* or something I can just tune in anytime. I just muck around really. (Stuart - The Grays)

In the afternoon Stuart may be joined by a friend he has brought home from school or, somewhat later in the afternoon, he is joined by either Emily or Mary, his sisters. Mary (16), however, is in and out of the room a lot whereas Emily (15) comes in especially to watch an earlier recording of *Home and Away*, which invariably causes Stuart to leave the room. It is Emily who uses the video a great deal either for time-shifting purposes or to watch a programme in relative peace when Stuart is not present (he otherwise tends to monopolise the viewing options):

I'll tape something and while that's on I'll do something in my bedroom or whatever I've got to do and then go back and watch it later on at night. (Emily - The Grays)

The video recorder, which the family obtained a couple of years ago, has thus diminished the amount of conflict that had previously existed between Stuart and his sisters, even though Emily and Mary tend to give in to Stuart by altering their temporal viewing intentions. The video recorder, in other words, has perhaps changed the vigour with which Mary and Emily pursue an argument, since the option to record the programme and watch at a later time seems to work as a compromise.

The evening's viewing is generally characterised by solo-viewing which means that the family hardly ever watches together. Instead, there is a coming and going of individual family members who watch their favourite programme(s) before leaving the television room to be occupied by another person. Thus, Emily is usually present in the early evening to watch *Neighbours*, perhaps the only programme which is, for some time at least, watched by all three children. She is followed by Stuart who remains until 9:30pm when he goes off to bed. His place is taken over by Mary, who, while having briefly checked earlier in the evening to see what programme is screening, occupies the room for the next hour or so.

Emily spends most of the evening in her bedroom where she does her homework and listens to music. Similarly, Cynthia Gray and her partner, Doug, are almost never present. Cynthia, who by her own admission watches very little television, spends the evening in the sitting room and one can thus understand her rationale for having the television in another room. The only time she watches television with a certain degree of forward planning tends to be on Sunday nights, the programme *Mobil Masterpiece Theatre* in particular. For this purpose the television *is wheeled out to the sitting room*, thus showing the relatively flexible nature of domestic regionalisation or, in this particular example, Cynthia's discretionary judgement regarding what kind of television programmes are 'allowed' to screen in 'her' sitting room.

An unintended consequence of the spatial organisation of the Gray household is that Cynthia feels she is losing track of what her children are watching and the amount of time they spend in front of the television:

...I am not aware of when they're watching television...That is one thing because it is in a separate room. I'm not always sure when someone has gone off to their room to do some homework, or they're on the phone, because at night time I am just sitting here listening to music or I am up studying, and so I'm not as aware what's going on. (Cynthia - The Grays)

Nevertheless, Cynthia reassures herself that her children are now old enough to make up their own minds, and restricts her supervision to the kind of videos (horror movies in particular) that Stuart might be tempted to hire.

### **From the ecological to the political dimension of family television viewing**

Giddens (1984:123) mobilises the concept of 'presence-availability' to indicate that:

...the rooms of a dwelling may ensure that encounters can be sustained in different parts of the building without intruding upon one another, providing a particular symmetry, perhaps, with the routines of the day for its incumbents. But living in close proximity within the house also means, of course, high presence-availability: co-presence is very easily secured and sustained.

The eight families discussed in the previous section of this chapter illustrated how presence-availability in front of television is partly regulated by the physical layout of their homes. Furthermore, 'time-availability' also tends to curb presence in front of the television as was evident from the earlier discussion of the temporal dimension of television viewing. However, the concept of presence-availability *vis-à-vis* a screening television set needs to be further developed.

On several occasions in this chapter reference has been made to the fact that television apparently screens as a background to other activities by family members. Presence-availability with respect to this inanimate object - even though referred to as almost a member of the family (Gunter and Svennevig, 1986:4) - tends to shift remarkably, particularly during the commercial breaks. This was a constant feature of all family members participating in this study. While it would be difficult to generally characterise 'watching television' as a prolonged, sustained effort requiring full attention, the commercial breaks especially become a signal to leave the room or trigger other activity. Even though the programmes may be watched fairly attentively, the commercial breaks are used for talk and doing other things like picking up the newspaper, leaving the room for a convenience stop or to make a hot drink.

The somewhat stereotypic depiction which holds that children are predominantly passive, 'zombie-like' consumers is also undermined by the findings of this study. While the television set screened for a considerable amount of time during the period 3:00pm to 6:00pm in the case of most families with children television viewing was invariably combined with such activities as doing homework and play. Indeed, it was observed that the television programmes screening during this time were often ignored for considerable periods, commercial breaks included. However, there is a pattern wherein children in the (relatively) younger age category have more difficulty than their older peers in combining the use of television space with alternate activities. This is particularly the case when the other activity concerns school homework. While it is, of course, possible that younger children have less homework, it is also possible that older children have learned to combine television viewing with doing homework, particularly when the latter concerns mainly routine tasks which, like watching television, do not require full concentration.

The ecology of family television viewing has so far been operationalised by focusing on the temporal and spatial dimensions. The temporal dimension presented the family television time-use patterns in terms of the actual amount of hours the television was turned on - using the categories of 'light', 'moderate' and 'heavy' television time-use. The first part of the chapter showed that television time-use is highly diverse between the eight families, ranging from 18:15 hours to 42:00 hours for the lowest and highest television time-use, respectively. The second part of this chapter discussed the spatial dimension of family television viewing, thus building on the notion that the use of time necessarily denotes the use of time in a particular space. This discussion concentrated on the regionalisation of the family home using categories pertaining to the physical features of the house - that is, the 'open-plan' family living space, the 'separate' living room and, finally, the television room.

In comparing the television time-use characteristics of the eight families with the spatial characteristics of their family dwellings, it is possible to arrive at the general observation that there appears to be a relationship between the actual hours the television was turned on and the spatial layout of the family home. As emerges clearly from Table 5.3, there is a strong tendency for those families (the Cooks, Elliots and Allens) which have an open-plan living arrangement to use television considerably less than the families (the Dawsons, Fields, Browns and Howards) having a separate living room in which the television is located. Moreover, the Gray household, which has allocated a room for television viewing purposes only, separates out, as it were, the light to moderate categories of television time-use families from the heavy television time-use families.

In this light, it is possible to argue that television may surface as an *environmental contention*; that is, television screening to an open-plan living room as compared with screening to a separate television/living room has certain implications concerning the use of television for those family members seeking to use this space. While television's influence in a separate room can be confined to this specific space by, for instance, merely closing the door; in an open-plan living arrangement television's perceived dominance over other activities may be more keenly felt by family members having to share this space. The latter may thus become an important consideration in the decision process governing the rules about when and for how long television is used. It is likely that in households with open-plan living rooms television is used less because it affects more family members in the same space. However, whether this involves a significant relationship between television time-use and the familial use of space - constrained though this may be by the physical features of the family dwellings in question - it is also necessary to consider the interpersonal factors that impinge on the family television viewing context, in order to arrive at an appreciation of the 'politics of the living room'. This will be taken up in the final section of this chapter.

### **Family viewing ecology and family politics**

The television time-use patterns of the families in this study were found to be mediated by the spatial layout of the family dwelling in question. In turn, this ecological 'fact' is daily negotiated by the persons living in the households. In other words, the family ecology of television viewing has an intimate interpersonal dimension. Moreover, this may be the result - to use a political analogy - of the various strategies which, whether or not intentionally applied, regulate the distribution of power and control within families. This may all sound somewhat 'heavy-handed', particularly in light of the, albeit romantic, notion



of the family/household as a nurturing environment for human development. But having said that, the concept of family politics here specifically refers to such everyday issues as parental control/supervision and the division of labour or, to be even more precise, to the question of how age and gender factors contribute to an understanding of the family television viewing context. Indeed, as Giddens (1984:85) has argued:

...individuals are positioned within a widening range of zones, in home, workplace, neighbourhood...Positioning in the *time-space paths of day-to-day life*, for every individual, is also positioning within the 'lifecycle' or lifepath [and] it seems to be the case that *age (or age grade) and gender* are the most all-embracing criteria of attributes of social identity. [emphasis added]

Hence, the interpersonal dynamics of television viewing within the eight families, while highly diverse at one level because of the different individual personalities involved, may be most profitably analysed in terms of family role or family position, with age and gender governing the social positioning of individuals within families.

The discussion of the ecology of family television viewing in terms of the temporal and spatial dimensions has already revealed some aspects of the interpersonal dynamics. Family politics inform, to a large extent, the television time-use patterns as well as the familial use of space. The following discussion, then, will concentrate on age and gender attributes as these operate within the temporal and spatial dimensions of the eight families' television viewing contexts.

#### *Parents and their children: supervision and control of television use in time-space*

Of the eight participating families, the Allens, Cooks and Elliots recorded the lowest number of hours of television time-use. Furthermore, these three families also happen to have dwellings with an open-plan arrangement where the television screens to or can be heard in to screen to several family living areas not separated by walls. While the Allens, Cooks and Elliots have these traits in common, their actual daily negotiation of television viewing practices is quite varied. However, both similarities and differences with respect to the families' daily viewing practices come together, as it were, when issues related to age are translated to mean the parental supervision and control of television usage.

Unlike the other families, the issue of parental supervision and control did not surface in the Elliot household for the obvious reason that their children had left home. However, this in itself meant that a considerable change occurred in the family's television usage. As Oscar pointed out: 'The television is nowhere near on as much now as it was when the kids

were home' (Oscar - The Elliots). Yet, Ellen remembers that the control issue only came up when their children's television viewing habits were seen to be interfering with their schoolwork:

I think the only time when we would start to say 'Oh, don't you think you're watching TV too much' [was] when the child responsible would come home with [his/her] latest marks [laughs]. We would have to start complaining because we...would start to think, you know, that it was becoming a habit. (Ellen - The Elliots)

Neither the Allens nor the Cooks raised the issue of controlling their children's television viewing habits in light of their school performances. In the Cook household, Robert and Paula have been raised from quite an early age to regard television viewing as something of a last resort, with their parents (Martin and Janet) actively promoting, if not themselves participating in, alternative activities. The parents feel that they have been successful to the point that their children do not need to be supervised even though Martin thinks it is necessary once in a while to remind his children, Paula in particular, 'to make them think through [if] is it more important than anything else they could be doing...I think it's made its impact and I don't think they just sit boggled-eyed' (Martin - The Cooks). Thus, the parents' stance towards their children's use of television is with respect to a host of other activities and does not necessarily confine itself to schoolwork. An evening's viewing, which is the typical time of the day when Robert and Paula use television, is characterised by either of them selecting the programmes they want to watch with Martin (Janet was out most evenings) taking on a relatively low profile; his main concern is usually to get some of his work done for which he claims 'his' chair in the far corner of the sitting room.

The Allens' strategies of supervision and control regarding their children's television usage varies according to the actual time of the day. This more or less means that during the early morning and afternoon period the television will screen if Andrew (12) and Eric (6) so wish. From 7:30pm onwards, the television is off-limits for the children in part because they have to get ready for bed, but also because their father, John, feels that they have watched more than enough during the day. This type of time management of their children's viewing hours has also to do with what programmes tend to be screening during the evening, thus bringing up the issue of censorship which was explained by John as follows:

There are rules but we don't have them listed and pinned at the wall. Obviously, there are programmes that we don't let the kids watch...but we make those judgements at the time. Anyway, after [7:30pm] the television is turned off...Alice puts Eric to bed and I start doing the dishes. (John - The Allens)

However, the relative freedom accorded the children during the day comes at a cost, especially for Alice who feels that she has to give in where her children's television viewing habits are concerned. This occurs particularly after school when the sitting room becomes the children's routine 'space'. At these times, because the screening television also makes its presence felt in the adjoining room, the habits of the children may prevent their mother (Alice) from getting on with her university studies or hobbies like listening to music. This example clearly demonstrates the way in which the ecology meets the politics of the family television viewing context.

The relationship of the ecology and politics of family television viewing can be further illustrated by drawing on the notion of television as a source of *environmental contention*. Particularly in those households where the television is part of an open-plan living arrangement, the television's presence is perhaps more acutely felt because it screens to a larger part of the house than just the one 'room'. The issue of control, furthermore, not only translates itself into the time-management of children's viewing habits but also into the management and allocation of family space. This argument can be further extended when looking at the remaining families in this study where the television is situated in a separate room.

In the four households where the television is located in a separate living room (the Browns, Dawsons, Fields and Howards), the daily enactment of parental control and supervision strategies tended to be less immediate than in the Allen and Cook families. The fact that the living room is physically separated from the other family living areas also means that the children using the television tend to be 'separated' from immediate parental control since the parent(s) may not be present in the room for considerable periods. However, while parental concerns and subsequent strategies employed may be quite diverse, the actual 'outcomes' as measured by the extent of television usage by children are not too incongruous. This also applies to the Gray household where the television set is located in a room used for television viewing purposes only.

The Grays' allocation of a separate room for television viewing was the direct result of the prior experiences of the mother, Cynthia, who considered that in their previous homes the television set had tended to monopolise family activity in the living room. Thus, when the family first moved into their present large home, the television set was placed in another space away from the main sitting room. But, as was noted earlier, this decision also meant that Cynthia relinquished some control, in that she was no longer able to fully monitor the television viewing practices of her children. However, she did not think that the parental

control issue was as urgent as it used to be when her children were younger. Apart from a relatively strict reign on violent 'horror' movies, for which Stuart had displayed a special interest, the overall attitude tended to be that Mary, Emily and Stuart were old enough to decide for themselves.

In the Brown household, Ann and Sylvia spend the greater part of the afternoon in the living room with the television screening. While usually at home, their mother, Margaret, hardly came in the room while her daughters used the television in combination with doing homework. Generally speaking, apart from excessively violent programmes, the issue of parental control did not surface in this family: 'I don't have many rules, I'm not very strict when it comes to TV...I'm quite slack when it comes to TV' (Margaret - The Browns). Alternatively, the use of television during the evening raises questions of who will be watching what, with Margaret usually giving in to her daughters' viewing preferences:

I concede a lot to these kids. I really would like to watch the News each night but I haven't watched in ages. I always have a feeling that I am lacking and sacrificing, and I tend not to put up a fight because they tend to automatically turn on to *Happy Days* and *Neighbours*. I would really like to watch the News [but] I don't get to watch it and it annoys me yet I don't do anything about it. But that's the only time I really feel irked by it. (Margaret - The Browns)

A similar picture emerges from the Dawson family. Like Ann and Sylvia Brown, Brenda and Judith Dawson turn on the television set as soon as they arrive home from school. Even though the parents have at intervals attempted to curtail the amount of television viewing hours ('...last year I thought they were watching too much, so for a week or two we had a limit of three hours a day' [Philip - The Dawsons]), when considered overall these interventions are quite isolated, mainly because Brenda's and Judith's school performance did not seem to be suffering:

...lately they seem to get on with their homework well and get very good marks for their homework and they do that while they're watching the television set...so we're not too worried. (Philip - The Dawsons)

With respect to controlling the screening of specific programme content, Philip and Joanne followed the so-called 'Adult-Only' criterion even though they recognised these guidelines may be somewhat ambiguous:

They're a bit border-line, aren't they, being thirteen and eleven - sometimes the classification is a little bit wrong but generally we say "Off to bed", if it's, I mean, could be, unsuitable. (Joanne - The Dawsons)

The Fields are in the somewhat unique position of having quite a gap between the ages of their two eldest daughters, Barbara (15) and Sally (13), and their younger sisters, Karen (9) and Jennifer (5). With respect to the monitoring of their children's viewing habits, it could be said that this was reflected in the differential treatment Barbara and Sally received in the past as compared with the present level of supervision that Karen and Jennifer experience, which is not unlike that for the children in the other families. It seems that the issue of parental control in this family had eased up considerably over the years, a point brought home (not without sour grapes) by Barbara and Sally who were apparently subjected to a relatively strict television viewing diet. This is not to say that control had altogether withered but that the issue of enforcement had become problematic: 'I'm not happy about the amount of television that they watch, but I find it very difficult to monitor' (Jane - The Fields). Jane was aware of the fact that the television sometimes acts as a 'babysitter'.

The issue of parental control in the Howard family tended to express itself in terms of conflict management. With the television screening almost constantly when the children were at home, control of the viewing hours was often associated with a minor crisis in the family's interpersonal relationships. It usually involved a challenge to parental authority followed by a reassertion of that authority after a relatively protracted struggle that saw Jill, the mother, dishing out several warnings - most of which were ignored by her children - until the father, Paul, intervened to support his spouse. Such exchanges occurred in the early morning when the children were asked to get ready for school and during the afternoon and evening when the television screened to a background of domestic 'strife', with the parents disagreeing about the supervision of their children, who were either in front of or away from the television. There was definitely a sense of frustration on Paul's behalf, something he believed was compounded by his physical handicap which prevented him from moving freely through the house:

...the thing is that people have got an impression of me being disabled. They usually think...oh, your children will be wonderful. I'm telling you they're not that wonderful and they get away with more than other kids would, I guess...A lot of screaming goes on in here - it isn't that we don't love the kids, it's just that if I didn't scream I couldn't get the frustration out...that's what it is. (Paul - The Howards)

Evaluating the strategies for control and supervision of children's television viewing practices within the eight families, it is possible to detect a disparity between parental attitudes regarding the 'desirability' of monitoring the amount of time children spend in front of the television set on the one hand and, on the other, the actual enforcement of the rules that regulate this monitoring. Justifications for this were readily provided; as long as television viewing did not interfere with schoolwork this disparity did not become a pressing

concern. Moreover, the parents were on the whole aware of the fact that their children were not 'glued to the box' but instead combined the use of television with such activities as doing homework or play.

Furthermore, the actual monitoring of children's television 'viewing' time in front of the television set was perceived as quite difficult to maintain on a daily basis. One reason for this may lie in the extent to which television viewing is integrated into everyday family life; that is, to the point that daily television viewing habits tend to go unnoticed. At least for the children, turning on the television set as soon they arrive home from school is part of a taken-for-granted reality. Parents may have certain misgivings about this routine - especially when they feel it somehow encroaches on their daily routines - but they very rarely challenge their children's habits.

The control and supervision of their children's television viewing practices constitute different and relatively conflicting experiences for mothers and fathers, respectively. For instance, in those households where during the day mothers have to share family space with their children, the television often screens for the sake of keeping the children contented - the mother 'giving in' to her children's appeals. Fathers, on the other hand, are more likely to assert their viewing preferences over those of their children, or are the prime movers in deciding whether or not the set should be screening in the first place. These and other issues related to gender relations within family television viewing contexts are discussed below.

### *Fathers and mothers: gender relations and television*

Perhaps one of the most outstanding findings that has emerged from this study is the relative absence of wives/mothers from the room in which the television screens. Compared with their immediate peers, the wives/mothers across all eight families spent the least amount of time in front of the television. This finding also implies that women/mothers tend to occupy an alternate space in the house, usually away from the immediate vicinity of the television set. The relative absence from television, therefore, seems to run like a thread through the women's experiences of family life. However, this experiences of women is not the outcome of an unadulterated 'biological' effect, but can be more fruitfully explained as relating to their position within the family or household. To illustrate and explain the position of wives/mothers, the focus of the analysis will be placed upon the related notions of the (gendered) division of labour and (female) participation in the work force.

One reason that may explain the relative absence of women in the television room is the extent to which they are involved in the labour force. In the case of two families, the Cooks and the Elliots, both spouses held full-time jobs. In another three families (the Dawsons, Grays and Fields), the mothers were in part-time employment with their husbands/partners working full-time. In the remaining three families (the Allens, Browns and Howards) the mothers were not in paid employment as such, though Alice Allen and Margaret Brown (the latter a single-parent) were pursuing university studies. In the Allen and Howard households, furthermore, the husband/father was not in full-time employment either.

As we have seen in the discussion on the temporal dimension, the occupational involvement of family members is a key factor in terms of the time available for television viewing. However, as Morley (1986:146) has pointed out, gender relations in front of the television set are themselves extensions of domestic social relations, in which men tend to perceive the family home as a site of leisure whereas for women the home is a sphere of work. Taking this benchmark to the eight families of this study, the following comments can be made.

The gender contrast drawn by Morley with respect to the television viewing habits of men and women is applicable to most of the families. However, the distinction of the family home as either a 'site of leisure' or a 'site of work' is to a large extent mediated by whether men and women perceive television viewing as a worthwhile leisure pursuit. While the pressures of a full- or part-time job in combination with domestic responsibilities are an important factor with respect to time-availability for watching television, the latter is also affected by preferences for alternative forms of leisure. Janet Cook is a case in point:

Sometimes during the week...if I know a particular film is coming on and I've heard about it...I would like to see it, say on a Wednesday evening. But very often when Wednesday evening comes, I feel it's a waste of time to sit down there and have two hours of film so I'll do something else... (Janet - The Cooks)

Apart from hinting at a 'puritanical' sense of guilt (with which adults in this study generally associated watching television), the comment depicting television viewing as a 'waste of time' was characteristic of women. For women, watching television is definitely something to be done as a last resort, and this should be seen in the context of their professional and domestic roles which leave little leisure time after all tasks have been completed. Watching television, then, appears to be a relatively low priority because other forms of leisure (such as reading and listening to music) may take precedence in the available time that remains.

However, a family's spatial organisation around the television set affects the extent to which alternative forms of leisure are possible. Mothers typically surrender the domestic space to their husbands or children whose television viewing practices tend to dominate family activity. Whereas both Alice Allen and Cynthia Gray preferred other activities over watching television, Alice Allen was far more constrained in what she could do - the television screened in the room adjoining where she would spend the evening - so she had to take the relatively drastic action of retiring to her bedroom in order to be able to read and listen to music in peace. Cynthia Gray, on the other hand, spends the evenings in her living room from which the television set has been purposefully removed.

While during the day-time women are normally absent from the living/television room, those who share the living room with their family in the evening combined watching television with activities such as sewing, knitting or ironing. Even though their husbands were sometimes also observed to be engaged in domestic activities (assisting their children with their homework, folding away washing, knitting and spinning), women tended to have a far looser relationship with television. Moreover, combining domestic chores with watching television was 'necessary labour' for women, whereas for men doing domestic chores in front of the television set tended to be complementary and was often accomplished during commercial breaks when full attention to the television screen was deemed unnecessary anyway.

In most families, conflict between the spouses about television programming was hardly acknowledged or observed to occur. One reason for this, of course, was that because the wife/mother was typically absent from the vicinity of the television, she was not present to have conflict with. Aside from this (somewhat moot) point, conflict about television programme choice tended to be among siblings, or between children and their fathers. The Howards were perhaps the family in which the gender factor with respect to television programme choice operated most rigidly. Paul and Jill Howard had rather opposing television programme preferences as a result of which Jill relinquished the television set in the living room, and moved to the set in her bedroom instead. The issue of power and control over programme choice came to the fore in this family most acutely, even though it seemed to be relatively easily resolved with Jill, apparently quite happy, watching 'her' favourite television drama programmes in the bedroom.

Another outstanding example of the different viewing habits of men and women occurs in the form of solo-viewing by all husbands, particularly after 9:30-10:00pm. If one takes the temporal dimension of television viewing into consideration, men are (so to speak) the 'third



shift' of the viewing day (the first shift being the young children during the day; the second shift referring to older children and parent[s] during the evening). After the living room has been dominated by children in the afternoon, then by the family as a whole, fathers in the later part of the evening seem to want to reclaim some solitary space for themselves. Interestingly, some men during this period of the evening moved themselves right in front of the television set, rather like their children did during the day. Furthermore, since men are the last to retire, this solo viewing may also be part of their perceived role of having to secure the family home for the night - not only checking whether the lights are turned off and the doors are locked but also catching the last news programme, perhaps to ascertain whether something has occurred that may affect 'their' families. It almost seems that once fathers have reassured themselves that the surrounding world - domestic and external - is 'safe', they too can go to bed.

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the temporal and spatial dimensions of family television viewing so as to arrive at an *ecological* appreciation of the family television viewing context. Throughout this discussion reference was made to the interpersonal or *political* dimension of the family ecology of television usage. The political dimension demonstrated the daily negotiation of the ecological context and the joint analysis of the ecological and political dimensions has facilitated a more in-depth understanding of the family television viewing context.

The analysis of television viewing practices in terms of family ecology and family politics has shown how these are embedded in and shape everyday family life worlds. Therefore, the ways in which families use television are not necessarily the outcome of family viewing styles *per se* (see Lull, 1980a), but in a broader sense reflect the ways in which families go about their everyday routines. Since the very notion of family viewing styles subsumes explicit strategies (and, of course, a certain degree of intentionality in the manner that these strategies are devised and implemented), it may create the impression that family television practices are somehow divorced from other family practices rather than being comprehensively enmeshed in the everyday routines of family members.

Television is so thoroughly integrated into everyday family life that it has almost become indistinguishable from the daily cycle of family members waking up, going to and coming from school/work, having dinner and retiring at night. This is not to say that families' (or, rather, parents') attitudes towards the use of television do not vary, but to translate these into

categories or typologies of viewing styles is to set television viewing apart from the overall family context in which the medium is used. Care must be taken to avoid bland generalisations which do not capture the complexities and dynamics of each family viewing context, however different these may be.

It is thus more profitable to highlight the collective individual television viewing styles and experiences across families. Here the emphasis is on individuals situated within families, and this collective experience enables the comparison of individual viewing styles between different families. From the findings presented in this chapter it is possible to extract distinct parallels in the spatio-temporal, or *ecological*, use of television as well as in the interpersonal, or *political*, use of television within the eight family contexts. More pertinently, these parallels also reveal that one is not dealing with isolated events but that the ecology and politics of family television viewing are intimately linked with the different viewing experiences of diverse families.

The presentation in this chapter of the ecological and political traits of the eight families' television routines demonstrated a remarkable degree of agreement between comparable groups of individuals. Family position, as judged by the criteria of age and gender, is a persistent feature in evaluating the spatio-temporal use of television. Likewise, family position also informs the politics of the living room with regard to the everyday use of television. While patterns of family television time-use (as measured by the number of hours the television set was turned on) vary greatly, family members across the eight households display consistencies according to which group is occupying the living room at different times of the viewing day in a series of *shifts*. The early morning shift is occupied by the youngest members of the family; during lunch time mothers may have a quick glance at the set; the afternoon shift is characterised by the presence of the youngest members again (admittedly joined by one or more older brothers and sisters who pay considerably less attention to the set); dinner time and the period into the early evening is when the family watches television together; and, finally, the late evening shift is typified by fathers who are usually watching by themselves.

The use of time denotes the use of time in space, thus linking the temporal dimension with the spatial dimension. With respect to the use of television, the spatial organisation of the home may not only influence the number of hours the television set is turned on (see Table 5.3), but is also salient in evaluating the seating allocations in front of the television set. The conception of television as a source of *environmental contention* was employed to provide an explanation of why the medium was used less in households with an open-plan

living arrangement as compared with households with a separate television/living room. In particular, it was suggested that in open-plan areas television's perceived dominance over other family activity may be more acutely experienced than in separate living rooms. The extent of supervision over children's viewing practices was also mediated by the spatial layout of the family dwelling; children using television in a separate television/living room were more likely to escape the immediate attention of their parent(s) who, particularly during the day-time, were elsewhere in the house.

The above example already indicates that the ecological dimension extends into the interpersonal and political dimension of family television viewing. This can be further demonstrated by pointing to the allocation of viewing spaces in the room where the television normally screens. In most cases, the television occupied a focal point around which the seating furniture was arranged - in other words, the family/living room functioned as a television room with the set positioned so as to signify that the family considered its use as a major family activity. There were two exceptions. The Cooks' small 14" set on a movable trolley was tucked away in a corner of the living room and only pulled out from the wall when required. The low profile of the small set is symbolic of the low prominence accorded television viewing in this family. The Gray household's decision to have the set removed from their main family living area represents the second variation. This decision catered mainly to the wishes of Mrs Gray (Cynthia), who described herself as a very selective television user, a description confirmed by the fact that she was rarely present in the television room.

With respect to the allocation of family members' viewing spaces around the television set, the comment can be made that these were relatively fixed. This is not to deny the fluidity of everyday television viewing practices - coming in and going out of the room, a feature easily seen by 'fast-forwarding' through the videotaped observations - but family members do seem inclined to settle for particular seating arrangements as a matter of routine. Children tend to occupy the space immediately in front of the television set, which appears to suit their habit of combining television viewing with homework and play. Teenagers can either be found on the floor or on chairs at a comfortable viewing distance from the set. Fathers, generally, sit at a considerable distance from the set where they also divide their attention between the screen and another activity such as reading. However, when a programme draws their interest and undivided attention, they move closer to the screen, usurping the more prominent viewing positions which their children may have to vacate. Mothers (if present at all), are usually with the family as a whole during the early evening but later in the evening seek the company of their spouses, positioning themselves in close proximity to their husbands. The evening invariably concludes with men standing the 'last watch' alone. They now have moved right in front of the screen, and they occupy positions similar

to those of their youngest children in the morning and afternoon.

The politics of the living room, then, are embodied in both the temporal and spatial dimensions. Behind the ecological presence of television lies a political reality, while the political practices of family television viewing routines are concretised in the ecological organisation of the family home. One outcome of the internal political organisation of families is the gendered division of labour. This aspect of structural inequality has an immediate impact on how family position circumscribes the divergent experiences of men and women in front of the box. For men, the domestic sphere is typically a site of leisure whereas for women the home is a site of work. Whether or not women combine a full-time or part-time job with housework, their absence from the family/television room can be largely explained by the position and 'duties' of women in the family. In particular, their daily involvement in domestic tasks prevents women from participating fully in this family event of television viewing, and their efforts towards maintaining social harmony in the family often marginalise their own viewing preferences.

## CHAPTER SIX

### TELEVISION TEXTS AND TELEVISION CONTEXTS

#### The Consumption of Television Texts in Family Viewing Contexts

##### Introduction

In her paper delivered to the inaugural International Television Studies Conference, Ang (1985) refers to the text-context problematic, emphasising that the analysis of the text needs to be combined with an analysis of its social conditions of existence. The works of Morley (1980) and Brunsdon (1981) were listed by Ang as examples of research empirically operationalising Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model which initially underpinned the conceptualisation of the problematic. However, this 'new credo' in television studies, according to Ang (1985:251-252), also has its limitations:

The encoding/decoding model can be said to have a quite narrow view of the role of the audience: its effectivity is limited to negotiations open to viewers within a given range of significations made possible by a text or genres of texts. Moreover, this model's very conception of the audience tends to be a limited one. For this research model, the sole problem is the way in which texts which are received/decoded are embedded in a general practice of television viewing.

In other words, the meaning of television viewing as a social practice needs to be taken into account, combined with the realisation that such differences are related to 'the structuring of television discourse, with its heterogeneity of representations and modes of address' (Ang, 1985:252).

Chapter One argued the case that *television viewing as a social practice* can be best understood when it is conceptualised as an everyday family activity (also see Chapter Two). Chapters Four and Five operationalised this understanding through the discussion of daily viewing routines of the eight families that participated in this study. Whereas Chapter Four was organised around the presentation of the eight families' typical viewing day, Chapter Five extended the analysis of everyday family television practices to include the contextual features of the domestic use of television. The main contextual features were identified as the *ecology* and *politics* of family television viewing processes. The in-depth analysis of these family contexts facilitated an understanding of the ways in which families or individual family members use television as part of their daily routines.

It is the aim of this chapter to 'match' different television texts (or programmes) to the actual family contexts in which these are consumed. While the overall concern of the family viewing context will be maintained, this chapter will also analyse the extent to which television texts may act as *repositories of meaning* for family members. In other words, the question under investigation is whether the characteristics of 'discrete' television texts can explain the various ways in which family members use television within the domestic context. While the analysis so far has focused on the domestic context of television viewing, an explicit concern for the textuality of television is needed, if only for the reason that family members have different television programme preferences, preferences which are guided by certain expectations about television texts. However, the viewers' expectations cannot be isolated from the viewers' context. The family context plays an important role for the television text being actually realised as meaning. Yet, the television text is a crucial part of the television viewing context and in this capacity alone warrants consideration.

So as to provide a possible avenue for the resolution of the problems raised by Ang (1985), this chapter will examine the text-context relationship, by analysing eight family television viewing contexts in the light of different television programmes. Fiske's (1989a) recommendation of seeing this relationship as constituting 'moments of television' has been an inspiration. His suggestion will be followed up by outlining examples of the interaction of the television text and context - in other words, it will focus on aspects of the text-context problematic using excerpts of family viewing episodes.

### **Genre and audience expectation**

According to Willemsen (1983:1), genre theory emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s as an elaboration of a theory of the cinema which sought to displace the dominant notion that the 'taste of a few educated amateurs with refined sensibilities constitutes the touchstone of film appreciation.' 'Genre' had often been cloaked under the pejorative notion of 'formula'. The term was in turn used as a 'magic' word by the 'taste establishment' to support their allegation that 'popular' cinema was a mass-produced factory product devoid of 'personality' (Willemsen, 1983:2). 'Genre' was thus seen as a source of audience pleasure and entertainment, in contrast to the auteur theorists for whom genre was simply a vehicle for the expression of individuality. This renewed interest in genre also arose as a result of broader developments in film theory which recognised the impact of semiology and discourse analysis on contemporary writing about the cinema.

It was Neale (1983) who first seriously explored the notion of genre in terms of its theoretical foundations, and pointed out both the complexities and limitations of the concept as a means of film criticism. Of particular interest to the function of genre in television is Neale's claim that genre acts as a process of expectation on the part of the audience that becomes a source of both meaning and pleasure. Here, the systematic repetition and difference that is part of a genre provides the basis upon which viewers derive pleasure and *jouissance*. It is this regularised variety of both form and content which allows for recognition and meaning and thus constitutes the basis of *audience expectation*.

Audience expectation, however, does not operate in a social vacuum, and as such is not divorced from the wider social reality in which audiences come to attach meaning to or derive pleasure from cultural forms like television or film. For instance, in his postscript to the *Nationwide* study, Morley (1981) suggests that television genres may form the basis of pleasure through their connection with the distribution of cultural competencies within audiences, thereby allowing the latter to 'read' particular generic forms effortlessly. The notion of cultural competence has its origins in the work of Bourdieu (1984) who explains cultural preferences in terms of cultural capital - the lived experiences, beliefs and values of social groups with educational background being an important variable. Audience expectation is thus regulated by the cultural competencies of consumers who differentially learn to 'appreciate' television genres, be they 'highbrow' or soap opera.

Perceptions about audience expectation within the television industry, like the film industry, also serve an important economic function as a means of producing profit. Economic factors operate to exert a pressure to perpetuate those particular genre forms which are financially successful, rather than the creation of new ones. Television genre, therefore, relies heavily on an assumption of audience interpretability as a basis for predicting audience popularity. In this way television genre functions to limit differences, as Feuer (1987:119) has stated:

From the television industry's point of view, unlimited originality of programming would be a disaster because it could not assure the delivery of the weekly audience, as do the episodic series and continuing serial.

Feuer (1987:119-120) describes television genre in terms of the aesthetic, the ritual, and the ideological approaches. The *aesthetic* component defines genre in terms of the opportunities it provides for artistic expression and creative endeavour and thus has some connection with auteur theory. The *ritual* approach considers genre as a cultural exchange between industry and audiences in which shared beliefs and values are negotiated in the interests of social

stability and adaptation. The *ideological* approach involves perceiving genre as an instrument of social control in the reproduction of political structures serving dominant interests. Through an historical account of the television sitcom, Feuer (1987:120-132) maintains that this particular genre has changed and evolved because of the television industry's conception of the changed social climate in which its audiences are consuming its products. However, the content rather than the actual format of the sitcom changed to adapt to these perceived changes in the broader socio-cultural environment.

Thus the television genre, it might be said, is more susceptible to influences which have their origin in the broader socio-cultural experiences of audiences (and the subsequent attempts of the television networks to respond to these cultural experiences), rather than any self-conscious attempt to evolve toward a more perfect form, as is perhaps the case in film. At the same time, it is apparent that genres in television are not as clearly differentiated from each other as they are in film. For example, the cop show may combine with aspects of the soap opera as in *Hill Street Blues*, and the sitcom may contain elements of realist drama as in *The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd*. Likewise *Twin Peaks* has been referred to as 'soap noir'. In television, therefore, the notion of genre comprises a more flexible and fluid concept within which expectations and conventions are maintained that depend to some degree upon the cultural competencies of audiences. Furthermore, 'watching television' may not necessarily denote watching a discrete television programme but can also be understood in a broader, if not generic, sense. To this effect, the discussion initiated by Williams (1974) on televisual flow begs some further attention.

### **From genre to television and contextual flow**

While it is possible to differentiate television programmes in terms of their genre characteristics, television as a broadcast medium displays generic qualities which operate across quite different programmes. Thus, although television genres are evident in quite distinctive programme types, it is clear that this is not the principal basis of television's coherence. Some theorists have maintained that rather than constituting discrete texts, television programmes blend together via the property of flow. It has been suggested that this constitutes the unit of television's coherence, rather than genre or the particular television programme. Williams (1974) gave the term 'flow' to the capacity of television to preserve a distinctive mode of presentation which imposes a common overarching sequence upon otherwise discrete programme units. This essentially positions the viewer as 'watching an evening's television', rather than discrete programmes such as the soap opera, sitcom, quiz game, or the news.



For the most part, television programmes have in common a segmentation, a particular narrative structure, a set of professional practices, codes, conventions, a programme format, and advertising breaks, all of which preserve a continuous flow overlaying individual programmes. As Feuer (1987:131) suggests, this serves to blend one programme unit into another, interrupted only by advertisements and programme trailers. Indeed, these very interruptions can themselves be considered contributions to the common features which all programmes share, and thus become part of the televisual flow.

Brunsdon (1989:118) perceives the notion of flow as an attempt to theorise how to grasp the continuousness of television and thereby integrate the experience of viewing into the analysis of the television text. She points to the tendency of many critics of television viewing (with regard to children's viewing, for example) to be primarily concerned with watching television, rather than with particular programmes. According to Brunsdon (1989:118):

Particularly for those concerned with children and adolescent viewers, watching television is often *per se* a bad thing, and thus program differentiation is of limited interest.

The difficulties of establishing how viewers engage with television are compounded by the privacy of television usage, yet the critical analysis of the television text is often based on the assumption of a particular form of engagement by the viewer, usually a sustained, continuous, and disciplined viewing of a specific programme. Undoubtedly, television viewers at times do choose to watch specific programmes, but it is also clear television may be turned on for a variety of other purposes - to see what is on, for company, or as background. Furthermore, as Morley (1990:7) has pointed out, 'having the set on is, for many people, simply an index of "being at home": they don't necessarily have any intention of watching it.' Likewise, television viewing practices may be episodic, interrupted, casual and generally lacking in attentive concentration. The viewing practices of family members during the commercial breaks serve as a cogent reminder of the various modes of viewing within the 'erratic' family viewing context.

Yet for all this, audiences are nevertheless 'inscribed' in the text and in forms of appeal as in particular genres such as *Blind Date* and *Sale of the Century*, or in specific modes of address such as may occur in news and current affairs. Furthermore, television programmes are also scheduled with particular audiences in mind, thus serving the economic imperatives of commercial broadcasting of delivering demographically segmented audience clusters to the advertisers. In this sense, viewers' expectations about particular television texts are

thought to be economically 'inscribed' by the television industry's expectations that television texts will attract *the* audience which, in this commodified mutation, becomes the source of financial revenue for commercial broadcasting.

Brunsdon (1989:122) further reiterates the point that viewers watch television in extremely heterogeneous ways - they watch alone, with other family members, with friends and with strangers. The everyday routines of television viewing practices lie at the heart of this heterogeneity of television viewing experiences (see Chapter One; Ellis, 1982; and Silverstone, 1990). Furthermore, Brunsdon (1989:122) argues that the notion of televisual flow is made less harmonious by practices such as channel switching, and thus it needs to be supplemented by an account of the way the audience is 'present-for-the-text'. In other words, the need to specify the viewing context - and the modes of viewing within that context - is significant, for this may determine more than any other factor, how the text is experienced by viewers. Accordingly, textual analysis, while a central part of television criticism, does not necessarily constitute the text as recognised by viewers. Not only do the television texts present themselves in different forms from the film text through the property of television flow, but the latter difference is further accentuated by the domestic *contextual flow* in which television is normally consumed. The domestic mode of consumption is thus markedly different from the 'spectorial' mode of consumption in which films are viewed in the cinema.

Fiske (1989a:59) abandons the traditional notion of the television text in favour of what he calls 'textuality' since, rather than delivering programmes, what television delivers is a 'semiotic' experience characterised by its openness and polysemy:

Television is not quite a do-it-yourself meaning kit but neither is it a box of ready-made meanings for sale. Although it works within cultural determinations, it also offers freedoms and the power to evade, modify, or challenge these limitations and controls.

For Fiske, even though television audiences may use a shared discursive repertoire, television provides adequate space for viewers to make different meanings from the same text which operates in a rather similar way to that which people employ when making sense of their social experience. He points to the various ways Australian children make sense of *Prisoner* and *Sale of the Century*, according to their experiences of school as an institution (Fiske, 1989a:58). Thus Fiske (1989a:63) describes television as a 'producerly text' in which audiences may write and 'read-write' the text by bringing to bear a variety of discursive competencies.

However, while the notion of 'flow' is a useful means of stressing television's lack of textual boundaries, it does not, according to Fiske (1989a:63), sufficiently acknowledge the fragmentation, discontinuity and contradiction which tend to dominate televisual experience. To this effect, Fiske prefers Ellis' (1982) notion of segmentation. The degree to which television genre may influence the meaning which viewers derive from a programme is, therefore, likely to be less significant than the overall 'cultural economy' (Fiske, 1989:62) within which the audiences' activities are situated.

The issue remains, however, as to the nature of the influence which the viewing context and modes of viewing may have on this process of making meaning and deriving pleasure from the text. Fiske (1989b:143), for example, refers to many women viewers of *Charlie's Angels* watching the programme selectively, concentrating their attention on the representations of strong assertive women detectives and avoiding the patriarchal closure at the end of the episode. Likewise, Altman (1986) describes some viewers watching *Dallas* behaving as if the programme is akin to a menu from which they select a meal that they consume. As Fiske (1989b:145) maintains, 'popular texts must offer not just a plurality of meanings, but a plurality of ways of reading, of modes of consumption.' Ang (1982) also found much the same sort of processes at work with women viewers of *Dallas*. She found that they could 'lose' themselves in the programme, because it afforded different points of contact for a variety of imaginations. Even though the text of *Dallas* had a specific structure, the pleasure which viewers acquired was not solely the result of the television text, but derived from a 'specific subject-position' (Ang, 1985:83), which in turn is the result of the habitual practice of television viewing and as such is part of a broader cultural environment.

The following discussion will be concerned with exploring how both the text (or programme) and the context (the family viewing environment) interact with each other. In doing so, this chapter concurs with Fiske's (1989a:74) call for further research in the text-context problematic:

What is needed is the investigation of instances that are no more and no less typical than other instances. And the emphasis should be not on what people do, not on what their social behaviour is, but on how they make sense of it. Their recorded words and behaviours are not data giving us their reactions and meanings, but instances of the sense-making process that we call culture, clues of how this process works and can be actualized.

Thus, in what follows, the analysis of family viewing practices will be expanded to consider how television programmes (television as text) reflect the family viewing context. This analysis will thus attempt to chart the 'rhetorical relations between television texts and

readers in specific temporal and spatial contexts' (Moore, 1990:24). To address these empirical concerns, a brief textual analysis of eight television programmes will be combined with the analysis of the family viewing contexts.

### **Family television viewing episodes.**

The selection of the eight family viewing episodes below was primarily guided by the desirability of having a relatively broad range of television genres to compare. However, this selection of television genre in particular family settings was constrained by the range of television programme types that each of the eight families watched. The selected family viewing episodes can nevertheless be considered to be 'no more and no less typical' (Fiske, 1989:74) than other family viewing episodes. In other words, the selected viewing episodes are typical for the family in question, in the sense that the family brought its own specific family viewing context to the television text. Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasised that family viewing contexts are very fluid and amenable to change, so that viewing processes may and do vary from those described in the family viewing episodes that follow. As Fiske (1989:57) has pointed out:

Any one viewer...may at different times be a different viewing subject, as constituted by his or her social determinants, as different social alliances may be mobilized for different moments of viewing.

With these arguments in mind, the following television programmes have been chosen: *Sale of the Century* - a daily half hour quiz show; *Blind Date* - a daily half hour dating game show; *Foreign Correspondent* - a weekly one hour documentary and current affairs show; *Neighbours* - a daily one hour 'soap opera'; *One Network News* - a daily half hour news programme; *One World of Sport: Nissan Rugby Special* - a weekend afternoon sport show, which in this particular example screened a 1990 rugby test match between New Zealand and Scotland; *Who's the Boss?* - a weekly half hour domestic situation comedy; and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* - a daily half hour children's cartoon programme. Furthermore, inserted within the programmes are commercial breaks and programme trailers. These insertions add another textual dimension to the family viewing context; for instance, the commercial breaks often provide the excuse for movement or flow in the viewing context.

### *The Allens watching Sale of the Century*

*Sale of the Century* screens five times a week, Monday to Friday, at 7:00pm on TV One. The programme belongs to the populist quiz/game show genre and employs a number of separate discourses associated with education, capitalism, gambling and sex (Bassett, 1989:31-38). The analysis of the text reveals an educational discourse which focuses on the immediate material rewards to be obtained as a result of educational achievement and possession of the requisite cultural capital. Economic advantage is interpreted as the result of educational success, in this case by knowing the correct answers to questions posed by the quiz/schoolmaster. 'Right' answers are ultimately rewarded with prizes of various consumer items and, at times, hard cash as well. In this way consumerism is linked to educational achievement.

In a capitalist society material success is also said to be symbolically connected with sexual potency - as such sexual energy and the possession of material goods are equated (see Bassett, 1989; Davies, 1984 and Fiske, 1984). In *Sale of the Century*, this sexual discourse is represented by the glamorous models who display the consumer items and drape themselves over cars and boats. As Conrad (1982:107) suggests, sexual desire is transposed into desire for consumer products. However, it is the educational discourse which dominates the show and reconstructs an 'examination experience' under the constraints of time. The positive value of education is transferred to the economic domain in forms which further legitimate the less acceptable elements of avarice and self-interest associated with capitalism. At the same time, a meritocratic ideology is reinforced through the elements of luck and chance which are woven into the show (Tulloch, 1976).

The Allens (John [F], Alice [M], Andrew [12], Eric [6] and their student-boarder, Carol) have usually finished their meal during *One Network News* and *Holmes*, the latter a 'personality-driven' current affairs show. During this news hour, the Allens normally have dinner in front of the television and this 'dinner time' thus represents one of the few instances that the family watches television together. *Sale of the Century* immediately follows the news hour and is often the final programme the children get to see during a typical viewing day. As such, this programme functions as a kind of temporal boundary between children's and adults' viewing hours, a boundary which is reinforced by the television usually being turned off at the conclusion of the programme.

When *Sale of the Century* begins and the contestants are being introduced, John, Andrew and Carol, occupying the seats which are placed in a half-circle around the television set, are engaged in conversation while Eric, the youngest son, lies on the floor in front of the set waving his feet in the air. Alice, the mother, is not in the living room at the time. The mother's absence from the immediate vicinity of the television is characteristic of this family - indeed of most families in this study - as is the relatively fixed seating arrangement which, for instance, sees the father occupying the most prominent chair.

While still in the introductory part of the programme, John and Carol leave the room carrying the empty dinner plates with them. Carol returns with an apple and sits down in the chair she previously occupied while John talks to his oldest son, Andrew. Meanwhile Eric has left the room and Andrew stands on his chair and walks over the furniture to John's chair via the coffee table. Eric returns to the room with an apple and moves to the chair previously occupied by his brother. When John returns, he finds his chair occupied by Andrew. A short exchange - similar to 'musical chairs' - takes place, before Andrew moves to another seat while John re-occupies his chair. Eric loses his seat to Andrew and has to return to the floor where he settles down right in front of the television set. These activities (such as carrying away plates and restoring the 'natural' seating order) are an indication of the contextual flow in which the family 'gets ready' to watch the programme. Even though *Sale of the Century* has started, the introduction by the programme's hosts is more or less ignored, almost as if this part of the programme is not worth watching and that the real pleasure lies in the competitive question-and-answer section.

By this time the introductions have been completed on the programme and the family attend to the screen as the first questions are asked of the contestants. All the family members attempt to answer these questions in a friendly and competitive manner. John does not answer all the questions but when he does respond he is usually first, quickly followed by his son Andrew. Eric and Carol tend to watch quietly while it is Andrew and his father who compete to give the correct answer. During this sequence of questioning-and-answering, Andrew on a few occasions gets the better of John and throws his arms up in the air with Carol stating 'Only two, so far!' There is some irony in the fact - unnoticed by any of those present in the room - that John rapidly answers a particular question at the same time as the quiz master cautions the studio audience not to think aloud. Except for Eric, who is lounging on the floor, the others have a concentrated gaze almost as if they were in the contestant's chair themselves.

When soon after Eric comments on one of the 'sales' offered in the programme by saying: 'We don't need a video...we've already got one', his father, John, replies 'You can always get another one'. This comment is followed through by Carol who suggests: 'In a few years when you have done lots and lots of study, and you're on this programme, you might be able to win it'. Andrew communicates to John that if 'Dad' were to go on the programme, he would easily win it. John, however, does not respond to this challenge. Another prize-giving causes some hilarity, initiated by Andrew who bursts out laughing, when a male contestant wins a year's subscription to a 'homemaker' magazine. The somewhat wry and embarrassing smile of the male contestant seems to add to the hilarity fed by sex-role stereotypes: 'What is *he* going to do with it?', wonders Andrew rhetorically.

As the quiz master reads out the 'homeviewer's question', Andrew shouts 'What a pathetic question!' Both John and Carol smile. Apparently fancying that he is being addressed as a 'homeviewer', Andrew feels that the rigour of competition has been compromised by a 'soft' question. The 'homeviewer's question' is but one example of how quiz shows produce active, participatory viewers (see Fiske, 1987:272-273). With a certain sense of anticipation that he is being positioned as an 'active' homeviewer, Andrew is visibly disappointed by the rather weak challenge offered to him. When the commercial break appears on screen, everybody stays in the room but John picks up a magazine from the floor and starts reading. The commercial break thus affects the viewing context; for some family members, John in particular, the textual 'break' from the programme is reflected in a break from television in general which may last some minutes into the resumption of the next segment of the programme.

*Sale of the Century* resumes with Andrew and John attempting to answer the questions. For once, both fail to give the right answer. John combines this activity with reading a magazine and Andrew and Carol are chatting with each other while watching. John involves himself again in the quiz more fully, giving an early answer while Andrew keeps on guessing. The commercial break commences with Eric humming along with the tune of a commercial. Another commercial featuring New Zealand equestrian hero Mark Todd, draws a comment from Andrew: 'He's broke...he's bankrupt!' to which John retorts: 'So you keep on telling us, Andrew'. Eric tells the others that the horse is doing all the work anyway. Another ad makes John wonder what they are advertising. 'Chicken, of course', says Andrew. Eric starts to sing loudly with the jingle of this commercial and Andrew joins him laughingly. The commercial break frees up the attention to the programme for some interpersonal

exchanges, even though some of them are directly television-related. Eric, who had been virtually excluded from participating during the quiz, now takes on a more assertive role, either commenting on some of the commercials or singing along with their jingles.

When the programme resumes, Eric is still quite excited, but is told to shut up by Andrew as he is concentrating on answering the questions. Eric cheers when the winner emerges from *Sale of the Century*, while Andrew claims that another contestant ought to have won it. As the programme comes to a close - the successful candidate being led by the host into the prize gallery - John picks up his magazine again. Shortly afterwards, he responds to a question from Carol. Everybody ignores what's on the screen and the television set is turned off with the remote control before *Sale of the Century* has finished.

It is interesting that when the question-and-answer part of the show is finished, the television set is switched off, thus missing the winner's introduction to the various prizes to be won. In many ways it is similar to the family's behaviour during the introductory part of the programme. It would seem that the primary determinant of pleasure for this family on this occasion is the competition during the question-and-answer portions of the programme. It could be argued that the programme itself is a large advertisement. Commercial products, with their company names, are mentioned or displayed throughout the show which culminates when the winning contestant goes 'shopping' for the various consumer prizes. In many ways, then, the response of this family at this point (turning the programme off), corresponds to the way in which the family generally 'watches', or rather avoids 'watching', the commercials by either leaving the room, reading a magazine or turning off the sound of the television set.

A number of other aspects of the text of the programme were confirmed during the family's viewing of this show. The competitive aspect of the programme was clearly the source of excitement and pleasure for at least Andrew and his father, both of whom competed not only with the contestants on the show but with each other as well. The programme's underlying premise that knowledge and correct answers are potentially a source of power and status was clearly assimilated by the family. For example, the link between educational credentials and consumerism was expressed during the programme when Carol said to Eric: 'In a few years when you have done lots and lots of study, and you're on this programme, you might be able to win it [a video recorder]'. Likewise, Andrew says, that if, 'Dad [John, a PhD candidate] were to go on the programme he would easily win'.



For John, the text of *Sale of the Century* also mediated his reception of the programme when he watched it with his family. During the family interview, he mentioned that he frequently knew all the answers but avoided always speaking them aloud for fear of interfering with the pleasure of other family members. The family viewing context was therefore obviously a factor in deciding how individual family members engaged with the programme. But it was also clear that to some degree they had accepted the ideological premise that right answers were a means to economic success. It could thus be argued that the programme assisted in the socialisation to (or transmission of) values which, conforming to a meritocratic discourse, would reflect the importance in which education is generally regarded in this family. To that affect, the references made to the youngest child, Eric, were less than subtle attempts to convince Eric of the benefits of study. This aspect of socialisation might come particularly to the fore in families with children, with the television text providing a 'menu' from which specific child-rearing strategies can be highlighted.

As in the wider society, the programme suggests that one's educational attainment can be legitimately employed to further one's economic advantage and that success in such quiz shows is a product of both talent and luck. As Fiske (1984:8) maintains: 'The shows are symbolic re-enactments of the examination system, only here the rewards of success are immediate, not deferred'. Thus in a capitalist society, quiz shows like *Sale of the Century*, are said to symbolically represent the role of education, which is regarded as a commodity for obtaining material rewards in the marketplace. To this effect, the comments of the individual family members reflected their acceptance of the underlying premise which drives the show. Moreover, this meritocratic premise also drives the family context; the process of making sense of *Sale of the Century* is thus grounded in the way education is regarded as a means to get ahead, not only in quiz shows but in life generally.

### *The Browns watching Blind Date*

*Blind Date* is primarily a question-and-answer game show centering around the choice of a dating partner. The show is constructed around a discourse of gender relationships, romantic love and sexuality. Essentially, the programme involves a single man or woman asking questions of an unseen trio of the opposite sex and thereby choosing a partner for a weekend at a romantic location. The show also contains a section where previous winners are 'interviewed' about their experiences on the date and how successful the 'match' was.

Textual analysis of this and similar programmes has concentrated upon elaborating the patriarchal definition of dating behaviour and heterosexual relationships which dominate the programme. The *risqué* nature of the questions and answers and the playful self-exposure of contestant attitudes, values and behaviour provide viewers with an opportunity for both 'voyeuristic pleasure' and a fantasy engagement with romantic love (Bassett, 1990a:30). The programme has also been analysed in terms of an ideology which oscillates between a reactionary sexism and a progressive representation of gender relations in which women are represented as equal in the process of choosing partners, and sex is defined as an 'equal' source of pleasure for both males and females (Turner, 1989). The show similarly contains important structural ambiguities, as evocations of romantic love compete with the spectacle of failure and embarrassment.

*Blind Date* has also been understood in terms of sexuality and patriarchal control (see Bassett, 1990a; Fiske, 1990). From this viewpoint, the programme is seen as providing invitations for 'tactical resistances to the social control of sexuality for both genders' (Fiske, 1990:83). There are additional images of commodity consumption associated with winning not only a partner of the opposite sex, but also the 'prize' of a weekend at a romantic location. Furthermore, the segment in which previous winning couples give accounts of their weekend together has been described in terms of Foucault's notion of the 'confessional' (Bassett, 1990a:36). However, the most prominent features of the programme are undoubtedly the theme of romantic love and the meaning of romance within the structure of the dominant sexual discourses.

During the monitoring of the television viewing habits of the Browns (Margaret [M], Ann [14] and Sylvia [11]), *Blind Date* screened Monday to Friday at 5:30pm on Channel 2. In the course of their participation in the study, the Brown family watched *Blind Date* on three of the five days. *Blind Date* on this particular occasion begins with Sylvia doing homework on the floor of the living room. As the male host of the programme appears on screen, Ann comes into the room and sits down in a comfortable chair in the far left corner. The players in the dating game are introduced and Ann watches attentively, placing her legs on the arm of the couch next to her chair. Sylvia only occasionally watches the introduction to the programme; her attention is mainly on her homework.

From the kitchen, Margaret calls out 'Come and get it' and Ann responds immediately by leaving the room. Margaret calls out for Sylvia who responds with 'Hang on', apparently now not wanting to miss anything on the show *Blind Date*. Ann returns to her previous spot and sits in a similar position with a plate of food on her lap. She has her dinner while

watching the programme. Margaret enters the room with her dinner and sits down (partially out of view) on a low chair in the far right corner. For a while it is fairly quiet with Margaret and Ann having their meal and watching the programme. Sylvia has collected her plate and sits down on the couch, situated in the centre of the room. Ann, after having turned up the volume with the remote control, moves with her plate and sits on the floor right in front of the television set. Today *Blind Date* has a male celebrity guest (an actor from a popular British television series) and Margaret asks 'Who's that?' Sylvia responds 'He's from *The Bill*' (a British police drama series).

All are engrossed, their eyes moving between their food and the television set. The question and answer sessions for the contestants in the programme draw comments and hilarity, particularly from Margaret who initiates much of the verbal interaction. The hilarity is a result of the answers given by the female contestants which contain sexual puns and the double meanings of the word 'bill'. ('He'll pay the bill, of course...good advertising for the programme [*The Bill*]', quips Margaret.) 'I'm impressed', says Margaret cynically of one of the female contestant's answers. Margaret and Ann laugh but Sylvia seeks further clarification of what has been said on the programme with Margaret providing some explanation: 'He'll have to keep his long baton [i.e. his penis] away...meaning she's keen'. Most of Margaret's interjections are not followed up by either Ann or Sylvia. When the programme comes to the point where the male contestant has to choose a blind date, Ann leaves the room briefly to get a glass of milk. Margaret and Sylvia comment on the deliberations of the male contestant: 'Three!', says Sylvia to which Margaret replies 'He's seduced by her husky voice'. When the male contestant has made a decision, Margaret says of a candidate who was not selected 'He likes her!', to which Sylvia responds, talking about the woman who was selected, 'She is so short!' 'Horrible dress is that', says Margaret as the contestants kiss. While Ann is quiet throughout this exchange, the comments of Margaret and Sylvia seem to indicate 'taste' or 'preferences' in terms of appearance and human interactions.

Margaret leaves the room with her plate and returns with a second helping. She sits down in the comfortable chair in the far left corner. The commercial break has started. Ann stands up and takes her plate to the kitchen, and is almost immediately followed by Margaret and Sylvia. Ann returns first and sits down in the comfortable chair. A few seconds later, Sylvia enters the room and sits herself down in the same position on the couch. Both watch the commercials fairly indifferently, lounging about in their respective seats. Margaret comes into the room, queries why Ann has taken her previous seat but then moves to the floor leaning back against the couch while lighting a cigarette.

*Blind Date* resumes, featuring the 'confessional', where former successful contestants relate their experiences of the date. This is watched attentively by all, with relatively few comments being thrown in, apart from those by Margaret such as 'He's good-looking' or 'She does not like him!' When the male contestant says that the date was a 'zero' on a ten point scale, Margaret interjects, turning her face to Ann and Sylvia, 'She's seething...Imagine [being told] on national television that your date was a zero'. There is, again, no response from her daughters.

As the commercial break comes on, the phone rings and Margaret asks 'Who's going?' Ann responds and walks out of the room. Sylvia shifts from the couch to the floor and, for a while, lies next to Margaret who briefly strokes her daughter's hair. Sylvia complains about a pain in her leg, to which Margaret says: 'Growing pains...if it gets too bad, I'll give you a Disprin.' Sylvia moves over towards her homework and Margaret announces she is going to do the dishes. Before leaving the room, however, she talks about the homework, crawls over to where Sylvia is working on her geography project and assists her with the spelling of geographical names. During this episode, both have ignored the commercials.

The programme *Blind Date* has appeared again after the commercials, but Margaret asks Sylvia to turn down the volume, not knowing how to operate the remote control herself. Sylvia turns off the volume completely and works on her homework with Margaret's assistance. A few minutes later, Margaret attends to the dishes and Sylvia turns on the volume as *Blind Date* is about to finish. Sylvia leaves and the programme's credits appear on screen with nobody in the room.

It is apparent from the responses and comments of this family that the programme is viewed in terms of many of the textual features which it contains. The sexual innuendoes are accepted as a 'normal' part of the show and the *risqué* nature of the questions and answers are likewise a source of humour and entertainment. Similarly, the predominantly patriarchal gender relationships which dominate the programme are acknowledged, at least by Margaret, in comments concerning the confessional aspect of the show. It is the 'semiotic excess' of such programmes which, according to Hartley (1983), creates space for a 'leakage of ambiguity' from the dominant social and political positions which the programme may contain. On the one hand this family, by their interaction, appear to accept the conventional definition of gender relations which the programme represents, yet on the other hand there is also an unwillingness to subscribe to aspects of the same patriarchal definition represented by the confessional segment. Turner (1989:29) suggests that the ambiguity of television dating games is their chief attraction:

The reason for this is that in ambiguity and contradiction we may find richness rather than confusion, a proliferation of possible meanings, a gradation of social/ideological positions and thus of possible uses to which audiences may choose to put a television text.

In this case, the ambiguity is between the show's invocation of romantic love and the spectacle of failure and embarrassment with which it competes when (as frequently occurs) the two contestants fail to 'find romance'. Turner (1989:30) further points out that such programmes, therefore, subvert and parody the romantic game format which they represent; since the apparent goal of uniting couples with a view to marriage is so seldom achieved, it has little to do with the programme's popularity. In the case of this family, it is the mother who draws attention to those aspects of the programme that contain elements of resistance. As a single parent and a student familiar with feminist ideals and views, Margaret takes responsibility for ensuring her two daughters are aware of the patriarchal messages of the programme, particularly in those instances during the show where she believes women are given a 'raw deal' by men.

In this sense, the particular social relationships which exist within this family influence the meaning and mode of viewing by which the programme is understood. In the subsequent interview Margaret revealed that she 'tended to be aware of a lot of rubbish that is on' and, therefore, felt obliged to comment during the programmes as a form of 'compensation because they watch so many hours...' Sylvia and Ann responded by claiming that they 'just wanted to be quiet and watch'. However, it was clear from this interaction that, as a parent, Margaret felt a responsibility to ensure that her daughters did not simply fall victim to the specific values which the programme exhibited. Since the two girls were inclined to attend closely to the screen, and spoke relatively little throughout the programme, their mother may also have sought to make public some of their otherwise private reactions to the show.

The family's interaction among themselves as they negotiate the text should also be seen in the context of the family having dinner together in front of the television. This daily routine, as Margaret pointed out, becomes something of a family event in which television is an important ingredient:

When we are sitting down here [in the living room], we've got nice food...and the kids are all here, it's a windy night, got the heater and telly on, it's a special time for us to sit down here.

Notwithstanding the fact that the definition of 'a special time' might differ insofar as her teenage daughters are concerned, it is likely that *Blind Date*'s text of heterosexual relations and sexuality would be a sensitive and self-conscious area which Ann and Sylvia would prefer to keep to themselves. Hence, they have their own quiet and attentive mode of

viewing, in contrast to the interactive behaviour of their mother and her attempts to provoke them into discussion. Nevertheless, the sexual discourse which the programme embodies is simultaneously a source of considerable humour for the family. Within this ambiguity, the dominant patriarchal definition of gender relations was thus not always challenged.

### *The Cooks watching Foreign Correspondent*

*Foreign Correspondent* is one of TV One's main current affairs shows which, during 1990, screened on Thursday nights at 8:30pm. As the title of this programme indicates, it focuses mainly on overseas news and current affairs usually relying on satellite feeds from English-speaking countries such as the United States, Great Britain and Australia. The night that *Foreign Correspondent* was screening to the Cook household, the programme was entirely filled with an Australian documentary from the *Four Corners* team on the topic of 'race relations' in New Zealand. This particular programming decision by TV One's *Foreign Correspondent* editor(s) should be seen in the context of it being 1990 - the year in which New Zealand celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of Waitangi. This Treaty was initially signed on 6 February 1840 by the representative of the British Government, Captain William Hobson, and 43 Maori chiefs. The Treaty has three articles: in the English version, the first article says that the Maori chiefs cede their sovereignty to the English Queen; the second article promises Maori the 'full exclusive and undisturbed possession of their Lands and Estates Forests Fisheries and other properties'; and the third article conferred to Maori the rights and privileges of British subjects (see Owens, 1981:52; Orange, 1987; Kawharu, 1989:316-321). During the 1970s and 1980s, the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi was increasingly asserted by Maori, a process which culminated in Government's official and legislative definition of New Zealand as a bicultural society. The Government also instigated the hearing and examination of Maori grievances by the Waitangi Tribunal on such issues as land ownership and fishery resources (see Kawharu, 1989).

With its focus on the Treaty, this particular episode of *Foreign Correspondent* could be categorised as a television documentary, a format which Williamson (1988:89) has defined as follows:

...an assemblage of materials - ideas, topics, data, interpretations, and other texts including films and tapes - which do not necessarily originate with, or fit neatly under the control of, those individuals who make the program.

The text of the *Four Corners* documentary on 'race relations' in New Zealand reveals this 'assemblage of materials' by combining interviews with socially prominent New Zealanders (such as public office holders, politicians and Maori leaders) with historical footage of significant events in New Zealand since European contact. The voice-over narration is one of historical and contemporary explication, constructed with predominantly Australian audiences in mind, and this gives it the impression of being an 'unbiased' outsider's view. The documentary conventions which, according to Fiske (1987:30), operate on the assumption that 'the camera has happened upon a piece of unpremeditated reality which it shows to us objectively and truthfully', are also identifiable in this programme.

The 'authoritative' narrative discourse, furthermore, has a definite neutralising effect which, intentionally or otherwise, tends to diffuse the complexity of the issues under investigation. In doing so, the programme rather specifically positions viewers in an already controversial discourse of 'race relations' in New Zealand because the programme's outsider claim to 'fairness' - as reflected in the programme's narrative discourse - attempts to bring about an 'informative' and sympathetic understanding for the issues presented. One can, however, only speculate about the different ways in which the programme may have been received by New Zealand and Australian audiences respectively. While such generalisations may not be appropriate in the absolute sense, ethnic and or national backgrounds do, of course, impinge on the immediate family viewing context.

For the Cooks (Martin [F], Janet [M], Robert [17] and Paula [13]), a programme like *Foreign Correspondent* would generally be deemed to be 'good television'. In a family that is very selective in its use of television, *Foreign Correspondent* represents the type of programme that the Cooks make a point of watching. As Robert, who in this particular viewing episode was the most 'involved', stated in the family interview: '...if it's a reasonable programme, something like *Foreign Correspondent*...I'll watch it' (Robert - The Cooks). For the Cooks generally, 'good television' is represented by programmes such as *Mobil Masterpiece Theatre* in the case of Janet, and for Martin and Robert this tends to include documentaries, British (situation) comedy and sport.

Just before *Foreign Correspondent* is due to screen, Paula and her father, Martin, are present in the living room. *The Comedy Company* screens on Channel 2. Martin sits in the far right corner chair doing some university work, most of which is spread out on the coffee table directly in front of him. Paula sits on the two-seater couch. When *The Comedy Company* has finished and Channel 2's *News Break* comes on screen she stands up, asking her father 'Do you want the TV off', to which he responds 'Yes, please'. Paula walks towards the set

and turns it off before leaving the room. While brief, this 'moment of television' is not insignificant for it reflects the Cooks' viewing context particularly well. After all, television in this family tends to be used on a programme-by-programme basis, Martin not allowing the television to merely screen as background: 'I certainly detest having the television on when nobody is watching it, and when it's just there as part of the background' (Martin - The Cooks). Paula's behaviour suggests that she is aware of this; having finished with television for the day, she turns off the set after checking with her father.

Only a few moments later, however, Robert enters the room and turns on the set. *Tour of Duty* is screening on Channel 2. Robert briefly leaves the room, but when he returns he switches to TV One's *Foreign Correspondent*. Now seated on the couch, Robert operates the remote control to once again flick back to Channel 2's *Tour of Duty* as well as checking out TV 3's *Midnight Caller* before, finally, settling with *Foreign Correspondent*. This programme screens a Waitangi Day speech (February 6, 1990) by the then Prime Minister of New Zealand, Sir Geoffrey Palmer. 'Boring', says Robert and this comment causes Martin to briefly look up to the screen. At this stage it is not clear whether Robert's comment refers to the overall subject-matter of the programme or the Prime Minister who was known for his lack of personal charisma. However, for the first five minutes *Foreign Correspondent* has Robert's undivided attention after which he temporarily leaves the room to make a hot drink, having asked Martin whether he would like one too. Martin declines, somewhat absent-mindedly, while he concentrates on his work, more or less ignoring the programme.

Meanwhile, the first commercial break within the programme has started. When Robert returns with a hot drink, he immediately switches to Channel 2's *Tour of Duty*, then to TV 3's *Midnight Caller*. He switches back to TV One, but as the commercial break is still in progress, he returns to *Midnight Caller*. A third attempt to switch to TV One proves well-timed because *Foreign Correspondent* has resumed. From the couch Robert proceeds to watch the programme attentively, while Martin is called out of the room by Paula to assist her with the piano. As he sips from his cup, Robert, now the only person present, watches the programme silently for a period of about seven minutes after which he switches to TV 3's *Midnight Caller*. At this point in time, Martin is still out of the room. Robert switches back to TV One where a commercial break has started - so it is briefly back to *Midnight Caller* then Channel 2's *Tour of Duty*. When a commercial break also interrupts this programme, Robert checks with TV One to see whether *Foreign Correspondent* has resumed. This not being the case, he flicks through the other two channels ending up with *Midnight Caller*. He remains with this programme for about one minute.



With respect to Robert's constant switching of channels, his earlier utterance of 'Boring' becomes more meaningful, especially when it is taken to refer to the public figures being interviewed in the *Four Corners* documentary. While some of the 'zapping' is employed to avoid commercial breaks, Robert also seems to switch channels when there is a 'talking head', usually that of a prominent New Zealander, featuring in the programme. On the other hand, he shows considerably more interest when the programme deals with broader historical themes, often accompanied with old footage. In other words, Robert seems to filter the programme according to what he may consider to be 'informative'. As such, the statements of politicians and other public figures fall outside this category. This dominant mode of viewing is maintained by Robert throughout the programme.

As his mother, Janet, comes home from the secondary school where she teaches, Robert greets her at the same time as he switches back to TV One. For a brief moment, he watches a Cathay Pacific advertisement, but this activity is overtaken by a conversation with his mother about her involvement with school play rehearsals. Meanwhile, although *Foreign Correspondent* has resumed, Janet (sitting on the floor in front of the fire place) and Robert continue their conversation. When Janet stands up and leaves the room, Robert switches momentarily to *Tour of Duty* before returning to *Foreign Correspondent* which he watches attentively for the next five minutes or so. During this period, Robert is alone in the living room. Initially he switches back for about thirty seconds to *Tour of Duty*, but ends up with *Foreign Correspondent* which he then follows quite closely until the commercials come on screen. Paula briefly enters the room asking Robert 'Where's Mum?', but leaves before her brother has a chance to reply. While Robert watches *Foreign Correspondent*, Paula and Janet return to the room before moving to the kitchen area where (out of view from the camera) they talk amidst a sound of dishes being cleared away. It is not a coincidence that Janet, having arrived home from extra-curricula activities at her school, attends to domestic chores almost immediately. Like most mothers in this study, her loose relationship with television can in part be explained by the call of domestic responsibilities.

As soon as the commercial break comes on screen again, Robert switches to *Tour of Duty*. This programme, however, is also interrupted by a commercial break headed by a programme trailer for the *Sunday Premiere Movie: Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*. Robert watches this trailer attentively and is joined in the room by Martin whose interest is also briefly aroused. After greeting Janet by asking how her evening was, Martin sits down in 'his' chair and (while browsing through some papers) starts a conversation with Janet who is in the kitchen area. While this is going on, Robert switches back to TV One where a commercial break is in progress. The next three commercials are quite attentively

watched by Robert, one of which, concerning a music compilation featuring Engelbert Humperdinck, amuses Robert who asks his father 'Do you want him, Dad...Engelbert Humperdinck?' 'Oh, no', says Martin, 'I'm not an Engelbert fan'. Robert jokes 'What a name!' This particular viewing episode is clearly characterised by 'visual flow' rather than 'genre' viewing.

While Martin has once again turned his attention to his work, the television continues to screen *Foreign Correspondent*. Martin's inattention to this documentary reflects what he considers his normal 'viewing' pattern:

I rarely just sit and watch. I'm either reading a newspaper or I read a book or do some work. And in fact when I think about it...the times we had a [foreign language] video, I got quite frustrated *because you had to sit and watch the screen because of the sub-titles...* (Martin - The Cooks)

Robert's apparent interest and attention to this programme has somewhat diminished as he has turned his eyes away from the screen. From the kitchen area, Janet asks whether Martin and Robert want a hot cross-bun. Both accept Janet's offer. During this exchange, Robert has briefly switched to *Tour of Duty* after which he resumes watching *Foreign Correspondent* with more attention until the next commercial break. Martin, however, completely ignores the programme, and instead looks over some papers and occasionally exchanges some comments with Janet and Paula. Janet brings in the coffee with the buns, sits down in the far left corner chair across from Martin and both talk about her experiences with the school play. Robert joins this discussion but when the phone rings he leaves to answer it. The latter occurs while the ads are screening. As the ads are about to finish, Robert returns and announces that his father is wanted on the phone. As Martin stands up, Janet collects the newspaper from the floor and starts reading it.

When *Foreign Correspondent* resumes with Martin out of the room, Robert sighs to Janet 'It's boring, *Foreign Correspondent*...it's all about the Treaty of Waitangi'. Janet, turning her face towards the screen, merely says 'Is it?' Then both watch the programme quietly for a while but Janet's attention returns to the newspaper. When a scene appears in which a Black Power gang performs a haka, Robert says somewhat cynically 'You'd love this, Mum'. Janet only responds with an absent-minded 'What?', as she flicks through the newspaper. Janet's indifference to *Foreign Correspondent* may be explained by the fact that this programme is not really her cup of tea - 'I'm sort of vaguely interested in that programme', Janet stated in the family interview.

When Martin returns, he continues his previous discussion with Janet about her involvement with the school play. Even though he had stated that the programme was 'boring', Robert continues to watch *Foreign Correspondent* attentively while his parents talk. A couple of minutes before the conclusion of the programme, however, it seems that Robert has given up. He stands and, while placing the remote control on the coffee table, announces that he is going to bed. The television continues but Janet and Martin are both fully engaged in their discussion and do not attend closely to the programme. When *Foreign Correspondent* concludes, Martin turns off the television with the remote control whilst talking to Janet.

Various elements of the family ecology of television viewing within the Cook household surface in this episode. Particular television time-use habits are evident in that this family uses television on a programme-by-programme basis. This is not only illustrated by Paula's question to Martin as to whether or not he would like the television off after she had watched *The Comedy Company*, but also by Martin turning off the set at the conclusion of *Foreign Correspondent* only to turn it on again an hour later to watch the late evening news. Furthermore, the spatial organisation and use of the living room enables Martin to do some work while Robert is 'watching' *Foreign Correspondent*.

Robert's reception of the programme is restless and fragmented. Throughout this viewing episode, he switches channels in part to avoid commercial breaks. This 'zapping' may also be explained by the fact that he is not terribly interested in the programme. Robert twice openly admits to being bored, first near the beginning and the second time some three-quarters of the way through the programme in a brief comment to his mother. This in itself is a significant moment as it says something about the text meeting a broader political context. As mentioned earlier, this Australian documentary screened to New Zealand audiences in a year when New Zealand celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of Waitangi. Robert's boredom with the programme could thus possibly be explained by a sense of *déjà vu*, given that the Treaty of Waitangi had been a regular feature of television programming, if not public discussion generally. However, while other viewing options presented themselves in such programmes as *Tour of Duty* and *Midnight Caller*, Robert nevertheless persisted with *Foreign Correspondent*. Perhaps it was a case of self-censorship with Robert acting on knowledge of his father's aversion to the children watching television 'rubbish'.

On a more specific level, Robert's statement concerning a scene in which a Black Power 'gang' performed a haka could be interpreted as bringing out a certain degree of ethnic prejudice. However, this interpretation needs to be qualified given that this footage (with

the editorial assistance of 'extreme close-ups') tends to emphasise a 'threatening' aspect of the gang. Trivialisation through humour could be a response to the actual way in which the Black Power group was portrayed. This contrasts with another viewing episode (both of television text and viewing context), where the All Blacks were performing a haka and the Fields displayed a different, more enthusiastic, reception (see later in this chapter).

There are several key themes which are thus presented. The Cook family viewing episode shows that family members consume television programmes with ostensibly 'low' levels of involvement. However, by interpreting the family context, a greater level of understanding can be gained of what are seemingly individual viewing experiences. While the analysis of the television text does not adequately explain apparent boredom with, and lack of involvement with, television programmes, the latter are part of the everyday reality of the family viewing context (see Morley, 1981). Moreover, viewers' expectations of what 'good television' exemplifies - and *Foreign Correspondent* falls in that category according to Martin and his son, Robert - do not guarantee viewers' attention to television genres. Instead, television offers a visual flow of images in which *Foreign Correspondent* is perhaps the preferred programme, but the latter screens to an otherwise indifferent family context.

### *The Dawsons watching Neighbours*

*Neighbours* screens on Channel 2 from Monday to Friday between 6:30 and 7:30pm. Produced by Grundy Television, it is part of an Australian 'soapie' tradition that, according to Moran (1989:13), 'has mostly been concerned with the home and the family'. With its overall narrative featuring domestic themes and tribulations, *Neighbours* lends itself to categorisation as a 'soap opera', which Glaessner (1990:118) defines as follows:

Commonly soap operas feature multiple and interlocking narratives, some of which may be shortlived, while others go on for months or even years. Ultimate narrative closure is indefinitely postponed - in this sense soap opera is open-ended as opposed to the characteristic closed narrative form of situation comedy.

The particular structure of narrative continuity attracted Brenda, the eldest daughter in the Dawson household, who preferred to watch and really get involved with events and characters over a longer time period:

...if you just watch something [like a single episode] you don't know what's happening, so you don't know if it's very interesting, but if you keep on watching it then you start getting into it more and you know what's going on and you find it more interesting. (Brenda - The Dawsons)

*Neighbours*, furthermore, is somewhat different from the average daytime soap opera in that it attempts to address a younger audience (Glaessner, 1990:123). In this respect it is also part of a broader trend observed by Neale (1990:61) who speaks of a 'juvenalisation' of (television) genres with the advent of a teenage culture. The latter is, of course, reflected in the early evening scheduling of the programme as compared with day time soaps such as *Days of Our Lives*. In this study, moreover, three of the eight participating families watched *Neighbours* on a regular basis, and in these families female teenagers invariably made up the greater part of those following the programme with a certain degree of consistency.

In the case of the Dawson family (Philip [F], Joanne [M], Brenda [13] and Judith [11]), watching *Neighbours* was part of a set daily family routine, which more or less occurred when the family had finished their evening meal and cleared away the dishes. As Joanne, the mother, mentions:

We've usually just finished the dishes and things...I sort of come in here to have a sit down, have my coffee and *Neighbours* is on. I do quite like *Neighbours* but it doesn't worry me if I [have] missed it... (Joanne - The Dawsons)

This particular viewing episode concerns a Tuesday night. As *Neighbours* is about to start, Joanne, Brenda and Judith are present in the living room. Joanne sits on the three-seater couch and reads the newspaper. Brenda sits in the chair on the left of the television set with some of her homework on her lap whereas her sister, Judith, is seated in the chair on the television's right. Judith hums and sings along with one of Channel 2's promotional jingles and with the *Neighbours*' soundtrack when the programme comes on screen. There is a short exchange between Brenda and Judith on the whereabouts of Philip, their father, with Judith stating: 'He usually comes to watch *Neighbours*...' The first minutes of the programme are only watched by Judith who lounges comfortably in the chair. Joanne reads the newspaper and Brenda's attention appears to be on her homework; she is vigorously using an eraser on a piece of paper. When she has finished, her eyes turn to the screen for a brief moment after which she proceeds to write. Joanne continues to read the newspaper virtually ignoring what is screening on the set.

While Judith watches *Neighbours* attentively, Brenda tends to divide her attention between her homework and the television programme. Approximately six minutes into the programme, Philip enters the room and Brenda - referring to her homework - asks: 'Daddy, have a look at this!' Philip responds by moving towards her and a brief discussion between them ensues about the homework. Philip then moves towards the couch, handing Joanne

a piece of paper. Judith stands up and leaves the room. Philip sits down on the couch next to Joanne and starts to read a magazine. Brenda tells her father that he should fix one of her school utensils. With Judith still out of the room, nobody appears to pay any attention to the programme screening on the television.

When the commercial break comes on, Judith returns to the room and resumes her previous viewing position. In fact, Judith is the only person who pays attention to the ads. Brenda is rather involved with her homework, whereas Philip and Joanne discuss the contents of the piece of paper that Philip had previously given to her. When *Neighbours* resumes, the programme still only attracts Judith's attention which is briefly suspended when she moves in front of the fireplace and starts flicking through a newspaper. She drags the newspaper over the floor to her seat and, while looking through it for a minute or so, returns to watching *Neighbours*. When the programme shows a scene of domestic strife with the characters arguing a lot, Joanne (now looking over the newspaper she is reading) asks 'What's going on, Judith?' Her daughter mumbles something which comes close to meaning that she does not know. Joanne returns to reading the newspaper while Philip and Brenda continue their respective activities without having been distracted by Joanne's and Judith's brief exchange. Brenda, however, does occasionally glance at the set but only for brief instances as her main attention is focused on her homework.

This viewing episode continues with a programme trailer for *All The Rivers Run II*, which initiates another brief exchange between Judith and Joanne, with Brenda joining in for a few moments, when they attempt to remember the name of the leading actress in this mini-series. Judith decides (incorrectly) that it is Sigourney Weaver, this name being called out by her several times, with little or no response from the others in the room. During the commercial break, Brenda asks Philip a question about her homework and he obliges by providing an explanation. Again Judith is the only person paying some attention to the commercials, while Joanne reads the newspaper.

When *Neighbours* returns on screen, Joanne points out to Judith that if she is going to have a shower she ought to take one soon, so that her hair will be dry before she has to go to bed. Judith answers that she will have a shower at half past seven; in other words, when *Neighbours* finishes. Even though Judith continues by asking (seemingly of everyone present) 'What's on at 7:30?', she does not draw a response. She briefly looks in the newspaper, apparently to check what is screening, after which she again turns her attention to the screen. For the next five minutes or so, Judith is the only person who watches *Neighbours*, even though Joanne tends to scan the screen more often than was earlier the

case. When the commercials come on once again, Joanne briefly leaves the room and as she returns Judith asks her whether she had taped *Blackadder* last night. When Joanne tells her that she did not, Judith makes her disappointment known to everyone. A moment later Judith moves to the couch where she sits down between Joanne and Philip, cuddling up to the latter. The resumption of *Neighbours* is meanwhile ignored by everybody present. Philip and Judith have a conversation - too loud for Brenda's liking as she tells them to be quiet.

When Philip asks 'Whose turn is it to light the fire?', both Judith and Brenda move towards the fireplace with Judith ultimately getting the nod to proceed. Brenda moves back to her chair and watches *Neighbours* for a brief period. While Judith is attending to the fire, Brenda stands up and walks towards Philip where she sits down on the arm of the couch before leaving the room. During this episode, which lasts about three to four minutes, nobody watches the programme. Joanne has picked up the newspaper again and Philip keeps an eye on Judith as she lights the fire.

Brenda returns to the room while the commercials have come on. After having passed on something to Joanne, she moves back to her seat collecting her homework from the floor and placing it on her lap as she sits down. Judith has also returned to her seat as *Neighbours* has started again. While Philip and Joanne are reading and Brenda has returned to her homework, Judith is watching the programme attentively. She momentarily checks the fire before leaving the room briefly. As Judith returns, Joanne puts the newspaper aside and gives her attention to *Neighbours*. Philip asks his daughters whether they would like to attend the netball test on the following Saturday night but only gets a lukewarm response. As the next commercial break comes on, Judith temporarily turns her back to the television to tell Joanne something. A commercial for the *New Idea* magazine catches her attention. There is laughter between Judith and Brenda about this advertisement's content regarding 'childbirth techniques', the reference to procreative sexuality is apparently a source of amusement for the teenage sisters. While the girls keep on laughing, Joanne moves towards the ironing board; she folds away some washing before starting to iron a shirt. She combines this with watching *Neighbours*, an activity combination which highlights the 'domesticity' of women's viewing behaviour yet again. Philip is fully absorbed in his reading and Brenda has gone back to her homework.

Judith's main attention is again on the programme even though she occasionally utters cursory comments, mainly directed to Joanne who does not respond. When the programme comes to a conclusion, Brenda more regularly glances at the set so that, apart from Philip,

everybody is quite involved in the programme. As the *Neighbours*' credits appear on screen, Judith stands up and leaves the room (to have a shower), Brenda gives her attention more fully to her homework (taking the opportunity to ask Philip another question) and Joanne continues ironing.

It could be argued, building on Modleski's (1983) suggestive line of inquiry, that the narrative structure of *Neighbours*, drawing on themes *de la vie quotidienne*, has an empathetic affinity with the routines of everyday life, including the routine, but fragmented, nature of domestic television viewing practices. While Modleski applied the everyday rhythms of daytime television to the specific structural location of domestic labour performed by women, the television viewing experiences of the Dawsons, as outlined above, readily show that this can also be applied to the family as a whole. The mundane context of television consumption sees a relatively low level of involvement with the television text and, in terms of the family ecology, a host of activities are combined with 'watching' the programme so that *Neighbours* screens to a backdrop of everyday family activity.

An illustration of the television text meeting the family context in a more immediate way is provided in one brief instance of the *Neighbours* text, a scene of domestic arguments, that draws a comment from Joanne. Perhaps it is not without significance that her comment 'What's going on, Judith?' approximates a possible intervention that a parent might make when confronted with a similar incident in her own home. It is perhaps also no coincidence that Judith answers with an indifferent 'Nothing', rather like she might have done if she had an argument with her sister.

The family context is otherwise characterised by individual family members seemingly minding their own business, with little interaction between themselves. In fact, there is really only one person, Judith, watching the programme with a certain degree of attention. It seems that she is watching *Neighbours* with intent, something which is highlighted by the exchange when her mother reminds her to have a shower and which concludes with Judith indicating her intention to do so at 7:30pm, when *Neighbours* finishes. The other persons present, Joanne and Brenda in particular, only sporadically turn their attention to the screen, whereas Philip ignores the programme altogether.

With Philip virtually paying no attention to the programme, Judith's earlier comment that her father usually comes into the room to 'watch' *Neighbours* may not be as contradictory as would seem at first sight. It appears that Judith equates 'presence' in the television room



with 'watching' a television programme. Audience research which has analysed videotaped observations of the viewing environment in conjunction with viewers' self-reports (in the form of viewer's diaries) has indicated that audiences tend to conflate presence in front of the television set with actually paying attention to television programming (see Bechtel *et al.*, 1972; Collett and Lamb, 1986).

More crucially, the above example may refer to Judith's definition of the family context which, at the time when *Neighbours* screens, is characterised by the family being together in the warmest and most comfortable room of the house. This may be more significant than what is actually screening on the television. *Neighbours*, however, may provide an equally comfortable backdrop to this scene in which family members are together because they choose each other's company: 'I come in here [the living room] because...I like to be with the others...' (Philip - The Dawsons). Or as Brenda mentioned: '[The living room] has got a [uhm] *feel* about it' (Brenda - The Dawsons). These contextual features are reflected in the way the individual family members consume the programme. For Philip and Brenda, the family company the living room provides is the overriding factor for their presence as they pay virtually no attention to the programme as such. To some extent, this can also be said of Joanne, but for her the living room soon turns into a place of work, as she attends to domestic chores which she prefers to do in front of the television. For the youngest daughter, Judith, the *Neighbours* programme may well account for her presence in the living room, but the pleasure she derives from the programme may also be accounted for by the presence of the rest of the family and her interaction with them.

### *The Elliots watching One Network News*

*One Network News* screens daily on TV One at 6:00pm. It is part of Television New Zealand's (TVNZ) news service from which 'More New Zealanders get their news than from any other source', according to TV ONE's self-referential and self-congratulatory promotional trailer (borrowed, incidently, from the American network ABC). Like most news gathering institutions in the world, *One Network News* draws on a global 'news geography' (Bardoel, 1985) which, apart from providing local news stories, has a strong emphasis on international 'top news headlines'. Thanks to the recent proliferation of satellite technology, New Zealanders, more than ever before, get an instant 'window on the world'.

The mode of news presentation relies on a combination of the spoken word and visual presentation. The former is often restricted to an introductory or concluding note from the anchorman/woman, whereas the visual footage (accompanied with an inserted 'voice-over') follows certain production/editing codes which usually present the story in 'news bites' lasting not longer than one or two minutes. In his analysis of television news, Jensen (1987b:24) comments that such a mode of address is one of the factors whereby the 'outward form or genre of the news appears to support the press's traditional claims to objectivity'. However, such claims to 'objectivity' have subsequently been translated as constituting one of the ideological roles through which the news operates (Fiske, 1987:288). Moreover, Lodziak (1986:43) mentions that television news has undergone more ideological analysis than any other televisual form. Because of a realisation that people have become increasingly dependent on television as a *source of news*, such analyses have invariably been concerned with establishing the ways in which television news represents a *source of bias*.

*One Network News* employs a programme format based on a worldwide formula for news presentation. Hartley (1982:38-39), furthermore, suggests that even though news is supposed to be about 'new, unexpected things', a breakdown of dominant news themes shows relatively predictable and reoccurring categories: politics, the economy, foreign affairs, domestic news (both 'hard' or 'conflict' stories and 'soft' or 'human interest' stories), occasional stories, and, finally, sport. While not in this exact order, this episode of *One Network News* more or less covered these topics. These included international and domestic news, sport, the weather and, quite typical for *One Network News*, a human interest story concluded the programme. Finally, since news is about the public sphere mostly inhabited by men, it is largely about the 'masculine' and is, by extension, largely aimed at a male audience (Fiske, 1987:284). There is a considerable amount of evidence in this study that men frequently watch the news by themselves, especially at a later time in the evening. This particular viewing episode also concerns a news programme being watched by the husband, Oscar, who is joined by his spouse, Ellen, towards the end of the programme.

Oscar Elliot daily tunes into *One Network News*, which tends to coincide with his arrival home from work. By Oscar's own admission, he does not belong to the 'majority' group that TVNZ claims gets its news stories from *One Network News*. This is mainly for reasons to do with Oscar's perception of the nature of television news:

...you tend to get better news coverage on the radio from my point of view - you know you get a visual picture {uhm} and you get the sensationalism on the television, whereas you get much more in-depth cover on the radio. (Oscar - The Elliots)

For Ellen's part, her hearing impairment precludes her from being able to follow the radio (and television as well), but she is an avid newspaper reader. Both factors obviously play an important role in our understanding as to why the news is watched in a fragmented way throughout the week, with Oscar and Ellen often being out of the room while the television continues to screen. However, in the following viewing episode Oscar is present throughout the programme.

With *M\*A\*S\*H\** coming to a conclusion, Oscar sits on the three-seater couch knitting what appears to be a jersey. A programme trailer for *Minder*, which will be screening later in the evening, catches Oscar's attention and brings a wide smile to his face (he is a self-confessed fan of this programme). As *One Network News* begins with an item by item rundown of the day's news events, Oscar focuses more closely on his knitting. However, when the news reader announces an item concerning the selection of the New Zealand All Blacks, Oscar looks up to the screen. The first item of *One Network News* concerns the 1989 Chinese government 'crack-down' on the student protest at Tianamen Square, Beijing. Ellen briefly enters the sitting room and, while standing in the doorway, she asks Oscar a question. Oscar nods his head whereupon Ellen leaves the room closing the door behind her.

Initially, Oscar more or less evenly divides his attention between the knitting and looking up to the screen, pausing with his knitting when he does so. When 'the pictures tell the story', Oscar watches the set more intently, following the overseas report about the Tianamen Square protests until it finishes. He then returns his visual attention to the knitting. From the adjoining room, Ellen announces that she is going to have a quick shower. This does not draw a response from Oscar, who is now very engrossed with an item covering the commemorations in Wellington of the Tianamen Square protests. Soon afterward, he turns his visual attention back to his knitting when an item on arms control between the super powers is introduced by the anchorman. But when overseas pictures of the talks between Presidents Bush and Gorbachev are shown, Oscar looks up again and closely follows the item having ceased knitting for the time being. When the news reader starts to introduce the next item, Oscar again turns his attention to his knitting. This tends to be his viewing style throughout the first eight minutes of *One Network News* until it is interrupted by a commercial break. While he has visual contact with the 'pictorial' news reporting, the introductory and/or concluding comments of each news item by the anchorman tend to be visually ignored.

The first commercial break suffers from a similar visual disinterest on Oscar's part, as he keeps his eyes firmly on his knitting. Apart from a quick glance at an advertisement for a cough syrup, Oscar does not look at the set at all. This is consistent with the way in which Oscar normally avoids watching the commercial breaks; to him advertisements are an intrusion and are, therefore, purposefully ignored. When *One Network News* resumes, Oscar attentively follows an item on a big fire at an Auckland secondary school, but once this brief item has concluded, his eyes turn back to the knitting. Overseas items on a traffic accident in France and a tornado calamity in the United States capture Oscar's close attention, especially the latter item which draws an impressed 'Oh' after some rather spectacular pictures of a tornado breaking up houses. A further item on Iran also gets Oscar's attention who has, meanwhile, put his knitting aside during the last three overseas items.

When the sports section of *One Network News* is introduced, Oscar maintains his interested 'gaze' at the screen still having suspended his knitting activity. An item on the selection of the All Blacks for a test match against Scotland has Oscar's undivided attention and this also brings a smile to his face, especially when some actual rugby footage is shown in combination with an interview with a new test cap. Oscar sustains this level of attention through an item on horse racing, but towards the end of this item he picks up his knitting only to cease this activity again in response to an item on cricket. During the cricket item, Oscar starts knitting again and only occasionally glances at the set from there onwards.

In between these sport reports, Ellen, from the adjoining room, asks Oscar if he wants her to set the table or whether he would like to have dinner in front of the television. Oscar mumbles 'Yes' in response. Referring to this occasion, Ellen stated in the interview: 'He usually decides...quite often I have even set the table for us'. The next sports item, on a netball test between New Zealand and Australia, captures Oscar's attention yet again as Ellen comes in with the evening meal. Oscar puts aside his knitting and thanks Ellen when she hands him a plate. Ellen moves to the chair immediately across from the television set and as she sits down asks Oscar about the netball. Because of Ellen's hearing impairment, such exchanges between her and Oscar are quite typical when both watch television together. While on other occasions Oscar's involved viewing style may lead to frustrations on Ellen's part - Oscar failing to respond to her inquiries - he now duly explains that the New Zealand team is off to Australia to play several test matches.

As both eat their meal, the commercials have come on. These commercials are virtually ignored with only occasional glances at the set. Oscar compliments Ellen on the way she has prepared the pumpkin and she responds by saying that she likes it too. They continue quietly having their dinner until Ellen relates to Oscar a particular anecdote which occurred to her at work earlier in the day. When *One Network News* resumes with the weather report, both Oscar and Ellen look up to the screen, Oscar temporarily stopping his meal. The final item of the news concerns the country music awards in Gore - 'a town in the bottom of the South Island... ', says the announcer. When, furthermore, the reporter speaks of 'the Country [music] capital of New Zealand', Ellen, somewhat unbelieving, asks 'We have a country capital of New Zealand?', to which Oscar simply retorts 'Gore'. Both watch this item attentively until its end which also happens to be the conclusion of *One Network News*. It is, of course, no coincidence that the news concludes with a 'human interest story' and that Ellen's and Oscar's interest is captured.

The analyses of the news as 'ideological text' does not seem an appropriate mechanism for the interpretation of the ways in which Oscar and Ellen interact with *One Network News*. The *content* of the programme can undoubtedly be analysed to bring out the ideological practices of news conventions as employed in the processes of news production and presentation, but to 'match' such analyses to this particular family *context* would be a rather ambitious exercise. On the other hand, Oscar did display different modes of attention which may hint at a particular priority for news stories he deemed worthwhile paying (visual) attention to. However, these levels of attention tended to be bifurcated on the lines of 'watching' the real-life news footage with a concentrated gaze, whereas the newsreader's introductory and concluding commentaries were ignored. Not too much can be made of this either, simply because one is still able to follow the programme by listening to the text. It should be remembered, on this point, that Oscar believes that the radio (audio!) offers more in-depth news cover than television (audio-visual). In other words, he may be behaving as though he were using (listening to) a radio.

While Oscar displayed hardly any observable interaction with the text, when he paid visual attention to the programme he did so in a relatively sustained mode of viewing, sometimes ignoring, or not hearing, Ellen's questions. Such a mode of viewing is quite typical of Oscar who, when he 'watches' television, tends to be involved with the programme of *his* choice. Oscar's engaged level of involvement with television is a source of irritation for Ellen as she has to compete for Oscar's attention. Ellen's hearing impairment compounds this even more; because Oscar might find it frustrating to sustain communication with his spouse (having to raise his voice, etc.), he may have 'developed' an attentive viewing style that

escapes the demands of verbal interaction with Ellen. Furthermore, in part because of her hearing impairment, Ellen does not use television as frequently as her husband, virtually making Oscar the only person in this household that uses television. It could thus be argued that this 'solo viewing' strategy nurtures an undistracted viewing style, particularly when there are no children present vying for one's attention.

### *The Fields watching One World of Sport - Nissan Rugby Special*

According to Dayan and Katz (1988:168), contests such as the Olympic Games, presidential debates, Watergate and perhaps quiz/game shows like *Sale of the Century*:

...are ceremonial competitions, miniaturized confrontations, that oppose matched individuals or teams equally worthy of respect, competing in good faith, and in accordance with a shared set of rules. Beyond winner and loser, contests are celebrations of these rules. Their relevance is affirmed no matter who wins.

In other words, following the Durkheimian framework of Dayan and Katz, the media events covering sport contests articulate consensus. Fiske (1987:248) argues, however, that this consensus in fact reflects the dominant ideology of democratic capitalism, in which the sporting male body is an 'active hegemonic agent for patriarchal capitalism' as well. With respect to televised sport's representation of gender, Bassett (1990b:8) has pointed to the ceremonial competition of rugby in New Zealand as a prime example of 'gendered' television through which masculinity is celebrated:

Male-dominated televised sport reflects the prevailing characteristics of manliness within [New Zealand] culture and as such reinforces these qualities as the natural expression of how men are...

In New Zealand, where contest through sport, rugby union in particular, is accorded a high social prominence, Dayan and Katz's viewpoint can be readily applied. Televised test rugby in New Zealand is an anticipated media event with protracted build-ups and after-match analyses. As Dayan and Katz (1988:169-170) have also pointed out, this anticipation of the event is precisely because contests are a 'normal, if not routine part of the functioning of institutions' and thus 'function as *rites de passage*...at infrequent, but repetitive, intervals.'

This sense of anticipation is clearly noticeable for some members in the Field household (Trevor [F], Jane [M], Barbara [15], Sally [13], Karen [9] and Jennifer [5]) on the Saturday afternoon when TV One screened the rugby test between New Zealand and Scotland. When Trevor turns on the television set, the two teams, New Zealand and Scotland, are awaiting the national anthems. Trevor briefly leaves the room for the kitchen from he collects a bottle

of beer. Meanwhile, Jennifer has entered the room and is standing in front of the two-seater couch. As Trevor sits down on the same couch, he exclaims 'Oh there's the pipes', referring to the Scottish national anthem being played. He asks Jennifer to move a small coffee table, to place it in front of the couch so that they can put the drinks and the popcorn on it. Having done so, Jennifer collects a glass from the kitchen and when she returns she grabs hold of the beer bottle saying to Trevor 'I'll pour it', to which her father replies 'Just a little bit, not a big one'. 'I know', responds Jennifer. However, Trevor takes charge of the bottle saying 'Let me pour it out first because this [bottle] is a full one'.

Jennifer has joined Trevor on the couch. 'Come on, let's sing God Defend New Zealand...listen to the people', says Trevor when the New Zealand national anthem starts to play. 'Look at the crowd', says Trevor again reacting to an aerial shot of Carisbrook, Dunedin where the rugby test is being played. He then moves to the windows and closes the curtains as the afternoon sun enters the living room. When Trevor returns to his seat, Sally and Karen come into the room. Sally sits down on the couch while Karen goes to the kitchen to collect a glass. She returns and pours herself a beer, an act which is carefully supervised by Trevor. 'That's enough', he declares when the glass is half-full. Karen moves to the floor where she sits in front of the television set.

Insofar as televised sport tends to chiefly address men and may act as a vehicle for male-bonding (Fiske, 1987:58), this function takes on a somewhat different meaning in the Field family. With Trevor being the only male in this household, certain elements of male-bonding (in its New Zealand version, 'watching the footy with a couple of beers') are, however, symbolically present in the way Trevor and his three daughters watch the rugby together. The beer and the popcorn are undoubtedly part of this otherwise predominantly male ritual in which Trevor's youngest daughters have a taste of the rugby as well as being granted a taste of its accompanying favourite drink. As Trevor reflected later on: 'It was a Saturday afternoon and the girls and I were sitting down with *our* popcorn and *our* beer...to watch *our* rugby' (Trevor - The Fields). 'Family-bonding' rather than male-bonding seems to be operative here, even though the way in which family solidarity is enacted reveals traces of the perhaps more exclusive practice of men watching rugby together.

'Here we go', says Trevor after the New Zealand All Blacks have performed the haka. 'What did the other team do', asks Karen and Trevor explains that the Scottish team 'just sang', noting that not many countries do what the All Blacks do before a game. 'Away they go', says Trevor again when the New Zealand team kicks off. Trevor explains the colours of the jerseys belonging to the respective teams as well as pointing out the 'knock-on' rule

to Karen who is interjecting the most at this point in time. When the All Blacks 'move out wide' there is general excitement, with Karen in particular spurring on the team to run. There are moments of silence especially when the ball is dead, but when the ball is in play Trevor utters short interjections which almost have the effect of providing a running commentary on the game's main events. 'It's not going to come out there!' and 'Penalty!' are some of Trevor's brief comments during the first five minutes.

When an All Black lines up for a penalty, Trevor passes around the bowl with popcorn. The quietness of the Carisbrook crowd is reflected in the silence of the living room. When the penalty is kicked and scores three points for New Zealand, Trevor says 'It's all there'. He then asks where his wife, Jane, is but the children do not seem to know. When the Scots make a promising run, Trevor excitedly exclaims: 'They're almost there' (pointing to the try line) and when in a subsequent move the Scots score a try, Trevor says 'He's there - what a beautiful try...he's one happy boy.' The action replays of the try are watched quietly, save for some comments from Trevor who appears to talk to himself; his comments, relatively rhetorical, do not draw any responses from his daughters. At this point in time, it seems that Jennifer has more or less had enough of watching the rugby as she somewhat disinterestedly leans against Sally. Jane enters the room and Trevor tells her the score. Jane briefly talks with her daughters, then leaves the room announcing she is going out. A chorus of 'Bye' accompanies her departure.

Soon after, New Zealand scores its first 'try' which is greeted with cheers from Trevor and Karen but not Sally and Jennifer who quietly talk to each other. Jennifer briefly leaves the room when Trevor tells her to put the popcorn she had dropped on the floor in the rubbish. When Karen takes some more beer, Trevor reprimands her by saying 'That's enough, no more'. Attention shifts from the game to a discussion about the evening meal with Trevor attempting to divide his attention between a conversation with Jennifer (who now stands next to him) and the television screen. Talk continues with Karen asking a question about the rugby scrum and Trevor explains as he watches the game.

While Sally, Karen and Trevor watch the game attentively, Jennifer moves around the room somewhat restlessly and ends up talking with Sally, distracting her from viewing. The remainder of the first half of the game is watched in similar fashion: Trevor continues making brief comments as the game progresses; Sally and Karen watch the rugby test relatively quietly; whereas Jennifer becomes a minor source of distraction for those present. When the phone rings, Jennifer runs out of the room to answer it. She quickly returns but when the phone rings again, Sally jumps out of the couch to answer it. She returns and has



a brief conversation with Karen (saying that it was somebody ringing the wrong number) while Trevor watches quietly. Interestingly, he does not comment when New Zealand misses a penalty. Sally's and Karen's interest in the game has subsided leaving Trevor the only person in the room attentively following it. As Scotland scores another try, Trevor employs one of his brief comments yet again: 'He's got to be there'. Sally leaves to go to the shops and she is followed out of the room by Karen and Jennifer. Meanwhile, Trevor is quietly watching the game by himself with Jennifer and Karen moving in and out of the room. When the New Zealand team scores its second try, Trevor says 'Well done'. As one of the players receives some treatment on the field, Karen asks 'What happened to him?' and Trevor answers, in a matter-of-fact, if not stoical, way: 'He's got a thump in the ribs'. On occasions he talks to Jennifer and when she moves onto his lap, he asks her to move aside because she is impeding his view.

When the first half of the match concludes, Grant, a colleague/friend of Trevor, pays the family a visit. He comes into the room and sits next to Trevor on the couch. Trevor asks him whether he would like a beer but Grant declines. Nevertheless, Trevor asks Karen to get another bottle of beer from the fridge. As the commercials screen, Trevor and Grant talk about their work, their heads turned away from the screen. Their conversation is interrupted by Jennifer who asks Trevor whether he has seen one of her toys.

The second half of the rugby test has started and once again Trevor asks Karen to get him a bottle of beer. Instead, it is Jennifer who responds, faster than her sister, as she carries in the bottle of beer. A second offer to have a glass of beer is not refused by Grant. Trevor asks Karen to get another glass and Jennifer to fetch the bottle opener. Both girls deliver the goods, and after having tussled with Jennifer to open the bottle together, Trevor pours Grant and himself a drink.

Trevor and Grant turn their attention to the rugby. There is some confusion on Grant's part regarding which team had scored a try (New Zealand is playing in a white outfit and not in their usual 'All Black' attire). This leads Trevor to make some dismissive gestures to his friend after which he explains the matter more fully. Both watch the repeats of the try attentively and both exchange brief comments on the merits of certain players. This is followed up by a conversation about their work as they watch the screen for the next five minutes or so. However, the discussion turns to rugby when an All Black winger is about to score a try. Both excitedly exclaim 'He's there...He's there', with Trevor adding 'It's about time he's there...he has not done much today'. During the action replays, the conversation turns back to the topic of work after a brief period of silence. When Jennifer

screams from another part of the house, Trevor asks her to come to the living room. Then both Trevor and Grant continue watching the rugby test quietly, a scene which is interrupted when Karen and Jennifer come into the room.

With Jennifer and Karen crawling over the floor, Trevor and Grant watch the match attentively interspersing it with comments about work as well as the good rugby weather. They are soon by themselves as Karen and Jennifer leave the room again. Another try to New Zealand draws short, approving comments from both men. Karen enters the room again shortly after. Trevor tells Karen that she is making too much noise and she leaves the room. From the adjoining room, Barbara, the eldest daughter, (who has just arrived home) asks 'Who's winning?' and Trevor jokingly responds 'Scotland'. Jennifer enters and cuddles up to Trevor while he and Grant talk about work. There is a considerable amount of excitement when Scotland are about to score a try but fail to do so. Trevor shouts: 'No, the poor buggers are robbed...Tough luck, Scots'. When Scotland do eventually score, Trevor and Grant are cheering as if New Zealand had scored.

Now standing in the doorway, Barbara comments on the facial looks of one of the rugby players stating 'Yuk, he's so ugly - I think I'll marry a soccer player'. Apart from the fact that she plays soccer herself, Barbara's comment may also be seen in the context of the World Cup soccer series being held in Italy at the time and which featured on television in the form of late night highlights, no doubt focusing upon the 'Adonis-like' players from Europe and Latin America. Anyway, Grant replies with a disclaimer: 'Because you do get ugly when you play rugby, you know. People keep on bouncing off your nose and things like that'. He then announces that he is going - apparently the reason for Grant's visiting Trevor was to discuss 'business'. Barbara again makes the point that a particular player is 'so ugly' but her father reassures her by saying 'Oh, I tell you what, somebody loves him'. Barbara also has difficulty realising that New Zealand plays in the white jerseys and is duly reminded by both Trevor and Grant. Soon after this exchange, Grant leaves even though the test is still in progress. Barbara leaves the room as well and Trevor is by himself with Jennifer and Karen crawling over the floor, occasionally teasing Trevor to the point where he tells them to be quiet. The game comes to a conclusion with Trevor literally having his hands full with Karen and Jennifer romping with him. Not long after he turns the television off.

Windschuttle (1985:172-173) has argued that sport spectatorship constitutes a 'very active process', largely because of the cultural competencies that (male) audiences bring to a televised sporting contest:

In the varieties of football, for instance, the spectators are largely composed of men who played in their youth and thus acquired an 'inside' sense of the game and a capacity to distinguish among many levels of excellence, by both individual players and teams as a whole.

Trevor's involved viewing style during the course of the televised rugby test fits the above description well. When watching the rugby together with his daughters, his verbal interjections reveal his knowledge of the finer points of the rugby game. His comments, moreover, take on the nature of a second level commentary on the match - largely for the benefit of his daughters who are not well versed in the rules of the game.

A similar yet somewhat different process is at work when Trevor's friend, Grant, joins the family towards the end of the first half of the test. Grant, initially confused about the colours of the rugby jerseys the two national teams are wearing, is laughingly dismissed by Trevor. While Grant might be 'excused' for having arrived during the middle of the game, a discriminating rugby fan would perhaps know that when the New Zealand team plays Scotland at 'home', it wears white jerseys in order to be recognisable on the field; the All Black attire of New Zealand would otherwise be difficult to distinguish from the dark marine-blue jerseys donned by the Scots. However, after Grant's initial indiscretion both men watch the test and discuss the merits of the two teams as seasoned observers of the game.

While partisan patriotism is definitely a factor underlying the pleasure of watching the game - New Zealand's point-scoring actions being accompanied with loud cheers - Trevor (and Grant) greeted Scotland's successful tries with a similar enthusiastic reception. Bourdieu (1984:215) has linked such behaviour to a predominant 'bourgeois' disposition towards sport. This behaviour, characterised by a certain form of 'aestheticization' (the focus being on the aspects of *excellence* in sport), is typical for middle-class sport participation as well as spectatorship. Such 'disinterestedness' is, furthermore, guided by what Bourdieu (1984:215) labels the cult of fair play: 'the code of play of those who have the self-control not to get so carried away by the game that they forget that it is "only a game"'. Thus, identifying and subsequently commenting on the excellence of both teams, provides Trevor and Grant with a set of readings which more or less transcend the 'vulgarity of the crowds' (Bourdieu, 1984:215). Although a particular class factor may be operative here, it should also be acknowledged that as the rugby test unfolded, New Zealand's ultimate victory was never really challenged by Scotland. As Fiske (1987:246) has noted: 'Sport's respect for a "good loser" is part of its celebration of the winner.'

Another dominant theme of this family viewing episode is the way in which the gender factor operative in the text is reflected in the viewing context. Reference has already been made to the manner in which Trevor 'co-opted' his daughters into what has traditionally been the distinctive male domain of New Zealand Rugby Union. He did this by letting them participate in the accompanying adult male ritual of having some beer (albeit little amounts). In fact, the beer and popcorn may well be the only reason for Karen's and Jennifer's presence at the beginning of the game. After all, when Trevor decides that both have had enough beer, their interest in the game markedly decreases.

During the first ten minutes of the test match, Trevor's spouse, Jane, leaves the house - an action which seems to reinforce the notion that watching rugby is predominantly a male preserve. Perhaps like other 'rugby widows' on that particular afternoon, she left for town to do some shopping. Interestingly, Jane's comments regarding the enthusiasm with which sport is followed in her family - 'We are *not* big sport's fans, really' (Jane - The Fields) - seems to downplay the seriousness with which her husband, Trevor, regards sport on television. However, this apparent contradiction might be explained by the fact that Jane may not often be present when her husband watches sport, be it on week-end afternoons or during the week at late evening hours.

Finally, another gender-related theme which is worth mentioning concerns the exchanges between Trevor, Grant and Barbara when the latter enters the room half-way through the second half of the game. Barbara's remarks pertain to the 'ugly' physical appearance of a particular rugby player, apparently comparing his appearance with that of supposedly 'better looking' soccer players. Poynton and Hartley (1990:151-152) have argued that while sport and sex do not mix:

Feminine infiltration into relations of looking, however, places demands upon the text. The visual element has the potential to be read erotically. For a male audience voyeuristic contemplation implies homo-eroticism. The suggestion that the pursuit of pleasure in footy is associated with...homo-erotic desires is outrageously unacceptable in a society long conditioned to acknowledge heterosexuality as the standard.

The exchange thus brings out a specific sexual discourse about men and sport in which the potential reading of rugby players as 'sex symbols' is brushed aside by Trevor and Grant, with the latter translating the ugliness of the player referred to by Barbara in terms of the rugby game itself: 'People keep on bouncing off your nose and things like that'. The male body is thus read in the display of physical prowess rather than as an objectified sexual icon

(Poynton and Hartley, 1990:150). The visual representation of male sport thus brings out a certain degree of sexual ambiguity as women enter the predominantly male viewing context.

### *The Grays watching Who's the Boss?*

Neale and Krutnik (1990:233) define sit(uation)-com(edy) as follows: 'The term "sit-com" describes a short narrative-series comedy, generally between twenty-four and thirty minutes long with regular characters and setting'. The repetitive narrative in serial form caters to a regular audience which television institutions are dependent upon for their income. *Who's the Boss?*, screening at 8:00pm on Channel 2 on Saturday nights, is part of a new generation of American situation comedies which go beyond the 'nuclear family-type' that so characterised this television genre from its inception in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, at the same time, the trend during the 1980s signified a return to the family even though not strictly in the 'nuclear' configuration. Marc (1989:201) has charted these changes as follows:

In the eighties, sitcom attention shifted away from the single people (MTM's speciality) and back toward the genre's traditional center: the family. Family and 'family values' shows such as *Diff'rent Strokes*, *The Facts of Life*, *Silver Spoons*, and *Family Ties*, and later *The Cosby Show*, *Who's the Boss?* and *Growing Pains* defined the state of the art.

As Feuer (1987) has argued these changes reflect the television industry's attempts to be in touch with, or attempts to mediate to its audiences, the changes within the broader socio-cultural environment. However, it is not a coincidence that situation comedy draws on 'familiar' themes such as that of the family. Tulloch (1990:254), using Ellis (1982), makes the interesting point that while genres representing violence such as the news and action drama 'confirm the "normality of the domestic" in their very difference from it, sitcom celebrates that all-tolerant normality itself'.

While not often watching television as a family, the individual members of the Gray family (Cynthia [M] and her partner, Doug, Mary [16], Emily [15] and Stuart [12]) regularly tune into a situation comedy. Programmes such as *The Cosby Show*, *Married with Children*, *Happy Days*, *Roseanne* and *Family Ties* are some of the American sitcoms watched in the Gray household. Interestingly, their British counterparts, of which there are plenty scheduled on TV One, are virtually ignored but this may have more to do with the fact that Emily, Mary and Stuart tend to switch almost automatically to Channel 2 and TV 3.

As *Lotto* (a five minute weekly programme featuring the lotto draw on Channel 2) concludes, Mary, Stuart and Michael (Stuart's friend) are present in the television room. Mary (on the floor) and Stuart (on a bean bag) sit immediately in front of the television set whereas Michael sits on the two-seater couch. All three have their dessert while occasionally talking - Stuart and Mary in particular - or watching the television, like Michael. When a programme trailer for *Jake and the Fatman* appears on screen, Mary asks 'What's on next?' to which Stuart replies '*Who's the Boss?*' When this programme indeed follows, Stuart mentions, referring to one of the programme's main female characters, that in 'real life...that lady is real rich - they showed you her house on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and, you know, Peggy Bundy...they showed her's [too]'. Mary with some measure of amazement replies with 'Oh, did they?' 'Yes', Stuart continues, 'and [uhm] what's the feller's name?' (Stuart pauses to think while watching the set) 'Dudley Moore'. This exchange clearly indicates the intertextuality of television - television's secondary texts in the form of newspapers, magazines, radio, television talk shows etc. - which 'promote[s] a realistic reading of television' yet 'play[s] with the boundary between the representation and the real' (Fiske, 1987:121). Stuart's reference to the character's 'real life', however, does not leave any doubt as to his awareness of the actor's 'dual reality', namely that of being a television character in *Who's the Boss?* as well as being a 'real rich' lady away from the television studios. Stuart, however, does not appear to see the connection between the two; after all, television 'stars', because they are popular, can command large salaries and thus tend to be rich in 'real life'!

During these exchanges, Michael hardly says anything as he watches the programme attentively. Meanwhile, *Who's the Boss?* has started its first domestic scene and Mary, Stuart and Michael have now all given their attention to the screen, watching the programme silently. The only sound (apart from the television) comes from Mary scraping her dessert plate. As this continues for two minutes or so, Cynthia enters the room and almost immediately Stuart asks his mother when she is going to pick up Emily, Stuart's other sister. Cynthia replies that she will be leaving in about ten minutes and asks her children, as she leaves the room again, to come and tell her when ten minutes are up because she is not wearing a watch. Cynthia's absence from the television room is in step with her usual absence from the room.

As all three are in the process of finishing their dessert (accomplished with a loud - rather irritating - scraping of the plates), they return their attention to the programme. Occasionally, however, Michael and Mary have more interest in seeing what is left on their plates than for the television programme. At this stage, Stuart watches the programme attentively as

Michael's and Mary's eating habits increasingly become a noise hazard. Stuart, however, does not seem to mind. The room becomes more 'peaceful' when, finally, Michael and Mary have put their plates aside and resume watching the programme more attentively. This viewing episode sees no verbal interaction between those present unlike their behaviour at the start of *Who's the Boss?* Significantly, there is no laughter even though the programme itself is full of 'canned laughter'.

When the first commercial comes on screen, Mary grabs her plate, stands up and, as she leaves the room, she states 'I'm gonna call Mum'. She is followed by Stuart who in turn is followed by Michael. They remain out of the room during the whole commercial break and when the programme resumes, Mary enters the room first. She rearranges one of the bean bags previously occupied by Stuart before sitting on it herself, continuing her watching of *Who's the Boss?* While she watches the programme, she mends a pillow with a needle and thread. A couple of minutes later, Stuart and Michael return with the former saying 'Mary, could you please get out of my place?' Mary responds by standing up and moving towards the couch where she sits down. The instant response with which Mary surrenders this seat to Stuart should be seen in the context of Stuart generally laying down the rules in the television room. According to his mother, Cynthia: 'Stuart certainly likes to have more control of things and the girls give in to him for [the sake of] peace.' Stuart rearranges 'his' bean bag and, after having closed the door on Mary's request, sits down. Michael sits down on the floor next to Stuart.

The family's dog has also come into the room and it competes with Stuart and Michael for a comfortable spot in front of the heater. When the dog starts to annoy Michael, Stuart tells him to push it away. Meanwhile, Mary watches the programme attentively even though she is still working on the pillow. When the leading characters of *Who's the Boss?*, Tony and Angela, to their amazement wake up in the same bed, Mary cannot help laughing. Stuart thinks it is funny too. The 'unconventional' domestic relations portrayed in this situation comedy - Angela being a divorced, professional woman and Tony being her full-time live-in housekeeper - are the show's major source of humour. From their own experiences as children of divorced parents, Stuart and Mary have a particular insider's knowledge about what it is like to live in a similar type of household, knowledge which may influence the way in which they receive the programme. However, during the screening of this sitcom this insider knowledge and its effect was not evident. Mary and Stuart, together with the latter's friend Michael, watched the programme like most children of their age might; relatively attentively with virtually no verbal interaction between them.

The remainder of the scenes in this viewing episode are watched quietly. The dog seems to have won the competition for the place in front of the heater as Stuart makes way surrendering the bean bag. Stuart moves in very close to the set, lying next to Michael. When the dog leaves the bean bag and walks towards the door, Stuart stands up and lets the dog out. He returns to the bean bag and resumes watching the programme. Mary, on the other hand, seems at this stage to pay more attention to the mending of the pillow.

A programme trailer for *21 Jump Street*, which screens later this particular evening, causes Stuart to react 'Oh, we have to tape that', again showing that he is in control. After this trailer, Stuart collects a videotape and sets up the recording procedure for the VCR. Stuart's actions represent one of the few instances in this study where a programme trailer illicitly such an immediate response. Michael follows his actions closely, saying he is doing it all wrong. Stuart almost arrogantly ignores Michael's suggestions. It is almost as if the two boys want to impress Mary by showing off their knowledge of how to handle this piece of domestic technology. As the commercial break has started, Mary asks Stuart to turn down the television set's volume because she believes it is too loud. Having done that, Stuart asks Michael whether he would like to play a game of cards. With Stuart and Michael playing cards and Mary mending the pillow, nobody pays particular attention to the ads. This scene provides another example of children combining play with watching television. However, a commercial for Cadbury chocolate gets Mary's attention (saying 'That's right, that's an old ad') while Stuart briefly sings along with the commercial's jingle.

When *Who's the Boss?* appears on screen again, Stuart and Michael continue with their game of cards whereas Mary looks at the set more attentively. However, the card game does not last long as Stuart and Michael leave the room. Mary divides her attention between mending the pillow and watching *Who's the Boss?* After a couple of minutes Stuart and Michael return and watch the programme attentively but quietly until its conclusion. When *Who's the Boss?* actually concludes, Stuart and Michael leave the room again whereas Mary moves to the bean bag where she sits down after again turning down the volume of the set.

Lovell (1986:154) has argued that the intention of situation comedies of making people laugh is clearly signalled:

Apart from their actual content, sitcoms signal comic intention through their credits, and through the creation of a comic climate by having the drama enacted before a studio audience, unseen by the audience at home, but whose infectious laughter punctuates what we see.



*Who's the Boss?* also operates through the conventions of television comedy as referred to by Lovell. The one technique most readily identifiable is that of 'canned laughter'. However, what stands out in this particular 'moment of television' is that such auditory clues are largely ignored by Mary, Stuart and Michael. In fact, there are only one or two 'comic' instances within the programme that make those present laugh. However, seeing viewers 'rolling over the floor with laughter' is, of course, only one observable indicator by which to evaluate the kinds of pleasures that viewers may derive from watching a particular situation comedy. Viewers may enjoy a programme like *Who's the Boss?* rather quietly, Mary being a case in point. Furthermore, watching comedy in a group setting (however common this may be) can be a risky enterprise; one's laughter about certain aspects of humour may be embarrassing to others. With Mary perhaps conforming to Stuart's stereotype of her as the 'older sister' and, likewise, Stuart possibly conforming to Mary's stereotype of him being the 'little (tyrant) brother', the lack of laughter may perhaps be explained as a kind of self-censorship. As Neale and Krutnik (1990:243) have pointed out regarding the 'communalizing activity' of the sitcom: 'The telling of a joke...serves to establish a demarcation between an "inside" and an "outside"'. While this may generally be one of the broader functions of humour, the ways in which family members are differentially positioned as viewers may prevent a simplistic demarcation of an 'inside' and an 'outside', particularly if it is used to refer to the family unit as a homogeneous group. Family members are bound to have different comedy preferences, men usually contrasting remarkably with women on that score (see Morley, 1986:170-172).

It may be possible that the children, particularly Stuart and Michael being the youngest, miss the finer humorous points of the comic situation portrayed in *Who's the Boss?* Mary, the 'older sister' may indeed be old enough to grasp the humour of a scene in which the male housekeeper wakes up with his female 'boss' in the same bed - hence her laughter. At 12, Stuart may be just a bit too young yet to 'independently' grasp the joke - hence he follows the laughter of his sister. It seems that this particular scene leaves Michael indifferent altogether but then he showed little response throughout *Who's the Boss?* Alternatively, it may be the case that they display what Tulloch (1990:256) labels a 'segmented reading of sitcom'. Viewers of sitcoms thus display a discretionary ability to define what they believe is funny which in turn is guided by the viewer's own 'construction of the narrative'. The concept of segmented reading may be somewhat *mentalistic* - a point more or less acknowledged by Tulloch as he qualifies the uses and gratifications research which he quotes in support - however, when the notion of segmented reading is combined with an appreciation of the *contextual flow* which fragments viewers' attention to television programmes, it may have a greater explanatory power. As for this viewing episode, the

different levels of attention exhibited by the different persons present may account for the segmented reading of the text, as well as the absence of a recognition of humour in the text through laughter.

### *The Howards watching Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*

The three children of the Howard family (Paul [F], Jill [M], Michelle [10], Lucy [8] and Peter [6]) regularly tune into TV 3's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* when they return home from school, often accompanied by one or two other friends. Screening on week days at 4:00pm, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* is a cartoon programme for children in which four turtle characters utilise Japanese martial arts to resolve potential threats to the Earth's order and stability. The programme has generated considerable controversy amongst both social critics and parents in terms of its violence and the (alleged) harmful effects of such violence upon children.

The turtle characters utilise a language and discourse that can be described as 'cool' and 'off-beat', and they generally display behaviour and cultural characteristics thought to be common amongst members of an American teenage subculture. The cartoon itself is heavily stylised and contains frequent episodes of ritualised violence of the cartoon type. A number of researchers have pointed to the ways in which children distinguish between this stylised form of cartoon violence and the violence of the real world (Palmer, 1986; Hodge and Tripp, 1986). However, parents have most often tended to assume that the greatest risk in such programmes has been the supposed inability of children to distinguish between the 'fantasy' of cartoon violence and the 'reality' of the everyday world. Furthermore, as Fiske (1987:76) has stated, children experiencing *pleasure* in watching cartoons are a constant 'source of worry to many parents who denigrate these tastes with a vaguely defined criticism that they are "bad" for children'.

It is Friday afternoon and, when *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* is about to start, Michelle and a friend are playing knuckle bones on the floor in front of the television. Paul, the father, is on the phone sitting in a chair in the far corner of the room. As the programme jingle starts, Jill walks towards her husband and has a brief argument with him before leaving the room again. Paul continues his conversation on the phone, ignoring Jill's protestations as she walks out of the room. Michelle has turned her face towards the television set watching the programme attentively for about a minute. Her friend keeps on playing with the knuckle

bones and, by asking questions about certain rules of the game they are playing, diverts Michelle's attention. A few moments later, Michelle joins her friend in the game, occasionally glancing at the set.

At this point Peter comes into the room and for a while stands right in front of the television cabinet before sitting very close to it and watching *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* undistracted. Michelle and her friend continue playing their game, however both occasionally glance at the television set. They talk about the rules of the game, a discussion initiated by Michelle's friend. Michelle responds to her friend by consulting a piece of paper. Paul is still on the phone, his voice clearly audible over the soundtrack of the television and the children's talk. This scene continues for a few minutes until Lucy and her friend enter the room. Both briefly sit on the floor, but leave together almost immediately after Lucy has a short verbal exchange with Michelle. Lucy and her friend soon return, sit themselves down on the floor - behind Michelle and friend - and also play knuckle bones.

Meanwhile a commercial break has appeared on the screen and Peter almost instantaneously leaves the room. During the ads all four girls sit on the floor playing the game in pairs. When a MacDonalds ad appears, Michelle sings or hums a couple of lines of the *Mac the Knife* tune. Peter now returns to the room again and walks/stands around for a bit before resuming his earlier position in front of the set, now with a pillow he has collected from the couch. A Coca-Cola ad, featuring the Australian singer and former *Neighbours* star, Kylie Minogue, captures the attention of all four girls. This ad is followed by a Barbie doll commercial which elicits a short conversation between Michelle, her friend and Lucy. Michelle's friend starts with the comment 'The[se dolls] change colours', while referring to the commercial. Michelle says: 'They've just started advertising it', a comment which Lucy questions by responding: 'Just started advertising...?' During this verbal exchange, Peter watches silently. In this particular episode which is dominated by a commercial break, we see an inversion of the usual pattern observed in this study. While Peter briefly leaves the room as soon as the commercials interrupt the programme he was attentively watching, his sisters and their friends interrupt their game, turning their attention to the commercials and the products being advertised. When Peter returns, he too pays attention to the commercials, yet quietly, rather like the way he was watching *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

Lucy leaves the room just as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* continues. Both Michelle's friend and Lucy's friend play with the knuckle bones. Michelle seems to settle in for a period of viewing but - as happened earlier - her friend calls her to look at one of her throws. Michelle responds having a close look at the bones. Her friend then hands Michelle the bones and, with her back to the set, Michelle joins in the game. During this episode, Lucy comes into the room with a rope and starts rope-skipping. After a series of jumps she leaves the room again. Paul, sitting in the chair in the far corner, is still talking on the phone while Peter, lying out-stretched in front of the television, watches the programme, occasionally having a quick look at the three girls. Even though the latter are busily throwing around their knuckle bones, they turn their eyes to the set briefly though Michelle, in particular, has a more prolonged look at the programme. This goes on for a few minutes with Michelle and her friends alternatively playing their game and watching the programme.

Jill (Mrs Howard) enters the room and moves directly towards Paul who is still on the phone. Jill, after having asked Paul something, is about to leave the room, apparently disgusted, saying: 'I'll come back later when you have time to talk with me...' Paul pauses on the phone but Jill walks away retorting 'Oh, forget it!' Paul continues his telephone conversation and Jill is audible in the background (in the kitchen) until she slams the door. Such angry exchanges between Jill and Paul are not atypical within this household, and perhaps for this reason it does not alter the way Michelle and the two friends go about playing the game. Peter has collected another pillow from the couch before returning to his spot immediately in front of the television set. Lucy enters the room and leans against the couch before sitting down on the floor. Referring to the list of knuckle bones rules, she asks loudly: 'Where's that paper gone?' She quickly retrieves the list, has a good look at it and tries to communicate something to Michelle and the two friends who are still engaged in their game. The television commercials have started but they are virtually ignored by those present.

Paul, having finished his telephone conversation, has picked up a newspaper or magazine which he reads. He calls out to his spouse: 'What were you saying, Jill?' Her response from the kitchen is inaudible. Paul then starts to read. Michelle's friend leaves the room followed by Lucy's friend. The former is about to return when Paul asks Peter 'Are you watching crap, Peter?' to which Peter replies with an indifferent 'Yeah'. Paul mumbles something and shakes his head. Lucy leaves the room while Paul asks Michelle's friend if she is sleeping over, which she confirms. Jill's shouting in the kitchen is rather loud. Michelle and her friend continue to play the game while occasionally watching *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Paul gazes towards the set but it is unclear as to whether or not he is involved with the programme. He asks Michelle questions regarding the game but then stands and leaves

the room. Lucy returns to the room and leans against the dresser. She walks backwards while watching the programme, picks up a vase with flowers from the little table on which the phone is situated and places it on the dresser. She then leaves the room again. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* is about to finish with Michelle and her friend watching the dying seconds of the programme though still throwing around the knuckle bones. Peter lounges on the floor in front of the television set but he throws the pillows back onto the couch and leaves the room as the end credits of the programme appear.

The episodic style of viewing adopted by the children in the Howard household was apparent from the moment the programme began. In this case, the *contextual flow* in which the programme was watched was one in which a variety of other activities were simultaneously engaged in. Their father, Paul, is engaged in a telephone conversation, the children and their friends play games and carry on conversations throughout the programme, snatching glances at the screen but only watching when something catches their attention, and their mother enters only briefly while apparently preparing the meal in the kitchen. Peter, the youngest child, is the only family member who appears to attend to the programme in a reasonably sustained way. In keeping with observations presented in the previous chapter, television watching, as shown in this family viewing episode, is not a single activity but one that takes place in a variety of forms and as part of the wider social relationships which occur within the family context.

Palmer (1986:140) refers to children attending strategically to television as they play in front of the set:

Children's behaviour in front of TV...exhibited recurrent patterns which were related to program content as well as social context, and which appeared to be initiated and directed by the child rather than the TV.

According to Hodge and Tripp (1986:158) children up to the age of twelve, when watching television, select those bits they experience pleasure from and ignore the rest. This 'childish' episodic viewing may later give way to a more disciplined, adult style. It is apparent that, apart from Peter, the same episodic style is being displayed by Michelle, Lucy and their respective friends in this viewing context. It is interesting, moreover, that Peter, who is the only one of the children to watch with concentrated attention is also the only one to receive any negative comment from his father who is present throughout the programme. It is this sustained concentration on television that parents and adults have characteristically criticised about children's viewing. When children sit or lie close to the screen, and appear to lose themselves in a programme, they seem to adults to confirm the helpless victim role

attributed to children by many critics of television. It has also been suggested (Fiske, 1989b:158) that this form of viewing by children seems to threaten adults because it is an instance of children creating their own culture outside of adult control. Telling children to move back from the screen, or the application of other sanctions, is frequently a way for adults to interpose their authority between the child and the television screen.

Palmer (1986), however, has also shown how this kind of viewing is relatively untypical and that children eventually create their own distance with their own mode of viewing in accordance with the rest of their everyday lives. The viewing context, it seems, is an important factor in the understanding of how children watch television. This aspect is evident in this example of the Howard children. Peter is not only the sole boy present, but he is also not included in the girls' games. In addition, the indifference of his response to his father's negative remark suggests that he wishes to avoid any confrontation or sanctions. It would seem that the nature of the viewing context, and the nature of the father/son relationship as manifest in this television viewing context, could in part explain the specific mode of viewing that Peter displays. Indeed, in the post-observational interview his father, Paul, expressed particular concern about his son's television viewing habits. He expressed the belief that 'TV takes over his life, I think'. Apparently, it is Peter's 'absorbed' viewing style that is singled out as a cause of concern by Paul Howard, even though the other children spend just as much time in front of the screen. In addition, the fact that *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* had already been the focus of some controversy could have increased parental concern, hence Paul's comment to his son querying whether he was watching that 'crap' again. However, it is likely that it is Peter's sustained and concentrated mode of viewing rather than the context which provokes the father's critical dismissal of the programme. Yet, as Fiske (1989b:158) states:

If children occasionally watch TV with self-loss and absorption it is because they choose to, for reasons relating to their social situation, not because TV has cast a spell over them like some wicked witch.

Several reasons may be offered as to why Peter 'chooses' to watch *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* in the absorbing viewing style he displays. First, and specifically related to the text, Peter simply enjoys watching *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. His parents, Paul in particular, have well-defined television programme preferences and so has Peter. During the interview, Peter in one breath mentioned a string of cartoon shows he liked watching, including *Duck Tales*, *The Smurfs*, *Dennis the Menace* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. His preference for cartoons, rather than watching television in general, also comes to the fore in the relatively selective viewing mode Peter uses during this episode by avoiding the

commercial breaks, or at least parts thereof. He also leaves the room when the programme concludes and does not return while *Home and Away* screens following *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* at 4:30pm.

A second reason concerns more immediately the specific viewing context in which Peter watched the programme. As his sisters were pairing up with their friends playing knuckle bones, Peter was literally the 'odd man out'. During *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, he once in a while checked how the four girls got on with their game, even though he did not attempt to get himself involved. However, within this particular setting it is feasible to suggest that he preferred to stay with the programme once he had tuned in and got involved with this particular episode's narrative. In other words, enjoyment of the text as well as factors belonging to the context (with limited options for play) may explain Peter's viewing style.

## Conclusion

This chapter analysed the question as to whether television texts can be viewed as *repositories of meaning*. In doing so, the overall aim was to determine whether textual analysis, however modest, can contribute to a fuller explanation of the factors impinging on the family viewing context. The theoretical basis of this investigation lies in the so-called text-context problematic and, more specifically, with a broader theoretical concern which attempts to address the question of how family audiences make sense of television programming in light of their everyday use of the television medium. To this effect, the concept of genre, as a tool of textual analysis, was analysed. Genre was primarily employed as a means of categorisation of television programmes and, in this capacity, it was conceptualised as guiding expectations which viewers bring to television texts. Eight different programmes were selected, the most important criteria for selection being to ensure a reasonable spread of different genres, or types, of television programmes, as well as their availability within different family settings.

It is clear, however, that the meaning produced by this encounter between the viewer and the text, cannot be established on the basis of the textual characteristics of the programme alone. What this chapter has shown is that the relationship between the texts of television programmes and the viewing context, constructs a dynamic which impinges in significant ways upon the mode of viewing adopted by individual family members. In the family context, television is watched not as a continuous text, but is more often viewed in discontinuous, fragmented ways according to a variety of forces operating both within the programme and within the family itself. The television text is seldom read as a unified or

singular entity, but is subject to a variety of factors operating within the social and spatio-temporal relations within family viewing contexts, and the broader socio-cultural environment. The different levels of viewers' engagement and interaction with television texts, however, tells us more about the family *context* in which the programme is viewed than the *text* of the programme itself. It would thus seem that from an audience research perspective a concern for context should override a complete preoccupation with the text.

Television's textual features have been theorised from various positions. Genre theory, as it emerged within theory of the cinema, has been adapted to television as governing sets of expectations that audiences bring to television programmes. However, it failed to account for television's property of 'flow' by analysing television programmes as discrete texts (Feuer, 1987). Moreover, while genre theory may account for the meaning processes that 'regulate the production of texts by authors', it does *not* regulate 'the reading of texts by audiences' (see Morley, 1981:10). Not only is the 'visual flow' of television remarkably different from that of film, but so too is the *contextual flow* within domestic settings of television consumption which contributes to the need to differentiate 'watching television' from the more intense 'spectorial' activity associated with watching a film.

This is not to infer that the analysis of television texts is rendered otiose, but that its practical purpose lies in bringing text and context together so as to enable researchers to theorise about how audiences make sense of television texts. The kind of textual analysis which suggests that audiences are 'inscribed' in television programmes may well be meaningless if the analysis of how audiences see themselves 'inscribed' in their daily uses of television is altogether absent. In other words, the family members' interaction with television programmes needs to be placed within the everyday contexts of their lives, and these contexts ought to be a major part of the explanatory framework for the understanding of television consumption.

The eight 'moments of television' presented in this chapter provided relatively unique 'snapshots' of family life in front of the television set. While the levels of interaction with the eight programmes varied enormously within and across the eight family settings, the social negotiation of the text invariably reflected the family context in which the television programmes were 'watched'. A few examples will be used to illustrate this point. First, the meritocratic discourse of *Sale of the Century* became a vehicle for the Allens to express a similar set of values about the importance of education. Even though the explicit link between educational knowledge and material success was affirmed by the (older) family members present, the main pleasure in watching *Sale of the Century* appeared to lie in the



question-and-answer sections of the programme, and the prizes on offer for the candidate with the highest score were ignored. While educational credentials are held in high esteem by this family - the father pursuing yet another academic degree to add to an already impressive list - cultural capital had not yet been converted to economic capital in this modest income family. By ignoring the material paradise, as presented by the show, it seems that the family does not fully subscribe to the meritocratic discourse.

A similar yet different form of family negotiation of television programming was operative in the Browns watching *Blind Date*. In this viewing episode the mother (and solo parent) put the programme's gender discourse under scrutiny for the benefit of her teenage daughters. Apparently it was to little avail, since her daughters were not particularly interested in their mother's interventions. The daughters just wanted to 'watch' the programme, as they normally and quietly did without a mother who constantly butted in.

A less obvious level of observable engagement with television programming was evident in the Cooks 'watching' *Foreign Correspondent*, the Dawsons 'watching' *Neighbours*, the Elliots 'watching' *One Network News*, the Grays 'watching' *Who's the Boss?*, and, finally, the Howards 'watching' *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. What the respective discussions of these viewing episodes indicated was that while the analysis of the text may facilitate an understanding of what occurs behind the screen, what occurs in front of the screen can only be understood in terms of the everyday dynamics that operate within each of the families. Textual analysis cannot completely anticipate the mode of consumption of television by audiences, whether or not audiences bring a set of expectations to the programme that 'governs' their decisions to watch a television programme in the first place.

A case in point is provided by the Fields. A definite set of expectations governed Trevor Field's decision to watch the rugby test between New Zealand and Scotland. However, the family context mediated his 'spectatorship', turning what was a traditional male domain into a family event; Trevor was the only male present until the arrival of a friend. The presence of his daughters initially became a sort of 'substitute' for male-bonding in front of the television set, with Trevor co-opting them in the New Zealand male ritual of 'watching the footy with a couple of beers'. When he judged that his daughters had had enough beer, they in turn lost interest in the game. When Trevor was joined by his friend, the family event turned into a more traditional 'male' environment until Trevor's eldest daughter entered the room. This changed context had an immediate bearing on the reading

of the 'male' text of visualised sport, in which a potential sexual reading, as offered by Barbara, was contested by the two men. The text of televised rugby, combined with its commentary by and for men, was negotiated yet again by the family context.

Thus the process of making meaning, that is making sense of television programmes, appears to be relatively eclectic insofar as the text on its own is concerned. Television 'genres' may elicit viewers' expectations, but these expectations cannot be divorced from the family context in which these genres are watched. Furthermore, the actual act of 'watching television programmes' is difficult to separate from everyday family life. This realisation places the onus of explanation on family contexts as the consumption site where meaning is produced about television texts.

## CONCLUSION

### TELEVISION FAMILIES: THE EVERYDAY USE OF TELEVISION IN HOUSEHOLDS

#### Introduction

'Sorting out the varieties of human response to the mass media', writes Inglis (1990:154), 'is like reading the encyclopedia. It's all bits and pieces.' The everyday complexion of media consumption could indeed be characterised as encyclopedic, insofar as it refers to the scope and diversity of experiences that audiences bring to as well as get from the media. Yet, the mapping of the 'varieties of human response' would involve more than a mere alphabetical listing - the predominant mode of presentation in which encyclopedias communicate knowledge. To be fair to Inglis, however, he moves beyond such a simplistic framework of understanding audiences to what he considers to be the two important tasks for the media theorist (Inglis, 1990:154):

First, he [*sic*] wants to discover...what the balance is between manipulation and expression. To what extent do people make their narratives for themselves, and to what extent are they pushed about by the producers of narratives for their own ends? Secondly, our theorist could do with a more workmanlike [*sic*], less mystifying account of the imagination and what to do with it in practical life.

In focusing on theories of television audiences, this conclusion will start with a brief summation of the major theoretical arguments. In doing so, I will briefly rehearse the major contours of post-war media theory especially where audiences are concerned. Furthermore, I will revisit the broader argument which concentrates on family audiences as the appropriate unit of analysis for the domestic context of television.

I turn then to the principal findings of the study. The 'everydayness' of family television viewing practices will become the major theoretical focus for the review of the findings. The mundaneness of family television viewing is acutely expressed when taking account of the *family ecology* (temporal and spatial aspects) and *family politics* (parental supervision strategies and gender issues). By firmly locating family television viewing practices within the context of everyday life, a new research agenda is suggested. The final section of this conclusion, a section concerning the text and context, will offer suggestions in this direction. A significant shift in the way in which we should understand television audiences will be advocated. This shift, in turn, has major implications for scholarship within the media studies field as this discipline attempts to 'balance out' the *textual* astuteness (via tools such

as semiotics and discourse analysis) of the academic critic with the *contextual* dénouement by which audiences routinely, but episodically, 'read-write' (see Fiske, 1989a) the television text within often erratic and fluid family settings.

### Television audiences are family members too

I began this work by outlining the broad contours of post-war media theory, focusing on how television audiences were researched and conceptualised. Three communication models were examined: the effects paradigm; the uses and gratifications paradigm; and the encoding/decoding paradigm. In addition, the market research model was mentioned, a model which is particularly dominant in New Zealand. The overall picture emerging from this discussion was that the ways in which audiences were theoretically conceptualised were intimately linked to the methodological strategies employed by researchers. A concern for the everyday context in which television is consumed was altogether absent, even though Morley's (1980) adoption of Hall's ([1973] 1980) encoding/decoding model proved to be a useful starting point from which a greater concern for the viewing context could be developed.

By 'getting his hands dirty' with empirical research, Morley (1981) was able to recognise the limitations of Hall's model. This was not only for reasons to do with the conceptual incompleteness of Hall's suggested decoding practices available to audiences, but also (and if not by immediate implication) because Morley realised the relatively artificial context in which he collected and recorded the ways in which respondents made sense of television programming. However, this research was removed from the domestic context in which audiences normally watch television. Morley experienced first-hand the difficulties so long associated with audience research which, for the experiment's sake, traditionally brought audiences into an artificial environment to test reassuring hypotheses about the so-called 'effects' of television which were seen to be either 'ideological' or 'socially undesirable'.

Audience research can presently be characterised as being at the crossroads between the impersonal, alienating ratings discourse on the one hand, and the increasing awareness of the actual dismemberment of the 'mass' audience into television viewing 'nomads' that escape the 'objective' rating statistics on the other. Furthermore, there has also been the realisation that television viewing as an *everyday social practice* constitutes a fundamentally different relationship between viewers and television than, for instance, the 'specialist' viewer watching a film of her choice at the cinema (see Ellis, 1982; Ang, 1985). In other words, the formulation of television viewing as an everyday activity more or less coincided

with the realisation that television viewing occurs within domestic contexts, with the household emerging as the naturalistic site for the study of audiences (see Lull, 1980a; Morley, 1986).

The literature on family and television stretches back to the late 1940s, and thus coincided with a period in which television became the domestic broadcast medium *par excellence*. With few exceptions, however, the first generation of these studies was not particularly informative, because the television-family nexus was poorly operationalised. Until the 1970s, the family was most likely to be characterised as a mere collection of 'isolated' individuals. Moreover, television was more or less perceived as an intrusion which undermined existing family routines such as conversational patterns, leisure and recreation habits, and child-rearing practices. Television and the family increasingly came to be seen as a 'site of struggle' with television being denounced in several 'end-of-civilisation' scenarios (see Winn, 1977; Postman, 1985). Research findings, furthermore, were often obtained through the administering of questionnaires, reflecting the methodological climate of the period, in which the quantification of variables was the only source of scientific respectability.

The contributions of Lull (1978; 1980a; 1980b; 1982) marked the second generation of television and family life studies. Lull took the family as the basic unit of analysis for television consumption, both conceptually and methodologically. Participant observation of family television viewing practices allowed Lull to study television consumption in the 'natural' context of the family home. His subsequent theoretical insights focused on the domestic ecology of family television viewing, as well as the interpersonal (or political) factors of the family television viewing context. Lull's (1980a) study of the social uses of television became a theoretical landmark on which further research has been based. Morley's (1986; 1988) work is a prominent example of this derivative and ongoing research. He interviewed family members in-depth, and uncovered the rich interpersonal dynamics of family television viewing practices, revealing gender as the overriding consideration in the family viewing context.

Both Lull's and Morley's contributions provided the conceptual framework of this thesis. Accordingly, this study took on board the notion that television viewing ought to be studied in the context of everyday family life, thus cashing in on the realisation that television viewing is part of everyday family routines. In particular, Lull's and Morley's insistence on the contextual factors of family television viewing, subsumed under the headings of the

*ecology* and the *politics* of family viewing, became the organising principles of the data analysis for this study. As a result, their attempt to capture the natural site of family television viewing through the use of qualitative methods was also adopted for this study.

### **Viewing and interviewing television families**

An in-home observation cabinet was used in this study, together with an in-depth family interview, to gather information. While the idea of the in-home observation unit was initially borrowed from Collett and Lamb (1986), a review of the relevant literature revealed that their research had been preceded by other attempts to record family television viewing habits on video (Bechtel *et al.*, 1972; Anderson *et al.*, 1985 and 1986). The in-home observation cabinet (designed to resemble up-to-date television and audio furniture) was placed in the family dwelling in the position where the family's television set was normally situated. The eight families participating in this study were monitored for seven consecutive days, a period preceded by another week during which the equipment was in place and the family got accustomed to it. The ensuing videotaped observations yielded pictures of the living room and its occupants as well as of the programme screening at the time when the television was switched on.

Putting together the case study narratives was challenging. Here, the basic issue was how to integrate approximately 270 hours of videotaped observations and the transcripts of the in-depth family interviews. This problem was compounded by what Ang (1991:164) claims to be the predicament of ('ethnographic') audience research; that is, that 'the very fluid nature of [the whole social world of actual audiences] resists full representation'. At the same time, while Ang (1991:170) offered the promise of new vocabularies articulating 'audiencehood', the construction of such 'new' vocabularies did not prove to be an easy task. On both the descriptive and analytical levels, 'watching television' represents a set of multi-faceted activities and realities that the contemporary discourse about television audiences appears to be rather inadequate in capturing. That being the case, the analysis of the videotaped observations in combination with the family interview transcripts represents a first attempt at putting together an *exclusively qualitative* argument employing both methods. By employing videotaped observations and family interviews, this study's design was theoretically ambitious by intent, because it wanted to assert a new empirical anchoring, on the basis of which a new discourse about television audiences could emerge.

### Television in everyday family life

The findings presented in this study confirm that the catch-all phrase of 'watching television' (Morley, 1986:15) is definitely a misnomer. Such an idiom not only ignores the variety of behaviours which can be associated with the use of television in the family context, but it also seriously downplays the variety of meanings that family members attach to their use of television. The evidence obtained through 'watching families watching television', furthermore, makes a strong case for television viewing practices to be most profitably understood as being firmly rooted in everyday family life. Indeed, the overriding theme emerging from the analysis presented in this study may be stated as follows. *The domestic uses of television embody dynamic family practices as these are situated within the everyday life experiences of family members in front of the screen.* This theme places the burden of explanation primarily on efforts to account for everyday family practices, so as to arrive at an appreciation of how the use of television fits within the daily routines of households.

The eight families that participated in this study were introduced via descriptions of each family's typical viewing day. These case studies also included socio-demographic summaries, and revealed a diversity of social backgrounds as well as of family composition. The greater part of the discussion of these family case studies, however, focused on how family members organised their day in front of the television set. At perhaps the most basic level, it could be argued that families 'watch' a considerable amount of television, because the set screens for several hours each day in most households. On the other hand, the observation that the presence of a screening television in the living/television room complements a host of domestic activities, lends support to the depiction of television as 'moving wallpaper'. Family members habitually tune in and tune out of television programmes. As a result, the levels of attention that these viewers give to the task of television viewing varies enormously. Two important, and intimately related, themes have guided our understanding of everyday family viewing contexts, namely the *temporal* and *spatial* uses of television. Taken together, these themes facilitate an *ecological* assessment of family viewing contexts.

One approach to evaluating the *temporal* uses of television within families is to account for the actual time the television was turned on. Television time-use patterns across the eight families reveal a great variability, ranging from 18:15 to over 42:00 hours during the week in which each family was monitored. Within families, however, a great differentiation of television time-use can also be discerned. This can be attributed to the time available to use

television. At this point, it is important to recognise not only the diverse television time-use patterns that differentiate adults and children generally, but also the differences that can be observed between younger children and older children on the one hand, and those contradictions that exist within the adult viewers' category on the other. Regardless of their workforce participation, women, whether they live in households in which the television time-use patterns could be characterised as 'high', 'moderate' or 'low', are consistently less involved with television than their male counterparts. Having to attend to domestic chores places time demands on women that typically keep them away from the living/television room. Furthermore, when women are present in front of the television, their attention to television is also 'fragmented', as they engage in other activities, including domestic chores such as ironing.

Unlike their children, the time that some adults spend in front of the television brings out in them an almost puritanical rejection of 'guilty pleasures'. Yet, whereas women act on the sense of guilt associated with 'time wasting', men are not necessarily prevented by their guilt from using television with relatively attentive viewing styles. The attentive viewing styles of men are associated with the finding that they tend to plan the use of television in advance, often consulting a programme guide for this purpose. Therefore, when men use television, they are more likely to watch it in a sustained fashion. However, such a mode of viewing is difficult to maintain in the family viewing context, which is characterised by continual bids for attention; for example, children asking their father to assist with school homework, or a spouse initiating discussion about her experiences during the day. In other words, the attentive mode of viewing of men is only fully realised late at night, when men occupy the living room by themselves.

Thus, while the overall arrangements of television time-use between families vary greatly, family members across the eight households can be categorised according to which individuals are in front of the screen at different times of the viewing day. The scheduling of programmes by the television networks seems to be on target when one considers the different *time shifts* during which family members are available to make use of television. The early morning shift generally involves the youngest family members who casually attend to the breakfast cartoon shows as they get ready for school. At lunch time, mothers may briefly attend to the screen, often combining this activity with having something to eat or completing a domestic chore. The next period of television use occurs when children arrive home from school. This afternoon shift is characterised by relatively attentive viewing styles by the youngest members of the family. Even though they may be joined by their older brothers and sisters, the latter pay rather less attention to the screen as they



do their school homework. Dinner time, followed by the early evening period, tends to bring the family together in front of the set. Finally, the late evening shift is characterised by fathers who are catching up with the latest news and sport.

These shifts within family television viewing practices demonstrate that the everyday use of television is thoroughly integrated into the daily cycle of family members, who wake up, go to and come from school/work, attend to household chores or school homework, have their evening meal, and enjoy a leisurely evening before retiring for the night. Television is thus part of the overall temporal organisation within households and, as such, television programming schedules are routinely integrated into the everyday activities of family members. While the use of television for some family members (fathers in particular) may involve forward planning by consulting a programme guide, more often than not the television set is habitually turned on. However, this use of television occurs against a background of other activities, such as doing homework or playing games. Therefore, the programmes screening on the television set aptly fit the description of 'moving wallpaper' that family members tune into and tune out of as they engage in other tasks. The latter behaviour adds another major dimension to the merely quantitative measurement of television time-use patterns; the television might be turned on, but whether the television programme screening at the time is actually being watched by those present in the living/television room is quite another matter.

The use of television as 'moving wallpaper' is particularly brought out by the behaviour of family members during commercial breaks. It could be argued that the television networks' routine insertion of commercial breaks into television programmes is met by family audience viewing routines that generally see family members tuning out from television as soon as the advertisements appear on screen. The arrival of commercial breaks on the television screen highlights the fluidity of the family context. Apart from the very youngest viewers, family members use the commercial breaks as a trigger to do something else. Thus, family members leave the room, pick up a book or newspaper and/or initiate conversations. Others may turn off or mute the volume of the set with the remote control or use the latter to 'zap' to another channel. Furthermore, the commercial breaks cause distinct changes in the levels of attention paid to television, and the subsequent inattention may persist even though the television programme 'watched' has come on screen again.

Within these broader contextual features, parental strategies can still be identified regulating the amount of time their television set is turned on. These familial strategies are often the outcome of parental attitudes towards television, and they conform to the general principles

of time-management which can be identified within each family. More specifically, parental strategies may be initiated by a desire to curtail the amount of time the television is allowed to screen in their household. Similarly, television may be employed to establish temporal boundaries within family life; for example, it provides the 'timing' for the evening meal and for children's waking hours. However, parental attitudes towards television may help explain whether or not 'watching' television is perceived to interfere with other family activities. The decision to either have dinner in front of the television or at the family dining table after the set has been turned off, is a case in point.

The depiction of television as 'moving wallpaper' also brings out the familiarity of the medium in domestic contexts. This familiarity is metaphorically described in the popular phrase which claims that 'the television is a part of the furniture'. While perhaps being somewhat colloquial, the latter analogy, nevertheless, uncovers another important everyday reality of television use which pertains to the *spatial* organisation of domestic settings. Following Giddens (1981; 1984), we can argue that the temporal and spatial dimensions of family viewing contexts are intimately linked, since the use of time denotes the use of time-in-space. The extent to which family members use television is both constrained and facilitated by the spatial layout of the family home. The concept of the regionalisation of the family dwelling was mobilised to refer to the allocation of family space-in-time. Indeed, by using the observable space-use categories of the 'open-plan living room', the 'separate living room' and 'the television room', a relationship became apparent between television time-use patterns and the spatial configuration in which television was located. Generally speaking, families with an open-plan living arrangement used television less than families where the television was located in a separate living/television room. The notion of television surfacing as an *environmental contention* was applied to explain this relationship. Being able to close a door behind you facilitates the use of television without others in the house taking exception to, or even noticing, the presence of an operating television. The latter may be more acutely felt in an open-plan living room, thus constraining television use. Apart from the differences in family time-management, the spatial organisation of family dwellings adds to an understanding of the discriminate uses of television by families generally.

An appreciation of the individual uses of family space by adults and children, fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers, inevitably leads to a better understanding of the family viewing context in terms of the *politics of the living room*. The analysis of the spatio-temporal uses of television, therefore, cannot be treated in isolation from the interpersonal dynamics that operate within family contexts of television usage. Viewing positions in front

of the television set are relatively fixed; the individual allocation of seats is largely informed by the distribution of domestic power which in turn is governed by family position. In line with Morley's (1986) convincing argument, this study shows that gender is a crucial determinant of family television practices. The latter effect is, for instance, illustrated by the daily enactment of parental supervision and control over the use of television by children. Mothers, for the sake of family harmony, tend to 'give in' to their children's viewing preferences, whereas fathers often assert their viewing preferences over those of their children. Moreover, the absence of women from the room in which the television screens can be immediately linked to the structural position of women in society at large. While, during the evening in particular, men may 'work' and assist their children with homework in front of the television, their use of television is otherwise attentive and purposeful. For women the relationship with television is far looser and, if present at all in the living/television room, they tend to combine the use of television with the performance of domestic chores. There may be the suggestion that this pattern has been developed from an early age; teenage girls were more frequently observed to assist their mothers in domestic tasks than were teenage boys. The gendered division of labour partly accounts for the fact that for women the family home is a site of work, while for men, the family home is a site of leisure. This stark contrast in parental roles not only assists in explaining the divergent uses of television by men and women, but it also facilitates an explanation of the different experiences that men and women get from television.

The understanding of family television viewing practices is greatly enhanced by the analysis of the *domestic ecology* (with its temporal and spatial dimensions) of everyday contexts of television consumption. However, the ecological dimension extends into the *interpersonal* or *political* dimension. While the domestic ecology structures the use of television by families, it is not an objective or 'given' reality. Rather, this everyday reality is 'politically' negotiated by family members in the process of making sense of their uses of television in their social roles as mothers, fathers, or children. Television audiences are first and foremost members of families/households, and individual as well as social uses of television reflect the particular family context in which television is consumed. In other words, television screens to already existing everyday family realities. This insight has to become the focus of analysis, if theories of television and its audiences are to contribute to our understanding. This realisation will be elaborated upon below.

### Everyday contexts of television: implications for media theory and research

It could be argued that the text-context debate acted as a kind of 'apotheosis' for the analysis of television viewing practices in terms of *everyday family contexts*. After all, the description and analysis of the modes of viewing exhibited by family members during selected television programmes revealed the significance of the family television context over and above that of the television text. The analysis of television as text brought out the general features in which television programmes as 'genres' can be understood. However, the issue of whether aspects of the television text governs the multiple sets of viewers' expectations about specific television programmes and thus determines the level of pleasure or *jouissance* that audiences derive from 'watching' television, is a far more complicated matter.

The discussion on genre theory, furthermore, revealed that its broader origins were situated within theories of cinema. Genre theory's application to television was complicated by the fact that television programmes do not operate as discrete texts in the same way as films. In particular, television's property of 'flow' essentially defines television's textual features as an 'assemblage' of visual images which, with its interrupted sequence, is markedly different from film. More crucially, the social practice of television viewing in domestic settings is characterised by a *contextual flow*, which creates a qualitatively different experience from the more intense 'spectorial' activity associated with watching a film. The text-context problematic, as operationalised in the last chapter, showed that the ways in which family members interact with, and make sense of, 'discrete' television programmes ought to be understood within the contexts of their everyday lives. The analysis of everyday family contexts of television consumption thus facilitates an understanding of how family audiences gave meaning to television texts, the complex processes of which invariably reflect the domestic context in which television is 'watched' - even in cases where the apparent level of involvement with the text is demonstrably low or 'passive'.

Thus, an analysis of the television text *alone* cannot in any way anticipate what audiences 'do' with a television text; how they make sense of it; whether or not they are bored by it and so on. Likewise, the analysis of the television text alone does not account for the ways in which audiences consume television. Audience expectation or viewers' preferences are also not a reliable guide as to how television programmes are actually being consumed in domestic contexts. The family context thus adds a predominant dimension to the mode of consumption of television which, characterised by its erratic and fluid circumstance, significantly mediates the materialisation of viewers' intentions to 'watch' a programme of

their choice. The usual domestic contexts of family television are so markedly different from watching a film in the dark and confined space of the cinema, that they cannot even be meaningfully compared. Yet, many 'television critics' - in the widest sense of this profession - continue to write about television programmes as if they were writing about discrete cultural products rather like films, or even books. In doing so, television critics may subscribe to the same self-fulfilling prophecy as their literary counterparts, who write or produce television programmes.

Similarly, other critics of television, whether they are concerned with the artistic merits of television programmes, or whether they seek to expose the ideological content of television programming, may also be surprised to find that actual audiences - 'as seen on videotape' - do not consume television according to the much laboured categories that the critics have devised. In other words, textual analysis of television is exactly what it says it is; *textual* - no more and no less. It fails, therefore, to account for the everyday practices in which audiences consume television. Audiences are not 'inscribed' (as suggested by a filmic/literary understanding of television production practices) in the text in the ways that audiences perceive themselves 'inscribed' in their use of television in family life.

While television programme scheduling might be on target with its conception of the daily family cycle and the availability of family members to watch particular programmes, the fluidity of everyday family contexts contradicts an understanding of the text-audience nexus on the basis of which television producers create programmes 'with the viewers in mind'. For instance, Collett and Lamb's (1986) videotaped observations of family television contexts apparently 'hit home' rather hard. A British programme maker, after having seen the viewers' reactions to *his* programme, 'was reportedly so shocked by what the viewers "did"...that he couldn't bear it any longer and decided to stop watching' (see Ang, 1991:152). Although one can only speculate on how New Zealand programme makers would react to videotaped observations of the living/television room generated by this study, responses would probably follow the example reported by Ang. Be that as it may, this research has led this author straight into the controversial realm of the politics of audience research in New Zealand.

This controversy, which concerned the so-called 'Zwaga heresy' (see McLeod, 1992:49), was generated by a 'cameo' publication of some of this study's research results for a largely marketing clientele (see Zwaga, 1992). The article focused on what audiences 'do' during commercial breaks, thereby asking the (somewhat rhetorical) question as to whether or not television delivers audiences to the advertisers. Not being without motives of potential self-

interest, the New Zealand print media gave this article wide press coverage, a move which drew the scorn of the public relations arm of Television New Zealand. TVNZ discredited the research as being a 'survey of just eight families' (see *New Zealand Herald*, 20 July 1992). As the article also questioned the audience research practice of data collection via the PeopleMeter, the television networks' response was to affirm the superiority of their audience research method. Morley's (1990) claim, that to challenge television ratings is to attack the economic and political heart of the television industry was thus immediately confirmed. Apart from the economic imperatives that drive ratings research, the commercial resistance to some of the findings reported in this study is not too different from the resistance put up by programme producers when confronted by such research. As Ang (1991:152) put it quite succinctly: 'Research begins to take on a disturbing reality here: the actual audiences come too close, become too "real"'.

Television texts, like the uses of television by family members in general, only make sense in domestic television viewing contexts. Therefore, the crucial site for analysing television in general is the everyday context in which families make sense of television. For this reason, research into the everyday complexion of the social uses of television by audiences has to be primarily *sociological* in intent and design. By extension, media studies needs more sociological theory, if only to realise *le fait primitif* that the media do not operate in a social vacuum, but are part and parcel of society - on both 'macro' and 'micro' levels - in which they operate and are consumed. It is thus essential for media studies not to get completely enticed into engaging in 'trendy', quasi-intellectual small-talk about this or that media product. (The present academic 'cottage industry' attempting to read-in-and-write everything there is to 'semiotically know' about pop singer, movie star and sex symbol Madonna - often without asking the teenagers for whom she may 'mean' something - serves as an example.) Media studies, in other words, should not stray away from its interdisciplinary 'text', and its theoretical indebtedness to a variety of academic disciplines, of which sociology is a foundation subject. Where research on audiences is concerned, qualitative sociology is needed so as to enable us to arrive at an understanding that audiences are socially constituted.

In a recent article, whilst referring both to his previous research and to the questions it generated, Morley (1991:1) identified a paradigmatic dilemma within media studies:

Clearly, any analysis which ultimately offers us *only* an understanding of the micro-processes of consumption in this or that domestic context, without reference to the broader cultural (political and ideological) questions at stake, is going to be, ultimately, of only limited value. That way lies the 'so what?' problem: however fine-grained our analyses, we end up with nothing more than an endless set of descriptions of the processes of consumption. Conversely, any analysis of these macro-

processes which is not grounded in an adequate understanding of the complexities of the process of (principally domestic) consumption runs the equal and opposite risk of being so over-schematic as to hide all the differences that matter.

Morley's (1991:10-12) subsequent call for the return of sociology to media studies is a direct response to the criticism his *qualitative* research on media consumption had received (see Morley, 1991:2-5). It is, of course, not uncommon for qualitative researchers to be criticised by those so-called 'relevance-mongers' (Hill, 1987:112) who, in fact, often subscribe to another research agenda. In media studies, this difference is acutely brought out by Curran's (1990) denigration of recent interest in qualitative audience research. Curran (1990:135) argues that this research merely constitutes old wines in new bottles, or in his words 'revivalism masquerading as new and innovatory thought' - the reference to revivalism presumably evoking the limited effects model as propounded by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955). Although the 'new wave' of 'ethnographic' audience research may have overstated its credentials as being original and new (some sections within this new wave could be accused of a somewhat convenient 'postmodern' historical amnesia where earlier qualitative, or even ethnographic, research traditions are concerned), this evolving tradition has, nevertheless, given a proper priority to researching the contexts of television consumption.

And this newly found interest ought to continue because empirical research usually raises more questions than it is possible to answer. This is particularly the case in this study, which generally adopted an inductive approach because there were no specific hypotheses to be tested or confirmed; instead, there was theory to be constructed. With respect to the previous discussion in this section, this type of research ought to be an appropriate antidote to the 'paranoiac fantasy' (Morley, 1991:1) of control usually embedded in the so-called 'more relevant' research proposals dealing with global and/or political economy issues in media research. This study has shown the intrinsic value of studying family audiences and in particular the theoretical mileage that can be gained from using the qualitative approach.

As Collins (1990:22) has recently stated:

Development of media studies in the 1990s requires crystallization of a new conceptual paradigm in order to displace the tattered but still defiant remnant of the old dominant ideology thesis which still, for want of a clearly articulated alternative, holds sway.

One reason for the persistence of a concern with 'ideology' in the media studies paradigm has been the absence of empirical research. In particular, in-depth qualitative research on television audiences themselves has been a glaring omission. By failing to come to an understanding of how media ideologies are consumed, the 'old dominant ideology thesis'

has continued to make an impact because media research in general has not tapped the various ways in which audiences make sense of the media in the context of their everyday lives. This study has unequivocally demonstrated that, through a research commitment to focus on audiences, a new conceptual paradigm will emerge which will take media consumption seriously. Perhaps there is some truth after all in Curran's assessment of the recent surge in ethnographic audience research as constituting a new revisionism. In the face of anecdotal descriptions about the all-powerful media, researchers in the 1940s and 1950s conducted empirical investigations which then showed that family audiences arbitrate media content according to their already existing social networks (see Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). It only needs researchers determined to find out how television operates in society to ask audiences themselves how they use television.



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## APPENDIX 1

### THE TELEVISION AND FAMILY LIFE PROJECT

#### FAMILY CONSENT FORM

Before signing the consent form please read the following carefully. Also note that all family members of sixteen years and older are encouraged to sign the consent form. It may be a good idea to read this page together and discuss it with all members of your family. It would also be important to inform visitors of the nature of the cabinet and say that you are taking part in a Massey University research project. If you have any questions about the consent form or about the project as a whole feel free to contact Wiebe Zwaga on 79413 (home) or 69099 ext. 8421 (work) for further information.

The research project "Television and Family Life" is designed to study the ways in which families use television in the context of their everyday life. While we know, for instance, that most New Zealand families own one or several television sets, we have presently little information about the role of television in family interaction. The present study is designed to provide information on this topic, paying particular attention to viewing behaviour of families and individual members of these families and how they make sense of television programmes.

Participation of families in this research project will involve the following measures. First, a cabinet consisting of a television set, two video recorders and a video camera will be placed in the home for seven days. This cabinet will be wired up so that when the television set is switched on the video recorders, through the camera, will start recording the activities of the viewers present in the living room as well as the programme they watch. An additional video recorder will be included in the cabinet for those families which normally use a video recorder. Second, one or two interview sessions will take place with the participating family using the video-taped recordings as a basis. These interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed. Both stages in the research will be arranged at times mutually agreed to by the participants and the researcher, with the understanding that the interviews ideally should take place no later than three weeks after the cabinet has been removed from the participants' homes.

Participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without threat of reprisal or recrimination from the researcher. Practically, this means that when one family member wants to withdraw from the research, the family as a whole will discontinue participation. Participants have the right to have any recorded material erased, if they feel that nobody should have access to what has been recorded on tape. The names of the participants will not be released and no identifiable material shall be shown publicly nor published in whatever possible form. The video recordings will be securely stored during the course of the research and will only be viewed for research purposes by Wiebe Zwaga and his supervisors who will sign an agreement that they will maintain the strictest confidentiality. The interview tapes will be erased once they have been transcribed.

The cabinet with the television set, the video recorders and the video camera is the property of Massey University. The cabinet will be insured by Massey University for the period the cabinet is in the participants' residence. The participants shall not be liable for any breakdown or accidental damage that may eventuate.

We herewith declare we have understood the above and accordingly consent to participate in the project "Television and Family Life".

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Participant)      \_\_\_\_\_ (Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Participant)      \_\_\_\_\_ (Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

**APPENDIX 2****TELEVISION AND FAMILY LIFE****CONTRACT FORM**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby sincerely pledge that I will not publicly reveal anything that I have come in contact with during the research project 'Television and Family Life'. I will adhere to the procedures that have been explained to me which seek to maintain the strictest confidentiality of the participants that partake in the research project 'Television and Family Life'.

Signed:-

\_\_\_\_\_(Research Assistant)

\_\_\_\_\_(Researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_(Witness)

\_\_\_\_\_(Date)