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

A dissertation presented in
partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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.¹

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.

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

A published compilation of papers presented at a symposium² 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.

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 PeopleMeter³, 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

³ 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.